

FOREWORD

In the culture of the Mediterranean, the Islamic periods on the Iberian Peninsula hold a particular place: Through different stages of history, the name of al-Andalus has had a particular resonance with intellectuals of all nations who have glorified its image as a paradise lost. This refers to the idealized courtly splendour of the caliphate of Córdoba as well as to the cohabitation of different religious communities under a postulated spirit of tolerance. The archaeological image is much more down to earth, in the literal sense. The brick walls of a rural settlement are permeated more with the sweat of labour and the purposeful investment into crops and animals than with high ideals of aesthetic pleasure and social ethics. Exploring a place like Cuatrovitas, with simple houses, built to serve peasants working in the olive groves, means first of all to enquire about the local conditions of agricultural economy, about the possibilities of producing and trading cash crops during the Almohad period, and about the vagaries of settlements after the Christian takeover of the region. Nevertheless, there is also the splendidly built minaret of Cuatrovitas, indicating that the founders of this settlement had aspirations and were following very high standards of architectural planning and construction, and that they were able to draw on resources from the urban environment of nearby Seville. Taken together, the material record of Cuatrovitas is more varied than it may appear at first sight, and it is apt to give a vivid picture of life in a rural community eight hundred years ago.

Cuatrovitas with its mosque-chapel and its abandoned settlement, and El Aljarafe as the landscape in which they are situated, have long been the subject of attention by Spanish scholars. First and foremost, it has been Magdalena Valor Piechotta who has been relentlessly working on exploring the region and highlighting its importance for historical and archaeological research. Due to her many other obligations, research at Cuatrovitas was for a long time limited to a small part of the extant remains.¹ This was, however, a substantial step forward from the earlier situation, for the abandoned settlement had been completely overlooked or neglected by earlier field surveys, although clusters of features had been visible on the surface for decades. Instead of professional archaeologists, detectorists began their illegal forays around the chapel, increasingly as the technology became widely available. Presently, the site of the abandoned settlement is becoming protected as a registered archaeological monument. The chapel with the adjacent minaret, in contrast,

was declared a Spanish national monument in 1931² and was mentioned in the 1939 volume of the historical monuments of the province Seville.³ Consequently, the minaret made an occasional appearance in works on the architecture of the Almohad period.⁴ However, more thorough research was scarce.

It was a unique constellation that led to the joint Spanish-German research activities on El Aljarafe. The archaeology of the Islamic period was firmly rooted with the chair of Professor Valor Piechotta at the University of Seville. In Bamberg, Islamic Art and Archaeology had been established with Barbara Finster as the first professor in this position. She had a lively interest in al-Andalus as well as many personal contacts with Spain (only later did I learn that she had long viewed Cuatrovitas as a potential object of archaeological research). These relations encouraged an attempt to continue and expand my own academic interests, and they were matched by a long-standing academic cooperation between the Universities of Seville and Bamberg. Finally, the fact that Anja Heidenreich was willing to develop her activities further at the University of Bamberg turned the balance for a joint research project: She had written her doctoral thesis on a topic that went along with intimate knowledge of Spanish archaeology of the Islamic period, and she had gathered ample experience as a field archaeologist. Together, Anja and I had visited a few places of archaeological interest in Extremadura and in Andalusia. During my stay at the University of Seville as a guest teacher in 2009, Magdalena Valor Piechotta took me to visit Cuatrovitas with its chapel-mosque and the abandoned settlement. The combination of promising factors at this place made it easy to arrive at a decision and develop plans for an archaeological project.

Funding by the German Research Foundation (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft) made it possible to conduct archaeological research at Cuatrovitas in two phases, 2013–2015 and 2016–2018.⁵ Several campaigns of field

1 Valor Piechotta et al. 2002.

2 In the decree of the ‘Ministerio de Instrucción Pública y Bellas Artes’, published by the Gaceta de Madrid nr. 155, 1173 on the 4.6.1931.

3 Hernández Díaz et al. 1939/I, 219–224.

4 Barrucand – Bednorz 1991, 192; Guichard 2005, 204; Morales 2006.

5 The official titles of the funded projects read: „Archäologische und baugeschichtliche Untersuchung der almohadenzeitlichen Moschee und Wüstung von Cuatrovitas im Aljarafe (Sevilla, Spanien)“ (KO 2130/8-1) and „Der Siedlungsbezirk von Cuatro-

research and excavations were conducted during this time. A close study of the archaeological remains, together with a thorough documentation of the chapel-mosque, promised to render reliable information on the character of this settlement and make it possible to sketch its history. In this project, the excavation of limited areas was to be combined with advanced methods of non-invasive recording and other cutting-edge methods of archaeological science. This meant that a large group of scholars became involved, many of whom worked on the site while others did most of their work in laboratories and libraries. The result of these joint efforts can be studied on the following pages.

