This paper studies a group of nine Afro-Portuguese ivory objects found in early modern archaeological contexts in southern Portugal. This is the first time ivory artifacts encountered in archaeological excavations have been studied in a way that allows for new conclusions to be made about their social, economic, cultural, and symbolic uses. The archaeological evidence permits us to conclude that, contrary to what has been known till now about these objects, they were not exclusively for display but were actively used and consumed in different Portuguese environments, in contrast to the rest of Europe.

WHAT IS “AFRO-PORTUGUESE”?

The expression “Afro-Portuguese” was first coined by William B. Fagg in the book *Afro-Portuguese Ivories*, published in 1959. The combination of these two words designates a wide range of artifacts made from elephant tusks and produced under Portuguese economic and cultural influence in four areas on the western African shores, namely Sierra Leone (Republic of Sierra Leone), Benin (Nigeria), Yoruba (Nigeria), and Kongo (Angola).

When the Portuguese arrived and established their presence in these regions, the production centers of ivory objects at each locale were the residences of specific African groups, with a complex social structure ruled by elites who promoted artistic developments connected with the religious superstructure, as well as with demonstrations of power and wellbeing. European interest in African ivory products goes back to the late fifteenth century, increasing in the two following centuries when kings, aristocrats, and high clergy figures grew to appreciate and collected such products. It was Fagg, together with Ezio Bassani, who promoted such objects to international recognition through the exhibition and book *Africa and the Renaissance: Art in Ivory* (Bassani and Fagg 1988). This book contains important texts that create a historical and critical frame for the ivory artistic objects, in spite of repeating some ideas that had been developed in the unpublished PhD thesis of Kathleen Curnow (1983), who undertook a great effort to identify and comprehend the cultural background of different workshops and craftsmen. In the *catalogue raisonné* a compilation of all known objects to date kept in museums and other public or private collections was made. Only about 200 complete or fragmented objects, dated to the late fifteenth–sixteenth centuries, manufactured in the abovementioned production centers, were presented.

A few years later, Bassani (1994) wrote a paper presenting a dozen more Afro-Portuguese ivories. He would later become the curator of another exhibition at the Musée du Quai Branly (Paris),...
Ivoires d’Afrique dans les Anciennes Collections Françaises, which also resulted in a well-illustrated catalogue (Bassani 2008).

In Portugal, José de Figueiredo (1938) showed initial interest in Afro-Portuguese ivories, publishing the study of a late fifteenth-century pyxis from the collection of the Museu Grão Vasco (Viseu), calling it a “Luso-African work” made in the Kingdom of Kongo. In 1953, Reynaldo dos Santos published the aforementioned pyxis, as well as two oliphants (carved horns) and a saltcellar kept at the British Museum (London), in the book História da Arte em Portugal (1953: 443–45), which he believed were made in the sixteenth century in the Kingdom of Benin. Luís Reis Santos published a paper in 1962 dedicated to Benin bronzes, relating them to the first Portuguese and African contacts. In 1975, A. Teixeira da Mota assembled and published several fifteenth and sixteenth-century documents about the acquisition and use of African ivories in early modern Portuguese society. In 1951, the Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga had acquired, in a public sale, a Benin salt celler to display in their collection, followed by other similar objects.

Overall, Afro-Portuguese objects known from Portugal itself are still relatively few, most of them residing in museum and private collections. Thus, the lack of knowledge about their original context and provenance obscures information about those who acquired and owned them and how they were used. The nine artifacts presented in this paper were all found in archaeological excavations, offering for the first time information concerning their consumption and discarding, consequently permitting new approaches to their study and comprehension.

PORTUGUESE PRESENCE AND IVORIES IN WEST AFRICA

The western coast of Africa counted among the earliest Portuguese explorations, beginning in the early fifteenth century. Portuguese sailors rounded Cape Bojador in 1434 and visited the Guinea coast for the first time in 1444 and Sierra Leone in 1460. They were led by Pero de Sintra (named in a royal document dated to 1472) to a zone of the African coast located between the Sherbro Island (at the time known as Ilha dos Ídolos) and Cape Mount. In 1471, Sintra and his men, along with Fernão Gomes, arrived in the Elmina area (also called as Costa do Ouro—the Gold Coast), in modern Ghana. In that same year, João de Santarém and Pêro de Escobar reached Shama/Samã, where they bought gold. Between 1472 and 1475, the Portuguese would reach the Benin Kingdom under the leadership of Fernão Gomes.

Portuguese commercial and strategic interests in expansion in Africa and controlling passage to the east were guaranteed in the drawing up of the Alcácovas Treaty (1479), and later confirmed by the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494), both signed between Portugal and Spain. The king of Portugal at the time, João II (r. 1471–1495), approved the construction of the São Jorge da Mina factory (Elmina,
Ghana) in 1481. Diogo da Azambuja was made commander of that outpost for three years from 1482. A number of important names in Portuguese history would pass through this locale, such as Duarte Pacheco Pereira; Brás de Albuquerque; Estêvão da Gama, son of Vasco da Gama; Valentim Fernandes; and Diogo Lopes de Sequeira; among others. This trading post facilitated the movement of over 400 kg of gold every year, a huge amount that accompanied trade in cloth, pepper, chilies, ivory, slaves, and other products.

