

Debris of greatness – research on the remains of 16th century Portuguese azulejo panels at *Igreja de São Roque* in Lisbon

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ABSTRACT

In the interior of *Igreja de São Roque* (Saint Roch Church) in Lisbon, on both sides of the nave near the entrance, an inspection of the tile linings promptly reveals a potpourri of azulejos hastily intermixed with the otherwise orderly panels bought from Seville in the late 16th century. Some of these azulejos are obviously connected with the Seville panels but others are very different.

In this paper, we present the results of a first study concerning those odd dispersed azulejos on the walls of the lower nave of *São Roque* and discuss their origin, significance and chronology.

RESUMO

No interior da Igreja de São Roque, em Lisboa, em ambos os lados da nave, perto da entrada, a observação do revestimento azulejar rapidamente revela uma miscelânea de azulejos encaixados de forma descontínua nos painéis sevilhanos datados de finais do séc. XVI. Alguns destes azulejos dispersos são obviamente parte das encomendas feitas a Sevilha na última década do século XVI, mas outros são totalmente diferentes.

Neste artigo, apresentam-se os resultados do primeiro estudo destes misteriosos azulejos dispersos nas paredes da nave inferior de São Roque, discutindo-se a sua origem, significado e cronologia.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the interior of *Igreja de São Roque* (Saint Roch Church) in Lisbon, on both sides of the nave near the entrance, an inspection of the tile linings promptly reveals a potpourri of azulejos intermixed with the otherwise orderly panels reputedly bought from Seville [1] in the late 16th century (Figure 1). Some of these azulejos are visibly connected with the Seville panels [1] but others are aesthetically different. The fact has been mentioned (e.g. by Pais [2]) yet they were never, to our knowledge, specifically studied.



Figure 1. An arch spandrel orderly lined with Sevillian azulejos (left side) compared to another with intermixed azulejos (right side) – the tiles referred to in this paper are within the area outlined in red

A close examination identified 51 whole tiles and fragments applied to the walls potentially from the same set. Besides these, the *Museu de São Roque* (Saint Roch Museum) keeps in storage a number of single azulejos amidst which seven other related units were identified. Therefore, there are, in the whole, 58 azulejos or fragments that may be related to one or more figurative panels that were lost. Figure 2 illustrates fifteen tiles from this mysterious set.

In this paper, we report the results of a study of the disperse azulejos, discuss what they represented and where they were originally applied. We also detail the information obtained from an analytical study of samples collected from the tiles, and discuss their possible chronology and integration into the production of their time.



Figure 2. Tiles from the dispersed set of azulejos at *São Roque*. From left to right and top to bottom: first row - 2a) part of an arm, branch of a bush and a halo; 2b) a foot; 2c) part of a fur vest (?); 2d) part of a letter (T) and the numeral “3”; 2e) a cloud with the sun (?) behind; second row - 2f) a tile depicting part of a frame made of ovals; 2g) part of a tree trunk with leaves; 2h, i, j) leaves, fruit and a flower; third row - 2k, l) representation of a precious tissue; 2m) part of a piece of furniture; 2n) decorative motives on furniture, simulating gold and 2o) a complex corner (?)

2. OBSERVATIONS ON THE TILES AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Although it is difficult to securely establish whether this set of *circa* 60 azulejos belonged to a single or to multiple panels and what was its iconography, some propositions can nevertheless be advanced. The presence of one azulejo where an arm can be seen over what seems to be a halo (Figure 2a) and another one with the writing “T:3” (Figure 2d) suggests a representation of the Baptism of Christ. The subject is addressed in the New Testament by three of the Evangelists (Mark, Lucas and Matthew), and Matthew refers to this event in the 3rd chapter of his Gospel (Mt: 3, 13-17). Having this in mind, we may have what seems to be part of a mention to the Gospel of Matthew referring to this narrative and the arm of Saint John the Baptist pouring water over the haloed head of Jesus. Furthermore, the tile in figure 2c could represent part of the lamb skin the Baptist used on his shoulders. Several other azulejos suggest a scene taking place in the open air, with trees and fruits, and also a bare foot on the grass, all elements that could be associated with the same scene. Although we do not actually have a representative set of azulejos to have a fair notion of the scene in the panel, it can be hypothesised that it might be something similar to the print by Abraham de Bruyn, after Gerard van Gröningen, dated 1583 (Figure 3).

Examining the figurative azulejos that are in storage we found that the backs were rather unusually marked by writing with white glaze (Figure 4). Besides a sequential number

at the centre, there is a symbol on top and, sometimes, other symbols are apparent below the number. The numerals are similar to one reported by José Queiroz from the back of a tile from *Capela de São Roque* [3, p. 111].



