

# PAST AND PRESENT OF THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE *ALQUERÍAS*

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## ABSTRACT

Thirty years after its first theoretical reflections, the archaeology of al-Andalus has yet to find a true identity in the context of Islamic Archaeology. It is a discipline focused on urban studies and fascinated by great monuments and higher material representations of the society, but which has still not developed a predominantly rural archaeology. In the same way as in recent years, there have been calls for a reorientation of the archaeology of the productive spaces to agrarian archaeology, this paper analyses the possibilities of a new archaeology of rural settlements or *alquerías* for the knowledge of Andalusian society<sup>1</sup>.

## KEY WORDS

Medieval Archaeology, Islamic Archaeology, al-Andalus, Rural Settlements, *Alquerías*.

## CAPITALIA VERBA

Archeologia Medii Aevi, Archeologia Maomethana, Hispania Arabica, Rustici situs, Villae.

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1. This article has been prepared in the framework of the Project HAR2010-21932-C02-01 "Aclimatación y difusión de plantas en al-Andalus. Selección y gestión de plantas en al-Andalus. Prácticas campesinas y estados" and the Research Group (2009 SGR-304): "Arqueología Agraria de la Edad Media (ARAEM)".

## 1. The Archaeology of al-Andalus and the search for identity

Although several decades have gone by since Miquel Barceló presented the need for a new archaeology to study al-Andalus in a historic article, his words still resonate. Lamentably, there are very few elements in current practice that allow us to speak about a new orientation, and even less of “a conceptually clean archaeology and, in itself, capable of proposing historically relevant problems and plausible responses to these problems”, as he wrote then.<sup>2</sup> Nobody has expressed it more clearly than Antonio Malpica, when he stated thirty years later, that “the hopes that existed in 1990 have evaporated, to the extent that, from the perspective of medieval archaeology, the change has been very negative”.<sup>3</sup>

This situation has ended up configuring a discipline that, despite its long trajectory, is still seeking its real identity.<sup>4</sup> In this sense, it is striking that the archaeology of al-Andalus is strangely distant from the international theoretical and methodological debate that has attempted over recent years to define the identity of so-called “Islamic Archaeology”, a disputed and, nevertheless, two-hundred-year old discipline.<sup>5</sup> The recent publication of Marcus Milwright's work, *An Introduction to Islamic Archaeology*, has dusted off the controversy that, more than ten years ago, generated a monograph by Timothy Insoll, *The Archaeology of Islam*, which posed some conceptual questions that have still to be answered.<sup>6</sup> The first of these works, Insoll's, was surprising for its interdisciplinary view that included the periphery of the Islamic world, which he knew so well,<sup>7</sup> and for the primacy of the interpretative hypotheses of specific models of the typologies and classifications. However, this

2. Barceló, Miquel. “¿Qué arqueología para al-Andalus?”, *Los orígenes del feudalismo en el mundo mediterráneo*, Antonio Malpica, Tomás Quesada, eds. Granada: Universidad de Granada, 1994: 93. The article was first published two years earlier in Catalan: Barceló, Miquel. “Quina arqueologia per al-Andalus?”, *Coloquio Hispano-Italiano de Arqueología medieval (Granada, 1990)*. Granada: Patronato de la Alhambra y el Generalife, 1992: 243-252 (the quote is from page 250).

3. Malpica, Antonio. “La Arqueología para el conocimiento de la sociedad andalusí”, *¿Qué es Andalucía? Una revisión histórica desde el Medievalismo*, Antonio Malpica, Rafael Peinado, Adela Fábregas, eds. Granada: Universidad de Granada, 2009: 40. For an even more critical balance, see: Martínez, Virgilio. “Reflexiones sobre el estudio de al-Andalus como sociedad o, de nuevo, qué arqueología para al-Andalus”, *Saber y sociedad en al-Andalus*, Alejandro García, ed. Huelva: Universidad de Huelva, 2006: 193-237.

4. It must be noted that not all authors share this negative outlook. Even some of those involved in the rise of Spanish medieval archaeology have stated that the current archaeology of al-Andalus constitutes “the fastest growing medieval archaeology in Europe, possibly only behind the British”. See: Zozaya, Juan. “Bocetos para la historiografía de la arqueología andalusí”, *711. Arqueología e Historia entre dos mundos*, Enrique Baquedano, Luis A. García, Alfonso Vigil, Manuel Ación *et alii*, eds. Alcalá de Henares: Museo Arqueológico Regional, 2011: 121.

5. A summary of the historical evolution of the so-called “Islamic Archaeology” can be found in, for example: Vernet, Stephen. “The rise of Islamic Archaeology”. *Muqarnas*, 14 (1997): 1-10.

6. The two works referred to are: Milwright, Marcus. *An Introduction to Islamic Archaeology*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010; Insoll, Timothy. *The Archaeology of Islam*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999.

7. Insoll, Timothy. *The Archaeology of Islam in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Cambridge (UK): Cambridge University Press, 2003.



was really a trial run for “archaeology of religion”,<sup>8</sup> in which Islam was identified as a uniform superstructure that could be detected by a specific analysis of the material register.<sup>9</sup> In contrast, Milwright presented a much more traditional view of the so-called “Islamic Archaeology”, distancing it from the archaeology of religion and configuring a hypertrophied and diffuse concept that generates a Euro-centrist archaeological discipline more typical of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>10</sup> It may be that, “in the end, “Islamic Archaeology” is only a chronological and geographic label that means little or nothing”,<sup>11</sup> but these works (and many other similar ones, with less impact) emphasise the need to establish the true targets of a growing discipline.<sup>12</sup>

While the arguments are deployed for the debate that aims to define the nature of the discipline in the international field, in the Iberian Peninsula (the territory where, paradoxically, it has developed most since the 1980s) these questions are barely discussed. In his recent and accurate diagnosis, Antonio Malpica has drawn attention to the immobility of archaeology on al-Andalus, but noting that, “at least awareness has risen of the real situation we are in”.<sup>13</sup> The needs are clearer than ever. And in this sense, following the line of a recent work published in this same journal, I want to insist on the need to orientate the archaeology of al-Andalus towards the terrain of the rural space, in this case, towards the field of settlements.<sup>14</sup>

## 2. On the need for an eminently rural Andalusian archaeology

A quick look at current publications on the Archaeology of al-Andalus reveals that the enormous growth in the discipline over the last thirty-five years has been far from homogeneous or proportional. The spectacular leap that Medieval Archaeology

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8. A sub-discipline that is being actively worked on. See: Insoll, Timothy, ed. *Case studies in archaeology and world religion: the proceedings of the Cambridge conference*. Oxford: BAR International Series, 1999; Insoll, Timothy, ed. *Archaeology and World Religion*. London: Routledge, 2001.

9. A more detailed critical analysis of Insoll's work and its reception in the works of Ennahid, Benco Robinson, Al-Sharekh and Whitcomb can be found in: Eiroa, Jorge A. “The Archaeology of Islam’ de Timothy Insoll”. *Anales de Prehistoria y Arqueología*, 16 (2003): 235-239.

10. The development of these arguments can be found in: Eiroa, Jorge A. “Sobre religión y poliglotía. Reflexiones en torno a la ‘Arqueología Islámica’ a la luz de un trabajo reciente”. *Debates de Arqueología Medieval*, 1 (2011): 185-188.

11. Johns, Jeremy. “Islamic archaeology at a difficult age”. *Antiquity*, 84 (2010): 1187-1191.

12. Some interesting examples: Northedge, Alastair. “Archaeology and Islam”, *Companion Encyclopedia of Archaeology*, Graeme Barker, ed. London: Routledge, 1999: 1077-1106; Walmsley, Alan. “Archaeology and Islamic studies: the development of a relationship”, *From Handaxe to Khan*, Kjeld von Folsach, Henrik Thrane, I. Thuesen, Peder Mortensen, eds. Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2004: 317-329; Whitcomb, Donald. “The Spread of Islam and Islamic Archaeology”, *Changing Social Identity with the Spread of Islam: Archaeological Perspectives*, Donald Whitcomb, ed. Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2004: 1-7; Petersen, Andrew. “What is ‘Islamic’ Archaeology?”. *Antiquity*, 79 (2005): 100-107.

