

THE LAST ISLAMICATE SOCIETY IN SOUTH-WESTERN EUROPE: THE PROJECTION OF POWER IN THE NASRID KINGDOM OF GRANADA

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The Nasrid kingdom of Granada was the last Islam-ruled territory in the Iberian Peninsula. It occupied a region in the southeast of the Iberian Peninsula between the 13th and 15th centuries. Archaeological analysis of the Nasrid Kingdom is a relatively recent phenomenon, although substantial progress has been made in recent years. The study of this kingdom by archaeological methods has greatly contributed to its historical reconstruction. The present paper aims to examine and understand the territorial projection and implications of political power at all levels in order to analyse the changes undergone by this Late Medieval Islamicate society and their archaeological expression. I intend to show that archaeology is well-poised to reconstruct a historical period and the role played in it by political power, a subject traditionally regarded as the exclusive abode of historians working with the written record. A new open and holistic approach to archaeology presents the material projection of different power structures, including not only political power, but also other economic and social manifestations.

Introduction

The Nasrid Kingdom of Granada was the last Islamicate territory in south-western Europe. Its conquest by Castile, in the late fifteenth century (1492) was the last episode of the so-called *Reconquista* (García Fitz 2010), understood as the process of territorial expansion undertaken by the feudal crowns of Castile and Aragón from the 10th century onwards, after they established an ideological frame which politically legitimized the aggressive policies of the Castilian and Aragonese monarchs. The *Reconquista* is closely tied with similar process occurred around the same period in other regions, both outside Europe and within it (Bartlett 2003).

The Nasrid Kingdom of Granada emerged after the progressive dissolution of the Almohad Empire, which had crystallized in the desert margins of the Sahara and which had eventually occupied the centre and south of the Iberian Peninsula

(Bennison 2016). The major offensive launched by Castile and Aragon in the opening decades of the thirteenth century led to the end of the North African empire in the Iberian Peninsula, and to the emergence of various petty kingdoms in well-defined territories: initially, Ibn Hūd revolted against the Almohads in Murcia in 1228, a rebellion that rapidly extended in the south-east of the Iberian Peninsula, with the exception of Valencia, which remained under the rule of an Almohad governor. Later, the military chief Muḥammad b. Yūsuf b. Naṣr carved a small fiefdom for himself in the hinterland of his native town, Arjona, near Jaén, which became the seed of the future Nasrid Kingdom (Boloix Gallardo 2017).

From that moment onwards, we may speak of the constitution of a new Andalusí kingdom, which carried the name of its founder: the Nasrid Kingdom. This small state controlled the south east



Figure 7.1 The Nasrid Kingdom of Granada in the south-east Iberian Peninsula. Map author's own.

of the Iberian Peninsula, including the modern provinces of Malaga, Granada and Almería, and partially those of Cádiz, Córdoba, Jaén and Murcia. The kingdom came to an end when the Catholic Monarchs, Ferdinand of Aragón and Isabella of Castile, conquered it in 1492 (see Figure 6.1).

For various reasons, the last Islamicate kingdom in the Iberian Peninsula has been paid a good deal of scholarly attention from the moment of its conquest. However, research has largely relied on the written record, and the analysis of the material record has only begun in earnest very recently. Although the presence of very visible material remains, beginning with the palatine city of the Alhambra, made this an inescapable task, initially the study of these remains adopted a highly descriptive and positivist stance; these remains were not granted any documentary value, and were used as little more than illustrations of historical events. Only very recently has the study of Nasrid material remains begun to play an active role in the process of historical reconstruction.

The written evidence available to the historian is relatively abundant and broad in scope, if compared

with other periods of the history of al-Andalus. It includes texts in Arabic, written either in Granada or the Maghreb (chronicles, historical-literary encyclopaedias, bibliographic repertoires, *adab*, poetry, travel accounts, legal treatises, religious texts, grammatical studies and technical and scientific compendia), and other languages, with texts written in other territories (including Castile, Aragon and other Mediterranean polities with which the Nasrid emirate kept close bonds). Archival documentation is, however, much scarcer, despite the great efforts being made since the mid-twentieth century to recover Nasrid

