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The Country Estate Castillejo de Monteagudo (Murcia): The Palace Complex in the Agricultural Plain (12th and 13th century CE)

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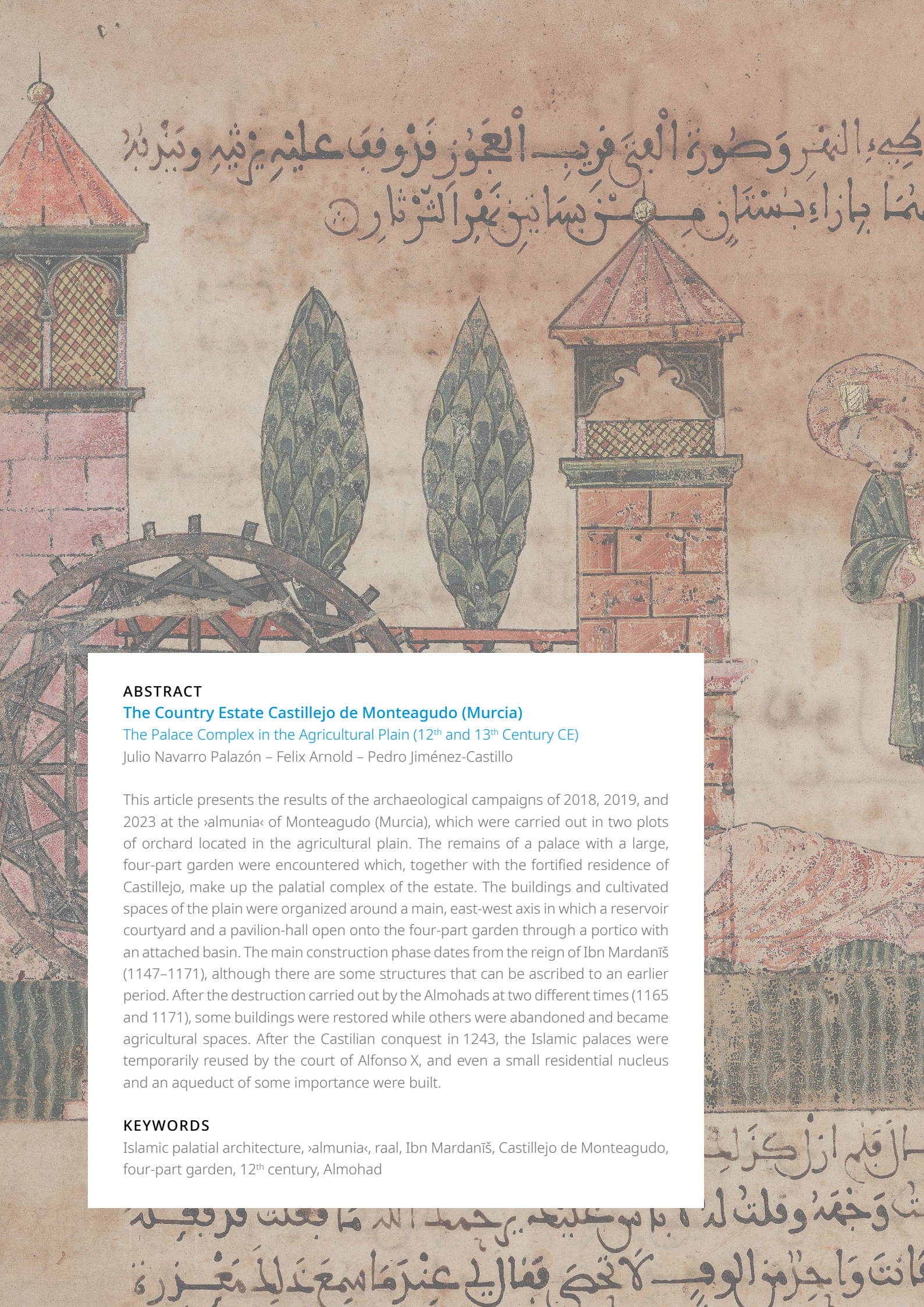

ABSTRACT

The Country Estate Castillejo de Monteagudo (Murcia)

The Palace Complex in the Agricultural Plain (12th and 13th Century CE)

Julio Navarro Palazón – Felix Arnold – Pedro Jiménez-Castillo

This article presents the results of the archaeological campaigns of 2018, 2019, and 2023 at the ›almunia‹ of Monteagudo (Murcia), which were carried out in two plots of orchard located in the agricultural plain. The remains of a palace with a large, four-part garden were encountered which, together with the fortified residence of Castillejo, make up the palatial complex of the estate. The buildings and cultivated spaces of the plain were organized around a main, east-west axis in which a reservoir courtyard and a pavilion-hall open onto the four-part garden through a portico with an attached basin. The main construction phase dates from the reign of Ibn Mardanīš (1147–1171), although there are some structures that can be ascribed to an earlier period. After the destruction carried out by the Almohads at two different times (1165 and 1171), some buildings were restored while others were abandoned and became agricultural spaces. After the Castilian conquest in 1243, the Islamic palaces were temporarily reused by the court of Alfonso X, and even a small residential nucleus and an aqueduct of some importance were built.

KEYWORDS

Islamic palatial architecture, ›almunia‹, raal, Ibn Mardanīš, Castillejo de Monteagudo, four-part garden, 12th century, Almohad

The Country Estate Castillejo de Monteagudo (Murcia)

The Palace Complex in the Agricultural Plain (12th and 13th Century CE)

1 Introduction

1 At Monteagudo, about 5 km northeast of the city center of Murcia, the remains of an extensive country estate (Spanish »almunia«) are preserved dating for the most part to the reign of Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad b. Saʿd b. Mardanīš al-Ǧuḏāmī (1147–1171) (Fig. 1. 2). The elements best known from this estate are the Castillo and the Castillejo, which occupy two promontories that dominate the ›almunia‹ (Fig. 3. 4). However, there was no prior knowledge of the existence of the large palatial complex located in the agricultural plain beneath the Castillejo and buried today under orchards of citrus trees. In 2018, we began systematic archaeological excavations at this site, which allowed us to identify a large, four-part garden presided over by a palatial complex, radically changing the interpretation of the organization and characteristics of the site (Fig. 5. 6. 7. 8)[1].

2 In addition to the palatial area, the ›almunia‹ of Monteagudo comprised large productive spaces including orchards, dryland, and forests. This is the most outstanding example of a series of Islamic aristocratic estates that are mentioned in the »Libro del Repartimiento« as »rahales« or »rafales«. All of them have in common their location at the foot of the two mountainous alignments that border the pre-coastal depression along the Guadalentín and Segura rivers, a location that made it possible to exploit the irrigated areas furthest from the alluvial plain at the edge of the drylands extending above them[2]. There are archaeological remains of several of these estates; the best documented are those of Cabezo de Torres[3], el Portazgo[4] and el Verdolay[5] (Fig. 2).

1 This study is part of the project ArqMUNIA ›Prestige architectures in medieval almunias: transmission of models from Antiquity to the Renaissance‹ (PID2022-141272NB-I00), directed by Julio Navarro Palazón, within the ›Proyectos de Generación de Conocimiento 2022‹ (Plan Estatal de Investigación Científica y Técnica y de Innovación 2021–2023), financed by the Agencia Estatal de Investigación (Ministerio de Ciencia e Innovación) and co-financed by FEDER funds.

2 Jiménez 2018a; Jiménez 2018b; Navarro – Jiménez 2023.

3 Navarro – Jiménez 1993, 450; Manzano 2007, 267–269.

4 Manzano – Bernal 1993a; Pozo 1995; Navarro – Jiménez 1995, 131 f.

5 Jiménez 2013, 337–342.

Fig. 1: Location of the city of Murcia and Monteagudo in the southeast of the Iberian Peninsula.

1

3 The Spanish term »almunia« derives from the Andalusi Arabic *munya*, an expression referring to a farm or orchard used for leisure[6]. Other names found in Arabic sources to allude to this type of complex include *bustān*, *ǧanna*, *dār*, *qaṣr*, *ḥušš*, *buḥayra*, and *karm*. The term *karm* is the root of the Spanish word »carmen«, which in Granada refers to an estate with an orchard or garden[7].

4 The study of the organization and functioning of the ›almunias‹ is a fundamental question of economic history, being at the core of the creation of new cultivation areas for commercial purposes by the privileged classes. Most ›almunias‹ developed

6 The Arabic term *mūnya* probably derives from the Greek word μονή, which was adopted by the Christian population in Egypt as *minya*. At first used to refer to a station, port of navigation or monastery (García Gómez 1965, 334), it was later employed for a type of walled royal residence in the desert comprising luxurious palaces, beautiful gardens, and productive orchards. In 8th-century *Córdoba* the term *munya* was applied to country residences of the elite. Arnold et al. 2021, 159–165.

7 According to the Real Academia Española »en Granada, quinta con huerto o jardín«.

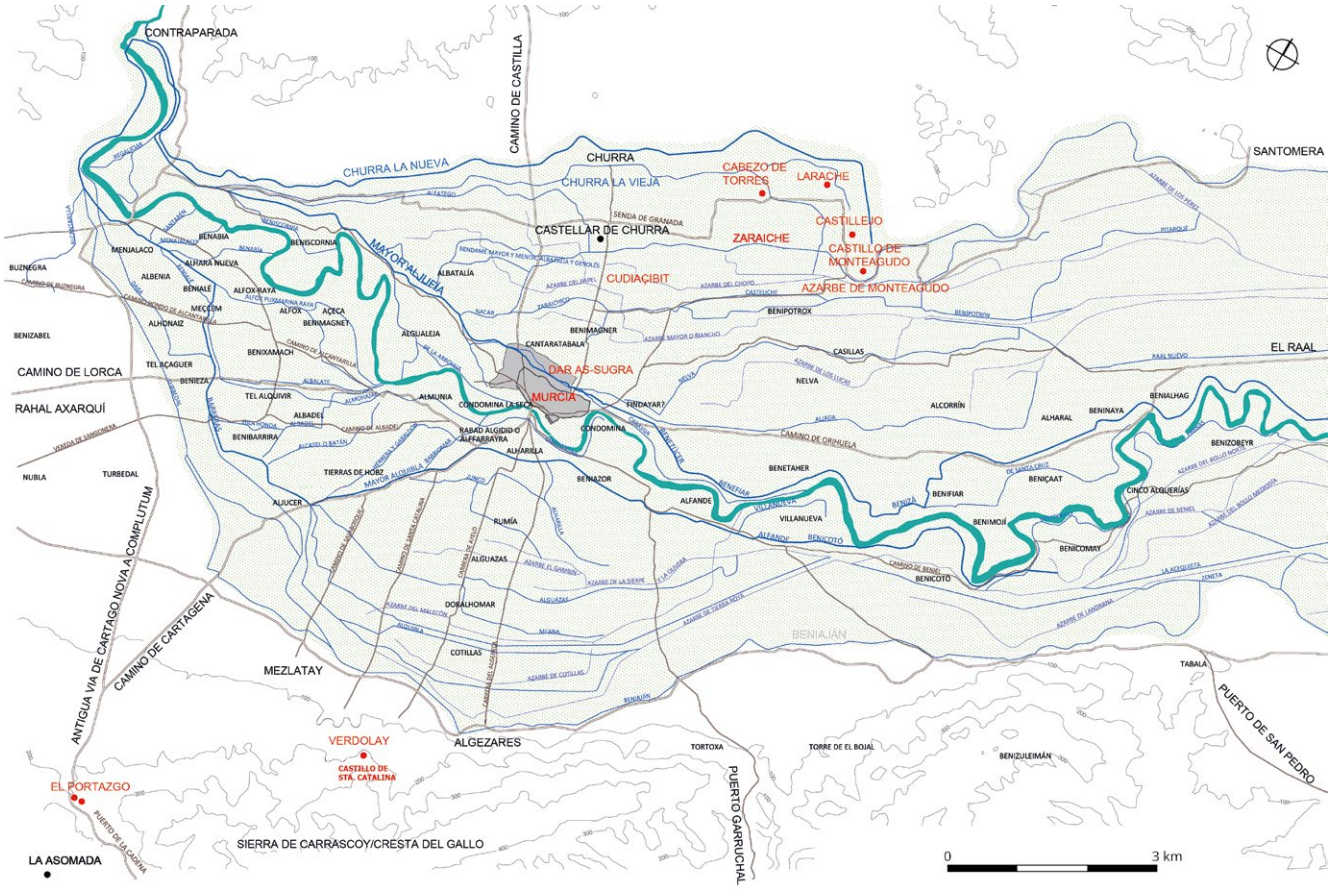

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Fig. 2: Map of the huerta of Murcia in the 13th century. The place names mentioned in the text are highlighted in red.

irrigated agriculture oriented to the local market, which explains why they were generally located near city centers. In addition, there were others in which dry farming was dominant, because they did not have natural springs and were not within the perimeter irrigated by a river. Their proliferation constitutes one of the fundamental aspects of the high medieval economic revolution, intimately linked to the demographic increase and the urban and commercial boom that took place from the 10th century onwards throughout Europe, and especially in al-Andalus[8].

5 Some ›almunias‹ were promoted by caliphs and emirs, not only for economic reasons but also in order to exalt their power and increase their prestige. In them the culture (*adab*) of sovereigns strongly linked to the Near East was expressed and developed and, in terms of customs and court protocol, linked to the introduction of new designs of palaces and gardens in which musical and poetic works were performed. The economic importance of their farms explains the effort made by their patrons to cultivate and adapt, for the first time, exotic plants[9]. Consequently, these peri-urban estates were essential not just for the social prestige they provided to their owners, but also for the role they played in the transmission of culture between the Islamic East and West and its subsequent export to Christian Europe.

8 Jiménez-Castillo 2022.

9 Testifying to this is the ›almunia‹ of ar-Ruṣāfa that was built by ʿAbd ar-Raḥmān I at the beginning of his reign, in memory of the palaces of his grandfather Hišām at ar-Ruṣāfa in Syria. Located northwest of Córdoba, it featured, »a great palace (*qaṣr*) and a vast garden (*ǧinān*) to which the most extraordinary species and the noblest trees were transferred from all the ends of the world. In them were also deposited the seeds and grains brought by Yazīd and Safar – two delegates sent to Syria – which grew vigorously with good care, becoming thick trees with marvelous fruits that then spread to all parts of al-Andalus«. Translation to Spanish by Julia Carabaza and Aly Tawfik (Al-Maqqarī 1988, 466 f.).

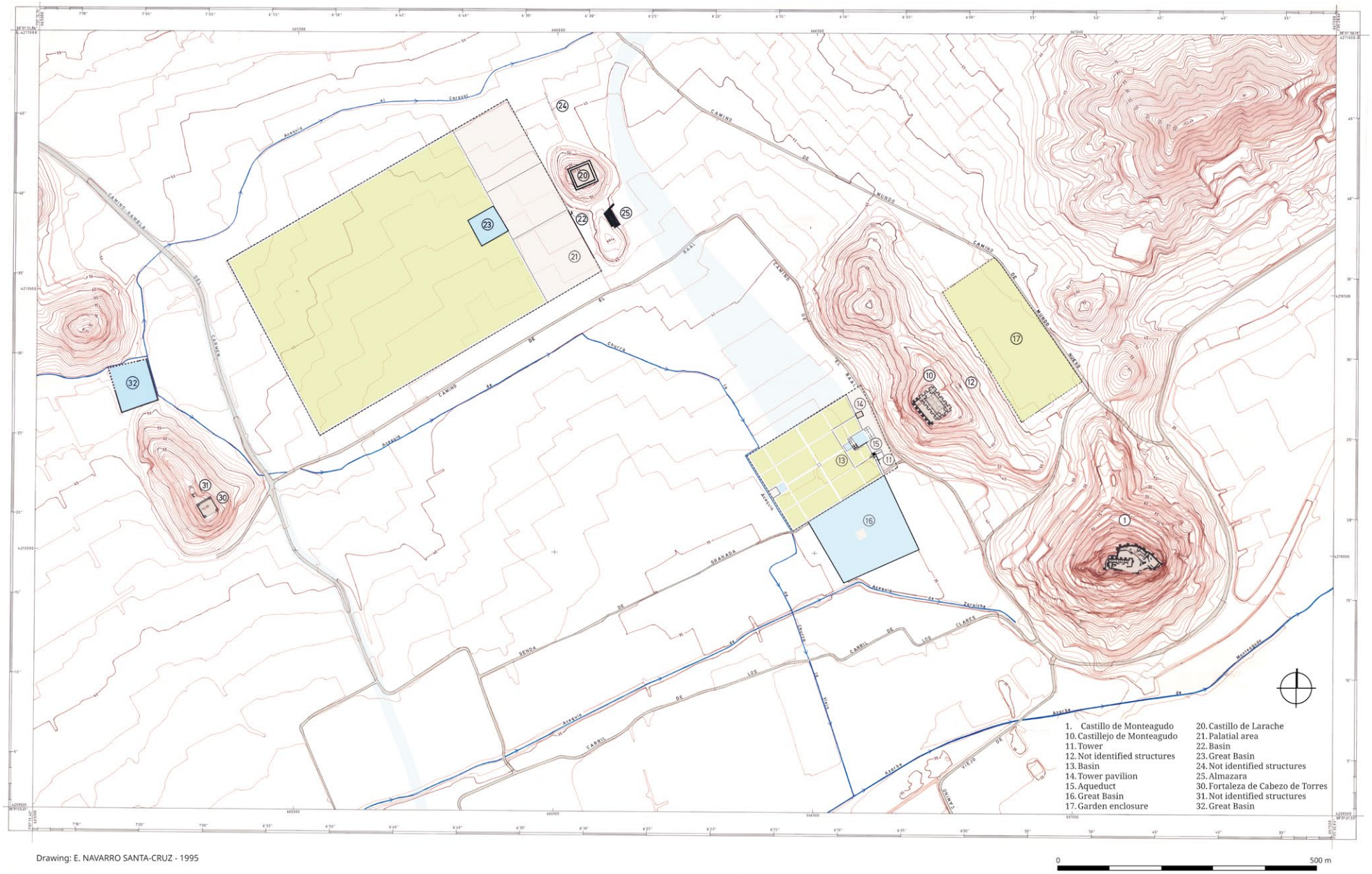

Fig. 3: Location of the Larache estate (top) and the Castillejo de Monteagudo estate (bottom) on the municipal map of Murcia.

4

Fig. 4: Monteagudo. General view of the Castillejo from the north; behind, the Castillo.

6 Interest in the study of ›almunias‹ has increased considerably in the last twenty years with the systematic exploration and excavation of four outstanding examples: ar-Rummānīya (Córdoba) between 2006 and 2014[10], the Agdāl of Marrakech (Morocco) between 2012 and 2014[11], the Genoardo of Palermo between 2020 and 2021[12], and Monteagudo (Murcia) between 2018 and 2024[13].

7 The fortified palace of Castillejo was partially excavated by Andrés Sobejano between 1924 and 1925 (Fig. 4). Excavations at this site were resumed in 2023 as part of an ongoing restoration project[14]. During the intervening century, the building complex was the subject of the attention of numerous scholars because, for many years, it was one of the few 12th century palaces known from the Islamic West[15]. In addition to being a key monument in the history of Islamic architecture, many researchers who studied the figure of Ibn Mardanīš have been interested in this building since the written sources attribute its construction to him as part of a building program that he developed mainly in the surroundings of the city of Murcia[16].

10 Arnold et al. 2015; Arnold et al. 2019; Arnold et al. 2021.

11 Navarro et al. 2013; Navarro et al. 2014; Navarro et al. 2017; Navarro et al. 2018.

12 Navarro et al. 2022; Navarro et al. in press.

13 Navarro – Jiménez 2023.

14 Salmer Cantería y Restauración S. L. was in charge of the archaeological excavations at the lower enclosure in order to facilitate the restoration of its wall. The company Mediohabit S. L. intervened in the upper enclosure, within the framework of the ›Project of archaeological and architectural diagnosis of the monumental complex of the historical site of Monteagudo and Cabezo de Torres: Castillejo, Alberca de Larache and Alberca del Molino Armero‹, promoted by the City Council of Murcia.

15 On this monument we wrote a detailed study that included a historiography going back to the 18th century, and an update in 2012, to which we refer: Navarro – Jiménez 1995a; Navarro – Jiménez 2012. Later contributions include Almela 2015; Robles 2016; García Granados 2018; Navarro et al. 2019; Eiroa – Gómez 2019; Robles 2019.

16 Some historical studies also mention the building program of Ibn Mardanīš, especially Balbale 2022.

8 Between 1983 and 1990, one of us (JNP) began to study the estate in which it is located, excavating in the Castillo de Monteagudo[17], and in 1989 he began the survey of the orchard area between Monteagudo and Cabezo de Torres. The results, which were published in 1993, showed that the Castillejo palace was located in the middle of an extensive agricultural estate that also included a series of architectural structures scattered around it[18] (Fig. 3). Shortly after, José Manzano also explored the area, reporting the results obtained in two publications[19].

9 In 2018, a team of the Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas (CSIC) began to investigate a sector of orchard located in the plain to the west of the fortified palace of Castillejo, which has been carried out since 2023 in cooperation with the Madrid Department of the German Archaeological Institute[20]. Three campaigns have been conducted so far[21] in two privately owned plots that, although close to each other, are separated by a citrus orchard[22] (Fig. 4). The site was chosen because of the high number of architectural structures that were visible on the surface[23]. In 2018 the investigation was limited to the southern plot, where the base of a tower and the remains of two building compounds organized around courtyards were encountered (Fig. 41. 42). In 2019 the work focused on the northern plot, where what appears to be the most monumental part of the 12th century palace was discovered (Fig. 19). Between the two plots there is an aqueduct, which seals off the structures of the 12th and 13th centuries and which probably dates to the period immediately following the Castilian conquest (Fig. 64. 66). In 2023[24], the intervention did not involve an extension of the area excavated in previous years, but rather it was intended to finish what had already been started, complete the graphic documentation, exhaustively analyze and study the remains already exhumed and proceed to their consolidation. Nevertheless, the work carried out, besides providing very rich and new information on the organization and history of the aulic building, has changed the perception we had of the estate until then[25]. The results of this latest investigation are presented in this article.

17 In this building, identified as a state granary, archaeological excavations were carried out in 1983, 1984, and 1990 by one of us (JNP), and twenty years later by J. A. Martínez López. The results remain unpublished, although some of the materials of the first ones are found in Navarro 1986, 283–308.

18 Navarro – Jiménez 1993.

19 Manzano 1998, 414–416; Manzano 2007.

20 Directed by archaeologists Julio Navarro and Pedro Jiménez. Felix Arnold of the German Archaeological Institute joined the steering group at the beginning of the 2023 campaign. The archaeological team comprised Francisco Muñoz, Juan Antonio Ramírez, Javier Valera, Joan Negre, Gabriel Simón, Alejandro Ugolini, Irene Zarco, Carlos Cano and Marina Correyero. The graphic documentation was carried out by Juan Antonio Hernández, Sara Peñalver, Luis García Pulido, Pablo Pineda, and José Javier Martínez. The paleobotanical studies were conducted by Concepción Obón and Javier Valera, the restoration work by the architect Francisco Javier López Martínez, Pedro Camacho (Cales Cafal S. L.) and Eva Mendiola.

21 The investigation was conducted in the framework of three research projects funded by the State Plan of the Spanish Ministries of Economy and Competitiveness and Science and Innovation: the first, ›Almunias of the Islamic West: Architecture, Archaeology and Documentary Sources‹ (HAR2015-64605-C2-1-P) from 2016 to 2018, the second, ›Medieval Almunias in the Mediterranean: History and Conservation of Peri-urban Cultural Landscapes‹ (PID2019-111508GB-100) from 2020 to August 2023, the current one, ›Prestige Architectures in Medieval Almunias: Transmission of Models from Antiquity to the Renaissance‹ (PID2022-141272NB-I00) started in September 2023 and is scheduled to finish at the end of 2026.

22 In this area we could not intervene because we did not have the permission of the owner.

23 They were identified and catalogued by us for the first time in 1989 and published shortly after: Navarro – Jiménez 1993. At that time, we did not know the function of some of them, but individual numbers were assigned to the structures: no. 11 to the tower of the southern sector, no. 13 to the walls of the Reservoir Courtyard, no. 14 to the northern pavilion, and no. 15 to the aqueduct.

24 The campaign of 2023 was funded by the Escuela de Estudios Árabes (CSIC) and the German Archaeological Institute, as well as a small grant from the Junta de Hacendados de la Huerta de Murcia.

25 The state of the research at the start of the 2023 campaign was published in July of that year in Navarro – Jiménez 2023.

