



Studies of the early medieval pottery of al-Andalus

JOSÉ CRISTÓBAL CARVAJAL LÓPEZ

MIGUEL JIMÉNEZ PUERTAS

This paper presents a review of the studies of early medieval (Amiral and Caliphal) pottery in al-Andalus. It opens with a discussion of the first archaeological and ceramics surveys, including an assessment of their historical and theoretical contexts and their relevance to the developing discipline. After discussion of the contributions and also shortcomings of current approaches, the article closes by sketching the direction of future research.

Pottery is one of the aspects of Andalusi archaeology on which much work has been done, and it has offered, accordingly, some fundamental perspectives on Islamic society in Iberia. Indeed, from the 1970s the field of ceramic studies has produced some of the most important innovations in Spanish and Portuguese medieval archaeology. However, it is also true that these studies have not always been either well applied or well directed. The current theoretical and practical approaches of most archaeologists working on al-Andalus are based on obsolete principles, and a re-evaluation is urgently needed. There is no institution with a programme of research specifically dedicated to this aspect of material culture, despite the general acknowledgement of its great importance and potential.

The goal of this article is to analyse briefly the history of research on Andalusi pottery, particularly that of the early Middle Ages (eighth to tenth centuries) (Fig. 1). A reflection on the state of current practice will follow, which will explain the main issues at stake and the approaches that

* We would like to thank Prof. Florin Curta (University of Florida) for the invitation to present the results of our research at the 43rd Congress of Medieval Studies held in Kalamazoo (2008), for encouraging us to write this article, and for making its publication possible. He also revised our text thoroughly and offered essential suggestions and corrections, making our English far more understandable. His work has been further improved by Susan Vincent's editing, and for that thanks are also due. Finally, we would like to thank the archaeologists who work in THARG, for putting all their work at our disposal. A special debt of gratitude is owed to Prof. A. Malpica and to Dr. J.M. Martín Civantos.



Fig. 1 Map of al-Andalus, showing the main places mentioned in the text

have been adopted. We will close by considering directions for future research on the material culture of this period.

Archaeology and Andalusí ceramics

The Spanish and Portuguese nations, which were founded on the defeat of al-Andalus, have systematically ignored the Islamic contribution to their respective cultures. An intellectual stance originating in the Romantic period treated al-Andalus as a lost civilization, and in many respects viewed the Islamic heritage as nothing more than a quasi-mythical ingredient of Iberian particularism. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but especially after the Spanish Civil War (1936–9), the study of al-Andalus made tremendous progress primarily as the result of the work of foreign (R. Dozy and E. Lévi-Provençal) and Spanish Arabists (J. Simonet and E. García).¹ However, most historians paid little, if any attention to the Muslim world, with the exception of the debate on the

¹ R. Dozy, *Histoire des musulmans d'Espagne: jusqu'à la conquête de l'Andalousie par les Almoravides (711–1110)* (Leyden, 1861); E. Lévi-Provençal, *Histoire de l'Espagne musulmane*, 2nd edn (Paris and Leiden, 1950); F.J. Simonet, *Historia de los mozárabes de España: deducida de los mejores y más auténticos testimonios de los escritores christianos y árabes* (Madrid, 1903); E. García and E. Lévi-Provençal, *El siglo XI en primera persona: las 'Memorias' de 'Abd Allah, último Rey Ziri de Granada destronado por los Almorávides (1090)* (Madrid, 1981).

1 influence of Islamic culture in the formation of an Iberian (either Spanish
2 or Portuguese) society. Scholars prominent here were A. Castro and C.
3 Sánchez-Albornoz.²

4 The traditional starting point for the study of Islamic pottery (within
5 the discipline of art history) is the publication in 1888 of Gómez-
6 Moreno's small book.³ Gómez-Moreno used materials recovered from
7 occasional excavations to shed light on the location of the Islamic city of
8 Ilbirah (south-eastern Spain). Many at that time believed it to be on
9 the site of modern Granada, while others favoured a location at the
10 foot of the Sierra Elvira, some fourteen kilometres to the north-west.
11 Gómez-Moreno's book employed historical and archaeological argu-
12 ments (including drawings of artefacts, primarily pottery) in support of
13 the second hypothesis. Madinah Ilbirah, an Islamic city that existed
14 between the eighth and eleventh centuries, thus marked an early interest
15 in Andalusi ceramics (Fig. 2).

16 After Gómez-Moreno, many studies on Andalusi pottery appeared,
17 many of them with less concern for historical interpretation than for
18 artistic matters. This was, of course, a consequence of the antiquarian
19 approach to archaeology, in which the aesthetic value of every piece of
20 pottery took precedence over its historical context. As a consequence,
21 pottery remains entering museum collections came with very little infor-
22 mation on their archaeological context. This is not to say that there was
23 no value to these early studies: they had, after all, drawn attention to an
24 aspect of medieval Iberia which had until then been completely
25 neglected. Moreover, given that most such studies were based on material
26 documentation, they provided very solid arguments, which however
27 rudimentary, were to be decisive in certain historiographic debates, such
28 as that concerning the location of Ilbirah.⁴ From the perspective of the
29 early twenty-first century they are, however, very dated pieces of research,
30

31 ² A. Castro, *La realidad histórica de España* (Mexico City, 1954); and C. Sánchez-Albornoz,
32 *España y el Islam* (Buenos Aires, 1943), *España, un enigma histórico* (Buenos Aires, 1956), and *El*
33 *drama de la formación de España y los españoles: otra nueva aventura polémica* (Barcelona, 1973).
34 Both engaged in a lively debate on the influence of al-Andalus on Spanish culture. Castro was
35 in favour of a strong influence, while Sánchez-Albornoz viewed the culture of al-Andalus as
36 essentially Spanish, with only superficial elements making it appear different, such as Islam and
37 the use of the Arabic language. Sánchez-Albornoz, like most medievalists, believed that those
38 elements did not alter the essential nature of Spanish culture, which remained the same from
39 prehistoric times. In reply, A. Castro argued that neither Spanish culture nor the Spanish nation
40 would have been possible without the participation of the Christian, Islamic, and Jewish
41 heritage of al-Andalus.

42 ³ M. Gómez-Moreno, *Medina Elvira* (Granada, 1888). The pottery of Ilbirah has been recently
43 published by C. Cano, 'Estudio sistemático de la cerámica de Madinat Ilbira (Granada)',
44 *Cuadernos de la Alhambra* 26 (1990), pp. 25–69; and J.C. Carvajal, *La cerámica de Madinat Ilbira*
45 *(Atarfe) y el poblamiento altomedieval de la Vega de Granada* (Granada, 2008).

46 ⁴ G. Rosselló, 'Reflexiones sobre *Un ensayo de sistematización . . . y otras historias*', *Arqueología y*
47 *Territorio Medieval* 6 (1999), pp. 17–28.

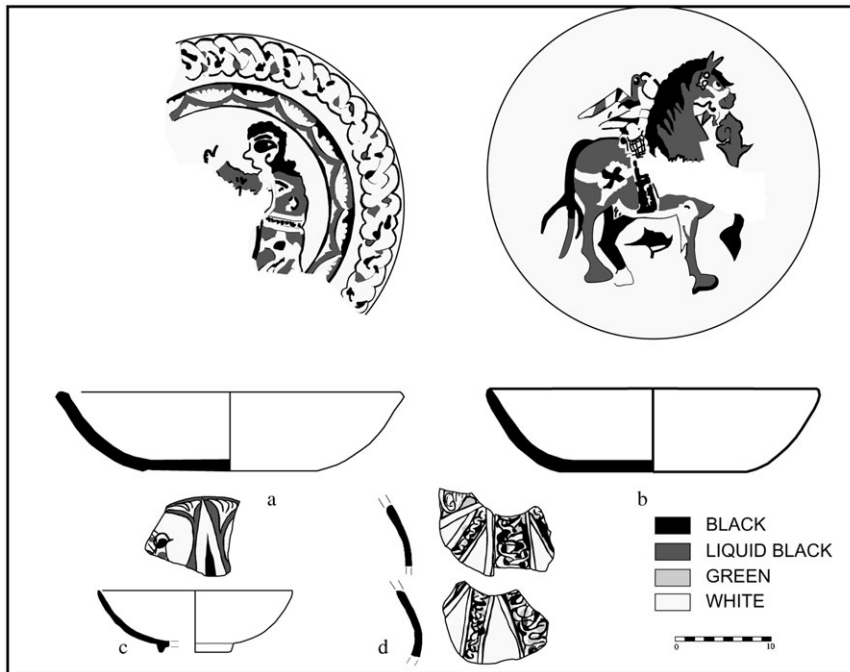


Fig. 2 Examples of glazed wares kept in the Archaeological Museum of Granada. They were found between 1872 and 1878

of no use in answering the questions raised by current historical and archaeological studies.