archival documents, both in Arabic and in Romance translations, which have substantially increased the information available (Zomeño 2011). As a result, the written sources at our disposal, especially the ones in Arabic, owing to their own nature, are largely restricted to the “cultivated sphere, and [they] preferentially pay attention to the elite and groups which were fully integrated within the official political apparatus, legitimizing the rulers” (Viguera Molins 2000, 21). As a result, the Nasrid Kingdom has for a long time been viewed through a prism that over-represents the social elite and the role played by political events, to the detriment of basic economic and social structures. Taking this perspective to its logical extreme, it is as though the Nasrid Kingdom could be explained only as a partisan struggle between *Abencerrajes* and *Zegríes*, two kinship groups that fought to control the kingdom during its final decades. This struggle, and the wide array of orientaling myths and legends to which it gave rise, was fascinating for nineteenth-century Romantic writers, and this has left a deep trace on the popular perception of the Nasrid kingdom, even among professional historians.

Until well into the twentieth century, the study of the Nasrid Kingdom was heavily coloured by the characteristics of the written evidence. Beginning with Miguel Lafuente Alcántara (1843–1846), and following with Miguel Ángel Ladero Quesada (1969) and Rachel Arié (1973), who began a new trend, subsequently adopted by Cristobal Torres Delgado (1974) and later by José Enrique López de Coca (Peinado Santaella and López de Coca 1987), more global studies began appearing in which economic structures, social groups and ideological frameworks were analysed in more detail. This was to a large extent due to the incorporation of new information which allowed for broader and less partial historical reconstructions, especially foreign documents from the same period and concerning the final years of the history of the Nasrid Kingdom. Despite these valuable efforts, which have considerably widened the historical lens, many of the sources used remained partial and mostly refer to the kingdom's late history and final demise, keeping its previous 250 years very much in the dark. On the other hand, archaeology had not yet begun to contribute to this renovated perception. At the most, individual buildings or monuments were analyzed from an art history or architectural history perspective, for instance by Leopoldo Torres Balbás (1949 among many others) and Basilio Pavón Maldonado (1975).

Archaeology is essential for a full understanding of the Nasrid world, but the discipline only turned up in the debate approximately 35 years ago (García Porras 2018). Of the pioneers in the emergence of a modern medieval archaeology in Spain, Manuel Acién, from Malaga University, Antonio Malpica, from Granada University, and Patrice Cressier, from Casa de Velázquez, were among those who paid special attention to this small kingdom. From the postulates of so-called Landscape Archaeology, introduced and developed in Spain by French researchers (Bazzana 1994), these authors began focusing on the Nasrid period, which remained virtually unexplored as far as archaeology was concerned. Thenceforth, settlement, fortification and irrigation systems, or the analysis of mate-

rial culture, especially ceramics, were included in historical accounts about the Nasrid Kingdom. In addition, it was during this period, the 1980s, that rescue archaeology came to its own, especially in urban centres. By the mid-1990s, an increasingly varied number of authors were publishing monographic studies on some of these issues, including purely archaeological topics, such as castles (Malpica Cuello 1995) and works that focused on specific cities (Malpica Cuello 2000) and monuments (Malpica Cuello 2002; Cara Barrionuevo 1990).

There is little doubt that the works published during this period constituted a spectacular step forward in our understanding of the final stage in the life of al-Andalus. In the turn of the twenty-first century, historical syntheses could no longer be understood without taking into consideration the archaeological perspective, where a good deal of the new knowledge about the Nasrid Kingdom was being developed (Viguera Molins; 2000; Peinado Santaella 2000). Publications began including chapters on such issues as “Coinage,” “Daily life,” “Settlement and the organization of space” and “Material culture and everyday life,” in which archaeological information played a central role.

The archaeology practiced by these authors was still firmly grounded on history, of which it was a branch. Often, archaeological arguments were used to corroborate or illustrate historical data, especially those which referred to the political elite. Little by little, archaeology demonstrated having the ability to ask new questions and present alternative views of the past. It also offered new, a different kind of data, providing evidence for those social groups and practices that were not reflected on the written record. In many instances, archaeology opened brand new avenues of enquiry (García Porras 2010; 2018). Let us see this in more detail.

