

URBAN ARCHAEOLOGY IN SÃO CRISTÓVÃO CITY, NE-BRAZIL

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Abstract: *This text has as objective to present field work activities developed in the ambit of the urban archaeology project entitled: Projeto de Levantamento e Monitoramento do Patrimônio Arqueológico da Área Diretamente Afetada pela Ampliação do Sistema de Esgotos e de Abastecimento de Água, nos Municípios de São Cristóvão e Laranjeiras, Estado de Sergipe. This project was executed by the Federal University of Sergipe, Archaeology Center at the Laranjeiras Campus – UFS/NAR, with financial support of Sewage Company of Sergipe – DESO, and administrative responsibility of the State Research Foundation – FAPES, developed in the city of São Cristóvão, Sergipe-Brazil [Costa e Mello, 2010].*

Key-words: *Urban Archaeology, São Cristóvão, Brazilian Northeast*

Abstrait: *Ce textea pour objectif de représenter les activités de terra indéveloppées dans le cadredu projet d'archéologie urbain eintitulé: Projeto de Levantamento e Monitoramento do Patrimônio Arqueológico da Área Diretamente Afetada pela Ampliação do Sistema de Esgotos e de Abastecimento de Água, nos Municípios de São Cristóvão e Laranjeiras, Estado de Sergipe. Ce projeta été exécuté par l'Université Fédérale de Sergipe, Centre Archéologie de Laranjeiras Campus-UFS/NAR, avec le soutien financier de la Société d'Égoutte Sergipe-DESO et le soutien administratif de Fondation Publique pour le Support de la Recherche – FAPES, dans la ville de São Cristóvão, Sergipe-Brésil [Costa e Mello, 2010].*

Mots-clés: *Archéologie Urbaine, São Cristóvão, Nord-est du Brésil*

INTRODUCTION

Founded in 1590 by Cristóvão de Barros, the city of São Cristóvão de Sergipe d'El Rei became quickly a sixteenth century cluster of Portuguese and Spanish colonization in the Brazilian Northeast. Until the beginning of the seventeenth century the settlement had its location changed numerous times, until it was definitely established on the margin of Paramopama River, an affluent of Vaza-Barris River. Also in the seventeenth century the city was occupied by the Dutch from 1637 to 1645, and was totally reconstructed after the Portuguese-Dutch war. In the beginning of the eighteenth century the city was retaken by the Bahia Province, and was later changed as the capital of Sergipe Province during the period of 1823 to 1855, when it was finally transferred to the city of Aracaju. (Map 1).

The city of São Cristóvão is protected by the Federal Law nº 94 of June 22nd of 1938 as a historic heritage of national interest. Its main architectural nuclei, representing the Brazilian colonial period, are located in three central plazas: the São Francisco Square where is situated the São Francisco convent, the Santa Casa de Misericórdia hospital, and the old Palace of the Province; the Matriz Plaza, in which besides the Mother Church of Nossa Senhora da Vitória there is also a block of relevant historic buildings including public edifications; and finally the Church of Nossa Senhora do Rosário dos Homens Pretos and Carmo Convent, that together constitutes the last plaza in the north of the historic center. (Map 2).

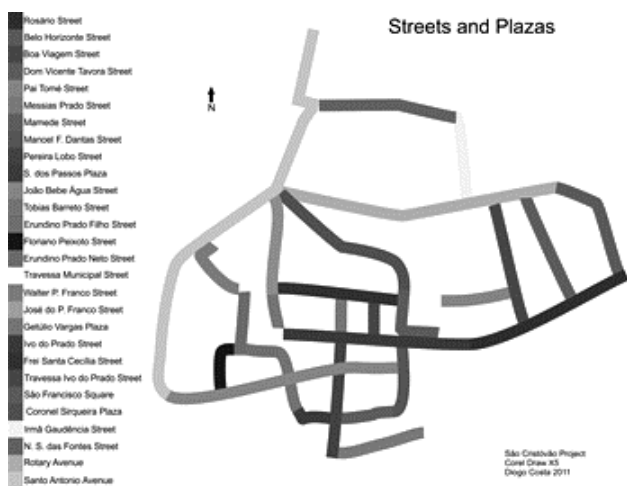


Map 1. Location of the São Cristóvão City

The urban archaeology project took place in over thirty streets, avenues and plazas, mainly in the historic center of this city. During the field work approximately more than 5.000 archaeological vestiges have been collected including fragments of artifacts in ceramic, glass, pottery, metal, as well as some ecofacts in bone, and vestiges of charcoal and shell. All the material culture is being processed, and shall be analyzed and interpreted in laboratory soon. The present text is only about the initial perceptions in field, also guided by thinking about the spatial distribution and concentration of the dug up material during the salvage activities. (Map 3).



