

## ***Post-Medieval Archaeology in Portugal***

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### INTRODUCTION

The preservation of archaeological heritage in Portugal is mandatory and regulated by a national law. Its definition is simple and wide: “every archaeological evidence of the planet’s evolution and the life of human beings”<sup>1</sup>. In this sense all evidence of human occupation should be accepted as archaeology by archaeologists in Portugal. Post-Medieval archaeology, therefore, should not be an exception.

The specific designation of ‘post-medieval archaeology’ is seldom used in Portugal thus its chronological scope hard to define within the country. While in many countries around the world, this term represents the archaeology since 1500 to the present day, in Portugal it is more complicated. The most common designation for post-medieval archaeology would be *Arqueologia Moderna*; a direct reference to the early modern period. However, defining the start of this period is not as easy as defining a simple date that separates medieval and early modern periods. It is assumed that the Portuguese *discoveries* (Ceuta was conquered in 1415; marking the beginning of the Portuguese colonial expansion) represent a major turning point in the evolution from medieval to early modern in Portugal. However, no evident changes are distinguishable in the archaeological record prior to the late 15th century when contact with sub-Saharan populations results in new materials appearing in Portuguese contexts<sup>2</sup>.

If one assumes the late 15th /early 16th centuries to be the starting point for *Arqueologia Moderna*, defining the end of this period is more straightforward. In Portugal, the iconic date of 1<sup>st</sup> November 1755, when nearly the entire country was affected by a major earthquake, marks the end of early modern period archaeology. Although researchers do not assume that the late 18th century is no longer early modern, archaeological studies tend to stop around this time. In central and southern Portugal, debris from the 1755 earthquake is frequently found in the archaeological record, and, in archaeological practice, it seems that only things from below this layer are considered to be worth studying or excavated properly by Portuguese archaeologists. In this sense, 19th- and 20th-century archaeology is a rarity and still lacks a proper definition. Industrial archaeology is an exception to the general lack of interest in 19th- century or later archaeology, and has become a leading aspect of archaeological studies on post-18th- century

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<sup>1</sup> Law n.º 107/2001, 8 September

<sup>2</sup> Gomes, 2012

contexts<sup>3</sup>. This has led some authors in Portugal to suggest that all archaeology dating to 19th-century contexts is intrinsically industrial and that the labels of historical or contemporary archaeology cannot be assigned to these contexts and materials.<sup>4</sup> Others argue that not all aspects of human life in these recent centuries are directly related to industrial phenomena and prefer the broad designation of Contemporary Archaeology for contexts from the 19th and 20th centuries<sup>5</sup>.

For the purpose of this paper all archaeology conducted in Portugal on contexts from after the late 15th century will be considered post-medieval including studies of *Arqueologia Moderna*, industrial archaeology and contemporary archaeology. However, if 16th- through mid-18th-century contexts are properly excavated and frequently published and industrial heritage is acknowledged as a research subject, contemporary archaeology is comparatively in its infancy as a sub-discipline with only a handful of existing projects<sup>6</sup>.

#### PRACTICING POST-MEDIEVAL ARCHAEOLOGY IN PORTUGAL

Interest in post-medieval archaeology in Portugal developed in the 1980s, although it took a few decades for it to be recognized as a discipline. Three different groups are responsible for the development of post-medieval archaeology in Portugal. The legal obligation of excavating and recording all archaeological sites and keeping all recovered materials, made commercial archaeology companies the primary excavators of post-medieval contexts, though most professionals are not trained as post-medieval experts. This resulted in a vast number of records and archaeological stores filled with unstudied items. With a few exceptions, the majority of these sites were never investigated or properly published. Secondly, some universities, such as at NOVA University of Lisbon, became increasingly interested in post-1500AD archaeology and projects and PhD students based in these institutions focussed on post-medieval contexts and theoretical debates. Finally, archaeologists working for municipalities or museums also conducted excavations of this period. Except for a few isolated cases, universities, municipalities and archaeological companies rarely work together in research projects<sup>7</sup>.