The Nasrid Kingdom of Granada from an archaeological perspective

The analysis of rural settlement has, to a large extent, followed the path laid out by Pierre Guichard and André Bazzana in eastern al-Andalus (Sarq

al-Andalus), and Patrice Cressier in the southeast, where fortifications (*ḥuṣūn*) played a central territorial role (Bazzana *et al.* 1988). Some castles near Granada had already been identified, on the basis of their morphology and construction technique, as belonging to a different political and social horizon (Bazzana 1983) and deserving to be analysed in detail, so their distinctive character could be explained. Manuel Ación (1998) and Antonio Malpica (2008) undertook this task, presenting a plausible explanation for the different characteristics of these castles.

Unfortified rural nuclei, however, have to date not been analysed comprehensively, beyond some general overviews, which are often out of focus, in which the contribution of archaeology has been small (Cressier *et al.* 1992; Ordóñez Frías and Aguilar Simón 2016). The difficulties associated with intervening in these spaces (many of which are still inhabited) and the lack of interest of public bodies in the study of peasant societies, partially explain this shortcoming, which demands a decisive academic response. Agricultural models, especially the irrigation agricultural systems that surrounded many of these rural nuclei, are much better known, as many of the hydraulic networks that irrigated the agricultural terraces and fields still survive. So-called “hydraulic archaeology,” developed by Thomas Glick (1970) for the area of Valencia, and Miquel Barceló and his team (Barceló *et al.* 1988; Kirchner and Navarro 1993) for the Balearics, has played a central role in the study of these spaces; the principles of hydraulic archaeology have been applied to a number of Nasrid irrigation systems (Malpica Cuello and Trillo San José, 2002).

Cities have also been subject of analysis. After the pioneering works published by Leopoldo Torres Balbás in the journal *al-Andalus* during the central decades of the twentieth century (later compiled in a single volume entitled *Ciudades Hispanomusulmanas*, published in 1970), it was only in the 1980s that the issue of the city was revisited, at long last, from an eminently archaeological perspective. During this period, archaeological practice became much more common, especially with the

implementation of cultural heritage laws which imposed archaeological controls upon urban construction projects. As a result, the number of publications dealing with archaeological activity in urban contexts has multiplied, although they are dispersed and their quality is very uneven (see Malpica Cuello and García Porras 2011).

It is in this field that the lack of a coordinated research agenda becomes more obvious; the results of different projects are of very uneven quality and, often, excessively descriptive and/or partial; research is largely improvised and lacking in a clear blueprint, which has undermined its scientific value (Malpica Cuello 2000a, 2011). However, although there are reasons to criticize the way the study of such an important topic as the Andalusi, and especially the Nasrid, city, has been undertaken to date, it is advisable not to be excessively pessimistic. These years have also witnessed the publication of a large number of works which focused on the analysis of the Islamic city, and specifically the Nasrid city; these were sometimes the result of conferences and scientific meetings, in which the nature, origin and characteristics of Andalusi and Nasrid cities have been at the centre of the debate.

Another aspect the study of which was boosted in the 1980s was the analysis of material culture. The number of archaeological projects carried out in recent decades has resulted in an enormous quantity of material, the study of which is essential. Undoubtedly, pottery has been the most intensively studied material, especially owing to its ubiquity in the archaeological record. All periods of Nasrid ceramics have been subject of analysis, from the opening years of the kingdom (García Porras 2000, 2003) and the relationship between Almoḥad and Nasrid ceramics to the end of the Nasrid kingdom and even beyond the Castilian conquest (García Porras *et al.* 2017); from rural areas to urban and even palatial contexts (Rosselló Bordoy 2006); from everyday domestic repertoires (García Porras 2006) to pieces produced for elite households and commerce (García Porras 2018a), an activity with which Nasrid ceramics had a close relationship.

This trend has continued in the early twenty-first century. Broad overviews are already available, which present a fairly accurate image of the recent progress of the discipline, especially in relation to such topics as settlement and the organization of the territory (Malpica Cuello 2014), although the level of detail offered by each publication is inevitably uneven.

Owing to research avenues opened in the 1980s, which are still yielding results, it is now possible to approach the Nasrid Kingdom of Granada from a renewed perspective and new theoretical and methodological approaches in which the archaeological analysis of the material record plays a central role.

