

British transferware in Portugal (1780-1920). Identity, domesticity and relations

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Abstract

British transferware, a production that started in the mid-18th century, starts to be recognized in Portuguese archaeological contexts around 1780. From that moment onwards its presence is constant although in different amounts, depending on the sites. This paper aims to debate about the presence of this ware in Portuguese archaeological contexts and how it reflects daily life, behaviours, and ideological and semiotic uses.

Introduction

The study of ceramic collections is rather frequent in Portugal. These are usually monographic studies made from one specific site, counting forms and decorations in analytical and comparative analysis in a cultural integration perspective. This paper, also starting in ceramics aims to be a holistic approach to the domestic consumption of 19th century British transferware in Portuguese households directing to make a behavioural and semiotic analysis based in the relations between people and objects, debating consumption and domestic identity. The study of communities it is not only made through people and their commodities. The ontological variability permits to give *exequo* values to people, animals, plants, landscapes, and places where everyone and everything are combined in the comprehension of different communities and where human and non-human agents interact in the creation of a social and cultural system (Harris, 2012, 77).

Until recently the archaeological sites of the recent past, especially the contexts formed after the 1755 earthquake, were seldom studied in Portugal. Except for industrial archaeology, possibly because industrial buildings were always present in urban landscapes, the scientific interest in 19th and 20th century domestic contexts did not exist in Portugal. The reasons for this lack of interest are complex and difficult to summarize in just a few words but the general idea was that these contexts were just too recent to

have an archaeological interest. Nowadays this panorama is partially solved since these contexts are not destroyed anymore although they do not generate much interest in researchers. Thus, the number of studies made about these domestic contexts is small and all of them made in the last 3 years and far from being in articulation with social, political, and ideological issues and compromised by a lack of public debate (Casimiro and Sequeira, 2020; Leão 2021; Casimiro and Sequeira, 2019).

As aforementioned ceramic studies are among the most frequent studies made in Portuguese archaeology. Nevertheless, even this approach is seldom made in contemporary contexts, a reflexion of the mentioned lack of interest and opposite to what happens in many countries in the world where 19th century contexts are usually studied and an important research is developed around British transferware ceramics.

British transferware is a tin glazed ware. It is distinguished from any other production by the fact that its decoration is made by transfer printing. It started to be made in England in the 1750s and spreading to several parts of Britain. A generation later it was one of the most successful productions around the globe with a massive production of objects supplying a large-scale trade. This production spread all over Europe reaching several different countries and Portugal was not an exception. It starts to be made in the outskirts of Lisbon almost a century after it started in Britain. Although this type of ware was made in different factories in several places around the country, the most well recognized factory was in Sacavém (Assunção, 1997).

In the United Kingdom this type of ware has been studied by archaeologists, art historians and collectors. Archaeologists have been studying it from a domesticity point of view (Brooks et al., 2015; Crooke, 2015), but also in terms of global distribution and used in other places such as South America and Australia (Schávelzon, 2015; Brooks et al., 2019; Brooks, 2005). Recently several papers have been mentioning how these objects can be useful in the study of identities which occupy domestic environments (Flexner and Ball, 2016). Most of these studies made use of an online tool, the Transferware Collectors Club online database, where almost every type of transferwares can be found.

Concerning Portugal, the publication of such objects is rare and archaeologically speaking exclusively made in the publication of entire assemblages (Capote, *et al.*, 2020; Araújo e Oliveira, 2020; Casimiro *et al.*, 2020). This paper is the first time that an

approach entirely dedicated to this ware is made. Nevertheless, it is necessarily focused on the Lisbon region where the authors are based. Although we wish to extend this research further north, our studies coincided with the COVID pandemic lockdowns and it was not possible to visit other collections, thus the conclusions drawn in this paper are regionally limited and we are not able to do a comparison with the coastal and internal country. The littoral northern zone of Portugal, which historically has a strong relation with England, can present different results and its comparison with southern areas may reveal different consumption patterns. Adding to these geographic issues most of the sites analysed in this paper can be considered urban sites, thus these results will eventually need to be compared with rural areas. We also did not include any island context namely finds from Azores or Madera, even though the news that we were able to gather reveal that British transferwares are abundant in both archipelagos, reflecting the same consumption patterns existing in mainland Portugal. Unfortunately, the news from former Portuguese colonial territories are non-existent, especially in African territories, which does not permit to infer if the model of use of English ceramics was similar to the European or if the cultural and ethnic variability of those territories changed the way people related with such objects.

