

# IN THE OTHERS WE SEE OURSELVES. QUESTIONING IDENTITIES AND CHANGE IN RURAL *LUSITANIA*<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

In Horta da Torre Roman *villa* (Fronteira, Portugal), ongoing excavations since 2012 have revealed a major double-apsed room with a *stibadium*, belonging to a major *villa*. The space has probably been used as a *triclinium aestivalis*, where an elaborated decorative programme and sophisticated architectural solutions show the opulence displayed by the owner. During the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, the area was carefully abandoned, but further occupation(s) left archaeological evidences. The construction of a perishable structure documents the precarious presence of people and animals (fauna recollected) in the once sophisticated room.

This evidence reflects new patterns of daily activities that strongly contrast with the previous occupation. Contextual analysis and stratigraphic evidence of ceramics and faunal remains allow us to interpret dramatic changes in economic strategies and cultural backgrounds. Questioning this evidence, we can search for patterns of change: in the funerary sphere; in material culture, and also in the connections between *villae* and urban sites in *Lusitania*, trying to characterize the agents in the territory. In this perspective, it is important to question how these major shifts occurred, their causes and the protagonists in the ground.

## Keywords

*Lusitania*; *Villa*; Patterns of change; Subsistence; Contextual analysis; Identities

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[410] “The barbarians who had entered Spain pillaged it with a vicious slaughter. A pestilence wreaked its own devastation just as vigorously.” 16: “As the barbarians ran wild through Spain and the deadly pestilence continued on its savage course, the wealth and goods stored in the cities were plundered by the tyrannical tax collector and consumed by the soldiers. A famine ran riot, so dire that driven by hunger human beings devoured human flesh; mothers too feasted upon the bodies of their own children whom they had killed and cooked with their own hands; wild beasts, habituated to feeding on the bodies of those slain by sword, famine, or pestilence, killed all the braver individuals and feasting on their flesh everywhere became brutally set upon the destruction of the human race. And thus with the four plagues of sword, famine, pestilence and wild beasts raging everywhere throughout the world, the annunciations foretold by the Lord through his prophets came to fulfilment.”

(Hidatius, 410: XV-XVI, in BURGESS 1993: 83)

## 1. IDENTITIES IN THE RURAL WORLD: THE AGENTS

Hydatius, bishop of *Aquae Flaviae* (nowadays Chaves, North Portugal), described the fate of *Hispania* in 410AD in what can only be labelled as an apocalyptic tone. Employing swords, famine and pestilence, the “barbarians” acted as the agents of the Apocalypse, bringing with them misery and cannibalism, reducing men and women to their original bestiality. What appeared to be an *annus horribilis* would, however, turn out to be the starting point of a much broader process of continuous atrocities that would ensue until 469, the year in which the bishop of Chaves’ chronicle came to an end, presumably as a result of his death. Throughout this time, successive hordes would engulf *Hispania* in fury - agents of imperial authority acting as autocrats (*tyrannicus exactor diripit*), and even (especially) external contingents – particularly the Suebi (Barata Dias, 2020: 292) – who insisted on breaking negotiations as a result of their natural perfidy (Burgess, 1993: 111; Carneiro, 2019). The “waves” of invaders were relentless. After the Goths, Vandals and Heruli, came the Suebi in 467, surrounding and destroying *Conimbriga*, ravaging the city and surrounding area (*regio desolatur et ciuitas*, Burgess, 1993: 119), an event that has conditioned interpretations of the archaeological finds in the place<sup>3</sup>.

The perception of “barbarians” as *gentes vagae* - nomadic communities that had no intention of settling on the land - was not exclusive to Hydatius. In fact, this idea was a central literary *topos* in the Ancient world, possibly coined from Herodotus, and applied by the author to the Cimmerians (*Historias*, 1.6: 15-16) and Scythians (1.73; 103-106), to name but two examples. This descriptive tool would prove long-lasting, serving to symbolise a civilizational chasm between the “civilised” urban

<sup>3</sup> The remains of a resident were found inside the main pool of the *domus* said to have belonged to Cantaber carrying two coins of Honorius (402-408), “[which] certainly serves as evidence of the attack on this house and the death of its unfortunate inhabitant” – a reference made to the Suebi attack (Alarcão, 1999: 75) - as well as the fragments of African *terra sigillata* found in amongst layers of destruction attributable to the Suebi attacks. (Delgado, Mayet and Alarcão, 1975: 288).

communities and “uncivilised” nomadic tribes. As such, the cultural uprooting, inadaptability to urban norms and animalistic behaviour of these agents was accentuated, factors generally applied to all “barbarians”, culminating in the most “vagrant”, or nomadic, of all: the Huns. A portrait that marks and conditions all subsequent historiography, as well as the entire perception of phenomena of migrant communities presented in much of the investigative work carried out to this day.