Two other Portuguese trading posts, Axim and Shama (both in modern Ghana), were situated in the Elmina dependency for trade and protection. In Sierra Leone, there was also the less-known factory or trade port of Mitombo/Bitondo, along the river of the same name, occupied for only a short period in the reign of King João II (Pereira 1892: book 1, chapter 32, p. 55). A factory was founded in 1487 at Oghoton (Gwato) near Edo, capital of the Benin state ruled at the time by the oba (ruler) Ozolua (r. 1483–1514), after the arrival of João de Aveiro. This factory closed in 1515 due to its lack of success (Curnow 1983: 166–67). Later on, Portugal occupied the Elmina fortress and controlled trade in the immediate area until 1637, by which time the Dutch, led by Mauricio de Nassau, took their place. Three years later, Shama was also lost, followed by Axim in 1642.

The oldest known reference to Afro-Portuguese ivories goes back to 1496 and corresponds to the entrance, in Cape Verde, of fourteen ivory spoons, probably originating in Sierra Leone. In the following year, three spoons are mentioned in a document discharging the goods owned by Estêvão Pestana, João II’s chamberlain, to his widow at the time of his death (Mota 1975: 581–82; Lowe 2016: 118). Through both these customs houses, other African ivory objects certainly arrived, such as forks, oliphants, pyxis, chests, and powder flasks, among others, mostly made in Sierra Leone and Benin. As an example of the objects entering Lisbon in the early sixteenth century, the visitation entry4 (1508) at the Nossa Senhora da Conceição church in Lisbon, belonging to the Order of Christ (whose head was King Manuel I; r. 1495–1521), mentions an ivory aspergillum (Dias 1979: 82) among Guinea and India (Calicut) cloth.

In the probate inventory of Álvaro Borges (1507), a settler on São Tomé Island, one oliphant and four ivory spoons were enrolled. The customs books of Santiago Island (Cape Verde) from 1515 mention "dois saleiros de marfim trabalhado" (two decorated ivory salt cellars) from Guinea. In 1517, another dispatch of goods from Cape Verde refers to six spoons and three salt cellars, all made of ivory (Mota 1975: 585–86).

Later, the probate inventory of André Marques, a ship’s captain who died on the return voyage from São Tomé, lists a dozen spoons and an oliphant (Mota 1975: 586).

In the probate inventory of the first Conde de Basto, Fernando de Castro (1582), a reference to “Hum saleiro de marfim com des colheres de marfim” (one ivory salt cellar with ten ivory spoons), said to be made in the east, is highly significant (Serrão 2014: 15).

In 1588, James Welsh, master of the ship Richard of Arundel, recorded what is considered to be the oldest description of decorated Benin spoons (Mota 1975: 588; Fagg and Bassani 1988: 53, 60): “Colheres de dente de elefante, muito curiosamente trabalhadas com diversos tipos de aves e animais nelas feitos” (spoons made of elephant tusks, well crafted with different types of engraved animals and birds). The most recent reference, written by García Mendes Castello Branco, dates to 1621: “Dali trazem umas «cucharas» de...
marfim mui curiosas que eles fazem” (and from there they bring the most curious ivory spoons which they make) (Mota 1975: 587; Cordeiro 1881: 27).

Despite the abundance of documentation from the navigational age, reference to Afro-Portuguese ivory objects on the whole is quite scarce. Other passing references to these objects come from early books on foreign cultures and geographies. The book *Esmeraldo de Situ Orbis*, written between 1505 and 1508 by Duarte Pacheco Pereira before he was captain in Sào Jorge da Mina/Elmina (1519–1521), makes two separate mentions of ivory spoons in Sierra Leone made by the Bullom people: “nesta terra [Ilha dos Ídolos] fazem humas esteiras de palma muito férmosas & asy collares de marfim” (Pereira 1892: book 1, chapter 32, p. 55) (in this land they make beautiful mats from palm fiber and ivory spoons); and “nesta terra se fazem as mais sotis colares de marfim & milhor lavradas que em nenhuma outra parte” (in this land they make the most beautiful ivory spoons, carved in a singular way as no one else does) (Pereira 1892: book 1, chapter 33, p. 56).

In the book *Descrição da Costa Ocidental de África* (1505–1507), Valentim Fernandes, a German working for King Manuel I, writes at length about ivory object production, following information provided by Álvaro Velho from Barreiro:

*Em Serra Lyoa som os homês muy satijs muy egeniosos / fazem obras de marfim muy maravilhosas de ver de todallas cousas que lhes manda fazer. s. hás fazem colheyros outros salesyros outros punhos para dagas e qualquer outra sotileza … Em esta terra há olifantes muytos de que tem jnfiijdos dentes que he marfins de que fazem todas suas obas louçâus* (fol. 136)

In Sierra Leone the men are very skilled in crafts of making wonderful ivory objects, and everything they are asked. Some of them make spoons, others salt cellars, others dagger grips among other things ... In this land there are many elephants, with tusks made of ivory used as raw material for all the fine carvings (Bensaúde 1997: 111).