13. Malpica, Antonio. “La Arqueología para el conocimiento...”: 45.

14. The work referred to is: Kirchner, Helena. “Archaeology of the Landscape and Archaeology of the Farmed Areas in the Medieval Hispanic Societies”. *Imago Temporis. Medium Aevum*, 5 (2011): 87-118.



took in Spain in the 1980s has traditionally been explained around some specific events that have ended up becoming almost mythical,<sup>15</sup> but the true reasons for the change can perhaps be explained simply by the 1985 Law of Spain's heritage.<sup>16</sup> The application of this legislation and its adaptation through the norms of the regional administrations, or *Comunidades Autónomas*, who were immediately given power in the field of heritage, meant a rapid growth in archaeological interventions. Most of this work was on medieval and post-medieval heritage, given that it was mainly carried out in urban areas, the primordial target of a seemingly endless construction boom. The leap in medieval archaeology was thus essentially quantitative, and in no case qualitative. As Juan Antonio Quirós has recently recalled, the exponential growth of archaeological activity in the medieval sites did not imply a consolidation of the discipline or reinforcing of the methodological, conceptual or theoretical proposals.<sup>17</sup>

There were many consequences of this new situation and these have been amply analysed, reflecting a not very hopeful panorama.<sup>18</sup> In our analysis, these can be summed up by one fact: the archaeological study of the rural spaces became a marginal tendency. The impact of the so-called "rescue Archaeology" or "commercial archaeology" was minimal outside the cities, limited to large-scale public works, in a space that has suffered much less speculation and that lacks the advantages derived from the plans for the special protection of the subsoil applied in urban areas.

Then, the archaeology developed from the scientific projects carried out in the universities and other research centres (museums, C.S.I.C., Casa de Velázquez, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, etc.) has been epidermal in many cases, and has mainly focussed on aspects far removed from the rural settings. The widespread oblivion that affected the Andalusian rural space helped to generate a monumentalism with 19<sup>th</sup> century roots that the archaeology of al-Andalus has yet to fully escape from. While understandable, the fascination of the study of the large monumental sites and the greatest material expressions of the society has conditioned the research programmes and presided over the explanations of the great historical problems of al-Andalus. This way, on many occasions a distorted image has been obtained, the result of the concatenation of various isolated and not very representative elements. This is a common ill of the archaeologies of other

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15. Among the outstanding events that are habitually cited as decisive factors for the exponential leap in Andalusian archaeology are the first Congress of Spanish Medieval Archaeology, held in Huesca in 1983, and the publication of the first edition of the *Boletín de Arqueología medieval* in 1986.

16. Law 16/1985, 25<sup>th</sup> June, of *patrimonio Histórico Español* (BOE num. 155, 29<sup>th</sup> June 1985; corrected for errors in BOE núm. 296, 11<sup>th</sup> December 1985).

17. Quirós, Juan Antonio. "Medieval Archaeology in Spain", *Reflections: 50 years of Medieval Archaeology, 1957-2007*, Roberta Gilchrist, Andrew Reynolds, eds. London: Maney Publishing, 2009: 176.

18. See the thoughts collected in: Malpica, Antonio. "La arqueología medieval entre el debate científico y social", *Tendencias actuales en arqueología medieval*, Ángel Luís Molina, Jorge A. Eiroa, eds. Murcia: Universidad de Murcia, 2007: 9-22. An analysis of the consequences, taking a specific chronological and geographic setting as an example, can be found in: Eiroa, Jorge A. "Arqueología urbana de la Baja Edad Media en la región de Murcia: datos para un debate sobre el modelo de gestión", *Ciudad y Arqueología Medieval*, Antonio Malpica, ed. Granada: Alhulia, 2006: 191-217.



periods, similarly focussed on the great architectural and artistic manifestations of the state, which end up pushing the studies about the rural environment into the background.

The fact that the cities played a central function in Andalusian society, as in most societies,<sup>19</sup> is accepted by everyone.<sup>20</sup> However, the Andalusian territory cannot be explained simply as “a country of cities”.<sup>21</sup> Al-Andalus was, to a large extent, made up of a sum of peasant territories and emphasising the decisive role played by the urban centres, which we all accept, need not minimise the importance of rural settlement.

Furthermore, in the future historiographic debate, the rural space is called upon to constitute the foundation to build future explanations on. In recent years, the debate about the characterisation of Andalusian society (the essential question) has been fuelled by the first in-depth response to Guichard's thesis, very widely accepted in the last thirty years.<sup>22</sup> This is Eduardo Manzano's proposed explanation of the first centuries of al-Andalus, in which the 8<sup>th</sup>-century conquest is presented as the result of the pressure of “the armies of the centralised empire (...) in which strict social hierarchies prevailed”.<sup>23</sup> Although the debate continues to develop, moving to the terrain of the specific questions and on the local and regional scale, the written sources seem to have offered almost all their answers and the solution will not remain in the hands of archaeology of power that has already been sufficiently exploited. In contrast, a better archaeological knowledge of what happened in the rural areas would be decisive for clarifying the true reality of Andalusian society. If, for example, the rural landscape of al-Andalus in the early centuries was not characterised by the presence of clannish cells but rather by the existence of small pre-Islamic settlements in which the members of the conquering army responsible for gathering taxes had settled, this would need to be confirmed beyond the written sources, in which, as Manzano himself recognises, identifying the conquerors is a task that “borders on the impossible”.<sup>24</sup> This is one example of the high level of

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19. We should remember the suggestive monograph by Glaeser, who exalted the city as the most important human creation and as the key element for development. See: Glaeser, Edward. *Triumph of the City. How our Greatest Invention makes us richer, smarter, greener, healthier and happier*. New York: Penguin Press, 2011.

20. Miquel Barceló himself recognised this in the controversial article that opens this analysis. Barceló, Miquel. “¿Qué arqueología...”: 93; or: Barceló, Miquel. “Quina arqueología...”: 250.

21. This denomination corresponds deliberately to the title of the congress held in 2005 and published three years later: Izquierdo, Ricardo; Carrobes, Jesús, eds. *Al-Andalus, país de ciudades*. Madrid: Diputación Provincial de Toledo, 2008.

22. This, logically, is the thesis first presented in: Guichard, Pierre. *Al-Andalus. Estructura antropológica de una sociedad islámica en Occidente*. Granada: Universidad de Granada, 1998 (facsimile of the 1976 edition, with a full preliminary study by Antonio Malpica).

23. Manzano, Eduardo. *Conquistadores, emires y califas. Los omeyas y la formación de al-Andalus*. Barcelona: Crítica, 2006: 18-19. In this book Manzano defends that the tribal past of the Arab population dissolved in the vortex of the conquest and the idea of an always marginal role for the Berber tribal groups; the author is convinced that the tribal structures weakened rapidly and that their influence on the structuring of al-Andalus was practically null.

24. Manzano, Eduardo. *Conquistadores, emires...*: 274, note 70.



opposition that the debate between conflicting postures has reached, but many more could be cited. It is probable that, as Antonio Malpica has indicated, the lack of a real dialogue between medieval history, essentially based on documentary sources, and archaeology has raised the idea of a very clear contrast between the grassroots organization of the peasant world and the State.<sup>25</sup> In any case, the rural archaeology of al-Andalus is presented as an essential tool for seeking new explanations, bringing postures closer and reaching consensus.