With this context in mind, this paper will serve to analyse archaeological data in the South-western part of Lusitania [Fig. 1] with the aim of seeking interpretations of unclear processes, the first of which will be those found in rural contexts.

## 2. CONTEXTS OF CHANGE IN RURAL AREAS: THE CASE OF HORTA DA TORRE

The Alto Alentejo presents a rural landscape in which a remarkable scarcity of urban nuclei has been identified, and in which private monumental structures predominate: the *villae* (Carneiro, 2014). Although few locations have been subject to rigorous archaeological excavations that were subsequently accurately published, in the past years the work carried out at the Horta da Torre *villa* since 2012 has allowed for a phenomenon relevant to understanding the process generically referred to as “the end of the *villae*” (Chavarría Arnau, 2007) to be identified. It has done so by shedding light on the process of abandonment undergone, and the subsequent re-inhabitation of the site.

Horta da Torre is located in the parish of Cabeço de Vide in the municipality of Fronteira, a short distance from what was then the route XIV of the *Antonine Itinerary* (Carneiro, 2008). The excavated area of the complex, which measures around 30,000m<sup>2</sup>, is no bigger than 1000m<sup>2</sup>, but the data collected has been consistent though the area is limited [Fig. 2]. It has allowed for interpretations to be formed of what would have been an opulent construction: a double apse crowning the monumental room with a *stibadium*. A sluice was located behind this device, on the wall of the internal apse, which allowed for water entrance to be controlled, covering the *opus signinum* pavement. The room opens onto a large peristyle (which has been only partially excavated to date), featuring a column-lined *exedrae*, surrounding a pleasant garden. A small peristyle lay to the south of the main one, sectioned off by a wall, housing *cubiculae* placed around an *impluvium* fed by a fountain, creating a private, relaxing environment. The GPR surveys carried out on this structure identified its location as being on the periphery of a much broader structure yet to be excavated.

A methodical, careful archaeological excavation suggests that the structure underwent a planned abandonment process in the mid-5<sup>th</sup> century, as no evidence of fire or destruction has been unearthed in the excavation. We consider the possibility that the main decorative ornaments were stripped before the abandonment, as the marble plaques in the room were removed, and this could have been a logistically

complex task (Munro, 2012). In contrast, the following archaeological evidence demonstrates particularly precarious processes:

### 2.1. Stibadium Room

The floor of the room was drilled into in order to build a shelter out of perishable materials, similar to others witnessed in *Hispania* (Tejerizo Garcia, 2015; table in Carneiro, 2020: 257)<sup>4</sup>, occupying over half of the double apse room, which measures approximately 100m<sup>2</sup>. Horse bones were collected, indicating that both people and animals would have occupied the space (Carneiro, 2020).

### 2.2. Small peristyle

The floor of the private resting area around the *impluvium* also presents with boreholes, serving to support what appears to have been a small fence used to contain animals (?). The structure's rooves had collapsed and the tiles were thrown into the *impluvium*. The aisles were used as disposal areas, the northern wing especially, a practice reflected in the thick layer of dark sediment found here, filled with coarse ceramic cooking vessels, remains of *dolium* used to store food and various remains of bones, including jaws [Fig. 3]. A marble column base was placed upside down to be used as a seat in a small *cubiculum* off to the side of the peristyle.

### 2.3. Large peristyle

Further boreholes have been found in the flooring of the excavated area, which is still limited. The inner area of the *impluvium* would have contained a garden, or *viridarium*, which was used as a disposal area for remains and rubble, in which several fragments of coarse ware pottery and several sections of bone were found, including jaws, which presented marks made from cutting and consumption.

These material and archaeologically detectable processes of change allows us to take interpretations in two additional perspectives:

### 2.4. Technological

The material culture found demonstrates that a profound change was undergone in the daily lives of the *villa*'s inhabitants. The period of Imperial occupation is characterised by the *villa*'s integration in a globalised Mediterranean economy, proof of which is provided in materials originating from very distant sources: late Hispanic and North African *terra sigillata*, for example. These materials also demonstrate patterns of opulent consumption in the presence of *amphorae*, which would have been filled with wine and fish preparations, but above all in the large quantities of mollusc

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<sup>4</sup> As seen in engraving *II Seville Council. Emilian Codex*. Library of the Royal Monastery of San Lorenzo of El Escorial, MS D.I. I, fol. 205v.

shells found in waste disposal areas located in the uncovered area of the double apse room. These indicators allow for an assumption to be made that the logistics behind goods transportation networks were reasonably straightforward and well-connected over extensive and supra-provincial areas. In contrast, locally manufactured and rudimentary ceramics have been found. They can be ascribed to the post-Roman occupation phase: ceramics made using pastes filled with non-plastic elements, moulded according to linear shapes and baked at low temperatures, leading to highly fragmented pieces scattered in the archaeological record. The usage patterns on these pieces show clear signs of systematic and prolonged use, with marks made by fire covering almost the entirety of the containers. Fragments of millstones provide evidence of grinding operations used to make flour to complement diets, suggesting both precariousness and technological scarcity.

