

UKXÛNUBA (FARO, PORTUGAL). AN ISLAMIC CITY ON THE LAGOON

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RÉSUMÉ : Faro, l'ancienne ville d'Ossonoba, à l'Âge du Fer et en temps Roman, ou Ukkûnuba, dans la période islamique, se situe toujours sur la même place, dominant la lagune et l'eco-système qui la caractérise. Son importance est déjà grande à l'Âge du Fer et cet aspect a certainement contribué pour que son nom puisse se maintenir pendant les époques romaine et islamique, toujours profitant du riche milieu qui l'entoure. Ukkûnuba est situé dans l'extrême sud du Portugal, à la province de l'Algarve. Sa situation sur une petite péninsule, presque une île, lui confère une qualité stratégique magnifique. La ville ne domine pas seulement une énorme extension de la côte mais aussi l'exploitation des importantes sources naturelles de la lagune, aujourd'hui appelée Ria Formosa. L'accès par la mer a toujours été très difficile, ce que la rendait un port dangereux mais, une fois connu, très important dans les routes du commerce du temps. Des fouilles récentes à Faro, à l'intérieur de l'ancienne ville, nous ont révélé la richesse de ses habitants, avec des céramiques, et une activité métallurgique assez importantes. Dans cette communication on parlera surtout sur la céramique « vert et manganèse » d'Ukkûnuba.

Ukkûnuba (Faro, Portugal), ancient Ossonoba, is still located at the same place in the Algarve, the most southern province of Portugal. It consists of an almost island, dominating the lagoon system surrounding it. This lagoon, called nowadays "Ria Formosa", has always been a very rich food resource for the inhabitants of the city, and at the same time providing it with a good defensive system. Its location is indeed excellent from a strategic point of view. In fact, the town can only be reached from the sea through its canals and after mastering the difficult sailing through and along them, because of its constant sandbanks. When the tide is up, it is not so difficult but when the tide is down, it can be a real problem. The town of Ossonoba changed slightly its name during the centuries. In the Islamic period it was first named Ukkûnuba, a change in the spelling, and only later Santa Maria d'Al-

Haroun, from which derives the name of Faro. It was already the Algarve main town during Iron Age and Roman period, and it remained as such in Islamic times, extending its name to the vast territory to the south of river Tagus (Júdice Gamito 1996).

In fact we find references in Islamic reports to both these aspects, either the town itself or the territory it dominated.

Ukkûnuba is thus located in the far South of Portugal (Fig. 1), in the province of Algarve.

This part of the eastern coast of the Algarve is characterised by long windy and sandy beaches as far as the mouth of Guadiana. It is only interrupted here and there by tiderips, or as we call them "barras". These consist of natural openings, which allow the entering of fresh marine water into the lagoon system (Fig. 2). The eco-system in there is excellent for the different species living in the

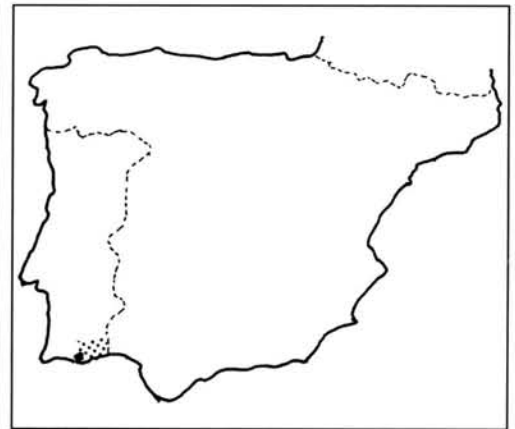
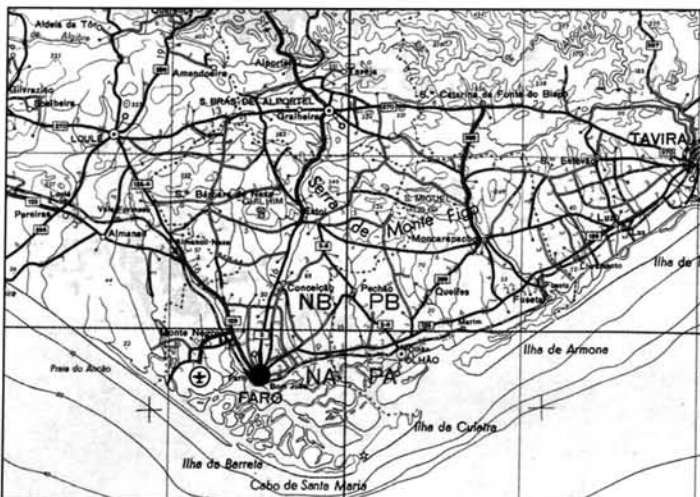


Fig. 1. Ukkûnuba (Faro, Portugal).