2 Written Sources

10 Only two Arabic sources refer explicitly to the ›almunia‹ of Castillejo de Monteagudo, although they are sufficient for us to know with a fair degree of certainty, that the name it received in the Islamic period was Ḥiṣn al-Farağ[26].

11 The first mention is provided by Ibn Ṣāḥib aṣ-Ṣalā', author of a chronicle which includes accounts of two destructions of the estate carried out by the Almohads in 1165 and 1171[27]. In the one referring to the siege of 1171 he states, »[t]hey arrived in Murcia, besieged it (*nāzalū*) and seized (*istaġlabū*) Ḥiṣn al-Farağ, which was the recreational estate (*mutanazzah*) of Ibn Mardanīš«. In order for a second devastation to take place, it was necessary for Ibn Mardanīš to restore the building complex or, at least, to make significant repairs. This is confirmed by the excavation of the Palace of the Plain, in which it was found that the palace was extended to the south, in addition to a refurbishment of its portico. These alterations we believe were undertaken after the sacking of 1165.

12 The second mention is provided by Ḥāzim al-Qarṭāğannī in his long poem entitled *Al-Qaṣīda al-alfiya al-maqṣūra*, in which he recounts the visit he made to the ›almunia‹ shortly before the Castilian conquest of 1243[28]: »And how many moments of joy (*furağ*) we had in the exalted (*as-sāmī*) Ḥiṣn al-Farağ, which drove away my sorrows until they rid me of them!«. The fact that the term *ḥiṣn* in al-Andalus habitually referred to a fortified place located in an elevated area explains why most researchers believed that these sources alluded to the great fortress that presides over the ›almunia‹, known today as Castillo de Monteagudo. This was, then as today, the most prominent topographic point of reference; therefore, it seems logical to assume that we are dealing with a synecdoche – that is, the denomination of a whole (the estate) with the name of one of its parts (the castle or *ḥiṣn*), a very common lexical phenomenon in toponymy.

13 No historical chronicles of the court environment of Ibn Mardanīš have been preserved that would inform us about the buildings and official residences in which he carried out his work of government, although we do know some indirect references, such as the one provided by Ibn al-Ḫaṭīb about the parties that Ibn Mardanīš celebrated, probably in the palatial area of the ›almunia‹ of Monteagudo: »he had two days a week reserved, Mondays and Thursdays, to drink with his guests«. Following the poet's text we know that, »such banquets were enlivened by slave girls (*qiyān*) specialized in music, with their flutes (*mazāmīr*, sing.: *mizmār*) and their lutes (*aᶜwād*, sing.: *ᶜūd*)«[29].

14 Given that in Islamic times the ›almunia‹ of Monteagudo must have been the property of the *maḫzén* (State), it seems logical to assume that it would pass directly into the hands of the Castilian crown after the conquest in the mid-13th century, as evidenced by the 15 documents that King Alfonso X issued there in 1257[30].

15 In relation to the dimensions and integrity of the estate, we have no information in the Arab sources, so we must turn to the data provided by the Castilian documentation of the 13th century. Thanks to the »Libro del Repartimiento«, we know that in 1266 the king gave a part to Queen Violante, which is recorded as follows: »La sennora Reyna tiene en el reyal de Monteagudo, en la vinna et en el [aluar] y mismo, DC tahullas, que son XC alffabas« (»the Queen has in the estate of Monteagudo, as vineyard and as [water] thereof, 600 ›tahúllas‹, which are 90 ›alfabas‹«)[31]. Now, were these 600 ›tahúlla‹

26 We thank Inmaculada Camarero for her collaboration in relation to the Arabic sources and the revision of the transliteration of the Arabic words.

27 Ibn Ṣāḥib al-Salā 1987, 136.

28 Translation in Pocklington 2018.

29 Ibn al-Jaṭīb 1955, 122, translation to Spanish by Alfonso Carmona González, in García Avilés 1998, 31.

30 Navarro – Jiménez 2023, 25 f.

31 Torres Fontes 1960, 1. 156.

(equaling about 67 ha) the only donation that was given from the area of the former Islamic estate and, therefore, are these its dimensions? José Antonio Manzano has shown that the information contained in the ›Repartimiento‹ indicates that this was most probably not the case[32]. He has pointed out that at the beginning of the Third and Fourth Partition, after the reference to the Queen's grant, the beneficiary Gil García de Azagra received a donation at the farmstead (Spanish »alquería«) of Cudiaçibit amounting to 470 ›tahúllas‹ (52.5 ha), counting as 125 ›alfabas‹. However, in the summary of these allocations, the following was recorded: »La sennora Reyna tene en Monteagudo dc taffullas, que son xc alffabas menos de la terra yerma« (»the Queen has in Monteagudo 600 ›tahúllas‹, which are 90 ›alfabas‹ not counting barren land«) and »Don Gil tene y cccclxx taffullas, que son cxv alffabas« (»Don Gil has there 470 ›tahúllas‹, which are 115 ›alfabas‹«)[33]. The second entry indicates that Gil García de Azagra had the lands »there« (*y*), in the same place where the queen owned land, which is none other than the estate of Monteagudo, from which it can be deduced that one of the two annotations is wrong, since it is not possible that the donation in question was both at Cudiaçibit and at Monteagudo. Now, which of the two entries is the correct one? The answer seems to be found in the same text of the ›Repartimiento‹ a few lines above (p. 156) in the summary corresponding to the lands distributed in Cudiaçibit, where it is indicated that the donation that the king gave at that place amounted to 395 ›tahúllas‹, among which it was impossible to find the 470 ›tahúllas‹ of García de Azagra, since they alone would exceed the total figure. In fact, if we add up the ›tahúllas‹ of the donations distributed in Cudiaçibit without taking into account those of García de Azagra, the result coincides approximately with the 395 ›tahúllas‹ of the summary, from which it can be deduced that the property of García de Azagra was not in Cudiaçibit but in Monteagudo. Therefore, the former estate of Monteagudo would comprise not only the 600 ›tahúllas‹ of the queen but also the 470 of García de Azagra, bringing the total to at least 1,070 ›tahúllas‹ (119.5 ha), not counting the barren land.

3 Phases and Chronology

16 Despite the distance of approximately 30 m between the two excavated areas, we were able to verify that their structures belong to the same palatial complex and that some of their phases of occupation coincide (Fig. 17. 18). The excavation of its Central Sector allowed us to identify at least two building phases: the foundational phase, in which the Reservoir Courtyard has no rooms along the long north and south sides, and a second phase in which two rows of rooms were built along the entire length of the north and south sides of the palace (Fig. 16. 19). These two construction events can also be detected in the southern sector, as well as a phase before and two phases after these (Fig. 41). Below we list them schematically, designating them with terms relating to the historical period to which we believe they belong to clarify the description of the building remains that we present in the following sections[34]. As for their chronology, we must make it clear that, in reality, we do not have absolute dates, so we rely principally on the

32 This was explained by the archaeologist in a conference, entitled ›The Muslim settlement in the orchard of Murcia during the thirteenth century‹, held in Monteagudo on January 12, 2019 as part of the seminar ›Expansión agrícola y colonización en al-Andalus (siglos X–XIII). El contexto socioeconómico de las almunias de Monteagudo-Cabezo de Torres (Murcia).‹ We are grateful for his authorization to share this unpublished information.

33 Torres Fontes 1960, 156.

34 This complex stratigraphy and the superimposition of Islamic buildings have similarities with the sequence one of us (JNP) documented in the 1980s in the Dār aṣ-Ṣuġrà (Fig. 15), preserved inside the monastery of Santa Clara la Real in Murcia. What was studied there helps us better understand the contexts in Monteagudo.

few references in the written sources and on the stratigraphic relationship between the different constructive moments; that is to say, on the relative chronology.

17 **Phase I: Formative**. The tower of the southern plot (Fig. 3, No. 11) and the rectangular pavilion (No. 14) to the north of the excavated area belong to this time as well as, probably, some constructive remains built over by the Castillejo palace that have appeared during the recent restoration work of the fortified complex. The tower and the pavilion are structures that are alien to the design of the later, four-part garden, Pavilion Hall and Reservoir Courtyard located in its main axis. They are probably buildings constructed by the state as part of the first estate founded in the area, about whose chronology we have no certain evidence, but rather some clues in this regard. First, we know that it precedes phase II, which dates from the period of Ibn Mardanīš. Second, the construction of the buildings of this period cannot be traced back to the 10th century or the first half of the 11th century. Nor have we found ceramics that correspond to that chronology, such as the ›verde y manganeso‹ ware. For these reasons, we are inclined to date this initial phase between the end of the Taifa period and the Almoravid period; that is, between the second half of the 11th century and the first half of the 12th century.

18 **Phase II: Mardanīšid 1.** This is the phase of maximum splendor and monumentality of the site. It incorporates the tower and pavilion of the previous phase in a large palatial complex organized around a four-part garden on whose central axis are located two large water basins, the protruding Pavilion Hall and the Reservoir Courtyard (Fig. 5. 6. 7. 8), all built of high quality materials such as lime mortar, well-fired bricks, painted dados and finely carved stone slabs. We know that the ›almunia‹ was attributed by Ibn Ṣāḥib aṣ-Ṣalā' and by al-Qarṭāğannī to Ibn Mardanīš, and this agrees with the style of the plasterwork found by Sobejano in the Castillejo. Therefore, the most likely hypothesis is that Ibn Mardanīš (1147–1171) is the patron of this phase of construction.

19 **Phase III: Mardanīšid 2.** This phase consists of the reform and extension of the palace of the previous phase (Fig. 16 b). The works belonging to this phase are characterized by the reuse of materials and by their hasty workmanship, of lower quality than the previous phase. The poor execution of the works and the irregularity in the design of the floor plan of some rooms is remarkable, in addition to the absence of reinforcements in the jambs of the openings. We know from Ibn Ṣāḥib aṣ-Ṣalā' that the Almohads destroyed for the ›almunia‹ of Ibn Mardanīš in 1171 for the second time, from which it can be deduced that it had been rebuilt between the first destruction in 1165 and the second in 1171. This is the main reason for dating this third phase to the short period between 1165 and 1171.

20 **Phase IV: Late Islamic.** In this phase a new residence was erected on the ruins of the old one, poorer and smaller than its predecessor (Fig. 54). This reform does not seem to have affected the general design of the four-part garden. The type of construction and some pottery fragments allow us to date this phase to the last quarter of the 12th or the first third of the 13th century. It must, therefore, be attributed to one of the Almohad governors or to the reign of Ibn Hūd al-Mutawakkil (1228–1238), although it seems difficult to attribute such a modest work to the initiative of this powerful sovereign who came to rule most of al-Andalus, which inclines us to propose that the building dates to the Almohad period (1171–1228).

21 **Phase V: 13th century.** This phase consists of the occupation and partial reuse of the Late-Islamic palace; for this purpose, minor alterations of the previous buildings were carried out and at least one new residential nucleus was built on the southern plot (Fig. 41). The four-part design of the garden would have been abandoned, at least partially, as evidenced by the construction of an aqueduct over its eastern walkway, which suggests a retreat from palatial life in favor of the productive aspects of the estate. The southern dwelling must date from the period of Ibn Hūd or later, judging by

Fig. 5: Monteagudo. Aerial photograph of the Castillejo and the sector of the adjacent orchards. Highlighted in red, hypothetical restitution of the ground plan of the Castillejo, the Palace of the Plain and the great water basin (*albercón*). Flight by Ruiz de Alda 1929/1930.

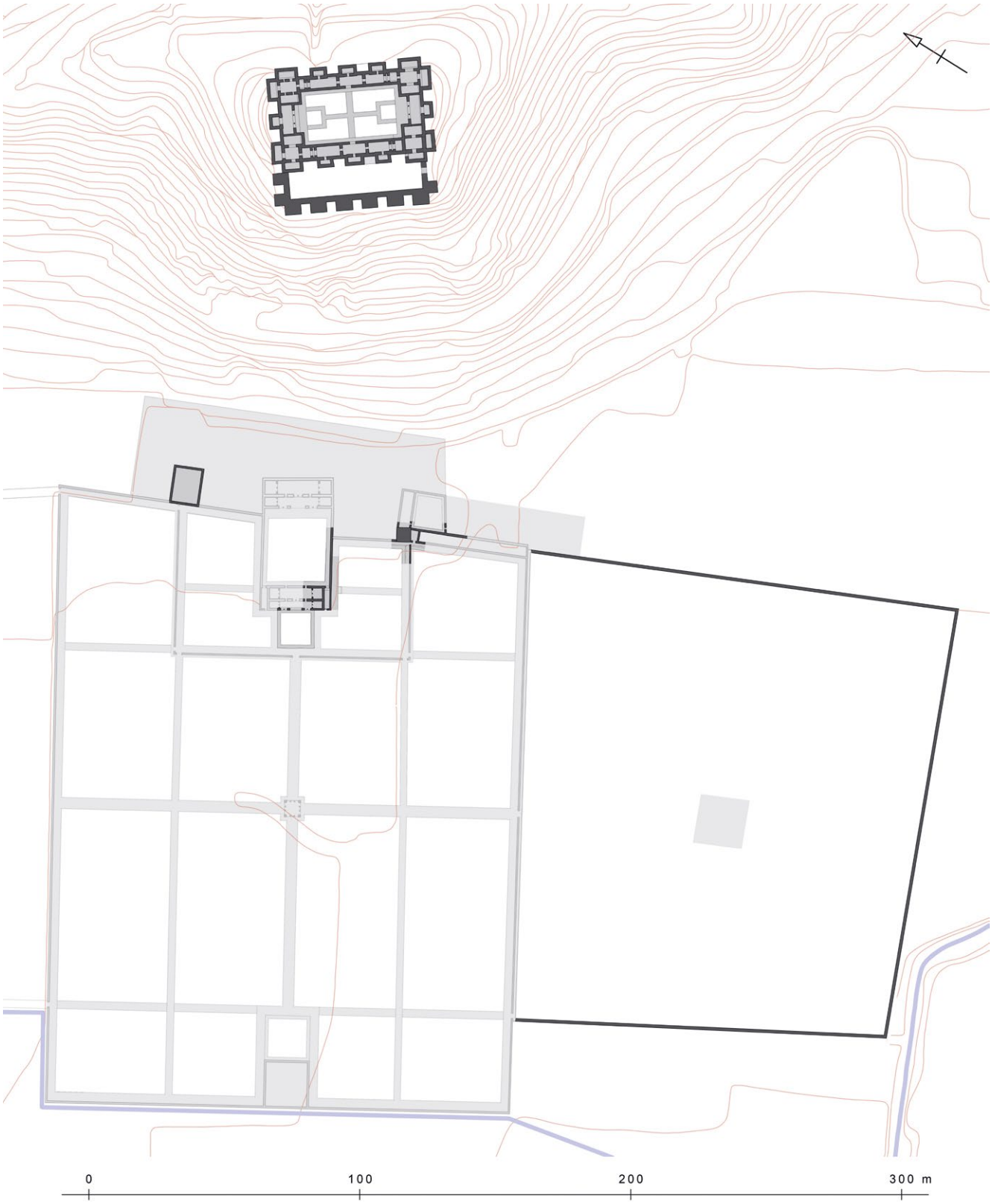

Fig. 6: Monteagudo. Hypothetical restitution of the ground plan of the Castillejo, the Palace of the Plain and the great water basin, based on the information provided by the excavations, the surveys and the aerial photograph.

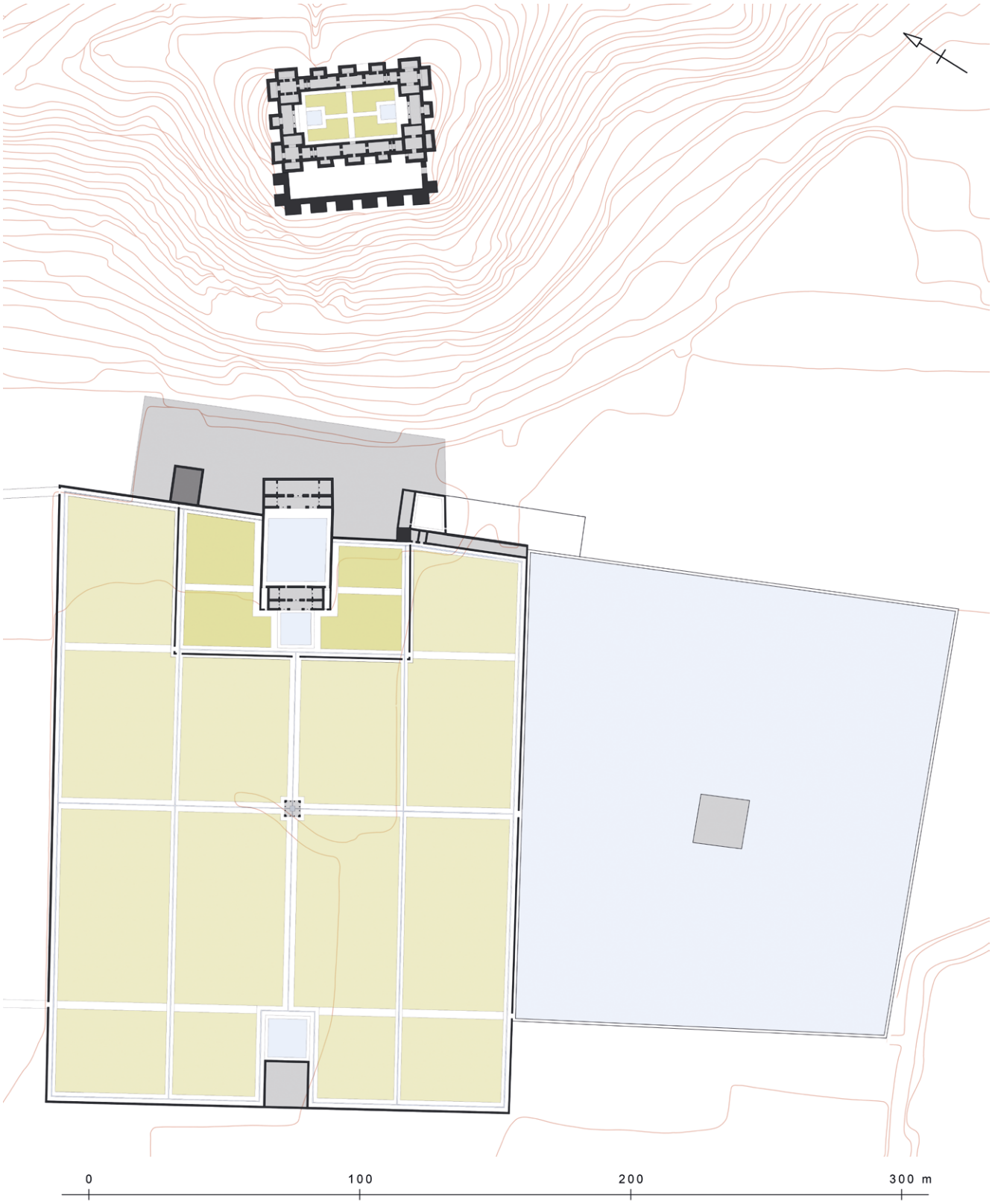

Fig. 7: Monteagudo. Hypothetical restitution of the estate.

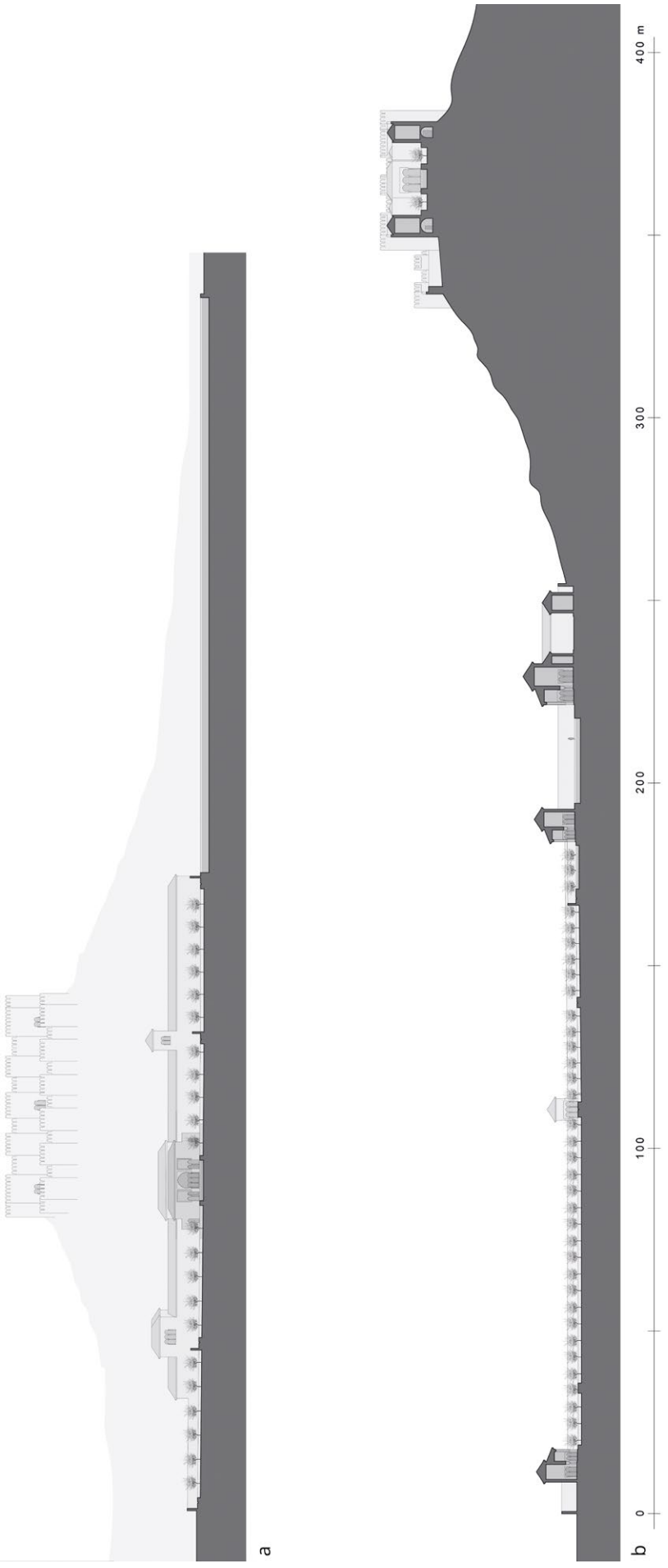

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Fig. 8: Monteagudo. Hypothetical restitution of the elevation of the Castillejo, the Palace of the Plain and the great water basin: a. transversal north-south section along the façade of the Central Sector. – b. longitudinal west-east section along the central axis.

the simple openings of the doors that replace the twin bays of the Almohad period. We associate the aqueduct built in this phase with the construction of the canal (Spanish »acequia«) of Caracol and this canal, in turn, with the erection of a palatial complex at the neighbouring site of Larache (Fig. 3), which we believe was part of a building project executed by Ibn Hūd. Consequently, we propose attributing this phase to this emir, although, with the data available to us, it cannot be excluded that they were built shortly after the Castilian conquest.

22 **Phase VI: Modern Period.** The most recent phase consists of a traditional orchard house located on the southern plot. Although it was demolished in the mid-20th century, the 1928 aerial photograph of Ruiz de Alda identifies three wings surrounding a courtyard that is enclosed in the east by a thick wall (Fig. 5). It is surprising to see that the courtyard of the house coincides with the porticoed entrance courtyard of the Late-Islamic palace phase IV which, together with the reuse of the tower in the northern bay, suggests that there has been an uninterrupted continuity in the occupation of the site until recent times.

4 Structure and Internal Organization of the ›almunia‹

23 The ›almunia‹ of Castillejo de Monteagudo is located on the northern edge of the valley that irrigates the Segura River so that, during the Middle Ages, the irrigated areas of the alluvial plain came into contact with the large areas dedicated to dryland farming and forests, located in the low foothills that delimit it (Fig. 2. 3). Between these elements, little streams (Spanish »ramblas«) made their way into extensive marshlands (Spanish »almarjales«), which no longer exist and which were transformed into orchards once they had been drained by the excavation of canals.

24 Considering how large the estate was and recognizing the difficulties we have in determining its limits, we have come to the conclusion that both the marshland to the south and the Rambla del Carmen to the west may have been two natural features that isolated it from the surrounding area. We have no evidence to determine its northern and western limits, although we believe that these sides had large areas of dry farming that could be used sporadically from the intermittent waters of the Rambla del Caracol and the Rambla del Carmen (Fig. 3).