Map 2. Small red circles central plazas, large blue circle High City



Map 3. Worked places in the city

The archaeological activities in the field were conducted with the objective of monitoring the interventions in the surface and subsoil by DESO Company in the historic center of São Cristóvão, which conducted renovations in the urban sewage and water pipeline. The UFS/NAR archaeologists were responsible for observation, characterization, and collection of archaeological vestiges impacted in the diggings due to the installation of following ducts. This work has been executed by four to six interns, at that time under graduate students from the UFS archaeology program of the, supervised by two archaeologists and professors who were responsible for the mitigation project.

The works in São Cristóvão began in May 17th of 2010, with the execution of surveys with the DESO Company in order to locate the old sewage and water pipelines in the city. In these surveys some exploratory diggings were executed in random order, through small pits of 1 x 1 meter and with depth varying until the evidence of the old ducts. Immediately after the excavations the soil was

survey seeking to recover any archaeological material present under ground. This first strategy had as goal to understand the urban stratigraphy and composition of the archeological signature in the city, and as guide to the next stage of the field investigation.

The second phase was monitoring the open of the ditches to the pipes installation. These ditches were excavated manually and had approximated 50 cm width and 120 cm depth. This activity took over one year, and the field work intended to: to conduct a systematic archaeological identification of the direct impacted areas by the sanitation constructions; to execute an inventory of historic testimonies through registering, mapping and collecting of all possible evidences; and to establish a preliminary typology to the collected archaeological vestiges.

Another activity conducted in the areas of the pit-tests and ditches intended to observe and describe the archaeological stratigraphy, and in the case of immobile structures to locate them, as well as to establish their category and describe each structure in detail. All these activities had as goal the characterization of the historic groups that lived in that area, and also to correlate the vestiges with the historic information already known about the city of São Cristóvão. At first neither in the preliminary phase or in the secondary field work phase no element directly related to pre-historic occupation of the area has been located; although this information can only be totally disregarded after complete laboratory analysis.

Parallel to the archeological monitoring at the sewage company constructions, a previous identification, description and classification of the urban and architectonic elements at the impacted areas was also performed. Conducted by two archaeologists this field activity was had as objective to collect building information and relate it with the recovered vestiges from the study areas. The work occurred during the month of March 2011, and concentrated mainly in the historic center of the city of São Cristóvão.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL VESTIGES FROM THE SÃO CRISTÓVÃO CITY

Even though the final laboratory analysis is still ongoing, it is possible to observe some constants in the spatial dispositions and concentrations of the recovered vestiges in the city of São Cristóvão. First, the spatial distribution of ceramic artifacts in the city follows a very well established pattern. In the region delimited by the streets Messias Prado, Memede and Manoel F. Dantas the ceramic concentration represented approximately 80% of the entire recovered sample of all other types of material. This is a relevant demonstration of how this material category occurred in a specific area of the city; in comparison to the rest of the city the ceramic only reaches 50% of the total of others material categories combined. In sequence, the distribution of ceramic artifacts decays at 10% minimum in the area among the

streets João Bebe Água, Tobias Barreto, Erundino Prado Filho and Floriano Peixoto. Thus, this area of the city also presented an accumulation of almost 70% of ceramics in comparison with all the others vestige categories recovered in the same place.

Following we have a concentration of 60% of ceramic sample in the region covered by the streets Ivo do Prado, Frei Santa Cecília and the Plaza Getúlio Vargas. This area confirms the same decay of 10% rate in the other sample areas showed before. Similarly, the region restricted by the streets Belo Horizonte, Rosário and Boa Viagem kept the same 10% decrease rate presenting a percentage of 50% of ceramic. It is necessary to note here that the ceramic rate that occurred in this area was the same found to the all ceramic samples in the city in contrast with the other material categories. After this area, the ceramic continued to decrease more than 10% in the region covered by the streets Irmã Gaudência, Nossa Senhora das Fontes and the Plaza Coronel Siqueira. It is also relevant to note that in this last cited area the ceramic only represented 40% of the total of material sample, and that this area is historically known as Cidade Baixa or the “low city” by the residents. At the end, the lower percentage of ceramic occurrence in the city was in the area restricted by the streets Erundino Prado Neto, Walter P. Franco and José do Prado Franco. This place also presented a concentration of only 30% of the ceramic in the total rescued sample, and also kept the same 10% decrease rate noted before, however in an unexpected place of the city now the Cidade Alta or the “high city”. (Map 4).