Figure 3. On the left side the print (source: Rijksmuseum ref. RP-P-1906-2170) and on the right side with six azulejos that could fit the representation

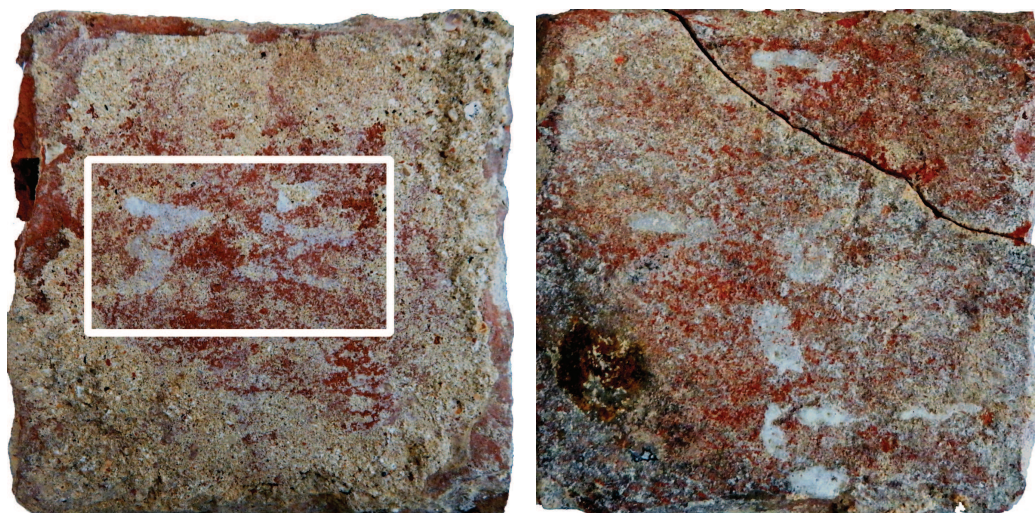


Figure 4. From left to right: 4a) back of a tile on which a sequential positioning marking “32” is clearly visible while a further marking below (?) is barely perceivable; 4b) back of a different tile with a numeral “2(?)6” in the middle, a horizontal line on top and, seemingly, more markings below (the colour was enhanced on both tiles)

If it is accepted that there once was a panel depicting the Baptism of Jesus, where would it have been located in the Church, and when was it made? The second part of the question is easier to answer, because *Igreja de São Roque* was erected between 1565 and 1573 when it was opened for worship albeit not yet quite finished [4]. The works continued in 1577 and the finishing of the interiors was mostly done in 1584-1586 [4]. The azulejos lining *Capela de São Roque*, inside the church, are precisely dated “1584” and this panel possibly depicting the Baptism of Jesus may have been made around the same time. The consecration of each of the four side chapels of the church that existed at this time is known and one of them was to the *Espírito Santo* (the Holy Ghost). Baltasar Telles mentions this chapel, identifying its patrons [5, pp. 123-124], but does not detail its decoration, nor does the unknown author of the description of the Church, *circa* 1706-1708 [6], who considers it “humble” presumably because it did not have any painted retable that they would consider remarkable. In 1749 this chapel was demolished and replaced by the lavish *Capela de São João Baptista* (Chapel of John the Baptist) commissioned in Italy by King D. João V and delivered as a self-contained fully decorated unit. Could an azulejo panel depicting the Baptism of Jesus have formerly been there? If so, how would such a panel have fitted in a space consecrated to the Holy Ghost?

The Holy Ghost is mentioned three times in the New Testament: connected to the Annunciation (Luke: 1, 35); in connection precisely with the Baptism of Jesus and, finally, the Descent of the Holy Spirit, in connection with the Christian holy day of Pentecost (Luke: 24, 49 and Acts 2:1-31). Of all these references, the most important one in terms of representation and symbolism is probably the Baptism, when the Holy Ghost was visible; in all the other events, the presence was felt but remained unseen. If there was a second azulejo panel with the same invocation in this chapel one might suggest that the image could be of the Annunciation and that the azulejos in figure 2 which have an image of a textile with a Greek motif could be related to such a scene.

As far as we know there is no mention of azulejos related to the chapel while it was consecrated to the Holy Ghost. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the chapel dedicated to Saint Roch, on the other side of the nave, is lined with an extraordinary set of azulejos signed “Francisco de Matos” and dated “1584” and it too was never even considered worth mentioning by those who described the church. Therefore, the authors of the two books referred above [5; 6] were seemingly not interested in azulejos or maybe even prejudiced against an art medium that competed with painting on wood, canvas or frescoes, but one may always hope that another more comprehensive source will someday be found.

3. EXPERIMENTAL

3.1. Samples

The dispersed azulejos of *Igreja de São Roque* were given the reference Az307. Nine samples were collected by removing small fractions, preferably of the glaze with biscuit attached, from areas already with previous damage. Figure 5 exemplifies the sample areas. Each sample was identified with an alphanumeric code added to the panel reference (see table 1).

