

The Nasrid Kingdom of Granada between East and West

(Thirteenth to Fifteenth Centuries)

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Domestic Spaces during the Nasrid Period: Houses

María Elena Díez Jorge

1 About Domestic Spaces¹

It is evident that the walls of dwellings demarcated spaces to create a certain setting and provide for a way of life that has been defined under the term “domestic.” With this concept we refer to the way of conceiving the home and the space it circumscribed in such a manner that the physical occupation of the home acquired certain features, generating a style and a particular way of life and, therefore, presupposing an intention and willingness to create a framework of coexistence and cohabitation within.

But the domestic space was more than just the walls that formed a closed structure, as certain household tasks were often performed outside the home, in nearby areas, such as at wells close to the house, communal ovens, warehouses, and granaries not adjacent to the house. In this way, domestic space should be defined based on the activities carried out in it, while being conscious that its functions were those that often defined its typology, though not in all cases. When the texts of the time describe homes, their descriptions are not limited to the house itself but rather make mention of stables, orchards, and corrals, if any. Sometimes when dealing with domestic spaces and tasks they refer to other areas that were not within the dwelling itself where the family resided, but rather attached to another not belonging to it, as was the case with the *algorfa* (*al-ghurfa*) and the *almacería* (*al-maṣriyya*, *maṣārī*).² The *algorfa* has been defined as the top floor of a dwelling accessed from an interior staircase, while the *almacería*, also usually found in the upper part, could

1 Translation from Spanish to English by Óscar Jiménez Serrano. This work forms part of the R&D project “De puertas para adentro: vida y distribución de espacios en la arquitectura doméstica (siglos xv–xvi),” R&D Projects of the Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness, HAR2014-52248-P. Principal Investigator: María Elena Díez Jorge. Also the R&D project “Vestir la casa: espacios, objetos y emociones en los siglos xv y xvi,” R&D Projects of the Ministry of Science, Innovation and University, PGC2018-093835-B-I00. Principal Investigator: María Elena Díez Jorge.

2 Mazzoli-Guintard, “Género y arquitectura doméstica.” Specifically, cases of Nasrid-era almacerías inhabited by people other than those living on the ground floor, in Rodríguez Gómez, “Documentos árabes sobre almacerías,” “Les maṣārī de Grenade,” and “Algunos interrogantes sobre la ciudad islámica.”

include space on the ground floor, but in no case did it constitute a residential nucleus, and it featured its own access from the street.³ In this work we focus essentially on homes, without reflecting on other domestic spaces.

We must take into account that the homes of al-Andalus, like medieval Christian ones, used to serve and encompass multiple functions: rest, eating, teaching, burial, and work, together with workshops or storage.⁴ Thus they served as places for both social relations and economic activities. As they crossed and blurred the line between the concepts of a private vs. a public space, we must take care to avoid applying current notions to a bygone time.⁵ It is important to note that, although there has been a tendency to point to privacy in al-Andalus as an essential and fixed characteristic over the course of its seven centuries, it clearly changed over the course of that period, not only with regard to the regulatory framework but especially insofar as social practices were concerned.

The definition of the house that we establish is important, and must be based on the concepts that existed during that time and appear in the written sources. It would be essential to study in texts from al-Andalus the word *dār* and its possible evolution and transformation, in order to fully understand it. Its meaning in Arabic is wide-ranging, and it would be expedient to thoroughly study *fiqh* and *hisba* documents in which we know there are concrete references. The word *dār* is applied to dwellings, including royal residences. Hence, in Andalusi sources and poems it is frequently used in relation to courtly architecture: *Dār al-Mulk*, *Dār al-Imāra*. In addition, it is used to refer to territorial areas of war and peace, to life after death, and, as in Spanish, to designate a family genealogy. As a result of all this it is a broader concept than *bayt*, house or room, which stems from the root “to spend the night.”⁶ Some authors have pointed out more than seven word combinations that are used in the Qur’an and Hadith to refer to the house.⁷ A definition of *dār* was given by George Marçais, for whom it originally meant a space surrounded by walls and buildings, a place to live. Thus, in this sense, *dār* entails a wider meaning than just

3 Navarro Palazón and Jiménez Castillo, “Plantas altas en edificios andalusíes,” 108–09.

4 Some cases are collected in Ávila, “El espacio doméstico.”

5 Van Staevel, “Casa, calle y vecindad”; Moscatiello, “La privacidad doméstica.”

6 I am grateful to José Miguel Puerta Vilchez, a professor of Art History at the University of Granada, for all these clarifications.

7 O’Meare, *An architectural Investigation*, 52–62 (<https://ethos.bl.uk/OrderDetails.do?uin=uk.bl.ethos.513890> [accessed on 26 September 2020]).

a space enclosed by walls.⁸ We should note that in al-Andalus relevance was granted to connections between houses that were arranged around an *adarve* (private dead-end street) or formed part of the same block, in a way perhaps closer to that defined by Marçais, there being precise rules established regarding the use and maintenance of certain shared rooms, spaces, and boundaries. As we can see, it is necessary to research the concept of *dār* in the different texts of al-Andalus. Its analysis in different documents will yield new perspectives; see, for example, the reference to the term *casa* in the dictionary of Arabisms by Diego Guadix, written in 1593, which indicates that this word derives from “ca,” which according to the author means “place” or “seat,” and “cha,” which he interprets as “came” or “has come.” All this leads him to affirm that “ca’cha” evolved into *casa* and that its meaning was “to give a house, or to establish a house or to make a house for those marrying.”⁹

Another aspect that is fundamental when studying the house is the people who inhabited it. Those who formed a domestic group could experience it as a space that offered security, a haven. In contrast, for others it was a place plagued by violent situations. For some it would be a site of repose, while for others it was a workplace, or both at the same time. There were multiple emotions involved, such that it is impossible to reduce them to one idea. The situations were multiple and complex, and homes could become peaceful refuges or domestic hells. In addition, spatial hierarchies were established that governed movement and circulation between different spaces, so that slaves, domestic servants, and owners experienced and used the home in different ways, this also depending on whether one was young or old, a man or a woman. Legal precepts governing domestic privacy (which were not exclusive to the world of al-Andalus, since they also occurred in contemporary Christian kingdoms, but were resolved differently) gave rise to architectural features and solutions for shared walls, façades, and hallways of houses, especially with reference to the right of sight; there were frequent disputes, for example, regarding the height of terraces.¹⁰ It is evident that this privacy affected not only women but the entire domestic group, although it is true that daily lives, as well as mobility and functions inside the house, could vary between men and women, and that this translated into a given organization and layout of the space. In the same way, mobility in the house was different for a young person and for elders. In

8 Marçais, “Dār.” (http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_1696 [accessed on 11 May 2017]). On the evolution of the term *dār* from the sense of a territory to that of a building in the Arabic sources, see some reflections in Denoix, “Note sur une des significations du terme ‘dār.’” See also Missoum, “La vivienda tradicional.”

9 Diego Guadix, *Recopilación de algunos nombres arábigos*, 182.

10 Carmona, “Casos de litigios de vecindad en al-Andalus.”

addition, the arrival of a boy or girl, or the illness of an older person, could bring about changes in the arrangement and uses of rooms and spaces.¹¹ This dynamism in domestic groups affected their dwellings, which were also subject to receiving or dividing inheritances, giving rise to processes of land consolidation as well as apportionment. Changes in occupants were common due to circumstances in cities at different times: repopulation, migrations in search of better futures, itinerant professions, etc. As a result renting was frequent, to the point that the enormous profits to be made from it were regulated. For example, in the *Cortes* of Valladolid in 1351, under Peter I of Castile, terms were stipulated to govern the renting of houses to Jews and Muslims. According to the regulations, those willing to pay more were to be allowed to offer higher bids. Conflicts arose, however, as an order issued by the *aljamas* penalized this kind of “speculation.” The courts insisted, and ordered that those who impeded the charging of higher rents were to be arrested and fined.¹²

Thus it is essential to study the domestic group that lived under one roof, taking into account relations of kinship, servitude, and slavery. Many different scenarios arose: members of the group who could live in other spaces, for example, watching over and caring for land and animals; people who did not stay overnight but moved about the house at certain times, etc. These were very dynamic relationships of cohabitation generated in a domestic space. Children grew up, people got old and sick, all of which transformed the house and household, altering the uses of its spaces, expanding or dividing rooms. It was a complex world of people, and not just women, as traditionally has been believed in the case of al-Andalus. It is true, however, that the home was viewed essentially as a feminine space, and considered *ḥarām*.¹³ While women did spend much of their time at home, it would be a mistake to think that it was a place almost exclusively for them, as domestic groups were also made up of men who could, like women, work from the home. In some houses there were spaces designated mainly for women, but this does not mean that they were confined to a room, but rather that the transit of people outside the family group was forbidden. Let us remember the custom, already established in the Qur’an, of announcing oneself at the doorstep with one’s name and full title before proceeding inside, in order to provide a warning regarding people

11 Crawford, “Archaeology of the Medieval Family.”

12 *Cortes de los Antiguos Reinos de León y de Castilla*, 41–42. I am grateful to Ana Echevarría Arsuaga for providing me with this information, which she is going to publish in “Does cohabitation produce coexistence?”. Relationships between Jews and Muslims in Castilian Christian towns,” *Minorities in contact*, Turnhout: Brepols (forthcoming).