Map 4. Ceramic concentration area

About the glass artifacts occurrence in the city the percentage and distribution of this material category was quite different from the one showed before related to ceramic vestiges. The place that presented the major concentration of glass material in the city was covered by the streets Irmã Gaudência, Nossa Senhora das Fontes and the Plaza Coronel Siqueira, with 30% of glass from the total of recovered vestiges, all located in the low city region. In one way, in the region restricted by the streets Belo Horizonte, Rosário and Boa Viagem the glass concentration in the total sample was only of 20%, as

well as in the streets Erundino Prado Neto, Walter P. Franco and José do Prado Franco, which also presented the same concentration of only 20% of glass in its entire recovered sample. In another way, in the region delimited by the streets Messias Prado, Mamede and Manoel F. Dantas the rate of glass vestiges reached 10% of the entire sample. This rate was almost similar with the average of approximately 9% of artifacts in glass to the entire city. Finally, the glass material and percentage decay drastically to only 4% in the region covered by the streets João Bebe Água, Tobias Barreto, Erundino Prado Filho and Floriano Peixoto, same pattern found in the streets Ivo do Prado and Frei Santa Cecília. Another point of interest here was the total absence of glass vestiges in the Getúlio Vargas Plaza and São Francisco Square. (Map 5).



Map 5. Glass concentration area

About the spatial distribution of the pottery artifacts, the percentage of the vestiges also reveals its own particularity. First, we found the largest percentage of pottery objects, almost 20%, in the area covered by the streets João Bebe Água, Tobias Barreto, Erundino Prado Filho and Floriano Peixoto, as well as in the area covered by the streets Erundino Prado Neto, Walter P. Franco and José do Prado Franco. It is interesting to note here that these pottery concentrations correspond to the west portion of the city, and that this is the same area that presented the lowest indices to ceramic and glass in the entire sample. On the other hand, in the region covered by the streets Belo Horizonte, Rosário and Boa Viagem it was found only a concentration of 10% of pottery in the total of the recovered sample. Here is also necessary to note that this rate was the same to the entire city, or that this was also the average percentage of pottery occurrence in all the researched urban area. Similar to this last pattern it also was found a percentage of 9% of pottery occurrence to the region delimited by the streets Messias Prado, Mamede and Manoel F. Dantas, as well as to the streets Ivo do Prado, Frei Santa Cecília and the Plaza Getúlio Vargas. Finally, the region covered by the streets Irmã Gaudência, Nossa Senhora das Fontes and the Plaza Coronel Siqueira presented the lowest rate to the pottery occurrence in the entire city, or 5%, a place known as the low city. (Map 6).



Map 6. Pottery concentration area

About the spatial distribution of the recovered metal artifacts in São Cristóvão we can observe another interesting pattern. The major concentration of metallic objects with a percentage to approximately 6% of all the vestiges collected in the field work occurred in the streets Ivo do Prado, Frei Santa Cecília and the Plaza Getúlio Vargas. In sequence, the percentage decay to 5% of metallic objects in the area formed by the streets Messias Prado, Mamede and Manoel F. Dantas. On the other way, in the area covered by the streets Belo Horizonte, Rosário and Boa Viagem, as well as in the streets Erundino Prado Neto, Walter P. Franco and José do Prado Franco the occurrence was 4% of metal in correspondence with the other material categories collected. Finally, the area covered by the streets João Bebe Água, Tobias Barreto, Erundino Prado Filho and Floriano Peixoto presented only 3% of metal artifacts in the all recovered sample. It is also necessary to relate that this last percentage was the most similar to the metal average for the entire city, which was of approximately 2%. Another interesting factor was the entire absence of metal objects in large portions of the town, such as the streets Irmã Gaudência, Nossa Senhora das Fontes and in the Plaza Coronel Siqueira, or else in the largest portion of the low city. (Map 7).



