

A Companion to Islamic Granada

Edited by

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From Stones to Clay Bowls. Visual Arts of the City's Islamic Past

Alberto García Porras

1 Introduction

Granada was one of the great cities that marked the Spanish Middle Ages. The material remains of this period speak very clearly of this, and are key to reconstructing the city's historical and material evolution over time.

The present chapter will deal with the analysis of its material culture, understood in a broad sense, from the vestiges of medieval urbanism—infrastructure, buildings, construction material, etc.—to the items manufactured in the city's industrial areas, which played such an important role in everyday life.¹ Material remains that are difficult to interpret, considered a result of a certain social, economic, and cultural group activities, should be analyzed out of both the social and cultural context in which they were produced and the special context in which they fulfilled their function and were utilized. Considering this general concept of material culture, those vestiges will be examined in depth in connection with the urban and domestic context from where they come, highlighting their specific material features (building techniques), structure and disposition. Finally, the development of these pieces will also be analyzed, depending on both the different dynasties ruling Islamic Granada and the scene in which these objects were used in the daily life, although many of these specific issues will be treated more in detail elsewhere in this volume.

2 The Development of a New Islamic City

As has been previously stated, the city of Granada was founded after the collapse of the Umayyad caliphate of Cordoba, when a new North African dynasty, the Zirids emerged in the region of Granada, who decided to create an urban center that would act as their capital. The chosen location was a pre-existing fortification known as *ḥiṣn Gharnāṭa* or “castle of Granada,” which was located

1 Giannichedda, “Uomini e cose.”

on high ground in the what is now the district of Albayzin.² The Zirids installed their first palace in this fortification, and soon the city started spreading down the valley. Shortly afterwards, the city came to occupy most of the slope and the plain below when most of the inhabitants of *Madīnat Ilbīra*, capital of the *cora* (the province during the Caliphate) moved to Gharnāṭa. Also key in this regard was the construction of defensive structures such as walls and gates, and infrastructure such as water supply channels, as Ieva Rēklaitytė will tackle in her chapter. Initially these consisted of the channel of Aynadamar, which comes from a spring in the nearby hills, and an ancillary *coracha* that collected water from the Darro River. At a later date, the city was also supplied by the channels of Axares and Romayla (also linked to the Darro), and Gorda (supplied by the Genil River).³

The construction technique used in many of these buildings was different from that used during the Umayyad period. The city walls, for instance, were built using hard lime concrete reinforced by large stone blocks, a technique known as “calicanto.” The concrete was applied with the aid of wooden formwork composed of vertical panels and horizontal bars; the concrete—a homogenous mix of lime, sand and stones—was poured inside the formwork and then rammed tight. Using this technique, the work could proceed upwards once the blocks of concrete were hard. The result was a solid wall, but often the corners required reinforcing with sandstone blocks, as is the case in several sections of the medieval wall of Granada. This technique was known and used at an earlier date in *madīnat Ilbīra*, but in Granada the technique was perfected.⁴

Other buildings erected during this period are, however, very similar to those built during the Umayyad era: for example, the Bridge of the Cadí, which in reality is the Gate of Tambourins or Boards (*Bāb al-Difāf*) (Fig. 2.1), and the minaret/tower in the Church of San José, in the Albayzin. Some buildings from this period have disappeared and are only known from old drawings and paintings. Apparently, these buildings were constructed during the reigns of Zāwī (r. 403–09/1013–19) and Ḥabūs b. Zīrī (r. 409–29/1019–38), with sandstone blocks arranged in a mix of headers and stretchers.

The second period of expansion of the city took place from the 7th/13th century onwards with the rise of a new dynasty in the city, the Banū Naṣr. They, after the fall of the Almohad Empire, founded what was to be the last Islamic

² Malpica, “Granada, ciudad islámica.”

³ Sarr, “La Granada zirí,” pp. 135–68.

⁴ Malpica, “La ciudad andalusí de Ilbīra,” p. 38.



FIGURE 2.1 Granada, *Bāb al-Difāf* (Gate of the Tambourins, 11th c.)

state in the Iberian Peninsula: the Nasrid Kingdom of Granada, to which Bárbara Boloix-Gallardo will devote her chapter.⁵

During this period of expansion, new *arrabales* (suburban areas) emerged to the east, *al-Fakhhārīn-Najd*, and north, Albayzin. The Christian advance

⁵ Malpica, “La expansión de la ciudad.”

into the Guadalquivir Valley and Levante in the 7th/13th century meant that important migratory flows moved towards the kingdom. Many inhabitants of al-Andalus moved to the recently founded Nasrid Kingdom of Granada or definitively left the peninsula in order to start a new life on the Southern shores of the Mediterranean.⁶

The growth of the city, therefore, can be explained, at least partially, by these migratory flows. The new dynasty was also behind the construction of a new palatial city, *Madīnat al-Ḥamrā'* or Alhambra, located near the old Alcazaba.⁷ In this period, the city underwent significant developments: new walls were built, using a new construction technique called *calicostrado*; new gates were opened, both in the new and the old walls; and new major buildings (aside from the Alhambra) were erected. These new constructions included the Madraza (*madrasa*),⁸ the New Alhóndiga (*al-funduqa al-jadīda*, where the merchants who visited Granada used to lodge), the Maristán or hospital, and several high-status houses such as Daralhorra, Casa del Chapiz, and the Convento de Zafra or Horno del Oro, buildings which Antonio Orihuela will address later.⁹

On the outskirts of the city, both within and without the city walls, were a string of properties called *almunias*, which acted as both holiday villas for their rich owners and as farming estates. Many of these *almunias* were owned by the Nasrid royal family, and others belonged to important members of the Nasrid elite, such as government officials and aristocrats. The most famous one is the Generalife, located on the hill opposite the Alhambra (Fig. 2.2), or the so-called Cuarto Real de Santo Domingo, situated in the city, near the Southern sector of the city wall.¹⁰ The water supply of both depended on the same aqueduct, the royal *acequia*. Both the Generalife and the Cuarto Real de Santo Domingo are built of rammed earth, brick, and masonry. From the 6th/12th century onwards, the use of brick became generalized in Granada, and brick production became such an important industry that one of the city gates was called the "Gate of the Brick Makers" or *Bāb al-Ṭawwābīn*. The gate was located in the vicinity of the city's brick-making workshops and the commercial area or *sūq* where these bricks were sold.¹¹ We also know that other brick-making facilities were located outside the city.

