

CARICATURES DRAWN ON ROMAN MURAL PAINTINGS OF *CONIMBRIGA* (*LUSITANIA*)

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Archaeological research conducted at the House of the Fountains (Casa dos Repuxos), a notable residential building in the city of Conimbriga (prov. Lusitania, Portugal), led to the discovery of a set of graffitied caricatures on some of the red-background murals panels that decorated the house before the renovations carried out in the first half of the 2nd century AD, when the walls were remodelled and the resulting debris was dumped into the building's abandoned basement.

The role of these images in visual communication is especially interesting, reflecting both roman aesthetic preferences and possible satirical intentions.



Fig. 1 Fragments of mural painting with caricatures; on the left, from the 1954 excavations. On the right, the three fragments from 2022.

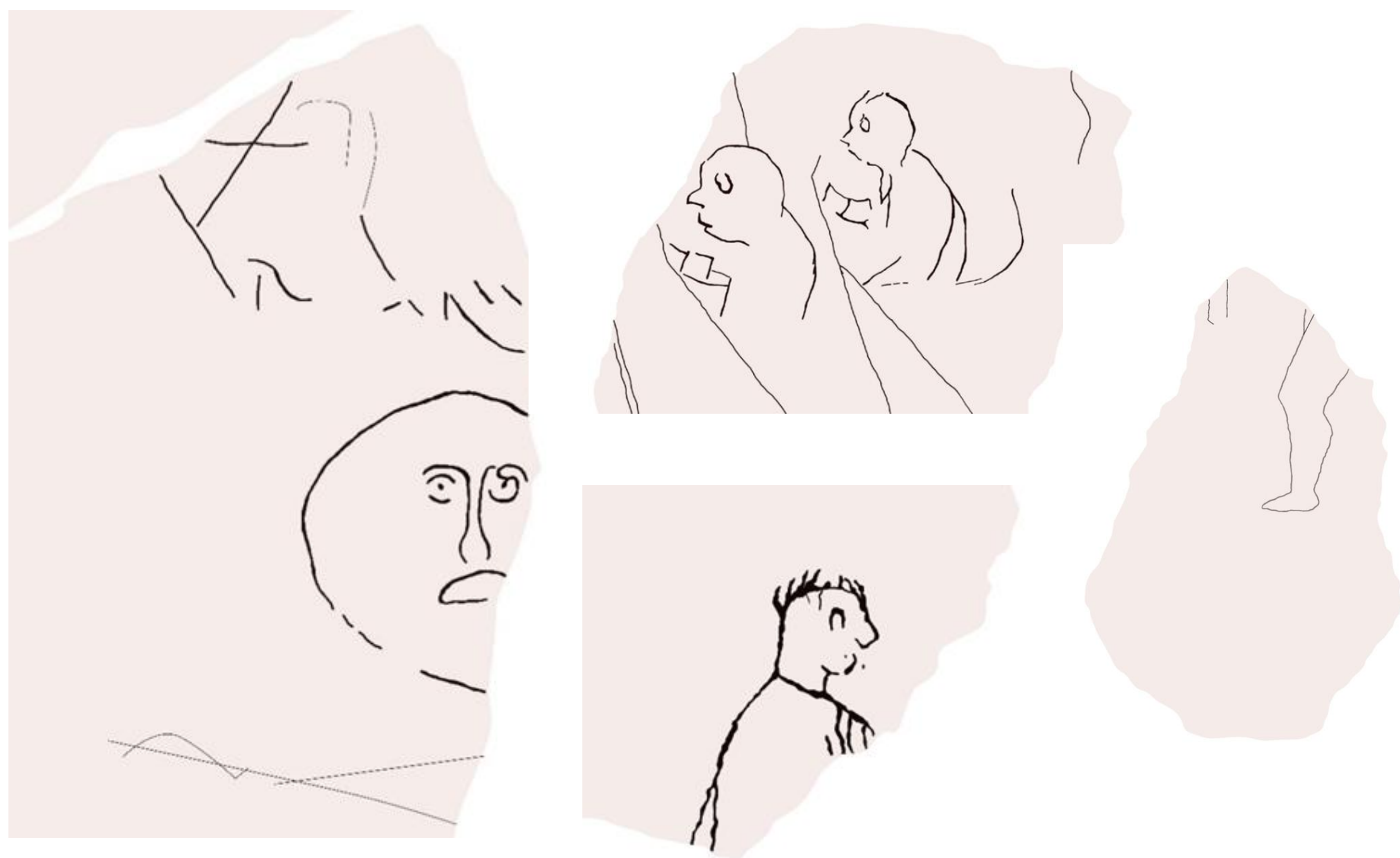


Fig. 3 Detail of caricatures (not to scale).



Fig. 2. Context of the paintings (from top): Conimbriga in the Iberian Peninsula; aerial view of the town; the House of the Fountains in its urban context; aerial view (c. 1980); general aspect of the part of the House currently being excavated; detail of mural paintings in their finding context.

The first caricature was made on a wall painted in burgundy red, and is later than the painting. In it, you can see a hairless head with a frontal representation of the face that, despite appearing simple, has well-defined details for the mouth, nose, eyes and eyebrows. The drawing is accompanied by cursive Latin writing at the top that has not yet been deciphered and could indicate a name, nickname, or some anecdote/joke about the person depicted.

The other three caricatures were found during the 2022 excavation campaign, and all were painted on red-background walls:

- one fragment depicts two human figures seated or squatting with their arms raised in front of them, apparently holding an object;
- another fragment shows the upper body (head, shoulders, and back) of an apparently male figure, with lines over the head that may represent hair or what could be a stylized laurel wreath;
- in the last fragment it is possible to see only the representation of an entire leg (from thigh to foot), and it is the only caricature of the set that was made before the wall was finished, probably with the mortar still wet, believing that the paint would cover the lines, which indicates that the person who made the graffiti had access to the building while it was still in the construction phase.

Further work is still required to fully understand the context and meaning of these caricatures and their role in the evolution of the decoration of the House of the Fountains, but their obvious interest merits their public presentation.

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