The Medieval Settlement in the Western Sierra Morena (Spain-Portugal)

By Eduardo Romero Bomba

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Resumen- Analizamos el poblamiento medieval en un territorio rural y periférico que formó parte de Garb-al- Ándalus, Sierra Morena Occidental. El estudio se realiza en base del registro arqueológico y abarca desde la etapa tardorromana hasta la conquista cristiana pero especialmente, la época andalusí. Una etapa histórica que contaba con un escaso conocimiento.

Palabras Claves: al-ándalus, poblamiento, arqueología.

Introduction

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, interest arose in the study of the Islamic past. Since then, there have been advances in knowledge about this period. Progress through milestones, such as the emergence of Islamic archaeology in Huelva, with work developed in Saltés and Niebla. In recent years, the archaeological record is providing an important set of data that contribute to clarifying the panorama. In the same way, the documentary record of the Arab period has made new contributions. This work offers an explanation of the historical process involved in medieval settlement in Sierra Morena Occidental, especially the Andalusian stage. The archaeological record is the source for its characterization but with a multidisciplinary analysis including the knowledge provided by written sources. A specific territory of the southwest of the Iberian Peninsula, Sierra Morena Occidental, has been chosen, with homogeneous geographical characteristics, but which presents sufficient diversity so that its study does not result in a biased sample and lack of historical coherence.

Mentions of place names date back to the Emiral and Caliphate periods, although they are scarce and diverge in terms of their definition as population centers, their functionality or their geographical characterization. The identification made on these populations differs and there is no consensus. One of the characteristics of territorial organization is the absence of urban centers, which is projected in the scarcity of mentions in Andalusian texts. Since the emiral and caliphal times the Arab sources cite places like Almonaster la Real or Aroche. On the other hand, other toponyms have not been identified in their archaeological record or are the subject of debate as to their location. Aroche is the town that presents a greater number of testimonies in Islamic sources, being also highlighted its participation during the Fitna. Its population characterization is heterogeneous, since it is cited as a castle, city and dependent district of Beja. There are other place names, such as *Šigūnsa*, identified with the fortified settlement of the Sierra de Gigonza, of which the sources are scarce in offering information, *Qaṭrašāna*, about which he maintains controversy about its location, and *Ṭuṭāliqa*, which is located on the left bank of the Guadiana, but without a specific location evidenced by material remains.

The late medieval documentation is more prolix than the Andalusian, although it has an indirect character in relation to the X-XIII centuries. This is not a burden, since they allow us to obtain relevant data, such as the existence of Andalusian populations that last during the late medieval period. The clearest examples are Aroche and Almonaster, cited both in the texts of both periods, which underlines their importance in the territorial scope. The relevance of Aroche in the Andalusian sources is corroborated in the Christian sources when indicating aspects such as its conquest, the dispute over its belonging between the Portuguese and Castilian kingdoms or the territory where it exercised its jurisdiction. Other toponyms, such as Aracena, arise during the 2nd half of the thirteenth century and have no correlation in Arabic sources, although there are hypotheses about their origin in the name *Qaṭrašāna*. Its importance during the Andalusian period is evident in Christian sources through the same motifs as Aroche. In fact, it is the populations, together with Moura and Serpa that are cited in the treaties of Badajoz and Alcañices. Another case is that of Valera la Vieja, whose archaeological record indicates the existence of Andalusian settlement, but ceases to appear in the late medieval documentation when Segura de León and Fregenal begin to be mentioned, which is a direct symptom of a new territorial reorganization. Other examples, Zufre, Cortegana or Torres, are cited in the texts of the mid-thirteenth century, but they are not indicated in the Andalusian texts, and there is no contextualized archaeological evidence of Andalusian settlement. At the same time, a series of towns that had

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not previously been mentioned begin to appear in the texts of the late thirteenth century, Cumbres, Santa Olalla and Cala de los Crespos, which are located in the northern limits of the kingdom of Seville. Other documents of the 2nd half of the s. XIII inform us about place names that last until today, limits and the process of conquest. They are the indicator of the repopulating process that was transforming the settlement of the Andalusian period by the new geopolitical keys derived from the process of conquest.

Establishing a characterization of the historical process of settlement requires knowing the background of the settlement of the Andalusian communities in the territory of Sierra Morena Occidental. The basis of this analysis is the knowledge of the population substrate of the late Roman period since we cannot compartmentalize the research without knowing the historical aspects that had been developed previously, that is, establishing impermeable temporal limits to both before and after the Andalusian period. From the late Roman period we do not have any specific study of the settlement in this period, since research has focused on presenting the sites or elements of material culture, as are the cases of the spolia from temples, Christian inscriptions or necropolis. There is little archaeological evidence of this period in Sierra Morena Occidental, although they cannot be qualified as symptoms of a population vacuum, since significant sites have been located, which correspond to settlements, necropolis, buildings of Christian worship or inscriptions. The late Roman period contrasts with Roman times, with an important density of population, having a dispersed settlement with a lower degree of implantation. It is a settlement that does not have areas of concentration and its density is scarce, although it has a development throughout the county area. The geographical representativeness of the late Roman settlement, visible throughout the territory, is more intense in the Vega del Chanza, where the high degree of Romanization with urban settlement patterns was felt. The settlement will be structured in rural settlements that share space with buildings of worship (basilicas) and necropolis. These will be the communities that will attend the arrival of the Muslim contingents. It is a reflection of the process of ruralization of society that marks the beginning of the Middle Ages, with small population centers that are alien to the influence of the large urban centers of the peninsular Southwest. They are small peasant communities with a dispersed population, which take advantage of the agro-livestock and mining resources of the environment as a model of economic exploitation. This model can be extrapolated to the first moments of the Andalusian stage.