One of these perspectives revolve around the study of Nasrid structures of political, ideological, economic and social control; in short: power; what it looked like and how it projected upon the territory; how it affected the lives of people; and what traces it has left in the material record. This is a subject of study traditionally regarded as being outside archaeological enquiry, whose only purpose was to fill the blank spaces left by textual history. On the other hand, orthodox historical materialism and structural anthropology stances espoused by many archaeologists in the 1980s and 1990s neglected the archaeological study of power. Only after it was realized that archaeology as a discipline could analyse fields of study traditionally addressed by historians, and after archaeology underwent a drastic epistemological overhaul, was archaeology confident enough to tackle the study of power structures and their material expression. We need to vindicate archaeology's global analytical perspectives and its ability to relevantly contribute to the historical reconstruction of historical periods.

For a long time, scholars at the University of Granada have been interested in the nature of power in al-Andalus, especially during the Nasrid period; this interest has crystallized in research the project *Power and Rural Communities in the Nasrid Kingdom* (thirteenth to fifteenth centuries) (HAR2015-66550-P).¹ The project aims to examine in detail

the reasons that have led for the Nasrid Kingdom of Granada to be considered merely an epigone of al-Andalus, a decadent period which is fundamentally different from the “proper” al-Andalus, where the true character of traditional Islamicate societies is to be found. It has been argued that different processes of change that affected the Nasrid Kingdom may have been directly grounded in the transformations undergone by its power structures and their ramifications down the social ladder, for example among peasant communities. In this framework, the ruling elite was represented by different agents who, by affecting the operation of these communities, may have undermined their internal cohesion and autonomy (Fábregas García and García Porras 2020).

The relationship between political elites and peasant communities has been regarded as an indicator of the evolution of the state. Whoever approaches the Nasrid period for the first time, will be confronted with the ubiquity of political power; at the top, power was embodied by the Nasrid crown, which presented the features that Pierre Guichard (2001, 45) considered typical of an Islamic polity.

Replicating the dynamics observed in other nearby Islamicate states and reinforcing them by implementing self-legitimizing policies, the Nasrid crown became increasingly strong over time, (Guichard 2009; Nef and Voguet 2011; Bennison 2014). The shine of its institutional apparatus has led many scholars, especially from the field of Arabism, to focus on the organic structure on which Nasrid power relied for over two centuries. This organic structure, at the centre of which were the high institutions of the state, the seat of which is found in urban and palatine contexts, had a clear projection upon the rural areas. This phenomenon is also visible in the opening stages of the history of al-Andalus, but became especially clear from the twelfth century onwards, with the constitution of the Almohad *majzen* (Buresi 2014), and especially with the emergence of the Nasrid monarchy. The political power of the crown was represented in the rural areas by means of officials

appointed by the state and also by the representatives of the peasant communities who, eventually, assumed the position of “servants” of said state. Acting with more or less independence from the central institutions, these representatives were entrusted with making the authority of the state felt in the countryside (Manzano Moreno 1998, 897). Similar dynamics have been attested in the central Maghreb (Picard 2012), where individuals who exercised diverse forms of moral leadership (holy men, *morabitos*) or economic authority (tribal chiefs), were used by the state as instruments with which to control rural communities (Ouerfelli and Voguet 2009; Voguet 2012). This, however, was not the only form of political interaction in operation in the Nasrid Kingdom. The projection of political power onto the rural areas could adopt very different shapes, and be articulated by various representatives and intermediaries (Fábregas García 2016; Trillo San José 2007), aristocratic groups linked with the governance of the Nasrid state (Peinado Santaella 2008) and commercial agents that shaped the economic choices adopted by peasant communities (Fábregas García 2007). All these agents may have contributed to undermine the traditional cohesiveness of rural communities. To date, this research has largely been based on written documents, but in recent years archaeology is also contributing decisively to the issue.

In this regard, crucial methodological advances have allowed us to increasingly use the material traces of power structures in the reconstruction of historical narratives. I am not merely referring to buildings erected by the state and its associated elites, such as palatine cities or other seats of power, but the reflection of power dynamics on aspects of the material record which, in principle, appear unrelated to the ruling elite.

On the one hand, we are trying to outline the archaeologically visible strategies implemented by state institutions to influence or infiltrate basic social structures; on the other, we are trying to evaluate the role played by material culture, buildings and peasant-related infrastructures, in

legitimizing the action of the state. We are even trying to define the asymmetric relationships that the action of the state may have triggered in the countryside, and the mechanisms of submission and resistance of rural communities in the face of an increasingly strong and pervasive state.