25 Thanks to the Castilian texts and the available archaeological information, we know that the ›almunia‹ was very large and that within it there were areas of orchards (more than 1,000 ha), large areas of dryland farming, and even lake and mountain areas. Its marshland, well documented in late medieval written sources, must have been largely drained during the 12th century, since its unhealthy presence would make the palaces uninhabitable despite no evidence to that effect. At its southeast end stood the Castillo de Monteagudo, which served to protect it and to store the grain it produced (Fig. 3).

4.1 The Enclosure

26 Even though no remains of the enclosure wall of the ›almunia‹ have been preserved, it is reasonable to suppose that such a wall existed, since this type of private estate was usually fenced in. This is attested by the Castilian documentation that describes the garden estates (*riyāḍ*) around Murcia of aristocratic properties surrounded by earthen walls and/or hedges that protected the animals that were raised there, as well as the fruit trees, vegetables, and working tools[35]. For obvious reasons, the protection and defense needs of the ›almunia‹ in which the sovereigns resided were greater and this one, in fact, became the target of the attacks of the Almohad armies on Ibn Mardanīš.

35 Jiménez 2018a, 772 f.; Jiménez 2018b, 413.

27 Legal treatises also mention these enclosure walls pointing out the following functions: delimiting property, consolidating the acquisition of lands that are legally dead (*mawāt*), protecting crops, and avoiding destruction by livestock[36]. Other written sources that prove the existence of walls are historical-geographical treaties such as the »History of the Judges of Córdoba« by al-Ḫušanī, which speaks of the enclosure (*ḥā'iṭ*) of an ›almunia‹ (*munya*) owned by the judge al-Ḥabīb, which was composed of two rows of trees[37].

28 However, the most authoritative and explicit Arabic texts are the Andalusi treatises on agriculture. Ibn Luyūn, when describing the most common type of inheritance in the 14th century, states: »It is excellent to protect the estate (*bustān*) with a wall (*ḥā'iṭ*) that completely surrounds it«[38], even that some species of trees are used that would contribute to its protection and isolation: »On the boundaries [of the estate, one plants] trees such as the fig tree (*tīn*) or other similar ones that do not cause any harm. All large fruit trees should be planted on the northern side, in order that they protect from the north wind whatever has been planted or installed there (*aqwām*), and without them coming to block the sun when it begins to heat up«[39].

29 The agriculturalist Ibn Wāfid recommends that, in addition to the wall that delimits the estate, a vegetal barrier should be planted next to it: »Arrange a plantation of tall trees such as the oriental plane tree, cypress, pine, willow, walnut, hazel and the like next to the walls of the orchard (*ḥawā'iṭ al-bustān*), until it is completely surrounded, and thus it will be more beautiful (*aḥsana*)«[40].

30 The size of the land to be guarded was not an obstacle, since Abū'l-Ḫayr informs us that not only orchards and vineyards, but also large estates (*fadādīn*) were enclosed with walls: »Go to a land (*faddān*) that you have completely fenced off with a hedge (*bi-siyāǧ*) or wall (*aw ḥā'iṭ*)«[41].

31 In addition to the texts just discussed, we have archaeological remains of such enclosure walls in 9th/10th century Córdoba. One example is the ›almunia‹ of ar-Ruṣāfa, in which there were botanical gardens protected by a 1 m thick wall of mixed masonry that was reinforced by buttresses[42]. We also know that it had several gates, and one of monumental character was ordered to be built by the emir Muḥammad (852–886)[43]. In 2020 a 118 m-long wall of the same category was published from Tablero Alto, which has been interpreted as belonging to the same estate. The 0.90 to 1.00 m-thick wall was composed of mixed masonry, with pillars of calcarenite ashlars alternating with segments of dry stone[44]. A section of the enclosure wall of Munyat an-Nāᶜūra was excavated at the Vado de Casillas, built of calcarenite ashlars with buttresses on both sides[45]. Another ashlar wall with buttresses was documented on Calle Sta. María de Trassierra, which could have been the eastern enclosure of another estate[46]. Finally, in the former Cortijo de Rabanales, a 165 m-long wall was interpreted as part of the enclosure of yet another estate[47]. It is not clear in all cases whether these were outer enclosures or walls of internal division.

36 The testimonies in the written sources quoted below are collected in Jiménez-Castillo – Camarero 2021, 16 f.
37 Al-Jušanī 1914, 188 ar. / 234 translated by Ribera.
38 Jiménez-Castillo – Camarero 2021, 16.
39 Jiménez-Castillo – Camarero 2021, 16.
40 Jiménez-Castillo – Camarero 2021, 18 f.
41 Jiménez-Castillo – Camarero 2021, 16.
42 Murillo 2009, 461.
43 Murillo et al. 2018, 36.
44 Clapés 2020, 320.
45 Clapés 2020, 321 note 14.
46 Rodero – Asensi 2006, 306.
47 León et al. 2014, 170.

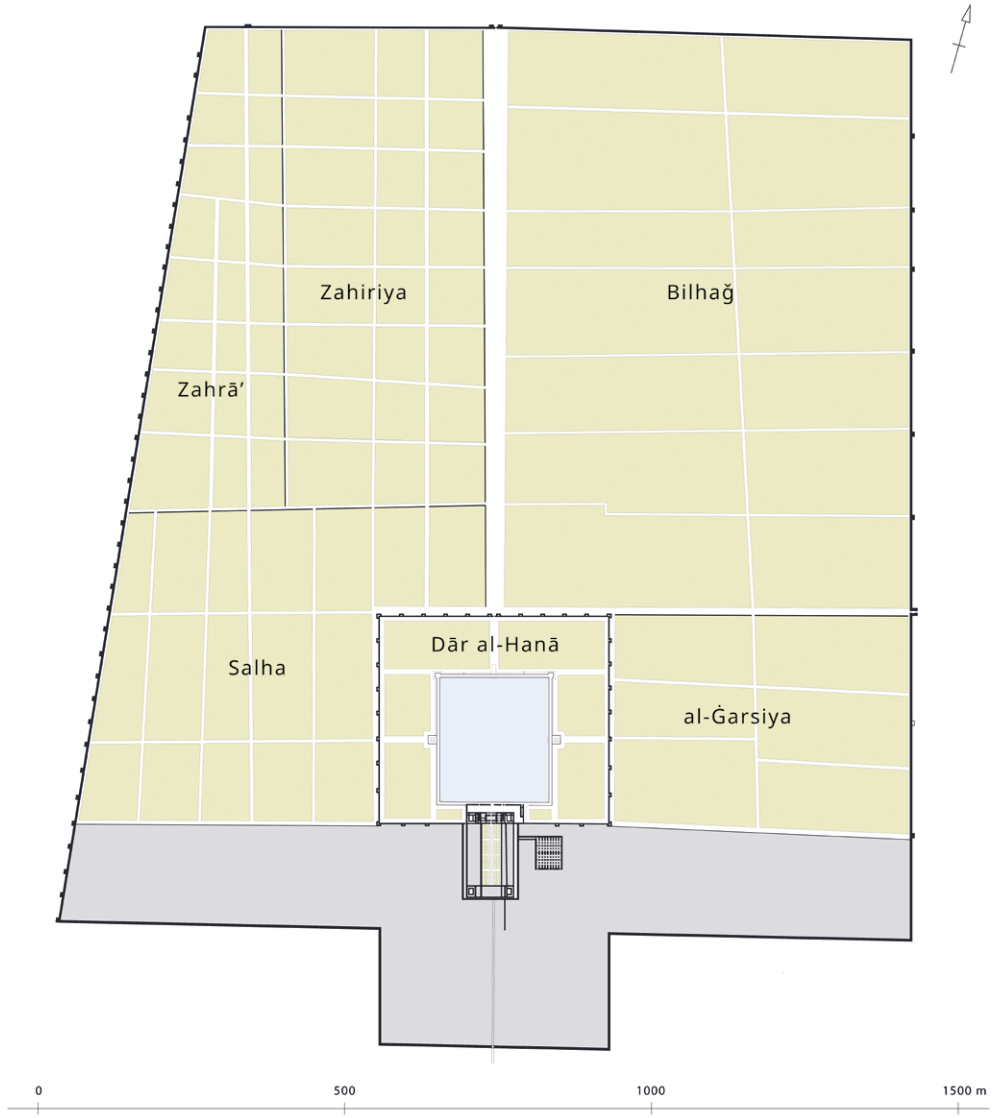

Fig. 9: Agdāl of Marrakech (Morocco). Hypothetical restitution of the ground plan of the estate as founded by Abū Ya'qūb Yūsuf (1163–1184).

9

32 The Agdāl of Marrakech, founded by the Almohad caliph Abū Ya'qūb Yūsuf (1163–1184), is probably the best example for studying the outer wall of an estate and the organization of the different enclosures inside it (Fig. 9). The estate currently encompasses an area of 400 ha and is protected by an enclosure wall that is about 9 km in length, reinforced with towers[48]. In 1171, the Almohad caliph built the estate of al-Buḥayra in Seville, and for this it was necessary to buy the land surrounding the palaces where he planted olive trees, vineyards, and fruit trees; subsequently, the whole complex was delimited by a wall made of lime, sand, and stones transported by pack animals and slaves of the caliph[49]. We also know from an engraving (the Plataforma de Ambrosio de Vico, Fig. 10) that the Generalife estate, which was founded in the second half of the 13th century, was also well guarded by a wall. Several sections of the wall have been preserved, especially those flanking the medieval entrance gate opposite the Torre del Cadí of the Alhambra.

48 Navarro et al. 2013; Navarro et al. 2014; Navarro et al. 2017; Navarro et al. 2018.

49 Ibn Ṣāḥib al-Salā 1969, 189 f.

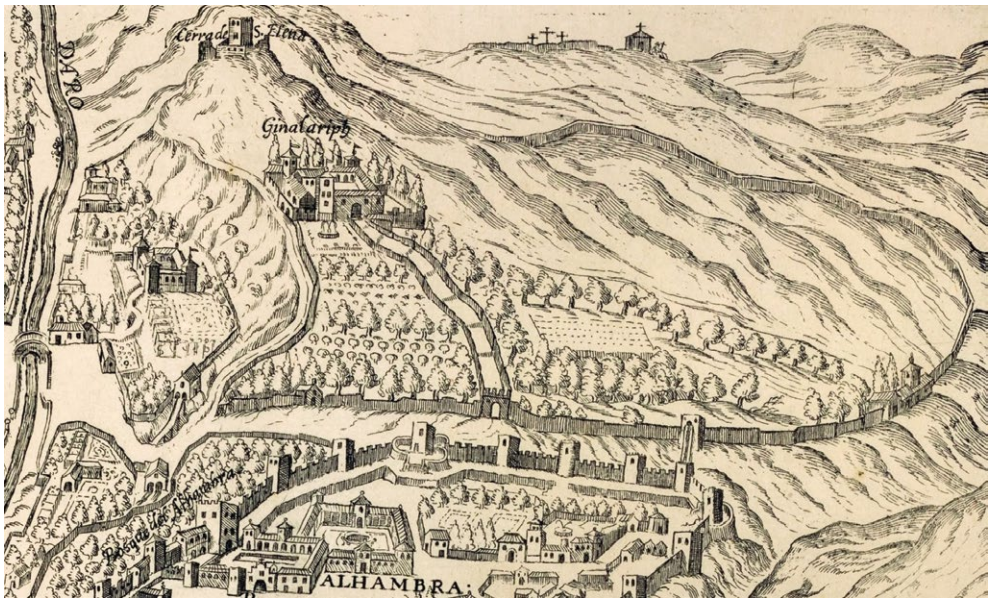

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Fig. 10: Generalife estate in Granada as depicted in the »Plataforma de Ambrosio de Vico« (16th century).

33 Further information may be gained from the manuscript containing the *Ḥadīṯ Bayāḍ wa Riyāḍ*[50], two of whose thirteen images (folios 17r and 19r: Fig. 11), we believe, represent a walled ›almunia‹ contemplated from the outside[51] . We know that its plan was rectangular, as shown in the front view which displays larger front with its two towers, and in the lateral (smaller) one in which there is only one tower. In both images, some architectural and vegetal elements have been selected by the artists to act as iconographic codes[52]. The first are the walled enclosure and the two towers that can be seen above the wall, belonging to the palaces inside; the second are cypresses and citrus trees that represent the palatial gardens and not the agricultural spaces of a productive nature that we suppose existed on the estate, all of which would be irrigated by the waterwheel depicted in the image[53].

4.2 The Palatial Area

34 The ›palatial area‹ is the part of the ›almunia‹ where the most important buildings and gardens are concentrated and where most of the protocol and festive life took place. In Monteagudo this area extends both to the western plain where ex-

50 This codex was produced between the late 12th and early 13th centuries in the Islamic West, probably in al-Andalus, and is preserved in the Vatican Apostolic Library (Vat. ar. 368). It contains an oriental literary work in which an account is given of the love affair between Bayāḍ, a young son of a merchant of Damascus, and Riyāḍ, a singing slave girl belonging to the court of a chamberlain (*al-ḥāǧib*). Their relationship begins in the palace gardens during a lively meeting in which they declare their love for each other by reciting poems and then wander around lamenting the impossibility of their relationship. One of the singularities of this copy lies in the fact that it seems to be the only Andalusi manuscript with figural images that has been preserved (D'Ottone 2013, 11 f. 49–56). Three editions of this text exist in different languages: that of Alois Richard Nykl in Spanish (Nykl 1941), that of Cynthia Robinson in English (Robinson 2007a), and the most recent by Arianna D'Ottone in Italian; the latter comments on the limitations and inaccuracies that the earlier editions contain (D'Ottone 2013). In addition to the Vatican codex there are two other, unillustrated copies in Dublin (CBL Ar. 4120) and Paris (Bulac Ar. 482).

51 The hypothesis that we are facing an exterior view of the ›almunia‹ is based off the young Bayāḍ being represented outside the enclosure, since at that moment of the story he could not meet with his beloved Riyāḍ on the inside. In addition, in both images the current of the river Ṭarṭār is shown, an element that would necessarily be outside the ›almunia‹.

52 It is important to point out that the same architectural codes appear in other mediums such as the ceramic architectural models from which plants are excluded due to the material nature of the medium and its use as an ewer (Navarro – Jiménez 1995b, 293–302).

53 We consider that the waterwheel is a secondary element in the conceptualization of the ›almunia‹, since it is not included in folio 17r.

Fig. 11: Depiction of an almunia in the Ḥadīṭ Bayāḍ wa Riyāḍ (Vat. ar. 368, folio 19r).

cavations have taken place and to the hill on which the Castillejo stands, as well as a large rectangular enclosure to the east of the Castillejo, which we have identified in the past as a possible zoological park[54] (Fig. 3).

35 Until 2018 it was thought that the Castillejo was the epicenter of the estate, but thanks to the archaeological remains that we have discovered, we know that the main nucleus extended to the west, where the building complex that we call the ›Palace of the Plain‹ is located, including its large four-part garden. We now know that the Castillejo, in addition to sharing protocol and apparatus functions with the buildings in the plain, must have had very specific tasks, such as that of a belvedere and an expression of the power of Ibn Mardanīš visible across the landscape due to both its location at the top of a hill and its being the private residence of the emir. The close relationship that existed between the upper and the lower palace required a ceremonial road that put them in contact but of which we know nothing so far.

36 The four-part garden that extended along the western sector of this area, in addition to articulating all architectural structures identified in the plain, created an axial perspective through its main west-east axis that, starting from the plain and passing through the Reservoir Courtyard, culminated in the Castillejo on the hill (Fig. 8).

37 In addition to the outer enclosure wall that the ›almunia‹ of Monteagudo must have had, we are sure that it also had another wall destined to protect only the Palace of the Plain. Although there are signs of its presence in the existing division lines of the land, we have not yet located material remains that corroborate its existence. In other ›almunias‹, important vestiges of such walls delimiting the nuclear palatial areas have been identified. An early example is preserved in the 10th century ›almunia‹ ar-Rummānīya (Fig. 12), where the palace and garden terraces were surrounded by a wall composed of pillars of ashlar alternating with segments of rammed earth (Spanish »tapial«)[55]. The best-preserved example of such an enclosure is the Agdāl of Marrakech, inside which a palatial area was implanted called Dār al-Hanā (Fig. 9), which had its own enclosure wall to protect the main palace and a garden organized around a basin of 208 m × 180 m. In addition to the Dār al-Hanā there were six smaller enclosures within what was the Almohad perimeter wall of the Agdāl, called Zahrā', Zahiriya, Bilhağ, Salha, and al-Ġarsiya[56]. Another relevant case is found in the Generalife which, like the Agdāl, was also organized and subdivided into different areas, including a palatial area with a monumental gate, called the Huerta Grande, as well as two others gardens, called Colorada and Fuente Peña, which had their own wall and gate[57].

38 In addition to the archaeological remains, we also have the information provided by some images in the above mentioned *Bayāḍ wa Riyāḍ* manuscript. In folios 4v, 9r, and 10r there is an idealized representation of a walled garden in which its limits are more or less elaborate walls, accompanied by viewing towers (belvederes) from which the landscape could be contemplated (Fig. 11. 13. 14)[58]. These three images do not delimit an interior palace courtyard surrounded by chambers, but rather depict the ample exterior gardens forming part of the palatial area of the ›almunia‹, where banquets were celebrated with music and poetic recitals[59].

54 Navarro – Jiménez 1995a, 97.

55 Arnold et al. 2021, 94–97.

56 Navarro et al. 2013, 27–32.

57 Navarro 2023.

58 In the copy of the story that the Dublin (CBL Ar. 4120) and Paris (Bulac Ar 82) codices contain, there is even a textual reference to the existence of such a boundary: »… we felt a rumor behind the wall and waited for something to happen: there the slaves were having fun among themselves playing, laughing …« (English translation of the Italian original in D'Ottone 2022, 96). The word translated as ›wall‹ is the Arabic term *ḥā'iṭ*. What is interesting about this term is that it means both a walled garden and the wall itself and may even be synonymous with *munya*. We thank Inmaculada Camarero for providing us with this translation.

59 Folio 13r of the Vatican manuscript expands upon the information provided by the three previous images.

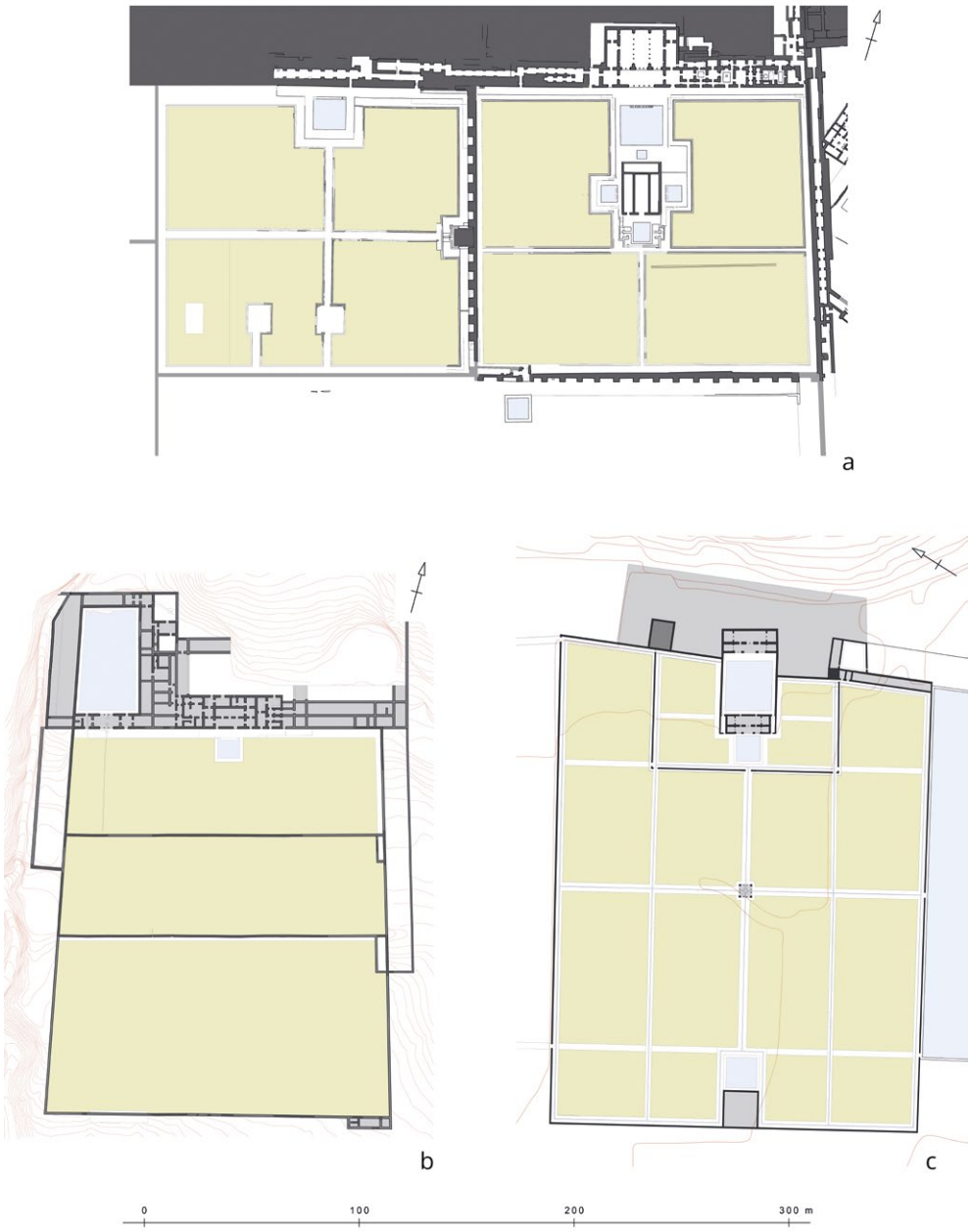

Fig. 12: Layout of gardens drawn at the same scale: a. Lower and Upper Garden of Madīnat az-Zahrā' (940–957). – b. estate of ar-Rummānīya (ca. 965). – c. palace of Ibn Mardanīš (1147–1171) in the plain of Monteagudo.

12

39 In fact, the palatial area of this type of estate not only comprised buildings of high quality, but also large garden areas that would have been planted mostly with ornamental and aromatic species, not excluding trees or shrubs whose fruits were edible. The landscape designed character of this space must have contrasted with the eminently productive character of the crops outside its walls[60]. Due to the combination

Since the scene is not framed between the two walls that represent the entire garden, it reproduces minor architectural, botanical, and zoological details that are not in the other folios. Among the animals represented is a hunting dog, which was interpreted as a rabbit by Cynthia Robinson (Robinson 2007b, 106). We propose that it is a sighthound type dog, morphologically related to the Cirneco de Sicilia and the Podenco Andaluz, based on the slender, narrow head in the shape of an elongated cone, long muzzle, very long ears, receding belly, marked scapulae and ribs, rounded forelegs, slightly raised tail, and uniform ochre-colored coat. We thank Filippo Sciara, historian and veterinarian, for this information.

60 Compare the difference in the planting of the Upper and Lower Garden of Madīnat az-Zahrā' with that of the exterior, which consisted of a fruit tree plantation. Arnold 2019, 313 f. fig. 5; Arnold et al. 2019, 121–123.

13

14

of this vegetal singularity with the architectural sumptuousness, one of us (JNP) called these spaces »huertas de primor« ›gardens of splendor‹ in previous publications[61].

40 This distribution of cultivated spaces is the one recommended by Ibn Luyūn from Almería, in his chapter entitled, »[o]n what is to be chosen in the layout of the orchards (*basātīn*), their dwellings (*masākin*) and the farmhouses (*diyār al-bādiya*)«. In this chapter, he describes each of the elements that should form part of an ideal ›almunia‹, which he refers to as *bustān* (pl. *basātīn*), detailing how the residential buildings are to be arranged, as well as the different cultivated areas and hydraulic infrastructures, distinguishing those that have a more recreational character from those that are essentially productive in nature. He explains that flowers and ornamental plants are to be placed near the residence and utilitarian species in peripheral areas and even indicates the type of plants that are to flank the walkways: »Near this water basin (*ṣahriǧ*), species should be planted that do not lose their leaves and are pleasing to the eye. At a certain distance from these, flowers (*anwār*) are arranged and, behind them, evergreens (*wāqy al-ašǧār*). As for the vines (*dawālī*), they should be planted on the sides of the dwelling and, in the middle of everything, let vine arbors (*ʿarā'iš*) abound. And, at the bottom of these arbors, let walks (*mamāšī*) surround the garden (*bustān*), enclosing it [...] The basis of everything that grows in a garden (*yubassatinu*) is proximity [to the dwelling], for it will be more cared for (*aṣwan*) for this reason«[62].