## 2.5. Economic

The archaeological record (Carneiro, 2020) uncovered also demonstrates a profound shift in daily consumption patterns and economic strategies employed. However, evidence of two diverse circumstances was found in the *stibadium* room: on the one hand, the presence of large fauna, especially cattle, and on the other the constant practice of *venatio*, in addition to elements of the world-economy referred to previously (*amphora* and molluscs). Fragments of *lucernae* provide evidence of banquets that would last during the night. In contrast, the post-Roman occupation demonstrates the predominance of sheep and goats, which would have been cooked and consumed in medium-sized containers used to make soups and stews, which display an abundance of fire marks. These findings provide evidence of unsophisticated pastoral operations involving highly resistant animals, from which by-products like wool and cheese could also be extracted, therefore providing extra income and dietary supplements.

## 2.6. Horta da Torre: discussion of the data

We can place an easy and direct question: can it be assumed that Horta da Torre was destroyed and occupied by “barbarians”? What does this radical shift in the human presence mean - one in which, in a short period of time, an opulent “imperial model” gave way to a “low-profile model” seeking not to rehabilitate the ruin but merely to provide shelter and use from it? Can it be assumed that the ruins were occupied by *gentes vagae*?

To answer to this question is essential to recall that the traditional process of understanding the “end of the *villae*” has benefited from a remarkable number of contributions in recent decades (Lewit, 2003; Chavarría Arnau, 2007). As such, the process is no longer believed to have been sudden - the result of the invasions of hordes

of barbarians who dismantled sites and brought an abrupt end to the lifestyle experienced previously - nor as a *continuum*, where a medieval “village” would have been born from the *villae*. Further research in *Hispania* has demonstrated the existence of intermediary phases, of which understanding is now being gained thanks to accurate stratigraphic records and planimetric readings bringing marked regional variations, which make it difficult to make generalisations about the process undergone.

Take Horta da Torre as an example: about 10km to the south, a geophysical survey carried out in the *villa* of Monte de S. Francisco allowed to document a process through which a significant number of graves (over a dozen) were installed very close to the urban area (Carneiro, García Sanchez, Stek, Kalkers, 2019: 52-53). About 10km southeast of Horta da Torre, however, stands the well-known *villa* of Torre de Palma, which seems to have visibly flourished in several ways in the 5th century AD: the wine cellar and/or olive oil storage area was expanded, along with the progressive expansion and monumentalisation of areas related to Christian worship – the basilica and baptistery (Lancha, André, 2000). These findings shed light on the complexity of the question, with such diverse phenomena being recorded in *villae* located mere kilometres apart. It should also be noted that less than 5% of the estimated occupation of the site has been excavated at Horta da Torre, which means that other phenomena, spaces and contexts may still be identified, thus contributing to more complex interpretations being made.

Another fundamental problem also applies to the rural world: how to determine the identities of the various agents in the ground. This is the case on various levels: on the one hand, a recurring difficulty exists in determining who the elites were, as they seem to have disappeared from the countryside to some extent, as pointed out by Tamara Lewit (2003). However, the same problem also exists for other groups: it is worth noting how huge necropolises existed during the Imperial period, made up of relatively prototypical graves that varied very little from one to the next (Rolo, 2018). This phase was followed by one in which more graves were added, sometimes for hundreds of people at a time, who would have been buried with no artefacts indicating their identities (for a provincial case, see Teichner 2017; for a general discussion about the “ethnic” and cultural contents, see Eger 2020). Who were these people and what was their role in the countryside? For multiple reasons, it is unwise to assume that these were communities of *gentes vagae* or “barbarians”, as they would undoubtedly have had with them identity markers, which would (it can be assumed) have been worn with pride.

In the *villa* sphere, Horta da Torre documents two circumstances:

a) the shelter erected in the *stibadium* room implied a certain level of investment; that is, the wooden hut structure indicates a desire to remain in the *villa* for some time, thus making the effort required to drill holes into the *opus signinum* worthwhile. This permanence is also visible in the large amount of food residue found in various parts of the excavated area;

b) a lifestyle based around mobility resulting from the pastoral operations carried out, which also required shepherds to have a high degree of knowledge about the region. It can therefore be assumed that shepherds would move around the local area, choosing abandoned structures in which to shelter and stay for a while before rotating to the following structure. This suggests that these shepherds would have had an elaborate “mental map” of locations that could serve as accommodation and in which the resources could be used.

Even when deprived of the operations characteristic of the previous phase, these *villae* operated as centres of attraction, magnets for agents travelling through the local area - people who knew them, the resources available at each one, and how to maximise them. As such, layers of sediment were uncovered due to elements being torn out or moved or containing remnants of everyday operations - fireplaces and combustion structures, materials abandoned, etc. – which require increasingly rigorous excavations with particular focus placed on the multiple indicators available for collection.