Masonry bound with lime mortar was another common construction technique used during the Nasrid period, after a time in which the techniques were used much more sparingly. Some authors have even suggested that the use of

6 Malpica, "La ciudad nazari," pp. 99–120, especially pp. 108–09.

7 Malpica, "La Alhambra, ciudad palatina."

8 Malpica and Mattei, "La Madraza de Yūsuf I."

9 Orihuela, "Casas y palacios nazaries."

10 Pavón, "El Cuarto Real de Santo Domingo."

11 Jiménez, "Una aproximación," p. 166.



FIGURE 2.2 Aerial view of Alhambra and the Generalife

this technique was encouraged by the monarchy, via a construction program that included the walls of frontier fortresses, the Alhambra, and Granada (among other important capitals).¹² For this technique, courses of large masonry blocks alternate with courses of smaller stone blocks. It is not the case that all masonry constructions built during this period belonged to this construction program. In fact, recent studies have identified construction phases in different buildings which are distinctly different in terms of technique to those which can be associated with this program.¹³ At any rate, during this period masonry work underwent a significant development, which has led many authors to try to discern the origin, function, value and meaning of this technique. Initially, it was believed that masonry techniques in Granada replicated techniques already known in the Christian regions,¹⁴ until it was pointed out that a similar evolution had occurred in fortresses located in the Islamic territories of North

12 Ación, "Sobre los *tugūr* del reino nazari," p. 438; Malpica, "Entre la Arqueología."

13 García, "Nasrid frontier fortresses," p. 127.

14 Terrasse, "Les forteresses de l'Espagne," pp. 32–33.

Africa.¹⁵ The function of these defensive constructions has already been clarified by Leopoldo Torres Balbás: the emergence of artillery meant masonry walls had to be adopted, and these were better suited to withstand the impact of cannon balls than the rammed earth designs used previously.¹⁶ In addition to this defensive function, however, it is likely that these new masonry walls also played a symbolic role: they symbolized the ability to resist enemy attacks, and were also a visual reminder of the power of the constructor and the legitimacy of the political status quo. Thenceforth, masonry walls were a common feature of constructions promoted by the Nasrid elite, both in the city of Granada and elsewhere. In Granada, this technique is especially conspicuous in the Alhambra and the Generalife, among many other examples.

Precisely because of their function and symbolic meaning, the construction techniques used in public buildings were very different from those used in domestic architecture, as these buildings responded to an entirely different set of needs.

The use of rammed earth for domestic buildings is attested from an early stage, both in *Madīnat Ibīra* and Granada; this did not change during the period of Islamic presence in the Iberian Peninsula, and, in fact, survived well beyond the conquest of the Kingdom of Granada. Domestic architecture also made use of masonry, although certainly not as extensively as public buildings; this, in any case, is an issue for which it is difficult to reach a firm conclusion. It seems clear though that the use of brick in domestic and official buildings is roughly simultaneous, which should not come as a surprise, for the use of brick requires the operation of a specific industrial sector, a sector which seems to have crystallized in al-Andalus in the 6th/12th and 7th/13th centuries. Masonry seems to have been used in domestic buildings in Granada only as a complementary technique; this is in contrast to other regions and periods, such as Cordova during the Umayyad Emirate and the Caliphate, as has been demonstrated by recent archaeological research.¹⁷

To date, archaeological excavations in the city have yielded little information concerning domestic architecture in the Nasrid period. Generally, however, these are rescue excavations which lack the necessary time and organization for a more in-depth examination of remains. Despite this, some interesting evidence can be noted. In the Zirid period, houses in Granada responded fully to the classic Islamic Mediterranean model, which clearly stands out from other domestic archetypes, which include mononuclear houses or clusters of

15 Acién, "La fortaleza de Amergo."

16 Torres, "Arte Almohade," p. 179.

17 Castro, "El arrabal de época califal," pp. 139–42.

specialized buildings.¹⁸ The Islamic model is characterized by a central space around which the rooms are distributed. Examples of this kind of house have been found archaeologically in different areas of the city, some of which are relatively distant from the center. For example, some have been found in the Albayzin, near the old Zirid alcázar,¹⁹ and on the plain of the *madīna*, both on the right riverbank—the most important, because it was the location of the aljama mosque, Candiota street,²⁰ and the Mercado de san Agustín²¹—and the left, where the Piedra Santa street, and many others are.²² The general arrangement of houses varied little over time, at least for more modest examples; high-status houses tended to greater variability.