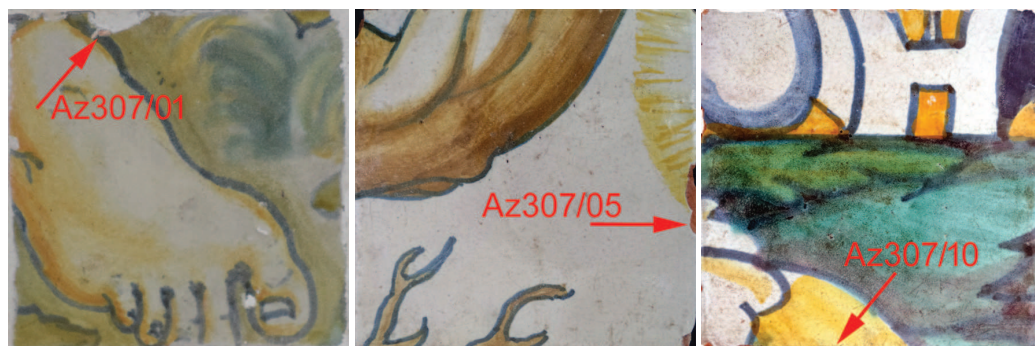


Figure 5. Sampling points – from left to right: Az307/01, Az307/05 and Az307/10

Table 1. Samples collected for microscopic and chemical analysis

Sample reference	Tile	Colour of the sampling point
Az307/01	integrated in the wall depicting one foot dark outline	dark greenish outline
Az307/03	integrated in the wall depicting a textile	white
Az307/04	integrated in the wall depicting part of a letter (T) and numeral (3)	white
Az307/05	integrated in the wall depicting part of an arm, branches of a bush and a halo	white
Az307/06	stored single tile decorated with yellow and blue motifs	blue
Az307/08	stored single tile decorated with green and blue motifs	white
Az307/09	stored single tile decorated in blue on white	white
Az307/10	stored single tile depicting part of a frame made of ovals	lemon yellow
Az307/13	stored single tile decorated with yellow, orange, blue and purple drawings	purple

3.2. Analytical methodology

The azulejo samples were stabilized in resin, lapped and polished to obtain a cross-section for observation and analysis by scanning-electron microscopy coupled with an X-ray energy-dispersive spectrometer (SEM-EDS).

The optical acquisition of images of the sections was obtained with a Leica DFC295 digital camera coupled to a M205C stereomicroscope of the same brand.

SEM-EDS observations and analyses were made at the HERCULES Laboratory in Évora using a Hitachi S3700N SEM with a coupled Bruker XFlash 5010 EDS. The specimens

were uncoated and the observations were made in backscattered electrons mode (BSE) in variable pressure mode at 40 Pa and at an accelerating voltage of 20.0 kV. The acquisition of X-ray spectra was done with the detector at ca. 10 mm working distance.

The selection of areas for EDS analysis avoided inclusions in the glaze or biscuit representing more than ca. 5% of the full area analysed. Whenever possible area sizes of ca. 200 × 200 μm for glazes and 500 × 500 μm for biscuits, or larger, were used but acceptable repeatability was verified in areas four times smaller. For comparison purposes, only the elements usually representing the major components were considered, excluding tin (Sn) in the glazes and lead (Pb) in the biscuits due to their variability with the area chosen (in the case of Sn in the glaze because of crystal aggregations and in the case of Pb in the biscuit because the content increases with proximity to the interface). The results of the EDS analyses were given in weight % of each element considered.

Principal Component Analysis (PCA) of EDS results was made using the SPSS© software platform by IBM Analytics.

3.3. Results

3.3.1. Morphological characteristics

Figure 6 illustrates microscopic images of two of the sample sections prepared. There are at least two different biscuit colours: buff (left side of figure 6) and red/brown (right side of figure 6). No *coperta* (a transparent glaze layer sprinkled on top of the painted glaze) was used over the painting.

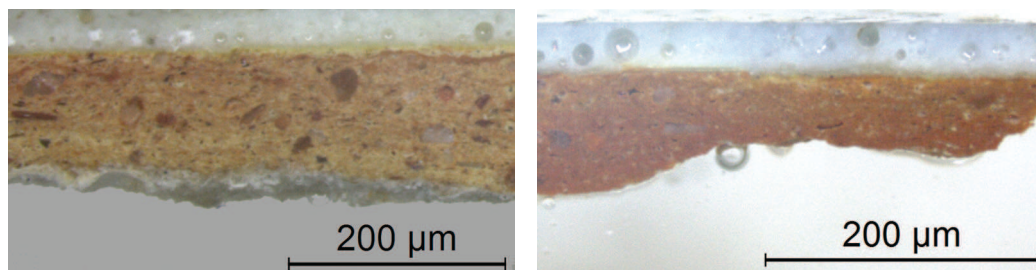


Figure 6. Prepared sections in optical microscopy - left to right: Az307/03 and Az307/06

Figure 7 illustrates SEM images of samples Az307/01, Az307/05, Az307/09 and Az307/13 that exemplify the variability of the main micro-morphologic characteristics associated with the glazes of these azulejos: relatively few inclusions, the most conspicuous of which are grains of sand, and an interface glaze-biscuit with a fair amount of individualized crystals of neoformation.