### 3. The social organisation of the Andalusian rural world and the questioned importance of the residential spaces

Although the organisation of the rural space must at first have taken a range of forms, in function of the different social formations that coexisted in the years after the conquest, all the data indicate that, from the 10<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the Andalusian rural world was characterised by the juxtaposition and interrelation of some more or less stable elements. These elements, which have not been analysed to the same extent (and rarely together), are habitually classified into three main groups: the defensive spaces, the productive or working spaces and the residential spaces. We now know that these three groups, each with its own variables, could combine and overlap, but with no need for the three to be in all the territories. We are even aware of the unity of elements, since Barceló first formulated something that nowadays seems obvious to us: the Andalusian rural settlements were an indivisible set of productive and residential spaces, in other words, of land and dwellings.<sup>26</sup> With a similar deduction, Pierre Guichard identified the existence in the *sharq al-Andalus*, of a clear association of the residential spaces, these rural settlements, and the defensive spaces (*ḥiṣn/ḥuṣūn*).<sup>27</sup> However, while this model of organisation of the rural habitat developed in the 1980s by researchers linked to the Casa de Velázquez,<sup>28</sup> the first general attempt to understand the complexity of the Andalusian rural landscape, was generally accepted, it was soon perceived to be reductionist and insufficient in light of the archaeological data that was appearing.

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25. Malpica, Antonio. "La Arqueología para el conocimiento...": 40. The debate is still alive, judging by the recent text by Sonia Gutiérrez about the banalisation of the process of construction of the archaeological document. See: Gutiérrez, Sonia. "La islamización de Tudmīr", *Villa 2. Villes et campagnes de Tarraconaise et d'al-Andalus (VI-XI siècle): la transition*, Philippe Sénac, dir. Toulouse: Université Toulouse II-Le Mirail, 2007: 278 and following.

26. An updated summary of the proposal in: Kirchner, Helena. "Archaeology of the Landscape...": 88-89.

27. One of the first works to detail this hypothesis was: Guichard, Pierre. "Géographie historique et histoire sociale des habitats fortifiés ruraux de la région valentienne", *Habitats fortifiés et organisation de l'espace en Méditerranée Médiévale*, Andrés Bazzana, Pierre Guichard, Jean-Michel Poisson, eds. Lyon: Maison de l'Orient, 1983: 87-94.

28. The best formulation of the model is in: Bazzana, André; Cressier, Patrice; Guichard, Pierre. *Les châteaux ruraux d'al-Andalus. Histoire et archéologie des ḥuṣūn du sud-est de l'Espagne*. Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 1988.



The existence of settlements scattered between numerous *alquerías* (*qarya/qurā*) (understood as homogeneous sets of homes and lands) of little demographic weight, structured within the same rural territory by grouped around a *ḥiṣn*, constructed as a refuge and eventually associated with a dwelling in the top or situated a short distance away,<sup>29</sup> is valid in some cases,<sup>30</sup> but not sufficient to explain the social organisation of the rural space in all territories and all periods. One of the authors of the proposal, André Bazzana, has recently recognised the ingenuity of the “‘*ḥiṣn-qarya*’ binomial”.<sup>31</sup> There are many situations that fall outside of this scheme and make the simplicity of the proposal evident: *ḥuṣūn* not built by, or for, the rural communities, like the fortifications erected in the rural areas by the power to control and defend the frontier around Huesca, in the Upper Marche, studied by Philippe Sénac;<sup>32</sup> *ḥuṣūn* that played a double role, as occasional refuges for the people of the *alquerías* but also as a place from which to exercise power, like those documented in the Alpujarras by Patrice Cressier;<sup>33</sup> or even networks of *alquerías* without *ḥuṣūn*, like those identified on Ibiza by Helena Kirchner.<sup>34</sup> These are only some examples, but enough to understand that the three main elements identified could be combined and reformulated in a wide range of ways, even generating new elements, such as the fortified granaries, that do not fit into any of these three groups, but strengthen and articulate the dialogue between these.<sup>35</sup>

29. A simple and clear explanation of the model can be found in: Guichard, Pierre. “Algunas reflexiones sobre la arqueología medieval y su valor”, *La arqueología medieval en la arqueología*, María de los Ángeles Ginés, ed. Granada: Universidad de Granada, 2003: 43.

30. As shown, for example, by the fatwā by ‘Abū-l-Walīd b. Ruṣd (Cordoba, early 12<sup>th</sup> century), that presented a territory of 14 *qurā* organised around a *ḥiṣn* that served as a shelter (with occasional habitat) in times of danger. See: Guichard, Pierre; Lagardère, Vincent. “La vie sociale et économique de l’Espagne musulmane aux XIe-XIIe siècles à travers les fatwā/s du Mi’yār d’al-Wansharīṣī”. *Mélanges de la Casa de Velázquez*, 36/1 (1990): 219-220; Lagardère, Vincent. *Campagnes et paysans d’al-Andalus (VIII-XV s.)*. Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1993: 176-177.

31. *Quizás tanto Pierre Guichard como yo tendríamos que hacer una especie de autocrítica: en efecto, para una mejor y más fácil demostración y para la claridad operativa del modelo, hemos acentuado demasiado los caracteres del ḥiṣn rural; la pedagogía puede revelarse como muy reductora* (“Maybe both Pierre Guichard and I should have done a kind of self-criticism: indeed, for a better and easier demonstration and operational clarity of the model, we accentuated the characters of the rural *ḥiṣn*. The pedagogy may turn out to be very reductive”). Bazzana, André. “Castillos y sociedad en al-Andalus: cuestiones metodológicas y líneas actuales de investigación”, *El castillo medieval en tiempos de Alfonso X el Sabio*, Ángel Luís Molina, Jorge A. Eiroa, eds. Murcia: Universidad de Murcia, 2009: 33.

32. Right from his early works. See, for example: Sénac, Philippe. “Contribution à l’étude de la Marche supérieure d’al-Andalus: les *ḥuṣūn* et le système défensif de Huesca”, *La Catalogne et la France méridionale autor de l’an Mil*. Barcelona: Generalitat de Catalunya, 1991: 269-281.

33. Cressier, Patrice. “Le château et la division territoriale dans l’Alpujarra médiévale: du *ḥiṣn* à la *tā’a*”. *Mélanges de la Casa de Velázquez*, 20 (1984): 115-144.

34. Kirchner, Helena. “Redes de alquerías sin *ḥuṣūn*. Una reconsideración a partir de los asentamientos campesinos andalusíes de las Islas Orientales”, *Castillos y territorio en al-Andalus*, Antonio Malpica, ed. Granada: Athos-Pérgamos, 1998: 450-469.

35. Eiroa, Jorge A. “Fortified Granaries in southeastern al-Andalus”, *Processing, Storage, Distribution of Food, Ruralia Series of peer review papers VIII*, Jan Klápšte, Peter Sommer, eds. Turnhout-Prague: Brepols Publishers, 2011: 1-9.



Of these three groups, the one of the fortified spaces has undoubtedly been studied in greatest depth. The fortifications, in any of the forms they took in the Andalusian rural landscapes (watchtowers, *alquería* towers, forts, etc.), are the most visible elements from the archaeological point of view. Perhaps that is why they have featured in the majority of non-urban studies of al-Andalus and the medieval Maghreb. In general terms, the *ḥuṣūn* have come to dominate the historiographic debate,<sup>36</sup> although it is clear nowadays that the castles do not generate a scientific explanation in themselves, but are more third-party elements in the process of historical reconstruction that can only be understood in relation with the territory, residential areas and areas of economic exploitation.