The great German artist Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528) mentions in one of his diaries the acquisition of two salt cellars from Sierra Leone in Antwerp in December 1520, costing three florins, which he most likely bought from the Portuguese commercial settlement in Flanders, although he notes that the cellars were produced in Calicut (Kozhikod, on the western coast of Indian subcontinent) (Goris and Marlier 1971: 83; Curnow 1983: 29; Bassani and Fagg 1988: 53). This attribution to Indian manufacture is widespread among most products traded via the colonies in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, with the intent of casting them as exotic objects possessing significant prestige value on account of their remote origin. The existence of the Casa da Índia customs house further enhanced this sense of exotic origin for certain objects, since almost every object from the East and Africa passed through Lisbon before being traded to other European destinations. Even porcelain and textiles clearly produced in China were said to be from India, especially Calicut (Calado 2003: 7).

Another important testimony regarding ivory production was recorded in the early seventeenth century book *Etiópia Menor* (1616) by Fr Manuel Álvares. He lived in Sierra Leone and recognized the region’s inhabitants as intelligent and able craftsmen with enormous artistic creativity, known for carving elaborate wooden images of their ancestors, among many other things. In Sierra Leone, he also recorded the manufacture of “colheres de marfim, tão acabadas, em cujos remates fazem as várias galantarias, como as cabeças de bichos, pásaros ou os seus próprios corofis (ídolos), com tanta perfeição que não há mais que ver” (ivory spoons, very well made and finished and perfect with animal heads such as birds or their own idols). He continues the description, mentioning that the craftsmen also produced round stools with curious decorations similar to lizards and other small creatures, concluding that, in their own way, they were very talented artisans. Álvares also writes that the local chiefs were the owners of several horns (oliphants), and that elephant tusks were abundant in the region, often so large and heavy that no single person could carry them alone (Mota 1975: 587; Hair 1990: chap. 2, pp. 2, 5, 6, 11). The latter point was also confirmed by A. Donelha (1977: 88), who writes that individual elephant tusks could weight five or six arrobas (60/75 kg). This is quite important in the study of Afro-Portuguese ivories made in Sierra Leone such as salt cellars, which could only be made using large and dense tusks.

A Bullom or Temne salt cellar from the Entwistle collection with columns and arches with small pearls at the base, alternating with seated anthropomorphic figures, was dated with C14 determinations, giving a range of 1438–1518 cal. AD (Bobin and Bouvier 2013: 140). New information from absolute dating can bring new possibilities to this research.

While it is clear that Portuguese historical documents from the early modern age are littered with references to ivory objects produced in and traded from Africa, it is less clear how they were ultimately consumed and used in their European destinations. The new information from archaeological excavations in Portugal in the ensuing section will help to clarify this and allow for the ivory objects to be contextualized within broader patterns of Portuguese consumption of such goods in the early modern age, as well as the more abstract (social) meanings they may have had for those who owned them.
ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE
Largo de Jesus, Lisbon

The archaeological survey of a construction site destined to be an underground car park in Largo de Jesus (Mercês parish) led to the excavation of a substantial area in 2005, supervised by Maria João Santos from the Geoarque archaeological company. Twelve years after the excavation, the importance of the context has been highlighted in different studies, as approached by diverse authors (Cardoso and Batalha 2017). As with any urban archaeological site, Largo de Jesus revealed an overlap of different structures and stratigraphy. Amid much domestic waste, the site revealed part of a tin glazed ware workshop dump, remains of a large building—possibly the Mendia family palace—and an eighteenth century fountain.

Most of the finds from this excavation include Portuguese faience, red wares, some scarce porcelain objects, glass, metal, and bone objects, generally dated to the seventeenth century (Santos 2007: 399). They are kept in the Centro de Arqueologia de Lisboa stores. Among them, a zoomorphic ivory object (Fig. 1) was found in layer 84, related to domestic waste (Santos 2007: 398, Fig. 47). The artifact was highly fragmented, with only the bird’s head and part of its neck surviving. The bird may be a grey heron (Ardea cinerea), a characterization based on the animal’s large circular eyes, with a long, partially open beak and the feathers represented using reticulated decoration all over the body except the beak. It measures 5.2 cm in length.

A comparable example is the Bini salt cellar, kept at the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, which has some birds represented on its lower part. These also have circular eyes surrounded by oval reliefs, and the feathers are represented through reticulated decoration exactly as with the Largo de Jesus bird fragment (Bassani 2008: 101, Fig. 104). This bird seems to have been part of the long handle of a fork or spoon and its decoration technique and style are quite similar to a crocodile head found at Almada, although representing a different species. In this sense, this bird can also be classified as Afro-Portuguese in style. It was found in an elite area of Lisbon where several palaces and convents existed since the sixteenth century, vouching for the wealth and accompanying consumption habits of the area’s inhabitants.

São Vicente de Fora Monastery, Lisbon

The archaeological excavations of this large religious building started in 1961 under the supervision of Fernando Eduardo Rodrigues Ferreira, and lasted until 2014, when he passed away. During these five decades, several layers from medieval to early modern ages were excavated and yielded thousands of artifacts, some of which are exhibited inside the monastery.