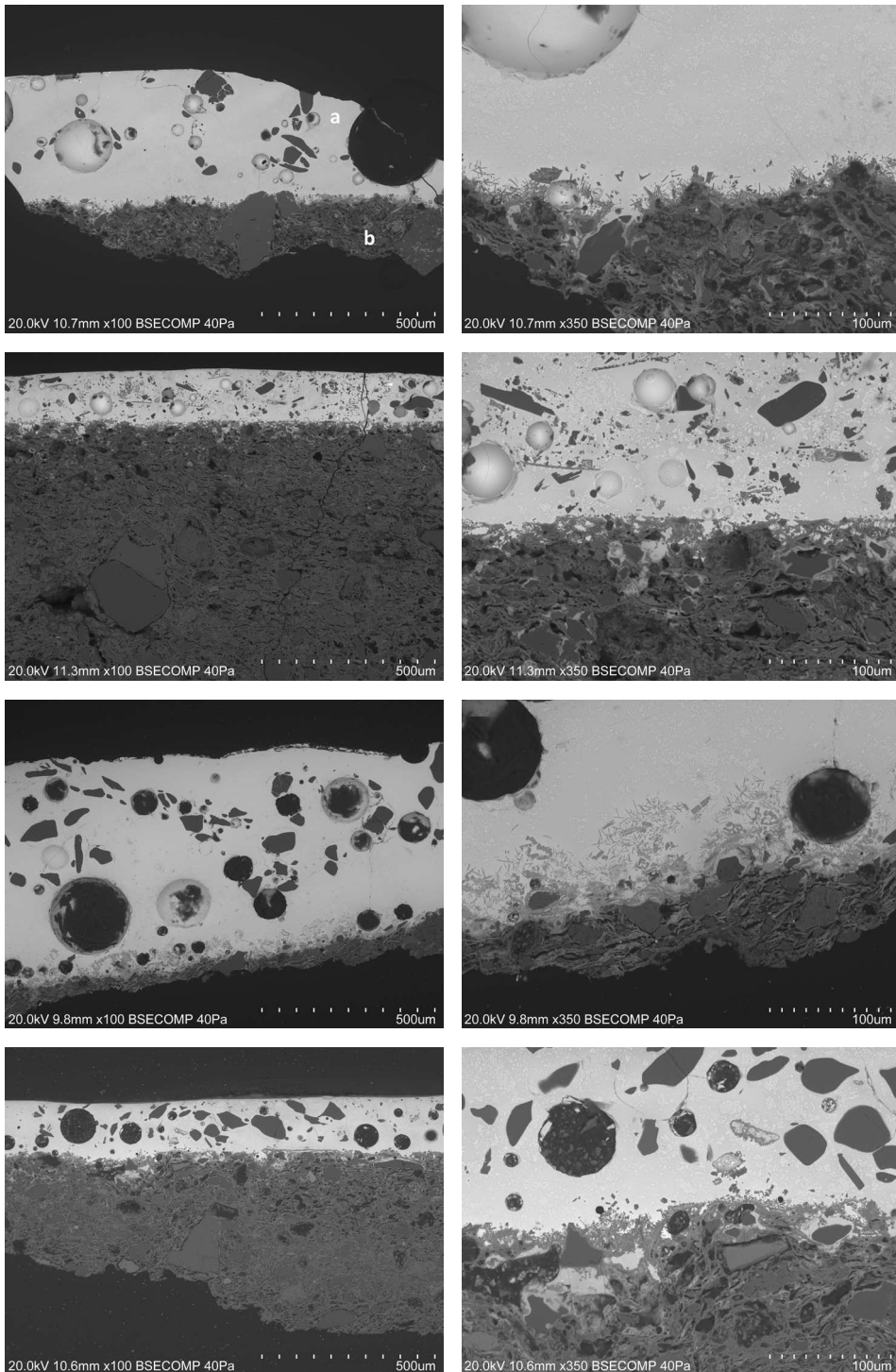


Figure 7. SEM images of samples (from top to bottom): Az307/01, Az307/05; Az307/09 and Az307/13, exemplifying the main micro-morphologic characteristics generally associated with the glazes of this panel (left side) and biscuit-glaze interfaces (right side) (a – glaze; b – biscuit)

3.3.2. Glaze composition

Table 2 includes the semi-quantitative results of analyses of the glazes by EDS in weight %. Sn was excluded for the reasons pointed out in section 3.2. The amount of oxygen was calculated through the remaining elements stoichiometry of their most commonly considered oxides and the results were normalized to 100%. The ratio between Si and Pb (the main components of the glaze) was determined and is also included in the table, as well as the averages and standard deviations.

Table 2. Semi-quantitative composition of the glazes determined by SEM-EDS (wt.% of oxygen and seven main elements of particular interest, excluding Sn, for comparative purposes, normalised to 100%)

Samples	Na	Mg	Al	Si	K	Fe	Pb	O	Si/Pb
Az307/01	1.05	0.37	2.61	18.70	1.78	0.67	46.36	28.47	0.40
Az307/03	0.91	0.40	2.99	17.81	1.48	0.73	47.85	27.84	0.37
Az307/04	1.49	0.50	3.22	21.50	3.49	0.81	36.87	32.12	0.58
Az307/05	1.54	0.60	2.69	17.56	3.78	1.04	44.77	28.01	0.39
Az307/06	0.92	0.44	2.75	17.29	1.13	0.59	49.82	27.07	0.35
Az307/08	0.83	0.42	3.97	18.25	1.33	0.81	45.36	29.02	0.40
Az307/09	0.78	0.38	3.48	16.24	0.82	0.73	51.03	26.54	0.32
Az307/10	1.17	0.53	2.82	19.08	1.60	0.69	45.01	29.10	0.42
Az307/13	1.24	0.58	3.27	19.14	2.26	0.83	43.00	29.67	0.45
Average	1.10	0.47	3.09	18.40	1.96	0.77	45.56	28.65	0.41
STDev	0.28	0.09	0.44	1.49	1.03	0.13	4.14	1.64	0.08

3.3.3. Biscuit composition

Table 3 includes the semi-quantitative results of EDS analyses of the biscuits of which there was a sufficient area. The results refer to oxygen (calculated through the remaining elements stoichiometry of their most commonly considered oxides) and eight other elements of higher content and particular interest for comparison purposes. Pb was detected in all cases but excluded for the reasons pointed in 3.2. The results are given in wt.% and were corrected to 100%. The table also includes the ratio between the main components of the biscuit, Ca and Si, as well as the averages and standard deviations.