The second of these groups, made up of the peasant working areas or productive areas (in other words, the fields in their different forms), has also been studied in depth, especially the irrigated areas, the highest agricultural expression of Andalusian society. Starting with the early research by Miquel Barceló in the 1980s into the Andalusian irrigated areas,<sup>37</sup> which outlined a series of general principles for Andalusian hydraulics, and the first fieldwork in Majorca, Granada and Ibiza, the so-called “hydraulic archaeology” has been defined.<sup>38</sup> This is a set of techniques and methods that have enabled the planimetric and functional reconstruction of the original Andalusian irrigated areas and, more importantly, the evaluation of their agricultural output and population load.<sup>39</sup> Other forms of peasant working spaces, like those used for livestock or non-irrigated agriculture, have been much more poorly analysed, but some recent publications indicate that this imbalance should be corrected in the coming years.<sup>40</sup>

In contrast, the third group, the residential spaces, has developed intermittently. The initial rise in Andalusian archaeology after the great leap in the 1980s led to some important projects for excavating *alquerías* systematically, like the work done in Castillejo de los Guájares (Granada), Bofilla (Valencia) or Castillo del Río (Alicante). However, this soon evolved into a kind of “extensive archaeology”, based on prospecting, and especially on the fields, where the logic

36. An accurate state of the question can be found in: Malpica, Antonio. “Los *ḥuṣūn* andalusíes y su análisis arqueológico”, *Arqueología Medieval. Reflexions des de la práctica*, Flocel Sabaté, dir. Lleida: Pagès Editors, 2007: 155-176.

37. Barceló, Miquel. “El diseño de espacios irrigados en al-Andalus: Un enunciado de principios generales”, *I Coloquio de Historia y Medio Físico. El agua en zonas áridas. Arqueología e historia*. Almería: Diputación Provincial de Almería, 1989: I, 15-45; Barceló, Miquel. “De la congruencia y la homogeneidad de los espacios hidráulicos en al-Andalus”, *El agua en la agricultura de al-Andalus*. Barcelona: El Legado Andalusi, 1995: 25-39.

38. Kirchner, Helena; Navarro, Carmen. “Objetivos, métodos y práctica de la arqueología hidráulica”. *Archeologia Medievale*, 20 (1993): 121-150; *Arqueología y Territorio Medieval*, 1 (1994): 159-182; Glick, Thomas F.; Kirchner, Helena. “Hydraulic systems and technologies of Islamic Spain: History and archaeology”, *Working with water in Medieval Europe. Technology and Resource-Use*, Paolo Squatriti, ed. Leiden-London-Cologne: Brill, 2000: 267-329.

39. I will not insist on these questions, much better explained in the article published by Helena Kirchner in this same journal. See: Kirchner, Helena. “Archaeology of the Landscape...”.

40. A good example is the recent volume about the dry-land areas published by the University of Lleida. See: Sabaté, Flocel, dir. *Arqueología Medieval: Els espais de secà*. Lleida: Pagès Editors, 2010.





of the whole system seemed to reside.<sup>41</sup> The coining of concepts that were decisive for understanding the complex structure of settlements, like the concept of the “networks of *alquerías*”: a “series of settlements —residential areas and working areas— homogeneous in construction and linked by specifically designed walkways”, was insufficient.<sup>42</sup> Interest was shifting towards other spaces and the research into rural settlement became circumstantial and very unusual.

In the same way that there have been calls over recent years for a change in the archaeological practice in studies into medieval agricultural areas towards agrarian archaeology,<sup>43</sup> I consider it necessary to reformulate the research strategies and broaden the sources of information to obtain significant results in the study of the residential spaces of rural al-Andalus. Going back to an archaeology of rural settlement would be of unquestionable value for answering essential questions for the characterisation of Andalusian society beyond the urban centres. It may also be necessary to redirect the research towards the rural settlements as they hold the key to understanding the cities. If, as Antonio Malpica suggests, such relevant cities as *Madīnat Ilbīra* or *Pechina* arose from various juxtaposed earlier rural settlements, the city can only be understood through the structure of the rural world and its maturation.<sup>44</sup>

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41. *Nunca un conjunto seriado de residencias contiene explicaciones suficientes sobre su emplazamiento. Sólo el estudio de los campos de trabajo puede revelar su lógica.* (“A series of residences never contains sufficient detail about its location. Only the study of working fields may reveal its logic”). Barceló, Miquel. *Los Banu Ru’ayn en al-Andalus. Una memoria singular y persistente*. Granada: Al-Baraka, 2004: 38-39.

42. *Un conjunto técnicamente articulado en el que su fisonomía espacial, su dispersión, resulta solo comprensible mediante el estudio de las áreas de trabajo que componen su secuencia* (“A set technically articulated in its spatial physiognomy, its dispersion, only understandable by studying the work areas that make up its sequence”). This is a reformulation, much more useful, of Barceló’s own ideas about the indivisibility of residential and productive spaces. Barceló, Miquel. *Los Banu Ru’ayn...*: 22.

43. Recently, a group of researchers linked to the study of medieval rural settlements and farming have called for a reorientation of the discipline with a proposed protocol, based principally on the archaeological resources, for studying agrarian areas: Ballesteros, Paula; Eiroa, Jorge A.; Kirchner, Helena; Fernández, Margarita; Ortega, Julián; Quirós, Juan A.; Retamero, Félix; Sitjes, Eugènia; Torró, Josep; Vigil-Escalera, Alfonso. “Por una arqueología agraria en las sociedades medievales hispánicas. Propuesta de un protocolo de investigación”, *Por una arqueología agraria. Perspectivas de investigación sobre espacios de cultivo en las sociedades medievales hispánicas*, Helena Kirchner, ed. Oxford: BAR-Archaeopress, 2010: 185-202. This proposal is articulated around three fundamental axes: the identification and reconstruction of the plots and their relation with the peasant settlements (the measuring of space); the dating and evolution of these spaces (the measuring of time); the study of the methods of managing these farmed areas. A development of these questions appears in: Kirchner, Helena. “Archaeology of the Landscape...”.

44. Malpica, Antonio. “Castillos, alquerías y ciudades en al-Andalus. Un debate partiendo del análisis arqueológico”, *El castillo medieval en tiempos de Alfonso...*: 120.



#### 4. An essentially archaeological problem

The written Arab sources have serious limitations, and these have turned the Andalusian field into “a terrain where we literally feel our way forwards”.<sup>45</sup> They are, as Pierre Guichard defined accurately, “a geography by city dwellers for city dwellers”,<sup>46</sup> where there is no room for rural settlement. There are some very valuable exceptions, like the more than two thousand *fatwās* by *Mi’yār de al-wanšarīšī*,<sup>47</sup> but the written Arab sources generally offer very limited information about the characteristics of Andalusian rural settlements. On one hand, as Eduardo Manzano stated, they impose a “top-down” vision, in other words, a view where almost everything we know refers back, in one way or another, to power, distorting any interpretation based around the reality of the peasant.<sup>48</sup> On the other hand, this information usually refers to two very specific aspects: the toponymy and, very specially, the terminology of the different types of settlement.<sup>49</sup> The texts use many denominations whose real correspondence with the archaeological evidence is far from clear. Together with the *qarya*, there is the *ḡayʿa* (hamlet, but we do not know how this differs from the *qarya*), the *raḡal* (individually owned rural settlement), the *maʿšar* (farmhouse or minor settlement, smaller than a *qarya*) or the *ḡāra* (segment or part of a *qarya*, sometimes converted into a *qarya* in itself);<sup>50</sup> other minor types of settlements, compared with the *qurā*, that have not been satisfactorily characterised.

In this sense, it is necessary to remind the reader that the term *alquería* is used consciously in this article, starting with the title, and this requires an explanation. Beyond that fact that, within the enormous diversity that characterised the rural territory of al-Andalus (especially during the emirate), the *qarya* became the most widely-spread form of rural settlement in al-Andalus, I believe that the word

45. *Un terreno por el que avanzamos literalmente a tientas*. Manzano, Eduardo. *Conquistadores, emires ...*: 274.

46. *Una geografía hecha por hombres de ciudad para hombres de ciudad*. Guichard, Pierre. “Los campesinos de al-Andalus”, *Las Españas medievales*, Julio Valdeón et alii, ed. Barcelona: Crítica, 2001: 129.