Two objects can be classified as African-Portuguese ivory spoon fragments and are displayed in the São Vicente de Fora Museum. One of them corresponds to a small portion of the handle and the beginning of the bowl (Fig. 2). The handle has a semicircular...
section with twisted ropes separated by discs and another part that is plain, with an interlace decoration composed of three ropes separated by small drilled holes. It measures 8.9 cm in length. The object was found associated with the monastery’s dump, located north of the building, outside the fourteenth century defensive wall, although this particular context was only formed in sixteenth century.

The type of twisted decoration on this object, evoking ropes or small columns, is common among the Bullom/Temne or Benin ivories. The interlaced bands with ropes and small drilled holes are also frequent in products made by these two ethnic groups. This ornamental technique is also present in the lid of an ivory salt cellar from the former Richard Rawlinson collection (eighteenth century). Two drawings of this object exist, although its current whereabouts are unknown (Bassani and Fagg 1988: 227, Fig. 22) (Fig. 3). Similar decoration also adorns a salt cellar from the Danish National Museum in Copenhagen (Bassani and Fagg 1988: 136, Fig. 173) as well as some oliphants kept in private collections (Bassani and Fagg 1988: 92, 93, 106, Figs. 99, 128); the Australian National Museum in Canberra (Bassani and Fagg 1988: 100, Fig. 112); the Paul and Ruth Tishman Collection, now in the National Museum of African Art, the Smithsonian Institution (Bassani and Fagg 1988: 107, Fig. 129); and the Merseyside Museum of Liverpool, now in the British Museum (Fagg and Bassani 1988: 237, nos. 100–102) (Fig. 3); among others.

The other Afro-Portuguese object found at the São Vicente de Fora Monastery is, as far as we can tell, the most spectacular ever found in Portugal. It is a handle of a spoon and a very small portion of the bowl (Fig. 4). Close to where the bowl would start, there is the representation of a stylized Portuguese male figure with several decorative elements. It measures 13.2 cm in length and it was found in a dump overlying the medieval cemetery, dated from the first quarter of the sixteenth century and before the building’s refurbishment, sponsored by King João III (r. 1521–1557) in the early years of his reign.

The anthropomorphic representation reveals an expressive oval face with well-marked anatomical details, following Bullom and Temne iconography, such as an elongated face, large and protruding eyes, and an oversized curved nose with very large nostrils. The Portuguese man is represented with African characteristics...
but without the prognathism and projecting mouth seen in other African works. His identification as Portuguese is related to the hair: long and plain, and cut in a European style of the time, quite different from contemporary African hairstyles. The figure also wears a round Portuguese helmet with a long neck guard. The clothing itself is very European, with buttons depicted over the chest (Fig. 5).

The opposite part of the vessel’s handle has a trapezoidal outline or a knot decorated with cords and very small, granulated pearled lines. It ends in a conical element, formed by superimposed discs of different diameters, as well as a small knob. A Bullom or Temne salt cellar from the Städtisches Museum Braunschweig (Bassani and Fagg 1988: 137, Fig. 175) shows similar pearled decoration and some trapezoidal elements at the base.

The classification of the São Vicente de Fora spoon as a late fifteenth or early sixteenth century Bullom/Temne product, based on its morphological and decorative characteristics, seems appropriate. Some similarities can be seen in another spoon represented in a Portuguese painting, the *Morte da Virgem*, attributed to the Mestre do Paraíso (fl. 1520–1530) from the Gregório Lopes’s workshop and kept at the Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga in Lisbon (Fig. 6). The similarities in the handle, except for the anthropomorphic figure, are striking.

Despite human representations known from other spoons—such as the one kept at the British Museum, clearly representing a Portuguese man, or the spoons of the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford—only one example, from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (Bassani and Fagg 1988: 86, Fig. 82), can be considered as Bullom or Temne. The São Vicente de Fora human figure is similar to others adorning some salt cellars, namely examples in the British Museum (Bassani and Fagg 1988: 55, Fig. 28); the Museo Nazionale Preistorico Etnografico Luigi Pigorini in Rome; the Museo Civico Medievale in Bologna; the Seattle Art Museum; and a private collection in Lisbon (Bassani and Fagg 1988: 52, Fig. 24).

*Campo das Cebolas, Lisbon*

Three ivory Afro-Portuguese objects—a salt cellar and two spoon fragments—were found at the Campo das Cebolas excavation. The site boasts three main phases, the latest excavated between September 2016 and October 2017, which demonstrate well the urban evolution of the Lisbon waterfront from the fifteenth to the twentieth century. While the salt cellar was found in a nineteenth century dump context, the two spoon fragments were found in the oldest fills, dating to the early sixteenth century (Fig. 7).

The old city wall marked the geographical limits of the riverfront city, where a beach occupied almost all the space outside the wall. In the medieval–late medieval age, this was a less-developed area of the city, mostly dedicated to river exploration and navigation activities. Things began to change in the fifteenth century, with the need to support navigation to Africa. However, the first large-scale repurposing of the area occurred in the early sixteenth century, at the command of King Manuel I, who ordered the reclamation of a large portion of the waterfront. The king’s intention was to create a space that would transform Lisbon into a seaport city by moving all the important buildings to the waterfront, such as the royal palaces, the shipyard, the Casa da Índia, and a new customs house. The waterfront was thus divided into two areas: the Terreiro do Paço and the Ribeira Velha.