This evidence points to abandoned sites still leaving their marks on the landscape - ruins visible from important, busy roads, therefore attracting visitors. Several people continued to visit Horta da Torre to seek shelter, remove materials, keep livestock, cook meals and dump waste, all of whom left behind marks of their presence. These agents gave new meanings to old spaces, testimonies of a bygone era that has since been permanently lost. While other places proved to have been specific hubs of operations, occupation of these locations developing over time, this *villa* became marginalised. It did not, however, lose its power or appeal, meaning it continued to be frequented though in a radically different way to that envisioned in its construction and design. It is worth noting that this is the only *villa* in the area with no signs of Christianisation. As such - and the agents not having left behind any identity markers or cultural indicators that would allow for their identities to be determined - until new data is found, it is plausible to assume that this presence came about as a result of Horta da Torre being seen as a relevant ruin in mental maps of the region, drawing people in through fascination, and because of their utilitarian interest in extracting relevant materials.

### **3. FUNERARY PRACTICES IN THE RURAL WORLD: A CLOSER LOOK AT THE 'WORLD OF THE LIVING'**

The fragility and scarcity of a funerary archaeological evidence in the Alto Alentejo as a whole can be put down to intensive agricultural practices carried out from the second quarter of the 20th century onwards, which have inevitably made it more challenging to preserve and identify any possible archaeological remains. In addition, old excavations, associated with arguable criteria and methodologies, produced most of the data available relating to religious funerary practices during the Roman Empire and in Late Antiquity. Consequently, the available information is

incomplete, and records of archaeological work carried out during the mid/ late 20<sup>th</sup> century are scarce or non-existent. In most cases, any osteological material found would not have been collected, for example, making any anthropological studies essentially unfeasible. The nature of these interventions, which was non-systematic and lacked rigour, thus leads to an assumption being made that the known data available makes up only a small part of the vast informational potential contained within the sites explored, but that, due to limited methods, recording equipment and/or interpretation, has been irreversibly lost. This information deficit is particularly consequential when it comes to funerary practices in Late Antiquity, either due to the difficulty in accurately identifying and interpreting archaeological records from the period or the scarcity of literary sources available. Unavoidable difficulties are therefore faced in terms of implementing a multidisciplinary approach, which would allow for the analysis carried out to go beyond material culture, tomb architecture and ritual practices, allowing for the identity(s) of individuals to be identified and the communities that inhabited the territory at the time to be determined (for an example of a working model, see the case studies presented in Carroll, 2013, or Leach et al., 2009).

Notwithstanding the constraints exposed above, the material culture identified relating to funerary practices dating back to Roman times and Late Antiquity seems to reinforce some fundamental evidence observed of daily practices from the time, therefore also complementing interpretations made of the 'world of the living'. One such example is the 'world economy', of which evidence was found dating back to imperial occupation of the *villa* in Horta da Torre, which was echoed in funerary practices. Large amounts of funerary offerings were often present during burials in the high-imperial period, which were almost always of a diverse nature (imported fine ceramics, glass, coarse ware pottery), attesting to the dynamism of commercial networks and the ease with which local communities could access foreign products. Examples of such funerary assemblages include those found in tombs E5 and G3 of the necropolis of Santo André (Ponte de Sor) (Viegas et al., 1981: 155-156, 163-165), graves 14 and 30 of the necropolis of Serrones (Elvas) (Rolo, 2018, I), and grave 1 of the necropolis of Pocilgais (Carneiro, 2005: 297-301). A progressive decrease was seen in funeral remains as time went on, becoming especially evident in tombs dating back to the 5<sup>th</sup> – 7<sup>th</sup> centuries AD (Frade & Caetano, 2004: 337). This trend was also witnessed in other provincial areas (Vaquerizo & Vargas, 2001: 161; Smith et al., 2018: 269), seemingly reflecting the spread of a new worldview shaped by new cultural and religious references. A generalised impoverishment of material culture was seen, visible not only in the aforementioned reduction in funeral offerings (in most cases limited to jewellery and clothing) but also in the rudimentary quality of ceramic containers (mainly beakers and jars) identified in the context of late-antique funerary practices. See, for example, the jugs with a trefoil rim collected in the necropolis of Torre das Arcas (Elvas), linked to a late funerary use of the site



(Rolo, 2018, I: 237) [Fig. 4]. This predominance of low-quality, locally sourced materials is also evident in domestic contexts, specifically in the late-antique occupation of Horta da Torre. Seeming to have come about as the result of a new 'post-classical' economic model, it was more autarchic, less demanding and adhered to less sophisticated consumption patterns.