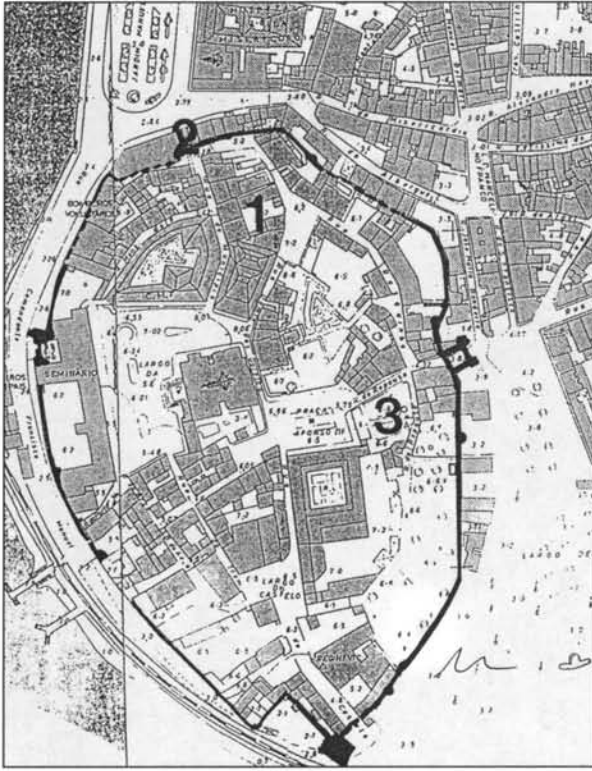


Fig. 2. Excavations in Faro: 1. "Judiciária". 2. Old entrance of Arco da Vila. 3. Horta da Misericórdia.

lagoon, providing an endless food resource for the populations living on its banks and an ideal place for nursery of numerous species (Gamito 1989).

The town dominates not only a large part of the coast, but it is also located at the extreme west of the bay of Gades, opposite to Gades itself, but also the vast estuary of Ria Formosa, with difficult access from the sea. In the



Fig. 3. Excavations at Horta da Misericórdia (1997-2000).

past it dominated a complex commerce net-work all over the area and even today it is still a good import/export harbour. In the Islamic period that activity might have been very important if we consider the archaeological finds found there, and extended to all the Al-Andalus. Recent excavations carried out within the walls of ancient Ukkûnuba (Fig. 2-4) revealed that the town has been an active town of wealthy people. In fact, it presents traces of important trade activities, importing beautiful and expensive ceramics and through its metal activity, especially jewellery (Júdice Gamito, forthcoming). In this paper special emphasis will be put on the so-called "green and manganese" ceramics.

The "green and manganese" ceramics started to be produced during the Califal period (10th century) and, for a time, it was thought that Medinat Al-Zahra was its main centre of production due to the large quantity of this type of ceramics found there, as it was considered at the beginning of this century (Jimenez *et al.* 1926). More recently the occurrence of the ceramics at other sites led to the thought that it might be produced elsewhere, so that, perhaps, the centre of production was not Medinat Al-Zahra, but might be produced locally, in different towns. Chronologically it started to be produced in the 10th century and reached the Taifa period in the 11th century (Rossello Bordoy 1978; Zozaya 1980; Bazzana *et al.* 1986). Nevertheless the place of origin for this ceramics was again picked up more recently (Barceló 1993).

In the 1990s some other aspects started to be considered. Cano Piedra (Cano Piedra 1991; 1996) suggested that this ceramics began to be produced in the 10th century under the influence of Byzance where the use of the different oxides was common, and also using the iconographic influences of Iran, Iraq, Syria and Egypt (Cano Piedra 1996: 45-47). He (Cano Piedra 1996) also emphasised the strong cultural relationship established between Medinat Al-Zahra and these distant areas, which were also largely developed and encouraged by Aabderraman III himself.



Fig. 4. Horta da Misericórdia: a cistern water collecting system.



Fig. 5. The peacock dish.