Following the demise of Iberian dictatorial regimes, during the late 1970s a radical change took place in the study of al-Andalus, which established medieval archaeology as an academic discipline in Spain and Portugal. Andalusí studies were at the forefront of this change, and for good reasons. This was a time for new ideas, some of which were instrumental in breaking long-established intellectual positions, the reproduction of which over several decades had been possible only because of the lack of freedom. This was also a time of great theoretical advances in medieval studies, which facilitated new approaches to the history of the Iberian Christian kingdoms and of al-Andalus.⁵ To a great extent these

⁵ Fundamental for the re-evaluation of the Visigothic kingdom and society was Abilio Barbero and Marcelo Vigil, *La formación del feudalismo en la Península Ibérica* (Barcelona, 1978). Equally significant was the publication of S. Amin, *Sobre el desarrollo desigual de las formaciones sociales* (Barcelona, 1974), with a preface by M. Barceló (the book is in fact the translation into Spanish of the first chapter of *Unequal Development: An Essay on the Social Formations of Peripheral Capitalism* (New York, 1976)). The first Marxist approach to Islamic Spain is R. Pastor, *Del*

1 advances were the result of applying historical materialist approaches to
2 data that had already been gathered. Equally significant was the introduc-
3 tion of concepts and ideas developed by anthropologists. Both were made
4 possible by the close relations between Spanish and French medievalists.
5 The adoption of those new approaches created an immediate interest in
6 the study of material conditions of life and, as a consequence, in the use of
7 archaeological evidence. This coincided with the first noticeable influence
8 of the New Archaeology, which had meanwhile become predominant in
9 English-speaking countries. This influence was particularly important for
10 the development of medieval archaeology generally. Notwithstanding,
11 most Spanish scholars, although more ready than the Portuguese to
12 promote new approaches, were more familiar with the French literature
13 and developments in French archaeology than with those in the Anglo-
14 Saxon world. As a consequence, the new ideas were received through the
15 intermediary of Italian medievalists, who maintained closer and more
16 productive contacts with Anglo-American archaeologists. This specific
17 cultural configuration is primarily responsible for the rise of a new
18 discipline in Iberia, namely medieval archaeology, which was initially
19 expected to answer specific questions formulated by historians of the
20 Middle Ages in their particular field of study. This important aspect is
21 often neglected in considering the history of medieval archaeology in
22 Iberia. Medieval archaeologists are too often believed not to be in a
23 position to ask the questions by themselves; they only need to answer those
24 formulated for them by historians. This is in sharp contrast to the situation
25 in northern Europe, where the relationship between the disciplines is
26 reversed, something which is only now beginning to occur in Iberia.⁶

27 It was particularly in studies of Andalusí pottery that those new
28 developments first became apparent. G. Rosselló's *Ensayo de sistematiza-*
29 *ción de la cerámica islámica de Mallorca*, which was published in 1978,
30 proposed a new system for the classification of pottery in the collection
31 of the Archaeological Museum in Palma de Mallorca.⁷ Rosselló's classifi-

33 *Islam al cristianismo. En las fronteras de dos formaciones económico-sociales* (Barcelona, 1975),
34 while P. Guichard, *Al-Andalus. Estructura antropológica de una sociedad islámica en Occidente*
35 (Barcelona, 1976) was based on a very influential anthropological approach.

36 ⁶ As we will see below, current theories about the rise of al-Andalus have been mainly based on
37 the archaeological evidence, since very little written information is available. The situation is
38 indeed very different from that pertaining to the late Middle Ages, in which the work of
39 archaeologists is expected either to prove or to challenge hypotheses formulated by historians.
40 Recently, however, the discipline of archaeology has been increasingly regarded as a reliable
41 source of new ideas. An excellent review is J.A. Quirós Castillo, 'Medieval Archaeology in
42 Spain', in R. Gilchrist and A. Reynolds: (eds), *Reflections: 50 Years of Medieval Archaeology,*
43 *1957–2007*, Society for Medieval Archeology Monograph 30 (London, 2009), pp. 173–89.

44 ⁷ G. Rosselló, *Ensayo de sistematización de la cerámica islámica de Mallorca* (Palma de Mallorca,
45 1978). See also his *El nombre de las cosas en al-Andalus. Una propuesta de terminología cerámica*
46 (Palma de Mallorca, 1991).

1 cation paid attention to the archaeological context and to the origin of the
2 specimens examined in order to establish a relative chronology, thus
3 moving beyond the exclusively aesthetic focus of previous art-historical
4 approaches. This same year, the first Meeting on Medieval Ceramics from
5 the Western Mediterranean took place in Valbonne (France). At that
6 meeting, J. Zozaya introduced a model for the development of Andalusí
7 pottery, which was connected with the main phases of the political history
8 of al-Andalus.⁸ Shortly after this A. Bazzana published the pottery from
9 *Sharq al-Andalus*, in eastern Spain. He proposed a model of classification
10 which was in many respects similar to Rosselló's, but also took into
11 consideration technological aspects of pottery making.⁹ These three
12 studies, by Rosselló, Zozaya and Bazzana, are very different in their
13 respective approaches to ceramic analysis. Rosselló, a prehistorian by
14 training, viewed pottery very much through the eyes of an art historian. As
15 a consequence, he was primarily concerned with producing a nomencla-
16 ture that would be appropriate for every shape of a specific use; he thus
17 developed a morphological and functional system of classification. Zozaya,
18 who had a background in Oriental Studies, was much more concerned
19 with chronology. Bazzana embraced the approach to material culture
20 advocated by French prehistorians, particularly by André Leroi-Gourhan;
21 he thus paid comparatively more attention to technology. Despite their
22 differences, however, all three authors strove to create a framework for the
23 study of Andalusí pottery. This was certainly not an accident, but a
24 reflection of the concerns of archaeological practice at that time. The new
25 interest in material culture had brought to light very large amounts of
26 pottery remains, which needed to be classified before any attempt could be
27 made to use them as evidence for historical reconstruction.

28 An equally significant development in the history of studies of
29 Andalusí pottery was the reform of the legal system in both Spain and
30 Portugal, following the demise of Franco's and Salazar's dictatorial
31 regimes. Heritage, the object of study for archaeologists, was given legal
32 status that allowed modern policies of protection. Archaeological exca-
33 vations on historical sites that were about to be restored received great
34 attention in the 1980s. This further brought to the fore new standards for
35 salvage archaeology. Such standards were developed by practitioners, who
36

37 ⁸ J. Zozaya, 'Aperçu général sur la céramique espagnole', in *La Céramique Médiévale en Mediter-*
38 *ranée Occidentale, Xe–XVe siècles* (Paris, 1982), pp. 265–96. Zozaya's model, though original, is
39 not very well grounded in the existing evidence, which in turn goes some way to explaining the
40 criticism which it immediately met.

41 ⁹ A. Bazzana, 'Céramiques médiévales: les méthodes de la description analytique appliquées aux
42 productions de l'Espagne orientale', *Mélanges de la Casa Velázquez* 15 (1979), pp. 135–85; and
43 'Céramiques médiévales: les méthodes de la description analytique appliquées aux productions
44 de l'Espagne orientale. II Les poteries décorées. Chronologie des productions médiévales',
45 *Mélanges de la Casa Velázquez* 16 (1980), pp. 57–95.

were not affiliated with any research departments or institutions of higher education, and who were interested in pottery mainly because of its potential for dating sites. At the same time, archaeologists and scholars studying ceramics suddenly found themselves responsible for a very large number of excavation finds. A preoccupation with pottery classification was therefore very much in line with the practical needs of the archaeologists in the field. Rosselló's *Ensayo de sistematización* was thus almost universally accepted as a model, despite Rosselló's warnings that his work had application only for a specific area (the island of Majorca) and for a specific period.¹⁰ New systems of classification were proposed, all of which tried without much success to account for all Andalusí ceramics. Recently it has become apparent – as will be shown below – that regional assemblages must be preferred to general models.

Searching for *the system*¹¹

Given that it is the most abundant and easy to manage object of archaeological study, for many historians and archaeologists pottery represented their first contact with the material culture of al-Andalus. It is no wonder that the works of the pioneers of the late 1970s stirred an unprecedented interest in the study of this material, under the assumption that good record-keeping was basically the same as a thorough analysis of Andalusí society. Many believed al-Andalus to have been a compact block, with a territory-wide common and homogeneous evolution; the same was assumed of Andalusí ceramics. The main objective of pottery analysis was to create (or adapt) a morphological and functional classification, which could bind together all the elements found on a site. This approach was criticized by Rosselló himself and by H. Kirchner in the late 1980s, but their criticism did not prevent the multiplication of such systems of classification.¹² Despite the fact that a number of archaeologists still regard this kind of study as the only valid endeavour in their discipline, others have by now accepted the idea of a certain distance between the pottery and the political developments of al-Andalus, while regional variants have become too important to be ignored.

¹⁰ Rosselló, 'Reflexiones sobre *Un ensayo de sistematización*', p. 22.

¹¹ This long period of research on Andalusí pottery has been excellently surveyed by V. Salvatierra and J.C. Castillo, 'Sistematizaciones y tipologías. Veinte años de investigación', *Arqueología y Territorio Medieval* 6 (1999), pp. 29–44.