13 O’Meare, *An architectural Investigation*, 57 ff.

who were not invited or lacked permission to be or see inside the house.¹⁴ We must also draw attention to the study of houses from the inside, and learn, through different Arabic writings from al-Andalus, about established habits and behaviours, comparing them with documents in files of a notarial nature, or others, to ascertain the practices carried out, as well as changes to them: to understand whether, for example, visitors observed the custom of announcing themselves at the doorstep, and whether there were changes with regard to gender and the disposition of spaces between homes in Caliphal as opposed to Nasrid dwellings, or if in the Nasrid period the same premises of prayer in the house were stipulated as those appearing in previous compendia, like that of al-Ṭulayṭulī (d. 996).¹⁵

2 The Current Status of Studies on Nasrid Domestic Spaces

With the exception of major architectonic creations like the Alhambra, the first studies of art from the Nasrid period did not regard it as very inventive, as it echoed previous models, the result of an interminable struggle in a context characterised by political pressures. In short, the Nasrid period was the twilight of al-Andalus and lasted more than two and a half centuries, the beginning of al-Andalus's decline, as its continued vassalage toward Castile marked the end of the independence it had once enjoyed. These assessments are surprising if we bear in mind that it was precisely during this time that unique examples of works of art are documented in al-Andalus, whether because they were created for the first time, such as the Madrasa of Yūsuf I (although there are reports of other such institutions in al-Andalus, it seems that they were not of an official nature like the one in Granada); or because they are the best or the only ones preserved in al-Andalus, like the *alhóndiga jadīda* (*funduq*). The same could be said of poetry, as manifested in the creation of the *Dīwān al-inshā'* (chancery) by Muḥammad II (reigned 1273–1302) with a significant production of courtly poetry, and that penned by Yūsuf III himself (reigned 1408–1417), considered the greatest poet-king after al-Mu'tamid.¹⁶

In different Arab sources and documents of the time we find the first evaluations of the architecture produced under the Nasrid dynasty. Following Islamic tradition, the great poet and vizier Ibn al-Khaṭīb (1313–1374/75) described the

14 It is what is called *istīdhān*. See O'Meara, *An Architectural Investigation*, 56.

15 Al-Ṭulayṭulī, *Mukhtaṣar*, 104–05.

16 Puerta Vilchez, "La cultura y la creación artística," for *Dīwān al-inshā'*, 355 ff., and on Yūsuf III, 363.

Nasrid sultans as genuine artistic patrons and promoters, stating that their great constructions contributed to their fame and greatness, and describing Muḥammad v (first reign 1354–1359, second reign 1362–1391) as a builder/ruler who enjoyed walking under scaffolds and between sacks of stucco and bricks.¹⁷ The poet Ibn al-Jayyāb (1274–1349) lauded the Nasrids' plasterwork, tiling, and roofs.¹⁸ Also, those visiting Granada found truly indescribable elements of great beauty, as recorded by the traveller 'Abd al-Bāsiṭ in the mid-fifteenth century.¹⁹ Some comments are noteworthy, such as that of Ibn al-Khaṭīb, who described the Alhambra as composed of palaces lacking in solidity, but entailing great investments in wood and lime – contrary to the assessment of later historians, who described such materials as cheap and of poor quality.²⁰ In contemporary Christian sources it is not difficult to find references to people who visited Granada and stressed the fine quality of its roofs, the splendour of its golden polychrome works, the use of marble floors in some royal buildings, and its serene gardens, as well as the perfection of its buildings and constructions for the storage and distribution of water.²¹

At this point there are two fundamental questions. First, to recognise the original forms of Nasrid architecture does not mean to ignore their imitation of other models, or to deny the influence of exposure to other kingdoms, such as the Marinid or Castilian (essentially, the Sevillian court of Peter I) or other communities, like the Genoese, that had strong ties to the Nasrid kingdom of Granada. In fact, external influences have been identified in a range of spaces in the Alhambra: the portico to the Palace of El Partal, the cloister form of the Courtyard of the Lions, and the paintings in the Chamber of the Kings. Second, it is evident that just studying monumental architecture would yield only a partial image of the society of that time and its experiences. Both questions call upon us today to understand domestic architecture beyond courtly spaces and places of power, and to situate it in its context, which means not severing it from other models that might have existed in the Christian kingdoms. Moreover, in numerous settlements in Nasrid territory there were different communities that played important roles, and it would be necessary to investigate whether they had different or similar ways of conceiving domestic spaces, depending on the cultural origins of their inhabitants. We know of the existence of major Jewish quarters in Baza and in Guadix, in Almería and Málaga.

17 Ibn al-Khaṭīb, *Nufāda*, 3:234–36.

18 Poems transcribed in Rubiera Mata, *Ibn al-Īayyāb*, ref. 89.

19 Transcribed in Levi della Vida, "Il regno di Granata."

20 Quote from Ibn al-Khaṭīb transcribed in Jiménez Mata, *La Granada Islámica*, 71.

21 Díez Jorge, "Algunas percepciones cristianas."

It seems that some areas featured numerous Jewish districts, for instance Granada, whose main one was in the Antequeruela area with another minor one in the Albaicín.²² There were specific districts for the Genoese in Granada, Málaga and Almería, and there was a permanent presence of Christians, mainly soldiers, captives, and merchants, although the latter did not seem to represent a high percentage of the population.²³

It must be recognised that the study of the home in different periods has not, traditionally, aroused the interest that it deserves. However, at the beginning of the twentieth century some scholars began to focus on domestic architecture, specifically when it was remote from centres of power. Vicente Lampérez y Romea did pioneering work on Spanish civic architecture in which he presents a typological division of buildings, distinguishing between houses and palaces and drafting a document specifically on Christian houses, and another shorter one on a type of house he denominates *mahometama* (Mohammedan), emphasising the lack of data on the latter.²⁴ It would not be until the 1990s that specific monographic works on the home in al-Andalus appeared, of special note being the collected volume *La casa hispanomusulmana. Aportaciones desde la Arqueología* [The Spanish-Muslim House. Findings from Archaeology] (1990); *Maisons d'Al-Andalus. Habitat médiéval et structure du peuplement dans la l'Espagne orientale* by André Bazzana (1995); a collected work dedicated to Andalusí houses from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries, coordinated by Julio Navarro Palazón (1995); and the extensive scientific work on Nasrid houses by Antonio Orihuela Uzal. Although it is true that studies on the medieval Iberian Peninsula have been characterised by an excessive dichotomy drawn between al-Andalus and the Christian kingdoms, sometimes impeding a recognition of the complexity involved, in recent years there has been an effort to provide a more inclusive portrayal, which, with reference to houses, has produced publications such as *La casa medieval en la Península Ibérica* [The Medieval House in the Iberian Peninsula] (2015), under whose title and common theoretical framework fall studies on Andalusí and Christian domestic architecture.

At the current historiographical juncture, and specifically with regard to the Nasrid house, it is necessary to systematically contrast Christian and Andalusí sources. Sources written after the Christian conquest give us valuable data for

22 Gonzalbes Craviotto, "Establecimientos de barrios judíos"; Espinosa Villegas, "Ciudad medieval y barrio judío" and "Anotaciones para una revisión."

23 On the Genoese: Salicrú i Lluçh, *El sultanato nazarí de Granada*. Interesting, but for after the conquest, is Girón Pascual, *Las Indias de Génova* and the same author, *Comercio y poder*.

24 Lampérez y Romea, *Arquitectura civil española*, 1:16, and specifically dedicated to what he calls "civilización mahometama," 167–75.

understanding what the Nasrid house of the fifteenth century may have been like, but it clearly varied from those of the thirteenth and fourteenth. To understand these differences, rigorous research is necessary in the Arabic sources of the time, such as historical chronicles, collections of sentences, biographical repertoires, and notarial texts. An interesting type of source after the Christian conquest consists of apportionment books: for example the apportionment book of the village of Loja, conquered in 1486 by the Christians. It is true that it is not a land-survey document and therefore does not describe rooms in detail or cite the dimensions of the houses, but it does list the buildings, from which one can infer their characteristics, such as the location of the corral (generally behind the house or, in some cases, even next to the door), and notes the significant presence of cellars and the frequent mention of sheds and stables – all this despite the fact that, as has been pointed out, it lacks the details provided by other apportionments, like those of Vélez-Málaga and Ronda, which were Nasrid cities conquered by the Christians during the same period. As we have said, the study of apportionment and census records has made it possible to establish some hypotheses as to what the village of Loja was like just before the conquest. A total of 419 houses were assigned to the new settlers, meaning an average of 2.5 Nasrid houses given as dwellings to each repopulator, which would yield an approximate figure of 1,162 preexisting houses of Muslims in the city – not far from the figures that travellers cited as probably existing in Loja.²⁵ This practice of using several Muslim houses to form one Christian one is mentioned in sources after the conquest, just as it is not difficult to find references to *rábitas* (small hermitages devoted to piety) and small mosques used as dwellings, presumably due to the scarcity of houses. Other changes in their usage are also documented. For instance, Loja's *alhóndiga* (*funduq*) was transformed into an inn, while Muslims who went to the city began to lodge in caves.²⁶ The systematic study of Andalusí sources from the Nasrid period, together with comparative examination of the sources after the Christian conquest, would foster major progress in our knowledge of the Nasrid house.