There is continuity in the occupation of the territory from late Roman times until the Christian conquest in a series of settlements: Almonaster, Aracena, Aroche, Noudar, Moura or Serpa. To this

contribute the special strategic characteristics where they are located: defense, visibility, communications or fundraising. This does not mean that there is a continuous occupation in the sequence of settlement since late Roman times. There is evidence of a previous settlement in these places but it has not been clearly found in the stratigraphic record. On the other hand, there is population continuity in Almonaster and Aracena at least since the tenth century as indicated by the material culture. The beginning of the settlement in these settlements during the caliphal stage is the response to a concentration of the population against a hypothetical dispersion of the settlement during the emiral stage. This may respond to the policy of the Umayyad state after the Muladi revolts. These population centers endure over time, both in the Taifa stage and the North African period, when a population expansion is evident that is reflected in both military and domestic architecture. With the Christian conquest, the settlement is maintained until today. At a general level, the scarce identification of stratigraphic levels corresponding to the emiral stage may be due to a reduced knowledge of the material culture of that time, the absence of absolute dating and the alterations of the record that occurred in subsequent moments of occupation of the habitats. Although we must take into account these conditions for Almonaster and Aracena, the registry currently indicates the emergence of ex novo nuclei during the caliphal stage that evidences the territorial reorganization that takes place from Córdoba. When Abderramán III manages to end the revolts at the beginning of the tenth century, a change occurs with the implementation of the districts as evidenced in Aroche, which seems to retain the role of administrative center, having caídes or governors appointed by the Umayyad state. There is also population continuity in Aroche, one of the places that had reached the category of urban nucleus during the Roman period. We must consider the fact that no continuous settlement has been detected in the same place, since the Umayyad habitat of Ladrillero does not coincide either temporally or spatially with the settlement of the North African stage that develops in the current urban area of Aroche. Despite having a sequence of occupation with stratigraphic evidence, we are facing a settlement that changes the location. There is a reorganization of the location in height of pre-Roman moments to the plain in the Roman stage, to reverse the process throughout the Andalusian period and occupy, again, the place in height. This may be the most coherent hypothesis, taking into account the characteristics of the settlement in this place through the successive historical stages. We move in the field of possibilities and the lack of a complete stratigraphic sequence, does not allow corroborating or refuting that hypothesis.

In Almonaster, without considering the presence of late Roman materials or the toponymy of the name,

the stratigraphy shows us the founding moment of the fortified enclosure in the tenth century and a sequence of occupation until Almohad moments that lasts during the late medieval stage. The fortification of Almonaster, erected at times, caliphs may have had the function of administrative center of state character. A function that is maintained over time and that reveals in the continuity of the settlement during the Almohad era. On the other hand, it has been possible to document Andalusian settlement in places where historiography had indicated its presence without having evidence of the archaeological record, such as the Peña de Alájar, as well as maintaining a waiting compass on the sequence of settlement in Cortegana and Zufre until the appropriate evidence is manifested. There are indications of its occupation during the Andalusian period, but, so far, the archaeological record and, above all, the stratigraphic sequence must corroborate the settlement during this historical stage. The opposite case is the places where settlement had been indicated, but the material evidence has not confirmed it, such as Cala or Santa Olalla del Cala. It has been evidenced through the stratigraphic record that the sequence of settlement begins during the Late Middle Ages, as it happens, with other populations, such as Cumbres Mayores or Cumbres de San Bartolomé, which arise ex novo from the territorial reorganization after the Christian conquest of the area and the process of repopulation. The stratigraphic sequences in the nuclei where an important Islamic settlement has been documented (Almonaster la Real, Aracena, Aroche, Moura, Serpa and Noudar) have shown greater temporal continuity.