Table 3. Semi-quantitative composition of the biscuits determined by SEM-EDS (wt.% of the main elements normalised to 100%)

Samples	Na	Mg	Al	Si	K	Ca	Ti	Fe	O	Ca/Si
Az307/03	1.56	1.20	8.81	22.44	2.65	14.39	0.75	4.67	43.53	0.64
Az307/04	1.44	1.46	9.25	22.85	2.37	13.53	0.65	4.48	43.96	0.59
Az307/05	1.52	1.43	8.57	22.99	3.62	13.73	0.56	3.99	43.59	0.60
Az307/06	1.33	1.38	9.63	27.98	3.24	4.70	0.64	4.40	46.68	0.17
Az307/08	1.24	1.37	9.68	25.67	3.19	8.46	0.76	4.13	45.50	0.33
Az307/09	1.56	1.66	11.04	25.11	4.02	6.27	0.86	3.86	45.62	0.25
Az307/13	1.09	1.51	9.31	20.21	2.87	17.28	0.99	4.14	42.60	0.85
Average	1.39	1.43	9.47	23.89	3.14	11.19	0.74	4.24	44.50	0.49
STDev	0.18	0.14	0.80	2.55	0.55	4.71	0.15	0.29	1.45	0.25

4. DISCUSSION

4.1. Technology

The SEM images of the glaze sections and their interfaces with the biscuits can be compared with corresponding images of samples obtained from panels attributed to João de Góis or his circle [7], e.g. the *Nossa Senhora da Vida* panel (Figure 8), confirming that they are similar, which suggests the use of an analogous glaze preparation and a comparable firing cycle, as was experimentally observed through the study of replicates [8]. In fact, such a close similarity points to a probable firing of all these panels in the same kiln [7, p. 130], possibly the same mentioned in relation with João de Góis and his brother Filipe that was situated at the bottom of the Santa Catarina Hill [9, p. 19].

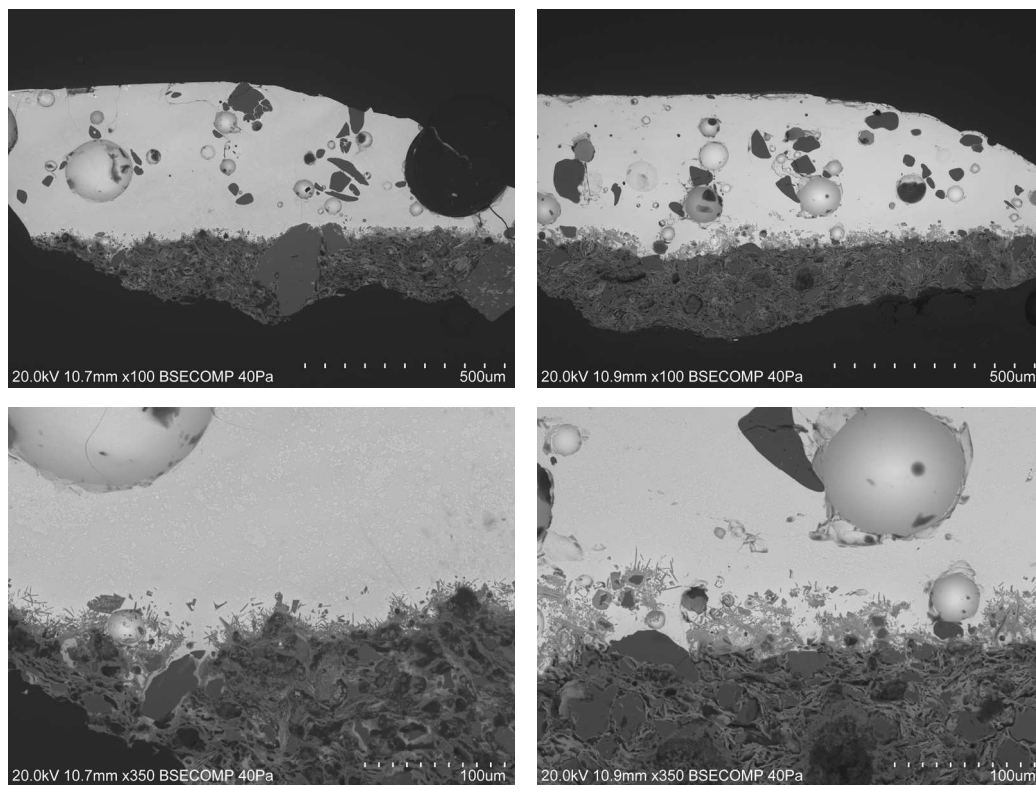


Figure 8. Morphologic comparison between Az307/01 (glaze and interface - left side) and a sample of the *Nossa Senhora da Vida* panel, Az032/01 (glaze and interface - right side)

Therefore, as respects micro-morphology (partially derived from an unusual firing technique) the tiles under study are similar to other productions of the João de Góis circle [7].

