

Caladinho 2010: A Preliminary Report on the Excavation of a First-Century B.C.E. Tower in Alto Alentejo, Portugal

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*The 2010 season marked the first excavation of the site of Caladinho, a small fortified structure on a hilltop near Redondo, Portugal. Field survey undertaken by Rui Mataloto has identified 24 similar structures throughout the Alentejo region. Surface finds on each site suggest a mid-1st century B.C.E. occupation and subsequent abandonment in the beginning of the 1st century C.E., thus linking these structures to the reorganization and colonization under the nascent Roman empire. Our project is the first systematic archaeological investigation of one of these small forts. Open area excavation of the structure permitted us to remove the collapsed structure, revealing the well preserved walls of a tower, three stamped pieces of Italian terra sigillata, and other dateable ceramics. Preliminary analysis of the structure, its assemblage, and its regional context indicates that the tower was part of network of fortified structures meant to control and surveil the newly colonized territory. This paper reports on the excavation of the structure at Caladinho, draws comparisons with other similar structures in the region, and considers potential motives behind its construction. The very brief occupation suggested by the finds and the establishment of at least one large villa nearby suggests that this watchtower was an effective means of control. Future work at this and other towers will further investigate this mechanism of colonization and control over the landscape in the Alto Alentejo region.**

The site of Caladinho is one of twenty-four small, fortified structures located in the Alto Alentejo region of Portugal. The majority of these structures were identified as a result of the intensive regional survey undertaken to mitigate the archaeological and environmental impacts of the recent Alqueva Dam Project, although Caladinho was first reported by João de Almeida in 1945.¹ In 2000 and 2001, Rui Mataloto conducted a field survey of these structures, recorded the presence of some exposed features, and analyzed surface finds. He categorized them into two types, small forts and tower enclosures, and dated them to the middle of the 1st c. B.C.E. to the beginning of the 1st c. C.E. Based on their ceramic assemblages (Figure. 9) he posited that these were among the first structures to be constructed during the earliest stages of Roman colonization in this rural context.² While none of these structures are identical, they share a number of characteristics, including their topographic placement, small occupied areas, thick outer walls, and artifact assemblages. These same features have often been used to argue for their defensive or even military nature, though some recent work has identified them as fortified farm houses.³

Caladinho is located on a hilltop on the border between the municipalities of Alandroal and Redondo, roughly 40 km from the city of Évora. When surveyed in 2000, one main structure was recorded on the site. This structure is situated on a naturally defensible ridge overlooking the plain to the north and west. It is

hypothesized that the structure at Caladinho was a watchtower embedded in the landscape in order to surveil the surrounding plain. Together with the other, similarly situated forts throughout the Alentejo, it formed an observational network that allowed monitoring of movement within the countryside. In most cases, however, there is no intervisibility between the watchtowers. They must, then, have been intended for observing only their local landscapes.

An abundance of pottery was recovered in the initial survey. Most of it was locally produced, although several imports were also collected. These include Baetican amphorae of the Haltern 70, Dressel 7-11, and Dressel 1C types as well as numerous sherds of Italian terra sigillata and amphorae fragments of Italian fabric (Figure. 6). The remainder of this assemblage includes a diverse variety of pots, bowls, and storage containers. Some wares, decorated with undulating lines or a reel, were also recovered. Interestingly, thirty-four loom weights were also discovered during surface survey. In addition to this evidence of textile production, slags from the working of lead and iron were also collected, along with a lead clamp used to repair a fractured vessel. The presence of metalworking at Caladinho is mirrored at the majority of the other forts. Indeed, many of them are located near ancient mining installations.

