

Analytical study of the azulejos from Igreja da Graça in Lisbon, signed by João de Góis

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SUMMARY

Besides the famous panels of Capela de São Roque in Lisbon, signed and dated by the painter, the incomplete and dispersed panels of Igreja da Graça are the only other Renaissance azulejos produced and remaining in Lisbon that are known to be fully signed. The panels have now been studied through twelve different small samples collected from as many azulejo units. This communication reports the results of that study identifying the main micro-morphological features and the variations that may be ascribed to different chronologies or to different workshops. The tiles making up the figure bearing the signing monogram have been studied in detail by scanning-electron microscopy coupled with energy-dispersive spectrometry (SEM-EDS) to establish a morphological and analytical template aimed at identifying a common officinal provenance in azulejos of the same general chronology known or presumed to have been produced in Lisbon.

On the walls of the ante-sacristy of Igreja da Graça in Lisbon subsist parts of one or more azulejo panels decorated with grotesque motifs that suggest an early chronology – figure 1. The incomplete panels have been reported by other authors [e.g. 1] and ascribed to the 2nd half of the 16th century based on the decoration. They were also often assumed to be of Portuguese production, although that assumption was not objectively proved. The rather surprising technical quality of most individual tiles or their variability, e.g. in terms of colour continuity, passed unmentioned and actually no author considered the tiles sufficiently important to justify a detailed observation.

In December 2014 we obtained an authorization from the church to make an exploratory inspection of the tiles and an acquisition of X-ray fluorescence (XRF) spectra using a Bruker Tracer III SD portable unit. We also made a detailed acquisition of images the painted monogram of the workshop master (and presumably also one of the painters of the original panels) was found [2]. That monogram (figure 2) has now been conclusively identified [3] as that of the elusive João de Góis, a Flemish faience and tile manufacturer until now known only from an Inquisition process for heresy of 1561/62 [4] and a tally of professionals living in Lisbon, made in 1565 for taxation purposes [5]. From the images acquired a first graphical restitution of the panel remains was attempted resorting to digital technology and the dispersed tiles started being assembled into what may have been a panel once bearing a shield of arms together with smaller panels and pilasters (for some images of the restitution see [2]).

SEM-EDS observations and analyses were made at the HERCULES Laboratory in Évora using a HITACHI 3700N SEM coupled to a BRUKER XFlash 5010 EDS. The results have shown that the tiles were fired in a cycle including a very long firing/cooling period, maybe using a single kiln for tin-glazed pottery then extant in Lisbon, resulting in a characteristically over-developed interface with extensive growth of lead-rich K-feldspars (figure 3) already found by other authors

in reproduction studies [6]. This is a fortunate instance because it offers a readily recognizable sine-qua-non characteristic for tiles produced within the same technological parameters. A study of the biscuits, which are the only part of the tiles believed to be wholly produced with local materials, identified three different types correlated with macroscopic differences in the painting and possibly related with phases of the production of the individual tiles. An explanation for this integration of tiles produced in different periods depends on a study of the backside markings of the ceramic bodies, which can only be made when the tiles will be removed from the walls for remounting in their correct positions.



Figure 1 – An aspect of the dispersed grotesque azulejo panels in Igreja da Graça

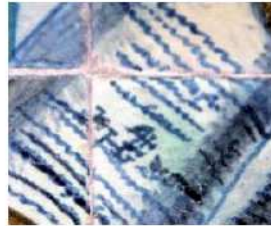


Figure 2 – Monogram of João de Góis signing the panels



Figure 3 – The glaze and glaze-biscuit interface of sample Az013/L2

Key-words: Renaissance majolica; Azulejo, Igreja da Graça in Lisbon; João de Góis; instrumental characterization

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