¹² Rosselló, 'Reflexiones sobre *Un ensayo de sistematización*', p. 22; H. Kirchner, 'Las técnicas y los conjuntos documentales. 1: La cerámica', in M. Barceló (ed.), *Arqueología medieval. En las afueras del «Medievalismo»* (Barcelona, 1988), pp. 88–104. Kirchner attacked the very idea of a general system. She pointed out that many studies showed increased regionalism, even if their authors had chosen to ignore it.

1 Early medieval pottery has played a decisive role in the understand-
2 ing of al-Andalus. Much like the pottery of late antiquity (fifth to
3 seventh century), the understanding of medieval ceramics has radically
4 changed the views of archaeologists and historians studying the period
5 between the eighth and the tenth centuries. This was a period tradi-
6 tionally known as the 'Dark Ages', primarily because it attracted little,
7 if any, attention from archaeologists owing to its relative poverty in
8 material culture terms (with the notable exception of Caliph al-
9 Cordoba). This applied also to pottery. When its study began to be of
10 interest to historians (for reasons explained below) any concern with
11 developing all-encompassing systems dissipated, for it became clear that
12 significant differences existed between regions which could not be
13 explained by any single system.¹³ At first such differences were attrib-
14 uted to the influence of earlier Visigothic traditions maintained by the
15 local, conquered population.¹⁴ This idea has been discussed from many
16 points of view, to which we will return later. For the moment, it is
17 important to note only that despite many common elements in respect
18 to both morphology and production, there is so far more evidence for
19 a break in tradition than for a smooth transition between the pottery of
20 the Visigothic period and that of later times.¹⁵

21 That is in fact where the failure of any generalized classificatory
22 system resides. Despite the undoubtedly significant contributions such
23 methodologies have made, especially in terms of morphology and func-
24 tion, questions of regional and chronological variability remain unan-
25 swered. This is particularly – but not exclusively – problematic for
26 turbulent periods, such as the eighth and the twelfth centuries, when
27 important changes occurred in the social and political structure of
28 al-Andalus as a consequence of the Islamic and North African inva-
29 sions, respectively.¹⁶

31 ¹³ Differences are sometimes notable even between neighbouring areas, such as Vega and the coast
32 in the region of Granada, which are only forty kilometres apart. See the works mentioned
33 below, nn. 37 and 39.

34 ¹⁴ M. Ación, 'Cerámica a torno lento en Bezmiliana. Cronología, tipos y difusión', in *1º Congreso*
35 *de Arqueología Medieval Española* 4 (Zaragoza, 1988), pp. 243–67 was one of the first advocates
36 of this kind of continuity on the basis of the modelling technology.

37 ¹⁵ Moreover, the pottery of pre-Islamic Iberia is too varied to allow for a definition of any general
38 trend. See E. Serrano, *Cerámica común romana: siglos II a.C. al VII d.C. Materiales importados*
39 *y de producción local en el territorio malacitano* (Málaga, 2000) for the pottery of the southern
40 region of the Peninsula; and L. Caballero, 'Cerámicas de "época visigoda y posvisigoda" de las
41 provincias de Cáceres, Madrid y Segovia', *Boletín de Arqueología Medieval* 3 (1989), pp. 75–107,
42 for finds from the central Meseta. In addition, there are major differences between the pottery
43 in use before and after the Islamic conquest in any given region. Any of the works cited in this
44 article will produce a sufficient number of examples in that respect.

45 ¹⁶ At the Eighth International Congress of Medieval Ceramics, which took place in 2006 in
46 Ciudad Real, G. Rosselló pointed out the obscurity that still surrounds the transitional
47 centuries of Andalusí history.

The 'two societies' of al-Andalus

One of the major problems with an approach based on the idea of a general system is that it cannot explain transitions. Transitions are indeed the most attractive and, at the same time, difficult aspects in the study of eighth- to tenth-century Andalusi pottery. In order to understand why this is the case, one needs to go back to the years before the 1970s, when al-Andalus was understood in both Spain and Portugal as a basically feudal society with a number of superficial elements distinguishing it from the Christian societies in the Peninsula. At stake in this historiographic (for archaeologists played no role in this at all) debate was what influence, if any, Andalusi society had on the configuration of the later Christian society in Iberia. Some argued that Islamic culture had no major influence. Under a veneer of Arabic language and Muslim faith, the Iberian people retained their Spanish and west European character, which essentially hindered the formation of an Islamic society along the lines of its North African counterparts. By contrast, P. Guichard (whose book on al-Andalus was translated and published in Spanish before it appeared in France,¹⁷ primarily because of support from M. Barceló at the Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona) argued on the basis of written and archaeological sources, that Andalusi society was not feudal and also that it had much more in common with other Islamic societies of Asia and Africa than had previously been believed. He emphasized the elements of tribalism that would have been spread into Iberia by the arrival of a large number of Arab, and especially Berber, immigrants. Guichard's book marked a major departure from traditional approaches to the history of al-Andalus. Despite criticism targeted at specific points, Guichard's underlying idea that the Muslim conquest constituted a major break with the past is still upheld, albeit not completely accepted, by both historians and archaeologists.

Given that the publication of Guichard's book coincided with the rise of medieval archaeology as an academic discipline, many archaeologists, including Guichard himself, began looking for archaeological arguments to support his discontinuity thesis. Scholars focused on tribal elements as being the most important difference between al-Andalus and Christian society. As regards pottery, this focus is particularly obvious in the work of M. Ación, who in the mid-1980s suggested that a system of ceramic classification should allow the identification of features most typical for the production and use of pottery in each tribe.¹⁸ In the early 1990s,

¹⁷ Guichard, *Al-Andalus*.

¹⁸ M. Ación, F. Castillo, M.I. Fernández, R. Martínez, C. Peral and A. Vallejo, 'Evolución de los tipos cerámicos en el SE de al-Andalus', in *V Congreso Internacional de Cerámica Medieval en el Mediterráneo Occidental* (Rabat, 1995), pp. 125–39. See also Ación, 'Cerámica a torno lento'.

1 however, Acién published a book significantly entitled *Between Feudalism*
2 *and Islam*, which was based less on Guichard's ideas (although not in
3 opposition to them) and more on a Marxist approach, as well as his
4 previous studies in history and archaeology. In this book, Acién focused
5 on the biography of Ibn Hafsun, a *muladi* (renegade Christian converted
6 to Islam) rebel, in order to suggest the existence in al-Andalus of two
7 different, conflicting modes of production: feudalism, the legacy of the
8 Visigothic era, which implied personal ties between primary producers
9 and landlords in the form of rent payments; and the tributary mode of
10 production, which Acién viewed as of paramount importance in the
11 centralized Muslim state ruled from Cordoba by means of tax collection,
12 and which he called the 'Islamic social formation'. According to Acién,
13 the latter eventually overcame the former during the tenth century.¹⁹
14 Acién's is a version of the model first advanced by Chris Wickham, which
15 he adapted to al-Andalus.²⁰ Like Wickham's, Acién's argument was met
16 with heavy criticism. While Wickham's ideas have been refined by John
17 Haldon, Acién's model received great support from Spanish scholars,
18 even though it was not completely accepted.²¹

19 The most important scholar interested in pottery to build upon
20 Acién's ideas is S. Gutiérrez, whose research focuses on the region around
21 Alicante in eastern Spain. Gutiérrez, who worked primarily on assem-
22 blages from museum collections, identified two main technological tradi-
23 tions, one of them characterized by domestic production of pottery
24 (either hand-made or thrown on a slow-turning wheel) with a local
25 distribution, the other by the predominance of wheel-made wares dis-
26 tributed through more evolved markets. Like Acién, Gutiérrez saw in the
27 latter a system of production and distribution introduced by the Islamic
28 conquest, and associated the former with the native society of the Visig-
29 othic era and thus with a feudal mode of production.²²

30
31 ¹⁹ M. Acién, *Entre el feudalismo y el Islam. 'Umar Ibn Hafsun en los historiadores, en las fuentes y en*
32 *la historia* (Jaén, 1994; 2nd edn, 1997).

33 ²⁰ C. Wickham, 'The Other Transition: From the Ancient World to Feudalism', *Past and Present*
34 103 (1984), pp. 3–36.

35 ²¹ J. Haldon, *The State and the Tributary Mode of Production* (London, 1993). This is not the place
36 to offer a criticism of Acién's model, but neither of the authors of the present article have
37 embraced it. The most important element emerging from the barrage of criticism with which
38 his book was met is that the social reality is more complicated than the simple dichotomy rent
39 vs. tax, a point duly acknowledged by Chris Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages* (Oxford,
40 2005), p. 36. The journal *Hispania* hosted a debate in its volume 200 (1998), in which Haldon's
41 and Acién's positions were compared and contrasted with other models.

42 ²² S. Gutiérrez, *Cerámica común paleoandalusí del Sur de Alicante (ss. VII–X)* (Alicante, 1986); 'La
43 cerámica paleoandalusí del sureste peninsular (Tudmir): producción y distribución (siglos VII
44 al X)', in A. Malpica (ed.), *La cerámica altomedieval en el Sureste de al-Andalus* (Granada, 1993),
45 pp. 37–66; and *La cora de Tudmir de la Antigüedad Tardía al mundo islámico. Poblamiento y*
46 *cultura material* (Madrid and Alicante, 1996).