Along with the sources, we must mention another challenge to our present state of knowledge of the Nasrid house: archaeological interventions requiring major excavations and carried out with methodological rigour. There have been some cases of such efforts. Unfortunately urban speculation and rushed

25 Barrios Aguilera, "La población de Loja."

26 "... e mas dieron la posesión de las tierras de los Baiombares e de las Marrojas e de la alhondiga de los moros para que fagan un meson tomando el sitio que bien visto les fuera a San Sebastian, con la cueva donde ahora se acogen los moros que a esta ciudad bienen": *Libro de los Repartimientos de Loja*, ed. Barrios Aguilera, 1:245.

excavations, in addition to inadequate action protocols, have led at times to a considerable number of archaeological excavations, especially in urban areas, not being executed with the proper diligence and care. The study of some archaeological reports that we have been able to consult at the Archaeological Museum of Granada is disheartening. Obviously this is not something that applies only to Granada. Spanish archaeology has made serious appeals in this regard, stressing the need to carry out rigorous horizontal excavations that make it possible to analyse spatial patterns and relationships, as well as to generate adequate diagrams that allow for the identification of the synchronies and diachronies of domestic spaces, so as not to project a static image of dwellings in al-Andalus.²⁷

Excavations of Nasrid domestic spaces should permit serious study of the occupation of these spaces within the urban context and their systematic rearrangement carried out in the wake of the Christian occupation. For example, some of the excavations in the house of Hernando de Zafra have shown, in the opinion of archaeologists, the existence of a domestic complex abandoned at the end of the eleventh or early twelfth century. In addition, in some areas of the sixteenth-century house there are remnants of homes from the Nasrid period, among them one with at least three galleries and a central courtyard. These were, apparently, spaces occupied for domestic use in the early Middle Ages which were abandoned and later occupied again in the Nasrid period, resulting in the concentration and adaptation of several Nasrid houses to create a sixteenth-century domestic complex.²⁸ This sequence of events was fairly common, and must be taken into account in archaeological excavations. Worthy of mention is the excavation of the houses at 2 San Buenaventura Street and 68 Cuesta del Chapiz Street, carried out in Granada between 2004 and 2005, overseen by Julio Navarro Palazón and with Ángel Rodríguez Aguilera as the technical archaeologist.²⁹ The space constitutes a unique property, with three historic plots: the house at 2 San Buenaventura Street and two houses at 68 Cuesta del Chapiz Street, one of them a Morisco one and others from the Baroque era. The project undertaken on the property yielded an important collection of data, drawings, plans, and various analyses, such as colorimetric studies, and others of the stratigraphy of the masonry work on all the elements found at the surface. Some surveys were also carried out, along with horizontal

27 See Gutiérrez Lloret, "Gramática de la casa," 149.

28 Rodríguez Aguilera *et al.*, "Actividad arqueológica preventiva mediante sondeos en la casa de Hernando de Zafra (C/ San Juan de los Reyes 46 y C/ Zafra 5), Granada."

29 I would like to thank Julio Navarro Palazón and Ángel Rodríguez Aguilera for having shared all their material and unpublished studies, on which they are preparing a publication.

excavation, always with a view to a more complete understanding of the historical processes of transformation that took place over time, without this having conflicted with an effort to solve the issues related to the refurbishment project. In the study the authors corroborate how at 2 San Buenaventura Street there was a house prior to the Nasrid period. In the era that interests us most, the Nasrid house of the fourteenth–fifteenth centuries, the previous house was extinct and the urban space was rearranged, another house being built with a rectangular courtyard and a small pool. The main gallery would be the one on the north side, featuring a portico. It seems that there may have been a decorated façade on the passage connecting the north room to the courtyard, of which there remain only the two tall windows, between three interesting decorative panels of plasterwork, with vestiges of the original polychromy (Fig. 10.1). In addition we have evidence of two different phases of use, with well-documented transformations in the Nasrid house. In the sixteenth century there were a number of important alterations. With regard to the houses at 68 Cuesta del Chapiz Street, a series of burials previous to the thirteenth–fourteenth centuries were documented. Study of the excavated walls allowed researchers to hypothesize that during the Nasrid period there existed at least one dwelling, oriented north to south. This domestic space underwent a major alteration in the sixteenth century, as the Nasrid house was replaced by a clearly Morisco one.

In short, research into Nasrid houses will advance greatly if we manage to combine efforts and incorporate the data offered by Arab sources, as well as Christian ones from after the conquest, comparing them with the remnants of material culture obtained from rigorous excavations that reveal the dynamic nature of these constructions. It is evident that they underwent adaptations of different types and degrees, a fact that sometimes makes it difficult to situate or classify them in a static way as corresponding to the prototypical architecture of a Nasrid, Mudejar, or Morisco house.

3 Concepts of Nasrid, Mudejar, and Morisco Houses

To date it has not been possible to verify whether during the time of the Nasrids, or soon after it, the term “Nasrid art” or “art of the Nasrids” was employed. This denomination actually corresponds to a historiographical division established in the twentieth century. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the art of al-Andalus was called “Arab art” or “Mohammedan art,” with hardly any stylistic distinctions within al-Andalus. The designation “Nasrid art” is actually recent and, as with the rest of the artistic historiography of al-Andalus, is



FIGURE 10.1 Detail of Nasrid Gate at the galleries of the house at 2 Buenaventura Street (Granada), found in the excavations carried out between 2004 and 2005, 14th–15th centuries

rooted in a political parallelism between the dominant dynasty and cultural and artistic processes: the art of the emirs, the art of the Umayyads of Cordova, Caliphal art, Taifa art, Almoravid art, Almohad art, etc. In this way knowledge was organized with Nasrid art being assigned a period, essentially from 1237 to 1492. While this stylistic classification, based on concrete historical-political facts, has been useful, we know that it does not actually correspond to practices. For example, the techniques and modes of the Almohad epoch did not end in 1237, just as Nasrid artistic traditions did not suddenly disappear in 1492, as Barbara Fuchs has pointed out in masterly fashion.³⁰

This situation becomes even more complicated if we add other terms for architecture, such as Mudejar and Morisco, noting that we must distinguish between these two concepts as social groups and the artistic definition of Mudejar as a set of artistic manifestations transcending the social group, and not created exclusively by Mudejar people. The Mudejar period arose following the Christian conquest of each city, such as in the major Nasrid cities of Málaga in 1487, Almería in 1489, and Granada in 1492. The Morisco period, on the other hand, refers to the forced conversions of 1501 and 1502, lasting until the expulsions of 1609 and 1610. These were stages in which, under the Christians' hegemonic power, certain habits and customs from the Nasrid period endured in a way, although in some cases prompting an escalation of repression toward the forms and customs of "Moorish times," as stated in documentation from the time. Different expressions of multiculturalism were part of those societies, in which it was sometimes difficult to distinguish between the "purely" Christian and the Islamic, because the cultural boundaries between them were not as sharp as has sometimes been thought.

As we have already pointed out, knowledge of the Nasrid dwelling, at least that of the fifteenth century, calls for an analysis of domestic architecture at the beginning of the sixteenth century, since many of the Nasrid houses of that time were reused, with varying degrees of adaptation and transformation, as recorded in the numerous documents of leases and purchases of buildings and surrounding plots. Complete demolition of Andalusí properties to construct new ones, or to expand squares and streets, took place mainly after 1530.³¹ Thus the Granadan house of the early sixteenth century gives us important clues as to what Nasrid homes were like, but it would be necessary to take a very good look at the many projects that were apparently carried out in a matter of just a few years: on houses that were empty, with demolitions, saturation,

30 Fuchs, "1492 and the Cleaving of Hispanism."

31 See López Guzmán, *Tradición y Clasicismo* and "La arquitectura doméstica granadina."

and piling one house on top of another, as well as actions to prevent fragmentation among different owners, etc.