Equally illustrative of this depletion of material culture is the 'forced' long-term usage of some pieces, or the 'reconversion' of others, adapted to new functionalities. An example of the first case is African *terra sigillata* dish Hayes 61A, which is attributed to the Carrão's archaeological site (Elvas). Although the piece is not believed to be linked to funerary practices, it is notable for several reasons. The first is the connection between the residential area of Carrão and the funerary area of Chaminé (Elvas), which served as a necropolis from the high-imperial period to the 6th/ 7th centuries AD when (at least some) of the *villa*'s old structures were 'necropolised'. The second is the piece allegedly serving as a "liturgical dish" (Deus et al., 1955: 569), therefore allowing a connection to be drawn to a newly Christianised community. The care taken in repairing the Carrão dish by those who used it – one lead rivet and holes for three more can be observed – allows for inferences to be made as to the importance (or at least perceived importance) of maintaining it for as long as possible, whether for ritual or religious purposes (Rolo, 2018, I: 356; III, Est. 128). As its archaeological context has not been determined, the piece cannot be dated or its 'lifetime' ascertained. It could, therefore, have been in use for a timeframe far beyond that generally attributed to ceramics such as this one - 325 - 400/420AD (Hayes, 1972: 107). [Fig. 5] In any case, two major ideas can be drawn from these findings: firstly, that this was the last burst of activity experienced from the commercial circuits between the late 4<sup>th</sup> and early 5<sup>th</sup> centuries AD in this rural part of *Lusitania* - an idea backed up by the material culture found at Horta da Torre (Carneiro et al., in press); and secondly, what seems to be an attempt "to perpetuate Roman cultural values and meanings at a time of increasing disruption and change" (Swift, 2015: 112).

The 'recycling' of material culture witnessed in the late-ancient phase resulted in a loss of cultural references from the previous period, as is documented in the late reoccupation of Horta da Torre. This rupture is evident in funerary assemblages and in practices such as the reuse of materials from high-imperial burials to build graves during Late Antiquity, therefore reflecting a change in beliefs and ritual practices. The necropolis of Camugem (Elvas) is a good example of this, as tombstones from the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD were reused as construction material for Late Antique graves (Rolo, 2018, I: 265, 373), thus serving as proof of "a significant shift in how people perceived their social relationships or obligations to those buried there" (Wanner & De Sena, 2010: 22-23). Changes can also be seen on other levels, such as areas that had previously been inhabited becoming burial sites, demonstrating somewhat of an

'invasion' of the world of the living - even if the buildings or structures 'necropolised' had already been abandoned and lost their original functionality. An example of this phenomenon can be seen in the thermal building of Pombais (Marvão), which was taken over by a necropolis during the late 4th or 5th century AD (Carneiro, 2014: II, pp. 299-302). This can also be seen in Defesa de São Pedro (Campo Maior), where a sarcophagus was placed in the centre of a building (Carneiro, 2014: II, pp. 95-100).

Parallel to this rupture, the symbolic dimension of some funerary areas remained. Many ancient necropoleis continued to work as reference points/marks in the landscape, and, given the context of mobility described above, it is not unreasonable to think that their symbolic value increased, along with their polarising effects. As Ripoll states, "it is only logical to imagine that every settlement will produce a 'funerary habitat', but an old cemetery can also generate such a habitat" (Ripoll López, 1989: 390, translated). This may have been the case of the aforementioned necropolis of Chaminé (Elvas), which seems to have undergone an extensive occupation from the Late Iron Age (3rd / 2nd century BC) to Late Antiquity (Rolo 2018, I). The data available suggests the stability of the burial site and the polarising role of the archaeological site of Chaminé as a necropolis, which also made it a *locus religiosus* (Vaquerizo, 2011: 95) for several communities. In the necropoleis of Torre das Arcas (Elvas) and Serrones (Elvas), different phases of funerary use were also identified. Between the mid-1<sup>st</sup> century and 6<sup>th</sup>/ 7<sup>th</sup> centuries AD, different communities chose the places as their burial sites. However, somewhat paradoxically, in terms of these necropoleis remaining symbolic references throughout these periods - whether for longer or shorter times, for larger or smaller communities - a break in cultural references and the memory of previous communities materialised in the reuse of graves. For instance, in Serrones necropolis (Elvas), the tombs 82, 84 and 90 (high-imperial cremation burials) overlapped with tombs 83, 88 and 89, respectively. The latter three corresponded to burials that can be dated back to Late Antiquity due to their structural characteristics and the absence of funeral offers (Rolo, 2018, I: 211).

During Late Antiquity, funerary evidence excavated *in agro* suggests a phase of social and ideological transition, along which old and new rites and beliefs coexist. In a general view, funerary practices for this period in the Alto Alentejo characterise by a relative discretion in funerary evidence, a remarkable polymorphism in tomb architecture, and a gradual decrease of funeral assemblages over time. The variability of the funerary evidence documented and the recurring absence of identifying elements in tombs make it challenging to carry out a plausible 'physical and cultural reconstruction' of the necropoleis and the local communities using them (Ortalli, 2008: 142). As such, the 'agents' who inhabited the area from the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD cannot be identified linearly. Were these new populations with new beliefs? 'Heirs' of the communities who had lived here during Roman times, having since adapted the old *modus vivendi* to new times and new habits? Or, as the evidence suggests, a combination of both scenarios? Two key ideas must therefore be highlighted. The

first is that the variability of funerary practices arose as a result of the different motivations “dictated by locale, population, roots and outlook – which are all things hard for us to trace and understand” (Christie, 2018: xiv). The second is that archaeological evidence from the late-Roman or high-medieval period does not always provide a clear picture of local communities and their experience. Instead, it could be said that the data available paints an image of “a complex panorama in which the change in the patterns of life and death becomes muddled as old relationships with locales are maintained” (Carneiro, 2005: 54, translated).