47. Lagardère, Vincent. *Histoire et société en Occident musulman au Moyen Âge. Analyse du Mi’yār d’al-Wanšarīšī*. Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 1995.

48. *Siempre tendremos (...) la gran limitación de no ser capaces de ofrecer una visión de al-Andalus “desde abajo”. A pesar de que en los últimos años los estudios sobre fuentes jurídicas están ofreciendo perspectivas mucho más profundas e insospechadas sobre la realidad social andalusí, ésta presenta una riqueza y complejidad que difícilmente podremos aprehender debido a la casi completa ausencia de testimonios procedentes de estos campesinos, artesanos o comerciantes que componían el grueso de la misma* (“We will always have (...) the great limitation of not being able to provide an overview of al-Andalus “from below”. Although recent studies of legal sources are offering up much deeper and unexpected perspectives about the Andalusian social reality, this displays a wealth and complexity that we can hardly grasp given the almost complete lack of evidence from those peasants, craftsmen and traders who made up the bulk of the [population]”). Manzano, Eduardo. “al-Andalus: un balance crítico...”: 31.

49. A good analysis of the evident shortcomings derived from the work with these sources is the one by García Sanjuán about the Huelva area during the Andalusian epoch. See: García, Alejandro. *Evolución histórica y poblamiento del territorio onubense durante la época andalusí*. Huelva: Universidad de Huelva, 2003: 162 and following.

50. About the *ḡāra* as a unit of settlement of the integrated *alquerías*, see: Martínez, Virgilio. *Al-Andalus desde la periferia. La formación de una sociedad musulmana en tierras malaqueñas (siglos VIII-X)*. Málaga: Diputación de Málaga, 2003: 323-328.



*alquería* should be used to designate any Andalusian inhabited rural nucleus. In other words, this would be in line with the definition in the Real Academia de la Lengua Española, which defines it as “a homestead or small set of houses”,<sup>51</sup> and not exclusively what the Arab texts identify as a *qarya*. We are similarly aware that, in the same way that the word *ḥiṣn* in the Arab texts refers to both the territory of a rural community and the fortified point which is its central point,<sup>52</sup> when the term *qarya* is used in these texts, it can designate the hamlet itself (the set of houses) or a relatively homogeneous set of dwellings and lands, as Vincent Lagardère has confirmed through his works based on the *fatwās*.<sup>53</sup> Although, from the latter perspective, we should understand the *alquería* as a territory of influence, in which it is not strange to find various places of residence and whose limits are very difficult to establish, I believe we need to recover its traditional meaning. Using the Spanish term *alquería* to refer to each and every Andalusian rural settlement, as most medievalists do, paying attention to the material evidence, independently of their nomenclature in the sources (which may or may not be *qarya*), and not to the land and fields (whose indivisibility has been only too well demonstrated) would help to separate the residential or inhabited nuclei from the productive spaces. This means they can be analysed separately, in my opinion an indispensable first step to exploit the archaeological register to the maximum before the inevitable comparison. The settlements of rural al-Andalus are susceptible to being analysed separately, which does not mean that understanding them also does not require studying the territory that maintains and explains them.

Thus I consider the use of the term *alquería* necessary to define a material, archaeological reality, with multiple variants, aware that this covers a wide range of possibilities designated in different terms, in other words, with different names, in the written sources. This decision is justified by the variability of the sources, which use different terms to designate the same settlement over a short period of time, as well as by the impossibility of finding equivalents for each of the terms documented.

A good example to understand the limitations of the written Arab sources regarding the characterisation of the rural settlement is the study of the territory in the province of Albacete by Carmen Navarro. A detailed analysis of the Arab documentation shows Albacete as depopulated, with hardly any fortifications of importance, such as Alcaraz. However, the map that she was able to make from the Castilian documentation generated in the early years of the occupation of the territory of Albacete showed over a hundred Andalusian population centres. This led Carmen Navarro to talk, very aptly, of “a textually almost invisible al-Andalus”.<sup>54</sup>

51. *un caserío o conjunto reducido de casas* (“Alquería”, *Real Academia de la Lengua Española*. <<http://lema.rae.es/drae>>).

52. Bazzana, André. “Castillos y sociedad...”: 10.

53. Lagardère, Vincent. *Campagnes et paysans d'al-Andalus (VIII<sup>e</sup>-XV<sup>e</sup> s.)*. Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1993: 176-177.

54. Navarro, Carmen. “Fortificaciones y asentamientos andalusíes en la actual provincia de Albacete: un al-Andalus textualmente casi invisible”, *L'Incastellamento*. *Actes des rencontres de Gérone (1992) et de Rome (1994)*, Miquel Barceló, Pierre Toubert, eds. Rome: École Française de Rome, 1998: 205-231.



Moreover, this is a good sample of the many possibilities offered by the Castilian and Aragonese documents from immediately after the conquest, especially in the case of the territories incorporated from the 12<sup>th</sup> century on and even more in the case of the Nasrid kingdom of Granada.<sup>55</sup> It is, above all, more proof of the necessity to turn to archaeology to seek answers.<sup>56</sup>

Thus the main source of information about the characteristics of Andalusian rural settlement is archaeology. However, the enormous limitations, presented above, of the current model of medieval archaeology, mostly urban and monumentalist, have considerably diminished its ability to respond to the questions posed by the written sources. The data gathered to date are heterogeneous and clearly insufficient. In Spain, there are very few cases published (at least partially) of Andalusian *alquerías* excavated extensively as part of archaeological research projects: Peñaflor (Jaén),<sup>57</sup> Bofilla (Valencia),<sup>58</sup> Castillo del Río (Alicante),<sup>59</sup> Las Sillas de Marcén (Huesca),<sup>60</sup> Solibernat (Lleida),<sup>61</sup> Tirieza (Murcia),<sup>62</sup> Yakka (Murcia),<sup>63</sup> La Villa Vieja de Calasparra (Murcia)<sup>64</sup> or El Castillejo de los Guájares (Granada).<sup>65</sup> Some *alquerías* may be missing from the list and some as-yet unpublished interventions will surely be added in coming years, but there are no more than a dozen examples. We can find some more cases if we include the research done in Portugal.<sup>66</sup> These include

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55. See, for example: Malpica, Antonio. *Turillas, alquería del Alfoz sexitano*. Granada: Universidad de Granada, 1984. Or, more recently: Martínez, Virgilio. *Torrox. Un sistema de alquerías andalusíes en el siglo XV según su libro de repartimiento*. Granada: Ajbar, 2006.

56. About archaeology as a way to renew medieval rural history, see: Alfonso, Isabel. "Las historiografías nacionales sobre el mundo rural medieval: una aproximación comparativa", *La historia rural de las sociedades medievales europeas*, Isabel Alfonso, ed. Valencia: Universitat de València, 2008: 24.

57. Salvatierra, Vicente; Castillo, Juan C. *Los asentamientos emirales de Peñaflor y Miguelico*. Sevilla: Junta de Andalucía, 2000.

58. López, Pedro. *La alquería islámica en Valencia: Estudio arqueológico de Bofilla, siglos XI a XIV*. Valencia: Generalitat Valenciana, 1994.

59. Azuar, Rafael. *El Castillo del Río (Aspe. Alicante). Arqueología de un asentamiento andalusí y la transición al feudalismo (siglos XII-XIII)*. Alicante: Diputación Provincial, 1994.

60. Sénac, Philippe. *Un "village" d'al-Andalus aux alentours de l'an Mil: Las Sillas (Marcén, province de Huesca)*. Toulouse: Framespa, 2009.

61. Rovira, Jordi; Casanovas, Àngels; González, Joan R.; Rodríguez, Josep I. "Solibernat (Lleida). Un asentamiento rural islámico con finalidades militares de la primera mitad del siglo XII". *Archéologie islamique*, 7 (1997): 93-110.