In an analysis of the territorial distribution of the locations, empty areas are observed, which should not correspond to historical reality. They may be motivated by an uneven implantation in certain areas of the territory. The central area of the mountain region, characterized by a marked orography and a dense vegetation cover, is the one with the lowest degree of population density. The locations are distributed perimeter to this area, that is, there are empty areas of settlement, but they are not the product of the lack of archaeological research, but because of the unequal implantation in the territory. This leads us to propose that the population density must have been scarce in this territorial area. Contrasting the model with the Roman era, which presents a greater territorial implantation, it can be concluded that there was a reduced occupation during the eighth and thirteenth centuries, although the values reached exceed the previous moment, the late Roman stage. This data is a mere indicator, since other factors would have to be taken into account, such as the ranges of extension of the settlements, the wide chronological development or the different cultural phases. A fact in this sense is the preponderance of settlements of the Umayyad stage over those of the North African period, although it is observed, as has been shown, that the large population centers of the region arise at the times of the caliphate, last during the stage of the Taifa kingdoms and are maintained during the period of Almoravids and Almohads until the Christian conquest. There are other settlements where this persistence is not detected in the settlement: El Ladrillero, Santa Marta I or the Peñas de Aroche.

Prior to the construction of the castles of the North African period, which are mainly characterized by the use of the rammed earth factory, various fortifications made of masonry have been cataloged. These fortified settlements where settlement gravitates are called ḥuṣūn, with a definition that has variable meanings, but which have a point in common, military architecture. They are built with a rig where the predominance of local construction techniques in a rural area is verified. This technique differs from the use of seating in the most important population centers of *Garb al-Andalus*. Its characteristics, with a chronology from IX-XIth centuries, are maintained over time because it is detected that these fortifications can last until late medieval times. They have a scarce defensive structure, since they are masonry fences in places of natural defense that do not have tower reinforcements. It seeks to link rocky outcrops to reinforce the defensive character and supplant the use of towers in the angles and breaks. The perimeter of the wall layouts adapts to the topography of the enclaves in height, including the rocky outcrops. They are located at strategic points and their plants are irregular polygons, with rectilinear sections of wall curtains without towers. They are built in the areas of higher altitude, although their location in mountain systems also prevails, which, although they are not at the highest level, have a better control of the territory. The sites are chosen for the easy natural defense of some of the slopes. The geographical position in elevations, with a wide panoramic view of the surrounding territory and with visual link with other nearby fortifications determines that these sites acquire a high defensive value from the point of view of the domain of space, control of resources and communication routes. They have an area to house housing structures, although they are small places. Murary structures can exclusively bypass a fortification area, while the habitat extends outside the walls. In other examples, the walls also surround the inhabited area forming an urban fence, and the existence of two defensible sectors or spaces is also detected in other habitats.

This type of fortifications of Umayyad chronology are distributed unevenly throughout the region, although, as we have indicated, they are located in strategic places that allow controlling the territory, especially communication routes and areas of capture of mining-metallurgical resources. Although material

culture indicates that occupation persists during the North African period in some of these *ḥuṣūn*, there is material evidence of their construction during the Umayyad period. They do not respond, according to our interpretation, to the functionality of the fortifications of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, linked to the state interest to stop the Christian advance, nor to those of the late medieval Christian period, due to the border problems with Portugal. Within this set of fortified settlements "dry stone", we observe a diachronic in its occupation and a distribution that seems to indicate multiple factors in the choice of location. Its constructive characteristics present similarities with other fortifications of *Garb al-Andalus*, although divergences are also observed. We find fortified settlements that have been occupied during the emiral stage and that could be linked to the Muladí revolts (Castillo de las Peñas de Aroche), and fortified settlements occupied during the caliphate-taifa stage, located next to communication routes, in possible territorial limits and with intervisibility with other fortified settlements (Santa Marta I, Alto del Castillo or Castillo del Cuerno). Also in some cases they have cisterns, which denotes certain stability and not, simple shelters for cases of need, such as *Šigūns*a (Sierra de Gigonza). Others are fortified settlements linked to the exploitation of resources, and could be useful both as a sporadic refuge for populations and as territorial landmarks (El Castillejo and Castillo de Salomón).

On the other hand, Almonaster la Real, head of a district, responds to an urban fence fortification, to which a territory with fortified settlements and linked to the state interest of controlling the territory, such as the collection of taxes, could be subordinated. According to these functions we can establish a classification from the constructive and polyorcetic models, since the typology of the constructions can indicate the link to one process or another. Its function was related to the defense needs of rural communities, with the control of the territory and with the exploitation of resources, as a consequence of the process of castillamiento that takes place in the emiral stage, especially due to the muladi revolts. This functionality reflects a complex reality in which we must consider both the territorial and temporal planes. The defensive system of these fortifications disappears after the Umayyad stage but some persist until after the Christian conquest, when the settlers and the new geopolitical conditions determine a series of changes in the settlement that force an occasional occupation during the late medieval stage. In this way, the fortified settlements of the Umayyad period can respond to the following assumptions: linked to Muladí revolts, linked to rural settlement, *ḥuṣūn*-refuge type, linked to the central political power that responds to a model of control of the territory, either of administrative limits such as territorial landmarks or of the exploitation

of resources and that can be classified as rural or urban, as district seat.