In any case, it is also convenient to stress that the struggle that I am characterising as typical of the Nasrid state should not be viewed in excessively rigid terms; the traditional dichotomy between state power and peasant communities hides a whole range of nuances. As such, the dialectic between these two poles in the final phase of the history of al-Andalus may have never been quite as homogeneous and straightforward as it might appear. There were regional variations, according to the strategic weight that different regions had for the state and the ability of the rural groups in each of them to fend off the encroachments of their consuetudinary customs by the state, a relationship that also ebbed and flowed over time. The detailed analysis of these variables will allow us to examine the ability of the state to transform social structures.

The power of the Nasrid Kingdom and its territorial projection

There is little doubt that the influence of the state was stronger in the places where it resided, the palatine city of the Alhambra and the citadels that presided over the different cities. The Alhambra, a citadel built by the founders of the dynasty, legitimized and displayed the new ruling class. The palatial buildings were erected with the explicit intention of showcasing the authority of the king: the whole city revolves around him. The citadel was there for his protection and the medina hosted the ruler’s entourage and officials and also industrial areas which produced the luxury goods consumed by the reigning dynasty and its officials. The city of Granada predates the Alhambra, which was thus set up in the midst of an existing city, and in some ways the citadel betrays the hierarchy that always existed between them. The channel that brought water to the Alhambra, for instance, branched out

from the Darro before the river reached Granada, taking thus priority in terms of water supply (Malpica 1995). On the other hand, the defences of the Alhambra must have incorporated pre-existing defensive structures, once more demonstrating their pre-eminence over the city, as attested in Torres Bermejas, Castillo de Santa Elena and Silla del Moro.

Construction works undertaken in the citadels of Malaga, Almería, Salobreña, Almuñécar, Guadix, Baza, Loja, Antequera and Ronda clearly betray the new dynasty's pretension to become visible in the most populous cities of the kingdom, as well as to have the means to effectively rule the territory, collect taxes, administer justice, organize defence, etc. (Figure 6.2) This is especially visible in Moclín, Guadix, Baza and Loja. The governorships of these cities were entrusted to members of some of the most prominent lineages from Granada, which were to become one of the cornerstones of government. Their power was based in the wealth amassed in large agricultural estates, which have led some scholars to describe these families as full-blown aristocracies (Peinado Santaella 2008). Most of these landed estates were located in flat valleys and coastal plains, in suburban areas and even inside the cities, where these officials resided. Many of these estates are described in the

written record as *almunias*, green gardens, temporary residences and summer residences, and in them leisure and agricultural production were combined. The evidence suggests that the number of such *almunias* owned by the elite in the vicinity of Almería and Granada was very high. Some have gone as far as describing the farmlands to the west of Granada as an aristocratic landscape (Peinado Santaella 1997). These lineages, at any rate, used these properties not only to display their power, but also to increase their wealth encouraging agricultural production. A number of towers which have traditionally been classified, as if “by default,” as “hamlet towers,” may, in fact, be the remains of these *almunias*, for instance the towers of Romilla (Almagro Gorbea 1991) and Las Gabias (Torres Balbás 1953, 1956). More specifically, Las Gabias not only presents clearly domestic architectural features, in nothing resembling the characteristics of “hamlet towers,” but also preserves remains of interior decoration panels in plaster in which the “banded coat of arms” (the coat of arms of the Nasrid dynasty), is represented.

The best known of these *almunias* is the Generalife, located in a knoll next to the Alhambra. The *almunia* is at a vantage point and is traversed by the royal channel that brings water to the citadel; the slope is occupied by a series of agricultural



Figure 7.2 The Alhambra of Granada. Palatial city of the Nasrid dynasty and the Alcazaba, in Almería. Photograph Museos de Andalucía.

terraces, which must have been especially fertile. Both the buildings and the terraces have been explored archaeologically, including very recent excavations (Hernández Bermejo and García Sánchez 2015). In one of these terraces, a relatively complex hydraulic system has been found, the purpose of which was to expand the agricultural area to the high ground (Malpica Cuello 1987).