Little is known about early palaces in Granada. Recent excavations in the *Madraza* have revealed the remains of a substantial building interpreted by the excavators as a “public building or at least publicly owned, which must have been erected very soon after the foundation of *Madīnat Gharnāta*.” Also, “the structure defined by the great *calicanto* walls could be interpreted as an *almunia*, for we know that King Bādīs (r. 429–65/1038–73) had one in the vicinity.”²³

Our data increases exponentially for the Almohad and Nasrid periods, and several standing buildings may be noted. Alcázar Genil, the Generalife, Casa del Chapiz, and Cuarto Real de Santo Domingo were built during this period. Apart from the artistic and architectural analysis of previously known examples, in recent years, archaeology has also compiled a large amount of information on areas of the city where we know that high-status, even royal, houses existed, for example near the city walls, both inside and outside the precinct. Several such structures have been attested in the Northernmost sector of the city wall, near the point where the *acequia* of Aynadamar enters the town.²⁴ To the east of this area, near the Guadix road and the wall, we found the Casa del Chapiz, which has been recently studied in detail.²⁵ To the west, we may highlight the building known as the Alcázar Genil, located in the *Vega*, outside the city walls. This building was constructed next to a large pool which was discovered only recently.²⁶ To the south, a considerable number of high-status constructions have been found in the *arrabales* of *al-Fakhkhārīn* and *Najd*. Especially of note

18 Gutiérrez, “Casa y Casas: reflexiones arqueológicas,” pp. 22–26; Navarro and Jiménez, “Forma y función de la casa-patio andalusí,” pp. 337–94.

19 López, “Excavaciones arqueológicas en el Albayzin,” pp. 33–69.

20 Rodríguez Aguilera, Consuegra and Morcillo, “Cerámica común granadina del Seiscientos,” pp. 13–14.

21 López, Fresneda, Peña, Alemán, Rodríguez, Álvarez, “El mercado municipal,” p. 131.

22 Rodríguez, “Granada arqueológica,” pp. 124–25.

23 Malpica and Mattei, “La Madraza de Yūsuf I,” p. 306.

24 Malpica, “La expansión urbana de la Granada nazarí.”

25 Álvarez de Morales and Orihuela, *La casa del Chapiz*, pp. 219–29.

26 Rodríguez Aguilera, Tito and Casares, “El Alcázar Genil de Granada.”

is the so-called Cuarto Real de Santo Domingo, which has yielded valuable information on the relatively complex internal organization of these buildings. The Cuarto Real de Santo Domingo is a neatly arranged palatial structure. The public areas—which were directly related to political and social activities and designed to emphasize this connection (with the so-called *Qubba*, which is still standing)—are clearly separated from the private dwelling of the family. This model was later reproduced in the Alhambra.²⁷ We must not forget the most paradigmatic *almunia*, the Generalife, which stood alongside other similar buildings (the Palacio de Alijares o *Dār al-ʿArūsa*) opposite the Alhambra.²⁸ In the late Nasrid period all these buildings had the same layout: they were built around a central courtyard presided over by a large cistern.

3 Wall Ornamentation in Granada: Kinds of Tiles and Their Techniques

The decoration of walls was highly developed in these high-status houses, as was that of the floor and the plinths, of which some exceptional examples have survived. For instance, the early painted red-colored mortars,²⁹ and indeed the later developments of this technique that are preserved in the Cuarto Real de Santo Domingo,³⁰ as well as the extraordinary paintings found in the houses of El Partal at the Alhambra.³¹ The most common technique, however, was the combination of multi-colored ceramics with plaster decorations.

Tiles have received considerable scholarly attention and are relatively well-known. One type, known as *aliceres*, are characterized by their small size and geometrical shape. They are glazed in a single color and would have been sculpted by hand. The combination of many of these tiles resulted in beautifully complex polychromous and geometrical patterns known as *alicatados*. Their production seems to begin in the second half of the 6th/12th century, during the Almohad period, but the best examples are dated to the Nasrid era.³² The use of this technique can be divided into two phases, according to the color palette used: the first phase is characterized by the use of cold colors, and the second one by the use of warm ones, especially a characteristic honey-colored glaze (Fig. 2.3).³³

27 García, “De palacio a convento,” pp. 72–74.

28 Torres, “Dār al-ʿArūsa.”

29 Rodríguez, “Granada arqueológica,” p. 125.

30 Pavón, “El Cuarto Real de Santo Domingo.”

31 Bermúdez, “La Alhambra y el Generalife,” p. 165.

32 Zozaya, “Alicatados y azulejos hispano-musulmanes,” pp. 601–13.

33 Martínez, “Cerámica hispanomusulmana,” p. 95.



FIGURE 2.3 Panel of glazed tiles from Alhambra, Palace of Comares (14th c.)

In addition to this technique, larger tiles (*azulejos*) were also used. These tiles were generally quadrangular or triangular, but could also adopt other shapes. They bore decorative motifs and could also be combined to produce very intricate patterns. The use of these larger tiles began during the Umayyad Caliphate of Cordova, but in the Almohad period it became much more widespread.³⁴ Many different decorative techniques were used on these tiles, especially during the Nasrid era, being also used in pottery production, as, for example, with the *cuerva seca* or reliefs; some tiles were glazed in a single color. The best known example of the application of *cuerva seca* on tiles can be found in the Wine Gate at the Alhambra.³⁵ Tiles decorated in relief, such as those used in the ornamentation of the Gate of Justice (built in 749/1348) were used in the same period (Fig. 2.4). These techniques, which were uncommon in domestic contexts and are largely found in monumental constructions, inspired later decorated-tile industries in Seville and Aragon.

The most common tiles are those which were glazed using a single color: blue, green, white, honey, or black, a similar palette to that used for *aliceres*. The relationship between *aliceres* and larger tiles is obvious, for they played the same functional and decorative role and were produced using similar techniques. It is possible to speculate that, from the Almohad period onwards, tiles and *aliceres* evolved in parallel, with cold colors predominating in the first phase and warm colors in the second.³⁶ It is, for instance, well-known that tiles were used in the decoration of the, now lost, Fish Gate (the construction of which is attributed to Nasrid emir Muḥammad II (r. 671–701/1273–1302), in the wall of the *arrabal* of *al-Fakhhārīn*.³⁷ Later, this kind of tile was used abundantly in the *Qubba* of the Cuarto Real de Santo Domingo, the Generalife, and the palaces of the Alhambra.