41 Beyond these landscaped orchards or irrigated spaces next to the dwellings, in which crops were located that combined their practical value to the ornamental,

Fig. 13: Depiction of an almunia in the Ḥadīṯ Bayāḍ wa Riyāḍ (Vat. ar. 368, folio 4v).

Fig. 14: Depiction of an almunia in the Ḥadīṯ Bayāḍ wa Riyāḍ (Vat. ar. 368, folio 13r).

61 Navarro et al. 2018, 31; Navarro – Garrido 2018, 244. 254; Navarro – Puerta 2018, 287; Navarro 2023, 52–55; this term has already been adopted by other authors, such as Tito 2023, 36.

62 Ibn Luyūn 1975, chapter 157; Jiménez-Castillo – Camarero 2021, 15.

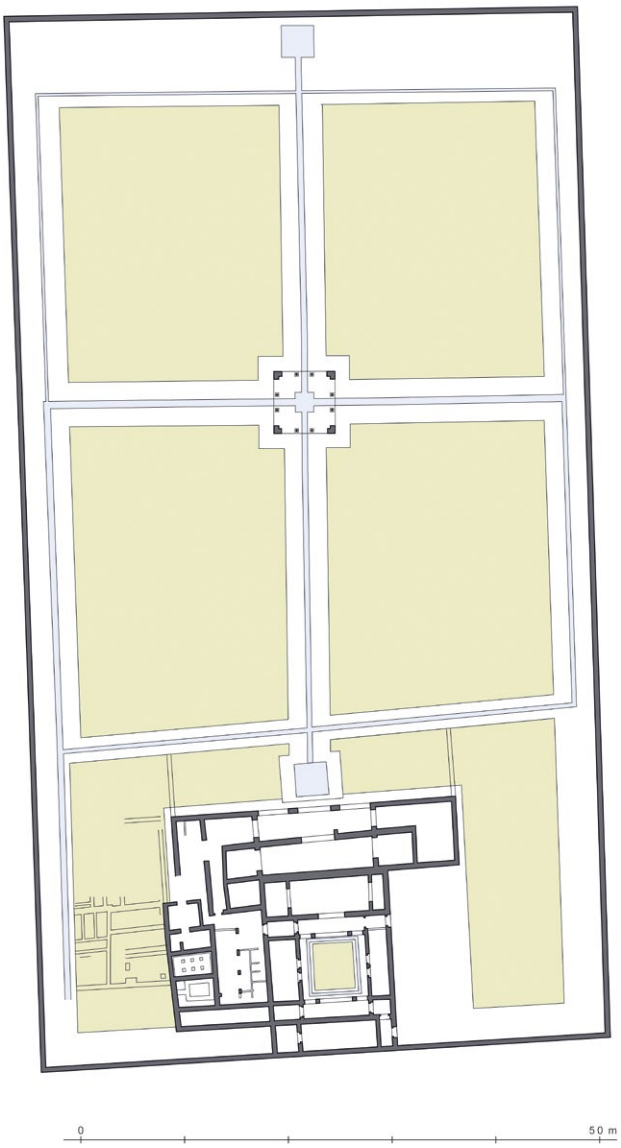

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Fig. 15: Dār aṣ-Ṣuġrà (Murcia). Hypothetical restitution of the ground plan during the reign of Ibn Mardanīš (1147–1171).

Ibn Luyūn locates the farmland fully intended for consumption crops »at some distance from all of the above« reserving a part of the farm »to the arable land (*arḍ bayḍā'*), to be sown whatever one wants to sprout«.

5 Palace of the Plain (Phase II)

42 We call the palaces and gardens that extend through the orchard area to the west of the Castillejo, below the so-called Raal or Almazara road that connects Monteagudo with Cabezo de Torres (Fig. 3), the ›Palace of the Plain‹. In this sector is where a large four-part garden has been discovered, within which we have located a segregated space that we call the ›Reserved Garden‹, as well as a set of buildings that presides over the garden from its eastern front (Fig. 5. 6. 7). Although these three areas are closely related to and dependent on each other, they also have their own characteristics that allow us to analyse them separately.

43 The remains of the palatial buildings are concentrated in a row of agricultural plots that follow the winding route of the aforementioned road (Fig. 5) whose layout is different from those in the lower laying area further west. The topographic singularity of the area is owed to its location at the edge of what had been riverbed before (Fig. 3). Its higher elevation explains why this area was chosen as the site for the buildings, protecting them from possible flooding.

44 We believe there is enough evidence to suggest that the Palace of the Plain was organized in a tripartite pattern, with the Reservoir Courtyard and the Pavilion Hall occupying the Central Sector. It was flanked on either side by sectors set back in the façade, each composed of buildings about which we have very little information (Fig. 6. 7). In the south there is a tower (Fig. 3, No. 11), from which one of the two secondary walkways that run along the four-part garden from east to west begin. Similarly, at the opposite end outside the excavated area, there is a large rectangular structure (No. 14, 11 m × 14 m)[63] from which the hypothetical secondary walkway starts, symmetrical to the previous one. This construction must have been remarkable, judging by the preserved remains; it is probably a pavilion-tower, a kind of *manzar/manzah* »viewing tower«[64]. The spatial subordination of the lateral dependencies would also be functional because, while the central Pavilion Hall and the Reservoir Courtyard seem to be the spaces of greater protocol importance, the rooms that flanked them would have secondary functions[65].

63 Navarro – Jiménez 1995a, 96.

64 Examples of pavilion-towers are the northeast complex of the Abbasid palace at ar-Raqqa (Siegel 2017, 167–203) and the palace of the garden of Lashkar-i Bazar (Schlumberger 1978), as well as the *Manār* of Qalᶜa Banū Ḥammād, the Merinid *manẓar* of Fez, and the *Raḍwana* of Marrakech. Arnold 2017, 137 f. 227. 309 f.

65 Regardless of the fact that the most important buildings of the palatial area were located in this eastern sector, we cannot exclude the possibility of a more complex architectural solution along the central axis on the western side of the garden that entered into dialogue with the Reservoir Courtyard.

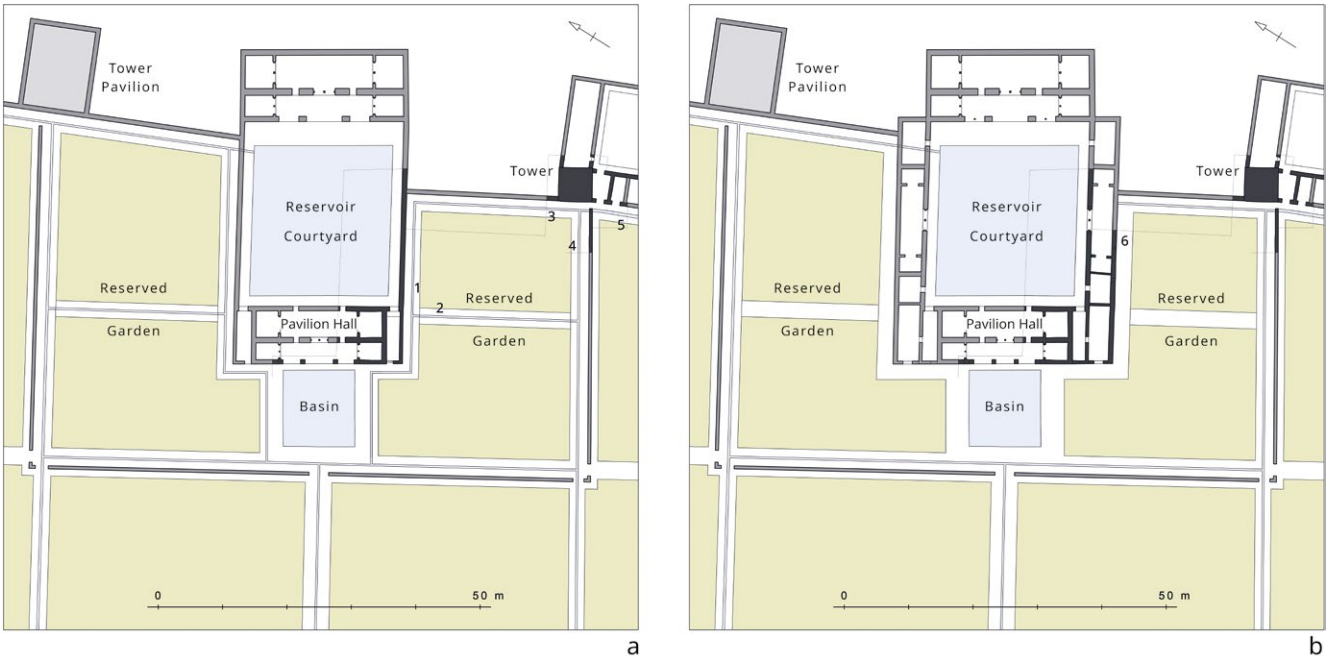

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Fig. 16: Monteagudo. Hypothetical restitution of the ground plan of the palatial area: a. phase II. – b. phase III.

45 The hypothetical tripartite organization that we have just described is similar to those documented in other palaces that open onto large gardens or large pools, as is the case, for example, in the palatial complex of the Upper Garden of Madīnat az-Zahrā' or in ar-Rummānīya (Fig. 12)[66]. In all of these, the most outstanding dependencies are located in the central sector, in direct communication with the garden through an intervening water basin.

46 The nucleus of the palace has been only partially excavated, so that we only know a segment of it; however, since we are dealing with monumental architecture dominated by symmetry, we can propose a reconstruction of the overall layout. Based on this reconstruction, we believe that it reproduced, to a large extent, the compositional model of the Upper Garden of Madīnat az-Zahrā', in which the Salón Rico is the most notable building as well as the starting point of a sequence of spaces that project towards the center of a garden designed in a cross-shaped pattern in the following order: throne room, large water reservoir, pavilion-hall, small water basin (Fig. 12)[67].

47 In Monteagudo we have no information on the first of the four elements that make up the Cordovan example, since the hypothetical main hall, if it existed, would have been at the east of the Reservoir Courtyard under a lemon orchard that we have not yet excavated (Fig. 16 a). However, we are inclined to believe that it did exist due to the typological similarity with the Upper Garden and to the fact that the Pavilion Hall of Monteagudo opens and projects into the four-part garden. This allowed it to preside over the events and ceremonies that were held in the great garden but not those that took place inside the palace, since the western side of the Reservoir Courtyard is not enhanced by the presence of a portico nor has its platform been given a greater width (Fig. 7. 8). Therefore, we propose that, on the eastern front of this courtyard there was a hall preceded by a portico, whose dimensions and complexity must have been greater than those documented in the excavated Pavilion Hall[68] (Fig. 16 a).

66 Arnold et al. 2019, 122 f. fig. 85 (Madīnat az-Zahrā'); Arnold et al. 2021 (ar-Rummānīya).

67 Vallejo 2010, fig. 55.

68 In ar-Rummānīya there is no hall behind the pool (Arnold et al. 2021, 88–91), in the Alcazaba of Almería (Arnold 2008, 41–50 fig. 14) and in the Dār aṣ-Ṣuġrà of Murcia (Pozo – Robles 2008, 14–31) there is.

17

Fig. 17: Monteagudo. Orthophoto of the excavated sectors of the palatial area.

Recognizing the similarities between the Cordovan example and the Murcian one, it is necessary to emphasize that there are also differences since, in the first case, the large basin in front of the Salón Rico is not located inside a courtyard and neither does it seem that the Cordovan pavilion, with a triple-nave plan, opens to the garden as in Monteagudo; on the contrary, its portico faces the Salón Rico. In addition to the precedent of Madīnat az-Zahrā' we have a very valuable parallel in the Dār aṣ-Ṣuġrà

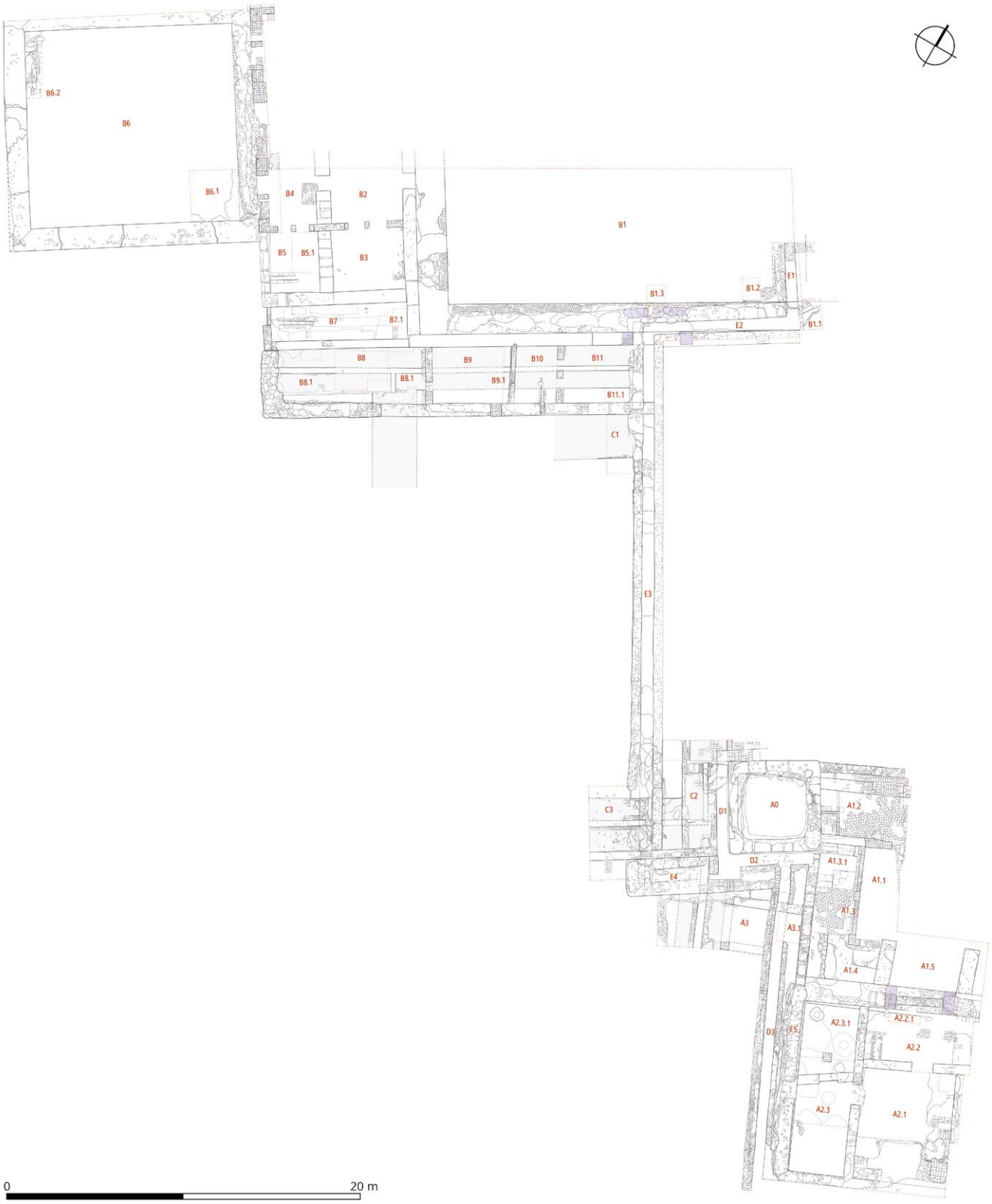

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Fig. 18: Monteagudo. Ground plan of the excavated sectors of the palatial area.

at Murcia (Fig. 15), also a work of Ibn Mardanīš, in which a large hall with its portico opens to a large, four-part garden, while also comprising a rear courtyard[69].

69 Pozo – Robles 2008, 14–31; Arnold 2017, 186–189 fig. 4.5.

5.1 Reservoir Courtyard (B1)

48 It is a courtyard that was occupied, for the most part, by a large water reservoir with platforms or walkways around its perimeter. We have only excavated a little more than half of its southern side and more than a third of the western one (Fig. 17. 18. 19).

49 Since we know the symmetry axis that runs from east to west, we know that the courtyard had a width of 25 m (north-south). As for its east-west dimension, we have to rely on indirect data, such as the location of the southern hall that was added to the Reservoir Courtyard when it was extended to the south (Fig. 16 b). Although the hall does not correspond to the initial phase, it must have been placed with respect to the layout and proportion of the original building such that the center of the entrance door to the hall must have been at the midpoint of the southern wall of the courtyard, which allows us to deduce that the courtyard must have been about 28.5 m in length (east-west).

50 Of the two walls that delimited the courtyard on the longer sides, only the southern one was encountered in the excavation, razed to a level slightly lower than that of the walkway floor (Fig. 21. 50). What is preserved is a wall of rammed earth about 75 cm thick, so we can expect that it reached a considerable height. Its base is the most solid part, made of mortar and stone. On it was raised a wall of rammed earth.

51 In the wall that delimits the Reservoir Courtyard to the west there is an opening placed to the south which, analyzed according to the rules of symmetry that govern this architecture, allows us to affirm with a fair degree of certainty that the patio communicated with the Pavilion Hall by means of two narrow openings displaced from the axis of symmetry and close to the alcoves (Fig. 16 a). Regarding the existence or not of a central opening between the two spaces, see the discussion below in the section dedicated to the hall (B2).

5.1.1 Walkways

52 Between the water reservoir and the walls that delimit the courtyard is a perimeter walkway (Fig. 21). The sections excavated on the southern and western side have a width of 1.65 m and 1.70 m, respectively; it is possible that the one located in the east was wider due to the presence of the hypothetical main hall and its portico. The pavement of the walkways has disappeared due to the erosion produced by farming activities after the abandonment of the area. We verified that a small sector of the southern walkway (Fig. 64) – saved from destruction by its position under a segment of the 13th century canal – was paved with a thick layer of lime mortar (8 cm thick) with a well-smoothed surface and painted in dark red (elevation 29.87 m ASL). The curb of the walkway immediately next to the water must have had some type of formalized reinforcement, very probably made of stone slabs that were looted in their totality. What is preserved is brick masonry that reaches an average width of 36 cm, composed of three courses, which served both as a base for the stone pieces and as containment for the concrete filling that formed the base of the pavement (Fig. 21). In other courtyards that we studied in the cities of Murcia and Orihuela[70] the stone curbs are carved forming a perimeter gutter that we believe served to collect rainwater and transport it outside the palace. One fragment of this kind was found in the southern sector of the site and was reused to close an opening.

5.1.2 Reservoir

53 Until the excavation campaign of 2023, we defended the hypothesis that in the courtyard of the palace there was a four-part garden[71] because this solution was

70 Navarro – Jiménez 2011, fig. 20. 27.

71 Navarro – Jiménez 2023, fig. 27. 28.

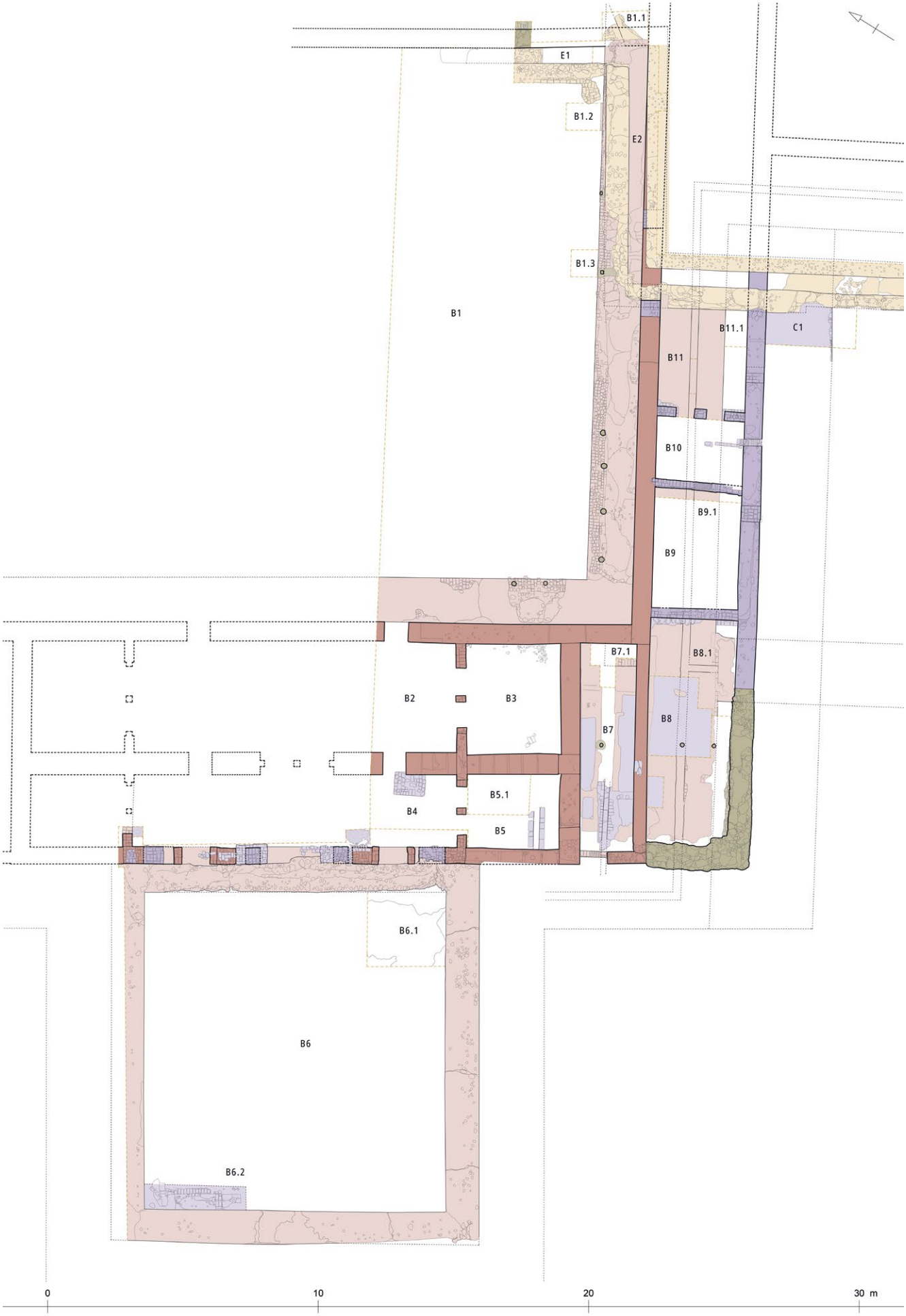

Fig. 19: Monteagudo. Ground plan of the excavated sector of the Central Sector, with phase II indicated in red, phase III in purple, phase IV in green, and phase V in yellow.

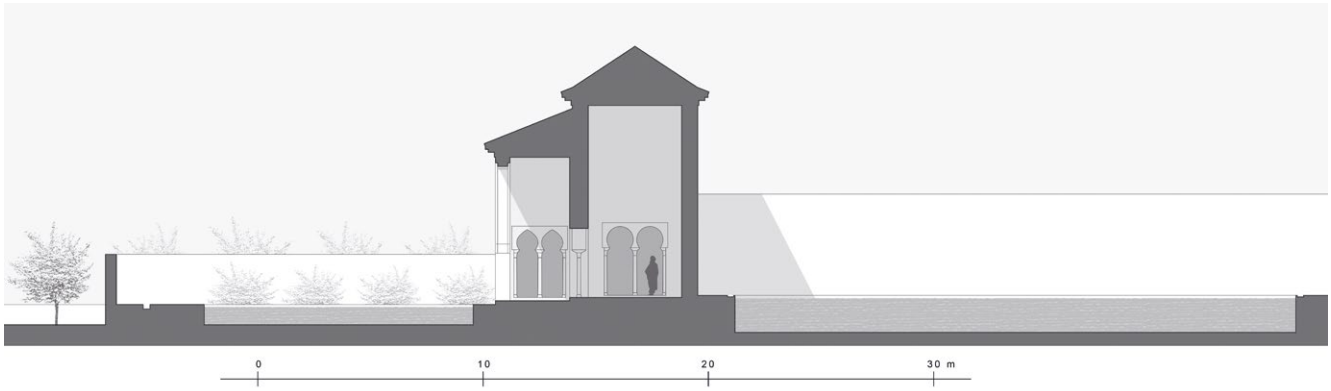

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Fig. 20: Monteagudo. Hypothetical restitution of the west-east section through basin, Pavilion Hall and reservoir.

Fig. 21: Monteagudo, Central Sector. Orthophoto of the southwest corner of the Reservoir Courtyard.

