

# **The tower of Agicampe (Loja, Granada). Social change in the rural Nasrid world**

by Alberto García Porras

The aim of this work is the study of certain buildings of Granada, constructed during the last medieval centuries: the so-called “Torres de Alquería”. Their functions will be analysed, especially those linked to the defence of rural communities, which has been their traditional purpose, though new ways of interpreting these buildings will be proposed. We also include a case study: the Agicampe Tower. A building that would correspond to this typology. We present the results of the recent archaeological excavations carried out in this building and its surroundings, as well as the impact on the settlement dynamics of the area, changes that could extend to the rest of the rural space of the Nasrid kingdom.

Late Middle Ages, Al-Andalus, Nasrid kingdom, Rural fortification, Settlement dynamics, Agricultural production.

## *1. Introduction*

Over the last few decades, our archaeological knowledge about Andalusí society has increased significantly, especially since the late 1970s. To a large extent, this followed the work of a number of French scholars, such as Pierre Guichard, André Bazzana and Patrice Cressier, whose publications had an immediate effect upon the work of Spanish historians and archaeologists.<sup>1</sup>

Guichard, who was strongly influenced by structuralist anthropology, was probably the most influential among these authors. He placed the dialectic relation between two key structures – the central authority of the Andalusí

<sup>1</sup> García Porras, “Estrategias y formas,” 200.

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Referee List (DOI 10.36253/fup\_referee\_list)

FUP Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing (DOI 10.36253/fup\_best\_practice)

Alberto García Porras, *The tower of Agicampe (Loja, Granada). Social change in the rural Nasrid world*, © Author(s), CC BY 4.0, DOI 10.36253/979-12-215-0562-7.09, in Juan Antonio Quirós Castillo (edited by), *Local Societies and Peasantry Agencies in Medieval Iberia*, pp. 207-231, 2024, published by Firenze University Press, ISBN 979-12-215-0562-7, DOI 10.36253/979-12-215-0562-7

state, in all its expressions and in different scales, and peasant communities, which followed their own internal logic – at the centre of Andalusi society; he thus drew a picture of al-Andalus that went beyond the sort of événementiel history that earlier historians had prioritised. In addition, he showed that this dynamic was not exclusive to al-Andalus, but could also be attested in other contemporary Islamic societies. This created a link between al-Andalus and other “oriental” societies, dispelling the notion of Andalusi exceptionalism vis-à-vis other medieval Islamic horizons.<sup>2</sup>

This new historical interpretation of al-Andalus had a very characteristic material expression. Andalusi settlements began being interpreted from this perspective, as sources of social and historical evidence. Cities, fortresses and other sites were interpreted socially, and their features were compared with those of similar structures in other social formations.<sup>3</sup>

Many authors followed the trail left by these authors. Antonio Malpica, for instance, expressed this clearly when he pointed out that

Dealing with Andalusi society in any period is dealing with a tributary-mercantile formation. This formation encompasses two main elements: the State and the peasant groups. They were both similarly important, and none can be understood without the other. Two historiographical positions predominate. On the one hand, those who think that peasant communities were the key factor, and the State something vague and distant. On the other hand, those who see State action as the most important variable. Therefore, some believe that rural communities were autonomous and that cities, where the king dwelled, had no real entity, being a result of a political executive act.<sup>4</sup>

Once these terms had been established, the following step was to determine the nature of the relationship between these two main components; how far did the State’s influence permeate the peasant communities that articulated the territory, and how did these communities affect the policies adopted by the State. The written record – Andalusi records and Christian documents from the aftermath of the conquest of al-Andalus – is scarce and uneven, and leaves many aspects in the dark. Therefore, the contribution of archaeology has always been regarded as crucial.<sup>5</sup> Soon, the combination of the archaeological and the written records began to show that the population of al-Andalus was organised around three key units: cities, castles and rural hamlets (*alquerías*).

It seems quite clear that cities, and their immediate hinterland, were directly related to political power, which resided in them. Even more distant fortifications, especially those in frontier areas (most notably during the Nas-

<sup>2</sup> Guichard, *Al-Andalus*; Guichard, *Al-Andalus frente*; Guichard, *Expansión árabe*.

<sup>3</sup> Bazzana, Cressier and Guichard, *Chateaux ruraux*; Bazzana, *Maison d'al-Andalus*.

<sup>4</sup> Malpica Cuello, *Últimas tierras*, 749.

<sup>5</sup> Guichard, *Al-Andalus frente*, 257, pointed this out in reference to rural castles: “lacking Andalusi documents that provide precise information about the material structure of castles in the region around Valencia, we can only but wait for archaeological data, combined with the Christian texts of the period of the conquest”.

rid period, in which they were essential for the survival of the kingdom), were clearly associated to the central authority of the state, and many of them were built directly on the state's initiative.<sup>6</sup> In other instances, Andalusi castles responded to a different set of dynamics, being the reflection of the occupation, exploitation, and collective management of the territory by peasant communities, which is not to say that the power of the state was entirely absent.

*Alquerías* constituted the bottom tier of Andalusi settlement structure. These were rural hamlets inhabited by homogenous and socially stable groups formed by several families; small landowners whose lands were spread around the settlement.<sup>7</sup> According to the above-mentioned authors, *alquerías* were not under the authority of major land owners or manorial structures, like in the feudal world. Their relationship with the state was direct but uneven. In many instances, this relationship was channelled through tribute, and in fact "the *alquería* was the basic source of state revenue".<sup>8</sup> Taxes were often collected by state agents (*mušārif*), whose profile, known through the written sources, is rather diffuse.

These communities had their own institutions to solve internal conflict, manage economic and social activities and, occasionally, mediate in the relationship of peasant communities with the state. Sometimes, local power acted as delegates of the state in the rural areas,<sup>9</sup> although according to Guichard, this delegation never crystallised in "permanent manorial features comparable to those that existed in the West".<sup>10</sup> Although it does not seem that authority was a more or less permanent prerogative of certain families, it is likely that, over time, a degree of social hierarchisation ensued as a result of the "unequal distribution of production"<sup>11</sup>. In any case, the administrative dependence between central and local authorities seems close enough for fluctuations in their relative standing to occur, and for peasant communities to never be able to act totally independently from the state. Taxation remained the most significant aspect of their relationship, for Andalusi society was an eminently tributary society.

Written references for the peasant world are scarce, isolated, and marginal. There are occasional mentions to local authorities; castles were often inhabited by *alcaldes* and *cadíes*, defined by Ibn Huḍayl (14<sup>th</sup> century) as military officers under the amīr, with approximately one thousand men at their command.<sup>12</sup> This is a very narrow definition, because very often the military function was secondary in fortresses that were far from the frontier, and in other instances the authority of these officials also extended to the adminis-

<sup>6</sup> Malpica Cuello, "Entre la arqueología".

<sup>7</sup> Guichard, "El problema;" Barceló, "El diseño;" Lagardère, *Campagnes et paysans*.