In the case of Granada, an initial attempt at classification was made by María del Carmen Villanueva Rico, who distinguished between a Christian type of house, with a large hallway, the stables off to one side, and a ground floor essentially designated for services (e.g., the storeroom, corrals, and servants' quarters), while the residential chambers were on the upper floor – as opposed to a house that sustained the Islamic tradition, characterised by a small hallway, an adjacent stable, a courtyard, a large space in front of the entrance to the house, an upper floor having a variety of rooms, and topped off by a roof level.³² This differentiation was based on a series of documentary descriptions and clearly referred to a type of house belonging to people of some means. Although this may constitute a first attempt at study, we believe that the distinction between Christian homes and those that continued the Islamic type throughout the sixteenth century is not so clear, that the typologies were actually quite varied, and that the relationships between the different cultural ways of understanding the home were, in fact, very complex. To what extent is it valid to trace a typological division of homes based solely on the cultural parameters of Christian, Mudejar and Morisco? Some specialists have pointed out the difficulty posed by the sixteenth-century Granadan house, as it shared elements with the Castilian one, as well as constituting a continuation of the Nasrid home. Solutions have included, in some cases, the application of concepts such as the “Morisco house” (*casa morisca*).³³ In fact, many historians have used the term “Morisco houses”: for example Manuel Gómez Moreno, who, at the end of the nineteenth century, alluded in this way to houses that he described as being built shortly after the Conquest, usually by Morisco families, in which elements of the Islamic tradition were mixed with Christian ones.³⁴ Also, studies of civil architecture dating from the early twentieth century employed the concept of the Morisco house, though with different nuances: for Lampérez it was one built after the Conquest, while García Mercadal seemed to refer to the house of al-Andalus when he stated that the Andalusí home was “a direct heir to the Morisco house.”³⁵

The term *Morisco* appeared in the eleventh century as an adjective to refer to some textiles, and in this context should be understood as “typical of Moors,”

32 Villanueva Rico, *Casas, mezquitas y tiendas*, 3–5.

33 Orihuela Uzal, “La casa morisca granadina.”

34 Gómez-Moreno González, *Guía de Granada*.

35 Lampérez y Romea, *Arquitectura civil española*, 1:120, 170; García Mercadal, *La casa popular en España*, 63.

although it is clear that it would be necessary to systematise it and confirm when the word appeared and how it evolved.³⁶ In Christian texts after the conquest of 1492, the terms *a la morisca*, *a la francesa*, and *a la romana* (in the Moorish style, the French style, the Roman style) often explain different ways of building a roof, or an arch, as well as referring to a fabric.³⁷ With regard to houses dating from after 1492, we have not found any descriptions that go beyond functional ones (house-*almacería*, house-store) or the house's age, or its size, or the look of the construction (*casilla* [small house], *chiquita* [tiny house], *casa buena* [good house]). We have found the term "Morisco house" after the conquest of Jerez in the apportionment allegedly made in 1266, which is not related to the Nasrid kingdom, although that city had been recently conquered by Castile. Manuel González Jiménez, who studied it thoroughly, concluded that the apportionment officials called small houses "Morisco houses."³⁸ Analysing the apportionment book of Jerez, we find the term "Morisco house" in eighteen entries, although much more frequent is *casa pequeña* (small house), which appears in more than one hundred.³⁹ On occasion it clearly refers to a house: "tres pares de casas moriscas e con otros cinco parejuelos moriscos" [three pairs of Morisco houses and with another five *parejuelos moriscos*] (entry 353), "en linde un par bono e cinco otros moriscos e un corral grande que fue casa morisca" [bordering a good pair and five other Morisco pairs and a large corral that was a Morisco house] (entry 1077). In others it appears accompanying pairs or the aforementioned *parejuelos*, which we must interpret as houses that were combined with others and/or demolished, although they are terms that also referred to various wooden elements of the buildings: "ende la otra parte de la calle otras casas en a un par de casas grande e bono e otro par de casas en que ovo tres pares moriscos" [in the other part of the street in which there were three other houses and a couple of large, good houses and a couple of other Morisco pairs] (entry 85), "enfrente un par de casas grande e bueno e un almasén de aseyte que se tiene en él un par mediano e quatro pequeños e dos corrales grandes en que ovo más de dose pares moriscos ..." [opposite, a couple of large and good houses, and an oil warehouse that has in it a medium pair, and four small ones, and two large corrals in which there were more than twelve Morisco pairs ...] (entry 943). However, in other partitions related to Nasrid cities, like Loja in 1486, we have not found the term "Morisco house,"

36 Bernabé Pons and Rubiera Mata, "La lengua de mudéjares y moriscos," 599.

37 Díez Jorge, "Algunas percepciones cristianas."

38 González Jiménez, "Repartimientos andaluces del siglo XIII." Of 2,585 properties, it is concluded that 25% (627) were small houses.

39 *El libro de repartimiento de Jerez de la Frontera*, I have found *casa morisca* in entries 85, 353, 419, 766, 905, 943, 101, 1029, 1077, 1396, 1445, 1512, 1543, 1583, 1585, 1594, 1695, 1730.

although it would be necessary to conduct a systematic search in other apportionment documents.⁴⁰

Far from the traditional image, sixteenth-century Granadan houses did not all feature a courtyard structure, nor were the majority based on a new design. Rather, the houses evolved by being expanded or, conversely, divided.⁴¹ We could approach domestic architecture in sixteenth-century Granada based on the analysis of a set of strictly formalist parameters: houses with a courtyard, houses with a courtyard and an orchard, houses with two galleries. This division based on architectural aspects is correct and adequate, but we must also strive to perceive some possible cultural modes in these houses. There is a reality of social groups (Mudejars first – followed by Moriscos – , Castilians, Aragonese, Genoese, Jewish converts) and it would be valuable to inquire as to the differences and similarities in their way of conceiving and living in their different dwellings. This view introduces complex nuances and infinite variables that it is necessary to address. We must remember that during the Nasrid period there were major communities of Jews, as well as Genoese. Without suggesting that there was a prototypical Jewish house, Jews' ways of understanding domestic relations may have influenced the internal configuration of spaces. What, then, should we call these houses lived in by Jews but whose possible architectonic structure may be defined as Nasrid?

The study of some houses after the conquest has entailed distinguishing the elements that apparently sustained the Nasrid tradition, and the Castilian aspects that were introduced; and here problems arise in classifying them as Mudejar, Morisco, etc. As we have already indicated, we must take into account that there were major processes involving the reuse of Nasrid properties, with refurbishments of varying magnitudes. Some authors have drawn a distinction between Christian and Morisco houses, based on stylistic elements: Morisco houses had an L-shaped entrance hall and were smaller, with porticoes on two sides of the courtyard; whereas Christian houses were larger, with porticoes on all four sides of the courtyard, and with Mudejar elements in the interior, but featuring magnificent Gothic and Renaissance external façades. Ultimately, however, there was an acknowledgment that there was a true interplay between them, an exchange of elements.⁴² Antonio Orihuela Uzal called certain houses in the Albaicín “Morisco houses” when he perceived a continuation of the Nasrid housing type, as well as the constructive and decorative techniques

40 *Libro de repartimientos de Loja, I.*

41 Díez Jorge, “La casa y las relaciones de género,” 186–94.

42 Henares Cuéllar and López Guzmán, *Arquitectura mudéjar granadina*, 168 ff. New edition in 2020.

and typological characteristics that survived in some areas of the Maghreb after the expulsion in the early seventeenth century.⁴³ The Morisco house was the product of a logical evolution of the Nasrid house. Castilian influences could be seen in the introduction of mixed brick and stonework, the use of Gothic and Renaissance decorative motifs, and the use over time of the upper floor extended to all the galleries of the house, mimicking the layout below.⁴⁴ The difference in the size and number of galleries found in the Morisco houses studied depended, according to Orihuela, on the economic level of their owners and the space available (Fig. 10.2).⁴⁵ According to this scholar, the Morisco house retained two clear aspects of the Andalusí house: its introverted nature and a desire for privacy.⁴⁶ This leads him to use the adjective “Andalusí” for properties already mentioned in the sixteenth century, as in his study, based on the 1527 survey, of Andalusí houses that belonged to mosques and were later donated by the Catholic Monarchs to the Archbishopric of Granada.⁴⁷ Obviously, at this time al-Andalus no longer existed, but the author, through this denomination, transmits these houses’ deep roots in the history of al-Andalus. But it is evident that, beyond these morphological aspects, it would be advisable to investigate in order to determine whether these similarities are a mere question of appearances, or whether Nasrid and Morisco society shared common ways of conceiving domestic space.