### **3.1. The funerary world: discussion of data**

Funerary evidence plays a fundamental role in knowledge about any ancient civilisation. Firstly, because it is considered a “cache” – items with their own symbolism that are intentionally buried. Secondly, because funerary archaeology can provide relevant and complementary information (some of which rarely found in domestic contexts) on the living, their background and identity(ies).

Even so, an overview of the Alto Alentejo cannot be determined, as contradictory indicators inform the scope of “deathscapes” or “necrogeography” (Semple and Brookes, 2020). Continuity supports the idea that these funerary spaces were validated by the community: necropoleis used for almost a millennium, even if not continually, create systemic “memory landscapes” and invoke a deep sense of belonging and attachment to the place. Disruption, which occurs at various levels, however, contrasts with this idea – spanning the looting and reuse of previous materials rendering them obsolete and unrecognisable, obliterating old memories and referential markers. Likewise, the ‘funerary appropriation’ of living spaces, breaking the classic differences between both spheres, demonstrates new ethical, cultural and religious conceptions guiding the behaviour of these (new?) agents.

As such, one central question must be weighted regarding funerary practices: who were the protagonists of this period? The widespread absence of remains in tombs from the 4th century AD onwards – the dead having generally been placed with unmarked ceramic containers – renders it impossible to truly know who the agents were. Whether concerning their identity and beliefs - no proper markers have been found - no interpretations can be made whatsoever, except for rare and isolated cases. An oil lamp (*lucerna*) with a *Chrismon* was found in the aforementioned site of Pombais (Marvão), but, found out of context, could the meanings of this easily recognisable symbol be ascertained? And does the old thermal building used for funerary purposes reflect an intention to erase its ‘impure’ prior use, or just a pragmatic way of making use of an abandoned structure where buildings materials were available? Without more accurate referencing of the identities and motivations of these agents – produced through further higher-quality excavations - all the potential meanings of ongoing processes remain to be clarified.

#### 4. CONTEXTS OF CHANGE IN URBAN AREAS: COMMERCIAL REDISTRIBUTION AND CONNECTIONS WITH RURAL SPACE

In urban *Lusitania*, the timeframe between the early 3<sup>rd</sup> and early 4<sup>th</sup> centuries AD was characterised by change. The population was recovering from the crisis and instability that had begun in the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, which resulted in that several cities on the Baetican and southern Lusitanian coastlines, dependent on maritime trade, had to deal with significant supply problems, from which few managed to recover. As an aggravating factor, some of the local mines, such as *Vipasca* (Aljustrel), faced declining production levels in around 150 AD, linked to the crisis that arose in *Baetica*'s metal-producing areas (Quaresma, 2012: 260).

Following the crisis, maritime trade began to grow again in this region, as did the amount of imported fine ceramics. The change in consumption patterns and commercial connections is evident. The previously predominant networks linking the Iberian Peninsula to southern Gaul and the Italian Peninsula were replaced mainly by links to Northern Africa. This fluctuation in the numbers of imports was also noted in the production and export of food products from *Lusitania*, resulting in a period of high outflows between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries AD (Bombico, 2017: 416). In terms of influx, imports were also of relevance. Items produced in central Tunisia (African *terra sigillata* C), in the main workshop located in Sidi Marzouk Tounsi, followed by others, such as Haffouz, Henchir Bloul, Henchir Tebraria and Henchir el-Kouky (Bonifay, 2004: 50-51), were found in coastal cities between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries AD. Imports to coastal urban areas endured until 550 AD, at which point "a reduction in the flow to less than half was observed" (Fernandes, 2012: 102). As for African *terra sigillata* D, its high quantity and variety meant it spread further throughout the Empire (Silva, 2010, vol II). Originating from the area of Carthage, with production dating back to between the early 4<sup>th</sup> and mid 7<sup>th</sup> centuries AD, four production areas stood out: the lower Medjerda valley, the centres of Oudhna and Sidi Khalifa, and an unidentified area named "workshop X" (Bonifay, 2004: 49).