During the lifetime of the project, I had the opportunity to participate in three field campaigns, which meant hands-on work/experience in trenches and on the study of the chapel, excursions to related sites and visits to our partners. On these occasions, I witnessed the enthusiasm and the heartfelt interest of the people of Bollullos de la Mitación for their sanctuary of the Virgin Mary and its history as well as their hospitality for the German team; I saw the eagerness of students from Sevilla and Bamberg to gain experience in field archaeology and their zeal to uncover the material culture of Cuatrovitas in minute detail. I vividly remember the unique atmosphere of the rolling landscape of El Aljarafe, on which human activities have left their deep imprints, and where the limits of exploitation by agriculture and settlement are becoming visible. All of these are now happy memories. It can only be hoped that the economy of El Aljarafe will manage to use the natural resources in a sustainable manner and that the cry of the hoopoe will continue to be heard in the olive groves, fields and meadows.

The research project on Cuatrovitas would not have been possible without the many institutions and persons who contributed to its success. In the name of the whole team, I would like to convey our thanks to:

the German Research Foundation (DFG) for six years of generous funding

the Junta de Andalucía for granting permission for fieldwork

the parish of Bollullos de la Mitación and the diocese of Sevilla for granting permission so that we were able to work on their grounds and lay hands on the chapel building

the owners of the Hacienda of Cuatrohabitan for allowing us to open trenches between the rows of olive trees

the Municipality of Bollullos de la Mitación, mayor Fernando Soriano Gómez, former mayor Francisco Manuel Godoy Ruiz and the municipal architect Juan de Dios Pilar Gutierrez for their generous support of the project with workforce and other help. The municipality also supported the installation of a joint internet site for the project, <https://www.cuatrovitas.org/>.

The Fraternity (*Hermandad de Cuatrovitas*) with its former chairwoman Estrella Gallego Fonseca and the actual chairman Pedro Moreno Sánchez.

José María Selas Martínez, who runs the adventure park “*Bosque Suspendido*” at the Centro de Naturaleza La Juliana, for spontaneous help that proved essential for the exploration of underground structures and the minaret.

The sacristans of the chapel, Antonio Varilla Riego and Dolores Bernal, who took a kind interest in our work, were always helpful and, despite their own advanced age, never complained about the extra work that the presence of archaeologists in the chapel meant for them.

The team of the field seasons varied greatly, and all participants deserve sincere thanks for the efforts that they put into fieldwork – the many students from Sevilla and from Bamberg as well as the established scholars, some of whom are represented as authors and co-authors of chapters in the present book. Particular mention should go to Gerhard Gresik, who prepared important steps in the digital recording and measuring of the chapel and its surroundings, to Pilar Lafuente, who took care of the ceramic finds of the excavation and whose expertise was indispensable, and to Heike Schneider, who managed to extract so much important information on the natural history of the site from palynological data.

It goes without saying that the greatest merits in the cause of this project must be attributed to the long-standing team members who conducted the project from the beginning to its end:

Magdalena Valor Piechotta, without whom the project would never have materialized, who put all possible energy into its smooth take-off and finding suitable partners for specific tasks, and who spent innumerable hours on the site and organizing the work of students from her department at the University of Sevilla;

Alejandro Jimenez, who was instrumental in running the excavation, was a paradigm in punctuality and hard work, and never ceased to develop new ideas on how to apply new analytical methods and how to interpret the available evidence;

and Anja Heidenreich, who prepared and conducted all field campaigns with great diligence and perseverance, who made Cuatrovitas her own cause and in whose hands all the threads come together. It is fully justified that the present book bears her name as the person who directed and conducted this project from the beginning to the publication.

Our sincere thanks go to them all.

Last but not least, I extend our thanks to the Reichert Verlag, and to Markus Ritter and Oya Pancaroğlu as editors of the Studies in Islamic Art and Archaeology series, who added the book to their programme.

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Lorenz Korn

vitae im Aljarafe (Sevilla, Spanien). Archäologische und naturwissenschaftliche Untersuchung almohadenzeitlicher Wüstungen um eine zentrale Dorfmoschee (KO 2130/8-2).