After 1530 there appeared the first newly built Christian houses for the aristocracy in which the elements of Granada’s Nasrid architecture no longer prevail. The main characteristics of this new architecture are the monumentalisation of the façade, the frequent abandonment of the L-shaped entrance-way to the courtyard, the absence of a garden space in the courtyard, a hard floor, the replacement of the central pool by an attached pillar in a gallery, the absence of tripartite rooms, the disappearance of lateral alcoves, the maintenance of the central axes for access to the rooms, and the appearance of the staircase as a fundamental element for vertical movement.⁴⁸

Recent works illustrate the complexity of Granada’s houses after the conquest of the Nasrid kingdom, and the difficulty of systematizing them under one stylistic concept, leading to the conclusion that there was no Renaissance or Classical language in contrast to the Mudejar, nor were very different formulas developed.⁴⁹ This difficulty of classifying the Granadan house of the

43 Orihuela Uzal, “La casa morisca granadina.”

44 Orihuela Uzal, “La casa andalusí en Granada” and “The Use of Wood in Morisco Houses.”

45 Orihuela Uzal, “La casa morisca granadina,” 755.

46 Orihuela Uzal, “La casa andalusí en Granada,” 306.

47 Orihuela Uzal, “Casas andalusíes en el libro de habices.”

48 López Guzmán, “La arquitectura doméstica granadina.”

49 Pica, *Casas de la oligarquía castellana*, 929.



FIGURE 10.2 Interior of a house at 16 San Martín Street (Granada), catalogued as a Morisco house. 16th century

sixteenth century into a given style can be explained by the peculiarities that arose in the era of cultural confluence that Granada experienced after the Christian conquest of the city in 1492, and also the need to systematize the typological variety entailed by the Nasrid dwelling in different contexts, not only the urban one.

4 Population Settlements and Homes during the Nasrid Era

There is no doubt that al-Andalus was characterized by the importance of its cities. Much progress has been made in research in this regard, with work such as that by Christine Mazzoli-Guintard, who, through an analysis of Arabic sources, has ably examined the cities of al-Andalus, combining social processes and morphology.⁵⁰ Also noteworthy are the astute observations on urban development by Julio Navarro Palazón, who provided valuable reflections on the creative or planned intentions of all settlements, discarding the idea of spontaneity while describing the urban phenomenon as something dynamic and changing, spawning evident situations of depopulation, saturation and overflow – for example, due to changes introduced by land redistribution.⁵¹ These advances make it possible to discard the classic image of the cities of al-Andalus as very compact concentrations of houses, when, in reality, they also included non-constructed spaces. Current research has also dispelled the image of random, labyrinthine layouts, supposedly due to an inability to “organize” the territory. In fact, these urban layouts were the result of social needs, as each owner acted in accordance with a set of basic premises in order to respect the privacy of his neighbour, guided by lawyers and *alarifes* (master builders), so that this form of organization was, in fact, coherent and planned.

This process of urban development also characterised the Nasrid kingdom of Granada, but other types of settlements should not be ignored; although classed as rural or semirural, they should not be viewed as opposed to the city. Despite the fact that these “rural” nuclei accounted for an important part of the Nasrid kingdom of Granada and al-Andalus, they have been less studied. Among these settlements were *alquerías*, essentially agrarian groupings made up of houses and lands held by different owners, and attributed to tribal or clan-based origins. There were also villages (*day'a*), rural leisure properties and farmhouses (*dār* or *jishr*), country houses (*majshar*), royal farms (*munya*),

50 Mazzoli-Guintard, *Ciudades de Al-Andalus*.

51 Navarro Palazón and Jiménez Castillo, “Sobre la ciudad islámica y su evolución.”

and periurban orchards (*karm, janna, ḥushsh*).⁵² The Arabic sources do not clarify these typologies, and neither does the subsequent documentation, as in the case of Granada's *cármenes*: for example, in the land-survey document of Loaysa from 1575 it is not possible to discern, for the area of Aynadamar (Granada), whether the *carmen* generally included a house, and whether it played a supporting role for rural labours.⁵³ Some studies of pottery carried out in this area reach conclusions that may seem "contradictory," as they suggest great *almunias* (rural estates for leisure) with houses and towers in the fourteenth-century Arab sources, in contrast to the small houses, orchards, and *cármenes* described in Christian documentation after the conquest. It is pointed out that this is probably due to the social heterogeneity that characterised these spaces: along with large landowners there were families contracted for the care and exploitation of these properties, hence the diversity of pottery elements found, ranging from very rudimentary items to more elaborate glazed decorative *alicatados* (mosaic tile panels).⁵⁴

As we have said, the line between city and country, between rural and urban spaces, is not always so clear, due not only to the complexity of social relations and multiple migrations, but also morphologically, as there were many semiurban enclaves and a diversity of settlement categories that the sources themselves do not explicitly define (*madīna, hiṣn, al-qarya* ...). There were aspects that did give rise to the establishment of differences, such as cultural level – measured, for example, by the number of *ulemas* (Muslim scholars) and poets, and strongly associated, according to the sources, with the city as a phenomenon. Urban layout and architectural typologies differed in many respects among settlements, but these distinctions were not only between the rural and the urban, between the countryside and the city, but also among the cities of the Nasrid kingdom themselves. In some respects the prestigious cities of Granada, Málaga, and Almería were not really comparable. Granada, for example, as the capital of the kingdom, boasted important and innovative infrastructure. Within the cities there arose very diverse models of houses, sometimes depending on the urban area where they were located. During the years after the conquest of Granada, the areas featuring the most activity in the purchase and rental of houses were the Albaicín and the Axares districts and the entire area of the lower city. In the areas that were on the outskirts at that time

52 See Martínez Vázquez, "Tras las huellas de los poderes locales," 75.

53 Barrios Aguilera, *De la Granada morisca*, 77.

54 Villarino Martínez, "Aproximación al estudio de la cerámica nazari," 231–32.

we have found less property-related activity. In these zones varying degrees of urban pressure impacted the capacity to enlarge houses.⁵⁵

In addition, these large cities do not exclusively define the urban phenomenon during the Nasrid period, as they are not representative of most settlements. Though highly significant, they were, in fact, “exceptional” and unique. Let us not forget enclaves that, although dating back further, reached the level of “cities,” according to Arab sources, such as Loja, Baza, Ronda, and Vélez-Málaga, and which help us to understand more fully the process of Nasrid urbanization.

It is clear that different social situations gave rise to diverse needs related to domestic spaces, as some activities prevailed over others. Let us look at two case studies of Nasrid dwellings in two “opposite” locations: one “urban” and palatine (the Alhambra), and another “rural” and fortified (El Castillejo, Los Guájares, Granada). Both illustrate the diversity of ways in which domestic spaces were understood during the Nasrid period, but it is evident, as we shall see later, that they do not present a “typical” model of a Nasrid house, as this generalization, though attempts have been made to advance it, can be too simplistic. We might say that they are “opposites” because while in Los Guájares thorough and systematic excavation has been possible, at the Alhambra, despite being one of the most important monuments in the world, archaeological excavations to date have been haphazard and unbalanced, a phenomenon at least partly owing to the dynamics that shape the management of the monument, in which tourism-related interests have, at times, tended to prevail over knowledge.

The Alhambra is a palatine city created by the sultan as a centre of power and a residence. In addition to houses for the Nasrid family and persons close to the court, it included domestic servants and artisans who resided there. Several researchers have published on the possible houses at the Alhambra during the Nasrid era, including pioneering work by Leopoldo Torres Balbás and Jesús Bermúdez Pareja.⁵⁶ Among later studies we must mention a text by Jesús Bermúdez López, and especially the work of Antonio Orihuela Uzal.⁵⁷ Without stopping to consider houses traditionally considered palatine, we find

55 Díez Jorge, “El género en la arquitectura doméstica,” 166–67.

56 Torres Balbás, “Plantas de casas árabes en la Alhambra”; Bermúdez Pareja, “Exploraciones arqueológicas en la Alhambra” and “Excavaciones en la plaza de los Aljibes de la Alhambra.”

57 Bermúdez López, “Contribución al estudio de las construcciones domésticas”; Orihuela Uzal, *Casas y palacios nazaríes*.

it more worthwhile to look at others less determined by protocol.⁵⁸ The greatest concentration of Nasrid-period dwellings at the Alhambra known to date was found in the Alcazaba, where the figures range from seventeen, indicated by Jesús Bermúdez López, to ten, cited by Antonio Orihuela. Their function has traditionally been explained as houses for the military garrison (Fig. 10.3). Another relevant area where there are vestiges of Islamic homes is what has come to be known as the lower medina, with the ruins of five houses. In the upper medina there is a house next to the Palace of the Abencerrajes, and another two next to the Tower of the Captain, which have been attributed to officials of the Nasrid court. In the upper Partal area there are two houses next to what has been called the Palace of Yūsuf III. In the lower Partal there are four adjacent to the Tower of the Ladies, which correspond to different junctures of the Nasrid period, in addition to that found next to the oratory. Historians have traditionally concluded that the houses in this part of the lower Partal were for use by the Nasrid royal family, though some of them may not have formed part of the royal residential complex.