The Andalusian polyorcética during the North African period in Sierra Morena Occidental, is roughly signified by the use of rammed earth in factories. The rammed earth factory is used with the application of an important presence of stone binders, slag, bricks and ceramics. The so-called common or simple rammed earth predominates, although the mixed rammed earth is also present, where other types of factories are incorporated, such as rows of bricks or masonry and the rammed earth chained with brick factories in the corners of the towers. The high module predominates, with a height of 80/85 cm and a length of 2.50/2.60 m. They have ribbon decoration with lime mortar simulating isodome rigging ashlars on the exterior walls. The towers are quadrangular or rectangular, documenting a polygonal plan in some cases. They may have chambers that have flared loopholes, although they usually have terraces at the height of the adarves. There are protruding footings or paws at the base of canvases and towers. The main access doors are in a bend and are located inside towers. The poternas are arranged on the flanks opposite the main entrance. Based on the example of the poterna of the Puerta de la Reina (Aroche), presumably they would have decoration. The adarves have a width between 1.75 and 2 m, a parapet with a width of 0.50 m, with merlature and without stops.

These castles (Moura, Noudar, Serpa, Aroche or Almonaster la Real) were erected as a passive defense against the Portuguese advance, with the same functionality as the late medieval fortresses that formed the Galician Band, to defend the western flank of the Guadalquivir Valley. This need for defense against the constant threat of the Christian kingdoms was not specific to the mountain region, but meant the development of a program of military architecture between the 2nd half of the twelfth century and the beginning of the s. XIII in other parts of the peninsular southwest. Stylistic and typological arguments have served to establish chronologies during that time period to the fortresses of southern Portugal, Extremadura and Western Andalusia. The fortifications of the North African stage can also be included in the definition of *ḥuṣūn*, but according to their functionality we can differentiate four types of fortification: urban fence, *qaṣaba*, towers and rural fortifications. In summary, the Almohad polyorcética in Sierra Morena Occidental is characterized by common features that can be extended to other points of *Garb al-Andalus*, although there are elements that characterize the military architecture of the Almohad period, such as the antemuros, which have not been verified in the area.

The evidence on domestic architecture in Aracena, Aroche and Moura is relevant for the analysis of the Andalusian settlement. Its characteristics indicate

that the model of other geographical points is present in this area. The criteria for the definition of a house in Mértola, Saltés or Seville can also be applied in the case of the homes of Aracena and Moura, although there are logical differences in terms of dimensions, quality of materials and decorations. The model is close to the constructions found in these urban centers and differs from the houses excavated in other population contexts, from Garb al-Andalus or from other areas of the peninsular geography, which have been classified as rural settlements without further definition or as farmhouses. The floor of the houses is distributed around the courtyard, with a central location, with environments of multiple functions, among which have been identified rooms with or without *alhanías*, hallways, kitchens and latrines. Therefore, it is integrated into the definition of the complex modular unit structured around a patio, or "courtyard-house". The compartments are different in terms of their dimensions and location on the floor of the house according to their functionality. The entrance doors to the houses, which had a threshold, are located in one of the side bays. Lime mortar was used for the wall coverings and parietal decoration to the almagra is documented forming baseboards or floors, but without geometric or vegetal motifs. Repairs are attested in the pavement, either in the replacement of the material (lime mortar by brick) or in the decoration, which indicates a special interest in its maintenance. The existence of pipes, with a careful design in their layout, also infers in the preservation of the domestic environment. In summary, its characteristics are: plant with hierarchy of compartments, a patio with special presentation care that articulates the structure, the presence of an elaborate domestic hydraulics and decorative elements with almagra paint on walls and floors (Romero and Rivera, 2020).

We not only try to characterize settlement from domestic architecture, but also to discern the degree of urbanization, that is, to establish whether domestic architectural evidence allows us to define the urban or rural condition of settlements, as well as categorize urban spaces, minimizing the subjectivity of the definitions of Arab sources. A conditioning factor in the urban configuration of Aracena was the topographic slope of the hill, which forced the disposition of the houses in a staggered way, with bays at different levels and a second floor isolating the patio and the rest of the house, the thickness of the bearing walls, the attachment of rooms to the rocky outcrop or the arrangement of the facades of the houses of a block with a similar orientation. These characteristics are factors of urban core planning. The grouping of houses consecutively, with the same orientation, where a road runs that allows access to domestic structures and organizes the space according to the contour lines, indicate an urban plot in block. To this is added the existence of sanitary pipes in that public space. The grouping of the domestic structures is carried out in an adjoining way, since their spatial organization shares dividing walls between neighbors, they are not isolated, they are arranged in plots and the roads are arranged according to the contour lines. It is a way of organizing an urban fabric, in a compact and structured way. The characteristics in terms of topography, internal organization of the housing registry, the typology and morphology of the settlement, and the functionality of the habitat allow us to approach its definition as an urban nucleus. Although its extension does not allow defining the settlement of Aracena as a city, it cannot be considered as a strictly rural settlement, since it presents characteristic features of the urban world. To this we must add its strategic location for the control of the territory, which distances it from settlements destined exclusively to rural exploitation. The settlement of Aracena has a certain territorial category, both for the above, and for the material culture exhumed during the excavations (Canto et alii, 2015; Romero and Rivera 2020). We consider that it would be the economic, religious and administrative center of the surrounding territory, but that it does not reach the category of city. This contrasts with Aroche, which is cited by sources as madīna and as an administrative center, corroborated by military architecture. The same happens with other nuclei that can provide us with a vision of the category of the populations of Sierra Morena Occidental, such as Almonaster la Real, head of a district, and Moura, which have urban fence and mosque.