Probably the most attractive of all the techniques used to decorate tiles was the application of metallic glazes (the lusterware tile), used for the ornamentation of domestic wares from the 6th/12th century onwards. Good examples can be found in the *Qubba* of the Cuarto Real de Santo Domingo—a building that is considered a precursor of Nasrid art—specifically in the arch that presides over the main entrance. The decorative motifs are exceptionally delicate arabesques with palmettes and leaves. These motifs, which we will come across later when discussing the monumental vases of the Alhambra, are reminiscent

34 Martínez, “La cerámica hispanomusulmana,” pp. 94–95.

35 Salameh, “Estudio de los elementos decorativos,” p. 135.

36 Valor, “Algunos ejemplos de cerámica,” p. 192 and Coll, “Talleres, técnicas y evolución,” pp. 50–55.

37 Torres, “Arte Almohade,” p. 176.



FIGURE 2.4 Panel of relief tiles from Alhambra, Gate of Justice (14th c.)

of the Almohad style. Another example of this technique can be noted on the exceptional Fortuny tile. This rectangular tile was produced to decorate a lintel in a palace. It is very large and its decoration is a veritable technical phenomenon. The decoration is extraordinary: arabesques, asymmetrical palmettes, and vegetal motifs, alongside others which are clearly Nasrid-inspired, including figurative motifs, heraldic symbols, and inscriptions in *naskhi* calligraphic style. The tile has been dated to the reign of emir Yūsuf III (r. 807–20/1408–17) on the basis of the content of its inscriptions, in which a Nasrid emir called Yūsuf is mentioned.³⁸

In this late period, however, the most common style was the combination of gold and blue, as illustrated by the tile, similar to the Fortuny example, which

³⁸ Martínez, “El arte nazari,” pp. 154–55.

is currently in the National Archaeological Museum of Madrid,³⁹ or the set of smaller tiles installed in the Chapel of San Bartolomé at the Hospital of Agudos in Cordova. These include several human figures (probably allegorical) within a blue foil frame.⁴⁰

There are not many examples of Nasrid lusterware tiles. Apart from the examples just mentioned, there are some floor tiles at the Instituto Valencia de don Juan (Madrid), and some more which must have belonged to an identical pavement at the Hispanic Society of America and the Museum of the Alhambra.⁴¹ It is likely that this pavement was originally installed in the Hall of Comares, where some of the tiles remain *in situ*. Based on their location and the decorative technique used, they should be dated to the mid-8th/mid-14th century. A similar kind of piece is the *alizar* or *mamperlán*, a ceramic piece used on the edge of steps or as skirting boards. These often bear calligraphy and crenellated decoration, such as that found in the Albayzín, and an *in situ* specimen in the tower known as the Queen's Dressing Room at the Alhambra.⁴²

Another exceptional set of triangular tiles was found in this same location (Fig. 2.5). They have no golden decoration, but the chromatic combination is unique: there are two tones of blue, intense and weak, and a purple that would have been produced by manganese oxide. Only a few of these tiles survive, but it is clear that they were used as floor tiles; they form rhomboidal patterns with a central motif framed by a figure which is formed by eight curved sides. The examples found in the Queen's Dressing Room represent two human figures, a man and a woman, separated by the classic Nasrid heraldic motif.

More of these tiles, with very similar technical features, colors, compositions, and motifs, have been found in the ruins of the Palace of Alijares, also part of the Alhambra-Generalife complex. Once more, the central decorative motif is framed by an eight-sided shape with curved sides; in some examples the central motif consists of two human figures, facing one another, and in others it consists of two fawns. In both the Queen's Dressing Room and the Alijares the central decorative scene was surrounded by vegetal motifs.

These are two truly exceptional collections, in terms of technical achievement and decoration. Their date, however, has been impossible to ascertain with precision. Some authors believe them to be relatively late, owing to the presence of the heraldic motif and to the 'Western' appearance of the human

39 Galván, "En torno al gran azulejo."

40 Torres, "De cerámica hispanomusulmana," pp. 419–20; Martínez, "Cerámica hispanomusulmana," pp. 114–15; Jordano, "El conjunto de azulejos nazaríes."

41 Martínez, "La loza dorada," p. 91; Frothingham, "Lustreware of Spain," p. 60.

42 Martínez, "La loza dorada," p. 90; Torres, "La torre del Peinador," p. 198.

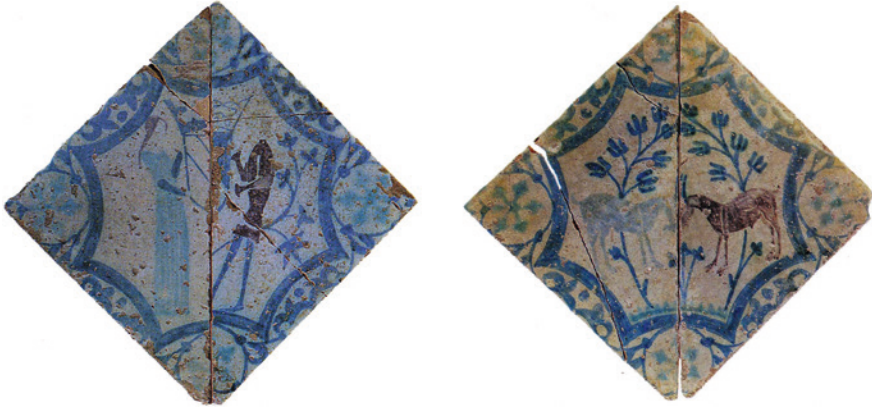


FIGURE 2.5 Figurative glazed tiles from Alhambra, Palacio of the Alijares and Dressing Room of the Queen. Alhambra Museum (14th c.)