<sup>8</sup> Glick, *Paisajes de conquista*; Barceló, "La primerencia."

<sup>9</sup> Guichard, *Al-Andalus frente*, 376.

<sup>10</sup> Guichard, 439.

<sup>11</sup> Barceló, "Visperas de feudales," 107.

<sup>12</sup> Peláez Rovira, *El Emirato nazarí*, 127.

tration of justice. According to some authors, in the Nasrid kingdom these officials were directly appointed by the crown “regardless of their effective relationship with the territory”. This suggests that “their relationship with the local population travelled along socio-political lines related to the defence and control of the territory”. From this point of view, “the delegation of central authority at the local level was an imposition of supra-local authority that the local communities were forced to accept”.<sup>13</sup> *Alcaides* were seconded in rural *alquerías* by *alfaquíes* and other officials of different rank, whose function is still to be characterised in detail.

Therefore, political power in the rural areas is still imperfectly understood, as the scope and limits of the relationship of central government and peasant communities are blurred and changing. We also need to determine to what extent local institutions were imposed from above, or tolerated by the central authority.

From an archaeological perspective, the analysis of rural settlements can provide important data for the links between these two levels, and this is the subject of an ongoing project which aims to analyse the territorial organisation of the Nasrid kingdom of Granada (see Acknowledgements).

## 2. *Alquería towers*

The studies undertaken by the French scholars alluded above established a wide typology of fortified buildings and settlements, each type playing a well-defined role: urban citadels were walled precincts situated in eminent positions within or nearly cities, and their position suggested that they operated independently from the city in which they were located; frontier fortresses were built in strategic positions, and settlements often formed around them, being visually connected with networks of watchtowers from which the territory could be surveyed; castles associated to permanent rural settlements; refuge-castles, located in hard-to-access mountainous areas far from communication routes and major settlements; and tower-*alquerías*, known in French as *Tour de hameau ou de petit village*.<sup>14</sup>

The most general interpretation is that the settlement hierarchy established by these French scholars responded to degrees of proximity to the central authority on one end and to peasant communities on the other. More recently, Patrice Cressier confirmed this point by dividing fortifications into two categories, according to their relationship with the central authority of the state and with the peasant communities, again regarding these two institutions as the key poles around which Andalusí society was configured.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Peláez Rovira, 132, 136-7.

<sup>14</sup> Bazzana, Cressier and Guichard, *Chateaux ruraux*, 107.

<sup>15</sup> Cressier, “Agua, fortificaciones,” 406.

Towers can belong to both these categories: those built by local communities are known as *alquería*-tower or *vega*-tower and those built by an external authority as residential tower or watchtower.

Therefore, although towers were regarded as a specific type of fortification, Bazzana's and Guichard's interpretation presented these towers as characteristic elements of a number of *alquerías* that emerged in the vicinity of the city of Valencia rather late (12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century), in response to Aragonese military pressure. Their function was "to defend the *alquerías* of the *Huerta*, forming an early-warning system for the city".<sup>16</sup> As such, they aimed to defend certain rural communities that were far from the city and major castles. Although these buildings are closely linked to peasant settlements, but "stood out" in the rural landscape, they conceived these structures related to peasant communities, but were considered infrequent with respect to the usual peasant settlement structures. In some cases even Bazzana and Guichard<sup>17</sup> suggested that these buildings could be related to aristocratic elites.

To these interpretations we must add that previously Leopoldo Torres Balbás, conservative architect of the Alhambra (Granada) already recognized and superficially studied the Nasrid farmhouse towers, and maintained that the basic function of these towers was "to serve as a refuge for the peasants and inhabitants of the nearby farmhouses in case of danger".<sup>18</sup> It seems clear that the issue is still open after these initial studies. This interpretation must be now revised based on new analyzes under new interpretative paradigms.

Manuel Ación, with whom we agree, already pointed out the need to review these buildings. He considered that these towers played a "disrupting role" in the general proposals advanced by these French scholars, and that too many authors have followed these proposals uncritically. For instance, the designation "*torre-alquería*" has been systematically attached to all residential towers other than watchtowers, "being related to a collective defensive function". In this paper we intend to review these initial interpretations based on the investigations we have carried out in the area of Granada.<sup>19</sup>

### 3. *Alquería towers in Granada*

In a recent survey of the territory of Granada we have identified 30 *alquería* towers, although there is written evidence for 54 more<sup>20</sup> (Fig. 1). In addition to this, 38 buildings have been labelled as possible *alquería* towers and need to be analysed in more detail. Based on the written evidence, therefore, it is likely that their original number was much larger than the current

<sup>16</sup> Bazzana and Guichard, "Tours de defense," 93.

<sup>17</sup> Bazzana and Guichard, 73.

<sup>18</sup> Torres Balbás, "Torre," 198.

<sup>19</sup> Ación Almansa, "Torres/burūy," 21.

<sup>20</sup> Fábregas García and González Arévalo, "Formas de integración."



Figure 1. *Alquería* Towers found in the province of Granada.

tally suggests, as already pointed out by Leopoldo Torres Balbás, who wrote that “few of these structures have survived”.<sup>21</sup> At the same time, a few of the towers that we have categorized as possible *alquería* towers may present *sui generis* features, so it is not implausible that the final list will grow.

The towers identified to date are found in several districts of Granada, from E to W (Fig. 2 above): Huéscar, Baza, Marquesado del Cenete, Tierra de Guadix, Montes de Granada, Vega de Granada, Quempe, Valle de Lecrín, Tierra de Loja and Alhama. Considering the hinterland of major Nasrid cities (Fig. 2 below), it is not surprising that the number of towers situated under the direct influence of Granada is significantly higher than those found in the territories of Baza, Guadix and Loja. In fact, nearly half of all towers identified are situated in the capital’s hinterland. The second in number of towers is Loja, followed by Guadix and Baza. In these instances, the towers are invariably situated in flat areas in the farmlands around Granada and Loja and the *Hoyas* of Guadix and Baza. Only occasionally are they situated on small knolls surrounded by farmland or in areas dominated by a more abrupt topography (such as the Valley of Lecrín), but even in this case the towers are built in small flat areas or valleys. No *alquería* towers have been identified in mountainous areas (for instance, in the Alpujarra or the northern slopes of

<sup>21</sup> Torres Balbás, “Torre,” 190.