4.2. Glazes

Figure 9 shows the results of a log-based PCA of the glazes considering the analytical results in table 2, together with samples from previous studies, used here for comparative purposes: first phase of *Igreja da Graça* (identified by the designation Graça I) [10], the panel *Nossa Senhora da Vida* formerly from *Igreja de Santo André* [11], the lining of *Capela de São Roque* [12] and the Sevillian azulejos from this same church [1]. The plot depicts a projection in the plane of the two principal components, P1 and P2. In Figure 10 is presented the loadings plot showing the contribution of each element to PC1 and PC2. PC1 explains 60% of the variation and is controlled in the positive sense by the contents in Na, Mg, Si, K and Fe, and in the opposite sense by the contents in Al and Pb. PC2 explains 20% of the variation and is controlled in the positive sense mostly by the contents in Al, Si and Fe and in the opposite sense mostly by the contents in Na and Mg.

As can be seen from figure 9, the present samples cluster together with samples from Graça I, the first phase of *Igreja da Graça*, the panel *Nossa Senhora da Vida* and the lining of *Capela de São Roque*, in this same church, all productions of the circle of João de Góis. On the other side, they are clustered far away from the Sevillian azulejos also from *Igreja de São Roque*.

Table 4 further compares the average elemental contents in the glazes of the azulejos presently studied (Az307) with the same for the panel *Nossa Senhora da Vida* (determined from [11, table 2] and the lining of *Capela de São Roque* – determined from the results for the panels of the dog and of the cardinal in [12, table 2]. The results demonstrate that the glazes are very similar.

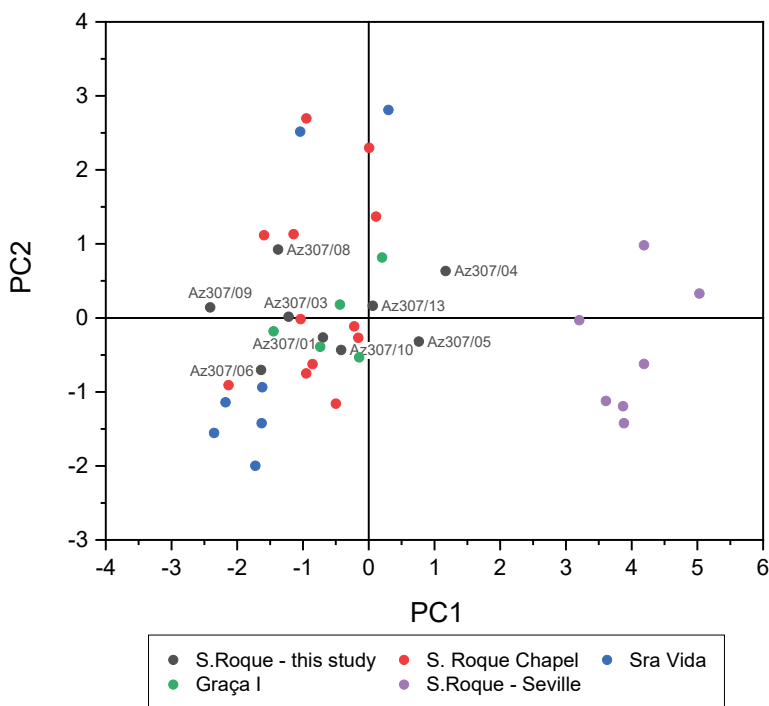


Figure 9. Score plot of the PCA of the glazes of Az307 (black) with other 16th century panels

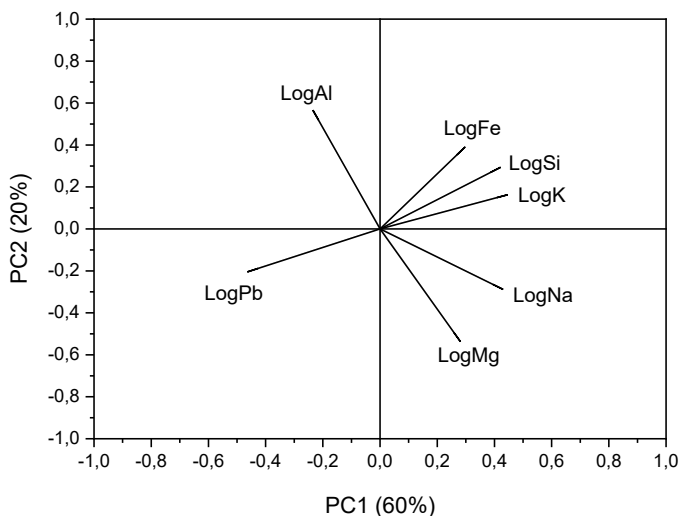


Figure 10. Loadings plot of the PCA of the glazes

Table 4. Comparison of average elemental contents and Si/Pb ratio in the glazes of Az307, the panel *Nossa Senhora da Vida* and the lining of *Capela de São Roque*

Az307	Na	Mg	Al	Si	K	Fe	Pb	O	Si/Pb
AVERAGE	1.10	0.47	3.09	18.40	1.96	0.77	45.56	28.65	0.41
STDev	0.28	0.09	0.44	1.49	1.03	0.13	4.14	1.64	0.08

N. S. da Vida	Na	Mg	Al	Si	K	Fe	Pb	O	Si/Pb
AVERAGE	0.92	0.48	2.98	17.33	1.25	0.78	48.87	27.39	0.38
STDev	0.24	0.20	0.71	3.47	0.66	0.20	8.50	3.91	0.17

Capela S. Roque	Na	Mg	Al	Si	K	Fe	Pb	O	Si/Pb
AVERAGE	0.98	0.46	3.21	18.76	1.74	0.82	44.98	29.05	0.42
STDev	0.19	0.22	0.67	1.32	0.50	0.24	3.92	1.70	0.07

4.3. Biscuits

Figure 11 shows the results of a log-based PCA of the biscuits of all samples, considering the analytical results in table 3, together with the same samples used for the glazes. PC1 explains 43% of the variation and is controlled in the positive sense by the contents in Na, Mg and Ca and in the opposite sense mostly by the contents in Si and K. PC2 explains 29% of the variation and is controlled in the positive sense by the contents in Al, Fe and Ti, and in the opposite sense mostly by the content in Si (Figure 12).