The archaeological evidence reflects the everyday activities of this area especially related to the river, such as trade and fishing, with several piers, and areas of naval construction or repairs of small boats. All the objects found in this exaction are kept at the laboratories of the archaeological company responsible for the excavation, Empatia Arqueologia Lda.

The Campo das Cebolas was also the location of many important houses and palaces in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, such as those belonging to the Távora family and the counts of Coelulim. However, the most significant residence in the area is the Casa dos Bicos, a fantastic example of Renaissance architecture. It was built between 1521 and 1523 by Brás de Albuquerque, an Elmina captain and son of Afonso de Albuquerque, the second viceroy of the Portuguese State of India. Although it is difficult to provide a specific connection between any of the objects found and that house, one cannot forget that the social base of the inhabitants in that area was related to the nobility who patronized overseas voyages and discoveries and benefited from the profits obtained in the new intercontinental trade. Consequently, the exotic artifacts arriving from distant places, such as porcelain, gemstones, and ivories, were all found in Campo das Cebolas archaeological excavations. If the owner was not Brás de Albuquerque, he was certainly someone from his social immediate circle. Indeed, the Portuguese noble families did not live
exclusively in Lisbon, as they had other palaces around the country. For example, Brás de Albuquerque built a palace about 35 km south of Lisbon in Azeitão, known as Quinta da Bacalhoa, executed in a rich Renaissance style using exotic tiles and construction methods.

The most relevant archaeological objects found at Campo das Cebolas were found in association with the earliest land reclamation works in the mid to late fifteenth and early sixteenth century, although these efforts continued into the seventeenth century during the reign of King Filipe II (r. 1598–1621). All of Portugal’s global trade connections of the time are materially represented at this site, with ceramics produced in the Far East (porcelain, celadons, martabani), Italy, the Low Countries, and Spain, but also goods such as gemstones, Venetian glass, and other exotic objects.

With Portuguese trade expansion, Lisbon rapidly assumed a central role in trade with Africa, India, and China, becoming a compulsory stop for all exotic products (expensive or not) entering Portugal. While the material culture found at Campo das Cebolas reflects the everyday life in the city, it also evinces global connections that took place over a period of some 400 years.

The area suffered great destruction in the 1755 earthquake, and during its reconstruction a new pier was built, reusing some stones of the former pier. Several new buildings were constructed at this time, including the Casa de Ver-o-Pêso (also known as Aver-do-Pêso or Casa dos Pesos do Concelho), a place where heavy products surpassing normal loads were weighed in return for payment. The only ivory salt cellar fragment found in excavations in Portugal so far (Fig. 8) was found in the layers corresponding to the demolition of this building in the nineteenth century, thus completely out of its original context. Its height is 8.5 cm.

The fragment of this salt cellar is the lower part of an Owo-Portuguese object, produced in what is today Nigeria by the Yoruba people, western neighbors of the Benin people whose capital was at Owo. This artistic craft center was identified by Bassani and Fagg (1988: 191–96), following Fagg’s studies of metal and wooden sculptures produced by the Yoruba people. Objects from Owo were produced with less influence from Portuguese taste, as the excavated example also shows. The salt cellar fragment corresponds to part of the body and foot, which was decorated with incised triangular and diamond-shaped elements. The body has a hemispherical shape, with paired birds surrounding large fish. This decoration would be repeated on four areas of the body, similar to frames, separated by two female images on their knees and two monkeys, although just one of each has survived. Above these, close to the rim, the decoration is formed by incised circles and triangles. A lid would have been set over the rim.
The only known parallel for this outstanding vessel is kept at the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, described in 1806 with a label at its base reading “urna pera sal” (salt vessel). The cellar’s lower body presents similar zoomorphic and anthropomorphic representations to the Campo das Cebolas example: two monkeys and two female figures on their knees. The four frames also present birds and fish, and the foot is also decorated with incised geometric motifs. This object was attributed to the Yoruba from an Owo workshop, whose production remains difficult to identify due to the few known artifacts (Bassani and Fagg 1988: 191–196, 247, Figs. 261, 261, no. 179).

Representations of fish are rare in Afro-Portuguese art, despite their abundance in the sea of Sierra Leone, as documented by A. Donelha (1977: 94) who, in the second half of the sixteenth century, refers to the existence of several species such as “cão marinho [and] peixe sapato … seis palmos de comprimento” as well as “muito peixes de diversas maneiras em quantidade e muito gordos” (“sea dogs and shoe fish six palms long, as well as several fishes with different forms, in large quantity and fat”). The fish is, of course, an important element in Christian iconography, representing the believers or Christ himself, and thus appreciated by Portuguese consumers of the time. In Benin, mudfish were a royal symbol, representing fertility and peace, while among the Yoruba, the economic importance of fish and origin myths associated with them led to the use of fish in sacrifices (Curnow 1983: 223). The Campo das Cebolas salt cellar also has monkey representations, which were symbols of progress for the Benin people and also often appear in Yoruba wooden objects (Curnow 1983: 225).

Two other objects from Campo das Cebolas are pertinent to this discussion: spoon or fork handles found in the early sixteenth century fills. One conserves a head of an African man with a cap or a peculiar hairstyle with a crest (Fig. 9). The style of the face suggests a Yoruba production, like the salt cellar. It measures 4.35 cm in length.