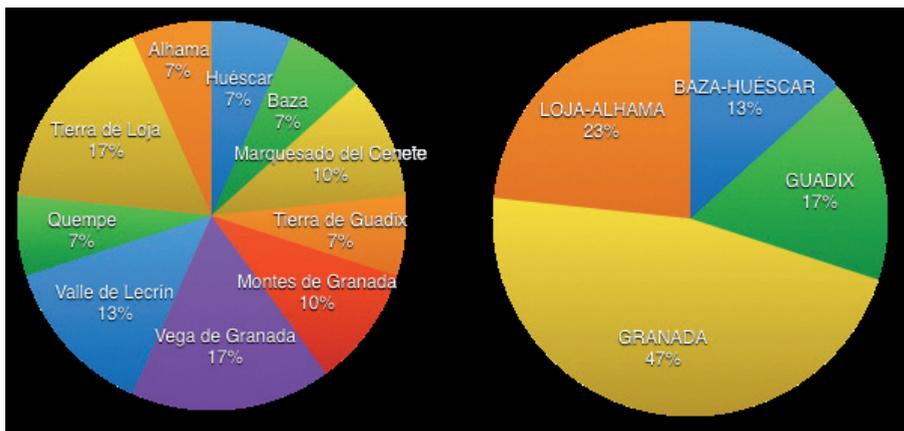


Figure 2. Towers identified in districts of Granada (above) and hinterland of the major Nasrid cities (below).

Sierra Nevada). They are also absent from areas in which the *hışn-alquería* system, a key feature of Andalusí territorial organisation, was well consolidated, that is, in those areas in which the territory was organised around major defensive settlements. (Fig. 2)

Returning to the need to review the functions of these towers already expressed above, we can observe after a careful analysis of their location, that these buildings were not only erected for defensive reasons. There is little doubt that defence was a major concern, and the existence of defensive features around some of these towers supports this interpretation, but it is also clear, on close examination, that most known towers were not large enough to hold the entire population of the *alquería* or *alquerías* under their protection. If we also take into consideration that some of them present other features such as water cisterns (leading the Castilians to interpret them as farmhouses), it seems likely that they were primarily used to store agricultural surplus and livestock, rather than for other purposes.

#### 4. *The Tower of Agicampe (Loja, Granada)*

The farmhouse of La Torre, in Loja (Granada), is located in the southern slopes of the Alamedilla hills, in a wide estate called Agicampe or Agicampo, near the homonymous stream. The water flow is rather generous (between 30 and 19 litres per second), but the associated irrigation system is smaller than others found in the district (approximately 30 hectares)<sup>22</sup> (Fig. 3). There is

<sup>22</sup> Jiménez Puertas, *El poblamiento*, 193-5; Jiménez Puertas, “Asentamientos,” 401-4; Jiménez Puertas, *Los regadíos*, 209-11.

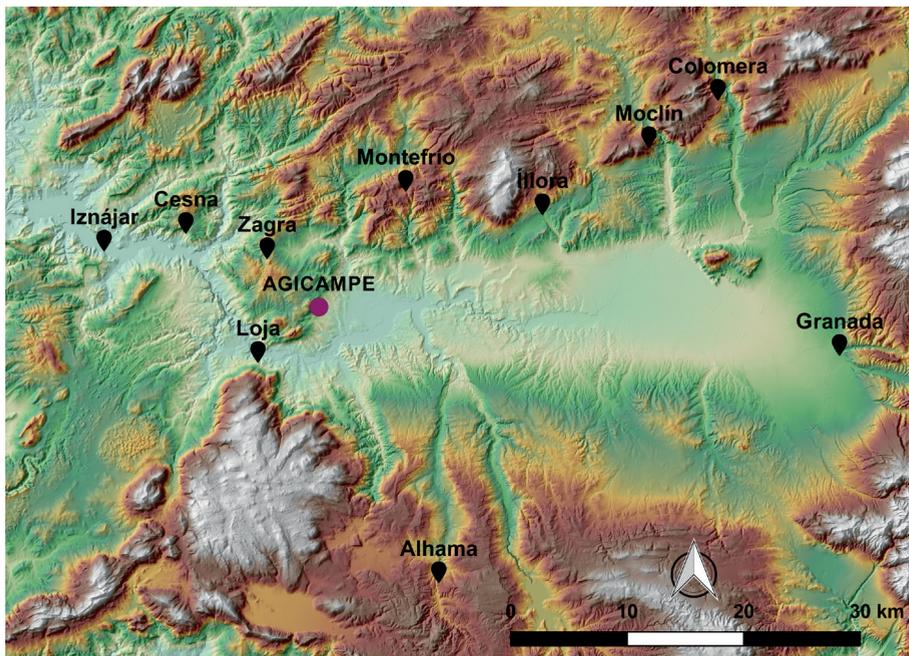


Figure 3. Location of the Agicampe Tower Farmhouse in the Vega of Granada-Loja.

evidence for early settlement during the Andalusí period. According to Iḥāṭa de Ibn al-Jaṭīb (14<sup>th</sup> century), the site existed as early as the 8<sup>th</sup> century. It is referred to as Šikanb, after the arrival of a Yemeni who, according to other authors, designed and constructed the irrigation system there.<sup>23</sup>

The tower that lends its name to the farmhouse was built, according to various authors, in the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century, when the frontier between Granada and Castile was established in the Sub-Baetic ranges.<sup>24</sup> It is also likely that other defensive features were also built alongside it. After the Castilian conquest, it seems that the *alquería* was largely abandoned and reduced to being a mere farmhouse, a common phenomenon in the aftermath of the conquest, especially in the district of Los Montes, where the settlement pattern changed substantially (Fig. 4).

<sup>23</sup> Jiménez Puertas, *Los regadíos*, 212.

<sup>24</sup> Malpica Cuello, *Poblamiento*, 220; Jiménez Puertas, “Asentamientos,” 403; García Pulido, “Sistema constructivo,” 380; García Pulido, “Estudio preliminar;” García Pulido, “Consolidación.”



Figure 4. Aerial photo of the ‘Cortijo de la Torre’ in Agicampe (3d model from a photograph from a drone).

## 5. *The territory*

The activities undertaken in the area during the archaeological study of the tower included the survey of the surrounding area. Other researchers had previously examined this area, so some preliminary evidence was available.<sup>25</sup>

The area was divided into several survey sectors. Sector A is the area around the tower and the farmhouse. Sector B is a wide expanse to the east of the tower, where the farmhouses of Chopo and Durano lie. Sector C, to the west of the tower, is the area known as Monte.

Survey area A is the closest to the tower and includes all the land around it and part of the slope of the Alamedilla range. The survey of this wide area yielded abundant Nasrid and Early Modern pottery, especially in the southern sub-sector. A few fragments of pottery dating to Antiquity and Late Antiquity were also found to the north of the tower. Much of this material will have been washed down the hill slope, from sector C (Fig. 5).

Survey area B is a wide expanse to the southeast of the tower and farmhouse. An *acequia* ran down the slope, reaching the farmhouses of Chopo and Durano, beyond the royal road of Agicampe (a road for livestock known as “cordel de Huétor y Granada”). The survey of this sector has yielded Late Medieval material disseminated over a wide area between the farmhouses. These materials are dated to between the 12<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, so it is to be assumed that the settlement located near the farmhouses has a similar chro-

<sup>25</sup> Jiménez Puertas, *El poblamiento*, 193-5.