Pottery in context

Four archaeological sites were selected to be used in this paper. Their chronology ranges from the late 18th century till the early 20th century, when British transferware was being imported into Portugal (Fig. 1). It is possible that the import of such wares started earlier, still in the 1750s, as a productive novelty, however we still have not found any context from before 1780 with this pottery. Four archaeological sites will necessarily offer a limited vision even that other sites will be briefly mentioned; however, these sites were selected due to their differences and locations and while some of them can be considered wealthy contexts, others are not so prosperous. These differences will surely help in understanding how different people reacted to these pots and how can their be interpreted. The good news is that the starting of this project made that many archaeologists around the country approached us sending photos of things found in the country, increasing the amount of information available.

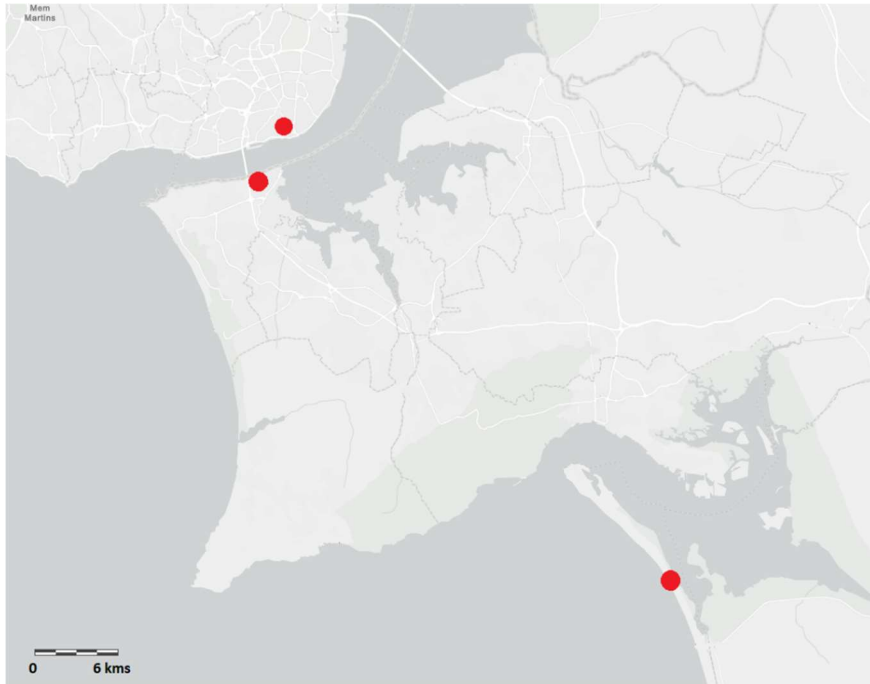


Fig.1 Location of the places mentioned in the text

The oldest place presented in this paper (dated 1780-1820) is in Almada, more precisely in Rua Latino Coelho (Casimiro, *et al.*, in press). This excavation was made by the city of Almada Museum's archaeologists. The only feature found was the remains of an abandoned water cistern abandoned in the early 19th century. In its interior the remains suggested a public establishment, possibly an inn. Inside there was an extraordinary amount of glass bottles and cups destined to serve wine, as well as an enormous amount of food remains, plates and cooking pots. Table ware corresponds to 93 objects (MNV), 25 corresponding to bowls and 68 to plates. Most of these objects was produced in Britain corresponding to creamware and pearlware, and just a small portion was made in Portugal. British transferware corresponds to 17 vessels (four cups, nine bowls, and four plates) (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2 – Plates found in Almada

In Lisbon one of the places selected for this paper was the archaeological intervention made in Terraços do Carmo. This was a huge excavation area with several contexts dated from the first half of the 19th century, interpreted as landfills. This was a convents' area thus the objects, if impossible to attribute to one specific convent, were most likely related to a religious house. This can be one of the reasons why the quantity and the quality of objects reduced in the second half of 1800, considering that religious orders were extinct in 1834. The contexts where the British ceramics were found are all dated from the first half of the 19th century. The material culture tells us that in early 19th century it was a privileged area, while in the middle of the century the social structures collapsed. Contrarily to what happened in the previous site it was not yet possible to analyse the entire collection, but the inventory of the tableware was already made. The British transferware corresponds to 32 plates, 23 bowls and 14 cups (Fig. 3). This number is just a very small portion of the collection since in total the Terraço do Carmo provided 754 objects which can be classified as tableware, with 496 plates, 216 bowls and 56 cups.