Other similar complexes to have been examined archaeologically include several *almunias* to the north, near the city wall, where a large number of these estates used the water brought to the city by the channel of Aynadamar. The excavations carried out in the University Campus of La Cartuja have revealed several more *almunias* (García-Contreras Ruiz *et al.* 2017). Another one, known as Cuarto Real de Santo Domingo and originally owned by the Nasrid family, has been identified inside the city of Granada, near the southern wall of the *arrabal* of Bāb al-Fajjārīn. The building, which has been known of old, was left to the Dominicans after the Castilian conquest for the construction of a monastery. The new owners demolished some of the existing buildings, but preserved the great tower that abutted the city wall, where Nasrid-period decorations still survive. The tower was probably to be used to conduct religious ceremonies during the construction of the monastery and the church (Pavón Maldonado 1991). After the confiscation of *mortmains* initiated in the nineteenth century, the building was left in private hands, the new owners preserving the building and incorporating it into the new residence built at that time. The excavations carried out after the city council of Granada became the owner of the property and adapted it for public use, demonstrated that the tower (the *qubba*) belonged to a substantial complex associated to agricultural land; that is, they belong to an *almunia intra muros* (García Porras and Muñoz Waissen 2011). Similar remains were found a few years ago at the other end of the city, near the Alberzana wall, erected in the mid-14th century.

These *almunias* played a significant role in al-Andalus from an early date (Navarro Palazón and Trillo San José 2018), although they seem to have

been especially important in the Nasrid period, operating as the economic base of the aristocratic lineages that held the political strings in the kingdom. The Nasrids were one family among many, although in all probability not only the most powerful, but the wealthiest as well.

As noted, these complexes tended to concentrate in suburban and urban areas, because their owners' official posts were based in the cities. The link between power, in this case the power of the state, and the city was very clear; some authors have pointed out that "agricultural production resulted in increased hierarchization, leading to the emergence of urban nuclei that were fully under the tutelage of the state" (Malpica Cuello 2011, 86). This had a direct impact on the morphology of the city, the construction of certain infrastructures and even architectural techniques. At least, this is what results from the examination of Nasrid cities.

Vital infrastructures such as water channels were totally subordinated to state needs. In Granada, as pointed out by Malpica Cuello (2014, 45), this appears particularly obvious in the channels that branch out of the Darro, which traverses the city. On the other hand, the *Acequia Gorda*, a channel which branches out of the second of Granada's rivers, the Genil, was increasingly under the influence of the city. This river must have been one of the main reasons that led the Ziríes to choose this location for their capital (García Porras and Sarr 2018), but this influence must have been especially significant with the growth of the city towards the east from the 13th century onwards, an expansion that resulted in the modification of the course of the channel; it seems likely that this project was sponsored by the Nasrid state (Jiménez Puertas 2013, 457).

Inside the city, the presence of the state is visible everywhere. It has become a truism that the state was a ubiquitous presence in Andalusí cities at all levels, political, religious and economic, but during the Nasrid period this presence was even more prominent. According to written and archaeological evidence, the ruling house embarked

in an ambitious construction programme in the mid-fourteenth century, when the regime was at its peak. This construction programme largely focused on the fortifications that defended the northern frontier, on which the survival of the kingdom depended, but a number of urban construction projects have also been attested (Malpica Cuello 1996a). In the city of Granada, we may highlight the construction of *Madraza Yūsufiyya* (Malpica Cuello and Mattei 2015), a college built by Yūsuf I for the education of the intellectual and religious elite of the kingdom. This may be interpreted as an attempt to domesticate a group that may prove problematic in politically convulse periods. The so-called *Maristán* or hospital (García Granados *et al.* 1989), another example of royal largesse, and the *Corral del Carbón* also seem to have been built during this period (Torres Balbás 1946). With the construction of the *Corral del Carbón* the Nasrid crown showed their wish to control economic flows, and especially to ensure that the kingdom played a role in international trade routes, also promoted by the creation of institutions to host foreign mercantile communities, such as the famous *alhóndigas* for Genoese, Catalan and Venetian merchants. Their activity was often placed under the protection of diplomacy; peace and trade treaties signed by their respective

governments and by the Nasrid crown included the provision of institutions and services for their benefit. In any case, the *al-funduq al-Ādīda*, known today as *Corral del Carbón*, did not respond to this model, as it was not targeted at a specific foreign mercantile community, but was simply an institution to channel state-sponsored trade (see Figure 6.3).

