

TECHNOLOGICAL CHOICES AT THE ONSET OF THE IBERIAN BRONZE AGE: AN INTEGRATED APPROACH TO CERAMICS OF THE MONDEGO PLATEAU, PORTUGAL

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This paper focuses on ceramic technology in the Mondego Plateau (Central Portugal) during the mid-third to early second millennium BC, a period that witnessed distinct changes in ceramic morphology and decoration.

Technology is here viewed as the whole process of manufacture, from the mixing of raw materials to produce the paste, through to the forming techniques and styles of decoration, and finally the firing of the vessels.

The study takes in three sites that stand out for their well-contextualised ceramic assemblages: Carapito III (a burial site), Malhada (a settlement) and Fraga da Pena (a 'gathering place'). These sites are representative of the archaeological diversity of this period, documenting different contexts of pottery production, use and/or deposition.

However, the pottery studied presents a range of problems for the analyst, being rather non-standardised, coarse and heterogeneous in paste, with a limited range of shapes. Types are long-lived across the prehistoric period and specific functions can rarely be ascribed. This situation provides a distinct challenge, and contrasts markedly with time periods and regions where the scale, nature and diversity of production might aid differentiation between distinct ceramic categories.

A contextualised characterisation of the pottery of this period was achieved by combining thin-section petrography and chemical composition by neutron activation analysis with detailed information on morphology and decoration.

The methodology used has produced a new picture for this period in the Mondego Plateau, notably through the investigation of clay recipes, and the integration of the general characterisation of technology with a detailed consideration of variability at each site. This approach facilitates an interpretation of technological variability that is rooted in social and technological practices, and that is of importance to our understanding of

human groups living in this region during the Chalcolithic to Bronze Age transition.