figures.⁴³ Based on Leopoldo Torres Balbás's dates for the Queen's Dressing Room and Alijares, they should be dated to the mid-8th/mid-14th century at the earliest.⁴⁴

Until very recently, these were the only known examples of 'blue on white' tiles. The recent fabric analysis carried out on some tiles found in Liguria (Italy), where different late medieval commercial routes converged, has confirmed their Nasrid filiation. Invariably, these tiles are quadrangular in shape and approximately 10 cm wide; they are glazed and decorated in cobalt blue. The most common decorative themes are vegetal, but other themes consist of heraldic and figurative motifs; one is decorated with a gazelle, a common motif in some Nasrid luxury productions.⁴⁵

In high-status houses, as well as in the Alhambra,⁴⁶ tiles were often combined with plaster decoration, either sculpted or mold-made, which was generally placed above the tiled decoration. These decorations can form vaults, arches, columns, or simply act as highly decorated panels (epigraphical, latticed, geometric, etc.). It was important not to leave any wall denuded of decoration. These plaster decorations represent one of the peaks of Nasrid technical achievement.

As previously noted, the Islamic house was designed to preserve the privacy of family life. In most known houses, an entrance hall prevented indiscreet

43 Martínez, "La cerámica nazari," p. 39.

44 Torres, "La torre del Peinador," p. 209; Torres, "Arte Almohade," p. 201.

45 Capelli, García, and Ramagli, "Análisis arqueométrico y arqueológico," pp. 130–34.

46 Rubio, "Yeserías de la Alhambra."

eyes from peering into the house from the street, the private chambers were farthest from the main door, and internal courtyards were also protected from outside scrutiny. It is very likely that doorways were covered with lattices or screens, one example of which is currently being exhibited in the museum of the Alhambra.

4 Household Items

Much of everyday life in Andalusi times took place in the private sphere, and it is, therefore, not surprising that most of the Andalusi objects which have survived were made to serve a domestic purpose. This includes textiles, furniture, and items used to prepare or preserve food. Unfortunately, we know very little about this private universe, beyond what these items themselves can tell us. Archaeology has largely focused on relatively well-preserved objects, especially ceramics, some metal objects, and glass.

The interior of houses was generally quite austere; in the most modest households the pavements were nothing but compacted lime. In those which were slightly higher up the social scale, floors were often tiled; the variety of tiling styles and materials is considerable, but the use of brick or tiles laid in order to form right angles is common. In the Alhambra, though, we commonly find heavy U-shaped bricks; laid with the hollow side down, these bricks form durable and well-insulated pavements. Occasionally, from the Almohad period onwards, bricks or floor tiles were combined with small *alicerces* or square-shaped glazed tiles called *olambrillas*. Also, steps were often decorated with *mamperlanes* or glazed bricks placed edgewise. In some cases, particularly prominent areas of pavements (such as doorways, water fountains, and special rooms) were profusely decorated with colorful tiling. We know of some examples of this in high-status houses: for example, in the Cuarto Real de Santo Domingo,⁴⁷ and a number of houses found in the south-east of the city.⁴⁸

The evidence also suggests that floors were covered with rugs and carpets to make the house more comfortable;⁴⁹ the use of these carpets and rugs to decorate the walls is, according to some scholars, a Christian habit which has facilitated the preservation of Nasrid pieces.⁵⁰ The Arabic etymology of the

47 García and Martín, "La cerámica arquitectónica del palacio," pp. 15–20.

48 Álvarez, "Aproximación a la configuración urbana," pp. 95–100.

49 Partearroyo Lacaba, "Los tejidos de al-Andalus," pp. 58–73; Serrano-Niza, "Amueblar la casa con palabras," pp. 307–35.

50 Rosselló, "Los ajuares de las casas," p. 72.

Spanish word for carpet (*alfombra*) seems to confirm their origin. The discovery of thimbles, pins, bone, and metal needles, loom weights, parts of spinning wheels, and even scissors indicates that many of the textiles used in the household were also produced within it. It is, therefore, likely that most houses, even in cities, had a space that was exclusively dedicated to productive activities such as weaving.

The city also has industrial areas that specialized in the treatment of fabrics and hides. To date, we know of at least two tanneries in Granada.⁵¹ One was in the Alhambra and must have been related to the processing of high-status textiles, such as silk, for which Granada was famed. This tannery is located in the urban area of the palatine city, to the south-east of the Convent of San Francisco. The excavations undertaken in this sector by Leopoldo Torres Balbás exposed a wide area with pools, cisterns, and sockets for the installation of the large ceramic vats which would have been used to tan hides or dye fabrics. The second tannery was found on the bank of the River Darro, in the modern Reyes Católicos' street. Another excavation carried out near the Nueva Alhóndiga or Corral del Carbón, uncovered several cisterns which, based on their morphology, could only have been used in different stages of hide-tanning.⁵² Similar structures were recorded upstream in La Colcha street.⁵³ This area was part of the medieval districts of *al-Ṣabbāghīn* (the Dyers' District) and *al-Dabbāghīn* (the Tanners' District).⁵⁴