Originally, the construction of this building was planned to take place in the vicinity of the mosque, where most commercial transactions in the city occurred, and the *alcaicería* or luxury product market, which was subject to strict fiscal controls. The lack of space in this part of the city was not a problem. The *alhóndiga* was finally constructed on the other side of the Darro, and its physical connection with the commercial hub of the city was assured with the construction of a bridge over the river. This extra expense demonstrates the strategic importance that the new building had for the government.

It is likely that the state's construction activity also increased in other Nasrid cities during this period, and this should be examined in detail. The available evidence, at any rate, speaks of a clear state-sponsored process towards the consolidation of urban structures, reinforced by the construction of public buildings.

As previously noted, however, this construction programme was not limited to large and middling cities, but also reached many rural settlements, which were to undergo a radical transformation as a result, most remarkably the fortifications that protected the Nasrid frontier. As is well known, these castles had their origin in fortified settlements that predated the existence of the frontier; these were eminently rural castles, associated with



Figure 7.3 Interior of Corral del Carbón (Granada). Al-funduq al-Yadida. Photograph Granadaporemundo.com.

groups of peasant villages and hamlets (*alquerías*). These castles, referred to in the sources as *ḥiṣn* (pl. *ḥuṣūn*), have received preferential historiographical attention (Bazzana *et al.* 1988). In the Nasrid period, when the line of the frontier became fixed, these fortifications underwent a profound structural transformation, to the point of becoming nearly unrecognizable. In general, these castles saw their size increased and their architectural language thoroughly altered; new elements were added, and old ones totally modified. I do not want to linger on these changes, which have been subject of extensive studies, but I want to emphasize those changes that seem to be most closely connected with the power of the state. These changes bear witness to how a peasant-built rural fortification could swiftly be transformed by the power of the state into an entirely new place which shared many characteristics with urban structures (Malpica Cuello, 2008).

Long ago, Leopoldo Torres Balbás (1949a) pointed out that one of the architectural characteristics of these new fortifications was the replacement of the old rammed-earth walls for new masonry structures, as a response to the introduction of artillery as a siege weapon. This does not seem to be far from the truth although, given the authorship of these changes, it is likely that their meaning transcended these practical considerations. Based on textual references, some authors suggested some time ago that it was Muḥammad V who began reinforcing the kingdom's frontier as early as the mid-fourteenth century (Arié 1992, 227), and archaeology has confirmed this hypothesis, associating Muhammad V's programme with the construction of the new masonry walls (Acién Almansa 1998). It is clear that the adoption of new siege technologies was a factor in the adoption of new construction techniques, but we can also argue that, by introducing these changes, the crown was trying to appropriate a series of fortresses from the peasant communities that had built them, and which probably still managed them until then. We know that the mayors of these frontier villages were members of some of the most prominent families

from Granada, such as the Banū al-Qabṣanī, rulers in the *alcaldía* of Moclín (Peinado Santaella 1993, 318). These mayors acted as intermediaries with or, more precisely, representatives of the state, who came from outside to rule over these peasant communities. In the case of the Banū al-Qabṣanī, they had no properties around Moclín, and their appointment was probably decided by the central government. In the village, the *alcaldes* occupied the upper part of the fortress or *alcazaba* (García Porras 2015). Access to the *alcazaba* from the outer defensive precinct, the village occupied by the local peasantry, was through a narrow tower with an L-shaped corridor, making the transition between both areas difficult. This suggests a neat separation between the peasantry that inhabited the village and the ruling class that inhabited the *alcazaba*. Archaeological excavations in Moclín have demonstrated that this gateway replaced the original access to the *alcazaba*, a straight aisle protected by two solid rammed-earth towers, built in the eleventh or the twelfth century (García Porras 2014). The transition between the village and the *alcazaba* was thus made more difficult, isolating both areas from one another.

It is also likely that the new *alcaldes* assumed new functions, including the direct management of those territories that were beyond the military command of the frontier. It is thus possible that they exercised a broad civil authority, which explains the construction of new buildings around their *alcazabas* (Fábregas García 2016). Monumental gateways, found in different frontier castles, seem to have played some civil role in addition to the defensive ones; in Moclín, this seems to be confirmed by the presence of symbols related to the Nasrid monarchy. In fact, the *Bāb al Šarī'a* or Tower of Justice in the Alhambra has been interpreted in similar terms (Acién Almansa 1998, 432) (see Figure 6.4).