21

very common in elite residences of this period[72]. However, a small trench excavated in October just next to the southern walkway showed that the area enclosed by the walkway had been used as a water basin, indicated by a pavement of lime mortar (elevation 28.24 m ASL) and the usual half-round mold placed at the inflection point between the floor and the base of the wall (Fig. 22. 23. 24). We also found that the upper part of the walls featured a simple decoration of interlaced band painted in dark red. The approximate dimensions of the pond are 21.5 m × 23 m × 1.63 m, indicating a considerable capacity of almost 800 m^3 (800,000 l).

54 The interest in the presence of water in palaces finds its maximum expression when the basin occupies the entire surface of a courtyard, except for the perimeter walkway. This is a well-documented solution in the history of Islamic architecture; we

72 This is the case of the Almoravid palace of Marrakech (Meunié – Terrasse 1952, 28 f.), of the Mardanīšid examples of the Castillejo de Monteagudo and the Dār aṣ-Ṣuġrà and of the Almohad palaces in the Alcázar of Seville, the Palacio de Contratación, the palace in the Patio de la Montería (Tabales 2001), and the Palacio del Crucero (Almagro 1999; Almagro 2002).

22

Fig. 22: Monteagudo, Central Sector. Trench next to the southern walkway of the reservoir.

23

Fig. 23: Monteagudo, Central Sector. Trench next to the southern walkway of the reservoir, with half-round mold placed at the inflection point between the floor and the base of the wall.

find it throughout different periods in numerous residences of caliphs, emirs and kings, as well as other important personages. Examples include the almunia of al-ᶜAlwiya in Darb Zubayda (9th/10th centuries, Fig. 25)[73], the Dār al-Baḥr of Ṣabra al-Mansūriya (10th century, Fig. 26 b)[74], the great basin of ar-Rummānīya (10th century, Fig. 26 f)[75], the

73 O'Kane 2014, 207 f. fig. 8.

74 Terrasse 2001, fig. 7; Arnold 2017, 42 fig. 2.5. It has been questioned whether the basin occupied the entire courtyard. There was also a Dār al-Baḥr at Aghlabid Raqqada and at Fatimid Cairo. Arnold 2017, 9–11. 42 note 16.

75 Arnold et al. 2021, 49–60.

a

b

Fig. 24: Monteagudo, Central Sector. Interlaced band painted in dark red along the top of the walkway.

24

Dār al-Baḥar of the Qalᶜa Banū Ḥammād (11th century, Fig. 26 c)[76], the palaces of the 11th-century alcazabas of Almeria (Fig. 26 g)[77] and Lorca[78], Belyunech in the vicinity of Ceuta (11th/12th centuries, Fig. 26 h)[79] and the Partal of the Alhambra (14th century, Fig. 26 k)[80]. Although it is not a courtyard in the strict sense, we could also include in this group the large basin between the hall of ᶜAbd ar-Raḥmān III and the Central Pavilion of the Upper Garden of Madīnat az-Zahrā' (Fig. 12), given that the basin in this place occupies most of the space between the two buildings[81].

76 Beylié 1909, 53–71; Golvin 1965, 54–66.

77 Arnold 2008, 41 f.

78 Jiménez-Castillo – Navarro 2016, 255–257.

79 Only the eastern half of the courtyard is a basin, the western half possibly a garden. Terrasse 2001, 95 fig. 12; Arnold 2017, 181–184.

80 It is not clear if the courtyard was surrounded by a wall only or if there were lateral bays. However, the entire surface of the courtyard except for the perimeter walkways would have been occupied by the basin, as is the case in Monteagudo.

81 Vallejo 2010, fig. 55.

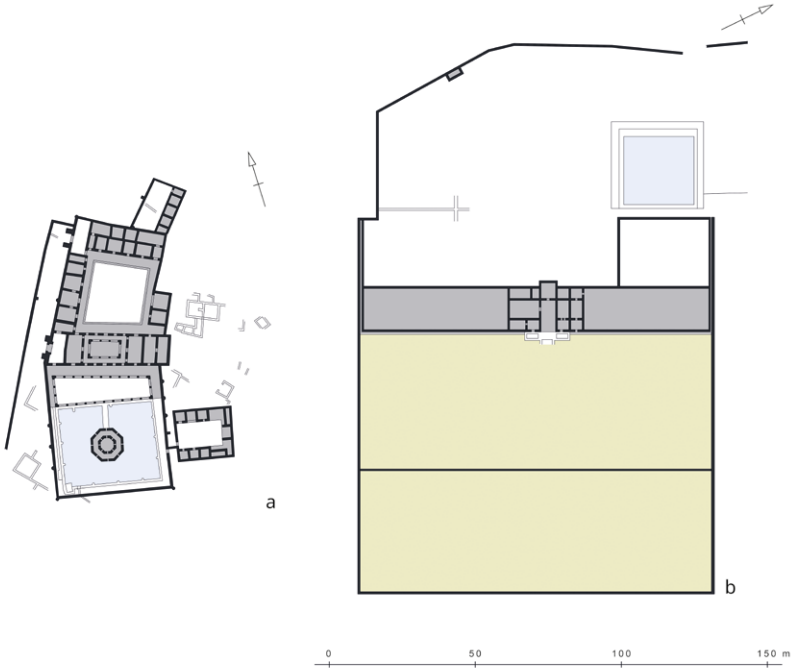

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Fig. 25: Estates of the 9th/10th centuries along the Darb Zubayda, northeast of Mecca (Saudi Arabia): a. al-ᶜAlwiya. – b. Barud.

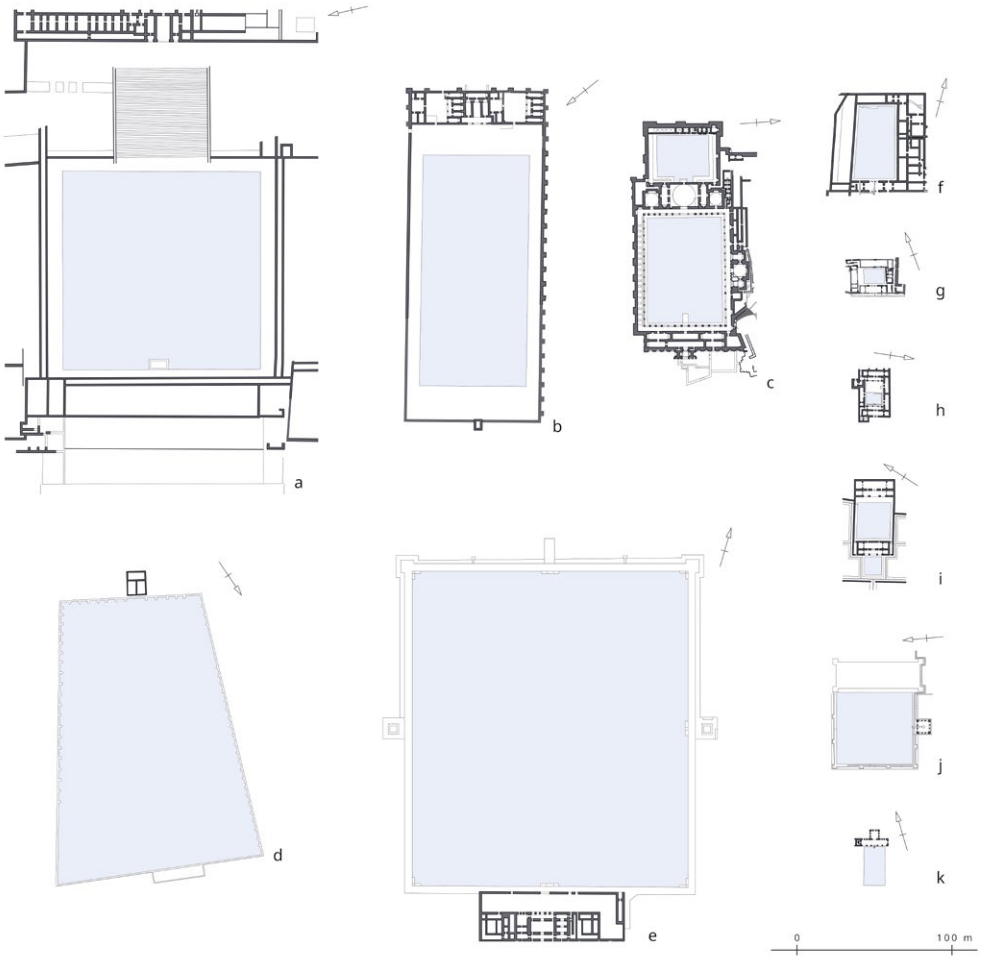

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Fig. 26: Palaces with large water basins, drawn at the same scale: a. Dār al-Ḫalifa, Sāmārrāʾ, Iraq (836–892). – b. Dār al-Baḥr, Ṣabra al-Mansūriya, Tunisia (953–969). – c. Dār al-Baḥar, Qalᶜa Banū Ḥammād, Algeria (1007–1015). – d. Qaṣr al-Baḥr, Raqqāda, Tunisia (876). – e. Agdāl, Marrakech, Morocco (1157). – f. Munyat ar-Rummānīya (965). – g. Alcazaba, Almeria (1012–1091). – h. Belyounech, Morocco (1009–1083). – i. Monteagudo, Murcia (1147–1171). – j. al-Buḥayra, Sevilla (1171–1172). – k. El Partal, Alhambra (1302–1309).

55 Some of the examples show[82] that the absence of rooms on the lateral sides of the courtyard is not as uncommon as one might think, being replaced on both sides by simple enclosing walls. In the case of Monteagudo, we believe that this solution was intended to generate a tripartite layout, in which the Reservoir Courtyard was flanked on either side by two garden areas that were separated from the rest of the four-part garden (Fig. 16 a). In addition, the sovereign was protected when he moved from inside the palace to the Pavilion Hall that opens onto the large four-part garden.

5.2 Pavilion Hall (B2–B5)

56 The third element of the composition that we have been analyzing is a hall complex, designed to meet the protocol needs during the parties and receptions that took place in the four-part garden (Fig. 8. 20).

57 Although its plan is not centralized, as is usual in a garden pavilion, we identify it as a ›pavilion‹ because it was spatially and functionally linked to the garden, with a marked autonomy with respect to the palatial building further east.

58 As with other parts of the palace, neither the hall nor its portico have been completely excavated, which does not prevent us from proposing reconstructions of its floor plan, accepting that there are important unknowns that we will not be able to solve until its excavation is completed.

5.2.1 Portico (B4)

59 The space we call the portico is a rectangular room measuring 12.0 m × 2.7 m, which opens onto the four-part garden through its arcade. At its north and south ends it extends structurally into two alcoves, being separated from them by the interposition of a screen with twin openings. It communicated with the main hall of the pavilion through doors in its eastern wall (Fig. 16 a).

60 Unfortunately, we were only able to study the southern third of the portico, because the rest of the space extends below another plot of citrus trees (Fig. 19). In the course of the excavation, we found that all the elevations of the walls had disappeared, probably due to agricultural work. The continuous ploughing of the land is what may explain why the remains of the pavement preserved are so scarce, which has not prevented us from verifying that they were 24 cm below the floor of the walkway of the Reservoir Courtyard at an elevation of about 29.63 m ASL.

61 In the wall that separates the portico from the main hall, we documented a door opening with a span of 85 cm through which both rooms were connected. Its jambs did not have the usual brick reinforcements, although they did have a greater amount of lime mortar (Fig. 31). Presumably there was another identical door that, with the first, flanked the central door that must have been located on the axis of symmetry of the building. We find the same solution in the Taifa palaces of the Aljafería and the Alcazaba of Almería[83].

62 On the design of the central access door of the hall, either by means of a triple or a twin opening, there are reasonable doubts on both hypotheses. The first solution has in its favor that it was adopted in the neighboring palace of Castillejo and in most of the examples we know of from the 10th and 11th century[84]; against it, we note that

82 Courtyards enclosed by simple walls on one, two or three sides are documented at the almunia of al-ᶜAlwiya at Darb Zubayda (O'Kane 2014, fig. 8), at Dār al-Bahr of Sabra al-Mansūriya (Arnold 2017, 41 f. fig. 2.5), at ar-Rummānīya (Arnold et al. 2021, 49–60), and at the Generalife in its foundational phase.

83 Ewert 1978, 18 plans 16–18 pl. 16; Arnold 2008, 50–61. If we analyze the small lateral openings in the north wing of the palaces of the Aljafería and in the alcazaba of Almería and compare them with those in the Salón Rico, we can interpret them as entrances for servants or exits for clients after the audience. Arnold 2008, 102–106 fig. 41. 42; Arnold 2017, 163.

84 Triple-bay accesses designed to facilitate circulation between porticoes and halls are found at Madīnat az-Zahrā' (Salón Rico and Upper Basilica Hall), in the north wing of the Aljafería in Zaragoza, and in the palaces

the small door we have just analyzed is very close to the hypothetical tripartite opening, when it would be expected to be farther away and next to the alcove. The second solution, with a twin opening, would be similar to the nearly contemporary examples in the Patio del Yeso of the Reales Alcázares of Seville and would furthermore be more compatible with the location of the small side doors.

5.2.2 Arcade of the Portico (B4)

63 What we were able to study in its entirety was the foundation of the outer arcade of the portico (Fig. 27. 28. 29). Despite being partly in contact with the border line of the neighboring plot planted with citrus trees, we were able to make a profile in which we identified some small fragments of the lime mortar floor as well as the remains of a brick floor that must have reinforced the thresholds of each arch.

64 The foundation of the arcade is a 60–64 cm-thick wall that technically is a mixed wall, in which sections of rammed earth alternate with brick pillars (Fig. 29). Unfortunately, we were unable to reach the base of the foundation as it is as deep as the rest of the walls that make up the portico and the hall. Its detailed analysis has allowed us to differentiate different phases that we will describe in the following (Fig. 30).

65 **Stage 1A**. The first phase is the result of a design that was never completed because new elements were added to alter the design during its construction. Originally, the arcade was intended to comprise three bays with a larger central arch with a span of 4.3 m being flanked by two smaller bays with a span of 2.7 m each. This tripartite design adheres to a model well known from the Taifa, Almoravid and Mardānišid periods, with examples found at Marrakech, Belyunech, Onda and in the Dār aṣ-Ṣuġrà of Murcia[85].

66 The foundations of its four pillars are rectangular in plan (70–74 cm × 60 cm), made with high quality red bricks (24 cm × 12 cm × 3 cm). There are indications that they were built before the wooden casings for the rammed earth sections were put in place. A significant deformation due to sinking may be observed in the center of all four foundations (Fig. 29), introducing the possibility that they supported vertical beams of wood intended to support the upper part of the masonry connected on top by horizontal lintels.

67 The two most extreme pillars adopt a singular solution by merging with those of the entrance wall of the alcoves, thus forming L-shaped pillars. In this way, they constituted a single structure, although each part had its own dimensions depending on the weight they supported.

68 **Stage 1B.** A second design, although different from the original plan, was the one that was finally executed and was visible until its demolition, probably during the Almohad siege of 1165. The original design was altered by adding four 25 cm × 64 cm large pillars of yellowish-colored bricks (24 cm × 12 cm × 5 cm) inside the side bays, modifying them in two ways: first, the length of the central pillars from the original design was increased, reducing the span of the side bays to 2.45 m while leaving the span of the central bay of 4.3 m unchanged. Second, pillars were added in the center of the side bays to serve as the foundation of columns, transforming them into twin bays, whose two arches must have oscillated around 1.1 m. As a result of these changes, the final result was a tripartite portico with five openings reminiscent of Almohad models, such as the façade of the Patio de Yeso in the Alcázar of Seville[86].

69 The alterations to the original design must have been executed while the construction of the building was still ongoing. The four new brick foundation pillars were

of the alcazabas of Onda and Málaga (the arcades in Almería are not preserved, see discussion in Arnold 2008, 57 fig. 16). Arnold 2017, fig. 3.27. In Almohad times the tripartite solution begins to give way to twin openings with a central column.

85 The facades of the Belyounech palace are asymmetrical. See Arnold 2004; Arnold 2017, 215–218.

86 Dated after 1172. Tabales 2002, 40–56. The façade of the portico of Monteagudo is the oldest of this type.

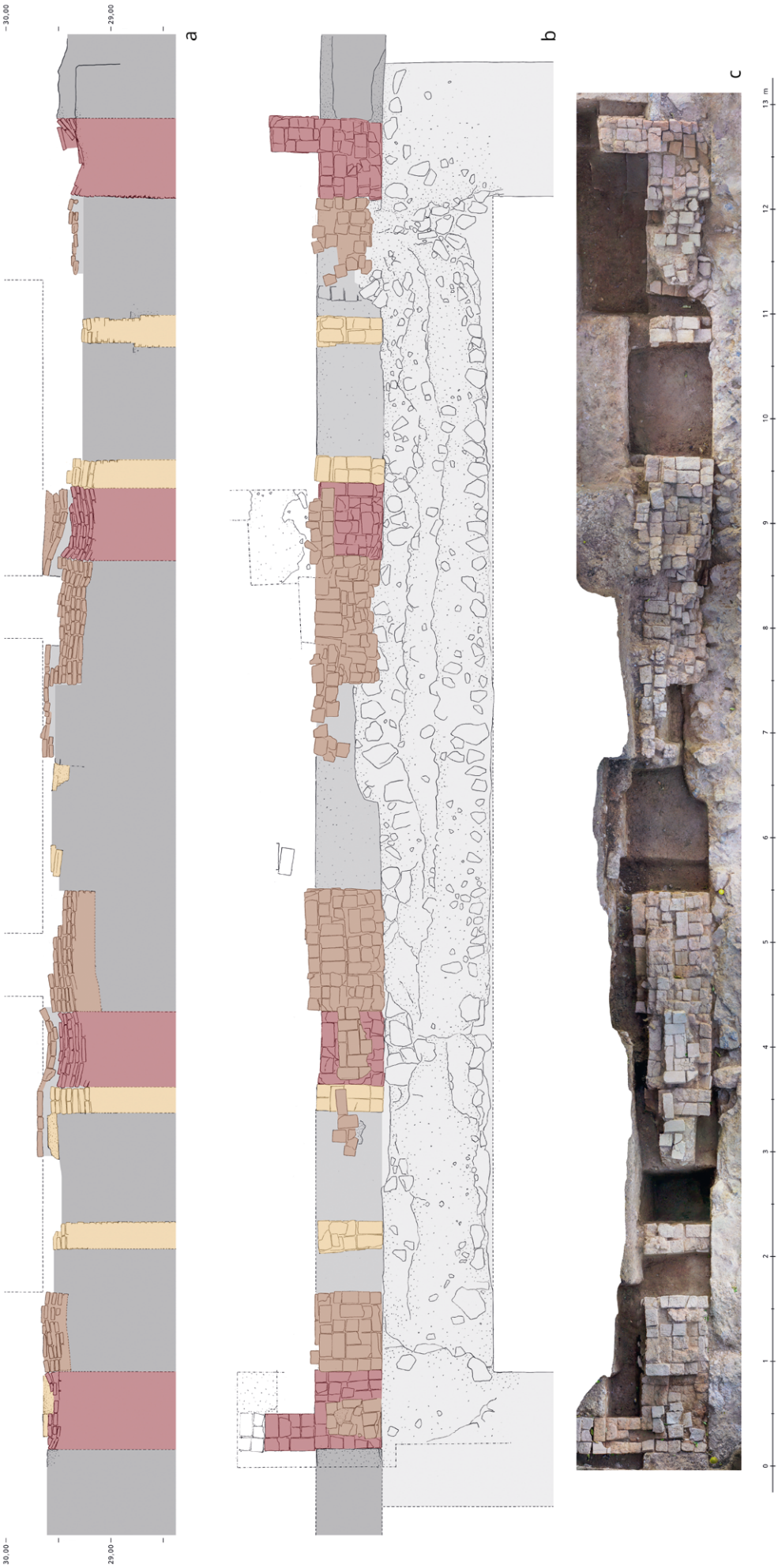

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Fig. 27: Monteagudo, Central Sector. Façade of the portico, with remains of stage 1A in red, stage 1B in yellow and stage 2 in brown: a. north-south section, looking east. – b. Orthophoto – c. ground plan.

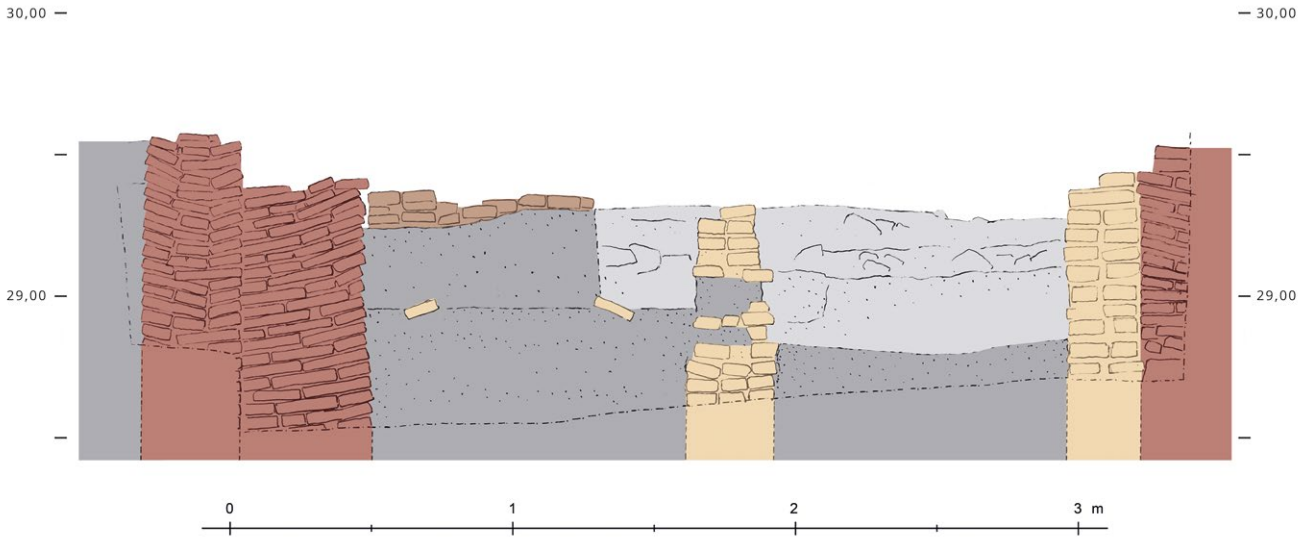

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Fig. 28: Monteagudo, Central Sector. South-north section of the southern bay of the portico, looking west, with remains of stage 1A in red, stage 1B in yellow and stage 2 in brown.

Fig. 29: Monteagudo, Central Sector. Southwest corner of the portico, with deformation of the corner pillar.

erected in conjunction with the adjoining sections of rammed earth. This is indicated by the poor placement and lack of interlocking bricks, the use of fragmented pieces, and the deformity and different thicknesses presented by the pillar foundations. The outer face of the earth sections furthermore covered in part the outside of the outer surface of the new pillars. The wall of the adjoining water basin was moreover erected only after the new pillars were set, since some of the pillars left an imprint in the outer face of the basin walls, the concrete of the basin walls spilling into the sections of rammed earth.

70 At least one reason for the alteration of the design may have been the weakness of the original foundations, leading to the pronounced deformation of the brick layers described above. Both the addition of brick pillars and the execution of rammed earth sections would have reinforced the structure of the façade. The deformations are

30

Fig. 30: Monteagudo, Central Sector. Hypothetical restitution of the western façade: a. stage 1A. – b. stage 1B. – c. stage 2.

not visible in the segments constructed after the design was altered. At the same time, the change in plan clearly demonstrates that a new design was now favored.

71 **Stage 2.** Later, the design of the arcade was changed once again. Both the Almohad destruction of 1165 and the possible ruin of the building due to the deformation and collapse of the pillars of the foundational project (1A) could have been the cause of the complete demolition of the old arcade and its subsequent reconstruction.

72 The new arcade is poorer in quality, manifested in the use of numerous brick fragments of mixed origin. The foundations of the pillars of the new arcade are very shallow and were built on the rammed earth sections, completely ignoring the solid and deep pillars of the previous construction event (Fig. 27). By way of comparison, it should be noted that we were able to count up to 21 courses of bricks in the southernmost pillar of the original phase without reaching its base, while the best-preserved pillar of phase 2 was no more than nine layers deep. The brick pavement placed between the new pillars partially hides the foundations of the original pillars.

73 Four new pillar foundations were added during this phase, two 75 cm-long segments at either end and two 1.15 m-long segments within the central arch. The basic tripartite design of the arcade was maintained, but the span of the arches was reduced. Based on the preserved foundations and the segments of brick pavement, the span of the central arch must have been reduced from 4.3 m to 2.75 m. The two lateral arches were almost the same width, which is not common in these arcaded compositions. Given the reduced size of the arches, the height of the façade is likely to have been reduced, giving the building a wider proportion.