According to specialists, furniture was used sparingly in Andalusí houses. Accordingly, few remains of furniture have survived; however, we should also bear in mind that perishable materials were used for furniture. We must not go as far as to think that chairs and tables did not exist, but it seems that cushions and rugs were largely used in their stead. Beds were also rare: people generally slept on rugs, mats, and cushions placed on the floor or on a low plinth. Some of the depictions in the *Cantigas* of Castilian king Alphonse x (r. 1252–84) represent Muslim characters sitting on a sort of seat, next to something that resembles a table. Unfortunately, no examples of furniture have survived, with the possible exception of a few pieces of wood found in la Sima de los Infiernos, in Liétor, Murcia.⁵⁵ Storage furniture is equally absent from the record, but it seems likely that baskets or other similar containers were

51 Rêklaityté, *Vivir en una ciudad de al-Andalus*, pp. 289–90.

52 Malpica, "El río Darro y la ciudad medieval"; Rodríguez, "Granada arqueológica," p. 155.

53 Torres, "Tenería en el Secano," pp. 433–37.

54 Seco de Lucena, "La Granada nazari," pp. 81–84.

55 Rosselló, "El ajuar de las casas," pp. 72–73; Navarro and Robles, "Liétor. formas de vida rurales," n° c. 75.

used alongside wooden chests, cupboards and the like. We also know of built-in pantries or shelves.

In contrast, we have an abundance of evidence concerning domestic ceramic items, which are much more likely to survive in good condition. Most of the pieces found in Granada were made locally. The written record includes some references to local pottery wares, but these are generally quite late in date and mostly consist of lusterware. This was the most famous Nasrid ceramic ware, and its use was more restricted. The workshops of Granada, therefore, must have produced a much wider variety of ceramic wares, as confirmed by the archaeological record.

Archaeology is beginning to shed some light on these pottery workshops, although our evidence is still incomplete. In Granada, pottery workshops seem to have originally occupied a suburban area to the south of the city: for example, under the current Casa de Los Tiros.⁵⁶ As the city expanded southwards, the workshops moved to the south-east, until they formed their own *arrabal*, known as *al-Fakhhārīn* (the Potters' District) during both the Nasrid and the early modern periods.⁵⁷ The area was ideal for this industrial activity as it was well-supplied with water and not far from good sources of clay. The evidence strongly suggests that the Alhambra also hosted pottery-making workshops during this period.⁵⁸ In any case, pottery making was not restricted to the city of Granada, but must have taken place in all urban centers of any size. Unfortunately, the available evidence does not allow us to systematically reconstruct the economic dimension of these workshops, as has been undertaken in other regions of al-Andalus, or even to discern whether production was concentrated in a few discrete centers or was dispersed throughout the territory. What the analysis of consumption contexts clearly reveals is that production and distribution channels were efficiently organized, since wares produced in a given urban context are abundantly found even in remote locations of the kingdom.⁵⁹

For the process involved in pottery production, the best evidence is the ceramic remains themselves. Esteban Fernández Navarro has published several works on this topic, and has concluded that, in addition to being aesthetically pleasing, Andalusī ceramics, especially during the Almohad and Nasrid periods, were particularly well-designed and technically suited for the function

56 López, Rodríguez, Fresneda, Peña, Pérez, and Gómez, "Casa museo de los tiros."

57 Álvarez, "Aproximación a la configuración urbana," pp. 98–99, Aguilera, Bordes, "Precedentes de la cerámica granadina"; Rodríguez, "Granada arqueológica," pp. 176–77.

58 Torres, "Tenería en el Secano," pp. 434; Flores, "Estudio preliminar," p. 19; Malpica, "La Alhambra de Granada," pp. 267–68.

59 García, "La cerámica del poblado fortificado," pp. 448–49.

that they fulfilled (volume, insulation, and resistance to thermal shock). Their success was due to the application of advanced pottery-making techniques, which exploited to the full the potential of the raw materials used.⁶⁰ This resulted in efficient, beautifully designed and durable wares in which functionality was given priority over other features, in contrast with the pottery from later historical periods.

But, what functions are we referring to? And how did function translate into design? Traditionally, Andalusí wares have been divided into different groups on the basis of function, as this is a determinant factor in the morphology of the item.⁶¹ In the domestic sphere, most shapes are related to preparation (kitchen wares), presentation (table wares), and storage of foodstuffs, as well as other uses, such as lighting.⁶²

One of the most important functions of ceramic containers in domestic contexts was the preservation of food, for which large vases (*tinajas*) and jars were generally used. The *tinajas* were large containers with thick walls, used to store water, oil or other foodstuffs. They are rarely glazed, although examples with a glazed upper body are not uncommon. Almohad *tinajas* are well-known; they were of a considerable size and had a wide base, a globular body and a broad and short neck. In the Nasrid period, the body became more stylized, the neck became longer and narrower at the base and the rim widened. “Shark fin” handles, based on monumental lusterware vase handles, became increasingly common. These large lusterware glasses have been described as “unique, the most select pottery pieces of the Middle Ages” (Fig. 2.6).⁶³ Indeed, the manufacture of these vases implies the exertion of an extraordinary degree of control over the production technique. The number of examples that have survived is limited, and all of them are equally beautiful. Despite some formal similarities, their function must have been very different to that of the *tinajas*. There is no consensus among specialists about their use; some think that they were used to decorate the palace, and others that they were water filters.⁶⁴ What seems clear is that the decoration and the technical features of these vases were a deliberate display of craftsmanship by Nasrid workshops, especially those related to the crown, the *tirāz*, a Byzantine institution that was later adopted in Baghdad, from where it would be finally exported to Egypt and al-Andalus.

60 Fernández, “Tradición tecnológica,” pp. 169–74.

61 Rosselló, “Ensayo de sistematización”; Navarro, “La cerámica islámica.”

62 Motos Guirao, “La cultura material y la vida cotidiana,” pp. 415–50.

63 Torres, “Arte Almohade,” p. 216.

64 Zozaya, “Los Jarrones de la Alhambra,” pp. 38–42.



FIGURE 2.6 Gazelles Vase. Pottery masterpiece of Islamic Granada. Alhambra Museum (14th c.)