1 It is true that her model departed significantly from the old idea of
2 al-Andalus as a monolithic and static society, and it introduced a dynamic
3 aspect into the explanation of social configuration. In the early 1990s, this
4 was in fact the most sophisticated model of analysis, at least in terms of its
5 explanatory value as applied to Andalusí society. Its particular strength was
6 the emphasis on applying a specific theory to a specific region. However,
7 Gutiérrez's model was primarily concerned with morphology, and little, if
8 any, consideration was given to technological aspects beyond the primary
9 distinction between wares produced on a fast wheel and those on a
10 tournette. Based as it was on Acién's ideas, Gutiérrez's interpretation was
11 too simplistic. She established a direct relationship between modelling
12 technique and mode of production, without an understanding of the
13 context in which those two variables operated. It has to be said that in her
14 more recent writing Gutiérrez has moderated her views on this point.²³ The
15 debate which her initial work sparked has by now moved the discussion in
16 a somewhat different direction, namely that of the nature of the Islamic
17 state of al-Andalus. As it stands, this is no longer a discussion about pottery.
18 Before entering the details of this debate, it is important, however, to
19 review the arguments in support of the idea of Andalusí tribalism.

20 21 **Tribalism: segmentary society in al-Andalus**

22 Among the most effective critics of Acién and Gutiérrez are those inspired
23 by the work of M. Barceló and his disciples at the Universidad Autónoma
24 de Barcelona. In the field of pottery analysis, most prominent among
25 them is H. Kirchner. Barceló, a medievalist who turned to archaeology in
26 the 1980s in search of new approaches, has introduced not only Gui-
27 chard's ideas to Spain, but also S. Amin's concept of the tributary mode
28 of production.²⁴ The most important advocate of Guichard's thesis of
29 discontinuity, Barceló has gone beyond this in certain aspects of his
30 anthropological approach. He was the first to attack Acién's model for its
31 inappropriate characterization of a social formation as 'Islamic', using, as
32 it were, an ideological and religious attribute in order to define relations
33 of production. Barceló also rejected the rather simplistic explanation of
34 the history of al-Andalus as that of a conflict between the feudal and the
35

36 ²³ S. Gutiérrez Lloret, B. Gamó Paras and V. Amorós Ruiz, 'Los contextos cerámicos del Tolmo
37 de Minateda y la cerámica altomedieval en el Sudeste de la Península Ibérica', in L. Caballero
38 Zoreda, P. Mateos Cruz and M. Retuerce Velasco (eds), *Cerámicas tardorromanas y altomedie-
39 vales en la Península Ibérica. Ruptura y continuidad. Actas del II Simposio de Arqueología de
40 Mérida (7–9 de Noviembre de 2001)* (Madrid, 2003), pp. 119–68, in which the authors publish an
41 assemblage from a very good context of transition. There is no sign in this article of the
42 distinctions Gutiérrez drew in her earlier work, which were based on assemblages stored in
43 museums.

44 ²⁴ Amin, *Sobre el desarrollo*.

1 Islamic modes of production. For him, the defining aspect of Islamic
2 society in al-Andalus was tribalism, even centuries after it had ceased to
3 be purely tribal. Following Amin, Barceló viewed this as an essentially
4 communitarian organization of production and distribution processes at
5 the basic levels of society, with economic complexity restricted to the
6 higher levels of the state. He developed a methodology for the study of
7 irrigation systems (hydraulic archaeology), and used it to show the pres-
8 ence in al-Andalus of Berber tribes with communitarian systems of
9 production.²⁵

10 H. Kirchner, the member of Barceló's team of scholars who was most
11 dedicated to the study of pottery, criticized the obstinate focus on search-
12 ing for a general system of classification for Andalusi ceramics. She was
13 also a harsh critic of Gutiérrez's identification of handmade pottery or
14 pottery thrown on a slow-wheel with the remnants of the pre-conquest,
15 Visigothic population, and wheel-made pottery with their Islamic con-
16 querors. To Kirchner, different technological levels were respectively asso-
17 ciated with a domestic (on a basic or even industrial scale) and a
18 specialized mode of production (again, with either individual artisans or
19 nucleated workshops), such as described by D. Peacock.²⁶ However, this
20 does not in any way mean that one mode of production is specifically
21 Visigothic, and the other Muslim. Gutiérrez (according to Kirchner) was
22 basically wrong. In Kirchner's opinion, the domestic mode of production
23 must be associated most (but not necessarily all) of the time with Berber
24 tribal elements, who chose to live at a certain distance from the state
25 centres of al-Andalus. In support of her contention, Kirchner pointed to
26 the pottery associated with the Islamic occupation of Ibiza, in the Balearic
27 Islands, which was mostly made by Berbers in the tenth century, at a time
28 when more complex modes of production were in existence in many
29 urban centres in the Peninsula. Kirchner further developed her ideas
30 about Andalusi ceramics on the basis of material from the area in which
31 her team works, and focused primarily on the technological conditions of
32 production and distribution.²⁷

34 ²⁵ M. Barceló, 'Visperas de feudales. La sociedad de Sharq al-Andalus justo antes de la conquista
35 catalana', in Felipe Mañillo Salgado (ed.), *España. Al-Andalus. Sefarad: síntesis y nuevas perspec-
36 tivas* (Salamanca, 1990), pp. 99–112; M. Barceló (ed.), *El Sol que salió por Occidente (Estudios
37 sobre el estado omeya en al-Andalus)* (Jaén, 1993), esp. pp. 11–14 for a critique of Acien's model;
38 M. Barceló, H. Kirchner and C. Navarro, *El agua que no duerme. Fundamentos de la arqueología
39 hidráulica andalusí* (Granada, 1996); M. Barceló, 'Immigration berbère et établissements
40 paysans dans l'île d'Eivissa (902–1235): à la recherche de la logique de la construction d'une
41 nouvelle société', in *Castrum 7: Zones côtières littorales dans le monde méditerranéen au moyen âge:
42 défense, peuplement, mise en valeur* (Madrid, 1997), pp. 291–321.

43 ²⁶ D. Peacock, *Pottery in the Roman World. An Ethnoarchaeological Approach* (London, 1982).

44 ²⁷ H. Kirchner, 'Las técnicas y los conjuntos documentales'; *La ceràmica de Yàbisa. Catàleg i estudi
45 dels fons del Museu Arqueològic d'Eivissa i Formentera* (Ibiza, 2002); and 'Torneta y torno. Formas
46 de producción, distribución y uso de la cerámica andalusí. El caso de Yàbisa', in A. Malpica and

1 The major problem with Barceló's and Kirchner's ideas is that they
2 never offered a theoretical alternative to Acién's model, i.e., an alter-
3 native interpretation of the history of Andalusí society. However, this
4 was never their aim. While Barceló and Kirchner never attempted to
5 take into consideration the whole social context, in the manner of
6 Acién, they did offer an in-depth analysis of the basic processes of
7 production, something which cannot be found anywhere in Acién's
8 work. Despite the sometimes complex presentation of their theoretical
9 background, Barceló's and Kirchner's works stand out for their remark-
10 able coherence and consistency based on archaeological and written
11 sources, the understanding of which has been gained and structured
12 through many years of thorough research. These studies are currently a
13 most valuable source of suggestions and ideas for anyone attempting to
14 find alternatives to traditional and even not-so traditional models.
15 Their major contribution consists precisely in being a permanent
16 reminder for historians and archaeologists alike to keep on thinking
17 about, and improving, the established interpretation of Andalusí
18 society. It is largely in reaction to that interpretation that a new thesis
19 on the origin of al-Andalus has been recently put forward, reformulat-
20 ing and adapting some of Acién's ideas.

21 22 The state in al-Andalus

23 Acién proposed two different modes of production for early al-Andalus,
24 and pointed to the tenth century as the historical moment in which
25 one of them, the tributary, overcame the feudal mode of production (in
26 which he included the tribal society), thus becoming the basis for the
27 establishment of the Islamic state. In this way, the state was identified
28 with the social formation typical for al-Andalus: had the state never
29 appeared there would not have been any al-Andalus. Even though
30 Acién drew inspiration from Guichard's ideas, in rejecting tribalism as
31 the key factor in the development of al-Andalus he was definitely
32 moving in a different interpretive direction. In fact, Acién went as far
33 as to suggest that the rebellions at the time of the *fitna* (the 'anarchy'
34 period of the late ninth and early tenth century) were not inter-tribal
35 conflicts, as Guichard had suggested in 1976, but confrontations

36
37 J. C. Carvajal (eds), *Estudios de cerámica tardorromana y altomedieval* (Granada, 2008), pp.
38 221–45. For her critique of Gutiérrez's model, see H. Kirchner, 'Indígenas y extranjeros.
39 Cerámica y etnicidad en la formación de al-Andalus', *Arqueología Espacial* 21 (1999), pp. 125–72.
40 For Gutiérrez's reply, see S. Gutiérrez, '¿Arqueología o deconstrucción? A propósito de la
41 formación de al-Andalus desde las afueras de la arqueología', *Arqueología Espacial* 22 (2000), pp.
42 223–54; with a counter reply in H. Kirchner, 'Indígenas y extranjeros, otra vez', *Arqueología*
43 *Espacial* 22 (2000), pp. 255–84.