5.2.3 Alcoves of the Portico (B5)

74 We have previously noted that the portico has an alcove at each end. While the southern one was completely excavated, the northern one remains hidden under the citrus orchard, except for what was discovered in a small excavation trench (Fig. 19). Here, the western pillar of its twin opening and the brickwork with which its threshold was reinforced were uncovered.

75 The dimensions of the southern alcove are determined by the width of the portico and the width of the alcove of the hall, with which it shares the back wall. As a result, the alcove of the portico is less wide than deep, instead of square (3.4 m × 2.7 m). The alcove communicated with the portico by means of a twin opening, separated by a central column, of which only the brick pillar that served as foundation remains. Each bay was about 77 cm wide. A brick foundation of the threshold is preserved, which supports stone slabs. It is usual in this architecture that the paving of the portico is lower than that of the alcove. In the entrance of the north alcove, we encountered a 15 cm-high step of this type.

76 The lime-coated earthen walls (Spanish »tapia calicostrada«) that delimit the alcove on three sides have different thicknesses: 77 cm in the south, 82.5 cm in the east, and 60–64 cm in the west. The difference between the east and west may be explained by the fact that the adjoining hall was higher than the portico.

77 To study the foundation of the alcove, we made a test trench of 1.50 m × 2.30 m next to the eastern wall. Although we did not reach its base, we were able to verify that it was composed of at least two superimposed layers of rammed earth separated by a layer of brick. The building was located on a gentle slope descending east to the west, which made it necessary to create an artificial platform. The construction began with the foundations being built at the natural ground level, without cutting a foundation trench, and then filling the interior of the room with very clean earth, which had to be properly compacted. Then the next layer of rammed earth wall was erected, repeating the same process of filling. This way of building is evident in the profiles, which clearly show thick layers of very homogeneous earth alternating with thinner layers that coincide with the layers of the wall construction and that would serve as working levels that spontaneously formed every time the work of building a course of walls was carried out.

5.2.4 Hall (B2)

78 As with the portico, only the southern third of the hall and the adjoining southern alcove were excavated (Fig. 19). It is about 12 m long and 4.1 m wide, with a ratio of almost 1 : 3. The pavements have not been preserved here either which, in

Fig. 31: Monteagudo, Central Sector. Southern alcove of the hall, looking south.

31

principle, should have been somewhat higher than those of the portico to the west. Everything indicates that this space was razed like the previous one. The western wall is 82.5 cm thick, while the eastern wall is only 72 cm. Although the exact reason for this difference is uncertain, it may be because the former also had to support the pressure exerted by the roof of the portico.

79 In the eastern wall there is a door with a span of 88 cm (Fig. 31). Following the rules of symmetry, another door must have been located at the northern end of the wall, both serving to connect the hall to the adjoining Reservoir Courtyard. The doors to the east and west are located exactly opposite each other and are of the same size. Unfortunately, it was not possible to excavate the central part of the hall, which prevented us from finding out whether there was a third opening in the direction of the Reservoir Courtyard along the central axis of the hall.

5.2.5 Alcoves of the Hall (B3)

80 As is the case with the portico, the hall had an alcove at each end, the southern one being the only one that could be excavated, as the northern one remains hidden under the citrus orchard (Fig. 31). The complete excavation of the southern one revealed a rectangular space, wider than deep (4.1 m × 3.5 m), which communicates with the hall through a twin opening with a column in the center, of which only the brick foundation is preserved. Each bay is 95–102 cm wide. The alcove is delimited in the south, east, and west by 74 cm-thick lime coated earth walls (›tapia calicostrada‹).

5.2.6 Hallway (B7)

81 This is a rectangular room (7.7 m × 1.9–2.1 m) built in the angle formed between the southwest corner of the Reservoir Courtyard and the wall that closed the alcoves of the portico and the hall to the south (B3 and B5). It was delimited on its west and south sides by walls of rammed earth, both 48 cm thick, composed of a base of solid mortar and elevations of lime coated earth (›tapia calicostrada‹) (Fig. 32. 50).

82 The western entrance door has a span of 1.02 m and is displaced to the northern half of the western wall. Although its threshold has not been preserved, we have located what could be its base, made of bricks set on edge (23.5 cm × 12 cm × 12 cm × 4 cm).

32

Fig. 32: Monteagudo, Central Sector. Hallway with remains of two superimposed floors and a drain along the central axis, looking east.

83 The identification of the room as a hallway remains a supposition, since no traces of a second door are preserved. However, the ramped layout of its pavement does suggest that a second door was in the eastern wall, providing access to the Reservoir Courtyard. Unfortunately, no remains of the threshold or the jambs of this door have been preserved due to the razing of the wall to below ground level. The door may not have been contemplated in the original project, since indications are visible in the foundations, as is the case in other doors. The door is most likely to have been opened during the construction process of the building, when the wall enclosing the Reservoir Courtyard had already been erected. This correction was probably carried out because the initial communications between the different spaces of the palace area were not entirely adequate, as no other passage was contemplated between the four-part garden and the Reservoir Courtyard other than the hall of state itself and its portico. The construction of the hallway undoubtedly facilitated the circulation between both areas, avoiding having to cross the portico and the hall. It was built, however, on an excessively narrow and elongated residual space, inadequate to implement the usual solution of a bent access.

84 In the interior of the hallway, the remains of two superimposed lime mortar pavements are preserved (Fig. 32). Apparently, they were partially destroyed when a trench was dug along the entire length of the room, possibly to recover a lead pipe that had existed here. The earlier pavement has a slope, from 29.43 m in the west to 29.53 m ASL in the east in order to bridge the difference in level between the walkway of the garden (29.47 m ASL) and the Reservoir Courtyard (29.87 m). About 6 m from the entrance, the ramp ends in a step or platform (at 29.63 m ASL) that occupies the entire eastern end of the room; in its southeast corner we identified a brick layer (23.5 cm × 11.5 cm × 3.5 cm) that could be the base of another step that reached the threshold of the door leading to the Reservoir Courtyard (Fig. 19). Its displacement to the south seems to be an attempt to misalign the two openings of the hallway, thus compensating for the absence of a bent entrance.

85 The construction of the second floor involved reducing the slope, the floor level now being at a level of 29.57 m ASL in the west and 29.69 m ASL in the east. The new floor was possibly made when a room was added to the south in phase 2. On the southern wall and in contact with the second pavement, fragments of a red-painted dado are preserved.

86 In the western third of the vestibule, we encountered a drain located on the east-west axis of the hallway (Fig. 32). The drain is 20 cm wide inside and preserved at a length of 2.25 m. Its bottom was paved with pieces of calcarenite stone of different sizes; both their dimensions and the quality of their finishes indicate that they are reused slabs, probably from the original building phase. Only the piece located in the lowest part of the channel in contact with the doorway could be measured and found to be 8 cm thick. The drain has a marked slope from 29.39 m ASL in the west (17 cm below the second pavement) to 29.17 m ASL in the east. The drain started more or less in the midpoint of the hallway, where there must have been an inlet. This suggests that the room was totally or partially open to the sky. The hallway would thus also have provided light and ventilation to the room in the south through the door that communicates both spaces.

5.3 Water Basin (B6)

87 The entire architectural complex that we have been describing in its projection towards the center of the great four-part garden culminates in the water basin (Fig. 19). Its plan is slightly rectangular, and it is very likely that it was designed with a longer side in order to highlight the main axis of the palace. Its interior dimensions are 11.8 m east-west and 11.1 m north-south, giving it a total interior surface area of 131 m^2 which, with a depth of 90 cm, would give it a capacity of about 118 m^3 or 118,000 l.

88 The walls are made of solid concrete and stone with a thickness of 1.25 m. In the east the width is only 1.05 m because of its connection to the foundation of the portico, which gave sufficient strength to the basin on that side. On the other three sides it must have been surrounded by walkway that ran along the entire outer perimeter of the palace, creating a wide circulation walkway similar to the one outside the Salón Rico of Madīnat az-Zahrā' (Fig. 12)[87].

89 The inner faces of the basin preserve a plaster with numerous incisions made when the mortar was still fresh. Their function was to facilitate the grip of the layer that would be in contact with water. The marks on the west wall are arranged in oblique horizontal bands of a herringbone pattern, while on the north wall they lack any geometric design, with larger and more spaced incisions toward the east. These differences have no relevance, since they were not visible in the end and their execution depended on the free choice of the workers who made them.

90 Although the interior of the basin has not been excavated in its entirety, we know from a trench excavated in its southeast corner that it had a solid floor made of lime mortar at a depth of 90 cm. The filling does not derive from the debris of the Almohad destruction but is later, with pottery dating to the second third of the 13th century, allowing us to conclude that the basin remained in use during the Late-Islamic phase.

91 At the top of the southern end of the eastern wall there is a depression that indicates the location of an inlet. Although we do not yet have any archaeological evidence, it seems likely that the basin was supplied with water from the reservoir of the inner courtyard, possibly by means of a lead pipe.

92 In the northwest corner of the basin a 2.96 m × 0.87 m-large, solid, rectangular structure is preserved, built with bricks and mortar. Along the outside bricks are laid in a header and stretcher pattern while its interior is filled with lime mortar. Unfor-

87 Vallejo 2010, fig. 55.

tunately, since the interior of the basin has not been excavated, we only know the top of the structure, but it is likely to have been a staircase. Given that it is not arranged on the axis of the pool, no symmetrical structure is preserved in the southwest corner so it is very unlikely that it is part of the original design of the basin. A Late Islamic date is possible.

93 In addition to being part of a complex hydraulic system that irrigated the four-part garden, the basin also played an important aesthetic and lighting function, since its location next to the portico allowed it to reflect the arches on the surface of the water while at the same time facilitating the illumination of the interior of the hall by reflecting the sun's rays (Fig. 20. 30). This type of water basin is a very frequent element in 10th and 13th century palaces, both in palatial courtyards, where it appears attached to the central opening of porticoes and in large open gardens. Square basins are common from the 10th to the 13th century[88], thereafter basins of narrower and more elongated shape evolved.

5.4 Four-part Garden

94 The four-part garden is of considerable dimensions, only a small portion of which we have excavated so far. We have been able to reconstruct the overall layout based on the aerial photographs of Julio Ruiz de Alda of 1928–1929 (Fig. 5) and by analyzing the pattern of agricultural plots, roads, and canals. For the most part, the garden occupies the old river bed of the Rambla del Caracol, whose course can be traced though the morphology of the cultivation plots that were formed inside the old bed (Fig. 3). This is a phenomenon that we can see very well in the vicinity of the hills of Larache (east side) and the Castillejo (west side), its traces disappearing 400 m to the south at the foot of the Castillo de Monteagudo, the area where the marshland begins. From this it can be deduced that, at the time the garden was designed in the middle of the 12th century, its intermittent waters were already controlled and contained so that the flow that could reach the plain during the rainy season would no longer be a threat to the built-up area[89].

95 As for the perimeter of the garden, at least three of its margins are very well defined, forming 90º angles. It is a rectangular space that is not completely regular, with dimensions of 205–225 m east-west and almost 170 m north-south. The southern limit coincides with the Camino de Granada, the western limit with the Churra la Vieja irrigation channel, while the northern limit is marked by a division of plots of land that runs in a continuous, straight line from east to west. Only the eastern limit breaks the regularity of the plan, as it had to adapt to the edge of the old watercourse on which most of the residential buildings were constructed, but on a higher level. In the north, south, and east a wall must have isolated the garden from the rest of the ›almunia‹, although there is no material evidence of it.

96 We have also been able to identify three axes running east-west in the form of paved walkways. The main, central axis passes through the basin of the Pavilion Hall and is flanked by two secondary ones that respectively begin in the southern tower (No. 11, A0 in Fig. 41) and in the rectangular building located to the north (No. 14). Of the three, only the southern one has been partially uncovered in the excavated area.

88 Among the many examples of square basins are those of the 10th century in the palaces of Madīnat al-Zahrā', the ›almunia‹ of ar-Rummānīya, and the basin of Cañito de María Ruiz, that of the 11th and early 12th century in the palace of Onda, those of the 12th century in the Dār aṣ-Ṣuġrà in Murcia and the Castillejo de Monteagudo, and those of the 13th century in the palaces of al-'Ubbād in Tlemcen, and the alcazaba of Almería. Arnold 2017, 69–115. 184–194. 223–233.

89 Probably up to the ›assisted drylands‹ which, we assume, were created earlier in the higher areas of the estate. Navarro – Jiménez 2023, 13–16.

The preserved segment is 2.9 m wide. Thanks to the usual symmetrical configuration, we assume that the northern one had the same dimensions.

97 The central axis was presumably wider and possibly marked by a pavilion at the intersection with the other main north-south axis, as is the case in the garden of the Cuba Soprana in Palermo with its Piccola Cuba, and in the garden of the Dār aṣ-Ṣuġrà in Murcia (Fig. 15)[90]. In addition, the canal that ran along it was also presumably wider, since the area that was irrigated by the canal on either side was more extensive. The central (east-west) walkway of the Dār aṣ-Ṣuġrà measured 4.15 m[91], the central walkway at Monteagudo may have been even wider.

98 This type of garden, in which two axes cross perpendicularly to create four segments (known as *čahār-bāġ*, »four garden« in Persian, »patio de crucero« in Spanish), is one of the most iconic types of Islamic gardens both in the East and the West. An illustrious example from the early Islamic period was built by Caliph Hišām (724–743) at ar-Ruṣāfa (Syria)[92], while the Abbasids used it in the palaces of Sāmarrā' (Iraq) in the mid-9th century[93] and the Ghaznavids in Lashkar-i Bazar (Afghanistan) in the early 11th century[94]. In the Islamic West, the first examples date back to the 10th century. We have identified the four-part garden scheme at Palermo, where the Cuba Soprana presided over the central axis of such a garden and the Piccola Cuba marked the intersection of the walkways. Examples at Madīnat az-Zahrā' include the main garden of the caliph (Fig. 33 a), the Lower Garden, the Upper Garden and the House of the Water Basin[95] (Fig. 12 a). Another 10th-century example has been identified by aerial photographs at Turruñuelos outside of Córdoba (Fig. 33 b). The scheme of the four-part garden was most prevalent in the 11th and 12th centuries, as is shown by examples in the Alcazaba de Onda[96], in the Almoravid palace at Marrakech[97], in the Castillejo de Monteagudo[98] and the Dār aṣ-Ṣuġrà of Ibn Mardanīš[99], as well as in the Almohad palaces in Seville, including the Palacio de la Montería, the Palacio del Crucero and, most probably, the original courtyard of the Casa de Contratación[100].

5.5 Reserved Garden

99 In contact with the southwest corner of the southern tower, we found a fragment of a 7.80 m-long and 48 cm-thick wall, which allows us to suggest the existence of an enclosure of small dimensions (71–83 m × 87 m) located on the eastern front of the four-part garden, surrounding the buildings of the Central Sector (Fig. 34. 37). The wall in question would have constituted part of the southern limit of this enclosure and would have extended to the west alongside the secondary east-west walkway. The northern wall would be located, by symmetry, at the height where the rectangular structure No. 14 is located. As for the western one, we do not have data that would allow us to locate it with certainty, but it may possibly have been aligned with the western side of the water basin (Fig. 15).

100 Regardless of the unitary character of this enclosure, it should be observed that its distribution on either side of the Central Sector would create two distinct and symmetrical spaces, separated by the Pavilion Hall and the Reservoir Courtyard. Each of

90 Navarro 1998; Navarro et al. 2022.
91 Navarro 1998, 104.
92 Ulbert 2004.
93 Northedge 2005, fig. 55. 85. 102.
94 Schlumberger 1978; Ruggles 2008, 39–49; Arnold 2009, fig. 2 b.
95 Vallejo 2010, 468. 473 fig. 45. 55; Arnold et al. 2019, fig. 84. 85.
96 Navarro 2012.
97 Meunié – Terrasse 1952, 27–32. 82–84 fig. 15 pl. 21.
98 Navarro – Jiménez 1995a.
99 Navarro 1998; Pozo – Robles 2008, 14–31.
100 Almagro 1999; Tabales 2010, 197–204. 215–255. 271–282.

33

34

Fig. 33: 10th-century gardens in Córdoba: a. Madīnat az-Zahrāʾ. – b. Turruñuelos.

Fig. 34: Monteagudo. Enclosure wall of Reserved Garden and adjoining walkways, looking west. To the left and in the background remains of the aqueduct of phase V.

these spaces would be delimited on all four sides, turning them into specially protected areas of restricted use, which we could call ›reserved gardens‹, reminiscent of the Italian ›giardino segreto‹.

101 The enclosure wall was constructed without significantly altering the overall geometry of the four-part garden and without impeding the walkway running from one side to the other of the garden, thanks to openings placed along the walkways.

We must imagine that, in its interior, both botanical and architectural means were intensified that aimed at increasing its exquisiteness, with a special development of the ornamental elements, especially those that affected the decoration of its perimeter wall. With its integration within the Palace of the Plain, a singular gradation was achieved between the artificial environment, represented by the architectures of the residential block located to the east and the natural environment located to the west and were represented by a particularly ordered and domesticated plant area, such as the four-part garden.

102 The presence of the Reserved Garden must have been widespread in the great palaces of different periods and cultural areas, as it is a response to the need to create small exterior spaces attached to the residence in order to ensure that their owners could go outside with the greatest guarantee of security and privacy. By way of example, we can cite two cases promoted by the Spanish King Philip II: the Garden of the Ladies and the Garden of the Prince that flank the royal residence in the Monastery of San Lorenzo del Escorial[101] and the Garden of the King and Queen at the palace of Aranjuez[102].

103 The agricultural treaties of the Islamic period do not mention such reserved gardens, which must have been characteristic of the ›almunias‹ of the highest-ranking rulers, since the readers of these treaties were the general landowning elites. However, even in those agricultural treatises, not only were the plants arranged according to their proximity to the main dwelling, but the built elements and hydraulic structures were also segregated from the cultivated areas of a more productive nature in order to serve the solace of their owners. For example, aṭ-Ṭiġnarī indicates where to install the water wheels and basins in order to make them more effective in irrigating the estate, but at the same to allow the owner and his entourage to enjoy the relaxation offered by strolling alongside the basins and canals without having to cross the garden. These cultivated and sheltered spaces can, however, be contemplated from the elevated part of the property: »… in laying out the canal (*sawānī*) and the water basins (*ṣahārīǧ*) see to it that they are near the gates of the garden (*ǧannāt*), in an elevated place, in the highest area of all the gardens (*ǧinān*), in order that whoever wishes to contemplate (*farǧa*) the orchard (*bustān*) may not have to pass through it. [This happens] when [the person] intends to enter the orchard (*bustān*) [and stroll] through the places where the water runs and the water basins (*ṣahārīǧ*) are for the repose (*rāḥa*) that it [offers]. When all this is near the gate, he need not pass through it except one who has the need to do so. The garden (*ǧinān*) should be preserved from the passage of people but arranged for contemplation. And, if necessary, let the orchards (*basātīn*) be protected more strongly than the dwellings (*dūr*)«[103].

5.6 Walkways

104 The four-part garden, including the reserved area we have just described, was bordered and crossed by elevated walkways which show a great variety of sizes. The ones we describe below have been excavated to the south of the Central Sector and appear to delimit a sunken garden of 23.5 m × 38 m, to which the palatial quarters located between the Reservoir Courtyard and the southern tower opened directly.

105 The differences detected between the walkways, in terms of dimension and elevation, show a hierarchy between them due to the greater or lesser prominence they had within the garden design. There are also differences in terms of the period they remained in use; while two of them were used for a very short time, around 15 years, the other two remained active for a century.

101 Sanz 2006, 185.
102 Sanz 2006, 223–234.
103 Al-Ṭiġnarī 2006, 94 f.

5.6.1 East-west Walkway next to the Reservoir Courtyard

106 This small walkway is part of the foundational design of the Reservoir Courtyard and runs along its entire southern front (Fig. 16 a, No. 1). It very likely also surrounded the western side of the palace to where the door of the hallway opens and to the water basin, creating a wide walkway around the basin. It is well preserved and does not seem to have suffered any alteration since it was used for only a short time, being built over by the southern extension of the palace (Fig. 50. 51. 52. 53). Its partial excavation in several sections within the four rooms of the southern extension of the palace made a detailed study of the walkway possible.

107 Its width ranges from 2.50 to 2.55 m and it had a very consistent and well-smoothed lime mortar pavement. At the western end the pavement is located at 29.47 m ASL and at its eastern end at 29.28 m ASL, creating an inexplicable slope. The level of the walkway was 70–89 cm above the level of the adjoining garden (elevation of 28.58 m ASL) and 40–59 cm below the level of the walkway surrounding the Reservoir Courtyard. This last difference in elevation is because the palace, in spite of projecting into the area of the garden, maintains the same floor level as the rooms further east, ignoring the natural slope of the terrain.

108 Along the entire length of the walkway runs a channel that is about 24 cm wide, dividing the walkway into two equal parts that are each about 1.10 m wide. The channel was delimited by two 30 cm-high brick walls that do not adopt the usual solution of bricks set on edge at the top. The channel was apparently never finished, and no floor was paved. Instead, it was filled with earth and covered by a layer of lime mortar that normalized the entire surface of the walkway. The original plan must have been modified during the construction process and the intention of creating the channel abandoned, similar to how the design of the portico was changed during the construction process.

5.6.2 Secondary North-south Walkway

109 We discovered a second walkway during the 2023 excavation of one of the trenches aimed at studying the aforementioned walkway that was directly in contact to the east-west walkway and running north-south (Fig. 35. 36). The few preserved remains were sufficient to suggest that this second walkway must have extended southward for 24 m until it met with the next walkway running east-west (Fig. 16 a, No. 2). It was 2.4 m wide, paved with lime mortar and located about 35 cm below the level of the walkway from which it starts (29.07 m ASL, 49 cm above the level of the garden), so it was necessary to descend a brick-reinforced step to access it. The channel of the east-west walkway had a derivation designed to bring water to the walkway running north-south. Surprisingly, this derivation was interrupted at the step and never continued southward. It is possible that a continuation was intended to be constructed on top of the walkway delimited by walls, as was done in the east-west walkway that starts from the tower and that we will describe below. The smaller dimensions of this walkway, its lower level, and its scarce development show that it was a secondary walkway designed to compartmentalize the sunken flowerbeds inside the Reserved Garden, without continuing beyond the limits of this enclosure.

5.6.3 Walkways next to the Tower (C2 and C3)

110 In the southeast corner of the Reserved Garden and at the foot of the tower we identified the remains of two walkways arranged at a 90º angle (Fig. 37). The first follows a north-south direction (Fig. 38. 39) attached to the western front of the tower (Fig. 16 a, No. 3), while the second starts from the tower, and runs west (Fig. 16 a, No. 4), attached to the enclosure wall of the Reserved Garden (Fig. 40). Both walkways were part of the foundational design but, unlike the previous ones, they had a long life that

35

Fig. 35: Monteagudo. Walkway of phase II along the southern wall of the Central Sector, found below the southern bay of phase III, looking east.

Fig. 36: Monteagudo. Remains of a secondary walkway of the Reserved Garden running north-south, cut by the foundation of the southern extension of the Central Sector (phase III).

36

allowed them to be reused, with few modifications, in the reconstruction of the palatial area during the Late-Islamic phase. This continuity in use demonstrates that the gardens predictably did not experience the same degree of destruction as the buildings, making them the most enduring architectural elements.

111 The later alterations in the height and width of the walkways as well as in their respective channels (Fig. 39) are visible in two sections that were excavated in 2023. It was also possible to relate these changes to the two major construction phases of the Islamic period identified in the palace complex. In the following we will describe the remains belonging to the mid-12th century phases, while the more recent phases will be discussed in the context of the Late-Islamic building.

5.6.4 North-south Walkway

112 Of the walkway running along the western side of the tower, only a 6 m-long and 2.55 m-wide segment was investigated. Its attachment to the tower only allows us to see its western edge, which was in contact with the sunken garden (Fig. 37. 38. 39). The good state of preservation of the walkway is due to its location between the tower and the 13th century aqueduct that, being higher, allowed a thick layer of earth to accumulate above the walkway protecting protect it (Fig. 38).

113 The north-south orientation of the walkway suggests that it continued northward, until it connected to the east-west walkway running along the Reservoir Courtyard. The walkway not only helped to facilitate the water to flow from the north to the south, but also provided the buildings alongside the walkway to open toward the Reserved Garden.

37

Fig. 37: Monteagudo. Remains of walkways to the west of the tower, looking east.