FIGURE 2.7 Casserole. Nasrid domestic pottery (14th–15th cc.)

The morphological evolution of jars is not quite so clear. It is possible that, because their use was exclusively domestic, they evolved little over time. Their design is clearly functional; the bases are flat or concave, but very broad, to ensure stability when full. The body is globular and narrow, and the neck tall and slender. Two handles linked the shoulder with the central part of the neck. Like the small jars, they were generally made of porous clay, to allow for transpiration and to keep the liquid inside cool and pure.

In order to prevent vases from sitting directly on the floor, coasters were used, and these were often decorated with incisions, lattices, and stamps. Lids were also common. The lids of *tinajas* were generally flat and had a central knob for handling. They were often decorated (stamped, incised, painted, etc.). Sometimes, the lids were simple discs, similar to those used by potters on the wheel. Jars, for their part, were generally covered with concave or convex lids; they were decorated and, sometimes, glazed in green or brown.

Kitchen wares are among the most common finds. The two main shapes within this group are the pan and the marmite. The pan is an open shape, low and wide, and would have been ideal for a quick recipe (the open shape leads water to evaporate quickly) (Fig. 2.7). It was used for the preparation of soft foodstuffs (vegetables, fish, some types of meat, etc.) and sauces. These recipes generally included fats, and the interior of pans are frequently glazed (this glaze often dripped down the exterior as well). The shape of pans changed over time, from thick walls and a cylindrical shape to globular shapes and thinner walls. Lips also adopted different shapes, such as out-folding, thickened, bifid and incised (for the fitting of a lid or another pan placed upside down), and so

did handles, including bridge handles and “ribs”; these changes can be noted towards the closing decades of the Middle Ages.

Marmites are taller vessels that were used for longer-cooking recipes and hard foodstuffs, such as legumes and some types of meat that would have been cooked in their juices. Marmites were also glazed on the interior, at least from the 6th/12th century onwards, and external drips of glaze are also common. The earliest types had thicker walls and cylindrical bodies. Over time, convex bases appeared and bodies adopted an oval or pear-shaped design, which made more efficient use of the heat; necks and bodies are clearly separated. These features indicate the technical expertise of the potters, who perfected the designs and constantly worked towards developing more efficient shapes. Permeability, which was an essential feature of these shapes, as they were used to prepare liquid and fatty dishes, was achieved by applying a honey-colored glazer to the interior. The only items of kitchen ware which lacked this glaze were a specific sort of pan or disc (similar to that used by the potters), like a *tabaq*, that was used to bake bread, and a special kind of drilled marmite used to cook couscous, which features in some Andalusi cookbooks from the 6th/12th century onwards.⁶⁵ In order to cook the couscous, wheat semolina is placed inside the *cususera* or *alcuzcucero*, which is then placed on top of another marmite full of boiling water; the steam, passing through the holes in the base of the *cususeras*, cooks the semolina.

Finally, we should mention *anafres* or portable stoves, which seem to have played a crucial role in Andalusi kitchens.⁶⁶ The *anafres* are two-piece stoves (Fig. 2.8), with an ashtray at the bottom and a well-ventilated brazier at the top, with sockets on which to place pans and marmites. Their shape did not change much over time, except towards the end of the Nasrid period, when more stylized *anafres*, in which the brazier and the ashtray cannot be distinguished externally, begin to appear in the record.

Table etiquette in al-Andalus prescribed that food was placed in a central position on the table, and that it was eaten communally. There was no individual service, therefore, except for soup, to which Andalusis were very partial, or other similar foods, such as sauces; these were served in small bowls, which were generally concave in shape. These bowls appear to be increasingly common over time, especially during the Almohad and the Nasrid periods.

Two characteristic types of table ware are the *ataifor* and the small jar. The *ataifores* were large flat bowls used to put the food on the table. In late Andalusi

65 De la Granja, “La cocina arábigo andaluza,” p. 23.

66 Marín, “Ollas y fuego,” p. 169.



FIGURE 2.8 Nasrid pottery cooktop (14th–15th cc.)

periods, the *ataifores* came in two main shapes: concave and hemispheric, and straight-walled with a vertical rim. Generally, both types were covered with different hues of green glaze (sometimes the color approaches turquoise), or white varnish on the interior. These pieces were decorated using different techniques and motifs: irregular manganese strokes on honey-colored or green glaze,⁶⁷ stamped decoration, green and purple paints, *cuerda seca*, or metallic glazes. These metallic glazes, with cobalt blue, were the most characteristic of Nasrid decorative techniques (Fig. 2.9), used by the potters from Granada to showcase their technical mastery. The Alhambra museum contains a wide array of examples, including pieces which are of different shapes and are decorated with different motifs (geometric, vegetal, figurative, etc.);⁶⁸ probably, the most paradigmatic example is the ship's plate, kept in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London (Fig. 2.10).⁶⁹ These pieces were widely commercialized and highly appreciated in European markets, in which they were known in medieval documents as "*operis terra maliqa*" (Malagan ground work).⁷⁰ In Granada they also had value as social markers, if not of political propaganda of the reigning house.⁷¹

67 Ruiz, "Decoración en la cerámica nazari."

68 Flores, "Estudio preliminar"; Marinetto Sánchez, "La decoración de la cerámica nazari," pp. 256–91.

69 Frothingham, *Lustreware of Spain*, pp. 94–95.

70 Fábregas and García, "Genoese trade networks," pp. 40–44.

71 García, "Producción cerámica y organización política."



FIGURE 2.9
Nasrid dish glazed and decorated with the
coat of arms of the Nasrid dynasty, Alhambra
Museum (14th c.)



