



HOUSES, PITS AND STREETS

THE MEDIEVAL
ROOTS OF
ALMADA

MUSEU
DE ALMADA

COVAS DE PÃO

Almada's city centre is eight hundred years old. There is an unknown Almada under its streets and houses, a city that archaeology has been revealing.

Mapping how its streets and quarters grow and evolve, one traces the city's history since its medieval origins on the slopes and plateau around the castle. The artefacts left behind by many generations tell us stories about the city's — and its inhabitants — daily life and allow us to follow its slow transformation over time.

A testimony of these ancient lives, the so-called "grains pits" or "silos" can be found in multiple places throughout the medieval town. Dug into the ground, they were the safest way to store cereals, guaranteeing the population's subsistence. The oldest traces of Almada's denizens were recovered from the interior of these silos, transformed into landfills after being abandoned.

The silos discovered by archaeological digs are just a small part of a larger set that remains hidden or has been destroyed. Their number far exceeds what was necessary for the local supply of the population and allows us to speculate on the importance of cereal production to a city where these structures — which are now "invisible" — were so numerous.

BETWEEN AL-ANDALUS AND THE CHRISTIAN KINGDOM

10 TH – 12 TH CENTURIES

Between 711 and 1147, the territory of Almada was ruled by Islamic dynasties, which controlled North Africa and most of the Iberian Peninsula. The Castle of Almada was built during this period and managed an essentially rural territory whose economy was based on agriculture and subsistence fishing. Almada's oldest population centre is born around this fortification.

Since the 10th century, Arab geographers have referred to the importance of gold mining in the Tagus sands, expressed in the toponym Al-ma'adan (mine or deposit), which evolved into the contemporary toponym of Almada.

In the mid-12th century, the Tagus valley region felt the pains provoked by the unstable borders between Christian expansion in the north, and the power of Al-Andalus in the south. During and after the conquest of Lisbon in 1147, Almada was administered by Afonso Henriques, who sought to reorganize the territory and settle the population, granting privileges to the Muslim community that remained here.

The grains pits are one of the few remains of the 12th century discovered so far in Almada, some of which were built and used in this period, on the outskirts of the urban centre.

Despite the conflicts between Arabs and Christians in this period, in 1194 Almada was definitively integrated into the kingdom of Portugal. The consolidation of this new domain at the beginning of the 13th century allows for a population increase and the slow but continuous expansion of the village from its oldest nucleus.



10 TH – 12 TH CENTURIES

A BUDDING TOWN

13 TH – 14 TH CENTURIES

The town grew toward the place where today sits the building of Paços do Concelho and Largo da Boca do Vento, adapting to the topography of the land. New dwellings were built over the grains pits, many of which had been meantime abandoned and used as landfills.

At the same time, small population clusters start appearing, isolated from the main nucleus. One of them, known as “Oliveira”, dates back to at least the late 13th century and was incorporated into the city as early as the 14th century, when the town’s growth extended to the area of the current Casa da Cerca. Houses from this period were primarily small single-story units.

As the village grew west, the castle lost its importance. The economic and social centre moved to the current Largo 1.º de Maio — the churchyard of the Church of Santiago, a meeting point for the population and the true centre of medieval Almada, the place where merchants, notaries and artisans converge.

In its vicinity, we see the emergence of Praça Velha, the square of the City Hall and the seat of the political, administrative and judicial powers. The town’s pillory was placed there later, the symbol of public administration of justice.

Fishing and agriculture, with an emphasis on wine production, are the town’s main economic activities. Benefiting from a period of lasting peace, trade and commerce became increasingly more dynamic and important.



13 TH – 14 TH CENTURIES

A FLOURISHING TOWN

15 TH – 16 TH CENTURIES

In the 15th century, the city continued to grow west following the axis of its main streets, which correspond to the contemporary Rua Serpa Pinto and Rua Capitão Leitão (old Rua Direita), reaching Largo Conde Ferreira and Ermida do Espírito Santo. Answers to the increasing complexity of urban life, facilities like the Hospital and the Inn of Santa Maria are built next to the current Igreja da Misericórdia. There are documents that refer to the house of a clerk and tax collector in Praça Velha.

As the town spreads out, Praça Velha becomes increasingly peripheral, and Praça Nova appears in the area of the current City Hall, which becomes the new urban centre. The town benefits from the economic prosperity of trade from Europe and overseas, evidenced by the number of objects of foreign origin collected in archaeological excavations.

Throughout the 16th century, Almada maintained its prosperity, even temporarily hosting the Casa dos Tratos da Guiné e Índia. This growth is justified by the proximity to Lisbon and the movement of the Tagus estuary, one of the great centres of international trade at the time.

In 1531, Almada suffered the effects of the great earthquake that destroyed about a third of the houses in Lisbon.



15 TH – 16 TH CENTURIES

THE ESTABLISHED TOWN

17 TH – 18 TH CENTURIES

Established in the late 16th century, the town limits were stable until the early 19th century. During this period, the population grows mainly in the small villages and hamlets around Almada, like Cova da Piedade and Cacilhas.

In the town, the castle, despite maintaining its military importance, is abandoned as a living space and relegated to a secondary position on the eastern edge of the urban centre. All the economic and social dynamics are now concentrated in Praça Nova and Rua Direita, which leads to the municipality's main road, leading to Trafaria.

With a consolidated urban area, changes within the village essentially occur in the organization of properties.

The destruction caused by the 1755 earthquake dictates the disappearance of the medieval urban centre, erased by the reconstruction that followed. Some of the most important streets maintain their layout, but many backstreets, paths and alleyways between them were incorporated into new properties, which absorb areas that were once common or of public use. Some dwellings are never rebuilt and are transformed into backyards, while others are integrated into new, larger houses.