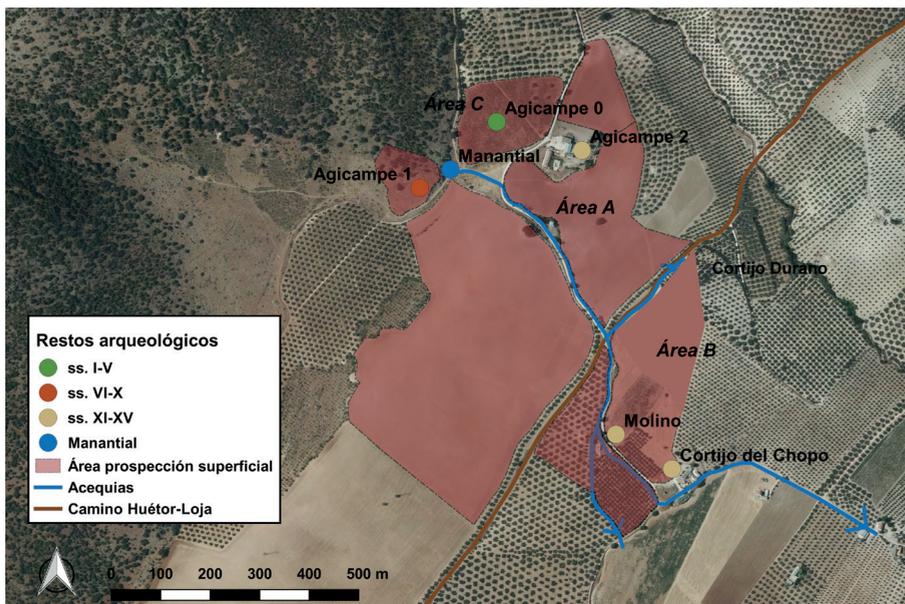


Figure 5. Areas established in archaeological survey and archaeological sites.

nology. The presence of the *acequia*, which is fed by the Agicampe stream, and its proximity to the farmhouse makes us suggest that all these elements formed a close-knit unit constituted by three *alquerías* or one with three different nuclei.

Survey area C, to the northwest and west of the tower, yielded, in the area that is closest to the farmhouse, a large amount of material, including flint cores and points, probably Chalcolithic in date, and abundant fragments of pottery dated to Ancient, the Early Medieval (5<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> century) and the Caliphate (glazed ceramics) periods. This suggests that the site was long-lived; Late Antique, Early Medieval and Caliphate-period materials are especially abundant. The site appears to have been abandoned in the 10<sup>th</sup> century (Fig. 6).

The most significant find of the survey was the discovery of a large quadrangular building (20 x 25 m) on the steep slope. The building, which we have called the Agicampe I site, was constituted by a substantial central courtyard and surrounding rooms. It was badly affected by erosion. The excavation of the building yielded evidence for Early Andalusí occupation (8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> century), but no post-Caliphate remains were attested. Although the building is of great interest, and for this reason it has previously been a case study<sup>26</sup> (Fig. 7).

<sup>26</sup> García Porras and Alonso Valladares, “El yacimiento.”

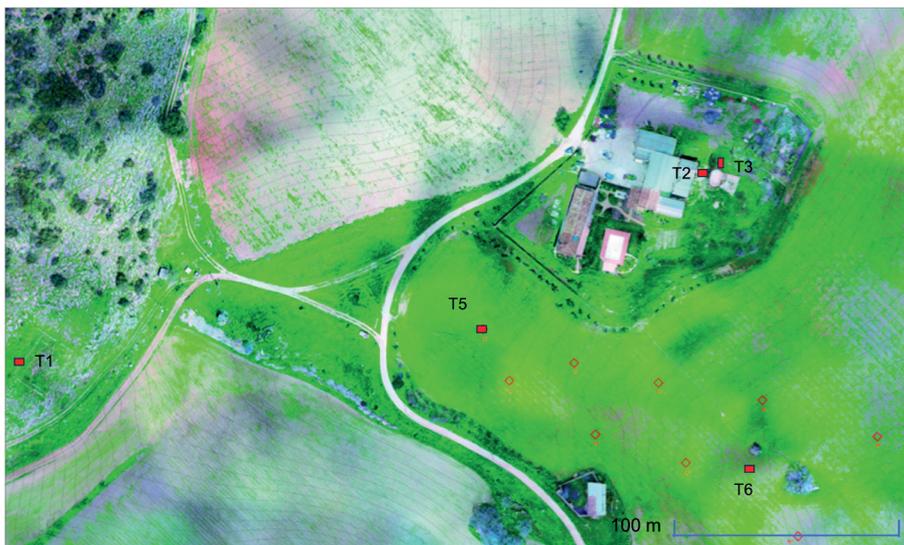


Figure 6. Trench carried out during our 2018 intervention (T1: Trench 1; T2: Trench 2; T3: Trench 3; T5: Trench 5; T6: Trench 6).



Figure 7. Building located in the prospecting área C. Agicampe I site.

## 6. *The fields*

In addition to this, we examined old photographs and the results of a LIDAR flight, focusing on the field to the south of the tower in order to ascertain its agricultural potential, as the exploitation of these fields seemed to go far back in time. We analysed the edaphic potential by taking a few coring samples. These provided detailed evidence concerning the depth of the archaeological layers, the archaeological potential of the soil and the nature and composition of the deposits. Samples were taken to both the southeast and the northwest of the tower. Following this first exploration, we made trench in the most promising areas, some of which found the geological substratum fairly close to the surface.<sup>27</sup> (Fig. 8)

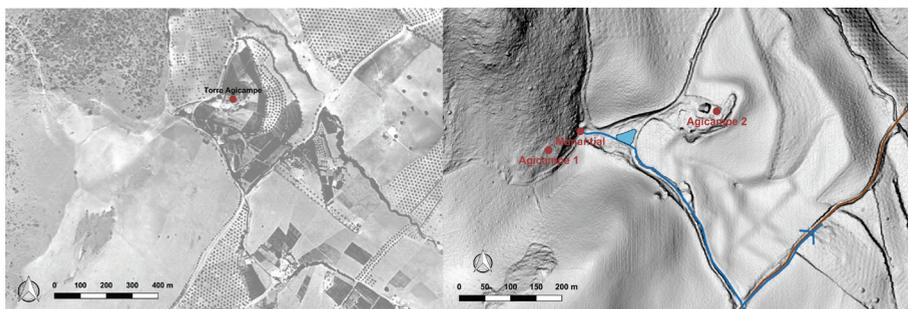


Figure 8. Aerial photo of the American flight (1956) and LIDAR flight.

The point of contact between geological levels and sediments was found to contain a number of fragments of Late Medieval Pottery, especially near the farmhouse, so we can assume that in the Late Medieval period the geological substratum was visible in some areas.

Trench 5 and 6 were the most successful. Trench 6 was situated in the central area of the field to the southeast of the farmhouse. There, the remains of a wall, 1 m high, was found; the wall was interpreted as a terracing wall.