Other late productions were identified in the coastal cities, but in much smaller numbers, as is the case of Late Roman C ware and Late Gaulish *terra sigillata* luisante DSP (derived from paleochristian *sigillata*). The former, from Phocia, on the western Turkish coast, dates back to between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries AD (Hayes, 1972:323). On what concerns Late Gaulish *terra sigillata*, *lucernae* were produced in the workshops of Conjux and Portout (Savoy) and date back to between the second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and the first half of 5<sup>th</sup> century (Raynaud, 1993a: 504-510); whereas DSP, the luisante *terra sigillata* was produced in Marseille, Narbonne and Bordeaux and dates back to between the late 5<sup>th</sup> and the very early 6<sup>th</sup> centuries AD (Raynaud, 1993b: 410; Carandini, 1981: 5-6). However, these imports were restricted to coastal areas. Having not reached inland settlements, they were consequently not redistributed to rural areas (Quaresma and António, 2017).

In terms of inland urban centres, similar data was collected in two different contexts, demonstrating increasing supply difficulties from 375 AD onwards, recorded in different patterns of material culture. While African imports persisted over time, though relevant variations between *Ammaia* and *Abelterium* were noted (perhaps due to route XIV, which had more significant foreign predominance), a break in consumption of *amphorae* was witnessed at the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, followed by a generalised collapse of all imports as the century drew to a close (Quaresma and António, 2017: 95-96). Similarly, supplies delivered to *villae* seemed to anticipate the pattern, as a break is visible in the late 4<sup>th</sup>, early 5<sup>th</sup> century AD - that is, deliveries of *amphorae*, *lucernae* and *terra sigillata* trailed off in this period (Carvalho and Almeida, 2005), as was also witnessed in the municipality of Fronteira.<sup>5</sup> In terms of the *terra sigillata* supplied to the southernmost parts of this area, a mention of a “crash from which they will never recover” was made in the mid-5<sup>th</sup> century (Fernandes, 2012: 101, translated). A logical pattern therefore seems to emerge for the circuits. Located further away from primary urban environments, private sites in rural areas were the first to face problems with supplies, problems that would only come to an end in the mid-5<sup>th</sup> century. As a result of this lack of supply, pieces that could not be replaced were often repaired, as documented in the case of Carrão's “liturgical plate”. In small inland towns, breaks can be seen in the late-5<sup>th</sup> century, while, as would be expected, coastal cities were able to maintain long-distance commercial networks until much later.

Although the political-administrative reorganisation carried out during the Diocletian principate, between the late-3rd and early-4th century AD, seems not to have had any negative influence on the south-west of the Peninsula (for the Algarve see Viegas, 2011: 71), the same cannot be said for the internal conflicts and dismantling of political-administrative structures that took place from the second half of the 4th century onwards. The case study of the city of *Ossonoba* shows that numbers of ceramics imported from North Africa dropped as of the first third/half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century (Martins, 2019); this was the case for other urban areas in the mid/third quarter of the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD (Viegas, 2011), or even early 6<sup>th</sup> century (Bernardes et al., 2020) [Fig. 6]. At this point, North African imports ceased definitively, though shipments of Late Roman C continuing (demonstrating the broader geostrategic changes taking place on the Mediterranean). However, “around the second quarter or the mid-sixth century”, these oriental imports began to no longer be included in the urban register (Fernandes, 2018: 106, translated). The most significant factor, however, is that these imports did not reach inland cities, remaining restricted to the coast, thus exhibiting the breakdown of inter-regional circuits.

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<sup>5</sup> The study of North African *terra sigillata* in the municipality of Fronteira was carried as part of the Degree in Archaeology at FCSH-UNL by Rodolfo Manaia Ferreira, in 2004, though it was never published.

In urban centres, populations concentrated in areas that had previously been reserved to political, administrative and religious functions. These areas were reconverted to serve other purposes, with populations seeking the safety of newly constituted walled precincts, therefore transforming town centres into mixed areas, where political, administrative and religious structures, housing, and commercial activities converged. This arrangement, in which cities remained dynamic and active while an enormous urban transformation took place, leading to socioeconomic and political-administrative activities restricted to the same areas as everyday life in these urban agglomerations, "survived" the passage of time from the Roman world to the medieval (Diarte-Blasco, 2020: 352).

However, signs of crisis and change can be seen how cities interacted with their surrounding areas, through the decrease in the arrival of imported ceramics, as recorded in other Western cities, such as *Balsa* (Viegas, 2011), *Mirobriga* (Quaresma, 2012) and *Baelo Claudia* (Bourgeois and Mayet, 1991), and the increasing levels of difficulty faced to supply their rural surroundings.

#### 4.1. Urban/rural world connections: discussion of the data

Few urban centres were located in South-western *Lusitania*, with those that did exist generally characterised as medium-sized and spread out very far apart. This settlement pattern implies that local identities were essentially forged from the dynamics of the rural world. During the Roman Empire, *urbes* played an important role, both as consumer centres and as platforms from which products would be sent to the surrounding rural territory, reflecting how trade flows evolved over time. However, shortages - and even the progressive collapses in supplies from abroad, as witnessed from the 5<sup>th</sup> century onwards - would always reflect, first and foremost, in rural areas, since, as one would expect, when a short supply of products arrived in urban centres, none would make it out to more remote locations.