The religious practices of Islam are materialized in the presence of prayer buildings or in funeral practices. For this reason, we have paid attention to the so-called archaeology of ritual, where the analysis of mosques and necropolises is integrated, with attributes from which information can be deduced through the analysis of religious architecture and the funerary record. One of the best preserved Andalusian buildings is the hermitage of the Conception of Almonaster la Real, model of an Islamic oratory (Jimenez, 1975; 2005). Its characteristics can be extrapolated to the mosques that would rise in other locations: Moura, Aroche or Aracena. The Andalusian settlement that has been detected in these populations raises the hypothesis of the existence of Islamic temples, as evidenced by the inscription of Moura that commemorates the construction of the *şawma'a* by *al-Mu'taḍid*, the representation in the council seal of Aroche of a minaret topped with yâmûr, or the results of geophysical prospecting in the Priory Church of Aracena. These data advocate the existence in these population centers of oratories for religious practices, which after the conquest became Christian temples under the invocation of Santa María, one of the indications to trace their existence.

There are few archaeologically excavated necropolises in this territory although the funerary record is verified by the presence of funerary epigraphy in other settlements. The *maqbara* of the Sierra del Coto allows us to have a sample to assess population aspects through the 57 burials that have been documented. The necropolis embodies the characteristics of the funeral ritual that dictate the Islamic precepts that materialize in the aspects of the location of the *maqbara*, the total absence of grave goods, the typology of the burials and the position of the bodies. The funeral ritual is based on burials in graves, with a right lateral decubitus position of the individuals (Delgado and Pérez, 2015). This *maqbara* allows having a sample of the population of the Andalusian period in Sierra Morena Occidental. A population with a high degree of mortality in pre-adult individuals (35.92%) and adults (53.84%), where a low percentage of 10.16% reaches the category of mature population, and in which it is found that there is hardly any differentiation by sex (Delgado and Pérez, 2015). The discovery of funerary epigraphs in Moura, Noudar, Castillo del Cuerno or Almonaster is an indication of the existence of necropolis associated with the settlement with dating from the mid-tenth century to the 2nd half of the twelfth century.

The settlement of the southwest of al-Andalus was organized between the cities of Beja, Seville, Mérida, Badajoz and Niebla, and in its ordering a series of localities that play a secondary role are integrated: *Mîrtula*, *Walba*, *Šaltîs*, *Šanta Marîya*, *Ukšûnuba*, *Ŷabal al-'Uyûn*, *Šillb* or *Šariša*. A 3rd level in the territorial organization is occupied by the population centers of Sierra Morena Occidental. In this territory converged the administrative limits of the provinces of Niebla, Seville, Mérida, Beja and *Firrīš* during the Umayyad period, and the borders between the kingdoms of the *aftasíes* of Badajoz and the *abadíes* of Seville in the Taifa era. During the integration phase of al-Andalus into the North African empires, the territorial organization continued to be administered by Seville, the governing center of the Almoravid and Almohad policy. The administration of the territory was carried out by *aqālīm*, whose limits are difficult to specify although we have the references to the demarcation of the terms of the villas during the late medieval period. The tendency at the time of the Christian conquest was to respect the terms of the Andalusian era. It is a coherent response to a territorial disposition articulated in a dispersed settlement but subordinated to governing centers. The districts had a population nucleus that articulated the administrative territory, as indicated by the textual mentions of Almonaster and Aroche, a paper endorsed by archaeological evidence. On the other hand, more controversial is the identification of *Qaṭrašāna* as a settlement, since its role as iqlīm is confirmed, its reality has been valued more as a territorial reference than as a population center. The toponym *Qaṭrašāna* has traditionally been identified with Cortegana and dialectic has originated between the authors who defend this identification (García Sanjuán, 2003) and those who choose to locate it in Aracena (Pérez Macías, 2001). The arguments systematized in a critical way support the defense of the identification of *Qaṭrašāna* with Aracena. There are justifications in the assimilation of *Qaṭrašāna* with Aracena according to criteria: geographical, due to its location in the eastern part of the mountain region; administrative, for a wide jurisdiction that has been observed since late medieval times, which is heir to the Andalusian stage, and for presenting greater territorial coherence; historical, for the importance verified by documentary sources in the future of the region; archaeological, for the documentation of a material record that evidences an important population nucleus since Caliphate times; and toponymic, for a name not exempt from similarity and that requires a specific study (Romero and Rivera, 2020).