Another novelty is the construction of keeps. The new role of *alcaldes* as representatives of the state and their constant, perhaps permanent, presence there, may explain the emergence of this new structure. The term is obviously feudal in nature,



Figure 7.4 Panorama of the Castle of Moclín (Granada). On the top left, the keep, on the bottom right, the tower-gate. Photograph author's own.

and it might seem inappropriate for al-Andalus, but it reflects the residential dimension that these towers appear to have possessed. The archaeological exploration of Moclín has revealed the transformation of a tower, probably dated to the Almoravid period and originally built with rammed earth, into a keep during the Nasrid period (García Porrás 2015). Following the models attributed to Muhammad V's programme, the rammed earth tower was lined with masonry and used as base for new rooms in the upper part (also built in masonry), and a crenellated terrace at the top.

In conclusion, the archaeological and architectural analysis reflects the profound transformation of Nasrid society. Many of these changes were the direct result of state measures, in both urban and rural contexts. In any case, it is worth stressing that the action of the state was not equally direct in all regions, and their material trace is, therefore, more visible in some places than in others. Some fortifications were still managed by the peasant communities, with the state being considered but a co-owner: "The šayj Abū Marwān was inside the castle with his retinue and the local population, for they all shared the ownership of the fortress" (al-Qaštālī, cited in Bloix Gallardo 2010, 154).

Something similar occurs with the defensive structures built in some peasant settlements, the so-called "hamlet towers" (Fábregas García and González Arévalo 2015). As previously noted,

many of the towers that have been labelled as such can, in fact, no longer be related to peasant communities but to aristocratic properties, including some owned by the Nasrid family. Others, however, seem to be associated with peasant communities, although there is considerable variety in terms of dimensions, structure and technique. While towers such as those in Bordonal (Malpica Cuello 1996b) and Margena (Pedregosa Megías 2011) seem to be related to rural settlements and their inhabitants, others are similar in structure and technique to the new dependencies built in the frontier fortresses (masonry laid out in regular courses, etc.), and seem, therefore, to be reflecting a different social reality, which needs to be investigated. This is the case, for instance, with Torre de Agicampe, in Loja, where a two-storey building with a terrace and an oval plan was erected in the midst of a series of *alquerías*. The construction techniques used in the first floor are reminiscent of coetaneous, high-status residential buildings. Access was through a stair and a doorway with stone doorjambs (García Pulido 2013), open to the ground floor and the rooftop terrace. The archaeological excavation of the exterior of the tower has attested storage facilities, probably for agricultural produce, but this is still awaiting confirmation (see Figure 6.5).



Figure 7.5 Aerial view of the tower of Agicampe (Loja, Granada). Photograph author's own.

Conclusions

In recent years, studies about the Nasrid Kingdom have gathered enough information for comprehensive interpretations of specific phenomena to be attempted. I have tried to examine the presence of structures related to the power of the state, and their uneven distribution throughout the territory in both cities and the countryside. Archaeology has played a crucial role in this attempt; the written evidence, especially concerning archival document, is very scarce. Archaeology, material remains, are interpreted as the expression of complex social processes, including that of power and its territorial projection.

Archaeology has played a central role in the reconstruction of the history of this small kingdom. The written record presented this polity as an epigone of al-Andalus, the final and decadent episode of a glorious Islamic past, almost the puppet of its Christians neighbours. This perspective fits with conditions at the time when these narratives emerged; Islamic societies had become little more than geopolitical puppets to the imperialist and colonising western nations, which portrayed Islam-dominated societies as eminently self-absorbed and ahistorical. In fact, it could be argued

that the Nasrid kingdom stood a paradigmatic example of this historical model; its historical trajectory was never detached from the looming threat of the Christian kingdom of Castile, and in a way the history of the kingdom, let alone that of the the Nasrid dynasty, which was seen almost exclusively through the lens of the luxurious palaces in the Alhambra, was never allowed to have an independent existence. Archaeology has done much to restore the balance between the different forces that constituted this kingdom; this perspective presents a clear

account of the changes undergone by the Nasrid Kingdom over time, finally transcending the idea of a static society while underlining the clearly Islamic roots of many of its elements. Owing in part to archaeology, the Nasrid Kingdom of Granada is thus presented as late medieval Islamicate horizon which already presents many of the contradictions that, after the conquest, were to crystallize in the form of new social and economic structures.

Note

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