As for the glazes, the PC1 vs. PC2 plot of the biscuits (Figure 11) shows that the Az307 samples are clustered together with samples from the João de Góis circle (*Nossa Senhora da Vida* and, partially, *Capela de São Roque*), while the samples from the Sevillian panels and linings form a different and well separated group.

It is of some interest to remark that the biscuits of those tiles that are in storage and that, therefore, could be examined from both sides are of a very unusual deep red/brown colour similar to tiles from the *Nossa Senhora da Vida* panel that we have examined. The biscuit is very hard and its thickness (ca. 13 mm) is small for the time but adequate given the hardness of the material. In this particular case, the colour and hardness are important distinguishing characteristics that, even in the case of archaeological shards, can point macroscopically to a common provenance.

Table 5 further compares the average elemental contents in the biscuits of the azulejos presently studied (Az307) with the same for the panel *Nossa Senhora da Vida* – determined from [11, table 3]; and the lining of *Capela de São Roque*, determined from the results for the panels of the dog and of the cardinal in [12, table 3]. The results demonstrate the

similarity of the biscuits – only the rates Ca/Si are somewhat higher than the other two because of a few samples with higher Ca contents, as seen in table 3, but still the results are compatible and the Ca/Si ratio is much lower than e.g. for Sevillian tiles of the period or Portuguese 17th century azulejos [see e.g. 1, table 4].

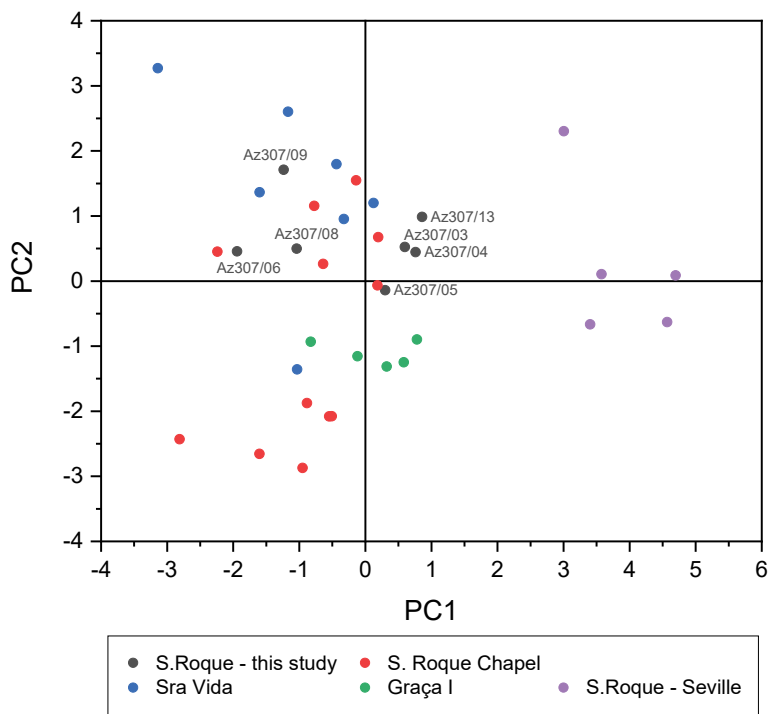


Figure 11. Score plot of the PCA of the biscuits of Az307 (grey) with other 16th century panels

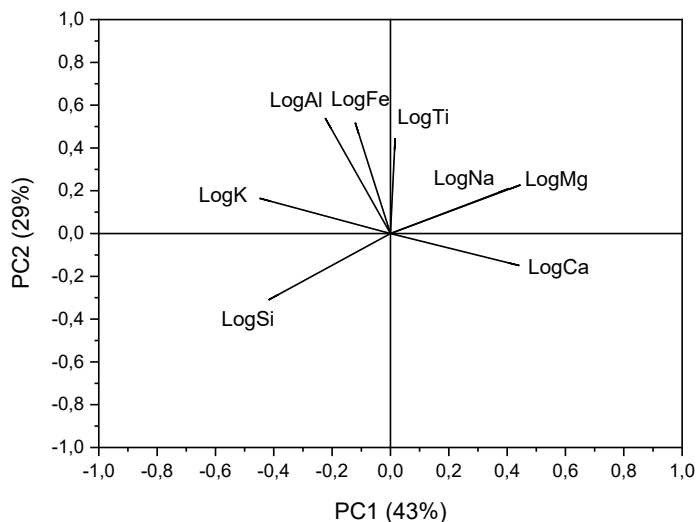


Figure 12. Loadings plot of the PCA of the biscuits

Table 5. Comparison of average elemental contents and Ca/Si ratio in the biscuits of Az307, the panel *Nossa Senhora da Vida* and the lining of *Capela de São Roque*