Fig. 3 – Fragments from Terraços do Carmo

The archaeological excavation in Rua do Vale was recently studied in a MA dissertation (Leão, 2021). The material culture associated to this building corresponds to domestic garbage produced inside the building and deposited in the backyard. The studied layers were dated between 1860 and 1920. At this time transferware production was already being made in Portugal thus the number of imported British objects is not enormous. From a total of 379 objects that can be classified as tableware, only 25 are transfer printed and from these we can classify the British origin of 16 of them: five cups, one jar, eight plates and two bowls (Fig. 4). The reduced number of such wares can be explained by several hypothesis, although considering the low income of its inhabitants it is possibly related with the poverty of the place.

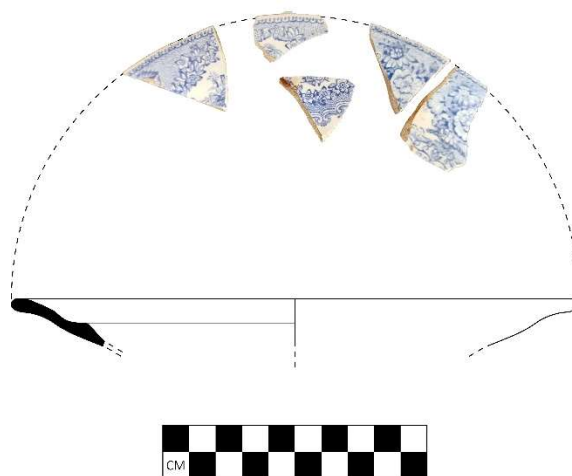


Fig. 4. Plate found in Rua do vale

The excavation made in Duna Malha da Costa (Grândola) discovered a fishermen's village, a confirmation made by several contemporary maps indicating that settlement in the site (Casimiro, *et al.*, 2020). The site was roughly occupied between 1850 and 1920, and we have no idea why it was abandoned. Although this site is not located on any urban centre it also could not be considered a rural site bearing in mind that its occupation, economy, and the identity of its people was organized for sea exploration. Table ware corresponds to 426 objects divided into 376 plates and 50 bowls. Only eleven British objects were found in this site with seven plates and four bowls, all of them very broken.

Site	Plates	Bowls	Cups	Jars	Total British wares	Total Table ware
Rua Latino Coelho	4	9	4	-	17	93
Terraços do Carmo	32	23	14	-	69	754
Rua do Vale	8	2	5	1	16	379
Duna Malha da Costa	7	4	-	-	11	426

The formal and decorative variety of the British transferware identified in Portugal reveals that this ware was made in different areas, with the predominance of Staffordshire productions. Sometimes we are lucky enough to find a maker's mark, usually located in the external bottom. In the four collections analysed in this paper only two marks were found: DEVONPORT and SPODE, both found in Terraços do Carmo. Although not included in this paper there are other marks such as AMOY, CTM POTTERY, and BARKER POTTERY, found in Lisbon.

Decorations

One of the most important characteristics of British transferware is its delicate decoration. With the new technique developed in mid-18th century it was possible to make more and more delicate objects. Most of these decorations were floral with the presence of several types of flowers and plants. Also very frequent are bucolic landscapes with forests, buildings, and rivers, some of them inspired in Chinese styles. When objects are very broken it is difficult to give them proper classification thus a general classification was attributed, such as floral or landscape.

Blue is the most frequent colour following the tradition in the decoration of Chinese objects and European tin glaze ware productions. Fewer objects have green, red and black decoration (Fig. 5).



Fig. 5 – Red transferware found in Lisbon

In the four analysed collections the most recurrent decoration is the Blue Willow pattern (Fig. 6), existing in all of them. This type of decorations is frequently found in many parts of the country.



Fig. 6 – Blue willow pattern found in Lisbon

This is an eastern inspired decoration. The ledge is decorated with geometrical patterns combined with some floral designs. Other plates reveal oriental buildings such as pagodas and temples or ruins such as castles and abbeys (Fig. 7). Associated to these buildings there are several animals.