This phenomenon may explain the progressive convergence of settlements in rural areas towards urban centres, which could be witnessed from the 5th century AD onwards<sup>6</sup>, resulting in the abandonment of peripheral territories due to the lack of population and/or resources in times of economic downturn. Simultaneously, however, the phenomenon also points to the progressive loss of power and influence of urban centres over rural territories in *Lusitania* or, (alternatively though not contradictorily), to the constant autarchic organisation of rural communities, which allowed them to gain strength in the same measure as urban centres ceased to provide services that, strictly speaking, they were never able to guarantee (judging by the small dimensions and absence of urban equipment). While foreign objects served as a symbol of power and integration, the disappearance of such objects signified a loss of this identification with external archetypes, consequently reinforcing local systemic identities.

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<sup>6</sup> Ongoing study undertaken by Pedro Trapero Fernandez, using GIS analyses and modelling of the Alto Alentejo's territorial resources.

## 5. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

By exploring the various spheres of analysis for the south-western peninsular area - the rural world; the funerary world *in agro*; and the patterns of ceramic imports and distribution – interpretations can be made of a complex time for which few references exist, that is, from the early 5<sup>th</sup>-century AD onwards. Although case studies on the subject are scarce, they provide enough information to point to significant trends that hinge on four key concepts:

a) *Diversity* - Despite the common trends and patterns detected, we can establish that each archaeological site experienced its own processes and dynamics resulting from multiple factors.

b) *Identities* – Paradoxically, and contrary to the commonplaces of traditional historiography, pinpointing the identities of agents in the ground is a complex task. The presence of foreign items or specific timeframes at which new beliefs and behaviours emerged cannot be pinpointed, due to the lack of distinctive markers present in material culture and archaeological materiality.

c) *Localisms* – This being an eminently rural territory, it is not surprising that local identities have a more independent, self-sufficient character, with individuals able to adapt to new circumstances and technological limitations. The marks left by human presence in most sites demonstrates adaptive behaviours that exceed those necessary to simply adjust to developing lifestyles.

d) *Simplification* - Changes and breaks in international supply flows triggered the adaptive processes referred to in the previous point, with a switch taking place, from a globalised world economy to resources being obtained locally, with agents on the ground demonstrating "patterns of resistance" and adaptation.

In brief: in this paper, we try to enhance the way to integrate patterns of activity and reflections of agents evolving, adapting and transforming the territory. Rural sites, burial places, material patterns did not follow a uniform effect, but they show various and, sometimes, contradictory elements of change and transformation. It is always complex to contrast the written texts with the elements found in excavations, but the material culture and the archaeological evidence have significant potential to bring out information in itself. In fact, they can show us different scopes for the agents, bringing to our scope agents that are absent in the literary sources. One key point is that we can draw more information from elements coming from discards, waste, fragments, absences and resistances in places of life and death. From these indicators, new stories can be told - not the stories of the great protagonists and movements, which have become fixed in historical texts, but the stories of the forgotten people who remained in the territory, maintaining their daily activities and choosing places to bury their dead.

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## LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 1 – Geographical area considered in this paper: the South-western *Lusitania* in the Iberian Peninsula

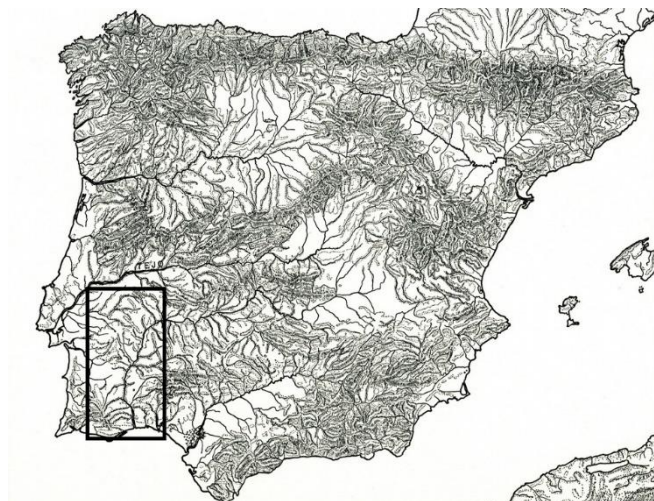


Fig. 2 – Excavated area in Horta da Torre: aerial view in the end of the 2019 campaign (drone photo by Jesus García Sanchez)



Fig. 3 – Late Antique dumping area with jawbone in [UE16] in the small peristyle, Horta da Torre (photo by André Carneiro)



Fig. 4 – Trefoil rim jar collected in the necropolis of Torre das Arcas (Elvas), grave 68, inventory MBCB ARQ 2421 (Rolo, 2018 I: 237; photo by Mónica Rolo)