Az307	Na	Mg	Al	Si	K	Ca	Ti	Fe	O	Ca/Si
AVERAGE	1.39	1.43	9.47	23.89	3.14	11.19	0.74	4.24	44.50	0.49
STDev	0.18	0.14	0.80	2.55	0.55	4.71	0.15	0.29	1.45	0.25

N. S. da Vida	Na	Mg	Al	Si	K	Ca	Ti	Fe	O	Ca/Si
AVERAGE	1.34	1.68	10.11	24.97	3.48	7.36	0.70	5.05	45.31	0.30
STDev	0.23	0.25	1.28	1.82	0.60	2.71	0.26	0.80	0.94	0.12

Capela S. Roque	Na	Mg	Al	Si	K	Ca	Ti	Fe	O	Ca/Si
AVERAGE	1.29	1.34	8.68	26.53	3.30	9.00	0.65	3.67	45.55	0.35
STDev	0.30	0.24	0.83	2.16	0.66	2.02	0.40	0.67	0.91	0.10

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

From the micro-morphology and compositional results, there is evidence that the panel or panels represented by the tiles grouped under Az307 are a product of the circle of João de Góis, maybe of his own workshop, with a chronology not far from the panel *Nossa Senhora da Vida* and the lining of *Capela de São Roque*. Even if the tiles available are few, some remarkable similarities can still be pointed (Figure 13).

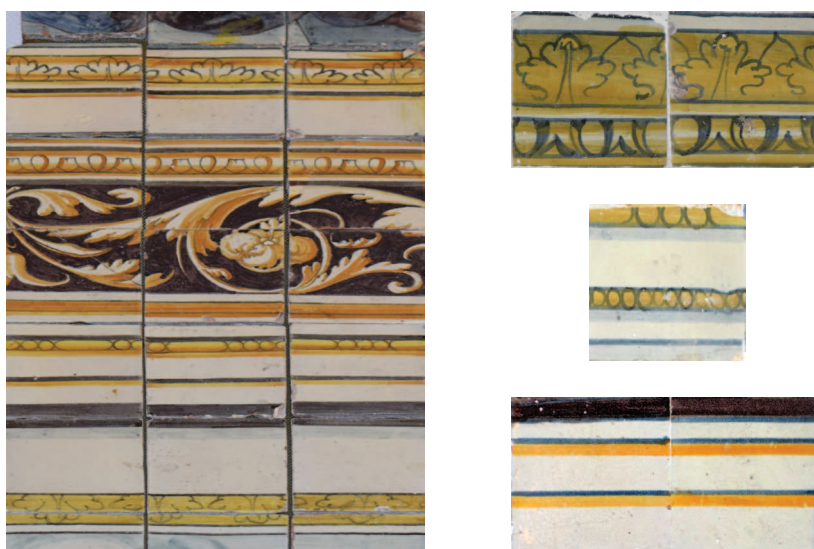


Figure 13. Occurrence of similar decorative elements in the panel *Nossa Senhora da Vida* (left side) and the dispersed azulejos in *São Roque* (right side), often simulating stonework

Another interesting aspect is that, even though the dispersed azulejos are few, several panels seem to be represented. This is suggested by the several patterns that once may have framed individual panels (Figure 14).



Figure 14. Parts of different frames of panels conserved in the dispersed remaining azulejos

If the dispersed azulejos represent several panels, one of them likely illustrates the Baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist. If such representation depicted the Holy Ghost as a dove, as it almost always does, the panel would befit the former Chapel of the Holy Ghost, replaced in 1749 by the present Chapel of St. John the Baptist. If we look today into this chapel in *Igreja de São Roque* and consider the finely made paint-like mosaic panels that decorate its walls, we shall see on the end wall the Baptism of Jesus, on the right hand side an Annunciation, and on the left the Descent of the Holy Spirit... exactly the three instances when, according to the New Testament, the Holy Ghost was perceived. The chapel called “of St. John the Baptist”, to honour one of the patronym saints of King John V who had it made in Italy and offered it to the church, actually conserves the memory of the original dedication. We will not, then, risk much in hypothesizing that three azulejo panels (or compound azulejo retables similar to *Nossa Senhora da Vida*) could have once decorated the same three walls, one representing the Baptism of Jesus, one the Annunciation (also suggested by the few remaining tiles depicting what seems to be a rich mantle fit for Archangel Gabriel, and a piece of furniture) and one the Descent during the Pentecost. Maybe the full order was never completed because João de Góis may have left Lisbon around this time [9, p. 21].

What happened to the other tiles? Seemingly they were not carried to another location for re-applying, else nothing would have remained and particularly not parts of the body of John the Baptist. A simple explanation could be that the tiles were broken and buried, but there is a more tantalizing possibility: that the missing tiles may actually still be lining the walls beneath the rich decoration of the Chapel of John the Baptist. Tiles pasted on the walls do not increase appreciably their thickness (ca. 15 mm in this case) and if the previous walls were kept, then the old panels may still be there, hidden by the new walls in the same manner as part of the lining of *Capela de São Roque* was preserved hidden by a painting [3, pp. 103-115]. Existing imaging techniques can clarify the issue and, who knows, if the azulejos are still there, they may one day be retrieved. In the meantime, we may conjecture their splendour from the meagre but still impressive debris whose study this paper presented.

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