62. Eiroa, Jorge A. "El castillo de Tirieza: un asentamiento rural fortificado en la frontera oriental nazarí", *El otro lado. Asentamientos rurales andalusíes en la frontera oriental nazarí*. Murcia: Universidad de Murcia, 2009: 37-48.

63. Ruiz, Liborio. *Hisn Yakka. Un castillo rural de Sarq al-Andalus. Siglos XI al XIII. Excavaciones arqueológicas en el cerro del castillo de Yecla (1990-1999)*. Yecla: Ayuntamiento de Yecla, 2000.

64. Pozo, Indalecio. "La alquería islámica de Villa Vieja (Calasparra, Murcia)", *Castrum 6. Maisons et espaces domestiques dans le monde méditerranéen au Moyen Âge*, André Bazzana, ed. Rome-Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 2000: 165-175.

65. García, Alberto. *La cerámica del poblado fortificado medieval de "El castillejo" (Los Guájares, Granada)*. Granada: Athos-Pérgamos, 2001.

66. A brief and updated review of the state of the archaeology of rural settlement in the Gharb al-Andalus appears in: Gomes, Rosa. "El mundo rural en el Sur del actual territorio portugués (siglos XII-



the classic studies carried out in Alcaria Longa (in the Bajo Alentejo)<sup>67</sup> or Aldeia dos Mouros (Algarve Oriental)<sup>68</sup>, as well as interesting new data, from sites like the fishing village of Punta do Castelo, in Carrapatiera (Algarve Occidental).<sup>69</sup> To sum up, there are few *alquerías* that have been studied under a global research project that involved archaeological excavation. There are few cases and these are very heterogeneous. It is necessary to widen the casuistic and define new research strategies, as rural settlement must necessarily be characterised from the archaeological data.

## 5. The characterisation of the Andalusian *alquerías*: old questions and new research strategies

Defining the characteristics of the Andalusian *alquerías* and their role in the social organisation of the rural (and urban) territory requires wringing as much as we can out of the archaeological register. Obviously, it is essential to increase the number of *alquerías* studied archaeologically. In this sense, it must be mentioned that the Archaeological field survey technique has been found to be insufficient. In recent years, the idea has spread that it is not necessary to excavate to develop archaeological knowledge of the rural settlement of al-Andalus.<sup>70</sup> Of course, excavation is not necessary: it is essential. We are not alone to register its importance.<sup>71</sup> Extensive archaeological excavation combined with well-defined stratigraphic sequences is fundamental for obtaining reliable chronologies or micro-spatial and functional readings, without forgetting the possibility of obtaining materials and samples

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XIII)", *Arqueología Medieval: Els espais de secà*, Flocel Sabaté, dir. Lleida: Pagès Editors, 2011: 99-116.

67. Boone, James L. "Rural settlement and Islamization in the Lower Alentejo of Portugal: the evidence from Alcaria Longa", *Arqueología en el entorno del Bajo Guadiana. Actas del Encuentro Internacional de Arqueología del Suroeste*, Juan M. Campos, Juan Aurelio Pérez, Francisco Gómez, eds. Huelva: Universidad de Huelva, 1993: 527-544.

68. Júdece, Teresa. "Aldeia dos Mouros versus Alcaria Queimada, an Ethnoarchaeological Case Study". *Coloquio internacional Arqueología hoje*, 1 (1990): 266-280.

69. Gomes, Rosa. "Povoado muçulmano na Ponta do Castelo (Aljezur)". *Al-Madan*, 10 (2001): 200-201.

70. For example, Virgilio Martínez wrote that, *conviene recordar, por si quedara alguna duda, que en esa arqueología destinada a reconstruir redes de alquerías sobra casi siempre la técnica de excavación. La prospección, por tanto, permite aportar un nivel de conocimiento aceptable* ("it is worth remembering, in case any doubts linger, that in this archaeology aimed at reconstructing networks of *alquerías*, the technique of excavation is almost always unnecessary. Thus, archaeological field some contributes an acceptable level of knowledge."). Martínez, Virgilio. "Reflexiones sobre el estudio...": 217.

71. Antonio Malpica has stated that, *Estamos de acuerdo con la necesidad de una arqueología del paisaje, sobre todo desde el momento en que las transformaciones son crecientes e imparable, pero de ahí a decir que las excavaciones sobran hay un gran trecho. Una intervención que analice el subsuelo con las leyes de la estratigrafía es fundamental y no sólo para ofrecer cronologías.* ("We agree with the need for an archaeology of the landscape, especially from the moment when the changes were growing and unstoppable, but there is a long way between this and saying that excavations are unnecessary. An intervention that analyses the subsoil with the laws of stratigraphics is fundamental and not only to offer chronologies"). Malpica, Antonio. "La Arqueología para el conocimiento...": 47.



to submit to archaeometric, archaeozoologic, or archaeobotanic analyses, the indubitable basis of archaeology nowadays and in the future.

Moreover, archaeological excavation represents the only possible option for understanding the evolution of the settlements, a diachronic reading that is usually completely overlooked by the territorial analysis based on systematic surface exploration and that is nevertheless decisive for understanding the social organisation of the rural landscape. For years, the *alquerías* have been defined with an immutability that is not true. The settlements changed and evolved, acquiring characteristics that varied greatly from the beginnings. The texts show that some were even abandoned.<sup>72</sup> Over recent years, various cases have been presented of rural settlement mutating towards into forms other than the *alquerías* that have acquired a decisive historical dimension, shedding light on new historical explanations for old problems. This is the case of the appearance of the *almunias*, a process of possible privatisation of the properties documented in the late 10<sup>th</sup> century in the vicinity of Tudela, Saragossa and Lleida by Philippe Sénac, in the absence of groups of habitats that can be treated as *qurā*.<sup>73</sup> Another case is the process of transformation of rural nuclei into *villas de frontera*, as Antonio Malpica defined them, from the 12<sup>th</sup> century, a process of generating almost urban structures in territories in which unfortified *alquerías* are conserved.<sup>74</sup> Thus, the *alquerías* were in no way static realities.

The need for more projects to excavate in *alquerías* is also applicable in qualitative terms. We need to widen our chronological window, as we have hardly any archaeological data about the *alquerías* in the formative period of al-Andalus. It is also necessary to extend our typological variety, including forms of rural settlement that have been bypassed in our schemes. This includes, for example, cave dwellings, which offer the best perspectives for research, with an unusual “reliability of readings” (less alteration of the stratigraphy, purity of the register, etc.). The recent studies in Priego de Córdoba are a good example.<sup>75</sup> Furthermore, establishing a typology for the *alquerías* to cover all the possible varieties would let us develop tools to reinforce the archaeological visibility of this type of settlement.

On the other hand, it is necessary to develop comparative case studies in the Maghreb, although we know that the “*ḥiṣn —qarya'* complex”, for example, has no sense on the other shore of the Mediterranean. In a recent publication, Patrice Cressier expressed his surprise at the persistence, and even growth, of the traditional disinterest Spanish medievalist archaeologists have shown in Moroccan or Algerian

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72. For example, the case of the abandoned *alquería* with a mosque near Vélez-Málaga that appears in an 11<sup>th</sup>-century text. Guichard, Pierre; Lagardère, Vincent. “La vie sociale et économique...”: 222.

73. Sénac, Philippe. “Evolución del poblamiento musulmán al norte del Ebro (siglos VIII-XI)”, *Arqueología Medieval: Reflexions des de la práctica*, Flocel Sabaté, dir. Lleida: Pagès Editors, 2007: 143-153, especially 150-152.

74. Malpica, Antonio. “Las villas de la frontera granadina ¿Ciudades o alquerías fortificadas?”, *Le château et la ville. Espaces et réseaux*, Patrice Cressier, ed. Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 2008: 151-173.