These oriental contacts might also be in the origin of some of the more exotic decorative motives we found in the ceramics of our excavations, such as the dragon (Fig. 5), a rare representation on these plates. The peacock, can also be considered rare, as well as other birds, like the ducks, which are not a very common motive (Fig. 6a). Most popular are certainly the geometric ones (Fig. 6b, 7a-b) also found at Mértola, Silves and at many other places (Gómez Martínez 1995; Gomes 1988; Macias 1996). The *palmetas* are also very common.

It seems that a large trade net-work was established all along Al-Andalus, and that the élite of the different main towns had an easy access to this ceramics, certainly the most luxurious ones at the time. They are indeed special dishes to serve food, in a way we could name as table wares, in low forms, usually largely open. They present a type of decoration made of copper and manganese oxides, dating from the 10th century. Its origin might be suggested as Byzantine, where similar techniques and the use of different oxides were also common.

Cano distinguishes two main periods of production (Cano Piedra 1996: 47): the first, dating from the 10th century, and probably located in the area of Cordoba, namely at Medinat Al-Zhara which presents a decoration done with dark traces of manganese and green upon a white surface; the second, largely dispersed within Al-Andalus, with motives of their own, that is to say, not necessarily following the patterns of Cordoba area, whose production could go into the 11th century.

In any case, we are dealing with a luxurious item of restricted access.

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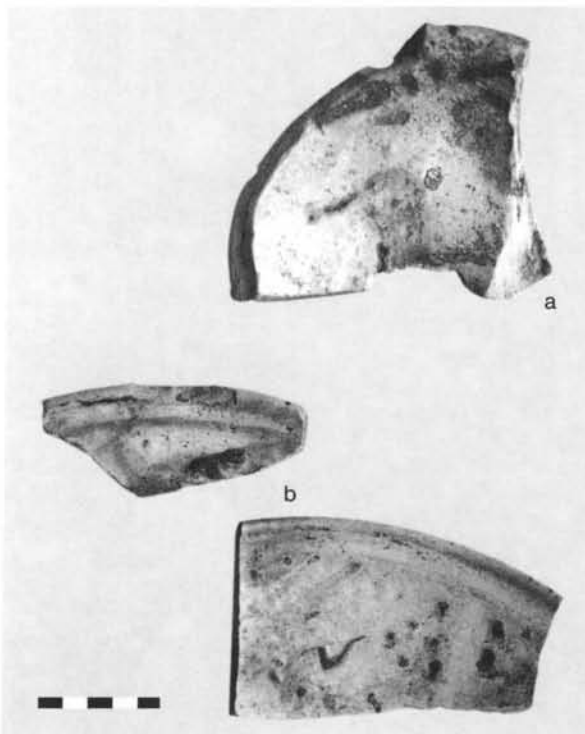


Fig. 6a-b. A duck and ribbon decoration.

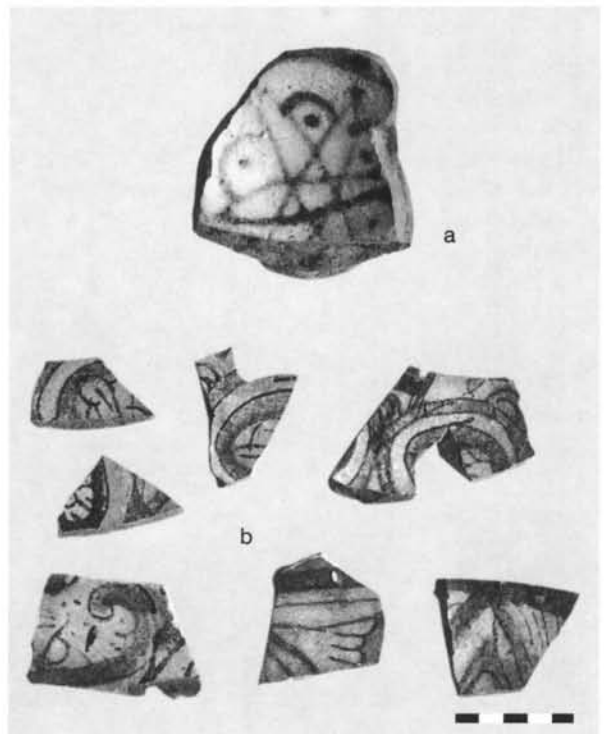


Fig. 7a-b. A central motive and geometric patterns.

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