Map 7. Metal concentration area

Lastly we have the distribution of the second largest material category in the all samples recovered in the entire field work: the bones. The major concentration of bone materials, with a percentage of approximately 50%

of the all recovered vestiges occurred in the streets Erundino Prado Neto, Walter P. Franco and José do Prado Franco, as well as in the streets Irmã Gaudência, Nossa Senhora das Fontes and the Plaza Coronel Siqueira. This was also an instigating fact, because for the first time a region in the high city and another in the low city shared the same rate concentration of a material category. In sequence, the archaeological vestiges in bone also presented a percentage of 40% in the streets Ivo do Prado, Frei Santa Cecília and the Plaza Getúlio Vargas, as well as in the São Francisco Square and its surroundings. In the same way, in the area covered by the streets João Bebe Água, Tobias Barreto, Erundino Prado Filho and Floriano Peixoto the bone vestiges dropped to 10%, presenting a percentage of 30% in comparison to the other material categories. However, in the sequence the bone material drop to only 10% of the total of the sample in the region covered by the streets Belo Horizonte, Rosário and Boa Viagem. The bone material closes its occurrence with a rate of 5% in the region delimited by the streets Messias Prado, Mamede and Manoel F. Dantas. (Map 8).



Map 8. Bone concentration area

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Here are presented some ideas and reflections about the spatial distribution and concentration of the recovered vestiges in the ambit of the urban archaeology field work in the city of São Cristóvão/SE. We can observe, for instance, that the ceramic artifacts are concentrated in an isolated area in the center-south of the high city, while its dispersion occurs in a more homogeneous form first in the northwest portion, and later in the northeast portion of the high city. In one way, it is necessary also to observe that the lowest distribution of ceramic artifacts occurs in the southwest extreme of the high city, and toward the river. On the other way, the glass artifacts have their major concentration in the region located at the center-north of the low city, and presented some similarity as for the quantity collected in the east and west boundaries of the high city. The glass artifacts presented the lowest distribution in the center-north of the high city, which was also the major point of concentration of the ceramics in the entire São Cristóvão.

In contrast the ceramic artifacts appeared in an almost homogenous form in the entire city; this material category has its major concentration in the west region of the high city, and a regular distribution first in the center and later in the extreme west of the same area. The lowest area of concentration of the ceramic vestiges was found in the center-south region of the low city. On the other hand, the metal artifacts distribution has a concentrated distribution on the center region of the high city, and a balanced distribution in the west, east and north quarters of the same area. However, a strong indicator of the metal distribution in the entire city was its almost complete absence in the low city. In conclusion, the bone distribution has its major concentration in the northeast region of the entire city, including high and low cities. This distribution can also be related to the proximity of the river, while in contrast the bone distribution decays in west bound, mainly concentrated in north direction of the high city.

In conclusion we can interpret that the distribution and concentration patterns of the material categories in São Cristóvão occurs as a formation of some combined clusters of artifacts:

- First, in the highest occurrence of ceramic artifacts region it was also identified the lowest occurrence of bones vestiges. While in the area of lowest occurrence of ceramic artifacts it also occurs the highest incidence of pottery artifacts and bones vestiges.
- Second, the highest glass concentration area was also the region of totally absence of metal objects, and the lowest incidence of ceramic artifacts. In the same way, the area with the lowest occurrences of glass vestiges was the area with the highest occurrence of metal objects.
- Third, the region with most occurrences of ceramic artifacts was also the area with major incidence of bones vestiges. However the area with less ceramic artifacts was also the area with high incidence of bones vestiges.

In this way, we can establish two direct correlations in the spatial distributions and concentrations of the São Cristóvão's archaeological material:

- First is the ceramic-bone axis, where inversely proportional to the increase of one occurs the decrease of other.
- Second is the glass-metal/ceramic axis, where inversely proportional to the increase of glass occurs the decrease of metal and ceramic artifacts, and vice versa.

At the end, there is an intersection area between these two axes, which is the Plaza Getúlio Vargas, which is the oldest historic block in the high city, or else it can be described as an epicenter of the material distribution to the entire city. From this plaza we have the increase of distribution of ceramic artifacts in the southeast direction, the increase of bone vestiges distribution in the northeast direction, the increase of glass objects in the northeast direction, and in its surroundings the concentration and the dispersion of the pottery and metal.

As previously stated, this analysis is not complete because numerous other elements need to be included as variables in these constants, such as the date and function of each vestige, and also its socioeconomic and probable symbolic attributes. The urban archaeology work in the city of São Cristóvão is yet incipient, but the idea of understanding this urban space as an entire archaeological site is a goal to be achieved. However, the analysis of the spatial distribution and concentration of the recovery vestiges in the city was not only limited to observation of patterns and clusters formations, but also to looking for a logic in the space construction of a historically living place. The São Cristóvão urban archaeology project intended to provide a singular contribution in the knowledge about the formation and dynamic of Brazilian Northeast cities mainly from the colonial period.

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