75. Cano, Encarnación. *La ocupación de cuevas naturales durante la Edad Media andalusí en el entorno de madīnat Bāḡuh (Priego de Córdoba)*. Granada: Alhulia, 2008.



archaeology.<sup>76</sup> Perhaps if we look back at recent analyses of rural settlements in medieval Morocco,<sup>77</sup> or even the classic studies of such fortified sites as Sabta, in La Bahira, or *ʿAyn Nzar*, in Oujda, dating from over fifty years ago,<sup>78</sup> we would find new elements for comparison.

The need to measure and quantify also appears on the horizon, returning once again to the crucial question of dimensions. I have no wish to enter the debate that tries to draw a tenuous line to separate the urban and rural worlds and that, in the written Arab source, led to settlements being designated as “rural” that when analysed archaeologically can be described as clearly urban.<sup>79</sup> Remembering the figures is enough to understand their limited ability when it comes to illustrating Andalusian rural settlement. *Las sillas* in Marcén (Huesca) had a population of around 200 according to Philippe Senac and Bofilla, in Valencia, had over 30 domestic structures.<sup>80</sup> Are these sites representative? They undoubtedly are, but not of the small *alquerías*. The 8,000 *qurā* that, according to *al-Idrīsī*, there were in the Aljarafe of Seville, would have been of various sizes, but most would have been small.<sup>81</sup> Castillejo de los Guájares is not even a case of a “small *alquería*”. As Alberto García Porras has shown, Castillejo functioned as hub around which the space and planning of the territory were organised, and the analysis of the pottery found there shows its links to long-distance trade.<sup>82</sup> It is thus necessary to broaden the casuistic to incorporate the study of the small populated nuclei, which were home to the bulk of the scattered rural population. Although the use of the concepts “dispersed” and “nucleated” was invented by modern historiography and is not usually applicable to medieval contexts,<sup>83</sup> al-Andalus often reflects a reality very far from that of the concentrated settlement, so the application of these concepts will be particularly

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76. Cressier, Patrice. “Archéologie du Maghreb islamique, archéologie d’al-Andalus, archéologie espagnole?”, *al-Andalus/España. Historiografías en contraste. Siglos XVII-XXI*, Manuela Marín, ed. Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 2009: 143-144.

77. Benhima, Yassir. “L’habitat fortifié au Maroc médiéval: éléments d’un bilan et perspectives de la recherche”. *Archéologie islamique*, 10 (2000): 79-102.

78. Allain, Charles. “Reconnaissances archéologiques dans le massif des Rehamna et la Bahira I”. *Hesperis*, 41/1 (1954): 156-189; Marion, Jean. “Les ruines anciennes de la région d’Oujda (Dir du Ras Asfour)”. *Bulletin d’Archéologie Marocaine*, 2 (1957): 117-173.

79. This refers, for example, to the case of *Siyāsa* (Cieza, Murcia), an urban site (at least in the period which most of the remains excavated date from) which in the written sources, is called *ḥiṣn* or *qarya*, but never *madīna*, and that has been defined by its two leading experts as a “hypertrophied rural settlement”. See: Navarro, Julio; Jiménez, Pedro. *Siyāsa: estudio arqueológico del despoblado andalusi (ss. XI-XIII)*. Murcia: El Legado Andalusi, 1997: 328.

80. Sénac, Philippe. *Un ‘village’ d’al-andalus...: 57*; López, Pedro. *La alquería islámica...: 158*.

81. In any case, this figure, which is surely exaggerated, indicates the existence of a very dense rural population, which the archaeology has confirmed. See: Valor, Magdalena; Carabaza, Júlia M.; Porras, Ana I. “Espacio rural y territorio en el Aljarafe de Sevilla: Ḥiṣn al-Faraḡ”, *Asentamientos rurales y territorio en el Mediterráneo medieval*, Carmen Trillo, ed. Granada: Athos-Pérgamos, 2002: 338 and 353.

82. García, Alberto: *La cerámica...: 454*.

83. See the reflections in: O’Keefe, Tadhg. “Reflections on the ‘dispersed-nucleated’ paradigm in medieval settlement archaeology”, *Ruralia III*, Jan Klápšte, ed. Prague: Institute of Archaeology, 2000: 103-105.



useful in the Andalusian field. It will allow a hierarchy of the settlements to be established and to define the characteristics of the polarisation around the mosques suggested by the texts.<sup>84</sup> This will require the typology of relations between the large and small settlements to be defined to establish the networks of settlement, which in turn, will enable spatial analyses to be applied to the typologies of settlement with a diachronic sense.

The question of the dimensions goes far beyond the above and becomes a decisive factor in relation with agrarian archaeology. The association between fields and houses, the indivisibility of the nuclei of residence and the working spaces have already been brought up. In that sense, over the last twenty-five years, the researchers in the team led by Miquel Barceló and later by Helena Kirchner, have rightly insisted on the need to measure the fields, reminding us “that size does matter”.<sup>85</sup> The peasant communities were aware of the precise limits of the carrying capacity of the territory they settled in. In other words, they knew the theoretical maximum size the human population could reach without exceeding the critical productive limits of its ecological niche, and maintain the stability with the environment.<sup>86</sup> The correlation between fields and houses is thus evident. However, it is not enough just to measure the productive spaces. It is equally necessary to measure the residential places, the *alquerías*. Sooner or later, agrarian archaeology will require the real measurements of the *alquerías* to enable the reaching of significant conclusions about the congruence of the watered spaces with the settled groups. The establishment of real correlations between the number of family units in an *alquería* and the area of its irrigated lands as a way of drawing significant conclusions about the distribution of property is still pending.<sup>87</sup> It is essential to determine the size and dimensions of the *alquerías* for the purpose of obtaining significant data about the number of inhabitants and family units, and the population density, that can then be used to analyse the carrying capacity in relation with the notions of risk and sustainability.

In this sense, we need to recover an archaeology of the *alquerías* which can develop research strategies to allow us to delve deeper into the central question of the autonomy of the peasant communities. For years, the term *alquería* conveyed a concept that we used to accept in plain language: social, economic or administrative autonomy from the external power. This was what was suggested by various textual fragments, but which were written in an urban and statist context.<sup>88</sup> The

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84. Especially significant is the dispute between *alquerías* about setting up a new mosque that appears in: Lagardère, Vincent. *Campagnes et paysans...*: 176-177.

85. In direct reference to the title of one of the works: Retamero, Félix. “Lo que el tamaño importa. Cuándo y por qué se modificaron los antiguos sistemas hidráulicos andalusíes”. *Arqueología Espacial*, 26 (2006): 293-310.

86. Glassow, Michael A. “The concept of carrying capacity in the study of culture process”, *Advances in Archaeological Method and Theory 1*, Michael B. Schiffer, ed. New York: Academic Press, 1978: 31-48.

87. Malpica, Antonio. “La Arqueología para el conocimiento...”: 44. Quoting: Ramos, Manuel. “Recorrido histórico por la arqueología medieval en Granada”, *La arqueología medieval en la arqueología*, María de los Ángeles Ginés, ed. Granada: Universidad de Granada, 2003: 71.