The other fragment comprises a complete handle of a spoon or fork decorated with two lateral ropes and a central circular relief element associated with the representation of a snake (Fig. 10). The animal’s body is covered with scales, with a wider head and an open mouth where a small tongue was carved. The end of the handle is finished with a small disc. It measures 11.44 cm in length.
the first time (1509) in this village for Queen Leonor, who was staying there having fled from the plague which afflicted Lisbon in 1506.

In 1992, the replacement of the sewage system in Rua da Cerca led to the discovery of a pit filled with domestic garbage. The archaeological excavation was supervised by Luís de Barros, the municipality archaeologist. On the basis of the material culture, the contexts were dated from the fourteenth to the early eighteenth century. The archaeological layer yielding the ivory object was classified as number 3 and corresponds to a mid to late sixteenth century deposition, dated with several coins of Kings João III and Sebastião (r. 1557–1578). Hundreds of objects were recovered, most of them pottery vessels. The majority were common wares used in the preparation of food, namely cooking pots, as well as many vessels related to holding liquids, such as bottles, costrels, and cups. Together with these locally made objects were rare imported vessels from Spain, Italy, and even China and a few so-called exotic objects, such as a chunk of turquoise and a carnelian bead.

Among these objects was what we believe to be the handle of an ivory spoon in the shape of a crocodile’s head (Fig. 12; MAH 4592, on display at the Museum of Almada) (Garcia and Pereira 1993: 12, Fig. 10; Barros 2000: 23, 68). This zoomorphic ornamentation was fixed between two small truncoconical, phytomorphic elements. Similar decoration can be observed on top of one spoon’s handle (made in Benin) kept at the Museum für Völkerkunde in Vienna (Bassani and Fagg 1988: 172, Fig. 228), where there is also a bird and a hand. The crocodile found at Almada has wide, oval shaped eyes, the mouth is slightly opened, allowing the teeth to show, and the head is covered in fine hatched lines representing scales. It measures 4.7 cm in length and has a 1.3 cm maximum diameter. This spoon handle was on display in an exhibition about the Portuguese discoveries in London (Garcia and Pereira 1993: 12, Fig. 10) and was mentioned in an unpublished academic paper as a Benin-Portuguese object (Henriques 2008: 12).

The reptile is a representation of ferocity and a symbol of power and strength connected with ancient myths and narratives in many cultures. While present in many iconographic grammars, for the Benin people the crocodile was one of the aquatic deities named Olokun, considered the guardian of the waters (Curnow 1983: 220, 223).

The British Museum has a similar fork in its collection believed to be made by the Bullom or Temne in Sierra Leone, its handle representing a crocodile and ending in two spherical elements (Bassani and Fagg 1988: 131, Fig. 167). A spoon also made in Sierra Leone, displayed in the Museum of the Americas in Madrid, has a twisted handle and a truncoconical element similar to the Almada spoon (Bassani and Fagg 1988: 58, Fig. 31). The latter, more stylized and slightly less elegant than the Bullom or Temne artifacts, is to some extent close to the Benin ivory productions made during the sixteenth century. There seems to be a connection between the crocodile head from Almada and a horse head on a salt cellar kept at the Museu Nacional Arte Antiga in Lisbon. The countenance of the partially open mouth revealing large teeth and very marked oval eyes in both animals (despite one being a horse and the other a crocodile) suggest close connections, perhaps even coming from the same workshop. The similarities between the partially open mouths of both animal representations were identified by Bassani and Fagg (1988: 182, 186, Figs. 247, 248), who suggested that these objects were made in the second half of the sixteenth century (Fig. 13).

Two other spoons classified as Benin products also have crocodile head handles. The example kept at the Musée du Quai Branly in Paris holds a human arm in its mouth (Bassani 2008: 92, Fig. 95); while the other, in a private collection in Portugal, shows a crocodile holding a human torso in its mouth with the arms spread wide (Dias 2004: 41, Fig. 7).
Avenida Miguel Fernandes, Beja

In 2003 and 2004, the construction of a new underground car park motivated the excavation of a large area by the archaeological company Crivarque, supervised by Andrea Martins (Fig. 14). During the archaeological work, 137 underground storage pits were found, filled with garbage, and the majority fully excavated. The analysis of the material culture shows that these storage pits were abandoned and filled with domestic garbage during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (Martins, Neves, and Aldeias 2010).

Inside pit 61, a small ivory Afro-Portuguese spoon was found, being the only complete example to be recovered from an early modern archaeological context in Portugal (Fig. 13). No specific associations with other material culture are known, allowing us only to conclude a general discard date.

The excavated storage pits were located outside the city walls surrounding the medieval urban center, and served the purpose of storing one of the most—if not the most—important Beja productions during the Middle Ages. The creation of a large communal cereal silo in 1579 marked the end of the use of these underground storage pits, although they were being abandoned earlier in many parts of the country, especially south of the Mondego River, and transformed into dumps (Martins, Neves, and Aldeias 2010; Martins, Neves, Costa, and Lopes 2010).