The material culture presents characteristics analogous to the whole of the peninsular southwest, since forms and decorations present in other parts of *Garb al-Andalus* are documented, so we are facing a production with common features, but that does not hide symptoms of local elaborations (Romero, Rivera and Pérez, 2012). An ergological set where foreign productions are also present that indicate patterns of commercial exchanges. This assessment is induced by the presence and/or absence of certain material elements, such as ceramics decorated in Green and Manganese or Dry Rope. The documentation and weight acquired by this type of sumptuary-type pottery in the ergological ensemble is an indicator of the places that have the greatest economic capacity and perform their function as governing centers or organizers of the settlement or as enclaves of itineraries through which trade routes run. The presence of the decoration of Cuerda Seca on the left bank of the Guadiana contrasts with the absence in the settlements of the Huelva and Badajoz mountains. The type of decoration engobe to the almagra, which is widespread throughout the geographical area along successive chronological moments, from the emiral stage to the Almohad era, is elements to evaluate its distribution by certain geographical areas. There is a local production, but there is also a supply through other producing centers since an influence of types and decorations is detected in the features of some types of emiral and caliphal pottery. The regional trade channels had to be expanded from that moment on, since there are other production centers that supply the market and have a superregional character. The morphology and ceramic decorations during the Almohad period present a greater uniformity in our territorial scope, at the same time that diversity is gained, that is, there is a greater

30

diversification of the ceramic repertoire during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, a circumstance that agrees with the rest of the studies carried out in the ceramics of Garb al-Andalus.

The ceramic sets follow the most common typological patterns of the Islamic repertoires, but for the most part they are local productions that show a low level of exchanges, as evidenced in the main population centers although exceptions must be established, since in these localities ergological elements are documented that denote a more sumptuary character, which would indicate the concentration of commercial exchanges in those points where administrative and economic activities converge. In rural settlements in the Moura area, high percentages of manual or slow lathe pottery, and a higher proportion of storage and cooking vessels, have been documented. This situation offers a strong contrast with what happens in other sites, such as those in the countryside of Huelva or in Mértola. Other evidence, of a faunal type or numismatic findings, denotes the existence of a trade network between the coastal area and the interior of the territory, as well as with Seville. In this territory no industrial production was generated during the Andalusian period according to the evidence, but was intended for local or regional self-consumption. This does not mean that the presence of surpluses or some type of economic activity favored commercial exchanges with other areas of Garb al-Andalus. The textual references to the collection of taxes, to products such as flax, tanning or honey, and the archaeological evidence on the production of iron could be the object of a commercial activity with the administrative centers of the territory that implies the generation of resources. What we still do not know is the degree of intensity it reached, but with the current data a low commercial level is inferred, which is a symptom of the marginality of the area, of its rural and peripheral character. We can point out that a framework of relationship is established between this rural territory and the surrounding cities, which become a peripheral market for a limited production that did not generate a volume of surpluses capable of being referred to in Arab sources, except with some products.

The natural environment in Sierra Morena Occidental, with scarce capacities for the development of agricultural practices, conditions the uses towards livestock and forestry practices. Geographical features are corroborated by historical data and paleoenvironmental analyses. The limitations of the cereal-type agricultural productive capacity of this territory do not exclude its production, as detected by the presence of manual mills in the Andalusian settlements. Agriculture was one of the basic resources of the Andalusian period, including the novelty of irrigation. The irrigated spaces in the surroundings of the settlements became an alternative to extensive crops, at the same time that the typical production of the Mediterranean world based on cereals and olive groves points to self-consumption.

During the Middle Ages the climatic conditions of the territory we analyzed were not substantially different from the current ones, although there have been alterations that have had an impact on the vegetation. We think that the greatest degree of landscape change is due to modifications of an antrópico nature. These changes have had to be produced by the various productive systems and territorial implantation, that is, the settlement that has been generated locally by the communities that have inhabited the territory in the successive stages of History. Among the antrópico factors that have modified the natural dynamics of vegetation are mining-metallurgical activities, as evidenced in the settlements of the third and second millennium BC of the Pyrite Strip and the Huelva Sierra, as well as agro-livestock practices, by which the environment would be subjected to logging processes, arson, grazing and deforestation, causing the decrease of tree masses. This process seems to be linked in Sierra Morena Occidental more to livestock than to cereal cultivation, giving rise to the configuration of the dehesa. This is reflected in the plant regeneration with species that are closely linked to the practices of fires and deforestation of the forest. During the Roman period, where there is a higher incidence of settlement, according to paleoenvironmental studies there is a degradation of tree cover due to the increase in cultivation and livestock activities in the environment. When anthropogenic factors, i.e. the incidence of settlement, decrease, the ecosystem tends to recover. This circumstance is extensible to the Andalusian period, as evidenced in Aracena, where there is a change in the arboreal landscape. From an important forest cover to deforestation, product of antrópico pressure for two main reasons: the constructive activities in the settlement and the incidence of the livestock herd, although we do not rule out the impact of mining-metallurgical activity (López et alii, 2015). Crops, especially cereals, do not seem to have a responsibility for deforestation, since, in contrast to other bordering regions (Tierra Llana de Huelva, Valle del Guadalquivir and Cuenca Media del Guadiana), there are a series of limitations in agricultural productive capacity. In the central area of the mountain region the density of the tree cover seems to be maintained, as witnessed in the maintenance of the oak grove during the late medieval period. Therefore, the evidence seems to indicate a productive system of forest and livestock base during the Andalusian era in Sierra Morena Occidental, although we do not rule out the complementarity of mining-metallurgical exploitations.