1 between different Arab groups with interests in a territorial dominion
2 based in 'feudal' ties.²⁸

3 In the 1990s, the old debate between advocates and critics of feudalism
4 turned into a debate about the role of the Islamic state, as opposed to
5 tribalism, in the rise of al-Andalus. At stake in this new debate was the
6 very nature of the Umayyad state. 'Tribalists' maintained that this state
7 was the result of a reorganization of tribal relations between Arabs,
8 Berbers and pre-Islamic settlers, which replicated the situation in the east.
9 Critics pointed out that the process had already taken place in the east,
10 and that it therefore did not need to begin in Iberia. Those who con-
11 quered the Visigothic kingdom were already members of a 'post-tribal'
12 society who were bent on organizing a new state in al-Andalus, either as
13 a dependent branch of the Caliphate or, at some point in the eighth
14 century, as a separate state.²⁹ A subsidiary, yet equally important debate
15 surrounds the organization of the lands newly conquered in the Penin-
16 sula. 'Tribalists' hold that this organization was the result of a decentral-
17 ized network of tribes and native communities; their opponents maintain
18 that it was based on the optimizing and pacifying intervention of the
19 state, which was enhanced in several areas by the inclusion in its appa-
20 ratus of prominent elements of the Visigothic state. Most historians
21 favour various combinations of these two extremes, with one or the other
22 factor prevailing. Notwithstanding the historiographic significance of this
23 debate, it has until now produced not a single study of pottery in favour
24 of either interpretation. As we will now see, this is primarily because of
25 the reorientation of ceramic studies, especially in reference to the early
26 Middle Ages.

27 28 **Evolution of pottery studies: the importance of territorial analyses**

29 We have pointed out the reasons for which pottery studies flourished
30 between the late 1970s and the early 1990s. However, given the time
31 and energy spent on devising a general system of classification, the
32 results fell far short of expectations, and in some cases even led to
33 confusion. Equally disappointing were the attempts to demonstrate

34
35 ²⁸ Guichard clarified his position on tribalism in al-Andalus in his *Les musulmans de Valence et la*
36 *reconquête (Xe–XIIe siècles)* (Damascus, 1990). Acién, *Entre el feudalismo y el Islam*, pp. 64, 73,
37 and 90–1 explicitly compares groups of different ethnic origin (Christians and Arabs) and
38 presents their similar stratification in a seigneurial sense, as well as their practice of indiscrimi-
39 nate violence towards other groups, irrespective of their ethnicity.

40 ²⁹ Most prominent among the 'tribalists' were Barceló and Guichard, while the key figures among
41 the advocates of a prominent role of the state were G. Martínez de Gros, *L'idéologie Omeyyade:*
42 *la construction de la légitimité du Califat de Cordoue (Xe–XIe siècles)* (Madrid, 1992); and E.
43 Manzano, *Conquistadores, emires y califas. Los Omeyas y la formación de al-Andalus* (Barcelona,
44 2006).

1 general development theories by means of information obtained
2 directly from an examination of pottery, for there is a long conceptual
3 gap between ceramic remains and such levels of abstraction. Therefore,
4 the initial enthusiasm began to cool and hopes for easy solutions had to
5 be invested elsewhere (GIS platforms are currently the prime candidate
6 for that position).

7 But pottery studies were not altogether abandoned. Instead, their focus
8 shifted to the study of local and regional assemblages. This followed
9 basically the same approach as before, but with a greater awareness of
10 regional variation. As a consequence, scholars interested in pottery con-
11 tinued to confuse the publication of ceramic assemblages with deriving
12 knowledge from pottery analysis. The clearest exponent of this mode of
13 thinking is M. Retuerce, a follower of Zozaya and the author of a very
14 well-documented book on the ceramics from the Meseta.³⁰

15 However, the new emphasis on regional patterns did spur the devel-
16 opment of pottery studies. When publishing an assemblage from a par-
17 ticular region, it was relatively easy for a scholar to link the pottery under
18 examination to the history of that region, and thus to produce more than
19 just a mere presentation of pots. As a matter of fact, most regional studies
20 were not concerned with pottery per se, but instead used ceramics as an
21 object of study to support broader arguments about settlement patterns.
22 In addition, since regional studies often employed representative samples
23 of material, new approaches could be introduced without discarding old
24 methodologies. While abandoning any attempt to devise a general system
25 of pottery classification, most scholars did not abandon the idea of
26 treating the whole of Andalusi pottery as a background for their own
27 studies. Many, in fact, regarded the regionalization of pottery production
28 and distribution as a fundamental feature of the archaeological record of
29 Islamic Iberia.

30 Regional studies on early medieval assemblages have been carried out
31 in many parts of the Peninsula, with only a few of them being compo-
32 nents of broader projects.³¹ Because of the importance of the site –
33 producing assemblages of more significance than anywhere else in Iberia
34 – the studies of the pottery from Cordoba deserve special attention,
35 despite their rather weak theoretical grounding and excessive preoccupa-
36

37 ³⁰ M. Retuerce, *La cerámica andalusí de la meseta* (Madrid, 1998).

38 ³¹ For Spain, see Luis Caballero, Pedro Mateos and Manuel Retuerce (eds), *Cerámicas tardorro-*
39 *manas y altomedievales en la Península Ibérica: ruptura y continuidad* (Madrid, 2004); A. Malpica
40 and J.C. Carvajal (eds), *Estudios de cerámica tardorromana y altomedieval* (Granada, 2008). For
41 Portugal, see R. Varela, 'Cerâmicas muçulmanas de Silves, dos séculos VIII e IX', in *I^{ra} Jornadas*
42 *de cerâmica medieval e pós-medieval. Métodos e resultados para o seu estudo (Tondela, 28 a 31 de*
43 *Outubro de 1992)* (Tondela, 1995), pp. 19–32; M. Varela and R. Varela, 'Cerâmicas alto-medievais
44 de Silves', in *Actas das 3^{as} Jornadas de Cerâmica Medieval e Pós-Medieval* (Tondela, 1999),
45 pp. 23–47.

tion with morphology and decoration.³² Special mention must also be made of the regional analyses carried out in south-eastern Spain since the early 1990s. We have already mentioned Gutiérrez's work in the Alicante area in relation to her application of Acién's model. R. Azuar and P. Reynolds also worked within this area, the latter producing an exemplary study of the fifth- to tenth-century pottery in the Vinalopó valley.³³ The region of Jaén has been the object of new and exciting studies by V. Salvatierra and his team at the local university, some of them with quite innovative approaches.³⁴ However, the University of Granada remains one of the most productive centres of research on the early medieval pottery of al-Andalus. The leading scholars involved in this work are members of a research group created in 1989, called Toponymy, History and Archaeology of the Kingdom of Granada (THARG). Initially led by A. Díaz, nowadays by A. Malpica, its main object of study is the region of Granada, particularly the territory of the thirteenth- to fifteenth-century Nasrid kingdom. While initially focusing on the late medieval and early modern period, THARG soon turned to questions regarding the development of Andalusí society. Fundamental for that change of emphasis was the publication in 1993 of a collection of studies on the early medieval pottery of the south of al-Andalus, which had been previously presented in 1990 at a conference in Salobreña (Granada). Participants in that conference included the field's leading scholars – among them Acién, Barceló, Kirchner and Gutiérrez – who shared some of their main ideas and the results of their regional studies.³⁵ The year of the

³² Despite the significance of the Amiral and Caliphal pottery from Cordoba, there are surprisingly few works dedicated to its study. See C. Cano, *La cerámica verde-manganeso de Madinat al-Zabra* (Granada, 1996); M.C. Fuertes and M. González, 'Materiales de época medieval', in *El Criptoportico de Cercadilla. análisis arquitectónico y secuencia estratigráfica* (Córdoba, 1996), pp. 119–85; A. Vallejo and J. Escudero, 'Aportaciones para una tipología de la cerámica califal común de Madinat al-Zahrā', *Arqueología y Territorio Medieval* 6 (1999), pp. 133–75; M.C. Fuertes, 'La evolución de la cerámica medieval de Cercadilla, Córdoba. Estado de la cuestión', *Anales de Arqueología Cordobesa* 11 (2000), pp. 217–32; M.C. Fuertes, *La cerámica califal del yacimiento de Cercadilla, Córdoba* (Sevilla, 2005); M.T. Casal, E. Castro, R. López and E. Salinas, 'Aproximación al estudio de la cerámica emiral del arrabal de Saqunda (Qurtuba, Córdoba)', *Arqueología y Territorio Medieval* 12.5 (2005), pp. 189–235; R. López, 'La cerámica del arrabal de Saqunda. Análisis cerámico del sector 6', *Anejos de Anales de Arqueología Cordobesa* 1 (2008). Most of the works dedicated to Cordoban Islamic pottery (and archaeology in general) can be found in the publications of the research group Sísifo of the University of Cordoba: *Anales de Arqueología Cordobesa and Anejos de Anales de Arqueología Cordobesa*.