Fig. 7 – Plate found in Almada

In the collections studied in this paper most of the animals correspond to what is usually designated as “domestic cattle”, and “bull and goat”. The interaction between humans and animals happens in several objects although in our objects we only recognized it in the “girl with dog” (Fig. 3) or the “boy ridding buffalo” (Fig. 2). Characters interacting with nature is also frequent as for example the girl in the “Mushroom picker” (Fig. 3).



Fig. 8 – Plate found in Almada

Floral patterns are among the most frequent decorations. Roses and camellias are some of the most frequent patterns, arranged in “flower arrangement”, “fruit and flowers”, “pinwheels”, “chinoiserie flower spray” (Fig. 8) and “Floral and Botanical border”.

British transferware in Portugal and the Atlantic context

British transferware is among one of the most international widespread pottery productions in the globe. Considering the political and economical relations Portugal had with Great Britain the presence of such wares in Portugal is not unexpected or is the presence of British wares is limited to transferwares.

Creamware, pearlware, ironstone, basalt ware, slipware plates, bowls, cups and less frequently tureens are frequently found in the country in different amounts. In certain cases, as it occurred in Rua Latino Coelho, these correspond to the majority of the collection. Hitherto this is a unique case in Portuguese archaeology considering that British pottery is never found in great amounts.

British transferware is thus rare in the late 18th century Portuguese contexts. The most frequent import at that time is undecorated salt-glazed ware and creamware, both also made in Britain. It becomes more frequent from 1800 onwards although never in enormous quantities when compared with the remains items in each collection. In the wealthier of the four contexts, in Almada, British transferware corresponds to 18% while in Rua do Vale, one of the less wealthy it corresponds only to 4%. Its presence in Duna Malha da Costa, the only non-urban site of this study, and dated from the late 19th century, its presence is only residual. In the Terraços do Carmo the quantity is equally small, however this is a landfill and not that much conclusions can be drawn from this site.

The amount of transferware in Portuguese archaeological contexts increase significantly when the Sacavém factory starts to produce in mid-19th century. A few years later other industrial units start to use the same technique in Lisbon such as the Janelas Verdes or Alcântara. The same technique is going to be used in the factories of the north of the country, namely Miragaia and Massarelos.

From all the archaeological contexts discussed in this paper the impact of the Portuguese productions is only visible in the Malha da Costa where it is frequent. A similar example was found in Almada in Quinta do Almaraz where a dumpster dated

between 1890 and 1910, was excavated. Among many items, some 121 transferware plates and bowls were found, and only one of them was a British production with a COPELAND mark (Capote et al., 2020).

The four analysed contexts allow to do a first analysis to the consumption of British transferware in Portugal but not to reach any conclusion. Talking with Portuguese archaeologist that frequently excavate 19th century urban contexts in Portugal this is not a frequent ware and only a few sherds are found in every excavation. Although these objects are more frequent in wealthier contexts it does not seem that the access to these productions was difficult considering the close relations Portugal had with Britain. The value of some of these objects was dependent from many factors but never exaggerated and easily accessible (Mullins, et al., 2013). However, the value seems to be just one of the reasons why these objects are acquired. Social, political, and ideological reasons are intrinsically connected with the consumption of such objects used as symbols of power, ideology, and identity (Bridges e Mejía, 2013).

Analysing additional contexts will allow the development of such ideas, especially when comparing different decorations, semiotic elements which pass messages related with traditionalism, imperialism, globalization, and colonialism. It is not a coincidence that in the late 18th century context from Almada, a moment when most of the pottery consumed in Portugal is still made with traditional techniques, most of this collection is imported from Britain. Its low incidence in early 19th century household contexts makes us believe that their role in domestic environments would be important. Floral decorations are very frequent in all types of tableware consumed in Portugal since the 16th century, and transferware reveals a continuity in those practices.

Several studies exist for the United States and South America concerning British wares, but these studies are still lacking for most of the European countries. When analysing the Atlantic trade of British transferware, the type of objects found in Portugal e similar to the British transferware found in South America (Brooks e Rodriguez, 2012; Brooks et al., 2019) and it is tempting to conclude that Portugal is committed to the Atlantic trade. This will be the preliminary conclusion while no studies appear in countries such as Spain, France, or Italy which can support or refute such conclusion. Additional work is also needed in Portugal.

Finally, we want to say that no archaeological project can be disassociated from the moment it was made. This project began in January 2020. The pandemic situation in Portugal led to two general lockdowns. Initially we hoped to be able to analyse more contexts and get a more widespread panorama of British transferware in Portugal. That analysis will be made in the future.

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