There are others indicated in wide-ranging data. At the end of the nineteenth century Manuel Gómez Moreno pointed out a house under the Palace of Charles V that appeared during excavations completed by Mariano Contreras. The same author mentions as Islamic the House of the Widows, to the east of the Convent of San Francisco, although nothing remained of it in his time.⁵⁹ More ambiguous is the case of the houses next to the Tower of the Cube, in the Alcazaba, identified by Jesús Bermúdez Pareja as a result of the excavations carried out in 1954 at the Square of the Wells. While he considered the rest of the houses found in the area of this square, up to the Wine Gate, to be Morisco, he did not believe that those close to the Tower of the Cube were Islamic or Morisco.⁶⁰ Finally, Jesús Bermúdez López mentioned a few more in the area of Real Street: specifically, across from what was the southern façade of the mosque, as well as the remains of another Nasrid structure at number 30 Real Street, and probably on the plot next to that one, and another house at number 36 on the same road. The latter were apparently located on each side of the alley across from the mosque's baths. Generally speaking, to date this is what is known of houses from the Nasrid period at the Alhambra, without including the various palace complexes.

58 For a map indicating the location of these houses and a more detailed study see Díez Jorge, "Casas en la Alhambra."

59 Gómez-Moreno González, *Guía de Granada*, 1:59–60; for Widows, see 139.

60 Bermúdez Pareja, "Excavaciones en la plaza de los Aljibes."



FIGURE 10.3 Nasrid houses in the Alcazaba at the Alhambra, Granada

Based on this material, the various specialists mentioned reached similar conclusions, pointing out the evident prevalence of houses centred around a courtyard, with important exceptions, such as the houses known as Casitas del Partal (Small Houses of El Partal), which lacked a courtyard. Around this courtyard, never a perfect rectangle or square, the different chambers were distributed. The courtyard often featured a pool or a fountain at its centre. All were equipped with water pipes. Most of them had a top floor accessed by stairs leading down to the courtyard and galleries. Access to the courtyard was usually via an L-shaped passage. There was often a main room that opened directly onto the courtyard, the most luxurious including small side alcoves. A particularity of the Alhambra houses is the presence in many of them of the *almatraya* (glazed ceramic floor) before the threshold of the main room. There are remnants of small houses that indicate enclosures with doors, and in some there are ruins of small stables at the entrance (Fig. 10.4, Fig. 10.5). Largely unsuccessful efforts have been made, since the first studies, to pin down precise dates, and most remain uncertain. However, there is a consensus that those corresponding to the Alcazaba dated from the early Nasrid period. These houses feature courtyards without porticoes, perhaps because they were older or humbler, while those of El Partal are thought to have been built in the fourteenth century – some believe in the first quarter, others in the middle of that century, with the exception of one apparently dating from the fifteenth. Without a doubt, the Alhambra still boasts enormous potential for knowledge of these domestic spaces, but rereadings of earlier excavations are necessary in an effort to identify, study, and better understand the material that was obtained from them. It is also necessary to execute new archaeological interventions with high standards in order to establish an at least reasonably reliable timeline, as the Nasrid period spans two and a half centuries, during which there were, obviously, changes in the way domestic spaces were understood. All this must be done without overlooking the Christian interventions after the conquest, which give us important information about houses of the late Nasrid era in the Alhambra.

These Nasrid houses at the Alhambra belonged to a palatine city, and therefore it is only natural that they reflect strong hierarchies and major differences. The rural, fortified settlement of El Castillejo (Los Guájares, Granada), abandoned suddenly at the end of the thirteenth or beginning of the fourteenth century, during the Nasrid period, stands out for its diversity. Unlike the first excavations at the Alhambra, in this case it was possible to excavate and study the pottery found *in situ*, as it was an abandoned village. This gave us some important information about the possible uses of the houses' different spaces. Research indicates that most of the houses had courtyards, although there

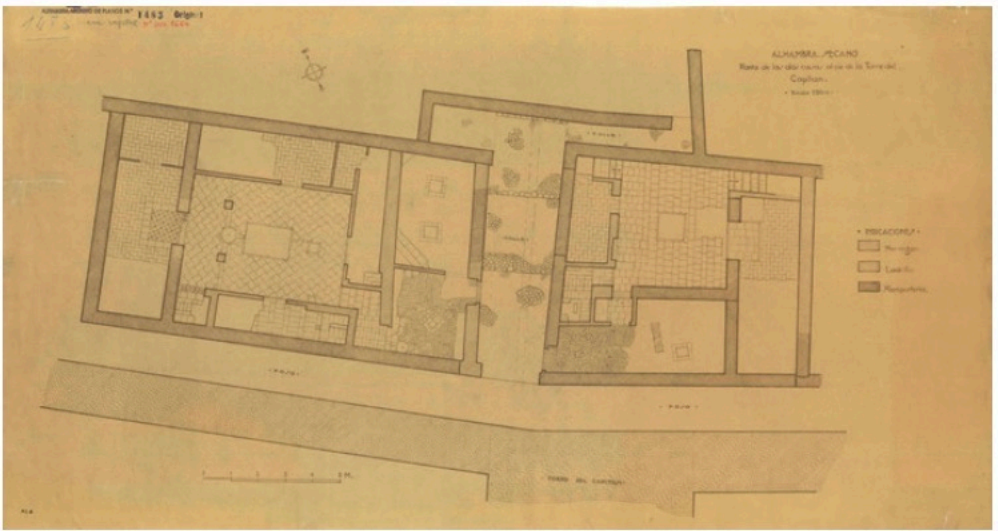


FIGURE 10.4 Plan of Nasrid houses next to the Tower of the Captain, Alhambra, Granada. Produced by Manuel López Bueno in 1933–1934 during the excavation



FIGURE 10.5 View of one of the houses next to the Tower of the Captain, Alhambra, Granada

were other types, including some with just one room. In general it seems that they had a second floor, as evidenced by the existence of stairs. It is interesting to note that the settlement was made up of more homogeneous constructions, without sharp hierarchical differentiations, which has led to speculation that it may have been a very cohesive agricultural community. Here there were no major differences among the quality of the houses' different features, nor porticos in the courtyards, which adopted shapes and designs adapted to the non-level terrain. The floors are not of the baked brick and glazed ceramic found at the Alhambra, but rather layers of pebbles that use lime or plaster grout. Some do not have hallways, whether L-shaped or not, but rather a direct entrance to the courtyard via a narrow corridor. This homogeneity of the dwellings found at El Castillo does not mean that there was not a certain diversity of ways of understanding domestic spaces, which seems to have varied in accordance with the needs of the domestic groups that occupied them. Hence there is a variety of types, which has led to a distinction between houses with a central courtyard and two rooms in the form of an L, occupying two of the four walls; houses with a courtyard and three or four rooms forming a U, situated in three different walls; a single-space house without a courtyard, of one room; a house with two parallel spaces, of which one is a courtyard; composite houses, one of a type featuring a courtyard and L-shaped rooms, but that underwent an extension, and another one formed by a central nucleus around which there were other buildings without a direct relationship among them; and dwellings of an indeterminate structure (Fig. 10.6).⁶¹



FIGURE 10.6 Representation of the southern area of the settlement of El Castillo (Los Guájares, Granada). Produced with a drone by José Antonio Esquivel and José Antonio Benavides, and by the Technical Support Service of the Delegation of Public Works and Housing of Granada (Enrique Aranda, Carlos González Martín, and Jorge Suso Fernández-Figares)

61 See the excellent, detailed description found in García Porras, *La cerámica del poblado fortificado medieval de "El Castillo" (Los Guájares, Granada)*, 53–153.

There are notable differences between El Castillejo and the Alhambra. We can continue to trace the diversity and complexity of Nasrid domestic spaces according to the type of settlement, rather than asserting a unique model and style. Although we can identify common elements such as the courtyard, this should not lead us to embrace a prototypical image of the domestic space. Obviously, the courtyard could provide for greater illumination and ventilation in any type of dwelling, but it may have been understood and utilised in various ways throughout al-Andalus. An interesting case in this respect, though dated prior to the Nasrid period, is that of the *alquería* (small rural community) in Cújar (Granada). One of the excavated houses is structured internally around a large courtyard, dated from the twelfth century, around which are distributed two L-shaped galleries on the southern and western sides. The most important element is, undoubtedly, the courtyard, covering 304 square metres, in which archaeologists did not detect traces of internal organisation with platforms, but did confirm two levels of topsoil, giving rise to an initial hypothesis that this courtyard may have been used for crop cultivation, as its eastern enclosing wall featured a water source halfway up it in the form of clay conduits.⁶²

These varying enclaves and activities are fundamental to understanding that the houses and their spaces, among them the courtyard, could be used and inhabited in different ways, even if they dated from proximate periods on the timeline, as may very well have been the case with the first houses of the Alhambra and the last ones at the countryside site of El Castillejo.