The results of trench 5 were particularly encouraging. The excavation allowed the identification of an agricultural terrace dated to the medieval period, based on the associated ceramic assemblage. This agricultural field was later sealed by a layer of deposits on which another terrace, supported by a masonry wall, was found. Above this wall, a substantial layer, containing a large number of charcoals remains (which were sampled), was found. This layer was covered by more recent agricultural deposits (Fig. 9-10).

The great interest of this trench encouraged us to take micromorphology and phytolite samples from the section. Micromorphology samples aimed to characterise the formation processes of soils and understand the agricultural

<sup>27</sup> Sampling and analysis were carried out by a team led by Aleks Pluskowski from the Department of Archaeology at the University of Reading.



Figure 9. Old cultivation terraces located in Profile S of Trench 5 in the field adjacent to the 'Cortijo de la Torre' in Agicampe.

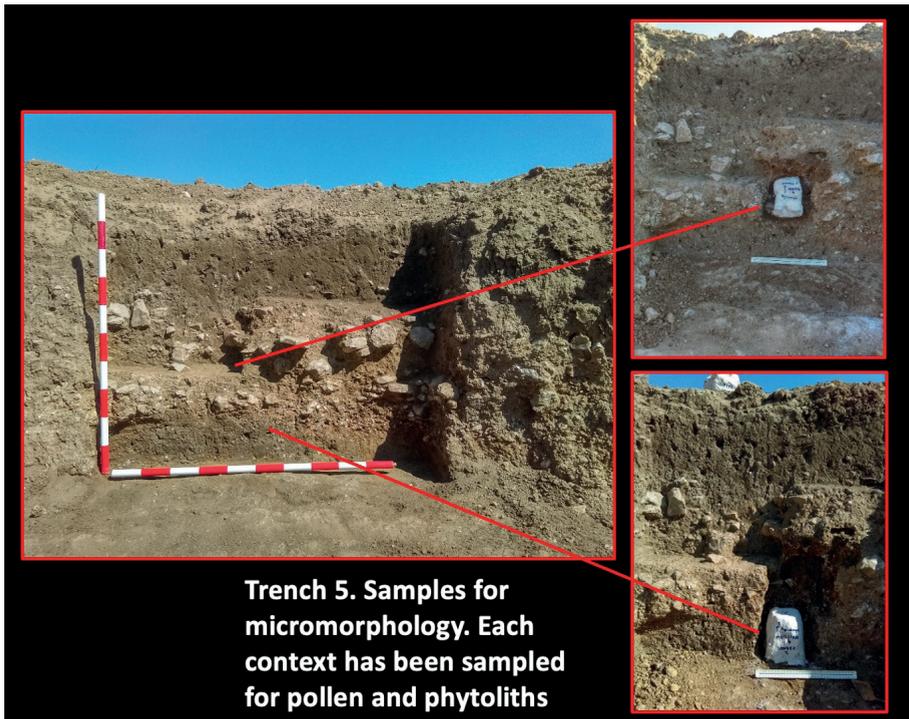


Figure 10. Micromorphology samples taken in trench 5 (R. Banerjea).

management of the terraces, and phytolites were sampled to identify the use of fertilisers and characterise crops. The analysis of phytolites can help to answer archaeological and paleo-environmental questions, as well as to provide evidence for the origin and dissemination of crops, the diet, agricultural practices, crop processing and the exploitation of plant resources for craft and industrial purposes.

Micromorphology analysis has contributed to characterise Nasrid agricultural terraces. According to this analysis, the soils were fertilised with domestic waste, including burnt bone and wood, manure, fish bones and eggshell, which may have modified the soil's micromorphology.

The analyses also suggest that the soils were likely irrigated. The loss of the soil's natural porosity led to fine sediments taking the place of air pockets in the coarser sediment, and certain components were dissolved and precipitated as a result of irrigation. In addition, the identification of newly formed shapeless iron and manganese nodules could suggest that the soils were exposed to alternate periods of arid and humid conditions. Geochemical analyses could go a long way in confirming that these soils were irrigated during the Nasrid period.

Finally, the analyses also provided evidence for the burning of vegetal stubble after the harvest, as suggested by the presence of charcoal, fragments of burnt soil and phytolites. This evidence only concerns the upper soils (the soil was regenerated seasonally) where abundant remains of burnt grassy phytolites (which may have included cereal) were found, although the temperature reached by the fire and its duration could not be determined.

It seems clear that the area around the tower of Agicampe was cultivated intensively during the Nasrid period, and that agricultural practices there involved fertilising, irrigation and stubble burning.<sup>28</sup>

## 7. *The tower*

The most significant architectural element in Agicampe is the tower. The tower, built in masonry bound with mortar, laid down in horizontal courses, was oval in plan; the stones used in the lower courses are larger than those used in the upper courses.<sup>29</sup> The tower is unusual in terms of both plan and construction technique.<sup>30</sup> The interior opens to two rooms covered by an excellent domed brick ceiling, built in a similar technique as that found in Torre de Romilla and some rooms in the Alhambra and the Cuarto Real de Santo Domingo,<sup>31</sup> which is remarkable for a building located in a rural setting. The access

<sup>28</sup> The results of these investigations were published in García Porras, Pluskowski, and Banerjee, "Gestión de los recursos."

<sup>29</sup> García Pulido, "Sistema constructivo," 375.

<sup>30</sup> Malpica Cuello, *Poblamiento*, 219

<sup>31</sup> García Pulido, "Sistema constructivo," 382-3.

to the interior is through a doorway open to the eastern façade and constituted by three large blocks of carved stone. The doorway is situated 6 m above the floor level, so a wooden staircase and platform must have existed outside. The upper room has openings to the lower room and the roof. The configuration of the upper room (a central area and two lateral alcoves) suggests a residential purpose, although no further evidence for this has been attested. The lower room, which was well sealed, must have been used as a storage room, and a good view of the surrounding area can be obtained from the roof<sup>32</sup> (Fig. 11).

The tower was partially built on a calcareous substratum. Based on the surrounding topography, some authors have suggested that the tower was surrounded to east and south by a defensive wall, but no clear evidence for this wall has been found.<sup>33</sup> The tower is visually connected with other nearby defensive structures, such as the tower of Huétor-Tájar or the tower of Salar, and even the Alhambra in clear days. It is also indirectly connected to Loja's citadel, one of the main fortifications in the district, and other castles and towers.

The tower has been subject to several archaeological interventions in recent years. The archaeologist Santiago Pecete and Antonio Buendía worked in the tower during the restoration process in 2016-17 (directed by the architect Luis J. García Pulido) and produced very detailed drawings and plans, which served as main basis for the analysis of the construction process. Three trench were also opened at the feet of the tower (south, west and north exterior faces).<sup>34</sup>

Our 2018 excavation aimed to obtain the widest possible perspective on the territory and its evolution over time (Fig. 6 and 12). Our research project began with the geophysical survey of the tower's surrounding area, with the aim of identifying underlying structures that could be excavated. The survey was undertaken by Rob Fry (University of Reading), using a gradiometer to detect soil magnetic resistivity. The survey clearly indicated the presence of anomalies to the northwest of the tower, linking the building to the area currently occupied by the farmhouse.