Boarded up or incorporated into the interior walls of the dwellings in Almada Velha these old doors and arches are the last remaining traces of this ancient urbanism. Testimonies of century-old streets that have been swallowed up by the city's growth and evolution.



17 TH – 18 TH CENTURIES

THE SITE

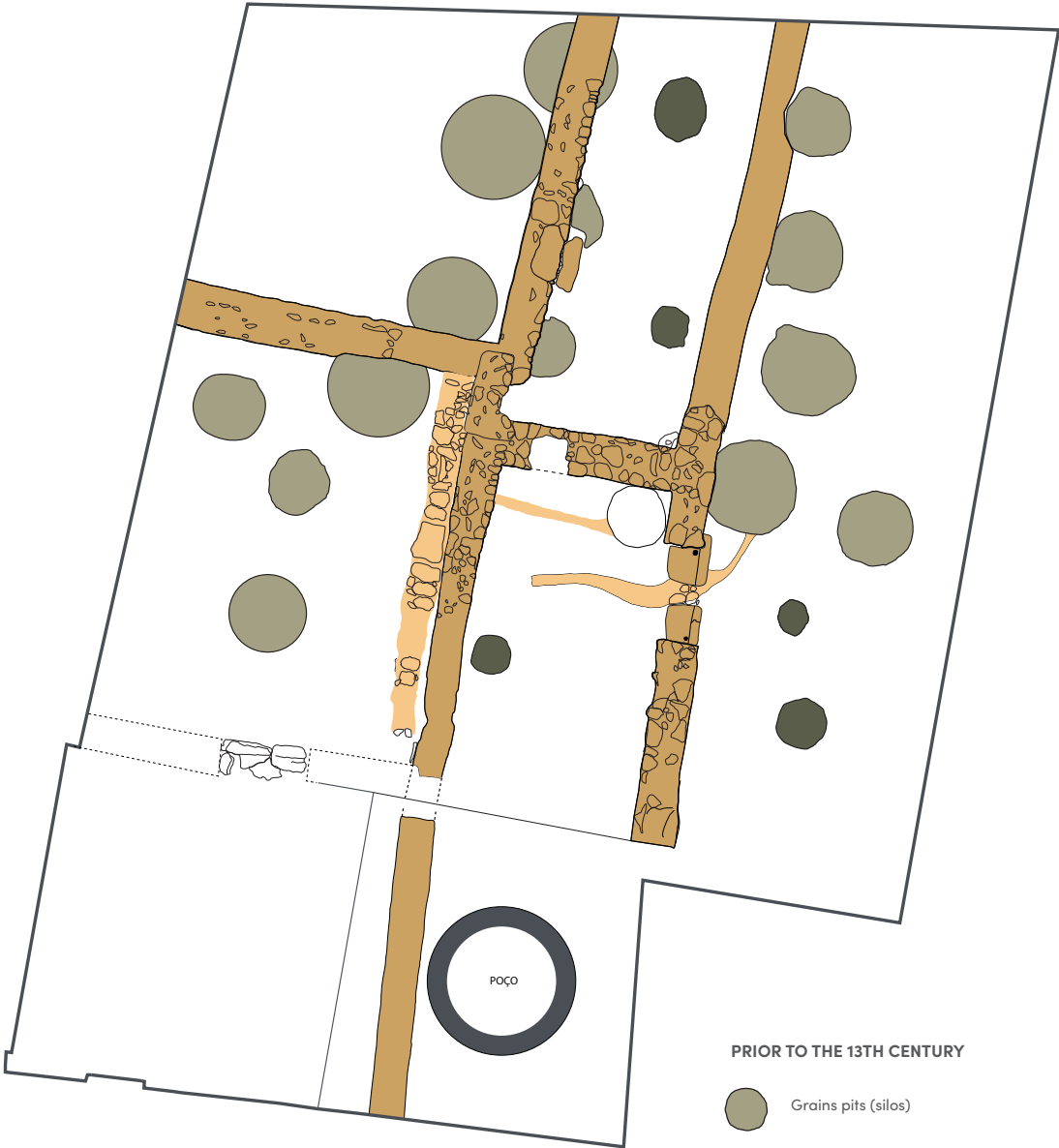
The archaeological site where it stands today the Museum of Almada – Covas de Pão was discovered in 1992 during construction works that were taking place on site. Carried out between 1992 and 1996, the excavations allowed the identification of archaeological structures that mark three phases of occupation.

In a first phase, prior to the 13th century, the area was intended to store cereals and included a set of 13 grains pits (silos), possibly built in the 12th century.

During the 14th-15th centuries, the area underwent profound transformations as the city grew. Some grains pits (silos) lost their original function and were used as landfills. A set of housing structures was then erected, of which some walls, door sills and water drainage ditches are preserved. A street was also identified, with a transversal orientation to the streets of Judiaria and Henriques Nogueira, as well as 5 grains pits (silos), contemporaneous with the housing structures.

The use of the area as a backyard started in the 16th century and lasted until the 20th century, and it is possible to distinguish several levels of landfill, namely those related to the 1755 earthquake.

RUA DA JUDIARIA




RUA HENRIQUES NOGUEIRA


PRIOR TO THE 13TH CENTURY

 Grains pits (silos)

14TH-15TH CENTURIES

 Housing structures

 Grains pits (silos)

 Water drainage ditches

OPENING TIME

tuesday to saturday

10.00 am - 13.00 pm; 14.00 pm - 18.00 pm

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