³³ R. Azuar et al., *El ribat califal: excavaciones y estudios (1984–1992)* (Madrid, 2004); P. Reynolds, *Settlement and Pottery in the Vinalopó Valley (Alicante, Spain) A.D. 400–700* (Oxford, 1993). For Gutiérrez's work in south-eastern Spain, see n. 22.

³⁴ J.C. Castillo, *La campaña de Jaén en época emiral (s. VIII–X)* (Jaén, 1998); S. Pérez, *Las cerámicas omeyas de Marroquíes Bajos (Jaén): un indicador arqueológico del proceso de islamización* (Jaén, 2003).

³⁵ A. Malpica (ed.), *La cerámica altomedieval en el Sureste de al-Andalus* (Granada, 1993). A number of key regional studies have been published in this book, such as Gutiérrez, 'La cerámica paleoandalusí del sureste peninsular (Tudmir): producción y distribución (siglos VII al X)';

1 Salobreña conference also witnessed the publication of E. Motos's
2 detailed study of an early medieval assemblage in the region of the Vega
3 of Granada.³⁶ Pottery studies dedicated to specific regions or sites mush-
4 roomed during the subsequent years. Particularly important for the early
5 Middle Ages are A. Gómez's (on the coast of Granada) and M. Jiménez's
6 (on the land of Loja).³⁷ Of all those projects, the most ambitious,
7 however, is that dedicated to the systematic excavation of Madinah
8 Ilbirah.

10 Excavations in Madinah Ilbirah: a new approach to early 11 medieval pottery

12 At the official request of the Delegación de Cultura de la Junta de
13 Andalucía (the regional heritage department), in 2001 THARG con-
14 ducted a rescue excavation in the Cerro (Hill) del Sombrerete (Atarfe).
15 Shortly after beginning the excavation, it became clear that archaeolo-
16 gists had stumbled upon a large eighth- to eleventh-century Islamic
17 city. This was identified as Madinah Ilbirah, a city abandoned in the
18 eleventh century. The site immediately attracted the interest of the
19 entire research group, if only because it had not been disturbed by any
20 major interventions in the entire period following its abandonment.
21 This was a unique opportunity to study one of the first Islamic cities in
22 al-Andalus and THARG director, A. Malpica, decided to use it to
23 launch a major research project. Following two field surveys (2003 and
24 2004), which showed that the total area covered by the early medieval
25 city must have been some 300 ha, in a discontinuous pattern, excava-
26 tions began in earnest in 2005. Three campaigns have been carried out
27 so far (2005, 2007 and 2009), in addition to another rescue excavation
28 in 2006, which was also the first year of material study.³⁸ A key element

30 Cano, 'Estudio sistemático de la cerámica de Madinat Ilbira (Granada)' (previously published
31 in *Cuadernos de la Alhambra* 26 (1990), pp. 25–69); Motos, 'La cerámica altomedieval de "El
32 Castellón" (Montefrío, Granada)'; and Gómez, 'Cerámica a torneta procedente de "El Maraute"
33 (Motril). Una primera aproximación a la cerámica altomedieval de la costa granadina'. Other
34 studies explored previously unknown sites or issues: Castillo and Martínez, 'Producciones
35 cerámicas en Bayyana'; Iñíguez and Mayorga, 'Un alfar emiral en Málaga'; Barceló, 'Al-Mulk, el
36 verde y blanco. La vajilla califal omeya de Madinat al-Zahra'.

37 E. Motos, *El poblado medieval de «El Castellón» (Montefrío, Granada)* (Granada, 1990).

38 A. Gómez, *El poblamiento altomedieval en la costa de Granada* (Granada, 1998); M. Jiménez, *El
39 poblamiento del territorio de Loja en la Edad Media* (Granada, 2002). See also A. Gómez, *El
40 Maraute (Motril): un asentamiento medieval en la costa de Granada* (Granada, 1992); 'Un
41 conjunto de cerámica califal procedente de la Catedral de Granada', *Cuadernos de la Alhambra*
42 29–30 (1999), pp. 39–55; and 'La primera cerámica islámica de Granada. Los ejemplares del solar
43 del Aljibe de Trillo', *Meridies* 5–6 (2000), pp. 63–86.

44 ³⁸ Under regional Andalusian law, every campaign of archaeological excavation must be followed
45 by a year of studying the materials found. The excavation seasons of 2005, 2007 and 2009 were
46 therefore followed by three years of material study, 2006, 2008 and 2010.

1 of the results obtained so far is pottery, for it has been heavily used to
2 date the structures unearthed in three different areas of the city. The
3 excavation has revealed on one hand the ninth- and early tenth-century
4 phase of occupation, while the late tenth- and early eleventh-century
5 phase appears to have witnessed a remarkable growth of the city. The
6 two occupation phases identified so far show a transition from a pri-
7 marily rural society, in which the production and distribution of
8 pottery was organized around small individual workshops established in
9 non-urban settlements, to a society in which the production of pottery
10 was centralized in specialized, complex workshops with a high degree of
11 organization, which were most likely located in Ilbirah or in the neigh-
12 bouring cities.

13 Pottery has therefore been the main element employed to characterize
14 the phases of the site.³⁹ However, the study of pottery discovered in
15 Ilbirah represents a major departure from previous approaches to
16 Andalusí ceramics. The two pottery specialists in the team, who are also
17 the authors of this article, were among the first in Spain to have system-
18 atically employed the British and American literature on pottery analysis
19 in order to deal with assemblages of Andalusí pottery.⁴⁰ Equally signifi-
20 cant has been the influence of another member of THARG, E. Fernán-
21 dez, with important contributions on Andalusí ceramic technology.⁴¹ The
22 end result of these multiple influences has been the development of a new
23 methodology, which lays more emphasis on the quantification of tech-
24 nological and morphological features, while drawing inspiration from
25 Peacock's concept of modes of production.⁴² Madinah Ilbirah pottery has
26

27 ³⁹ A. Malpica, M. Jiménez and J.C. Carvajal, 'Estudio de la cerámica de la Alcazaba de Madinat
28 Ilbira (Cerro del Sombrerete, Atarfe)', in *Anuario Arqueológico de Andalucía 2006 (Granada)*
29 (Seville, Junta de Andalucía), pp. 1838–50. M. Jiménez and J.C. Carvajal, 'La cerámica del
30 Pago de los Tejoletes, 2006 (Madinat Ilbira, Atarfe, Granada)', in *Arqueología medieval*,
31 available online at <<http://www.arqueologiamedieval.com/articulos/articulos.asp?ref=100>>,
32 accessed 11 December 2008; A. Malpica, M. Jiménez, J.C. Carvajal and A. García, 'La
33 cerámica de Madinat Ilbira. El Pago de la Mezquita (campana de 2007)', in *II Taller de la*
34 *cerámica. Cerámica medieval y historia económico-social. Problemas de método y casos de estudio*
35 (forthcoming). For the 2001 campaign, see J.C. Carvajal, 'La cerámica islámica del Sombre-
36 rete (Madinat Ilbira, Granada). Primera aproximación', *Arqueología y territorio medieval* 12.1
37 (2001), pp. 133–73; J.C. Carvajal, 'Nuevas aportaciones al estudio de la cerámica islámica del
38 Cerro del Sombrerete (Madinat Ilbira, Atarfe, Granada)', in A. Malpica and J.C. Carvajal
39 (eds), *Estudios de cerámica tardorromana y altomedieval* (Granada, 2008), pp. 405–65; J.C.
40 Carvajal, *La cerámica de Madinat Ilbira (Atarfe) y el poblamiento altomedieval de la Vega de*
41 *Granada* (Granada, 2008).

42 ⁴⁰ Most important was Peacock, *Pottery*, in addition to D. Peacock (ed), *Pottery and Early*
43 *Commerce. Characterization and Trade in Roman and Later Ceramics* (London, 1977); H.
44 Howard and E.L. Morris (eds), *Production and Distribution: A Ceramic Viewpoint* (Oxford,
45 1981); and S.E. van der Leeuw and A. Pritchard (eds), *The Many Dimensions of Pottery*
46 (Amsterdam, 1984).

47 ⁴¹ Fernández's 2003 Ph.D. dissertation, which was known to most members of THARG, was
48 published as *Tradición tecnológica de la cerámica de cocina almohade-nazari* (Granada, 2008).

49 ⁴² Peacock, *Pottery*.