Caladinho and the other forts are situated in the epicenter of resistance to Roman imperial control over

western Iberia. From 80 – 72 B.C.E. in this region, the renegade Roman senator Quintus Sertorius created a break-away Roman republic, with disaffected Romans as well as indigenous elites forming the new senate. Évora, named *Liberaltas Iulia Eboracensis* in antiquity, is mythologized as Sertorius's headquarters, although little evidence exists for the city in this period. After suppressing Sertorius's rebellion, Évora was raised to *municipium* status, and quickly became an important city on the route from Lisbon to Mérida. Also, the much larger and almost certainly Roman fortification of Castelo da Lousa occupies another hilltop to the south of Caladinho. Castelo da Lousa was founded at or around the same time as Caladinho in the 60s B.C.E., contains a similar artifact assemblage, and incorporates elements of Roman architecture built in the same manner as Caladinho.⁴ Castelo da Lousa may have served as the headquarters for all these forts, though this point requires significantly more investigation. Given the tumult of the first decades of the 1st c. B.C.E. in Iberia, it is no surprise that forts like Caladinho, Castelo da Lousa, and the others in this region were constructed. The surveillance they provided would have greatly aided in securing this landscape.

In 2010, Mataloto and Williams undertook an expanded project at Caladinho, which was judged to be an excellent representative example of the other forts in the region. The project set out to complete the excavation of the tower to sterile strata. Its primary goal was to test the hypothesis that these structures were related to the Roman colonization and reorganization of the Alentejo in the mid-1st c. B.C.E. It also hoped to better identify the inhabitants of this structure – were they indigenous people concerned over the safety of the countryside, or invaders monitoring the movements of indigenous people through the landscape? And, regardless of the identity of the inhabitants, the project also sought to better understand the nature of the control granted by watchtowers like Caladinho. Given their regular proximity to mines and fertile agricultural land, it may be postulated that the forts were intended to grant their owners control over natural resources and perhaps even monitor enslaved labor.⁵

With the permission of IGESPAR and the local municipality of Redondo, excavation at Caladinho began last summer assisted by a team of field school students and volunteers. Open area excavation of the structure permitted the removal of several stratigraphic layers of debris, revealing the thick walls of a tower, a fortification wall to the northwest, and an abundance of artifacts. The tower, however, proved to be double the size suggested by features exposed on the surface, making it impossible to complete its excavation in a

single season. Regardless, the removal of the debris from the tower's collapse revealed a great deal of information regarding its foundation, abandonment, and inhabitants.

Cleaning of the walls exposed the full extent of the structure, and three basic spaces were identified inside: a narrow northeast room, a large southwest room, and an L-shaped corridor between the two (Figure. 7). In total, the structure is nearly 9 × 5 m in size, with external walls that are almost a meter wide and internal walls which are roughly half that size. The southern corner of the structure has disappeared (likely eroding down the hill over the past two millennia) while the northern corner has suffered some damage from trees. The eastern corner of the site incorporates an outcrop of bedrock, while the western corner abuts a much larger outcrop. The nearly 4 m height of this outcrop suggests that the tower must have been at least as tall if the occupants were to see over the outcrop and to the plain below. This minimum estimated height is supported by the great deal of debris located within and on top of the standing remains.

The walls of the structure were constructed from unbonded rubble, comprised entirely of the local schist stone. The stones incorporated into the structure appear to have been chosen and laid with some care, and there is some evidence that clay was used to line the interior walls of the structure. It appears that the majority of the packed clay lining was washed away when the collapse of the upper floor or floors exposed the interior of the structure to the elements. The internal walls appear, at least on the plan, to have been constructed after the larger external walls, but the precise phasing of the walls will only be certain when the structure is excavated to its foundations.

The narrow northeast room is slightly over 1 m wide at its largest point and a little over 2 m long. It lies immediately opposite a 1 m wide gap in the wall leading out to a promontory, perhaps used for observing the countryside to the north and west. Whether access to this promontory was available only to the occupants of the tower is as yet unclear. This gap is flanked by another 1 m gap which we think is the main entrance to the structure. The corridor makes a 90 degree turn to the southeast near the center of the structure. On the plan, the corridor looks deceptively narrow here as interior walls are leaning inwards, one of them precariously. The confined space makes it difficult for more than one or two people to work in this area at any given time, but nevertheless a great deal of rubble from the building's collapse was removed as this area was excavated to more than a meter in depth. The larger room contained less rubble particularly on its southern and western sides, probably owing to the

same erosive forces that claimed the southern corner of this room.