The spoon in question has an oval or, rather, almost fig-shaped bowl, with small incisions on its join with the handle (Fig. 15). The handle is decorated with a twisted shape using three cords, getting tighter close to the bowl, ending with a disc with a diameter slightly wider than the handle. It measures 14.8 cm in length; the bowl is 2 cm wide and its handle as 1.1 cm diameter. It was presented for the first time in an unpublished academic paper where it was classified as a Bullom/Temne-Portuguese piece, on the basis of its twisted decoration and the shape of the bowl: rounder and smaller than Benin-Portuguese examples (Henriques 2008: 10, 12). This spoon may have been influenced by the mother-of-pearl spoons from the Far East, made from large shell valves collected in the Indian and Pacific Oceans.

This type of twisted decoration, possibly inspired by ropes or architectonic elements, is widely known from other Bullom/Temne ivory productions from Sierra Leone. Although having only one cord on its handle, one of the spoons found at the São Vicente de Fora Monastery has a clear affinity with the examples mentioned here. Similar decoration can be found on a Bullom/Temne spoon and one fork kept at the Musée National de la Renaissance in Ecouen (Bassani 2008: 50, Figs. 41, 42). Thus, although without a secure chronology, it is possible to say that the Beja spoon was also made in Sierra Leone. It is kept by Crivarque in its headquar- ters in Torres Novas.

**DISCUSSION**

The African-Portuguese utensils and salt cellar presented in this paper are quite important in the study of such artifacts, not only because of their rarity but especially because they offer a new approach to the study of these objects. They are the first group of early modern ivory artifacts produced in African workshops and brought to Europe by the Portuguese to be recovered in archaeological contexts, despite the fact that none of them was found in a consumption site and all are associated with domestic garbage areas.

Until now, the published objects have all come from old collections (curiosity cabinets, wunderkammer, and kunstkammer) as exotic and display objects owned by political elites or royal houses such as the Medici in Florence, the grand dukes of Tuscany, or Archduke Fernand of Tirol, the grand duke of Saxony, the duke of Savoy, King Frederick II of Denmark, the dukes of Braunschweig-Bevern, or the royal Spanish and Portuguese houses (Curnow 1983: 32, 33; Bassani and Fagg 1988: 53). Consequently, these objects still have connotations of belonging to very wealthy and important people in Europe, used as display items and status symbols.

On the contrary, the objects found in Portuguese archaeological excavations, associated with domestic garbage, reveal that they were part of more ordinary domestic activity. Once broken, they were discarded together with other domestic refuse. Throwing away expensive objects is certainly not a novelty in early modern Portuguese domestic behavior, for the same was done with Italian wares and Chinese porcelain. One of the spoons from São Vicente broke in its most fragile area—between the bowl and the handle—while the Beja spoon reveals extensive wear, which may indicate that some of these objects were used on a daily basis. As for the
others, wear marks are difficult to identify, although their presence in dump contexts at archaeological sites may in fact indicate their common and widespread use.

These objects found in archaeological excavations in Lisbon, Almada, and Beja are associated with disposal contexts from the early sixteenth to early seventeenth century but were manufactured and used for many years prior to their discarding, which is logical if one considers the importance that such artifacts may have had in their domestic environment. The beauty and rarity of such exotic items would have made them desirable and thus preserved, most of them perhaps becoming family heirlooms.

The archaeological evidence reveals a new biography for these items related to their social environment, deviating from the theory which dictated, for so many years, that the spoons were exclusively kept for aesthetic reasons. The use of ivory spoons for serving salt, spices, or food, but also for eating, for example, could have been something that occurred only in Portugal, considering its direct trade connection to the regions where these objects were produced, and a particular taste for new and exotic items—whether food, plants, animals, or objects—that developed with the diversified overseas interactions. Although these objects were recovered from dumps, the areas where they were found suggest the presence of wealthy communities, either noble houses, rich merchant homes, or monasteries. In Largo de Jesus and Campo dos Mártires da Pátria, the palaces and convents clearly denote elite contexts, while Rua da Cerca in Almada is known for having nobles’ and merchants’ houses. Campo das Cebolas was one of the richest areas of the city in the early sixteenth century, directly connected to overseas nobility and São Vicente de Fora, one of the most important religious houses in Lisbon. The material culture from the Beja pits also reveals a rich community with imports from different areas of the world. It seems that the Afro-Portuguese objects discussed here were not found far from their original consumption context and were enjoyed and appreciated not exclusively as collectible items. K. Lowe (2017: 121), based on the interpretation of sixteenth century religious paintings, has already suggested that these spoons may have been used by certain social groups in Lisbon, but it seems that they were used all over the country.

Of course, other exogenous exotic objects were a mainstay in rich houses, convents, and palaces. The visitations made to the churches of St. James in southern Portugal in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries record many religious objects, mostly textiles produced in many parts of the African continent (namely the Guinea Coast), although other places such as India and China are also mentioned as sources for these textiles, most of them silk. These heterogeneous origins reveal the Portuguese desire to show increased religious devotion by donating prestige foreign objects, not unlike what social elites were doing in their homes with such objects for display and daily use.

A surviving record from Casa da India e da Guiné (a type of customs house) from 1505 reveals the entry of 114 ivory spoons (Lowe 2017: 118). These objects belonged to the sailors, the Elmina captain (Diogo Lopez de Sequeira), merchants, a recorder, and even a priest (Mota 1975: 581–83). Arguably, most of these objects were intended to be sold for profit, but some of them were no doubt gifts. The social base of their consumption can be observed in the aforementioned surviving inventories of Catarina Lobo and André Marques.

The Afro-Portuguese ivories from Sierra Leone, made by the Bullom/Temne people, are rarer and more elegant, with very meticulous decoration. The spoon found in the São Vicente de Fora monastery representing a Portuguese man is one of two known Bullom/Temne spoons boasting anthropomorphic decoration. Its importance increases when taking into account the existence of similar figures on some salt cellars, which may in fact indicate that they were used together. It certainly reveals the diversity of objects produced by the same craftsmen.

If one adds the objects presented in this paper to the number of artifacts published by Bassani and Fagg (1988), the quantity increases significantly. Salt cellars and spoons are the most abundant objects, broadly 70% of the total number of known Afro-Portuguese ivory objects, while 20% are oliphants. The remaining
10% are powder horns, pyxes, forks and other artifacts. Fagg (1959: 180) considered that the surviving objects comprise less than 10% of the total production, never forgetting that the majority of historical documents refer to spoons, most of which have been lost over time (Curnow 1983: 92).

The aforementioned authors have altogether catalogued just over a hundred Bullom/Temne ivory artifacts produced in Sierra Leone, possibly made in three or four different workshops. Salt cellars make up 52% of the inventory, oliphants 33%, while spoons are just 8% and forks 3% (Bassani and Fagg 1988: 61; Bassani 1994: 37).

The key question becomes whether these figures are significant in the light of each object type’s use and therefore demand. Why did the Bullom and Temne make more salt cellars, while the Benin craftsmen invested more time in spoons? Was this related to their artistic skills or were they merely supplying European demand? These were acquired somewhere between 1490 and the mid-sixteenth century (ca. 1540–1550), when the Sierra Leone area was invaded by the Mani/Manes (Mende). This occurred from 1545 to 1560, following Donelha’s (1977: 12, 104) information from that time. According to some authors, this may be related to developments of ivory production in the Benin kingdom during the second half of the sixteenth century (Curnow 1983: 65, 68; Fagg 1959: 176–77).

P. Mark (2010: 181) sought to refute this theory by arguing that the Sapi, a group of people that includes the Bullom, Temne, Baga, and Landuma (Curnow 1983: 55), continued to produce ivory objects to sell to the Portuguese until 1580, based on information from the time that mentions the production of oliphants in Sierra Leone, which may in fact have been manufactured by the Mende. However, no contemporary information is known regarding spoons or salt cellars, although it is unlikely that production completely ceased. On the other hand, the Portuguese presence in Benin diminished after the closure of the Oghoton factory and the frequent misunderstandings with the different obas who succeeded the Oba Ozalua.

Benin products are rarer, as only around seventy objects are known. Spoons are most abundant (74%), followed by salt cellars (22%) and oliphants (4%) (Curnow 1983: 197; Bassani and Fagg 1988: 150). However, there is a smaller number of other pieces whose functions are still unknown to us.
CONCLUSION

Human societies have always desired and sought out exotic items with which to negotiate social relations and create a sense of prestige. In early modern Europe, the Portuguese in particular showed this through their consumption of ivory objects made in Africa. The ability to acquire these objects started in the first half of the fifteenth century through commercial and cultural interaction with North Africa and the Near East via the Mediterranean Sea, when maritime trade routes to India were nonexistent. As mentioned in several documents of the time, the Portuguese not only sought ivories from Africa, but also strongly desired textiles, gold, and spices. Ivory objects were always considered extraordinary, displayed in rich homes and church reliquaries. However, based on the archaeological information presented here, it is possible to infer that they were probably used not only for display but may in fact have been functional items in daily activities, namely at the table (spoons, forks, salt cellars), or during hunting (powder horns).

The excellence of Afro-Portuguese ivories, as the fragmented objects in this paper testify, presents a union of forms, technical and decorative solutions from Europe manufactured from African raw materials, aesthetic language, virtuosity, and able execution, creating a sort of elegant hybridization. Although spoons and objects may have been used by African populations, certainly forks and powder horns were a European introduction. This exchange of knowledge and symbols created original objects with significant historical, cultural, and ideological research potential.

Notes
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1 A circular vessel with or without a tall foot where sacramental bread is kept on the main altar in churches (Curnow 1983: 126).
2 A substantial section of horn or tusk typically decorated with intricate reliefs. They were very diverse functionally: from reliquaries, to drinking and powder horns, or simply status symbols.
3 Defined in their function by A. Wollaston Franks (Fagg 1959: xi), these objects are frequently composed with two small, curved bowls, interpreted as keeping in one and pepper in the other; thus these should be called salt and pepper cellars or spice cellars (Curnow 1983: 190).
4 A visitation is the inspection of the religious activities, goods, and buildings of a certain parish, compiled in a document listing the parish’s possessions.
5 Nowadays known as Sherbro people from Sherbro Island.
7 The Portuguese-Cape Verdean A. Donellha (1977) was in Sierra Leone in 1574, although he obtained information from his father and slaves who had been there.

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