In the pollen diagram of the Castle of Aracena during the XII-XIII centuries there are indicators of grazing pressure, that is, the existence of a livestock herd in the vicinity of the site (López et alii, 2015). This

31

has been corroborated by the faunal set that has been analyzed, which allows the understanding of the economic dynamics during this period, especially when written sources have not left information on livestock practices, except for some citation on beekeeping. This is especially relevant in a region whose geographical characteristics favor livestock production. The study has resulted in a very diverse set of species, predominantly domestic species: pigs, cattle, goats and sheep, as well as horses and poultry. The hunting of wild animals, such as deer and wild boar, has also been documented. Some remains of rabbits, hares, and several carnivores (dogs, wolves, cats, lynx, and bear) have been identified. Although rare, the remains of marine molluscs testify to their occasional use and the probable existence of a commercial network of these coastal resources in the territory. The information offered by nearby settlements denotes a harmony in terms of species, with the exception of the genus suido, and evidences the livestock activities that prevailed (Valente et alii, e.p.).

One of the documented economic activities are mining extractive techniques and metallurgical processes, which basically continue to use the same processes as during the Roman period, although the type of ore and the volume of production change. The archaeo-metallurgical record of Sierra Morena Occidental is increasing with new data and this highlights the importance of mining-metallurgical activity in *al-Andalus* (Pérez Macías, 2008). Although there are textual testimonies of Arab authors about the production of silver in Ṭuṭāliqa, the steel industry is the one that takes on a greater role, although the scale of its industrial performance cannot be established. Different types of iron ores are extracted: gossan and magnetite, for processing by bleeding furnaces (Pérez Macías, 2008). The economic importance is reflected in a territorial organization based on the subordination of the places of extraction/processing of mineral resources to fortified settlements and the governing centers of the *āqālim*. Other types of transformation activities are textiles, such as the cultivation of flax attested by Arab sources and archaeological evidence, leather tanning or the manufacture of construction materials.

The Christian conquest of Sierra Morena Occidental was developed through a unique model, characterized by its heterogeneity in times and protagonists. It caused conflictive political situations and litigation between the various actors that led the occupation of the territory (Portugal, Castilla y León and the military orders of the Hospital, Temple and Santiago) which ended up generating decades of instability and insecurity and slowing down its repopulation (Romero and Rivera, 2012). On the political change that took place in the thirteenth century, two questions are clear. The entry of Portuguese troops and military orders

snatching property from the Andalusian population, and the dispute of the territory by the Portuguese and Castilian monarchies until the definitive Treaty of Alcañices of 1297, although with the Treaty of Badajoz of 1267 it had passed to the nominal control of Castile and León (Pérez Embid, 1995).

The Andalusian defense of the territory was lacking a political power to maintain it, so the process of conquest was accelerated through the formulas of capitulation and military takeover. The analysis of the Christian conquest from the archaeological record of Aracena allows us to assess the use of violence, since it is verified the dismantling of the domestic architecture of the Andalusian stage, strata with abundant presence of ashes, the presence of war material or the fragmentary state and the location in situ of the material culture. Faced with this evidence we find a gap of information on the use of violence in the register of Moura, Noudar, Aroche or Almonaster. This corroborates what was indicated by the sources for the conquest of other populations that were taken by capitulation, or by means of siege and military takeover. A point not resolved by the investigation is the date of the conquest. Except for the references of the documentary sources on Moura, Serpa or Montemolín, several hypotheses had been considered that coincide in the establishment of a period of 23 years, in the time interval between 1230/1234 and 1253, when the populations of Serpa, Moura, Aroche and Aracena were taken. Given the exhaustion of the information provided by historical documentation, the archaeological record has been resorted to through evidence of radiocarbon and numismatic dating that indicates an intermediate chronology of that time period, the decade of the 40s of the XIIIth century.