1 also invited comparison with early medieval pottery from other sites,
2 which can now be dated on a firmer basis. In this way the ceramic
3 remains from Ilbira have begun to shed new light on several other sites
4 of the Vega de Granada (the region in which Ilbira is located): Cerro de
5 la Solana de la Verdeja (fifth to ninth century), Cerro del Molino del
6 Tercio (fifth to ninth century), Cerro de la Mora (seventh to tenth
7 century), and Albaycín, the old residential quarter of Granada (from the
8 ninth century to the present day).⁴³ Moreover, research on Ilbira has
9 given impetus to investigating the links between early medieval and
10 pre-Islamic ceramics, as instanced by the first workshop on late Roman
11 and early medieval pottery organized in Granada in 2005. Further studies
12 of early medieval Andalusí pottery have recently employed assemblages
13 from such sites as Cerro del Castillejo de Nívar and the Madraza of
14 Granada.⁴⁴

15 All these studies have refined to a considerable degree our under-
16 standing of the production and distribution of pottery in the region of
17 the Vega de Granada from the arrival of the Muslims to the fall of the
18 Umayyad Caliphate. Four different phases may be distinguished. The
19 eighth- to ninth-century pottery of the first phase may be divided into
20 two main groups, one of a clearly late antique technological tradition,
21 the other characterized by a number of morphological and technologi-
22 cal innovations with no analogies in previous centuries. This is however
23 a far cry from identifying the handmade pottery or the pottery thrown
24 on a tournette as of late antique tradition: on the one hand, there is
25 plenty of wheel-made pottery in ceramic assemblages dating before the
26 Muslim conquest; on the other, the domestic mode of production,
27 which is commonly associated with pottery not thrown on a fast-
28 turning wheel, is also attested in post-conquest assemblages attributed
29 to newly arrived groups of immigrants (Fig. 3). During the second
30 phase (ninth to tenth century) wheel-made pottery appears to have
31 been predominant, while at the same time adopting several morpho-
32 logical and decorative (but not technological) elements of late antique
33 tradition. This is not to say that there was anything like an integrated
34 and unique tradition. Instead, a great variety of technological solutions
35

36 ⁴³ Carvajal, *La cerámica de Madinat Ilbira*.

37 ⁴⁴ Excavations in the Madraza of Granada and in Cerro del Castillejo in Nívar took place in
38 2006–7 and 2007 respectively. Their results have not yet been published, but the situation
39 promises to improve. For Nívar, see now M. Jiménez and J.C. Carvajal, 'La cerámica del
40 Castillejo de Nívar (siglos VI–XII)', in *II Taller de la cerámica. Cerámica medieval y historia
41 económico-social. Problemas de método y casos de estudio* (forthcoming). The assemblages
42 discovered in the Madraza have been dated to the tenth century, those from Nívar to
43 the sixth and seventh centuries. This information has been kindly made available by the
44 directors of excavation, A. Malpica and M. Jiménez. The proceedings of the 2005 workshop
45 have been published in Malpica and Carvajal (eds), *Estudios de cerámica tardorromana y
46 altomedieval*.

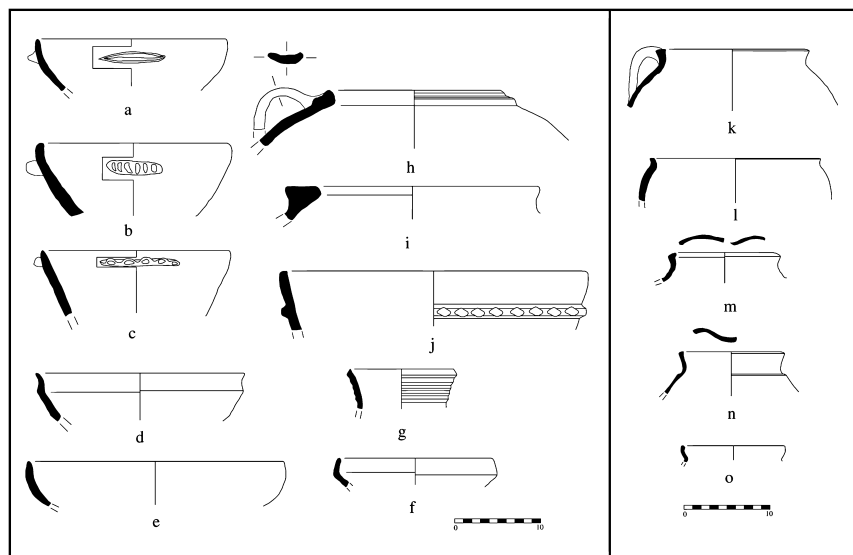
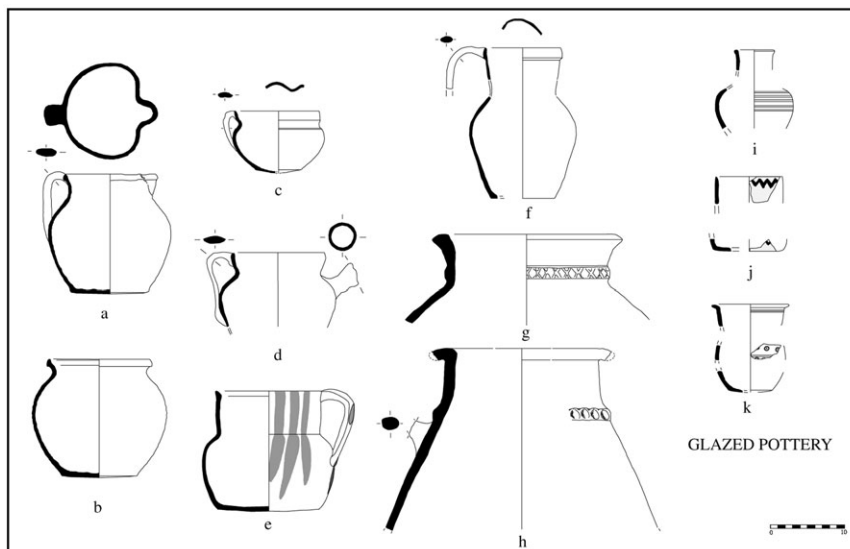
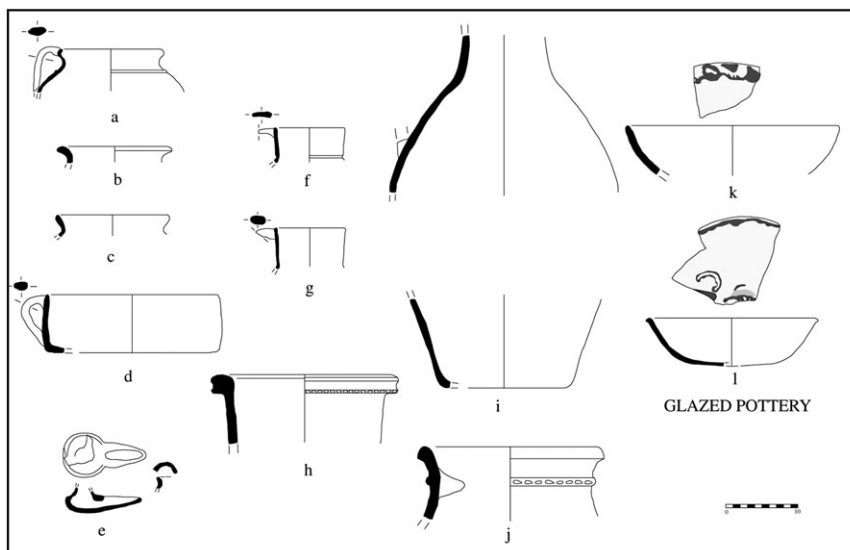


Fig. 3 Examples of eighth- to ninth-century pottery from the Vega of Granada

were employed to produce similar vessels, an indication of a wide distribution of potters, each one of them producing for a neighbouring, local market – a phenomenon which may explain the localized production and distribution. At this point cities had not yet developed in the Vega de Granada, so urban markets were not attractive for master potters. A major innovation for this period is the (initially timid) appearance of glazed wares. While it is not currently possible to establish whether at least some of these wares were made in the Vega, glazed pottery is certainly a sign of long- or medium-distance trade (Fig. 4). During the tenth century – the third phase in the development of Andalusí pottery – considerable changes were taking place in the Islamic society of the Vega. The production and distribution of pottery was now based in towns, specifically in Ilbirah, and the organization of labour involved higher levels of complexity, with nucleated pottery workshops of a larger scale of production. This phase witnessed the generalization of glazed ware, with frequent trade contacts between cities, which were apparently supported by the state. Cordoba and Bajjana, the ancient Almería, were the key components of this trade network (Fig. 5). The fall of the Umayyad Caliphate in the early eleventh century was a major political breakdown, which marks the beginning of the fourth phase. However, on close examination this political crisis does not seem to have had the major impact on social organization which might have been expected. In the Vega, the crisis of the