While the presence of two entrances on the northern corner calls into question the defensive nature of this structure, the potential defensive application of the L-shaped corridor is significant. The presence of walls on the western side of the hill, which incorporate the stone outcrops and reinforce the natural protection provided by the ridge, indicates some additional attempt at defensive architecture. Further exploration of the hilltop is needed in order to determine whether these walls continue around the fort or if they only block the approach from the northwest.

Little can yet be said about the functions of the narrow northeastern room or the larger southwestern room until the remainder of the debris is removed. We speculate that these spaces were used for storage, perhaps even the storage of the products of nearby agriculture or mining overseen by the tower. We hope that the presumably undisturbed contexts beneath the debris of the tower's collapse will provide the answer. Nevertheless, the careful stratigraphic excavation of the debris revealed evidence of the upper floor as well as the nature of the collapse itself. We were able to recognize multiple stratigraphic units within the debris, suggesting that the collapse took place over a period of time. As the upper floor gave way and fell inside the structure, it was followed by the walls slowly leaning, and finally falling, inward. Notably, there appears to have been some activity at the site after it had begun collapsing. The remains of what may have been a metallurgical furnace were recorded along the northwestern side of the large room, along with some slag, charcoal, and burned clay, all located above and cut into a unit of rubble.

The artifact assemblage recovered from the interior of the structure gives us some idea of the inhabitants, the function of the upper floor, and the chronology of the site (Figure. 8). Thirteen fragments of Italian *terra sigillata* were collected, the majority of which were undiagnostic body sherds. The few diagnostic pieces, however, included two bases of the *Conspectus* B1 type, one of which bears a radial stamp with the name: *Dar[?]vs* (Figure. 8). Dareus is thought to have been active at Lyon between 30-20 B.C.E.⁶ Two other stamped pieces were also recovered (Figure. 9). Although fragmentary, the name of A. Vibius Scrofula may be read on the smaller of the two. This name is relatively common on *terra sigillata* produced at Arezzo between 40-15 B.C.E.⁷ The third stamped piece is illegible, but may present the name of Camurius, another Arretine potter active between 30-70 C.E.⁸ Together these ceramics give us a useful *terminus post quem* for the abandonment of the structure as they were

all found amid the debris, meaning that they were probably among the objects on the upper floor when it collapsed. We can then assume that the tower at Caladinho remained occupied into the last decades of the 1st c. B.C.E., and perhaps into the 1st c. C.E.

Unlike the assemblage recovered during survey, only two amphora fragments were collected during excavation, and what few were collected were found during the last days of the project. We presume this is because the amphorae used on site were stored in the bottom floor, whereas the upper floor was used for domestic activities. Thus, it is encouraging that amphorae began to appear on the final days of the project as that would suggest that we have found the bottom of the debris and will be able to excavate the sealed contexts of the bottom floor this coming summer. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the two amphora fragments we recorded were both of Baetican fabric, but were otherwise undiagnostic. Another amphora sherd of the same fabric was discovered embedded in the central interior wall. If we are able to recover and analyze this fragment, we hope that it will provide us with a date for the construction of that wall and perhaps of the entire structure.

The common wares collected during the excavation are of a diverse morphology and most are made in the local clay. Interestingly, and supportive of the evidence for a domestic function of the upper floor, 18 loom weights of a variety of sizes were collected, primarily from the narrow room and the corridor, although two were excavated near the northeastern wall of the large room. Added to the 34 loom weights recovered during surface survey, the 52 total weights suggest the presence more than one loom. The sustained domestic activity suggested by the loom weights runs counter to our interpretation of the site as a watchtower, and we intend to pursue this line of questioning further.