5 Typologies and Formal Aspects of the Nasrid House

Unfortunately there is often much talk of the “traditional house” of a culture or a territory, when a closer look reveals that the typology is actually quite recent, or even invented.⁶³ Tradition must be distinguished from custom, since the former imposes fixed, unchanging practices, while the latter does not preclude innovation and change at given times.⁶⁴ We will refrain from pointing out errors made as part of some house-restoration projects, which, seeking to discover a certain “charm” or “flavour,” have interpreted as traditional what in fact were elements from other cultural contexts, or entirely invented. We

62 I am grateful to the archaeologist in charge of this excavation, Ángel Rodríguez Aguilera, who gave me the text he is preparing for possible publication: “Espacios domésticos y agrícolas en la periferia de Granada. La alquería islámica de Cújar. Granada (Siglos XI–XII).”

63 Hobsbawm and Ranger, *La invención de la tradición*.

64 On the concept of repetition and the new, Benjamin’s text “Eisenman and the Housing of Tradition” is of interest.

should point out that, historiographically, the image of a “traditional” Islamic house has prevailed and been portrayed as something fixed, characterised by a courtyard and serving as a space essentially for women, giving rise to a design centred on “privacy” and “intimacy.”

Without entirely dismissing these ideas, we must start to dispel certain assumptions about fixed and unchanging elements attributed to the houses of al-Andalus, and to introduce the necessary nuances and qualifications. Not all houses had courtyards, although those were very common. Torres Balbás sought to establish an initial type of classification of the Nasrid dwelling, emphasizing several types: one with a rectangular courtyard with arches on columns along the shorter sides; more modest ones with a rectangular courtyard and an open gallery featuring columns or pillars; the most humble, with a small rectangular courtyard without an arcade that gave onto the rooms; and houses without courtyards, which he considered anomalous: these were built, according to this author, when they were in secluded places, or between gardens, such as the houses of El Partal (the Alhambra).⁶⁵ There has been much study since then, giving rise to further clarifications, including those provided by Antonio Orihuela, who pointed out the great variety of morphologies, often corresponding to diverse domestic groups.⁶⁶ A large proportion of Nasrid dwellings featured a courtyard, which provided for internal ventilation and lighting, as well as constituting a unique form of organisation and distribution. However, even in regal and urban areas not all the houses had courtyards, even in some belonging to the Nasrid dynasty but possibly initiated during the Almohad Caliphate: examples include the Cuarto Real de Santo Domingo and the Alcázar Genil, both devoid of this type of courtyard as the central hub around which the other rooms were configured. It is clear that having a courtyard and porticoes was not exclusive to the Nasrids. It is now possible to establish in a more detailed manner those architectural features that were frequent in Nasrid homes, especially urban ones: sitting rooms accessed by a single entrance decorated with plasterwork and formed by an arch with *tacas* (small niches); the sitting room enclosed by wooden doors opening outwards, using hinging posts; cabinets (*alacenas*) on the inside of the wall and to the sides of the door; *alhanías* at the ends, elevated slightly off the floor; life essentially lived on the ground floor, although many houses featured an upper floor; an elongated pool along the longitudinal axis of the courtyard, etc. Many of

65 Torres Balbás, “Plantas de casas árabes en la Alhambra.”

66 Orihuela Uzal, *Casas y palacios nazaríes. Siglos XIII–XV*, 19–26. Note that this work generally studies urban houses and homes belonging to high social classes.

these aspects were unthinkable in the most modest Nasrid homes, which had neither a pool nor porticoes.⁶⁷

Therefore, along with houses that included courtyards with different layouts, there were homes without courtyards, as well as single-story structures, and others with two stories, in some cases after expansion in response to urban pressure, in others due to socioeconomic factors, and in still others simply to meet domestic needs. This dual height varied the typology of the house, as some featured a second floor of dimensions similar to those of the ground floor, while in other cases it was even larger, because of overhangs and eaves – or smaller, as in some rural houses, where the second story was reduced to a kind of *algorfa*, in some cases used as a storage space. Sometimes the houses underwent partitioning processes that introduced changes to their physiognomies during the Nasrid period. There was clearly a multitude of circumstances, a fact that demands not a static image of domestic space but rather a sequence of layers showing the different processes which transformed the Nasrid house: in some cases well documented, as on 4 Santa Inés Street (Granada), dating from the fourteenth century but with refurbishments dating from the fifteenth (Fig. 10.7).⁶⁸

It is important here to note the existence of other domestic spaces, as sometimes we find *algorfas* and *almacerías*, generally on the top floor, inhabited by people other than those residing in the lower part of the property. These were small spaces that in some cases were inhabited in the absence of a courtyard, and might enjoy interior access, external stairs, or, in other cases, stairs leading to the vestibule.⁶⁹ In a sale contract from 1480, with a settlement document dating from 1483, an *almacería* is cited whose buyer is aware that “dicha finca sufre la servidumbre de que, por bajo de la almacería y por la parte del vendedor hay un cuarto de casa pequeño, servidumbre que acepta, obligándose a respetarla” [this property includes an easement: under the *almacería* and in the seller’s part there is a small room of the house. This easement is accepted, and (the buyer) pledges to respect it.] It is worth noting that the seller was the buyer’s stepfather. The seller later sold to the same woman “la mitad del pasillo que hay al este de su casa y al cual tiene salida la almacería de la compradora” [half of the corridor to the east of his house, accessible via the buyer’s

67 Orihuela Uzal, “La casa andalusí: un recorrido.”

68 Almagro Gorbea, Orihuela Uzal and Sánchez Sánchez, “La casa nazarí de la calle del cobertizo de Santa Inés.”

69 Rodríguez Gómez, “Algunos interrogantes sobre la ciudad islámica.”



FIGURE 10.7 Detail of the interior of the house at 4 Cobertizo de Santa Inés Street, Granada. 14th century with reforms from the 15th

almacería]. The other half of the corridor still belonged to the seller, as it was indicated that the buyer wished to add it to her *almacería*.⁷⁰

The real estate records of the time actually do not specify what an *almacería* was, typologically or functionally. What is clear is that it was associated with houses, with domestic architecture. *Almacerías* were not always small; in fact some were large, in some cases even bigger than the house. In addition to a diversity of sizes there was also typological variety: we have found, for example, a corral cited that used to be an *almacería*, a house that was an *almacería*, an *almacería* over a store, etc.; in general, the descriptions reflect a great variety, as an *almacería* could include houses, doorways, chambers, palaces, and courtyards. Their uses were not at all well-defined. Though it was often indicated that they could be used to store grain, we find many examples in which it is specified that they were inhabited, perhaps reflecting the several functions that they served, as was typical of the architecture of the time. In documentation from a few years after the conquest it is common to find references to an *almacería*, frequently as property belonging to women. Some of these purchased *almacerías* were far from the buyer's regular residence, and the buyer acquired only the *almacería* even when it formed part of another property. This fragmentation of domestic architecture must have been relatively frequent, and worried the municipal authorities due to the problems that it entailed between neighbours, such that in several cases attempts were made to unify the ownership of given buildings to prevent scenarios in which the upper and lower floors of the same house had different owners. The problems of *almacerías* located under houses were also specified.⁷¹ At other times, however, the space formed part of a unified arrangement, when the house and corral were together and the *almacería* was located above them – as in the case of a document written in Arabic on the sale of a house owned by Umm al-Fath in the city of Granada, dated 1493, which mentions the sale of a house with a corral to the south and, over it, an *almacería*.⁷²

Another idea that merits qualification is that the Islamic house, and therefore the Nasrid one, was a space for women, where they spent more time than men did. This aspect does not make it different from houses of other cultures, nor does the fact that the circulation of people from outside the domestic circle was strictly controlled. In addition, whether women spent most of their time in the household or not varies immensely depending on the social class to which they belonged, as many domestic tasks were carried out outside the

70 Document 39, trans. Seco de Lucena, *Documentos árabe-granadinos*, 75–77.

71 Díez Jorge, “El género en la arquitectura doméstica,” 177–78.

72 Díez Jorge, “Mujeres y arquitectura a finales del siglo xv.”

home, such as going to the souk, to the public ovens, or to the river to do the washing.⁷³ We should also reflect on what is meant by intimacy, a concept that, applied to the home, really belongs to later times. And we must remember that this “bastion of intimacy” was not, in any case, created exclusively for women and the home that they have been said to represent; the scarcity of apertures, and the L-shaped entrances, affected every member of the domestic space, not just women. Despite the associations traditionally drawn between this aspect and the Islamic world, it is worth noting that this protection and safeguarding is also found in other contexts and cultures, though it is approached in different ways.⁷⁴

6 Behind Closed Doors

With regard to the observation that the interior of the Andalusí house contained limited furniture and fixtures, it must be borne in mind that this situation varied enormously depending upon the social class of its occupants, and that in the medieval Christian world homes were hardly overflowing with furnishings either, though there were certain differences. Interior accommodations did not conform to a static model, but rather were subject to the demands of their occupants and their potential. Depending on the type of house, it can be difficult to find rooms with a clearly identified activity, while in other cases their roles are clear. The smallest houses had to be very flexible in their use of space.

