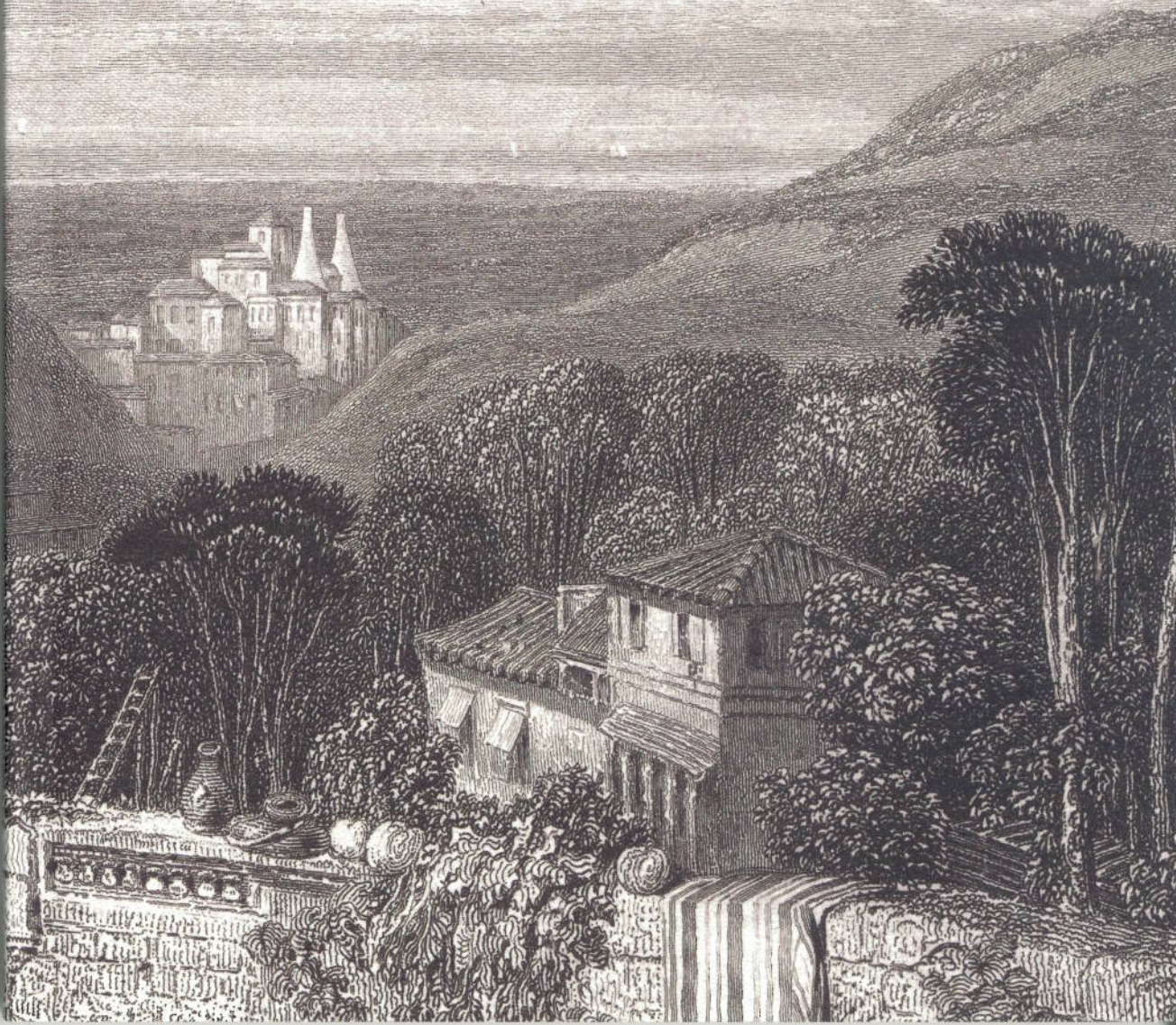


THE ROYAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL INSTITUTE

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COVER ILLUSTRATION *Cintra*, engraved by E. Finden. Drawn by C. Stanfield from a sketch by Captain Elliot. Published by J. Murray and C. Tilt, London, 1832

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THE CASTELO DOS MOUROS, SINTRA

INTRODUCTION

Since June 2009, Parques de Sintra — Monte da Lua S.A. has been undertaking a project, called *Conquering the Castle!* which is intended to enhance the Castelo dos Mouros (Castle of the Moors) at Sintra. It has set up an archaeological research base on site with the aim of supporting the restoration work and improving current knowledge of the people who occupied the castle as well as its phases of construction and the planning of its living spaces. The campaigns that have been completed so far have brought to light some surprising information on the history of this monument and the space surrounding it. Historical and archaeological research has particularly focused on the period in which the castle's fortifications were created. The detailed investigation of later periods has yet to be undertaken.