114 In the south, the walkway ends at the enclosure wall of the Reserved Garden. A door probably existed at this point, attached to the tower, through which one could leave the enclosure and continue to a walkway that probably reached the Camino de Granada and may have continued to the great water basin (Spanish »albercón«) located further south (Fig. 6. 7). The southern continuation of the walkway has a slightly different orientation, due to the orientation of the adjoining buildings.

115 The structure of the walkway could be analyzed thanks to recent intrusions (Fig. 38. 61). The cleaning of these pits provided the opportunity to investigate a profile through the walkway, showing that the walkway originally had a lime mortar floor and a channel made of bricks set on edge (Fig. 37). In this case, it was found that the construction of the channel was finished and became operational, transporting water from the north to the south.

116 The level of the walkways was subsequently raised by 20 cm, covering the original construction (Fig. 39). The new channel was shallower, thus reducing its capacity to transport water. The level of the original pavement is located at 29.08 m ASL (50 cm above the level of the garden, like the secondary north-south walkway), while the bottom of its channel is at 28.83 m ASL, making it 25 cm deep. The second pavement is located at 29.26 m ASL (68 cm above the garden level) while the deepest part of its channel is at 29.08 m ASL, a difference of 18 cm. The walkway along the Reservoir Courtyard is located at a higher level, indicating that the water was running in a north-south direction.

117 Outside the Reserved Garden and to the south of the southern front of the tower, we excavated a 4 m long trench (A3) that allowed us to document the south-

Fig. 38: Monteagudo. Walkway C2 looking north, with the tower of phase I to the right and the aqueduct of phase V to the left. Visible are three superimposed pavements of the walkway of phases II and III (A), the portico constructed on top of the walkway in pahse IV (B), and the walkway added outside the portico (C).

38

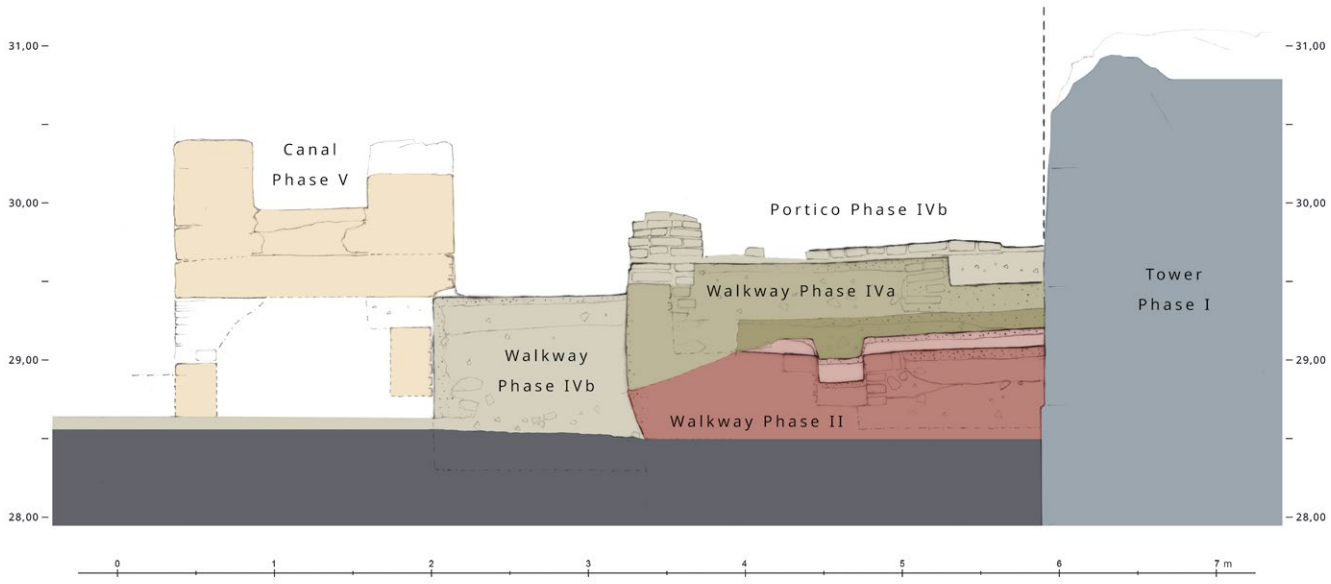


Fig. 39: Monteagudo. West-east section of the walkway, with tower of phase I indicated in blue, walkway of phase II in red, walkways of phase IV in green, and aqueduct of phase V in yellow.

39

ern extension of the walkway and its channel (Fig. 41. 42. 43. 44). This segment of the walkway is linked to a 12th century building located south and southeast of the tower, described below (Fig. 16, No. 5).

5.6.5 East-west Walkway

118 The second walkway starts from the previous one in a westward direction (Fig. 16 a, No. 4). The walkway was 2.9 m wide and thus wider than any of the others described so far, indicating its overall importance within the garden (Fig. 37. 40). In addition to being one of the most important axes of the four-part garden, it also played a significant role within the Reserved Garden, as it was attached to the enclosure wall. A walkway of the same category must have exited on the northern and western side of the Reserved Garden.

40

Fig. 40: Monteagudo. Remains of enclosure wall and adjoining walkway preserved below the aqueduct of Phase V.

119 As in the previous case, part of this walkway has been preserved thanks to the aqueduct placed over it. In this section a channel can be identified, made of bricks set on edge (Fig. 40) and built on top of the floor of the walkway (walkway elevation 28.93 m ASL, 35 cm above the level of the garden, channel elevation 28.97 m ASL). This way of constructing a channel on top of a walkway is unusual. Commonly it was placed below the floor level, as is the case for example in the four-part garden of the Dār aṣ-Ṣuġrà of Murcia[104].

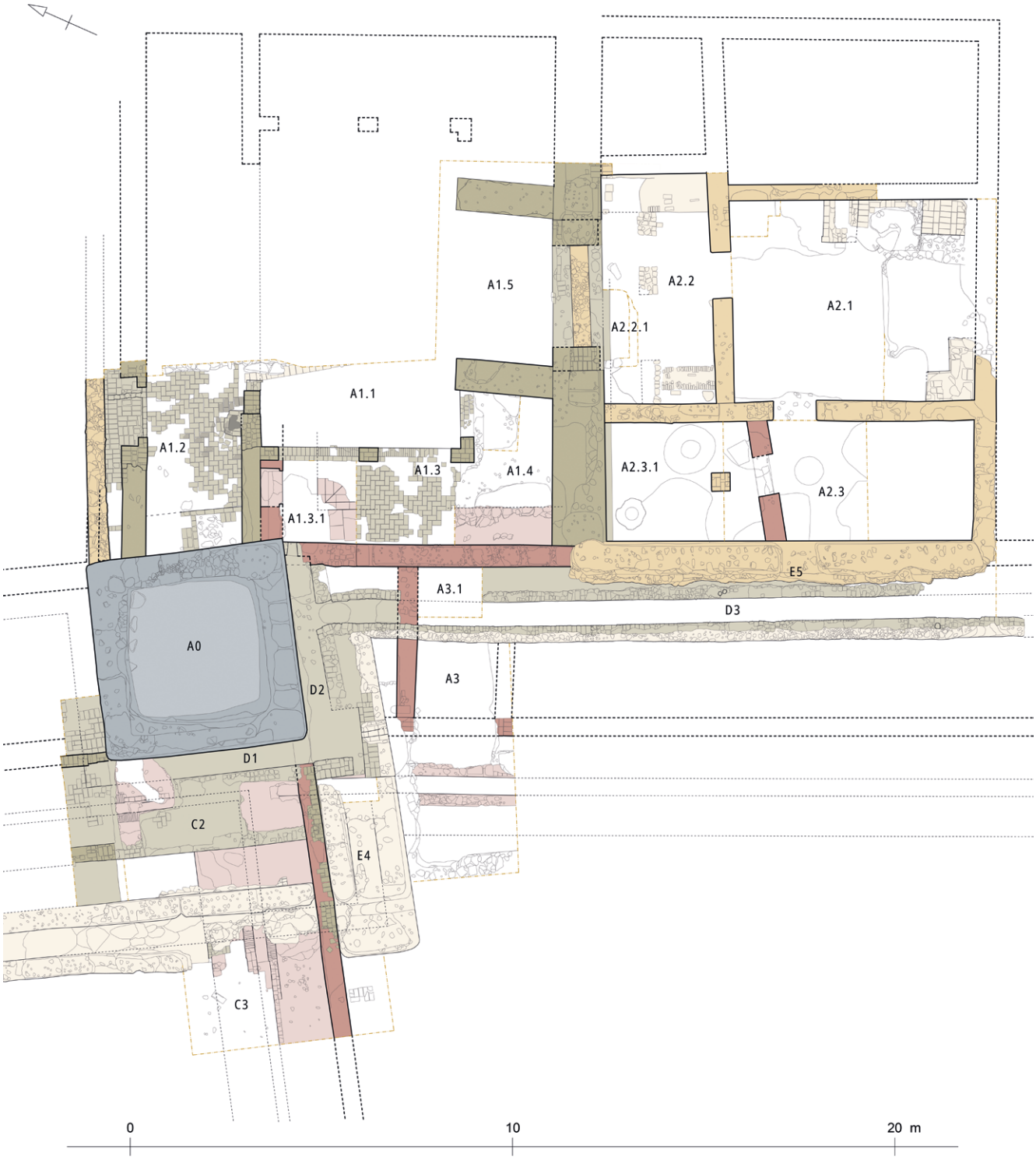
120 The channel was probably connected to that of the north-south walkway and is most likely to have conducted water from this channel westward to the center of the four-part garden. This would follow the direction of the irrigation used to the present day with water coming from north to south by means of the Churra la Vieja and Caracol canals and then distributed from east to west. However, it should be noted that the preserved level of the east-west running channel is located 6 cm higher than the level of the first phase of the north-south channel, and 19 cm below the level of the second phase channel. This only makes sense if the east-west channel is contemporaneous with the second phase, not the first phase.

5.7 Tower (A0)

121 The location of the tower presiding over one of the main east-west axes of the four-part garden indicates its relevance in the general design of the palace (Fig. 42). In fact, it is possible that its presence conditioned the organization of this sector of the four-part garden since it is earlier than the surrounding structures of the Mardanīšid period. We also note that it was reused in later phases and remained standing until the 20th century, being incorporated into an orchard house.

122 The tower is square in plan (5.20 m × 5.20 m) and solid up to the preserved height of 3 m so that the walls that form it do not have an interior face. It was built with 75 cm-high layers of rammed earth, of which four are preserved and which concentrated the lime and stone material on its outer perimeter, while the interior is a filling of compacted earth. The entrance to the tower has not been preserved because it would have been located at a higher elevation above the solid body of its base.

104 Navarro 1998, 104–107.



41

Fig. 41: Monteagudo, southern sector. Ground plan with indication of the phases, with phase I indicated in blue, phase II in red, phase IV in green, and phase V in yellow.

123 Of its original height we know nothing because it was demolished in the 1960s along with the orchard house into which it had been incorporated. Remains of the upper part, composed of large fragments of concrete walls, were documented in 2018 when we removed the debris of the house. Evidence that the tower was reused until the 20th century can be found in the fact that its massive base was emptied of its earthen fill to convert it into a room, to which a 60 cm wide doorway was attached that was later blocked again by dry-stone masonry.

42

Fig. 42: Monteagudo, southern sector. Orthophoto of the excavated remains, including to the north (left), the tower, to the east (top) the entrance courtyard of phase IV and the late-Islamic building, and to the west (bottom) the walkways and the aqueduct.

124 The tower was well-integrated into the palatial complex among essentially representative and courtly spaces, which suggests that its function was recreational, excluding a possible military use. It is most likely that its upper floor housed a belvedere from which to contemplate the estate, which was entered through one of the buildings located to the east or north of it. Given that we consider the tower to belong to the formative period of the estate (phase I), we could ask if its use was recreational from the start or whether it had a defensive purpose at first. Unfortunately, we do not have enough evidence to allow an interpretation for this first phase, but its location in the middle of the plain in a depressed area would make the tower of little use from a military point of view, especially when in its vicinity there are several hills suitable for such a purpose[105].

125 We know this type of belvedere tower very well thanks to the manuscript of *Ḥadīṯ Bayāḍ wa Riyāḍ* cited above where, in at least three of its illustrations (folios 4v, 17r and 19r: Fig. 11. 13), we identify massive towers topped with pointed roofs under which there are belvederes that are furnished with single or twin openings closed by screens. In addition to the images in which the lookout tower appears, the codex contains others in which the belvedere is located on top of corbels that rest on the enclosure wall (folios 3v and 10r). We can conclude that their large number is proof of the importance of this architectural solution in the iconographic representation of the palatial area of an ›almunia‹. Such belvedere towers also appear schematically represented in the Islamic ablution basins of Murcia in the form of an architectural model[106].

126 The documentation and archaeological evidence seem to indicate that towers became more frequent in ›almunias‹ from the 11th century onwards, as insecurity and the risk of raids increased. Again, the treatises on agriculture provide valuable information, which mention presence of towers in the ›almunias‹, underlining their double functionality, defensive and residential[107]. The recommendation made by Ibn Luyūn

105 On the nearest hill, just 100 m from the tower, stands the Castillejo palace, in which restoration work began in 2023 on its lower enclosure. After the removal of the rubble generated by the excavation of the upper enclosure in 1928, it has been found that the work of the Mardanīšid palace was founded on top of an earlier structure possibly of defensive character.

106 Navarro – Jiménez 1995b.

107 Jiménez 2018a, 775. 779; Jiménez 2018b, 415–418.

about the convenience of protecting country residences with a tower that he calls *burǧ suknà*[108], must be placed in its chronological context – that is, at the beginning of the 14th century, when the incursions of the Christian armies into Nasrid territory were very frequent. By the end of the 15th century, we know that these structures were numerous in the surroundings of the Nasrid cities. In this sense, Münzer writes immediately after the Castilian conquest that the flood plain of Granada »has orchards irrigated by irrigation canals full of houses and towers, inhabited during the summer«[109]. These were towers belonging to the sultan, the court or the urban elite, richly decorated inside and with a sufficient number of outbuildings for permanent residence which, in addition to offering security and privacy to their dwellers, were also magnificent belvederes[110]. In relation to Baza, Hernando del Pulgar wrote that »there were more than a thousand small towers, because every citizen of that city who had any part of it had a tower close to his trees; and that which belonged to him was surrounded by canals«[111].

5.8 Southern Sector

127 The southern sector is located south-east of the tower. It is characterized by a high number of structures belonging to phase IV, constructed on the buildings of the 12th century, which has prevented an extensive excavation and, therefore, efforts to obtain information on the original layout (Fig. 41. 42). Unlike what happens in the Central Sector, in which practically all the architectural remains belong to the same building of the 12th century, in the southern sector there is a greater archaeological complexity due not only to the overlapping of the two palace phases, but also to the fragmentation and diversity of some spaces that are not articulated along a single axis. In particular, it can be seen how the walls have divergent orientations, due to the adaptation to the topography of the terrain and pre-existing structures, a fact that is clearly observed in the southern limit of the court, whose orientation differs from that of the four-part garden and the Central Sector (Fig. 6. 7).

128 In this sector a wall was added to the southern face of the tower and runs southward for at least 18.5 m (Fig. 41. 42). It is a very solid wall of rammed earth and stone, with a thickness of 55–58 cm. In addition, it stands out for clearly separating the spaces to the east and the west of it. The fact that in this wall there is no opening shows that these were areas with very different functions. Noteworthy is also its long survival, as it is present in all phases from the 12th century onward.

5.8.1 Western Sub-sector (A3)

129 This is the area to the west of the wall just described. Here, in 2018, we limited ourselves to making a 3.5 m × 6 m test trench (A3) (Fig. 43. 44). Its small size, the poor state of preservation of the remains, and the superimposition of the 13th-century channel on the remains of the 12th-century palace have made it difficult to interpret the latter. In the southern profile of the section, we identified a thick stratum deriving from the destruction of the 12th century palace, in which abundant pieces of finely carved calcarenite stone, bricks, and large fragments of wall plaster painted in dark red can be identified. Pottery was very scarce, but a fragment of a jar with stamped decoration stands out.

130 We can generally conclude that, for the 12th century in this subsector, we can document the prolongation of the north-south walkway that we have identified further north (Fig. 16 a, No. 5), to which is attached a narrow row of small rooms, about 4.0 m wide.

108 Jiménez-Castillo – Camarero 2021, 18.
109 Münzer 2008, 105.
110 Navarro et al. 2019, 17.
111 Del Pulgar 1780, 339.

43

Fig. 43: Monteagudo, southern sector. Excavated trench with remains of the north-south walkway and bay of phase II, looking east.

44

Fig. 44: Monteagudo, southern sector. Remains of the north-south walkway and adjoining rooms preserved below the aqueduct, looking north.

131 As for the walkway, only its 1.1 m-wide eastern half, built of lime reinforced rammed earth remains. There are also remains of a central channel that was 45 cm wide and up to 40 cm deep; its two interior faces are made by encased rammed earth rather than being reinforced by bricks set on edge, as is the case in the channels near the tower. Unfortunately, nothing is preserved of the western limit of the walkway.

132 Of the rooms to the east of the walkway, a trapezoidal chamber has been identified, whose main axis is perpendicular to the walkway (Fig. 41. 42. 43). In the north it adjoins the tower, while to the east is located the long wall that separates this

sector from the eastern area[112]. Only its southern wall could be excavated on one of its faces and it was found to be a lime coated earth wall (›tapia calicostrada‹). The few visible remains of the western wall are made of brick, belonging to the reinforcement of door jambs. Its interior face could not be excavated because it was covered by the remains of the later canal.

133 It is very likely that there was at least a second room to the south. Unfortunately, the area was very altered and the wall that separated it from the walkway and in which the entrance door was probably located was not preserved; however, in each of the profiles (north and south) there is a brick pillar preserved, which seems to reinforce the hypothesis of the existence of a door.

5.8.2 Eastern Subsector (A1 and A2)

134 What we know of the 12th century structures to the east of the dividing wall (Fig. 41. 42) is very fragmentary, because we have only been able to excavate the areas where the remains of the Late-Islamic palace have disappeared, which has provided significant, although very incomplete, information (Fig. 6. 7). Several walls of the original phase were reused or remodeled in the Late-Islamic phase, suggesting that the original layout and function was analogous to the spaces of the later phase. Of the original phase, we know that there was a building organized around a courtyard in which there was no western bay, although it did have a northern bay. We do not know anything about the eastern one until further exploration in that direction.

135 **Courtyard.** One of the trenches was made at the foot of the southeast corner of the tower, and there we located the northwest corner of a courtyard paved with rectangular and finely carved white sandstone slabs, placed at two different levels (Fig. 45). The slabs on the higher level (28.59 m ASL)[113], attached to the wall that delimits the building on the west, are rectangular and arranged perpendicular to the wall forming a perimeter sidewalk, whose foundation had to be reinforced at its inner edge. The paving located about 10 cm lower (28.49 m ASL) covered the inner part of the courtyard and is composed of similar stone slabs that appear to form rows running north-south; on the surface of some, incised lines are visible that mark the limit of the sidewalk as well as a diagonal.

136 The courtyard extended to the south, as we were able to verify in a trench excavated next to the north face of the great wall that later divided this space in phase IV. Here, we documented the lime mortar preparation for the pavement as well as a foundation structure of dry masonry with a face to the east, which could have served to support the sidewalk of stone slabs, now completely missing due to looting (Fig. 46).

137 On the wall that delimits the building on the west and in contact with the southeast corner of the tower, we found a fragment of a painted dado that must have covered the entire perimeter of the patio (Fig. 47). In the decoration we can identify dark red bands that formed rectangles, leaving the background white. It is possible that some of the panels were filled with geometric decoration creating an alternation of plain and decorated panels, like in the palace of the Castillejo de Monteagudo[114].

138 **Northern bay.** To the north of the courtyard and attached to the eastern side of the tower was a room that had not yet been excavated. Its interior width measured 4.0 m, similar to that of the hall of the Central Sector. In its southern wall, with a thickness of 78 cm, there is a door that connects the courtyard with the room to the north (Fig. 48).

112 At the north end of this wall, next to the tower, we found an opening through which one could access the eastern subsector, and which was later closed with masonry. After its demolition, we found that it did not have well-defined jambs, so we concluded that it could have been opened, as an improvised passage, once the 12th century palace was in ruins.

113 It is at the same level as the four-part garden to the west.

114 Navarro – Jiménez 1995a, fig. 51. 52. 53.

45

Fig. 45: Monteagudo, southern sector. Stratigraphic section with the brick pavement of phase IV above and stone pavement of phase II below. The demolition layer of the old building lies between both floors.

46

Fig. 46: Monteagudo, southern sector. Foundation of the walkway of the courtyard, looking west.

The door is 1 m wide, excluding the moldings, and its jambs were not reinforced with brick or a thicker layer of lime mortar. Its threshold (28.69 m ASL) is composed of a rectangular stone slab, located 10 cm above the sidewalk of the courtyard. Inside the threshold the floor was furnished with a very smooth lime mortar, probably extending into the room.

139 The interior structure of the wall in which the door is located was documented in a well that had been cut in recent times. While the foundation of the wall is composed of solid lime mortar and stone, the upper part is made of rammed earth only. This type of construction, as well as the lack of brick door jambs, make it similar to the second phase of the Central Sector (phase III) rather than the original building (phase II).

140 The jambs were decorated with a geometric pattern painted in dark red formed by the confluence on the same axis of vertical symmetry of two horizontal bands

Fig. 47: Monteagudo, southern sector. Detail of the painted geometric pattern on the northern end of the western wall of the courtyard, next to the tower (A on Fig. 48).

47

Fig. 48: Monteagudo, southern sector. Northwest corner of the courtyard of phase III (A 1.3.1) and the entrance door to the north bay, looking north. Remains were found of a painted dado that ran along the base of the courtyard (A) and continued along the jamb of the doorway (B). In the foreground are pavement slabs of the courtyard and its surrounding walkway (C).

48

which, when approaching each other, bend and become vertical (Fig. 49 a). It is at the angle where they change direction that the artisan introduced a curved motif to replace the usual 90° angle. The presence of this motive is familiar from more elaborate dados discovered in the Castillejo de Monteagudo[115] as well as in other Mardanīšid monu-

115 A good parallel is found in one of the panels (C-4) discovered in situ in the palace during the excavation of 1924–1925 (Robles 2019, 64). An identical solution appears in a fragment that remained unpublished and is kept by the Museo Arqueológico Nacional in Madrid, whose photo and description have been published (Eiroa – Gómez 2019, 221 cat. 78).

49

Fig. 49: Monteagudo. Examples of painted geometric patterns: a. southern sector of Monteagudo (B on Fig. 48). – b. Dār aṣ-Ṣuġrà, first phase. – c. Dār aṣ-Ṣuġrà, second phase. – d. Almoravid building under the extension of the Qarawīyīn mosque in Fez.

ments such as the Dār aṣ-Ṣuġrà (Fig. 49 b. c)[116] and the oratory of the alcázar of Murcia[117]. A precedent is found in one of the dwellings excavated under the Almoravid extension of the Qarawīyīn mosque in Fez, which is securely dated to 1134 (Fig. 49 d)[118].

141 **Southern bay.** To the south of the massive east-west wall erected in the next phase (IV), we excavated a large trench that extended over part of the western bay of the 13th century building (phase V) to be described later. Here, we documented some remains belonging to the 12th century palace. Preserved is a 40 cm-thick wall whose orientation is slightly different from that of all other buildings documented in the area and that is set against the main north-south wall (Fig. 41. 42) The wall is made of lime coated earth (›tapia calicostrada‹), plastered on both sides and with remains of painted decoration in the south. A door opening is located at the same level as the pavement of the courtyard farther north. The fact that the calcarenite slab that forms the threshold is aligned with the northern face of the wall and that the lime pavement of the space to the south invades the thickness of the wall are evidence that the wall separated an exterior space in the north from an interior space to the south. Although we have not been able to confirm it archaeologically, everything suggests that this wall is the southern limit of the same courtyard that we saw further north.

142 It is interesting to compare the similarities that exist between this opening and the door of the northern bay. In both it has been verified that their jambs are made of the same lime coated earth construction (›tapia calicostrada‹) and that they are not reinforced with brick jambs; we have also seen that their thresholds are made of calcarenite

116 The dado we are most interested in appeared in the south hall of the palace and was covered by a new one made during a later renovation. Although some authors date it to the Almoravid period (Robles 2019, 56), we consider it to be an early Mardanīšid work, contemporary with those discovered by Sobejano in the Castillejo de Monteagudo.