As far as possible, the study of a home should be carried out taking into account the needs of the domestic group that occupied it: basic (eating, sleeping), material (shelter and work), and social, such as affective and hierarchical relations. A home's interior distribution, as simple as it may seem, was often determined by these needs, making use of physical aspects – separation by walls, levels, and heights, the use of different materials, hallways and corridors between rooms – and architectural design, the main determiner of domestic volumes and uses. It is in some of these architectural elements, such as capitals and arches, that the most recognizable elements for the stylistic definition of Nasrid architecture have been found, a fact that, in turn, helps us to understand possible uses of its rooms. It is worth mentioning the Nasrid cubic capital, the frequent use of the scalloped arch with minute festoonery, especially

73 Díez Jorge, “Women and the Architecture of al-Andalus,” 507 ff.

74 Díez Jorge and Espinosa Villegas, “Cristianas, judías y musulmanas”; Moscatiello, “La privacidad doméstica.”



FIGURE 10.8 Detail of Nasrid mural painting at the House of the Girones (Granada)

in porticoes; the technical and aesthetic mastery of the *mocárabe* (*muqarnas*) appearing on capitals, arches and vaults; the use in certain chambers of finely decorated woodwork ceilings; certain specific features in Nasrid roof framing; and the use of glazed pieces for floors and tiling.⁷⁵ Many of these elements do not appear in more modest homes. Mural paintings do frequently appear in the houses, however, although painting in the Nasrid home has not been studied and systematized as a whole. There are just a few good examples preserved of geometrical and vegetal elements, in the House of the Girones and the House of Zafra, both in Granada (Fig. 10.8).⁷⁶ But there are small vestiges in many of the houses, including the most modest ones, which allow us to surmise that the use of mural paintings was widespread throughout different rooms, as well as on the porticoes of the courtyards, where there was a greater concentration of decoration.

75 López Pertíñez, *La carpintería en la arquitectura nazarí*; Fernández Puertas, Marinetto Sánchez and Alzajairi López (eds.), *La carpintería de lo blanco*.

76 Although there are more recent works, the pioneering study by Medina Flórez and Manzano Moreno merits mention: *Técnica y metodología en la restauración de pinturas murales nazaríes*.

Let us enter a house through its wooden doors, which at times displayed wrought-iron nails, knockers, and large keys. Inside, braziers heated the home, and textiles were used as insulation against the cold and the sun. Fountains cooled the home in the summer. Basins were used for personal hygiene. Some houses perhaps had their own lathe or loom so that their inhabitants could work at home. We need to stop for a minute and smell the food being cooked in an *anafre* (portable clay burner); at times a more elaborate space was reserved for the preparation of food, with cooking utensils and storage elements like jugs, pitchers, casseroles, pots, crocks, mortars, cheese keepers, pans, lids, jars, etc. When it was time to eat, it was sometimes with spoons, *zafas* (platters), *ataifores* (deep dishes), cups, mugs, jugs, and *alcuzas* (cruets). Everything was kept in small chests, both personal clothing and textiles for the house. After sunset, candles and oil lamps would help light the home.⁷⁷

Some of these objects are found in excavations, while we know about others from documentation in archives. In the partitioning and liquidation of the inheritance of a Muslim woman (Mudejar, at this point, as it is dated in 1495) whose house was in the Albaicín, there was a carafe of Málaga glass, a Chinese mortar, a wooden reliquary, a saw, a piece of textile and a wooden loom, six pillows, two *almaizares* (pieces of thin cloth to cover the hair), spun linen, a copper skillet, an *almadraque* (quilted cushion), a pearl, a thin wool carpet, a sheepskin, a prayer mat, a water jug, and many other domestic items.⁷⁸

There have been many studies of furniture and jewelry, with now-classic works on inventories and dowries, and specifically on textiles and ceramics; less emphasis has been placed on correlating these household items with the different rooms of the houses, though some researchers have striven to do so.⁷⁹ Household items should be connected to the physical space of the house, locating the objects in specific areas and realising that different pieces could be elements that served to organise the space and the internal social hierarchy of a house. A good study on Nasrid dwellings, in this case rural ones, was carried out in El Castillejo (Los Guájares, Granada), where, based on the study of ceramic materials, it was possible to ascertain with some confidence the different functions and uses of certain spaces in the dwellings. In number five, for example, it was concluded that the family must have spent most of its time in

77 The catalogue of the exhibition on household goods in the Nasrid home, held in 2015 at the Museum of the Alhambra, is illustrative: *El ajuar de la casa nazarí* (http://www.juntadeandalucia.es/export/drupaljda/El_ajuar_de_la_Casa_NazarA-Catalogo.pdf, consulted 6 June 2020).

78 Document 92, trans. Seco de Lucena, *Documentos arábigo-granadinos*, 144–47.

79 Roselló Bordoy, *El ajuar de las casas andalúsies*; Gutiérrez Lloret and Cañavate Castejón, “Casas y cosas.”

the courtyard where food was stored. Another one of the largest areas was used for rest, and another smaller one for storage. The presence of discs on which to bake large amounts of bread, and the large number of earthenware pots, suggest the importance of activities related to breadmaking, such as kneading and baking.⁸⁰ In the excavations of a house regarded as Morisco, archaeologists uncovered the remnants of a Nasrid dwelling from the fifteenth century with three galleries and a possible fourth, a rectangular central courtyard, and principal rooms, at least at the northern and southern ends. Dating back to Nasrid times, the ground floor featured an entrance, a hallway, and some latrines beside the home. In the sixteenth century it underwent some refurbishments, but not major ones: the original entrance was walled off to one side, and the use of the latrines was changed, compartmentalising it to obtain a space for food preparation where materials specifically for cooking appeared, from both the Nasrid period and somewhat later. Together with Nasrid pear-shaped cooking vessels, an oil lamp, an *ataifor*, and a *jofaina* (washbowl), there appeared a casserole with elements that would be consolidated in the sixteenth century.⁸¹ Piqued by curiosity, we long to know if there was a change of occupants after the conquests, why they would compartmentalize the latrines to make a new home space there, etc. Archival documentation definitely helps us to understand the interior of these houses and, at times, based on how and when the objects are listed, we can intuit their location in the house.

A scarcity of furniture is frequently mentioned as one of the most characteristic aspects of dwellings in al-Andalus, and rightfully so. There were benches or couches attached to the walls that served as both beds and seats, small tables, and trunks and chests to store clothes and household objects. All of them could be made of wood and covered with leather, or with pieces of wood assembled employing the techniques traditionally used for finely decorated woodwork ceilings. Still, an absence of furniture does not mean that these were bare spaces devoid of any tools for housework. We know that some houses of the Nasrid period contained very refined dishes, and in them the individual dish had been introduced. There was also pottery glazed in gold, sometimes combined with cobalt blue, which was very costly because it needed several firings. Textiles were also used to furnish houses, covering walls and furniture. This appreciation for details and refinement in their objects is particularly well documented in royal spaces and those corresponding to the aristocracy, but also in other more simple but intensely inhabited areas, where there appears an immense repertoire of unglazed pottery bearing stamped decorations, kitchen

80 García Porras, *La cerámica del poblado fortificado medieval de "El Castillejo"*, 69, 70.

81 Rodríguez Aguilera, "Informe-Memoria de la excavación arqueológica de urgencia."

tools, braziers and oil lamps, to which we must add the entire atmosphere created throughout the interior with textile decoration. Let us not forget that the Nasrid kingdom was one of the finest producers of cloth and textiles, especially during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and that they boasted vivid colours and high-quality dyes. This aspect is interesting to highlight. An example of this limited furniture is the one that Seco de Lucena mentioned based on Arab documents dating from the fifteenth century: a house whose furnishings were humble and scanty, consisting of a *marfa'a* (which he considered a kind of sideboard) and a *thābūt*, a piece of furniture considered akin to a chest.⁸² It is true that there may have been a dearth of furniture in some cases, but this does not mean that houses were not furnished or appointed, as in the same documents we can appreciate the fine textiles found in houses, with silk pillows, headboards and textiles – generally, as we know, featuring vivid colours.⁸³

Through the study of household goods we can also enter a world of human emotions. The house fulfils the role of bringing together a group of people linked by affection, kinship, and cooperation. It is a place where relationships and prohibitions are focused, where internal and external coherence is given to the domestic group that inhabits it, and where a series of lessons are learned about sensitivity, solidarity, authority, and punishment. Some of those emotions and affections can be appreciated through proper interpretations of these domestic objects. In this way we can provide meaning to the study of Nasrid domestic space, because its walls and roofs were made to harbour life, because its cushions and curtains were silent witnesses to caresses and blows, and because the perfume in a glass jar may have made someone dream. And those kisses and caresses, dreams and failures, took place in the room of a Nasrid house.

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82 Seco de Lucena, *Documentos árábigo-granadinos*, I.

83 Document 7, trans. Seco de Lucena, *Documentos árábigo-granadinos*, 7–11. Serrano, “Amueblar la casa con palabras.”

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