88. Guichard recompiled the majority of the written evidence with indices of community structures. See: Guichard, Pierre. *Al-Andalus frente a la conquista cristiana. Los musulmanes de Valencia (siglos XI-XIII)*.





archaeological analyses have normally confirmed that the homogeneity and cohesion of rural groups was reflected in the *alquerías*. This is clearly so with building materials and techniques (especially with the technique of “tapial” (rammed earth) or the absence of buildings overly differentiated by size or structure. Also significant is the lack of representative public spaces, except for some isolated exceptions, like the disputed public baths in Bofilla (Valencia), and the presence of collective storage spaces (hydraulic or agricultural) or defensive structures (walls, albacar, towers). It is even frequent to read that the archaeological material commonly found in the *alquerías* reveals the high degree of self-sufficiency of their inhabitants.<sup>89</sup>

However, the autonomy of the rural communities, recognised by even the authors most critical of the tribal model, is being more nuanced.<sup>90</sup> It is no longer possible to continue to think that they lived independently from the central power and, even less, from the urban world. The model created from Pierre Guichard's first ideas, in which he presented a strongly united peasant world whose very loose relations with the State were limited to the periodic payment of the Quranic tax, has been shown to be rigid and insufficient.<sup>91</sup> On a clearly theoretical base, it does not adapt to the reality of the rural archaeological, in which peasant life appears clearly transformed by their mercantile capacity.<sup>92</sup> Even the intervention of groups of power outside the State in the rural communities has been widely observed, not only in the formative

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Valencia: Universitat de València, 2001: 294-295.

89. This is the case, for example, of the *alquería* of Las Sillas de Marcén, or the *alquerías* documented in the Extramadura region by Sophie Gilotte. See: Sénac, Philippe. *Un “village” d’al-Andalus...: 125*; Gilotte, Sophie. “Al margen del poder. Aproximación arqueológica al medio rural extremeño (ss. VII-XIII)”, *Arqueología Medieval: La transformación de la frontera medieval musulmana*, Flocel Sabaté, ed. Lleida: Pagès Editors, 2008: 76.

90. Eduardo Manzano wrote that the conquering army had been joined by “Berber tribal contingents, whose role evolved after their settlement in al-Andalus. From being rigidly controlled by their Arab lords, these African troops started to acquire ever more autonomy”. Manzano, Eduardo. *Conquistadores...: 274-275*. However, in another work he suggests that the presence of the material culture of the caliphate in the rural spaces furthest from the urban centres invites a revision of the degree of self-sufficiency of the peasant communities. Manzano, Eduardo. “al-Andalus: un balance crítico”, *Villa 4: Histoire et archéologie de l’Occident musulman (VIIe-XVe siècles)*. *Al-Andalus, Maghreb, Sicile*, Philippe Sénac, ed. Toulouse: CNRS-Université de Toulouse-Le Mirail, 2012: 28.

91. Again, as Manzano has aptly indicated, the problem is not Guichard's hypothesis, but rather the bad use that is made of it: the “consecration as a “model” of a historical study, that was, in truth, brilliant and sugerente, but that contained hypotheses and proposals for study that the author himself recognised should be checked and further developed, with the result that what were brilliant beginnings for the enormous task of interpreting the complex Andalusian society came to be established as incontrovertible premises”, Manzano, Eduardo. “al-Andalus: un balance crítico...”: 22.

92. A development of this question can be found in: Malpica, Antonio. “Castillos, alquerías y ciudades...”: 99-107. There he states that *no se puede sostener, por tanto, que las comunidades rurales no se vieran afectadas por esa realidad cada vez más insoslayable* (“it cannot be sustained that the communities was not affected by this reality every time more inescapable”), although *eso no quita que pervivieran formas de vida próximas a la autonomía de las mismas, e incluso que se mantuvieran manifestaciones en coherencia con el peso de unos lazos familiares extensos* (“this does not avoid the continuity of ways of life closed to the autonomy and even some manifestations that continued the weight of widespread family ties”).



periods of al-Andalus,<sup>93</sup> but also in the central centuries.<sup>94</sup> Thus, it is necessary to intensify the archaeological analysis of the *alquerías* to document the presence or absence of an internal hierarchy in the settlements, as well as to measure the real autonomy of the peasant groups in relation with the external powers.

In this sense, the possibilities offered by the study of rural dwellings in al-Andalus are especially interesting as an unsurpassable reflection of the organisation of the family groups. This is still pending an adequate characterisation to clarify if there really was a definable housing type and its possible evolution. Although, as is often mentioned, this was a local, traditional and popular “architecture without architects” in which continuity was stronger than evolution,<sup>95</sup> it must be defined and a typology established. It would be the starting point for understanding the micro-spatial organisation of the *alquerías*. Learning the key points of the internal distribution, external connections and hierarchy within the settlements could be vital for understanding the organisation of work and the social hierarchies.

The development of the archaeological analysis of the *alquerías* would also allow the archaeological analysis of the non-agricultural terrains associated with them to be included.<sup>96</sup> The unfarmed communal spaces and all they represent (livestock, gathering, hunting, etc.) will never be understood without taking the peasants and their homes as the starting point. The excavation of the residential spaces, an invaluable source of archaeological material that can be analysed in the laboratory (archaeometric, archaeobotanic, etc.), does allow significant conclusions to be drawn about the strategies for managing and working the natural environment. Finally, it is necessary to clarify the relation between the documented *alquerías* and mining and salt panning, traditionally marginal activities in the research, but that are nevertheless of vital importance for a full knowledge of the economy and the development of the productive efforts.

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93. The references to troops billeted in *alquerías* in Eduardo Manzano are very interesting, suggesting an early Arab settlement of pre-existing places. See: Manzano, Eduardo. *Conquistadores...: 276-282*.

94. For example, the Umayyad inscription from Logrosán (Cáceres) which commemorates the restoration, by private initiative, of a rural mosque. See: Gilotte, Sophie; González, Antonio; Souto, Juan A. “L’inscription d’époque omeyyade de la mosquée de “Las paredes” (Logrosán, Cáceres, Espagne)”. *Archéologie Islamique*, 10 (2000): 55-64.

95. Bazzana, André. “La maison rurale dans la péninsule iberique: un atelier d’ethno archéologie”, *The rural house: from the migration period to the oldest still standing buildings*, Jan Klápšte, ed. Prague: Institute of Archaeology, 2002: 230. André Bazzana’s two-volume monographic work is still today the most complete study of rural settlements in al-Andalus. See: Bazzana, André. *Maisons d’al-Andalus. Habitat médiéval et structures du peuplement dans l’Espagne orientale*. Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 1992.

96. About the division of the territory of the *alquería* into various complementary parts, as separate legal entities, notable among which are the suitable land or *mamlūka* and the unsuitable or *mubāḥa* (commonland and wasteland), see: Trillo, Carmen. “La alquería y su territorio en al-Andalus: estrategias sociales de organización y conservación”. *Arqueología Espacial*, 26 (2006): 243-262.



## 6. Conclusions

Despite its extraordinary development, the archaeology of al-Andalus has yet to find its true identity in the context of “Islamic archaeology” and still has to give an adequate answer to the doubts reflected by the first theoretical reflections from over two decades ago. The spectacular development of urban archaeology and the inevitable fascination with the great monumental sites of al-Andalus and the highest material expressions of its society has relegated rural archaeology to the background. However, an archaeology focussed on solving the problems of the social organisation of the peasant space is the best way to find new elements to let us characterise the society, the final aim of any research into al-Andalus.

In this sense, in the same way that in recent years, there has been a call to re-orientate the archaeology of the Andalusian productive areas towards agrarian archaeology, we consider that it would be just as decisive to intensify and renew the archaeology focussed on the rural settlements, in other words, the *alquerías*. Research into the *alquerías* should be reactivated, increasing the number of known cases by systematic archaeological excavations, multiplying the casuistic and encouraging comparisons with Maghrebian rural settlement. We have to determine the characteristics of rural population centres in al-Andalus (site, situation, size, number of inhabitants, density, typology and evolution of the dwellings, internal organisation, etc.) with the purpose of defining a chrono-typology of the *alquerías*, and establishing the foundations for their relations with the surrounding territory, both the productive areas (cultivated or not) and the fortified ones. It is necessary to measure, name and connect. This is the only way the archaeology of the *alquerías* will manage to reformulate itself and cease to be an ancillary and illustrative sub-discipline, to enable it to respond to relevant historical problems, like the crucial question of the independence of the Andalusian peasant communities from the external powers.

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