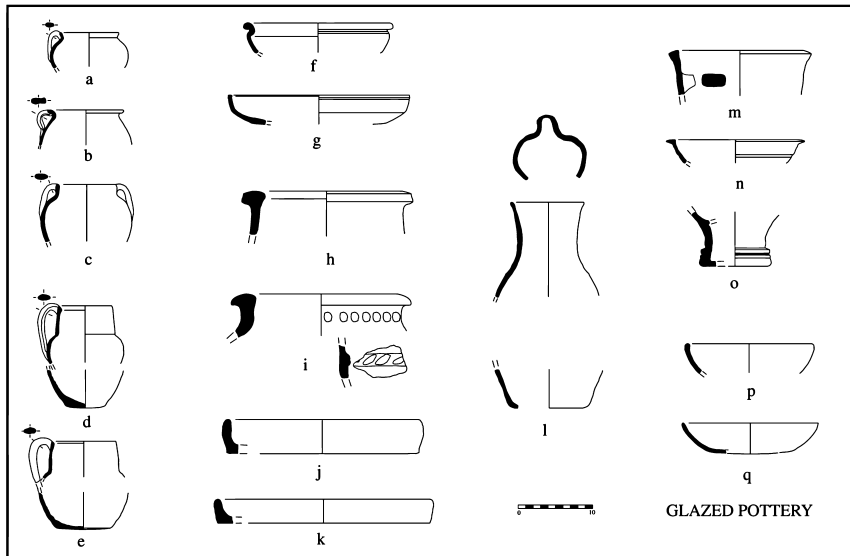


1 Fig. 4 Examples of ninth- to tenth-century pottery from the Vega of Granada



2 Fig. 5 Examples of tenth- to eleventh-century pottery from the Vega of Granada

3
4
5 Caliphate translated into the rapid decline of Ilbirah. However, the
6 alliance established with the North African Sinhaja tribe of the Zirids
7 and the creation of a new capital in Granada contributed to the continuity of social organization, including the system of production and
8



1 Fig. 6 Examples of eleventh-century pottery from the Vega of Granada

2
3 distribution of pottery, which had been established since the tenth
4 century (Fig. 6).⁴⁵

5 This four-phase chronology of social development may be extrapolated
6 to other regions of al-Andalus, although not necessarily with the same
7 chronological details. However, as a whole, this scenario nicely dovetails
8 with the idea of a 'tribalist' origin of Andalusí society.⁴⁶ In other words,
9 this model supports the idea of a society in transition from a quasi-tribal
10 form of organization to one of superior centralization by state authorities
11 based in towns. That transition may also be regarded as an expansion and
12 consolidation of the state at the expense of tribal society. It is remarkable
13 that, in sharp contrast to the society of late antiquity, Andalusí towns
14 (*mudun*) appear to have outlived not only political and military turmoil,
15 but also the very structures responsible for their creation. Within and
16 without al-Andalus, most towns created after the Muslim conquest survived
17 the historical collapse of the Caliphate and have lasted to the

18
19 ⁴⁵ For further details on this four-phase chronology of the development of Andalusí pottery, see
20 Carvajal, *La cerámica de Madinat Ilbira*. See also J.C. Carvajal, 'Pottery Production and Islam
21 in South-East Spain: A Social Model', *Antiquity* 83 (2009), pp. 388–98; and 'El poblamiento
22 altomedieval en la Vega de Granada', *Studia Historica. Historia medieval* 26 (2009), pp. 133–52.

23 ⁴⁶ See Guichard's works cited above in nn. 5 and 28; Barceló's, in n. 25; and Kirchner's in n. 27.
24 See also A. Malpica: 'La formación de una ciudad islámica: Madinat Ilbira', in A. Malpica (ed.),
25 *Ciudad y arqueología medieval* (Granada, 2006), pp. 65–85 and Carvajal's works cited in n. 45.

1 present day. An advanced study of the pottery from Madinah Ilbirah and
2 of other sites will undoubtedly clarify and refine the details of these
3 conclusions.

4 5 **Conclusion: the future of early medieval Andalusí studies**

6 This article has presented the history of research on Andalusí pottery over
7 the last thirty years or so. It has by now become apparent that the amount
8 of data from new finds has increased exponentially. The same, however,
9 is not true of the approaches research has taken into understanding these
10 finds, particularly after the innovative work of the late 1970s and early
11 1980s undertaken in the context of a revival of interest in medieval
12 archaeology. In that context, pottery was regarded as one of the most
13 suitable categories of archaeological evidence for answering new ques-
14 tions about the organization of production and distribution in
15 al-Andalus. However, with the gradual accumulation of data from both
16 excavations and museum collections, it became clear that the information
17 was too context-bound to provide meaningful solutions for questions of
18 such a high level of abstraction. The usefulness of pottery assemblages for
19 the formulation and testing of general theories of historical evolution
20 appeared to be quite limited. Eventually the idea of a general system of
21 classification for Andalusí pottery, similar to that devised for Roman
22 pottery, had to be abandoned. Disappointment about the failure to
23 accomplish such lofty goals may have been responsible for the diminish-
24 ing popularity of pottery studies during subsequent decades. Nonethe-
25 less, there has been tremendous progress in the understanding of pottery
26 production and distribution: indeed, Andalusí pottery is perhaps the best
27 studied in the entire Islamic world. Although no unique system of
28 classification was ever created, the effort to do so indirectly contributed to
29 a better understanding of Andalusí ceramics. The works of such scholars
30 as Rosselló, Zozaya and Bazzana have transformed this subfield of study
31 into a point of reference for all archaeologists working on the early
32 Middle Ages in Iberia.

33 Another important aspect of pottery studies during this period has
34 been the increasing focus on regionalism. Current studies set the lens at
35 the micro-regional or even site level, and use ceramics to approach local
36 history. Irrespective of the positions or conclusions reached by various
37 authors, this has so far been one of the most productive areas of current
38 research. The result has been a multiplicity of sequences of change
39 proposed for different regions, which are often neither coincidental nor
40 parallel. This has enormously enriched the background of historical
41 studies of Andalusí society. Knowledge of early medieval pottery has thus
42 become a *sine qua non* for such studies.

1 At this moment, and given the history of research presented above, a
2 number of lines of future development can be distinguished. First, new
3 approaches and methods are much needed for the medieval archaeology
4 of the Iberian Peninsula (and not just for pottery studies). Methods that
5 have been proved to work in other contexts need to be tested here as well,
6 and their innovative potential revealed. Medieval archaeology is not an
7 auxiliary discipline of medieval history, for it can by now formulate its
8 own questions and answers, which are independent from those formul-
9 ated by historians. This is especially evident for the early Middle Ages, a
10 period of known scarcity of written sources, for the research of which the
11 only hope is in the archaeological record.

12 Second, Andalusí pottery needs to be studied in its immediate context,
13 with the aim of understanding its appearance and development. This
14 context can now be framed in three distinct ways: the Iberian Peninsula
15 (relations between al-Andalus and the Christian kingdoms); the Islamic
16 world (relations between al-Andalus and the rest of Islam); and the
17 Mediterranean region (the relations of al-Andalus to the systems and
18 traditions connected to the fundamental axis of the Mediterranean region
19 during the Middle Ages). This is a desideratum that goes well beyond the
20 study of pottery and must be contemplated for the general discipline of
21 Andalusí history and archaeology.

22 Finally, pottery is by now a fundamental ingredient in any approach to
23 Andalusí society and economy, even if it has proved to be inappropriate
24 for answering questions of a high degree of abstraction. It is therefore of
25 crucial importance to use research on pottery to broaden the knowledge
26 gained from other fields. Here again, it is significant that the analysis of
27 early medieval materials has played a key role in challenging the tradi-
28 tional interpretation of Andalusí history. The problems associated with
29 the study of Andalusí ceramics therefore run much deeper than simple
30 methodological issues. It is perhaps not too far-fetched to presume that
31 progress in the study of Andalusí pottery may very well stimulate research
32 in medieval archaeology and history, particularly for the period of the
33 so-called 'Dark Ages', much as it did thirty years ago.

34 Current practice, especially in Spain, allows for moderate optimism.
35 One cannot miss the introduction of new approaches and the rise of
36 young scholars, many of whom are striving to open up the field to new
37 ideas in order to fill in the gaps left by traditional interpretations. At the
38 same time, public administrative bodies responsible for heritage preser-
39 vation and protection, as well as research institutions (mainly universi-
40 ties), still have little use for medieval archaeology, a discipline still
41 associated more with art history and the preservation of historical monu-
42 ments. As a consequence, scholars interested in the early Middle Ages
43 have seen their research budgets reduced and the recognition of the

1 importance of their work diminished. One way out of this sad situation
2 is to open up the discipline of Andalusí archaeology to the international
3 community. Al-Andalus has always been treated as a marginal field in the
4 Islamic world, more interesting to Iberian researchers than to scholars of
5 medieval Islam in general. However, the enormous amount of informa-
6 tion currently accumulated, the thorough organization of the existent
7 data, and their relative accessibility for study (especially when compared
8 to Islamic countries), make Iberia a very suitable place to do research on
9 medieval Islam. With the exception of French scholars, few foreign
10 researchers have taken notice of this state of affairs. The participation of
11 Spain and Portugal in international missions of archaeological research
12 could provide mutual enrichment to Iberian and foreign researchers. It is
13 perhaps no accident that research on the early Middle Ages has shown the
14 way for this kind of international cooperation. As scholars such as Gui-
15 chard, Barceló and Acién have applied to al-Andalus methods and
16 approaches from other parts of the world, they have not only contributed
17 to the general knowledge of Islamic society (inside and outside
18 al-Andalus), but have also made it more accessible to other researchers.⁴⁷

19
20 *University of Granada*

21

22 ⁴⁷ An exemplary application of this kind of comparative work is Chris Wickham's monumental
23 *Framing the Early Middle Ages*.

Toppan Best-set Premedia Limited	
Journal Code: EMED	Proofreader: Elsie
Article No: 330	Delivery date: 9 September 2011
Page Extent: 25	