#### RESEARCH THEMES

In post-medieval research, there is a strong interest in studying the more outstanding buildings – primarily churches and convents, palaces, fortresses, and factories (some being medieval in

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<sup>3</sup> Custódio, 2002; Ribeiro and Silva, 2008; Sequeira and Silva, 2017.

<sup>4</sup> Custódio, 2015: 93.

<sup>5</sup> Casimiro and Sequeira, 2019.

<sup>6</sup> Casimiro and Sequeira, 2019.

<sup>7</sup> Such as Teixeira et. al, 2015.

origin but still active in the following centuries); military archaeology; or material culture studies (i.e. ceramics). While ceramic studies were initially grounded in culture-historical approaches throughout the 1980s, scholars since made use of new theoretical approaches and themes such as inequality and identity, among others, were approached<sup>8</sup>. Archaeometry has also been a major focus of material culture studies<sup>9</sup>. Other specialist archaeological approaches such as the archaeology of death or zooarchaeology are just occasionally studied<sup>10</sup>.

Material culture studies are among the most researched in Portuguese post-medieval archaeology, owing to the abundance of material but also due to the fact that Portuguese ceramics were exported in large quantities, which makes them an important object for understanding globalisation<sup>11</sup>.

Although Portugal was heavily involved in Atlantic and worldwide expansion, the discussion of colonial encounters is still very recent and few publications have dealt with this subject<sup>12</sup>, in spite of the work made by Portuguese archaeologists abroad<sup>13</sup>.

Underwater archaeology of one of the most active subjects in this field with several research projects focusing on ship building and navigation being conducted since the 1990s<sup>14</sup>. The chronological range of underwater studies is wide and there is research and evidence dating from the late fifteen century up until the Second World War<sup>15</sup>.

Despite the small number of university staff, post-medieval archaeology is taught in four universities in Portugal (Lisbon, Porto, Minho and Évora). However, 19th- and 20th- century archaeology is generally approached from an industrial archaeology perspective<sup>16</sup> and all other aspects are still ignored, especially how archaeology can inform on the histories of everyday lives of people. The geographical disparities are also considerable since most of the work is focused on the Lisbon area with only casual research taking place in areas such as Coimbra or Porto<sup>17</sup>.

## VENUES OF PUBLICATION

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<sup>8</sup> Casimiro et al., 2019a

<sup>9</sup> Such as Ferreira et. al, 2018a; Ferreira et. al., 2018b

<sup>10</sup> Moreno-García and Detry, 2010; Davis et al, 2012.

<sup>11</sup> Casimiro, Gomes and Gomes, 2015; Casimiro and Newstead, 2019

<sup>12</sup> Casimiro et al., 2019b; Coelho, 2018; Teixeira et al., 2015

<sup>13</sup> Azzeddine and Teixeira, 2011; Gomes et. al, 2016.

<sup>14</sup> Several MA and PhD dissertations have been produced on the subject such as Bettencourt, 2019: Martins,

<sup>15</sup> Alves, 2001; Castro et. al, 2011;

<sup>16</sup> Sequeira and Casimiro, 2018; Ramos, 2017

<sup>17</sup> Silva, 2019

Although a lot of studies have been conducted in Portugal, publications largely relate to site reports and the study of specific collections. Broader debates on major research themes remain largely absent from archaeological publications. Research is often only published in conference proceedings<sup>18</sup>, small regional journals, or in the national Portuguese-language archaeology journals *Almadan* or *O Arqueólogo Português*. However, some post-medieval archaeological research has been published in a range of English-language proceedings and journals, such as *Post-Medieval Archaeology*<sup>19</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

In sum, there is no lack of research in Portuguese post-medieval archaeology, with numerous papers published every year. The problem remains that most of this research continues to be produced for an internal public and written in Portuguese. Considering the global impact this country had in the last 500 years in cultural, political and economic aspects, there is a comparable lack of internationally oriented research.

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<sup>18</sup> Such as Teixeira and Bettencourt, 2012; Arnaud and Martins 2017

<sup>19</sup> Gomes and Casimiro, 2013

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