In both aesthetic and archaeological terms, the work undertaken for King Ferdinand II in the 1840s left a profound mark on the castle (Illus. 22). This not only



ILLUS. 22 Sintra, Castelo dos Mouros: general view of the rebuilt walls

involved a huge campaign of reforestation on the mountain range around the castle, giving it its present appearance, but also brought about the major remodelling of the castle itself with the aim of regenerating the ruins which were consequently transformed. In effect, the aesthetic concept of Romanticism, the guiding spirit of the work, was responsible for producing new ruins. New spaces and paths were created over extensive earthworks with secret shelters for the delight of the population. Unfortunately this required among other things the partial destruction of the medieval necropolis of the Church of São Pedro de Canaferrim to make way for the access path to the castle, and landfill covered the interior of the stables.

EARLY OCCUPATION

Recent archaeological evidence indicates that the site was first occupied during the Early to mid-Neolithic period (*c.* 5000 BC). The nature of this settlement has not yet been clearly defined because it, too, was damaged by the remodelling and conservation work carried out since the nineteenth century. A Palmela-type bowl found in the north room of the stables suggests that the site was also occupied during the Chalcolithic period (Illus. 23). The Bronze Age left its mark, too, this being represented solely by fragments of a burnished ceramic object with incised decoration unearthed in the south room of the stables. However, practically nothing more is known of this



ILLUS. 23 Sintra, Castelo dos Mouros: excavated pottery and human bones, evidence of early occupation

prehistoric occupation since no archaeological levels have been identified associated with these periods. Neither is any more known about the Roman period since only two fragments of Hispanic *terra sigillata* ceramics of *c.* AD 70 have been identified on the site. Nevertheless there is a persistent belief that the site of the castle may have included a lookout tower designed to watch over both the surrounding region and offshore maritime traffic. This is based on the fact that from here one can see as far as the Berlengas Islands, where there were Roman settlements. More certainly the Sintra mountain range assumed great importance as a lookout post from which to control and fight the *majus* (Vikings) who assailed the Emirate of Cordoba and ravaged local coastal and riverside populations

The first clearly identifiable medieval population probably settled in the Alcáçova area. Excavations of the old stables have uncovered fragments of dwellings and storage buildings dating from the tenth and eleventh centuries. These are probably related to the remains of dwellings already identified in 1998 (Coelho 2000) outside the castle. Together they constituted a settlement, probably founded during the period of the first *taifas* (1031–1086) occupying part of the hill on which the castle sits.

THE PRESENT CASTLE

In the words of the fourteenth-century polymath Ibn-Khaldoun ‘for a city to prosper, it must have the following five elements: running water; fertile land for agriculture; a nearby forest that supplies firewood; solid walls and a leader who maintains the peace

and safety of the roads and punishes the rebellious'. Sintra possesses all of these and also commands vast territory, thus it became a defensive bastion for the City of Lisbon during the period of Moorish occupation (eighth–twelfth centuries). Hence the castle was attacked by the Crusader Prince Sigurd of Norway when en route to the Holy Land in 1107.

It was probably about then that the silos which have been excavated inside and outside the castle were formed. It is still not possible to determine whether they had a domestic use or formed part of a tax collection network. Many taxes were effectively collected in the form of goods that could be conserved, such as cereals or dried fruits.

Archaeological data indicate that a section of the east wall was built after the eleventh–twelfth centuries, since it is later than an underlying house which has been discovered there. It is possible that it may date from the second half of the twelfth century, and be the work of the Christian governors who took control of the castle after the capture of Lisbon in 1147. In fact, there is clear evidence that the typically Moorish *soga e tissão* technique involving alternating rows of headers and stretchers was not used in this section, and, moreover, the entrance door set into this section of the wall has all the characteristics typical of Christian construction.

The full extent of the walls does little to demonstrate the density of the Muslim occupation or the vastness of the overall area that was settled within and around the castle. As evidence of this, yet more silos, probably contemporary with those of the castle, have been discovered in Quinta da Trindade on the western boundary of the castle estate and close to the second, outer line of castle walls. Further evidence of the great extent of the settlement lies in the discovery of the castle's *almocavar* (or Islamic cemetery) which lies at some distance from it near the entrance to Pena Park. Following custom, the cemetery was situated outside the settlement, but nevertheless close to its entrance. These initial results from the archaeological survey open up a new perspective on the history of the Castelo dos Mouros. However, they also raise further questions that only future work and the exhaustive study of the estate can answer.

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