Following these results, we opened two trench: Trench 2 (adjacent to the Trench 2 opened during the previous excavation in 2016-7) was situated at the feet of the northern face of the building and Trench 3 (next to the older Trench 3 in 2016-7), at the feet of the eastern face.

The excavations (both those of 2016-7 and ours of 2018) led to the identification of at least three major stratigraphic horizons, corresponding to three important stages in the history of this defensive structure and its surrounding area. First, a series of badly preserved structures and deposits dated to the period in which the tower was operational (Late Middle Ages and Early Mod-

<sup>32</sup> García Pulido, "Sistema constructivo;" García Pulido, "Estudio preliminar."

<sup>33</sup> Malpica Cuello, *Poblamiento*, 219-20; Jiménez Puertas, *El poblamiento*, 193-5; Argüelles Márquez, "Sistema de vigilancia;" Martín García, Bleda Portero, and Martín Civantos, *Inventario*, 302-3; García Pulido, "Sistema constructivo," 376.

<sup>34</sup> Pecete Serrano, García Pulido, and Buendía Moreno, "Datos arqueológicos."

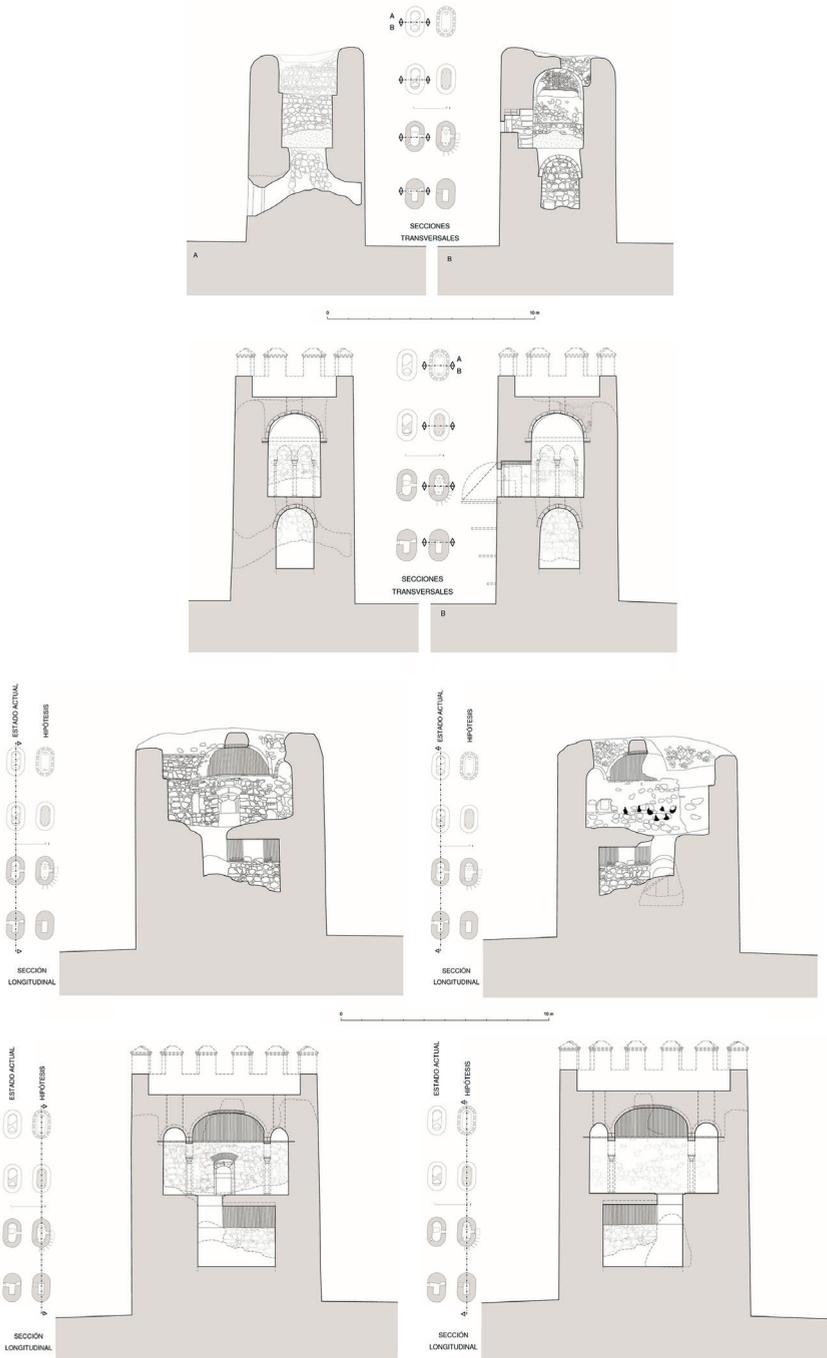


Figure 11. Sections of the Agicampe Tower with the hypothesis of the original moment and the state in which it was (L. García Pulido).

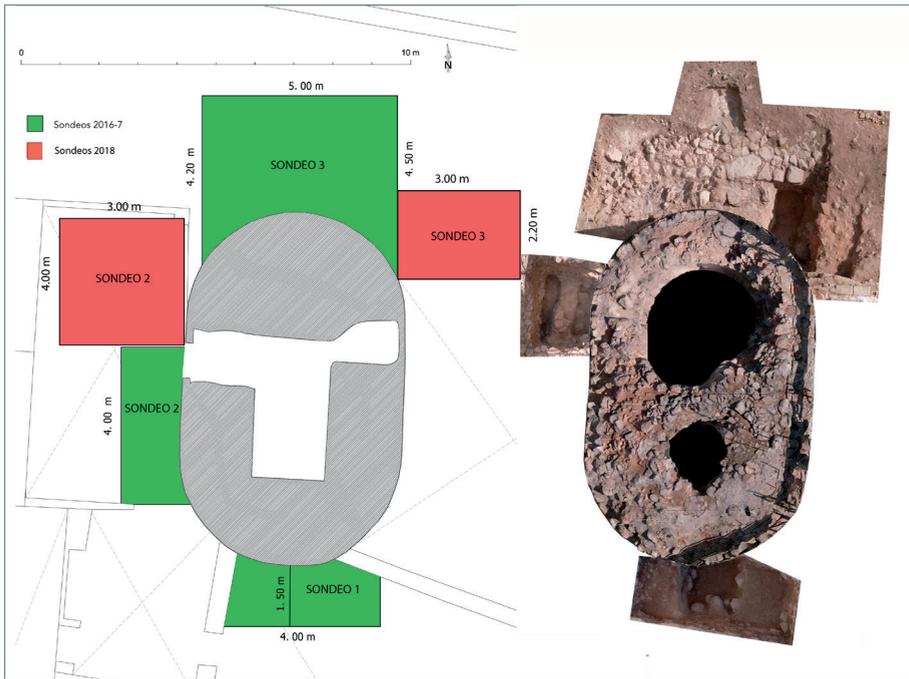


Figure 12. Surveys carried out in 2018 in relation to the previous intervention (A. García, L. García, S. Pecete and A. Buendía).

ern Age). These included a series of features found during both excavation seasons in Trench 2 and the pavement identified in Trench 3 (also during both seasons). These features suggest the existence of a pavement around the tower and a building, which was probably used for storage, as suggested by the ceramic assemblage (Figs. 13 e 14). The building seems to have been pulled down on purpose during the Early Modern Age. It is likely that after this the building and the surrounding structures were abandoned, although the site seems to have remained inhabited, since the terraces found in the vicinity suggest that agricultural practices continued without interruption. It is likely that the farmhouse located at a certain distance from the tower is dated to this period. The farmhouse was expanded towards the tower in the end of the Early Modern Age, the tower being used to keep livestock when a new pavement was laid down. More recently, a pavilion was built next to the tower.