117 In the excavations carried out in the oratory of the Islamic alcázar of Murcia under the present Church of San Juan de Dios, the fragment of a dado was located that has remained unpublished and whose stratigraphic context is unknown. Although it has been published as an Almoravid work (Eiroa – Gómez 2019, 178 f. cat. 36), we consider it to be early Mardanīšid.

118 García Granados 2018.

slabs. The similarity of construction, taken together with the apparent continuity of the courtyard pavement under the wall that divided this sector in the following phase IV, as well as the fact that the floors of both sectors are at approximately the same level, lead us to believe that we are looking at the same building whose courtyard measured 12.65 m along its north-south axis.

6 Reform of the Central Sector (Phase III)

143 Although we know with certainty that the original building of phase II underwent various modifications and alterations after its completion, the exact extent of these changes still needs to be defined, as well as their possible relationship to one of the two destructions suffered by the ›almunia‹ according to the historic sources. We have identified at least three major changes that altered the original building. The first is the *ex novo* construction of the entire southern bay of the Reservoir Courtyard and this is undoubtedly the most important alteration, due to its size and the functional and spatial changes that this reform entailed (Fig. 16 b; 19; 50). The second was limited to the reconstruction of the southwest corner of the aforementioned bay (Fig. 50) The third corresponds to the rebuilding of the Pavilion Hall (Fig. 27). Other archaeological evidence indicates the existence of minor alterations related to the refurbishment of some spaces.

6.1 Southern Bay (B8–B11)

144 The most important alteration to the Reservoir Courtyard was its enlargement to the south by the construction of a new bay, founded on top of the existing east-west walkway that bordered the palace and on a narrow strip of land of the adjoining Reserved Garden (Fig. 50. 51. 52. 53). The new bay needed to be attached to the southern wall of the Reservoir Courtyard and the hallway. The interior width of the new bay is 3.25 m, but we do not know its length because it continues east in one of the plots that we have not excavated.

145 In order to build the new bay, it was essential to build *ex novo* the southern wall which, once erected, would constitute one of the side façades of the renovated palace. When the new bay was defined, it was necessary to add a layer of earth and rubble to its interior so that its floors would be at the same height as the walkway of the Reservoir Courtyard.

146 Of its southern wall only two layers remain visible. The lower layer, which functions as a base and the beginning of the foundation, is made of solid concrete and stone (Fig. 51). The upper layer, which has largely disappeared, was constructed of lime coated earth (›tapia calicostrada‹), reinforced with brick pillars placed within the earthwork (Fig. 19); at the base of this layer of rammed earth we can see, in some places, pieces of dry stone and in others bricks placed as inclined headers in a herringbone pattern. The remains of only two brick pillars are preserved in the eastern half of the wall. They were placed on a layer of fresh mortar and measure 60 cm × 72 cm. On the outside the bricks were laid as headers and stretchers, the inside was filled with brick fragments. The brick pillars were constructed before the rammed earth sections were constructed.

147 The interior of the bay was subdivided by at least three walls with foundations of different thicknesses (Fig. 52. 53). In addition, we identified remains of what appear to have been a drain leading in the direction of the garden. The walls delimit three distinct rooms, starting from the west: a new hallway in the southwest corner of the building (B8), a smaller room (B9), and a large hall with alcoves (B10 and 11). The entrance door to this hall must have marked the north-south symmetry axis of the palace, so that at the eastern end of the bay extending below the lemon orchard, there would

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Fig. 50: Monteagudo, southern extension of the Central Sector. Remains of the hallway and the southern bay, looking east.

be other rooms similar to those documented or, at least, of the same proportions. The poor building quality of the dividing walls and their poor orientation could indicate the existence of a continuous ceiling throughout the southern bay, supported by the north and south walls, as well as the presence of a second floor that only extended over the spaces flanking the central hall[119].

148 It can be assumed that this enlargement of the palace was repeated on the north side, which would further modify the design of the palace to finally make it much more compact. With this reform, the original courtyard, which basically served as a communication between the Pavilion Hall to the west and the hypothetical hall of state to the east, was transformed into a conventional courtyard that, in addition to having its east-west axis, was provided with a new north-south axis (Fig. 16 b) with two new halls facing each other across the courtyard[120]. The layout of the palace in this phase, with four bays around a large water reservoir that occupied the entire surface of the courtyard, can be considered as the direct precedent of the El Partal Bajo palace, the first Nasrid palace in the Alhambra.

6.1.1 New Hallway (B8)

149 The westernmost room is a rectangular, 3.2 m × 8.5 m-large space that occupies the western end of the bay and that we identify as the new first and main space of the entranceway to the palace (Fig. 50). Its entrance door from the outside, which is not preserved, must have been located in its western wall[121]. The fact that this

119 In theory, there could have been two superimposed halls as is frequent in Nasrid architecture, but the absence of porticoes that could have support galleries on the upper floor, both on the southern and western side of the Reservoir Courtyard, contradicts this hypothesis.

120 An example for a rectangular courtyard in which the main halls are located along the minor axis is the Palace of the Lions in the Alhambra.

121 Before the campaign of 2023, we erroneously argued that this room was the second part of a hallway that led to the Reservoir Courtyard (Navarro – Jiménez 2023, 42).

51

Fig. 51: Monteagudo, southern extension of the Central Sector, looking east. Visible is the walkway of phase II with its canal (A), the entrance to the alcove (B) and the outer wall (C) of the southern extension of phase III, as well as the walkway of phase III (D) and the first arch of the aqueduct of phase V (1).

Fig. 52: Monteagudo, southern extension of the Central Sector. Subsidiary room and hall in the southern bay, looking east.

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Fig. 53: Monteagudo, southern extension of the Central Sector, looking west. Visible is the walkway of phase II with its canal (A), the twin openings of the alcove of phase III (B), as well as the wall dividing the alcove from the adjoining room, with an opening that was used during the construction and later blocked with bricks set on edge (C).

room shares a dividing wall with the old hallway (B7) allows it to communicate with it through an opening, of which there is no evidence other than a stone slab belonging to its threshold[122]. The transit between the two spaces allowed the new hallway to have a triple bend, similar to that of other palaces, such as the Palacio de Leones in the Alhambra. When the entrance door of the old hallway was blocked the room had no lighting or ventilation, making an opening in the ceiling necessary which, in addition to illuminating the entranceway, would do the same with the adjoining new hallway (Fig. 16 b).

150 The south and west walls of the new hallway were subsequently removed and rebuilt from the ground up, leaving no trace of their original construction. The amorphous character of the foundations replacing the old wall contrasts with the regularity of the walls belonging to the previous phases which, following the usual practice, were built using wooden formwork. The new foundation was built by excavating a trench when the adjoining walkway still existed and was filled with stones of a larger size than usual, laid in lime-rich mortar (Fig. 50). The excavation of the trench caused the destruction of all floors inside the hallway, and even partially affected the older walkway underneath, which had been covered by the construction of the new hallway. As for the reason behind the replacement of the walls, it is worth pointing out the special vulnerability of the outer corners, especially when they coincide with the lowest level of the building, as is the case here. Another reason for weakness may have been the door that we suppose existed in the western wall. We

122 It is a 4.5 cm-thick rectangular slab of very fragmented calcarenite. The hypothetical span did not leave any sign in the foundation, nor is there any trace of brick reinforcements of door jambs, which suggests that the opening was not foreseen when the wall was built.

do not know when this repair was carried out, so we cannot rule out that it was done in the Late-Islamic phase (IV), when the pergola garden was designed on the ruins of the 12th century palace.

151 The floor of the hallway is made of lime mortar at an elevation ranging from 29.70 m ASL in the northwest corner to 29.57 m ASL along the south side, the latter being analogous to that of the second pavement of the old hallway (29.57–29.69 m ASL), and about 17–30 cm below that of the Reservoir Courtyard (29.87 m ASL). The elevation of the new walkway located to the west and south of the bay is not preserved, but it can be assumed to have been at a similar level[123].

6.1.2 Small Room (B9)

152 The small room is located to the east of the new hallway just described. It has a rectangular floor plan, with dimensions of 3.2 m × 4.4–4.6 m. Because of its dimensions and location, it seems that this was a secondary dependency whose function is completely unknown.

153 The room is separated from the hallway by a 36 cm-thick wall, the thickest of all subdividing walls of the new bay, which seems to be due to the interest of its builder to minimize the noise that is usually generated in a busy place like the entrance (Fig. 35. 36. 52). The wall is built of brick (23 cm × 10.5 cm × 3.5 cm) that reused fragments of the same material in its interior. Near its southern end, its continuity is interrupted by three unhewn stones, which might indicate the blocking of an old opening; the location of the opening in the foundation suggests that it was used only during the time that the work lasted, a period during which the workers could circulate through the different rooms of the bay without being forced to go out to the Reservoir Courtyard. The northern end of the wall partially destroyed the existing wall of the old hallway, while the southern end was located outside the area of the old walkway making the construction of an additional brick foundation necessary, embedded between the old walkway and the new south wall (Fig. 36).

154 The eastern wall of the room is narrower than the western one, and its thickness corresponds to the length of the bricks used to construct it (23 cm × 11 cm × 3 cm). All of them are laid horizontally, except for one section that is slightly displaced to the south and has bricks set on edge (Fig. 52. 53); this arrangement of the bricks could indicate the presence of another door used during the construction period.

155 The complete destruction of all walls down to just below ground level, in addition to explaining the disappearance of the pavement, also removed all traces of an entrance door. This is especially as the door is likely to have been opened in the pre-existing northern wall in which it had not been foreseen, without the usual brick door jamb reinforcements.

6.1.3 Hall with Alcoves (B10 and B11)

156 Farther east of the previous room we excavated part of a large hall (B11), including its western alcove (B10).

157 The alcove, measuring 3.25 m × 2.30 m, opens to the hall through twin openings, each 78 cm wide, with a central pillar that served as the foundation of a column (Fig. 19. 53). It is surprising that this room is not completely orthogonal to the north and south walls of the bay. The three pillars of the dividing wall were built in very different ways: the northern one was cut into the existing wall in a trench filled with lime mortar and brick fragments; the southern one is set against the new south wall and has a much deeper foundation, while the central pillar rests on the pavement of the old walkway. The pillars at the ends, being structurally more important, were given greater solidity in

123 The old walkway had a level of 29.47 m ASL in this area.

the foundation. They are rectangular in plan (76 cm × 35 cm)[124] and are made of bricks laid in regular rows. The central pillar is also made of brickwork, measuring 44 cm × 35 cm at the bottom and reduced to 23 cm × 35 cm further up.

158 Remains of the entrance door of the hall are located in the northern wall, under the channel of phase V (Fig. 65). Preserved are the bottom layers of two brick pillars that formed the door jambs. The door would have been cut into the pre-existing south wall of the Reservoir Courtyard. The distance between the two pillars is 2.70 m, a span wide enough to suggest a twin opening with a central column.

159 We know less of the western half of the hall, as it is mostly located beneath the neighboring lemon orchard. The excavated remains are sufficient to indicate that the hall was a large oblong room, with alcoves at either end (Fig. 16 b); the remains are enough to reconstruct its overall plan, given the likely symmetry of its layout. The entrance door is likely to have marked the north-south axis of both the hall and the adjoining Reservoir Courtyard. The total dimension of the hall including the two alcoves would have been 3.25 m × 16 m.

160 The construction of the southern hall and, most probably, of another hall located in the opposite bay, must be seen as a qualitative change that substantially modified the overall layout of the building, transforming a very elementary compositional scheme to a more complex one of a palace-courtyard type surrounded by four bays. These architectural transformations cannot be understood without changes in function. A possible explanation could be found in the written sources describing that the ›almunia‹ was destroyed by the Almohads in 1166 and 1171. Based on this information it is possible that the Central Sector was restored after the destruction of 1166 and that its extension was due to the need to accommodate functions that had been accommodated originally in areas not rebuilt.

161 The construction of the south bay and, probably, another one to the north, made the entire building much wider than originally planned, from 26.3 m to about 34 m. This enlargement in plan contrasts with the reduction in height of the portico, resulting in a new design that is wider than it is tall (Fig. 30).

6.2 New Walkway (C1)

162 With the extension of the palace to the south the old walkway (Fig. 16 a, No. 1) was built over, making the construction of a new walkway necessary (Fig. 16 b, No. 6). Only the eastern end of this walkway is still preserved, under the aqueduct of the 13th century (Fig. 18). Here, it was found to have been 2.50 m wide (Fig. 51). The walkway was made with abundant lime mortar on the outer face, while its interior is composed of a compacted filling of earth mixed with fragments of construction materials, including bricks, tiles, stone slabs, and rammed earth. The walkway reached an approximate height of 1.35 m, resulting in a pavement level of 29.93 m ASL, slightly higher than pavement of the second walkway at the foot of the southern tower (Fig. 16 a, No. 3; 29.69 m ASL), so we must conclude that these two structures may have been contemporaneous.

163 Although no remains have been preserved to the west, we have indirect evidence to affirm that its pavement must have been below the level of 29.93 m ASL documented at its eastern end. The entrance hall was located at 29.57–29.70 m ASL and the portico at 29.65–29.70 m ASL, 23–36 cm below the level of the walkway (29.93 m ASL). These differences in level between east and west are only possible if the walkway was designed with a steep downward slope to the west or by the interposition of a step.

124 The pillars of the alcoves of the portico and the Pavilion Hall of the foundational phase have similar dimensions.

7 Late-Islamic Palace (Phase IV)

164 The building was constructed on the ruins of the 12th century palace (Fig. 54), on top of a 1.20 m-thick layer of rubble (Fig. 45). Some of the old structures were reused (Fig. 41), which could indicate that the new residence also partially reproduced the spatial organization of the old one. Although we know very little of the floor plan of the new palace, there is some data indicating that it was more modest and reduced, as shown by the sectors of the old palace that were not rebuilt at this time and that were transformed into agricultural areas, as is the case with the garden of the pergola which was designed on top of the ruined Reservoir Courtyard.

165 We do not have evidence for the absolute date of this construction phase within the chronological range between Almohad conquest in 1171 and the incorporation into Castile in 1243. The rise to power of Emir Ibn Hūd al-Mutawakkil in 1228 meant the foundation of a new Islamic state with its capital in Murcia would have justified the creation of a new palatial area within the Monteagudo estate, but the modesty of the building discovered seems a solid argument against such an attribution, especially if we compare it with the dimensions and quality of the work done by Ibn Hūd in the Dār aṣ-Ṣuġrà of Murcia. Therefore, we should not rule out the possibility that it is a project promoted by an Almohad governor between 1171 and 1228, just as at that time some reforms were carried out in the palace of the ›almunia‹ of Dār aṣ-Ṣuġrà, as we (JNP) documented[125]. More consistent with being considered a project of Ibn Hūd in Monteagudo is the fortified complex of Larache and the large water basin in its vicinity, known as Huerto Hondo[126] (Fig. 3).

166 While recognizing that the information we have about the building is very scarce, we believe that it is sufficient to reconstruct its general plan (Fig. 54). Based on the archaeological evidence of an arcaded courtyard, and probably a second courtyard that preceded it organized along a north-south axis, we suggest that this access was arranged perpendicularly to a main east-west axis of a palatial nucleus that existed further north.

167 In the following we will present four elements of this palatial phase. They coincide with the areas excavated of the 12th century palace, but now we will describe them in reverse, from south to north, starting with the sector that has provided the most relevant information.

7.1 Access Courtyard to the Palace

168 The excavation of the former eastern subsector (A1 and A2) made it possible to document, above the 12th century levels, the very fragmentary remains of two buildings organized around a courtyard. In the northernmost subsector (A1), we initially excavated two sections that were extended until the access to the palace was identified. The L-shaped excavated area corresponds to a quarter of the courtyard, the entire western bay and part of the northern and southern ones. Of the rest, we know nothing because it remains covered by a layer of rubble.

125 The excavation of the four-part garden uncovered a series of architectural structures that were published as belonging to an intermediate phase, located between the Mardanīšid and the Hudi period and described as ›residual‹. Fragments of Almohad plasterwork were also uncovered. Navarro 1998, 108–110. 114 fig. 15.

126 José Manzano and Francisca Bernal are in favor of dating the Castillo de Larache to »a very late phase of the Islamic period (once the Castillejo was abandoned), in the last quarter of the 12th or first quarter of the 13th century, as a fortified palace of the Almohad governors or of the Hūdi emirs, the last independent rulers of Islamic Murcia until the Castilian conquest.« Manzano – Bernal 1993b, 165 f. While Alfonso Robles ascribes it to Almohad times: »We believe therefore that the existence of Larache is certain in the reign of Abū ᶜAbd Allāh ibn Hūd al-Mutawakkil (when the poet visited the estate that he would later evoke in the *Qaṣida*, written already at the Hafsid court), although we believe it to be more likely to have been built in the last quarter of the 12th century« (Robles 2016, 785).

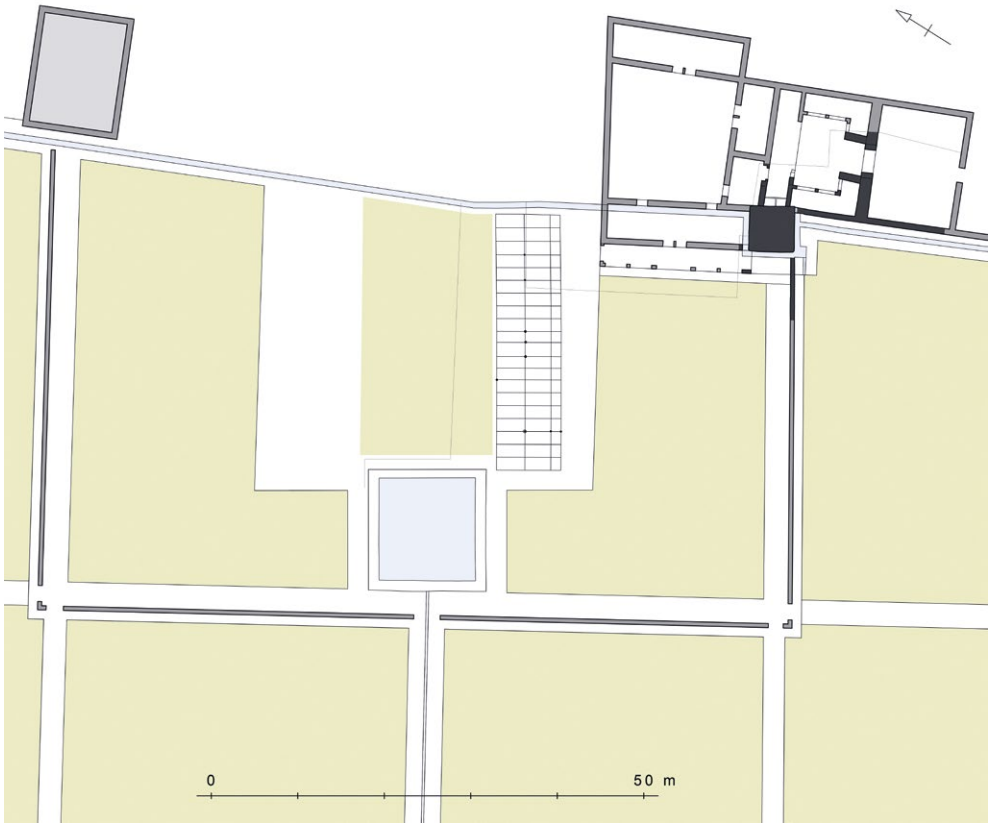

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Fig. 54: Monteagudo. Hypothetical restitution of the ground plan of the palatial area in phase IV.

169 During the campaign of 2023, we realized that the excavated structures were part of an arcaded courtyard surrounded on three sides by galleries which, in Islamic architecture, is found both in mosques and palaces. In this case it served as the forecourt of the Late-Islamic palace that we assume is still buried beneath the citrus orchard to the north[127]. Likewise, we noticed that the doors to the north and south of the courtyard are placed along the same north-south axis of the building. Based on this, we now assume the courtyard to have been symmetrical and to have had a rectangular ground plan, measuring 8.3 m east-west and 5.2 m north-south, which is a rather anomalous and poor solution (Fig. 41).

170 Given the fragmentary state of the remains, it would have been difficult to identify them as the entrance area to a palace, if we did not have as parallels the courtyard of the Guardia at the Generalife, reconstructed by Torres Balbas (Fig. 55 a), the Patio de Machuca, located in front of the Mexuar of the Comares Palace in the Alhambra (Fig. 55 b), and the Patio de la Montería, located in front of the monumental façade of the palace of Pedro I in the Royal alcázar of Seville (Fig. 55 c)[128]. These examples suggest that a second forecourt was located to the south. If so, it was destroyed when the 13th century residence was built (phase V), which we will describe later. The same parallels also indicate that the main entrance door to the palace complex was located further south in front of the second courtyard, in the vicinity of the Camino de Granada. It is at this point that an old road culminated that has since disappeared, as the aerial images Ruiz de Alda took in 1928 show (Fig. 5).

127 At the time of its excavation in 2018, this space was interpreted as a residential building of the 13th century, organized around a courtyard, in whose western front there was a hall. Navarro – Jiménez 2023, 32 f.

128 See Arnold 2023, 490–556 fig. 34.

Fig. 55: Entrance courtyards of palaces of the 13th and 14th century: a. Generalife (1273–1302). – b. Patio de Machuca, Alhambra (1362). – c. Patio de la Montería, palace of Pedro I, Sevilla (1356–1369).

55

7.1.1 East-west Wall and the Gate

171 In the Late-Islamic phase IV, the courtyard was delimited to the south by a massive wall running east-west. Its considerable thickness of 1.30 m made the construction of a monumental gate possible (Fig. 41. 42. 56. 57), similar to the one at the entrance of the Patio de la Monteria in Seville[129]. The wall is a lime-coated, earthen wall (›tapia calicostrada‹) that has two very different faces: the southern face, more solid and thick, is of very compact mortar and rests on a foundation trench that protrudes about 15 cm from the face of the wall; the northern face, also of a lime-coated earth (›tapia calicostrada‹), starts at a much lower level (55 cm), is less thick and was not built in a foundation trench. The disparity between the two faces forces us to consider them as the result of two different periods of construction, as is shown also by the misalignments of the imprints of the framework. On the southern face, the imprints of two wooden casing boards are preserved that do not have corresponding imprints on the northern face. The lime-coated southern face must therefore have been constructed when the rammed earth construction of the northern face already existed, making the northern part older than the southern part.

172 In the wall, a door with a span of 2.74 m is preserved that is flanked by jambs reinforced with bricks (24.5 cm × 11.5 cm × 4 cm). The door construction is not well-integrated into the wall, because in addition to the fact that the bricks are not well-faced, they do not sit properly on the lower part of the wall. In fact, the door appears to have been part of the construction of the southern face and to have been cut into the already existing northern face.

129 See Almagro 2009.

56

Fig. 56: Monteagudo, entrance courtyard. Remains of the blocked gateway, looking north.

7.1.2 Vestibule

173 The monumental gate gave access to a rectangular space measuring 3.9 m × 2.5 m that functioned as an entrance area or vestibule, completely open to the courtyard in the north (Fig. 56). It was delimited to the east and west by two 80 cm-thick, lime-coated, earthen walls (›tapia calicostrada‹). The considerable thickness of the side walls may have been necessary to accommodate niches for guards sitting within the vestibule, as can be seen in the first forecourts of the Generalife[130]. Similar vestibules are also found in the Patio de Machuca in the Alhambra[131] and in the Patio de Montería in Seville[132] (Fig. 55). The thickness of the two walls may also be explained by the height of the vestibule, possibly with a room on the upper floor to serve as a lookout.

7.1.3 Galleries

174 The courtyard was surrounded by galleries on all sides except for the north, where a hall was located providing access to the palace beyond (Fig. 58. 59. 60). The western gallery is a space open to the courtyard through two wide openings of unequal size (2.0 m and 2.15 m wide) separated by rectangular pillars (36 cm × 49.5 cm) made of brick laid in lime mortar. Only the one located in the southwest corner has an L-shaped section (Fig. 58). The gallery is paved with bricks laid in a herringbone pattern, a solution that was widely used in the houses of Murcia from the time of the Castilian conquest in the mid-13th century onwards[133].

175 We do not know if the western gallery continued uninterrupted to the south and then east, forming an open, L-shaped space, or if the western bay was closed off by a wall at the corner pillar with the southern gallery forming a separate space. The

130 Orihuela 1996, 201 fig. 109 plan 43; Arnold 2023, 541 fig. 51.

131 Arnold 2023, 508 fig. 5. 34.

132 Almagro 2009; Rodríguez 2015, 280–283 fig. 164–167. See also the north entrance to the mosque of Madīnat az-Zahrā'. Vallejo 2010, fig. 14.

133 Navarro – