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# URBAN PLAYERS WITH RURAL INTERESTS. THE CRAFTSMEN OF COIMBRA AND THE STUDY OF THEIR PROPERTY IN THE LATE MIDDLE AGES[1]

## *Actores urbanos con intereses rurales. Los artesanos de Coímbra y el estudio de su propiedad en la Baja Edad Media*

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ABSTRACT: The craftsmen of Portugal encapsulate a vivid portrait of the urban dynamics of the Middle Ages and *ancien régime* embodying both urban sensibilities and contemporary social practices. The workers in the manufacturing industries of leather, metal, textiles, and pottery occupied a large part of medieval Coimbra, developed business networks, and fostered important social and economic dynamics. Craftsmen will be examined as holders of capital and both movable and immovable property, as well as usufructuaries of

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Abbreviations: ANTT = Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo; AUC = Arquivo da Universidade de Coimbra; CSC = Cabido da Sé de Coimbra, 2.ª incorporação; CSBC = Colegiada de São Bartolomeu de Coimbra; CSCC = Colegiada de São Cristóvão de Coimbra; CSJAC = Colegiada de São João de Almedina de Coimbra; CSJC = Colegiada de Santa Justa de Coimbra; CSTC = Colegiada de Santiago de Coimbra; CSAC = Convento de Santana de Coimbra; doc. = document; Lx = Lisbon; M. S. Clara = Mosteiro de Santa Clara de Coimbra; M. S. Cruz = Mosteiro de Santa Cruz de Coimbra.

ecclesiastical property in Coimbra, both in the peri-urban ring and in the hinterland. The following questions will be posed: What property did they hold? Where was it located? How did they purchase or inherit it? How did they exploit it? How did they make it profitable? To whom did they transfer it? In answering these questions, the craftsmen of Coimbra and its role in the relationship between city and countryside will be described. Rather than draw definite conclusions, the goal is to achieve a broad base of knowledge that allows a comparison between Coimbra and other cities, where craftsmen played an equally important role.

*Keywords*: Portuguese craftsmen; Portuguese medieval city; hinterland; urban property; urban society; country-city relations.

RESUMEN: Los artesanos de Portugal encarnan un vívido retrato de la dinámica urbana de la Edad Media y el Antiguo Régimen, tanto en lo que respecta a la sensibilidad urbana como a las prácticas sociales contemporáneas. Los trabajadores de las industrias manufactureras del cuero, del metal, de los textiles y de la cerámica ocuparon gran parte de Coímbra medieval, desarrollaron redes laborales y fomentaron importantes dinámicas sociales y económicas. En este artículo, se examinará a los artesanos como poseedores de capital y de bienes muebles e inmuebles, así como usufructuarios de bienes eclesiásticos en Coímbra, tanto en el anillo periurbano como en el territorio del concejo. Se plantearán las siguientes cuestiones ¿Qué bienes poseían? ¿Dónde estaban situados? ¿Cómo los adquirieron o heredaron? ¿Cómo los explotaban? ¿Cómo los rentabilizaron? ¿A quién se los transferían? Al responder a estas preguntas, se describirá la artesanía de Coímbra y su papel en la relación entre la ciudad y el campo. Más que extraer conclusiones definitivas, el objetivo es lograr una amplia base de conocimientos que permita, en trabajos futuros, comparar Coímbra con otras ciudades en las que los artesanos desempeñaron un papel igualmente importante.

*Palabras clave*: artesanos portugueses; ciudad medieval portuguesa; hinterland; propiedad urbana; sociedad urbana; relaciones campo-ciudad.

SUMMARY: 0 Introdution. 1 The territory: Coimbra and its region. 2 The studied population: the *mesteirais* of Coimbra. 3 The relationship between town and country, in light of the study of *mesteirais*. 3.1 The *mesteirais* receiving emphyteusis contracts: exploitation or economic intermediation? 3.2 *Mesteirais* as landowners in the rim and hinterland: investments in life and death. 4 Final reflections. 5 Appendix. 6 Works cited.

## 0 Introduction

This study takes upon itself the task of contributing to the understanding of the city and its relationship with the countryside in the Portuguese Lower Middle Ages. This study will investigate urban social and economic dimensions through an investigation of both the peri-urban area and the hinterland of Coimbra and its population, with a focus on the *mesteirais* (craftsmen) living there during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

The analysis that will be carried out reflects the crossing of paths of the research of its authors[2] and the choice of Coimbra, an important region of Beira Litoral, with its rim and hinterland, which came naturally as a territory for analysis in this field. In turn, the choice of the *mesteirais* as the studied population for this social approach —aiming to examine the countryside-city dialogue— results from the commitment of both researchers with an international research project specially devoted to the study of crafts in the Portuguese Middle Ages and Late Middle Ages[3]. According to the definition followed by the project's team, *mesteirais* will be understood as all professionals dedicated to the transformation of raw materials, or to non-agrarian or rural services, thus excluding professions related to agriculture and animal husbandry, fisheries, and commerce as an exclusive activity[4].

This project focused on the regulation of crafts in Portugal in a period before the formation of professional associations and, as such, allowed the authors to carry out an investigation on the *lagareiros* ('pressmen', operators of olive presses) and the regulation of the oil presses and olive oil production in the city of Coimbra at the beginning of the sixteenth century[5]. This study illustrated a dimension of this city-countryside relationship, as it revealed the dependence of the olive oil industry on the urban environs, through its location, through the agents that drove and regulated it, and through the main consumption centres of its product[6]. Furthermore, it enabled an understanding of the interests of the *mesteirais* through the various phases of the olive oil production cycle, namely in the exploitation of the olive groves at the edge of the city and the presses located in the suburbs of Coimbra, a subject that will be revisited later in this study.

[2] In 1983, Maria Helena Coelho presented a doctoral thesis on rural history, see Coelho, «O Baixo», a study later published: Coelho, *O Baixo Mondego*. This thesis practically assumed a foundational role in this field of historiographic investigation for the Middle Ages in Portugal. This extensive work focused on the Baixo Mondego region and, among many other aspects, analysed the relationship of the city of Coimbra with its nearest and most distant rural area. While Maria Amélia Campos defended a thesis on the ecclesiastical and socio-religious history of the parish of Santa Justa de Coimbra [Campos, «Santa», published later in Campos, *Cidade*]. This thesis analysed an urban and suburban territory intersected by one of the main communication routes that enabled the entry/exit of the city to the north. It is characterized by the dynamism of the passage, settlement, and interactions of different socio-professional groups linked to the urban world and the surrounding rural world. The inclination of one author to primarily observe the countryside and the other to closely examine the city that governed it converge in this study to focus on and analyse the close relationships between these two spaces.

[3] The research project *MedCrafts – Crafts regulation in Portugal in the Late Middle Ages (fourteenth-fifteenth centuries)* PTDC/HAR-HIS/31427/2017 https://medcrafts2021.wixsite.com/medcrafts/.

[4] Melo, «Trabalho», I, 43. In order to define what the *mesteirais* were in the Portuguese medieval city, the classification presented by Beirante, *Ao serviço,* 17-26, was also taken into account.

[5] Coelho and Campos, «Regimento dos Lagares».

[6] On olive oil production during the Portuguese Middle Ages, see Marreiros, «A indústria» and Coelho, «O azeite». In fact, this episcopal city, with numerous churches and monasteries, demanded olive oil for the lighting of multiple chapels and altars, as well as for the consumption of its residents, in lighting, food preparation, food preservation, and even in other transformative activities. However, the city of Coimbra was also one of the most important olive oil exporting centres, and for this reason, in the late fourteenth century, it received the privilege from the king of Portugal to directly sell olive oil to foreigners, consult Dias, *Chancelarias*, vol. II, t. 3, doc. 1236.

As a result of this work, the importance of opening the investigation to include the entire population of *mesteirais* was realised, and subsequently of understanding what information such study could provide toward the characterisation of the relationship between town and countryside. In this case, it is important to understand the dependence of an essentially urban population on the surrounding rurality: as an economic space of wealth production, for the realisation of estate profitability and, consequently, of social affirmation.

To develop this study, a structure is proposed that begins by characterising the research space, whilst seeking to reflect on extant knowledge regarding the dependencies between the rural and urban worlds in the Portuguese Late Middle Ages. Furthermore, it is crucial to characterise the study population, the craftsmen of the city, by placing them within the broader social context of Coimbra. The research based on the property of craftsmen as a means of characterising the interrelationship between the city and the countryside will be developed in the third part of the study.

In that section, the craftsmen will be observed first as individuals who were granted emphyteutic contracts related to properties within the vicinity and jurisdiction of Coimbra, and then as owners of assets in those territories. The data analysed is derived from the research carried out in the archives of the ecclesiastical institutions of the city, which have preserved the most significant documentary collections for the study of medieval Coimbra[7]. Wherever possible, documentation from royal and municipal production is relied upon. For the sake of efficiency and to meet the goals of the project within which this research is conducted, the chronological scope has been set between 1300 and 1450. In order to examine the acquisition and management strategies of the craftsmen in the city, emphyteusis contracts[8], sales contracts, and wills were primarily analysed. As a result of the study of these latter documents, the reflection on investment strategies for heritage was broadened, particularly in the establishment of commemorative ceremonies after death and for the benefit of souls.

## 1 The territory: Coimbra and its region

The city and the countryside maintain a close two-way relationship that is already well known and defined. It can be immediately considered that the great «house» that is the city, with its significant concentration of population, requires a supply dependent on

[7] Lx, ANTT, CSC; M. S. Cruz; M. S. Clara; CSBC; CSTC; CSJC; CSJAC; CSCC. Without relevant data for this study, documents from the collections of the collegiate churches of São Pedro e de São Salvador na Almedina de Coimbra and of Mosteiro de São Jorge were also consulted.

[8] Enfiteuse was the preferred land tenure system by the majority of Portuguese institutions during the Middle Ages and Late Middle Ages. In addition to the aforementioned works on rural history, it should be noted that the study of this system in Portugal has inspired other extensive works during the 1980s and 1990s, see for instance Gonçalves, *O património* and Amaral, *São Salvador*. Internationally, this topic has known recent developments with the publication of a Treatise on Emphyteusis, written at the University of Toulouse in the fourteenth century (Tisserant, *Emphytéose*).

the agricultural and livestock production of the countryside, be it near or far[9]. Therefore, if urban dwellers go to the countryside to buy provisions to feed the city, conversely, peasants head to the city if they happen to have agricultural surpluses, and there they seek sales in markets and fairs, aiming to grow a financial return[10].

The city, through its power of consumption, is simultaneously a factor of stimulation, organization, and transformation[11]. Men move from the countryside to the city and from the city to the countryside; areas of varying extensions are developed for the cultivation of durable or perishable food products, according to urban demand; at the level of power, the administrative delineation of the city and its surrounding territory is defined. These dynamics are activated by the concentration of money that accumulates primarily in urban centres, making it necessary to articulate the socioeconomic dynamics of the city and the countryside across the various economic scales. This encompasses the markets of small towns and villages, fairs, regional trade gatherings, and, ultimately, the markets of major urban centres.

This work, focused on a case study (the city of Coimbra and its surrounding rural areas), seeks to define their urban and rural spatiality, and subsequently explore the role of capital in the city-countryside relationship, as envisioned through the dynamics of the social group of craftsmen. The city of Coimbra (figure 1) had a walled area of 22 hectares[12] with a population of around 5000 inhabitants[13], and legal dominion over a vast territory with a radius between 39 and 54 km[14].The hinterland, however, underwent fluctuations, especially in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, with lands being dismembered from it to be donated to royal descendants and vassals, although some were later recovered[15]. In the city, the *intramuros* (lit. intramural) area is considered,

[9] Illustrative of this issue of urban supply in the context of the peninsular kingdoms and Portugal are the studies gathered in the works of Arízaga Bolumburu and Solórzano Telechea (eds.), *Alimentar*; Andrade and Silva (eds.), *Abastecer*.

[10] For a comprehensive understanding of such dynamics in other European regions, see: Pucci Donati, *Approvvigionamento, distribuzione*; Knaepen, Loir and Wilkin (eds.), *Approvisioner,* and Miranda, (ed.) *Essays*.

[11] Boucheron, Menjot and Boone (eds.), *Historia*, II, 153-6.

[12] See Coelho, *O Município*, 33.

[13] There is a lack of documents that would allow a calculation of the population for the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The earlier source for this purpose is the *Numeramento de 1527-1532* which indicates that there were 1329 households in the city (assuming an average equivalence of 4 people per household, this can be extrapolated to 5316 individuals). Of these households, only 37 % were within the city walls. In the hinterland, 3291 households were found, accordingly 12,964 people; see Freire, «Povoação» 243-4 and Dias, *Gentes*.

[14] See Oliveira, *A Vida,* 41. This author states that this hinterland would encompass 10 to 12 leagues. For the conversions to the metric system, a minimum value of 3250 meters and a maximum value of 4500 meters to the league is assigned. As the following appears very small, the value of 1125 meters that is also provided by Marques, «Pesos» was not considered.

[15] On this royal politic, see Oliveira, *A Vida*, 39-52. With King D. Fernando, the hinterland of Coimbra lost Ançã, the farm of Vilarinho (nearby Coimbra), and Cantanhede. And during the time of D. João I, the towns of Tentúgal, Pereira, Anobra, Cernache, and Condeixa were removed from this territory, mainly to establish the duchy of Coimbra for his son, Infante D. Pedro. Due to Infante D. Pedro's opposition to King D. Afonso V in the Battle of Alfarrobeira, his subsequent death, and the consequent confiscation of his assets

frequently, sparsely populated, compared to its large extent, the suburbs, where the majority of city dwellers lived, and also its ring or suburban area that grew «in the shadow of the olive groves»[16]. The urban parishes extended, at times, through this ring and could even overtake it, indicating that these urban outskirts could expand up to almost 5 km[17] (figure 2).

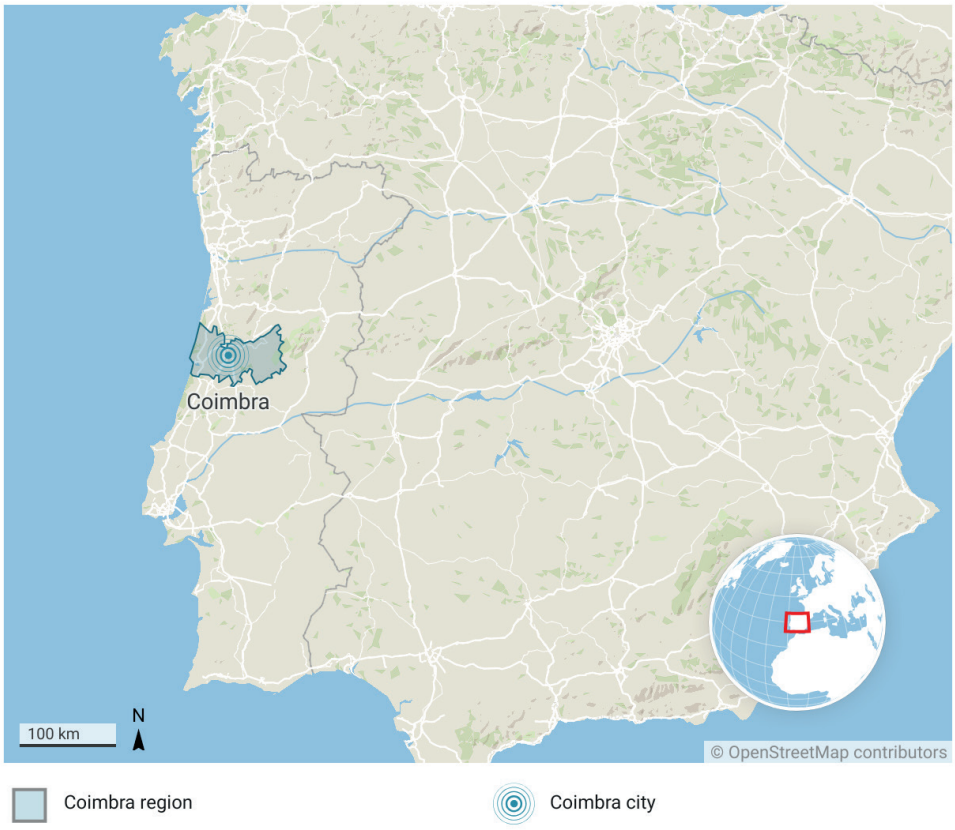
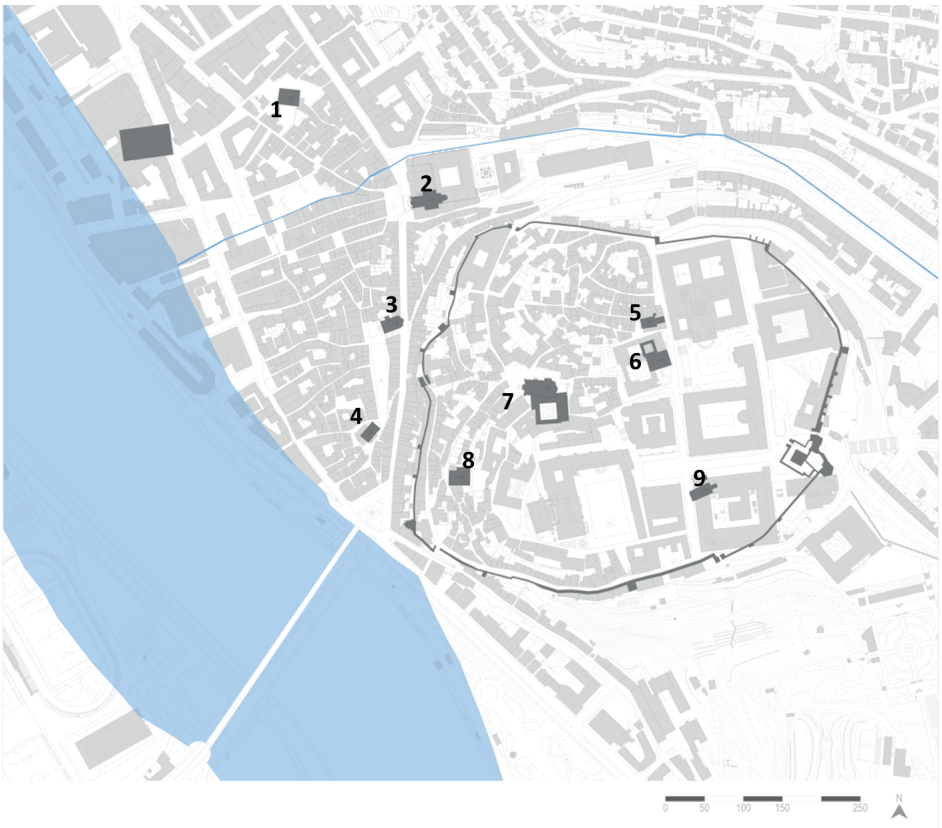



Figure 1. The current location of Coimbra district within the map of mainland Portugal.

by the crown, some lands once again came under the jurisdiction of Coimbra. For further information, read Coelho, *O Baixo*, I, 465-77 and 563-73.

[16] See Oliveira, *A Vida*, 53.

[17] *Ibídem*, 55.




1. Santa Justa
2. Santa Cruz
3. Santiago
4. São Bartolomeu
5. São Salvador
6. São João de Almedina
7. Santa Maria (Cathedral)
8. São Cristóvão
9. São Pedro

Figure 2. Coimbra's parish network in the Middle Ages. Sketch made from the «*Base Cartográfica: Levantamento Topográfico de 1993/1999*» (Cartographic Base: Topographic survey of 1993/1999) of the city of Coimbra, carried out by the City Council.

In the centre of this territory, the form and landscape of the city of Coimbra were defined across centuries, dominated by two structural elements: the hill and the river. Favoured by its defensive characteristics, the hill hosted the nucleus of the primitive settlement that, during the period of Islamic occupation, was first walled[18]. Outside the

[18] See, among others, Alarcão, *Coimbra,* 193-267.

enclosure, particularly along the route of the Roman road that connected Braga to Lisbon, crossing the Mondego River in Coimbra[19], the growth of population density and occupation of space can be observed, especially after the definitive Christian conquest in 1064. In turn, from the twelfth century onwards, areas of settlement structured around nine parishes can be clearly identified[20]. The parish of Santa Maria da Sé was located at an intermediate elevation[21], sharing the *intramuros* area within with the parishes of São João Baptista, São Salvador, São Pedro, and São Cristóvão. In the suburbs, at the entrance of the city for those crossing the river from the south, was the parish of São Bartolomeu[22], followed by Santiago and Santa Justa[23]. In 1139, between the two forementioned, the final parish was circumscribed and demarcated under the jurisdiction of the Santa Cruz Monastery[24]. Except for the latter, which was under the jurisdiction of the Monastery of Canons Regular of Saint Augustine, all the others would assume the status of collegiate churches from the thirteenth century onwards. Attention should be drawn to the cartography of the Coimbra parish network since the parishes served as operative spaces of the proposed analysis.

It is important to briefly mention that Coimbra played a significant political role during the period of affirmation of the first Portuguese monarch, Afonso Henriques (1140-1185), and the autonomy of the Kingdom of Portugal from Castile[25]. For that reason, the city was endowed with buildings and institutions befitting a city of royal residence, a status it would maintain until the ascent to the throne of Afonso III (1248-1279)[26]. This king, dissatisfied with Coimbra's position in the war in which he won the crown, began to prefer staying further south, notably in Lisbon. During the period analysed here, this political pre-eminence was no longer evident, and other cities surpassed it in terms of size and wealth production[27]. However, the symbolic role of Coimbra was persistently invoked throughout the Portuguese Middle Ages, largely due to the prestige of its religious and civic institutions, in keeping with its municipality[28].

With the rise of the second royal dynasty, Coimbra assumed another dimension. Chosen as the stage for parliamentary meetings that would decide to crown João I (1385-1433) as the king of Portugal[29], it would later be selected by him as the nucleus of the duchy bestowed upon his son, Pedro. Between 1408 and 1413, a policy of acquiring territories can be inferred on the part of the king, from the municipality and private

[19] See, among others, Mantas, «As vias», 498-501 and Alarcão and Madeira, *As pontes.*
[20] See, among others, Campos, «Coimbra's».
[21] See Morujão, *A Sé*.
[22] See Campos, «La parroquia».
[23] See Campos, *Cidade*.
[24] See Gomes, *In limine*.
[25] See Mattoso, *D. Afonso.*
[26] See Ventura, *D. Afonso*.
[27] For a comparative analysis of Portuguese cities in the Late Middle Ages, see Coelho, «As cidades».
[28] For further information on the foundational times and the history of the municipality of Coimbra, see Coelho, *O município,* 31-79.
[29] See Coelho, *D. João,* 59-73.

owners, which were gradually transferred to his son who, in 1415, would be invested by the monarch as the Duke of Coimbra[30], a title he held until his death in 1449[31].

## 2 The studied population: the *mesteirais* of Coimbra

The city of Coimbra, like other cities in Europe, was a centre of power, civil and religious services, and a bustling hub of labour. If wealth and capital were concentrated in the hands of aristocracies —with their wealth founded on land ownership and trade, or both— labour was predominantly carried out by those engaged in artisanal production, small-scale commerce primarily focused on supply, or agricultural production. Indeed, there were men who resided within the city but were involved in rural occupations. Specifically, there were individuals employed as *almuinheiros* (agriculturalists), responsible for tending to the gardens and small parcels of farmland within the urban area. Additionally, there were men dedicated to the care and cultivation of the olive groves encircling the city. In this regard, the parish of Santa Justa remained a significant residence for *almuinheiros*[32] throughout the Middle Ages. These *almuinheiros* laboured in the peri-urban outskirts while the parish derived substantial income from the tithes on their produce, both from men and women[33].

Moreover, craftsmen met the basic needs of the city's inhabitants —from food to clothing and footwear, not to mention housing, armament, transportation, and the manufacture of tools for work—. This is demonstrated by the first *posturas* (legislation of local application; local laws) of the city from 1145, which itemise the price of blacksmiths' and shoemakers' work. The *foral* (charter) of 1179, however, specifies a more detailed set of craftsmen: bakers, shoemakers, furriers, blacksmiths and professionals associated with boatbuilding[34].

The absence of craft guilds in medieval Portuguese cities[35] was compensated by the tendency, recognisable early on within the studied period, for these men and women to associate themselves in brotherhoods or confraternities[36]. The inclination to establish

[30] For further information on this subject, see, among others, Moreno, «O Infante».

[31] The *infante* would die in the battle against his nephew, D. Afonso V (1438-1481), in a context of civil war where his defeat would lead to a profound division within the nobility of the kingdom. For further information, Moreno, *A Batalha,* 321-401.

[32] The rural workers constituted 18 % of the residents and/or recipients of property exploitation contracts within the social structure of this parish, holding a recognized socio-professional status.

[33] Numerous legal proceedings were found, adjudicated in the Bishop's Court of Coimbra, concerning the payment of tithes relating to fruits and vegetables from the gardens in the outskirts of Coimbra, which were supposed to be paid to the Church of Santa Justa. For example, see Lx, ANTT, CSJC, m. 15, n. 292 (1420-09-2); Lx, ANTT, CSJC, m. 15, n, 299 (1425-12-01).

[34] See Coelho, *Município de Coimbra,* 46-52. For a detailed list of the artisanal professions in Coimbra, spanning from the twelfth to the sixteenth centuries, see Campos, «Vigilância e control», 287-303, especially Table 1 for a comprehensive list in that regard. https://eg.uc.pt/handle/10316/95901

[35] On this subject, see Melo, «Entre trabalho».

[36] On portuguese urban confraternities, see Farelo, «A rede», 465-92; Coelho, «Pratiques» and Rocha, «As confrarias», 29-45.

their residence near professionals of the same trade reflects concerns for enhanced collective defence and more effective attraction of clientele[37]. In general, this behaviour is observed long before it is mandated by municipal authorities, there aiming for easier surveillance and control over the quality and price of manufactured goods. The medieval streets of *Padeiras* [female bakers], *Tanoeiros* [coopers], *Peliteiros* [furriers], *Oleiros* [potters], and *Fuseiros* [spindle-makers] bear witness to the presence of several artisanal activities in the city of Coimbra[38].

Clearly, the craftsmen of Coimbra had their workshops in the city where they worked and sold their products. These buildings could also serve as their residences, although there are cases where they lived in one parish and worked in another, which required the division of tithes between both churches[39]. Guided by this toponymy and, above all, the historical research already carried out for this city, the socio-topography of the *mesteirais* of Coimbra can be presented in general outline, according to their parish of residence or where they exercised their trade.

Next to the bridge, the parish of São Bartolomeu showed an extraordinary urban dynamism characterised by the abundance of tanneries and oil presses[40], which was further reflected by the residence of many pressmen and shoemakers, along with other less dominant crafts. In the parish of Santiago, whilst less studied at this point, crafts related to the manufacture of leather, metal and esparto grass products can be identified, namely, saddlers and rug weavers. Further north, in the parish of Santa Justa, the textile sector is marked by the strong presence of a group composed of tailors (male) and dressmakers (female), and weavers of both genders amongst the throng, whilst there are also potters, and again some oil pressers. The scarcer information regarding the intramural parishes prevents the creation of a similar socio-topographic analysis of the resident crafts in this territory. However, other works on the socio-economic history of the city allow the intuiting of the residence of tailors[41], shoemakers and merchants[42] of different types of goods.

Based on the aforementioned observations, it can be understood that within the urban realm, craftsmen formed and organized professional and economic networks which also served as the foundation for their networks of sociability, solidarity, and indeed familial relationships. However, within the city, they also played a crucial role in bridging the urban-rural relationship as the primary processors and vendors of raw materials, as well as significant stakeholders and beneficiaries of agricultural resources from the surrounding rural areas. This second dimension will now become the point of focus of this work.

[37] On this subject for medieval cities of Porto and Braga, see Melo and Ribeiro, «A influência».

[38] For further information on this subject, regarding the Portuguese case, see Andrade, «Conhecer», 83-96 and 128-32 (footnotes) and, for the case of Coimbra, see Campos, «Marcos», 157-76.

[39] Lx, ANTT, CSCC, m. 3, n. 20 (May 7, 1314), was the case of two shoemakers who resided in the parish of São Bartolomeu and worked in the parish of S. Cristóvão.

[40] Campos, «La parroquia», 610-3.

[41] Campos, «Un quotidien».

[42] Designations such as *Rua das Tendas* and *Rua das Fangas*, for example, can be identified. In addition to the aforementioned works on toponyms, refer to Campos, «Alimentar».

## 3 The relationship between town and country, in light of the study of *MESTEIRAIS*

Some of these craftsmen not only earned money from their handicraft, but also through income that came from the economic exploitation of rural property within the rim or hinterland. This relationship between the countryside and the city, intertwined through craftsmanship, is a manifestation of the pluriactivity of many urban inhabitants, who thereby ensured different sources of income. This dimension of the pluriactivity of medieval city dwellers has not been extensively studied in Portuguese historiography, and as such is deserving of the attention given here.

In this context, it can therefore be stated that some craftsmen had the capital to purchase and own rural properties in the outskirts and/or surrounding rural areas[43], which they would lease out to those who cultivated them, earning fixed rents primarily in goods or cash. Sharecropping was a typical form of land exploitation by peasants, who, in most cases, practiced subsistence farming. Meanwhile, urban dwellers sought to receive fixed payments, which would thus bolster their business prospects. These individuals interacted with a market economy on a daily basis, and everyone —from the elites through the artisans to the commoners— sought to profit through the commercialisation of agricultural products. This mindset and practice eventually influenced the mentality and practices of the peasantry[44].

As will be seen shortly, during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the lands most coveted by the artisans were vineyards and olive groves, as these crops ensured the availability of two highly marketable products: wine and olive oil, both for the internal and external markets.

### 3.1 *The* mesteirais *receiving emphyteusis contracts: exploitation or economic intermediation?*

The study of lordly power in the region of Coimbra in the Early Middle Ages leaves no doubt as to the interest of the *mesteirais* in receiving emphyteusis (long-term lease) contracts for farmland in the rim and city limits, since many are found in this situation. Indeed, those who could afford it often accepted contracts for manorial lands, acting as intermediaries, paying the rent to the lord and then subcontracting the land or exploiting it under direct administration. In this case, as mentioned, they preferred to pay a fixed rent in cash to the lords, particularly the ecclesiastical lords in Coimbra, as the value of currency significantly depreciated during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. They would then collect the produce themselves and place it in the market with the expectation of earning good profits[45]. The payment of a fixed rent in money would be highly

[43] It should be noted that the land registry of the *contato* of Arezzo indicates that 90 % of the urban population who owned assets in the county are craftsmen, small shopkeepers, and occasionally skilled workers. See Boucheron, Menjot and Boone, *Historia*, 155.

[44] Coelho, *O Baixo*, I, 309.

[45] See Coelho, *O Baixo,* I, Table on page 315, and for a more comprehensive analysis, pages 314-7. This topic has received continuous updates by European historiography in recent years. See for instance, Feller, «Les conversions».

profitable during periods of monetary inflation and rising prices. By selling a small portion of the crops, the necessary amount of cash to be delivered to the landlord could be obtained, and the profits from the sale of the rest of the production could be maximized through seasonal price fluctuations.

The rural real estate of the urban rim of Coimbra was mostly handed over to *mesteirais*, as has already been demonstrated for the Baixo Mondego[46], and it is known that in 76 % of these contracts the tenants paid a fixed rent in coin[47]. During the severe demographic crisis of the second half of the fourteenth century, a group of individuals known as *homens de serviço* [service men], akin to the craftsmen, can be seen also securing contracts. These service men formed a workforce without apparent specialisation, engaging in a range of services essential for urban life. This circumstance suggests the possibility that both these service men and certain craftsmen may have migrated from rural areas to urban centres during this period of crisis[48]. Once in the city, even while practicing their crafts and services, the countryside was not entirely abandoned, although there might have been a different economic stance regarding the utilization of land.

With this knowledge as groundwork, a survey was undertaken to identify the *mesteirais* receiving emphyteusis contracts, taking as a sample those who lived in, or owned, property in the parishes of Santa Justa or São Bartolomeu, between the beginning of the fourteenth century and the middle of the fifteenth century. Through this approach, 25 contracts established between ecclesiastical institutions of the city, namely the Cathedral chapter[49], the collegiate churches of Santa Justa[50] and Santiago[51], and the monasteries of Santana[52] and Santa Cruz[53], and various craftsmen were identified. Within this group there is a great multiplicity of professionals and representatives of almost all sectors of craft production. However, those related to textile transformation and clothing production stand out —weavers and tailors— as well as those related to footwear and the production of leather goods —saddle-bag makers, scabbard makers, harness makers, saddlers, and shoemakers (figure 3)—. In general, the leather industry likewise represented a strong economic sector, with the region of Coimbra exemplifying this not only because it exported many furs[54], but also due to the multitude of skilled craftsmen engaged in the production of various objects. Considering the overall presence of activities such as

[46] Coelho, *O Baixo*, I, 331. It accounts for 28 % of the recipients of contracts with an identified profession.

[47] See Coelho, *O Baixo*, I, table, 328.

[48] See Coelho, *O Baixo*, I, 330.

[49] See Lx, CSC, m. 74, n. 2976 (1354 December 10); Lx., Col. S. Salvador, m. 15, s/n (1429).

[50] See Lx, CSJC, m. 25, n. 519 (1340 November 15); m. 30, n. 677 (1361 January 1); m. 17, n. 361 (1393 September 09); m. 30, n. 672 (1406), m. 34, n. 773 (1412), m. 30, n. 685 (1415 January 07); m. 9, n. 179 (1415 December 25); m. 4, n. 109 (1418 August 06); m. 4, n. 80 (1426 December 14); m. 4, n. 101 (1428 October 21); m. 10, n. 191 (1429 October 27); m.18, n. 367 (1434 September 23); m. 4, n. 112 (1439 February 13); m. 37, n. 843 (1449 October 21); m. 8, n. 165 (1428 January 20).

[51] Coimbra, AUC, Col. de Santiago, Tap III, p. 98, perg. 536 (1362 July 10).

[52] See Lx, ANTT, CSAC, cx. 3, s/n (1371 March 02).

[53] See Lx, ANTT, M. S. Cruz, p. 9, al.15, m.10, n. 22 (1389 January 10) and book 44, f. 100 and following.

[54] See, among others, Sequeira, «Comprar».

pottery in the territory under scrutiny, and the frequent evidence of potters receiving the usufruct of houses within the city, the absence of these craftsmen in this sample probably reveals their lower capacity for investment.

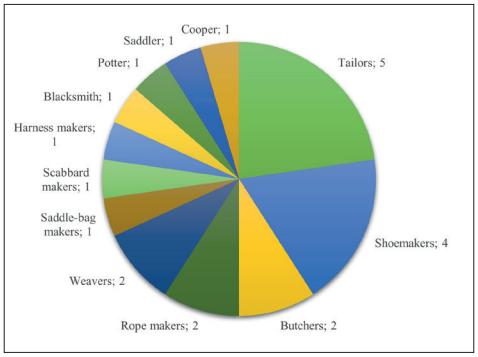



Figure 3. *Mesteirais* receiving usufruct of property (emphyteusis) contracts in the rim and hinterland of Coimbra (1340-1449). Figures 3 to 8 illustrate the analysis of the data collected in the documentation supporting this study, which is cited throughout the text. For a global view of the archival resources dealt with, see footnotes 1 and 6 and the list of bibliography at the end of the article.

The properties contracted in this way were mostly olive groves or production units composed of vineyards and olive groves located in the peri-urban rim. In fact, only a contract of cereal land with olive trees given to a butcher[55] can be found as an exception (figures 4 and 5). Given this data, a difficult question to answer becomes manifest. In these contracts for rural properties in the urban rim, were the *mesteirais* mere intermediaries between the owner of the goods and those who worked them, or did they reconcile their craftwork with rural work? In the case of contracting the usufruct of small olive groves or vineyards, the direct exploitation by the *mesteirais* and their families would be feasible and seems likely. In the same manner, it is also plausible to consider that, given their insufficient time to cultivate the land and care for vines and olive groves, there would always be the possibility of resorting to the recruitment of daily or weekly wage-earners during the heaviest periods of agricultural work. This recruitment would be undertaken informally, even orally, leaving no records or testimonies, except when for some reason there was recourse to council or episcopal justice[56].

[55] See Lx, ANTT, CSJC, m. 4, n. 109 (1418 August 06): Vasco Afonso, the prior of the Collegiate Church of Santa Justa, leases to Gil Peres, a butcher residing in Coimbra, a property for cereal production with its olive trees, located in the *Corredoira*, for 4 *alqueires* of olive oil, to be paid every 2 years.

[56] In fact, the daily wage earners are mentioned in the documentation only when some irregularity or dispute is observed. As it was not possible to identify any of these individuals working in the olive groves and vineyards of the peri-urban area, attention is drawn to their identification as labourers in the oil mills of the lower part of the city. See Lx, ANTT, CSBC, m. 14, n. 10 (1341 January 9) and Lx, ANTT, CSJC, m. 15, n. 311 (1387 November 14).

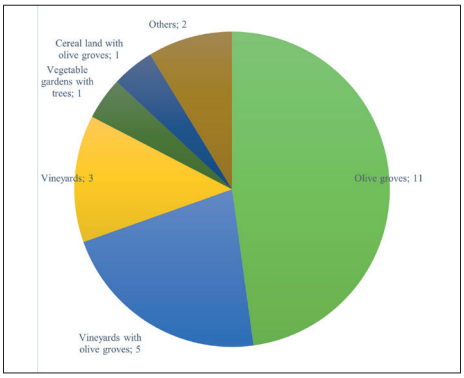



Figure 4. Typology of the properties granted in emphyteusis contracts in the rim and hinterland of Coimbra (1340-1449).

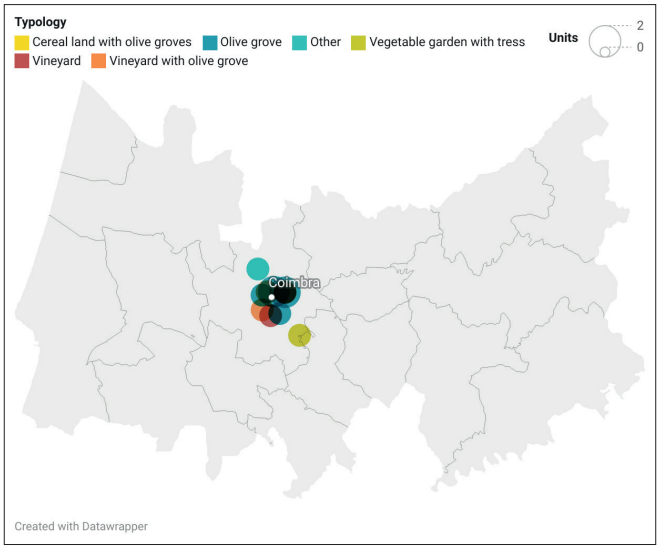



Figure 5. Location of property received by the *mesteirais* through emphyteusis contracts (1340-1449). (From the map of the municipalities of the District of Coimbra).

Regarding the function of the *mesteirais* as intermediaries between the landlords and those directly responsible for agricultural exploitation, the documentation is eloquent. In the small sample examined to clarify this consideration, this practice was noticed on the part of a tailor and a butcher. The first case deals with a tailor, parishioner of Santa Justa, with property from the chapter of Coimbra, who passes on the work to a

couple, a service man with his wife[57]. The second case is that of an individual found in the documentation of the main ecclesiastical institutions of Coimbra as an emphyteute and purchaser of property from other private individuals. He was a butcher, and his name was familiar as the protagonist in the processes of re-parcelling of property or the usufruct of land located in Alcarraques, about 10 km north of the centre of Coimbra[58]. After his death, the estate that he had gradually acquired became the subject of several disputes in the episcopal court, during which the interests of his former owner were safeguarded by another butcher, serving as his executor[59], a point to which attention will return. At this juncture, it is important to emphasize that in both cases —the tailor and the butcher— city dwellers who were affluent enough to make their property profitable are being examined.

### 3.2 Mesteirais *as landowners in the rim and hinterland: investments in life and death*

A more detailed examination of the occurrences of *mesteirais* as owners of rural property can be undertaken, with recourse to two types of documents. Firstly, the deathbed wishes, recorded in donations and testaments, preserved in the archives of the churches where testators elected to establish their ceremonies of commemoration and suffrage, such as chapels and anniversary Masses —both very common in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries—. Secondly, and further, through certain purchases or exchanges of these properties by *mesteirais* and the rare emphyteusis contracts in which they figure as landlords. A search for such documents was undertaken in the documentary archives of the collegiate churches, the Cathedral and the Monastery of Santa Cruz de Coimbra.

Whilst there are few documents that allow the study of the role of *mesteirais* as holders of buildings in the rim and hinterland of Coimbra, the analysis of this sample reiterates what has already been inferred from the study of their role as emphyteusins. Firstly, although a great variety of professions can be identified, leather workers and makers of clothes are the most represented —such as shoemakers[60], tailors[61] and head-dressers[62] (figure 6)—. Secondly, in these cases, the preferred property typologies were olive groves,

[57] See Lx, ANTT, CSC, m. 8, n. 369 (1366 February 01). Martim Anes Bocalvazinho, resident in *Rua de Figueira Velha* (Coimbra), together with his wife Maria Lourenço, leases to Francisco Geraldes, a *homem de serviço*, and his wife Teresa Garcia, residents of Coimbra, a portion of an olive grove that they have leased from the Chapter of the Cathedral of Coimbra, in the locality of Maínça.

[58] See the following contracts of purchase and sale Lx, ANTT, CSC, m. 91, n. 4376 (1375 November 12); m. 1, n. 40 (1386 May 13); m. 78, n. 3326 (1380 February 10). He can also be found in a barter agreement, Lx, ANTT, CSC m. 79, n. 3344 (1388 June 28).

[59] See ANTT, CSC, m. 94, n. 4490 (1416 January 10); m. 78, n. 3323 (1416 May 21); m. 20, n. 830 (1416 May 26); m. 52, n. 2046 (1416 November 21).

[60] See Lx, ANTT, CSBC, m. 5, n. 7 (1305 January), published by Guardado, «A Colegiada », doc. 15; Lx, ANTT, CSCC, m. 7, n. 10 (1344 March 10) (See document 1 in the appendices); Lx, ANTT, CSC, m. 11, n. 898 (1311 June 20); ANTT, M. S. Cruz, pasta 40, sem cabo, serie 126 (1354 June 16).

[61] See Lx, ANTT, CSJC, m. 2, n. 19 (1371 June 1); See Lx, ANTT, CSC, m. 95, n. 4582 (1450 November 5).

[62] See Lx, ANTT, CSJC, m. 29, n. 665 (1381).

vineyards or production units which combined these two types of crops (figures 7 and 8). A few exceptions confirm the rule: a *casal* (small farm)[63] —whose property was gradually acquired, through various contracts of purchase and barter, by Pedro Torneiro, the butcher mentioned above— and a chestnut grove, whose delineation by markers, possibly made of wood, gave rise to a dispute between a candle-maker and a tailor[64]. One other property should be noted for its particular character: it was composed of a house, a vineyard and a lime kiln, owned by a quicklime painter, and which, upon his death, was donated to the Monastery of Santa Cruz by his widow[65]. As regards to location, the properties owned by the *mesteirais* of Coimbra, when outside the city, reveal an almost exclusive preference for the peri-urban rim.

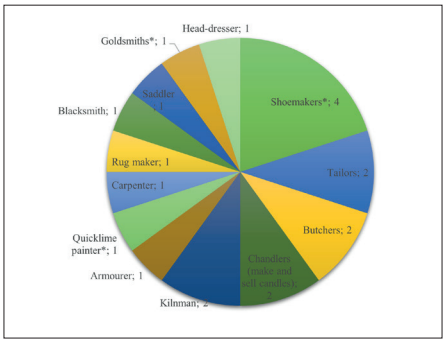



Figure 6. *Mesteirais* with rural property in the rim and hinterland of Coimbra (1305-1450).

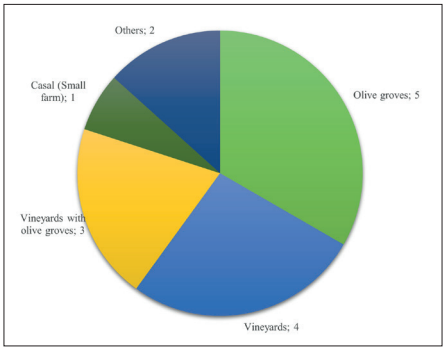



Figure 7. Typology of the properties owned by *mesteirais* in the rim and hinterland of Coimbra (1305-1450).

63 See Lx, ANTT, CSC, m. 91, n. 4376 (1375 November 12); m. 78, n. 3326 (1380 February 10).
64 See Lx, ANTT, CSC, m. 95, n. 4582 (1450 November 5).
65 See Lx, ANTT, M. S. Cruz, m. 63, al. 11 and m. 8, n. 6 (1429 September 21).

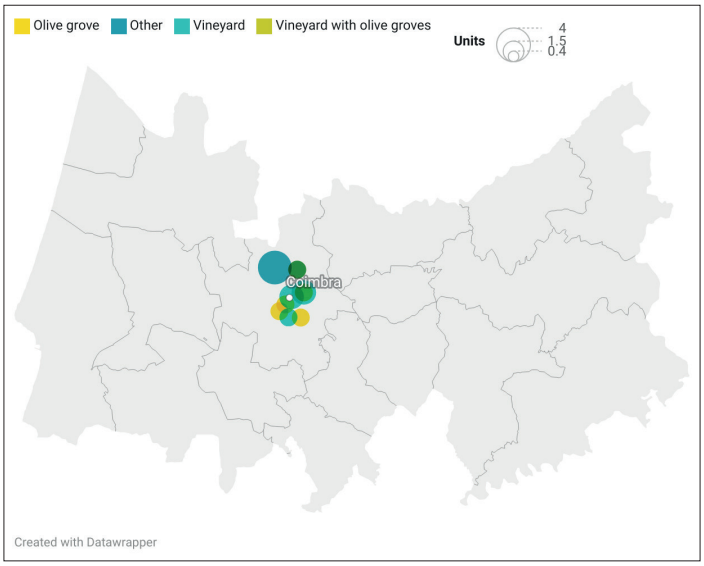



Figure 8. Location of the property owned by *mesteirais* in the rim and hinterland of Coimbra (1305-1450). (From the map of the municipalities of the District of Coimbra).

The exploitation strategies implemented for this type of property did not differ much from those previously stated. When these men and women owned agricultural property in the vicinity of the town, they too could resort to partial agricultural work —in proportion to the time they had available from their trades— or to salaried labour, however, both cases are unfortunately difficult to document. With regard to the agricultural use of these properties, and in particular the harvesting of grapes and olives, it can also be assumed that these professionals formed a network of solidarity, working together and sharing the effort involved in these tasks in each of their properties. However, no empirical data have been found to support this hypothesis. Some contracts of usufruct concession of these properties, made between private individuals but preserved in the ecclesiastical institutions of the city, allow a brief glimpse of the recourse to emphyteusis by these professionals.

An example is the case of Leonor Anes, widow of João Martins, a goldsmith, resident in the parish of Santiago[66]. In 1415 and 1416, she granted the concession of two olive groves in the rim of Coimbra to a couple residing in the hinterland of Coimbra[67] and to a couple residing in Coimbra[68] itself, respectively. In the latter case, it is known that the recipient was a weaver who served as the king's harness maker in the palace of the

[66] They resided in *Rua de Coruche*, in the parish of Santiago, even if this documental process is preserved in the archival fonds of the Collegiate church of Santa Justa.

[67] See Lx, ANTT, CSJC, m. 9, n. 179 (1415 December 25).

[68] See Lx, ANTT, CSJC, m. 37, n. 838 (1416 June 26).

citadel of Coimbra, and his wife. Through this contract, they received the usufruct of an olive grove, against the payment of 20 bushels of oil every two years. In July 1429, after the death of Leonor Anes, her son engaged a representative to receive the rent in arrears from the weaver, now residing in Lisbon. This is a case of management of part of the inheritance of a goldsmith, consisting of olive groves, made profitable through recourse to emphyteusis, with a contract received by another *mesteiral*, who would certainly have ensured its exploitation through subcontracting or recruitment of temporary or seasonal labour.

This kind of property, however, allowed for other forms of profitability. For example, when its exploitation was no longer possible, viable or desirable, its transaction would allow the collection of some monies. In fact, the observation of purchase and sale contracts allows a recognition of the transaction of these goods: for example, a shoemaker selling property to a canon of the Cathedral[69], the widow of a kilnman[70] acquiring property from other laymen[71] and a carpenter selling a small olive grove to a blacksmith[72].

The final investments that this property acquired and exploited by *mesteirais* allowed was the foundation of commemoration ceremonies and suffrages for souls after death. Testaments and post-mortem donations made by saddlers[73] and shoemakers[74], from the leather sector, by (*alfageme*) armourers[75] and blacksmiths, from the metal sector, by tailors and head-dressers, from the clothing sector and a small donation made by the widow of a quicklime painter from the construction sector are all documented. Among the types of heritage bequeathed, the olive groves stand out, whose annual rents would be used to finance anniversary masses and other ceremonies. An analysis of these documents shows the solidarity between professionals of the same trade when choosing their executors, as well as the knowledge they would have of the liturgy of the deceased, when listing the ceremonies and prayers they wanted for their celebration. Both are well exemplified by the case of a post-mortem donation made by a shoemaking couple, executors of other already deceased shoemakers, in which they founded anniversaries on the main Marian festivals of the liturgical calendar[76]. In fact, the analysis of this document gives the impression that both the widow and the testament executors of the deceased shoemaker show a sense of solidarity in establishing this post-mortem anniversary.

Moreover, the testament of Gomes Anes, a saddle maker, executed in the stable of the Monastery of Santa Cruz in 1441, is highly eloquent with regards to another

[69] See Lx, ANTT, CSC, m. 11, n. 898 (1311 June 20).

[70] The original Portuguese read *forneiro*, that is, someone who tended and operated a *forno*, which can mean both «oven» and «kiln». As bread was most frequently baked by women (*padeiras* and *forneiras*), this (male) *forneiro* was most likely a «kilnman».

[71] See Lx, ANTT, CSJC, m. 9, n. 182 (1344 January 17).

[72] See Lx, ANTT, M. S. Cruz, book 41, fl. 65 (1442 November 16).

[73] See Lx, ANTT, CSJC, m. 24, n. 488 (1441 August 8).

[74] See Lx, ANTT, S. Bartolomeu, m. 5, n. 7 (1305 January) and Lx, ANTT, CSCC, m. 7, n. 10 (1344 March 10) (See document 1, appendices).

[75] See Lx, ANTT, CSTC, m. 6, s/n (numeração antiga 27 e 637) (1381 May 27).

[76] See Lx, ANTT, CSCC, m. 7, n. 10 (1344 March 10) (See document 1, appendices).

aspect[77]. In this document, the testator chooses the cemetery of the church of Santiago for his burial and appoints his wife as his executor. To her, he leaves all his belongings and instructs that should she come into possession of them, she may invest as she wishes in the suffrage of his soul. Following this impassioned exclamation, the testament lists a wide range of debts in which the testator is either a creditor or a debtor. Among his debtors, find nobles and other affluent individuals can be found, for whom he crafted luxury saddles for which he was never paid, as well as some of his iron suppliers. Among the debtors, explicit reference is made to the treasurer of Infante Pedro, Duke of Coimbra. Among the suppliers, it is worth noting the mention of two successive generations of Jewish blacksmiths who served as suppliers of iron components. Conversely, through the list of debts he mentions, many of his creditors can be identified alongside debtors, revealing a complex system of credit-based monetary transactions that interconnected family and professional networks.

## 4 Final reflections

In this study, a deep reflection on the current knowledge about the social fabric of the city of Coimbra during the Middle Ages and the relationship between urban society and the surrounding countryside was sought, and to complete this knowledge by analysing a sample of around five dozen documents.

It is evident that the population of the *mesteirais* of Coimbra was very heterogeneous, not only in the sectors of activity they occupied, but also in the monetary resources they earned/received therein. In this sense, the butchers, tailors, shoemakers and goldsmiths stood out as exhibiting the greatest wealth. The study of their participation in contracts of purchase and emphyteusis reveals a tendency to invest their income in the peri-urban rim of Coimbra, in the acquisition or usufruct of vineyards and olive groves, which they exploited or gave to others to exploit. In turn, analysis of their inheritances has revealed that, just like other Christians who were able to do so, the *mesteirais* of Coimbra invested in ceremonies to celebrate their memory, choosing their parish churches for this purpose. The solidarity between professionals of the same trade is both touching and noteworthy at the time of choosing executors of wills —the trustees for the enactment of these final wishes.

A global observation of the behaviour of these men and women within the social universe of Coimbra in the High and Late Middle Ages leads to a comparison of their economic behaviour to that of representatives of other professions, such as small traders —namely *almocreves* (pedlars)— and royal notaries, for example. At this point, a conclusion can be made by drawing attention to this urban social group that used the rural surroundings of the city to capitalise on the income from its manual labour, whether in a close relationship with the main landlords of the city —of whom it held concessions— or as landowner, leading a behaviour that extended throughout the entire ancien régime.

[77] See Lx, ANTT, CSJC, m. 24, n. 488 (1441 August 8).

## 5 Appendix

Document 1[78].

1344 March 30, Coimbra – Afonso Anes, shoemaker, and his wife Maria Domingues, executors of Maria Domingues *Lameira*, widow of João Soares, shoemaker, donate to the church of São Cristóvão de Coimbra, a vineyard with an olive grove in the hamlet of Assamassa [located in Eiras, Coimbra], for the foundation of three anniversaries for the soul of the latter [i. e. Maria Domingues *Lameira*], to be celebrated every year on the days of Saint Mary in August, February and September.

A) Lx, ANTT, Col. S. Cristóvão de Coimbra, m. 7, n. 10 (parchment, cursive gothic hand, good state of preservation, notarial mark, 350 ml x 229 ml)

Sabham todos quantos este stormento virem que nos Affonsso Anes, çapateiro e Maria Dominguez, dicta Lameira, moradores e veezinhos da çidade de Coimbrra e testamenteiros de Domingas Domingues, molher que foy de Joham Soares, çapateiro en outrro tempo da dicta çidade de Coimbrra, ambos ensembra, cada huum de nossas boas e livres vontades, conssirrando quanto bem se fez na eigreja de Sam Chrisptovam da dicta çidade de Coimbrra pellas almas d'aqueles que hi algũa coussa leixarom e otrosi como a dicta Domingas Domingues [.][79] gran devoçam aa dicta egreja de Sam Chrisptovam, damos e leixamos e outorgamos pera sempre aa dicta eigreja de Sam Chrisptovam hũa vinha con seu olival que jaz a par da dicta çidade no logo que chamam Assamassa. A quaal vinha e olival foram de Joham Soares e da dicta sa mulher os quaaes lhi a ella ataçerom (?) de partiçom em sa parte ela pera ambos[80] aa dicta egreja pela alma da dicta Domingas Domingues con todos seus dirrectos e sas entradas e saidas e pertenças[81], como eles melhor podesem aveer e tirar. Per tal preito e condiçom que os priol e raçoeiros della en cadahum ano digam ou façam dizer tres missas officiadas na dicta eigreja e façam aniversairo pela sa alma con crruz[82] e con agua beenta como he custume da dicta eigreja pelas festas do ano de Santa Maria. Convém a saber, hũa misa con aniversairo, no dia da vespera de Santa Maria d'agosto, e outra misa con seu aniversairo, per vespera de Sancta Maria de fevereiro, e a outra misa con seu aniverssairo per vespera de Sancta Maria de setembro. A qual vinha e olival partem em aguiom com vinha e olival de Joham Lourenço, tabeliom da dicta cidade e da parte do avegrro, con olival do moesteiro de Sanctana da dicta çidade e da outrra caminho publico da qual vinha e olival ambas enssembrra e cada

[78] The palaeographic transcription of this Portuguese document is based on the standards written and systematised by Costa, *Normas gerais de transcrição*. Abbreviations have been silently expanded. The use of the letters «i» and «j», «u» and «v» has been standardised. Words incorrectly joined are separated, and words incorrectly divided are joined. Double consonants written at the beginning of words are transcribed as single. Original punctuation and capitalisation are adjusted for easier reading. Illegible words are represented by [.]. Interlinear insertions are marked < >. Doubtful readings are indicated by (?).

[79] Unreadable word.

[80] Difficulty reading a word on the right margin of the parchment.

[81] Difficulty reading a word on the right margin of the parchment.

[82] Difficulty reading a word on the right margin of the parchment.

huum metemos corporalmente em pose per terra e per vides e oliveiras, Johane Anes, raçoeiro e percurador da dicta eigreja em afam della. E damos e leixamos a dicta vinha con seu olival, con sas pertenças como dicto he, con esta condiçom que os dictos vinha e olival vam pela linhagem de Maria Domingues, irrmãa da dicta Domingas Domingues pelo mais chegado da linhagem da dicta Maria Dominguez e a maior de dias do dicto linhagem e o que os tever e possoir pague aa dicta eigreja trres libras de dinheiros portugueses en cada huum ano per pensom, convem a saber, vinte soldos per vespera de Sancta Maria d'agosto e vinte soldos per vespera de Sancta Maria de setembrro e os outrros vinte soldos por vespera de Sancta Maria de fevereiro e asi cada ano. E extinta a linhagem da dicta Maria Domingues os dictos vinha he ollival fique livremente aa dicta eigreja e que aalem das trres libras quantos vinte soldos dessem pelas dictas vinha e olival cada ano e as dictas missas digam ou façam dizer os dictos prriol e raçoeiros con seus aniverssairos pela alma da dicta Domingas Domingues.

Em testemunho desto fezemos antre nos seer fectos dois stormentos semelhaveis dum teor per mãao de Joham Lopeez, tabaliom del rey en Coimbra. Fecto foi en Coimbrra na eigreja de Sam Chrisptovam, trrinta dias de março da Era de mill e trezeentos e oiteenta he dous anos.

Testemunhas que presentes forom Pasqual Lourenço e Affonso Domingues, capellam da dicta eigreja de Sam Chrisptovam e Stevam Anes e outras testemunhas. E eu tabelliom sobredicto a esto pressente fui e a rogo e per mandado das dictas partes dous stormentos semelhaveis duum teor con mha mãao scpervi he en el e en cada huum delles este meu signal fiz que tal[sinal]he. En testemunho das dictas coussas.

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