After the Christian conquest, the settlement is articulated around the main Andalusian nuclei, although we must differentiate two chronological moments that cover the 2nd half of the s. XIII. The Portuguese occupation of the territory focuses on the Andalusian nuclei (Moura, Serpa, Noudar, Aroche and Aracena), although ex novo points also arise that are justified as territorial milestones that are the precedent of the process of castillamiento of the s. XIV, which seeks to attract population. To promote repopulation, privileges are granted that become the legal systems of these populations. The temporary development is not synchronic, which is motivated by the establishment of the border, since at first territorial claim is sought with de facto policies, legal security and protection of populations after the treaties of Badajoz and Alcañices. This trend is also observed during the 2nd half of the s. XIII in the possessions of the military orders, where privileges are granted and the emergence of population centers within the *encomiendas* is favored. In the case of the royal land dependent on the kingdom of Seville,

the settlement of population in Andalusian nuclei is observed, but spontaneously, without the granting of privileges (*fueros*), although later ex novo settlements arise outside of a planning by the council of Seville. Faced with this reality and the events that occur: insecurity, territorial claims, military conflicts, etc., a new policy is executed based on the construction of castles, a process of castillamiento, to guarantee the repopulation of the territory that began in the mid-thirteenth century. It develops from the end of that century and during the first half of the s. XIV, moment in which the Galician Band is formalized in the Land of Seville. In front of this set of fortifications stand the Banda Lusitana and the fortresses of Extremadura in the domains of the Military Orders, which originates a high density of castles in Sierra Morena Occidental. Subsequently, the political and economic circumstances of the fifteenth century propitiate the demographic growth and, therefore, the occupation of the territory in a spontaneous way through small populations subordinated to the localities that had castles, which become the governing centers. It is the development and rise of atomized settlement.

The current settlement of Sierra Morena Occidental has its origin in the Andalusian stage, when, faced with the process of ruralization of society that occurs after the Roman stage, the main population centers that articulate the territory arise: Aroche, Moura, Serpa, Almonaster, Aracena although we can not consider them as cities as can be seen from the assessments made by Arab sources. We interpret that they respond to the policy of the Umayyad state after the muladi revolts, which concentrates the population in the face of a hypothetical dispersion of the population during the emiral stage. The sequence of occupation from caliphal moments indicates the beginning of an urban model in those nuclei in which the settlement is maintained during the late medieval stage. It is in those moments when a pattern of settlement is articulated that knows successive transformations during the process of repopulation of the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries. The archaeological record has provided us with data and information that contribute to knowing society and, especially, the medieval settlement in Sierra Morena Occidental. Knowledge has been generated that answers a series of questions about the Andalusian period in this territory, but there are still many stages left on the road we must travel. We are convinced that the archaeological discipline will help to solve the gaps in historical information of a period and a geographical area that deserve greater attention from historical research.

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Fig. 1: Location of Sierra Morena Occidental in the Southwest of the Iberian Peninsula

Fig. 2: 1.- Almonaster la Real; 2.- Aracena; 3.- Aroche; 4.- Moura; 5.- Peña de Arias Montano (Alajar); 6.- Serpa
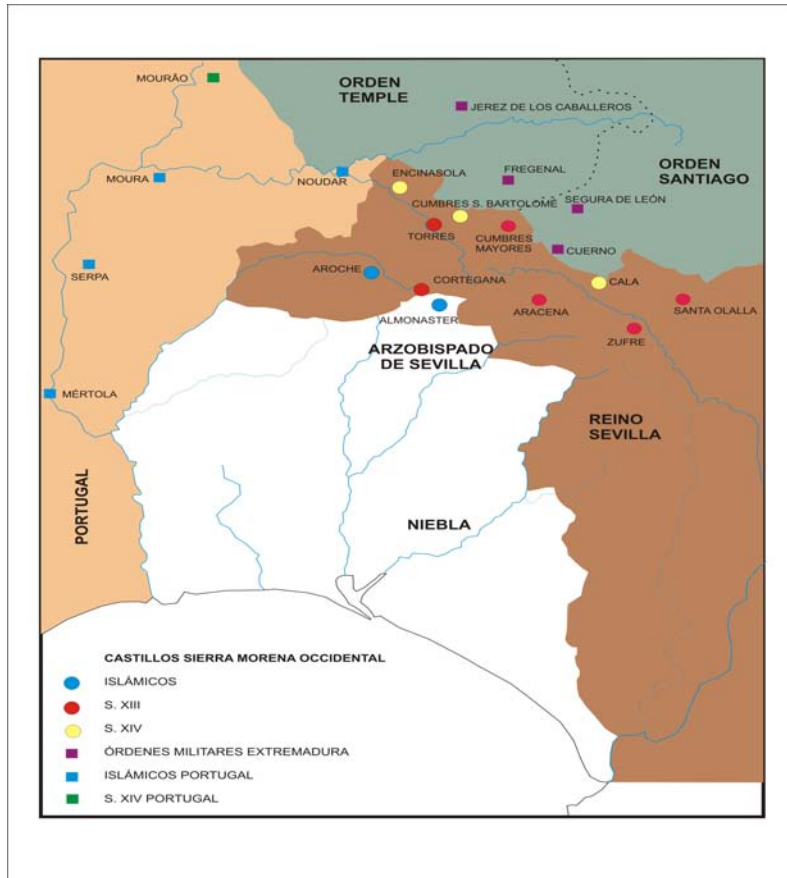
Fig. 3: Almonaster la Real Mosque

Fig. 4: Distribution of medieval castles in Sierra Morena Occidental