The evolution of the site, as illustrated by the archaeological remains identified during excavation, can be easily integrated in the broader perspective presented by Miguel Jiménez Puertas in his doctoral thesis and later works on the *tierra de Loja* (land of Loja).<sup>35</sup> The Christian conquest led to the destruc-

<sup>35</sup> Jiménez Puertas, “Asentamientos.”

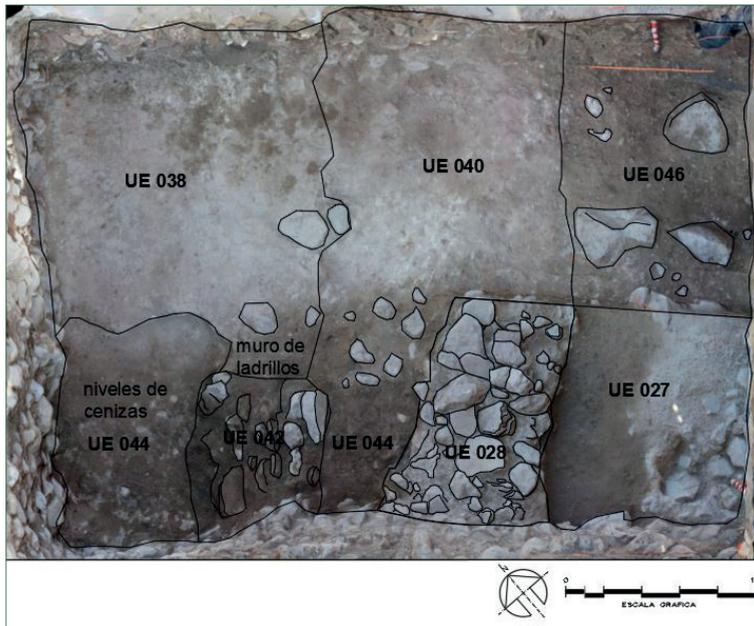


Figure 13. Final photograph of trench 2 (2018).

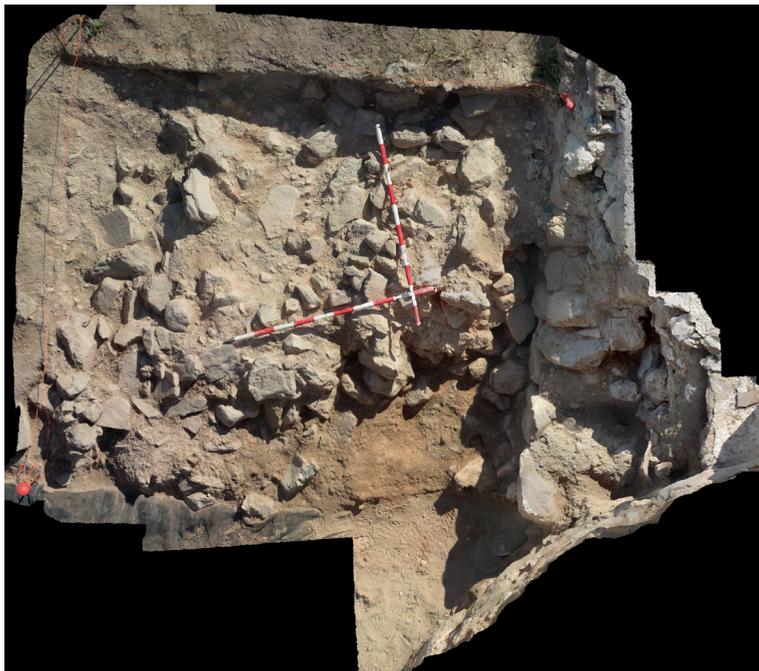


Figure 14. Final photograph of trench 3 (2018).

tion of many of the agricultural *alquerías* that had earlier peppered the territory; the conquest involved a comprehensive transformation of agricultural regimes and a new territorial configuration, which included the construction of many farmlands in the areas formerly occupied by *alquerías*.

## 8. Discussion and conclusion

The presence of the water stream partially explains the intensive human occupation of the area. The steady water flow encouraged human occupation and the agricultural exploitation of the area even before the Medieval Period. The materials collected up the slope suggest Roman and even earlier occupation (survey sectors A and C). In any case, this site, the nature and characteristics of which are unknown, seems to be limited to the slope situated over the stream. Our evidence is not enough to establish whether the agricultural exploitation of the fields that surround the tower began in Antiquity or in the Middle Ages.

Based on the ceramic assemblage collected on the surface near the rectangular building found up the slope, the Roman occupation must have continued through the Early Medieval Period. This large building is dated to the Andalusi period, between the Emirate – and Caliphate-periods, according to the ceramics found in its abandonment levels.<sup>36</sup> It is inevitable to link this building (Agicampe I) and the earliest medieval occupation of the area that is mentioned in the written sources, which points to Šikanb (source of the toponym Agicampe) as the *alquería* and complex irrigation system built by a Yemeni in the 8<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>37</sup>

No hydraulic structures have been found in the vicinity of this building, but we have been able to attest a water cistern and an *acequia* that irrigated the fields below all the way to the current farmhouses of La Torre, Chopo and Durano. The material found around the farmhouses during survey (sector B) suggest a construction date no earlier than the 11<sup>th</sup> century, and more likely the 12<sup>th</sup>, for these features. This makes us suspect that the irrigation system was created at that time, once the building up the slope had been abandoned and replaced by a system of *alquerías* (of which three nuclei are known), irrigated fields and a channel network controlled from the cistern above and fed by the stream.

Agricultural activity must have become more intense in the Late Almohad and Early Nasrid periods. Trench 5 and 6, in the field open to the southeast of the farmhouse of La Torre, have yielded a Late Medieval date for the breaking up of these soils, perhaps following the expansion of the agricultural area. The excavation of the first trench led to the identification of a Nasrid agricul-

<sup>36</sup> García Porras and Alonso Valladares, “El yacimiento.”

