In 1992 and 1993, archaeological excavations directed by A.M. Dias and Diego in the gardens of PALÁCIO DOS CONDES DE PENAFIEL, in Lisbon, revealed a rich and complex stratigraphical sequence, from the Early Roman Empire to Medieval Age.

The area of the city is a key one to understand urban evolution in Late Antique and Early Medieval periods because it is located between the great Roman baths, named Th ?><nos, and the Medieval town walls known as “Casa Moura”, a defensive structure with enclosed the baths from urban perimetric, mentioned by medieval archetexts from X to XXI century on.

The studied context proves the existence of human occupation of the zone during Late Antique - Early Medieval Age, known through a building that reused walls from the ancient roman baths. Various findings of 6th-7th century architectural elements and funerary epigraphy occurred in the vicinity of Palácio dos Condes de Penafiel, associated to later contexts found amongst domestic discarded materials in medieval Muslim storage pits and reused in a grave (15-16th century) of the disappeared São Mamede church, that once stood in front of the palace garden. The concentration of these materials in the area is strongly suggestive of the existence of an early or medieval mosque, eventually the ancestor of the Sáo Mamede parochial church, only attested in Portuguese documents from the 12th century onwards. The analysed context revealed another epigraphy, the earliest occurrence of this sort of evidence in connection with the supposed Late Antique-Early Medieval temple.

The context excavation remains unpublished.

THE CONTEXT corresponds to a c. 2 metres high pit with a V section excavated in the geological bedrock and in earlier deposits of the site, later affected by Medieval and Modern Age activities. Filled with successive thin layers (“17a, 20, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30”), the full archaeological data collected during the context excavation remains unpublished. Inside the pit, in its lower part and in contact with its interfacial limits, a fragment of a funerary inscription was found (DIOGO e TRINDADE, 1997). Although most of its text is missing, namely the date, the identity of those elements in the area is strongly suggestive of the existence of an early or medieval mosque, eventually the ancestor of the Sáo Mamede parochial church, only attested in Portuguese documents from the 12th century onwards. The analysed context revealed another epigraphy, the earliest occurrence of this sort of evidence in connection with the supposed Late Antique-Early Medieval temple.

EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN (PHOCEA, AEGEAN, PALESTINE)

The finds consist mainly in pottery, although some faunal remains and charcoal were collected, along with a human lower mandible. This data suggests the deposition of urban domestic residues and possible nearby constructive activity. The fact that fragments of the same vessels are distributed through the different layers suggests that the filling of the pit was a single event, short in time: this is an important element to date the pit, providing a firm to its formation in the second half of the 6th century, accordingly to the associated ceramic imports.

The importation pattern is similar to the 5th and first half of the 6th century contexts from Lisbon, although still scarcely known (DIOGO 1993; 2000; AMARO 1995; FABIÃO e PIMENTA, forthcoming), of which the earlier deposits of Palácio dos Condes de Penafiel, yet unpublished, are also a fine example.

In spite of the considerable data limitations, this assemblage is evocative of a larger picture, raising further issues:

- the very complex and largely misunderstood trade dynamics which took place under the Visigothic real, involving different political entities;
- the plausible surviving exportation of regional fish sauce (cf. FABIÃO e PIMENTA, forthcoming);
- the questions regarding local course ware, in the sense that it becomes apparent that smaller scale productions dominate regional markets.

The pottery assemblage imports are dominated by Byzantine Empire ceramics: Eastern Mediterranean L81 amphorae of probably different origins are clearly dominant (12 MNV) over the also Oriental LR2 (2 MNV), Palestinian L81 (1 MNV), North African oil containers (2 MNV), and unclassified Aegean types (3 MNV); Phoenician sigillata (9 MNV) is more represented than ABS-D (3 MNV) in fine pottery, and two coarse North African vessels (2 MNV) are also present.

Local and regional fabrics demonstrate two main tendencies. The main overall ceramics is hand made pottery, most of it produced at low temperatures, with a limited formal repertoire: cooking or firing pots are the most represented types, followed by liquid containers (jugs and mugs) and a small number of large basins of Roman tradition. On the other hand, wheel-thrown ceramics, a minority group, attests few examples of lulas, basins and jugs, and also singular examples of jug, pot, firing pot and a late variant of Almargue 9C amphore, produced in one of the lower Tago valley potteries.

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