Given the defensive nature of much of Caladinho's architecture – as well as the surveillance potential provided by its position within the landscape – it is difficult not to interpret Caladinho as part of a program of colonization and control connected to the Roman occupation of the region.⁹ The nearness of Évora and Castelo da Lousa, both of which were settled by the Romans at roughly the same time as Caladinho, also argues in favor of this interpretation. The control over nearby natural resources offered by Caladinho and the other defensive structures in the Alentejo perhaps was the impetus behind their construction. And, once the region was secured and the landscape reorganized and divided amongst numerous new villas, Caladinho and the other watchtowers were swiftly abandoned. Indeed, field survey of the area around Caladinho supports this interpretation. A large unexcavated villa is located to

the northwest. While limited, data collected from this site during field survey suggests that it was founded at the end of the 1st c. B.C.E., just as sites like Caladinho were falling out of use.

Mataloto and Williams intend to complete the excavation of the main structure at Caladinho in 2011. It is hoped that the contexts excavated after the last of the rubble is removed will reveal not only the function of the ground floor rooms, but also further clues as to

the identity of the site's inhabitants. We also hope to expand the excavated area to include more of the hilltop and, with small, targeted test pits to ascertain the presence of any additional structures. Given time and resources, we would also like to expand the project to encompass other small forts in the Alentejo. We hope in the near future to be able to place these structures more fully in their regional context and to better understand the changing Alentejan landscape and its inhabitants under the nascent Roman Empire.

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* An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 112th Annual Meeting of the AIA in January 2011. This project would not have been possible without the assistance of the *Câmara Municipal de Redondo*, the *Instituto de Gestão do Património Arquitectónico e Arqueológico* (IGESPAR), the Department of Classics at the State University of New York at Buffalo, the PortAnta Archaeological Cooperative, and the Mark Diamond Research Fund of the Graduate Student Association at the State University of New York at Buffalo. Special thanks should also be extended to our field school students, supervisors, and volunteers, including J. L. Santo António, J. Carman, R. Clemente, I. Conde, J. Inverno, L. Feldballe, S. Moore, E. Morgan, D. Neves, G. Prescott, L. Palmentere, M. Pawlowski, C. Sogin, R. Vennarucci, K. A. Whittingham, B. Wong, L. Wong, and R. Yeung.

¹ Almeida 1946.

² Mataloto 2002, 179-80; for further information on the site of Caladinho, see also Calado 1993, 55; Calado and Mataloto 2001; Mataloto 2004, 39. The use of fortifications such as these in the reorganization of western Iberia during the first decades of Roman colonization is widely discussed. See especially Ortiz Romero (1995), Moret (1995) and Fabião (1998, 265-90).

³ Vasconcelos (1895) and Maia (1974a; 1974b) categorize these structures as evidence for military occupation, while Wahl (1985) and Moret (1995, 557) suggest that they are instead fortified homes. Fabião (1998, 287) suggests a multiplicity of functions for this type of structure.

⁴ Alarcão et al. 2010.

⁵ Maia (1986; 1996) identifies similar structures in the south of Portugal as supporting the mining industry. A similar interpretation of watchtowers associated with mines in the Faynan region of Jordan has been advanced by Friedman (2009).

⁶ Ettlinger et al. 1990, 154-5; Oxè et al. 2000, 210 (see Figure. 724 [584] for an image of the same stamp).

⁷ Oxè et al. 2000, 479 (see Figure. 2400 [2327,2328] for images of stamps similar to this one).

⁸ Oxè et al. 2000, 173 (see Figure. 514 [397] for images of stamps similar to this one).

⁹ Fabião 1998, 520; see also Ortiz Romero and Rodríguez Díaz 1998; Gonçalves et al. 1999.