FIGURE 2.10 “The dish of the ship.” Pottery decorated with blue and luster. Museum für
Islamische Kunst, Berlin (14th c.)

Small jars were used to contain liquid, but could also have been used as drinking cups. Out of the Nasrid repertoire, this vessel underwent the most formal variation, although it is not always easy to follow the evolution of the shape. The earliest small jars had rounded bodies, similar in profile to those of marmites, and were well-proportioned. In the Nasrid period, small jars became taller and the profile changed considerably. Simple conical bases disappeared and were replaced by different bases, some of which are technically challenging: sometimes the base was flat and broad, while some were very tall and hollow, and bore molded decoration. The bodies were less globular and sometimes were distinctly pear-shaped. Necks became tall and open. Bridge handles could either run the whole length of the neck or be small and circular, joining the top of the body and the base of the neck. As noted, small jars were among the most variable types during this period. All these pieces were made of highly depurated, fair-colored clays, which facilitated transpiration and thus the conservation of the contents.

Small jars, as well as the *ataifores*, were particularly exposed to the gaze of visitors, and thus decoration was frequently applied (stamps, manganese paint *cuerva seca*, incisions, varnishes, lusterwares, etc.). Other usual tableware shapes, but much less common than *ataifores* and small jars, were jars, oil bottles (with tall cylindrical necks or trefoil mouths) and jugs (Fig. 2.11).

These shapes covered basic domestic needs, but we must not forget other ceramic shapes which served in less important, sometimes subsidiary, roles. The *lebrillo*, a large bowl used for storage, kneading, personal hygiene, or washing, among other functions, was one of the most useful ceramic items. The *lebrillos* are easy to distinguish: they have a flat base and straight, not-too-tall walls ending in an out-turned lip. Sometimes, Nasrid examples had a molding that ran under the inside of the rim, and they were increasingly glazed on the interior. Only exceptional examples bear decoration.

Lighting also played an important role in the home, and clay lamps were an essential domestic possession. Andalusí lamps of the 5th/11th and 6th/12th centuries are reminiscent of ancient *lucernae*. The deposit was closed and surrounded by a rim, from which a pointed nozzle emerged. The handle stemmed from the other end of the deposit. During the 6th/12th century and part of the 7th/13th, simpler models were used, which consisted of a small pan with a pinched nozzle. In the 7th/13th century, lamps adopted increasingly tall feet; a handle linked the pan, where the wick was placed, with the foot. These pieces were often glazed or decorated with more complex techniques and motifs. Although they do not belong to the domestic scope, the beautiful metal samples used to light mosques should be included here. The lamps of Madīnat Ilbīra, the urban precedent of Granada, are spectacular as well as the



FIGURE 2.11 Nasrid pitcher decorated with blue and luster. Valencia de don Juan Institute, Madrid (14th c.)

lamp of the Great Mosque of the Alhambra, both now kept at the National Archaeological Museum at Madrid.⁷²

Less common are other domestic pieces such as toys, drums, chamber pots, cups, funnels, water bottles, and whistles, some of which are extremely beautiful.⁷³

Along with ceramic wares, other items found in domestic contexts include metal and bone objects used for personal hygiene or sewing (needles, swabs, punches, thimbles, etc.), or personal accessories of metal or glass. The collection of such objects found in the necropolis of Sahl Ibn Mālik al-Azdī (d. 639/1242), near the Elvira Gate (*Bāb Ilbīra*), is especially interesting in this regard. The tomb offerings include metal earrings, necklaces, rings, and amulets.⁷⁴ Rings and bracelets were also made of glass, often forming twisting patterns. Glass was also used to make jars of different sizes, bottles or plates, some examples of which have been found in the surroundings of the Convent of Santa Isabel la Real.⁷⁵ Unfortunately, owing to its fragility, this material is not found in great quantities and we know very little about possible glass workshops. The evidence suggests that there was a workshop in the Albayzin,⁷⁶ although the best-known example was excavated in Real de Cartuja street, on the periphery of the city; this workshop, at any rate, is dated to after the Christian conquest.⁷⁷ The most important glass collection is currently in the Museum of the Alhambra;⁷⁸ most of the items included in the collection were used to serve and store drinks, as well as other precious liquids (perfumes, oils, etc.).

5 Final Remarks

The city of Granada was the town of al-Andalus that was conquered by the Christians the latest. Its almost 500 years under Islamic control has left a deep impression in the city's material manifestations, which are still visible today. The art, architectural, textual and, above all, archaeological analysis allows to

72 Vilchez, *Las lámparas de Medina Elvira*.

73 Flores and Rosselló (eds.), *Del rito al juego*; Marinetto, "Juguetes y silbatos infantiles," pp. 183–205.

74 Fresneda, López; Alemán, Rodríguez and Peña, "Orfebrería andalusí."

75 López, "Excavaciones arqueológicas," p. 155 (text by Isabel Cambil).

76 López, Caballero, and Pertíñez, "Excavación de urgencia," pp. 281–86 (text by Isabel Cambil).

77 Carta, González, and Narváez, "En las afueras de la ciudad nazari," pp. 118–21.

78 Marinetto, "El vidrio en la Alhambra."

much better understand the material features of Granadan medieval Muslim society as well as the way of living of its inhabitants. This is especially evident in the urbanism of the city, its architectural resources, its aesthetic expression, artisanal facilities, differing room shapes, and, mainly, in its tools and objects used in daily life. Throughout this chapter all these elements have been examined from a global material cultural perspective.