<sup>37</sup> Jiménez Puertas, *Los regadíos*, 212.

tural terrace and another post-conquest terrace above it. The analyses carried out indicate that the soil was fertilised, that clearing techniques were used to get rid of post-harvest stubble, and that the fields were irrigated.

The intensification of agricultural practices is contemporary to the construction of the masonry wall situated next to the Agicampe farmhouse (Fig. 15). The tower was probably built upon an existing (but still Late Medieval) settlement, as suggested by the discovery of pre-Nasrid material in its vicinity. The excavation of the tower's surroundings confirms that there were other structures associated with the tower, and thus it is plausible to interpret the defensive structure as the core of a larger settlement or *alquería*. The ceramic assemblage suggests that these external structures were used as storage spaces. The tower must have also been used to store valuable produce, especially the inferior room; the superior room presents some features that suggest a domestic nature, but there is no clear evidence for this<sup>38</sup>. It would be interesting to ascertain what was stored in the tower. It is likely that the building was seen as the safest place to store local produce with which to meet fiscal demands and otherwise allocate agricultural resources.

As previously noted, function is still one of the main questions hovering above the study of these *alquería* towers.

As we have previously pointed out, Bazzana and Guichard<sup>39</sup> suggested that some of these buildings were related to aristocratic elites. Aristocratic towers or *rahal* are well attested in Granada, for instance Romilla, Cijuela, Asquerosa and Gabia (some of these no longer survive), and a few late documents seem to confirm that the state played an important role in their construction.<sup>40</sup> Also, a different category altogether are more complex rural fortifications, such as Tájara and Alhendín, which can hardly be referred as towers, being much more complex defensive systems.<sup>41</sup>

Ever since Leopoldo Torres Balbás studied them, it has been generally held that the basic function of these towers was to “serve as refuge for the peasants and inhabitants of the nearby *alquerías* in case of danger”;<sup>42</sup> subsequent authors have repeated this idea, and the towers have been assigned a Nasrid chronology because the region was turned into an unstable frontier. While it cannot be ruled out that some of these buildings were erected for this reason and in this period, a detailed analysis reveals that this is not the only possible explanation. Many of them were far from the frontier, for instance in the Filabres range, El Cenete, the valley of Lecrín and the mountains of Malaga. In addition, as defensive structures, many of these towers fell well short of requirements; textual accounts of their conquest often mention only a

<sup>38</sup> Fábregas García and González Arévalo, “Formas de integración,” García Porras, “Estrategias y formas.”

<sup>39</sup> Bazzana and Guichard, “Tours de defense,” 73.

<sup>40</sup> Mármol Carvajal, *Historia del rebelión*, 35.

<sup>41</sup> Jiménez Puertas, “Asentamientos,” 396-7.

<sup>42</sup> Torres Balbás, “Torre,” 198.



Figure 15. The 'Cortijo de la Torre' in Agicampe (Loja, Granada) from the south.

few defenders, less interested in actually holding their position than in saving the integrity of the produce and livestock contained within.<sup>43</sup> Others do not match a Nasrid date, as suggested by the construction technique and the associated ceramic assemblages.<sup>44</sup> Many of them were built earlier and are part of a wider phenomenon that affected other regions of al-Andalus in areas that were not under the military pressure of the Christians.

In my opinion, the construction of these buildings may have become common in the Almohad period, when a significant intensification of agricultural production, the result of the introduction of irrigation systems, is attested.<sup>45</sup> These buildings, emerged as spaces from which to manage the increasing surpluses that these agricultural strategies pursued in an attempt to meet the growing fiscal demands of the state, is a material reflection of this process. We must not forget that the *alquería*, from its recognized management autonomy, lay at the foundations of the state's tax base.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, these towers must have been very numerous and played an essential role in the reproduction of peasant communities and the maintenance of the state through tax.

Significant in this regard is an early document (9<sup>th</sup> century) of a tributary nature that deals with the *aqalim* under the jurisdiction of Córdoba, indi-

<sup>43</sup> Fábregas García, and González Arévalo, "Formas de integración."

<sup>44</sup> Malpica Cuello, "Alquería nazari."

<sup>45</sup> Malpica Cuello, "Trasformazioni."

<sup>46</sup> Guichard, *Al-Andalus frente*, 308-17.

cating that the rural population was organized in 148 *ḥuṣūn*, 294 *burūy* and 1079 *qurà*, organization of the settlement that will appear repeated in later documents;<sup>47</sup> this information is corroborated by a text post-dating the conquest, which claims that the territory of Córdoba was divided between 888 *alquerías*, 301 towers and 148 castles.<sup>48</sup>

In my opinion, the initiative behind the construction of these towers must have been the peasants; there is no evidence that the state encouraged their construction or participated in any way.

Our tower was built in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, using similar techniques to those found in other fortresses in the frontier of Granada in the area of Montes, not far from Agicampe. These structures have been attributed to Muḥammad V's wish to reinforce the frontier.<sup>49</sup> There is little doubt that the use of masonry bound with mortar in frontier castles was an attempt to reinforce them against the use of a new war technology: artillery. The use of this construction technique, however, soon acquired a new meaning, being related to the royal authority that promoted this defensive works, a meaning that went beyond its strict poliorcetic function. That is, the building technique conveyed messages of authorship and belonging.

The use of these techniques in the tower of Agicampe, in an eminently peasant environment, can be explained too on defensive grounds. Beyond function and the meaning of certain techniques, the three sites attested in the tower's surroundings and related to it even suggests that a certain hierarchisation existed, although it is impossible, with the evidence available, to confirm that this was the result of a parallel segmentation of the human group that inhabited it.

After the conquest, the tower was, at least partially, affected by the Catholic Monarchs' edict that ordered towers to be made unusable, as suggested by the collapse levels detected during excavation. The tower, however, remained partially standing, and the agricultural fields around it were not abandoned. Progressively, the *alquerías* turned into isolated and independent settlements, and they remain so today. Agricultural production did not decrease, as indicated by the trench opened in the fields, which indicate no diminution in the intensity of exploitation. What changed was the way production was managed. Peasant settlements changed, and a central space to manage production surpluses became necessary, and this was the tower's main aim.

<sup>47</sup> Acién Almansa, "Torres/burūy," 21.

<sup>48</sup> Bazzana and Guichard, "Tours de defense," 75.

<sup>49</sup> Torres Balbás, *Arte almohade*; Acién Almansa, "Tugur;" Malpica Cuello, "Entre la arqueología."

*Acknowledgements*

We want to thank the owner of the land (Miguel Maldonado Frias) for facilitating the work on his property, as well as those who collaborated in the work, either by providing information on previous actions (L. García Pulido, S. Pecete, A. Buendía), such as during our intervention (R. Fry, A. Pluskoswki, R. Banerjea, A. Brown, G. García-Contreras, M. Alonso, J. M. Jiménez, J. A. Rojas, M. J. Peregrina and students of the archeology degree at the University of Granada).

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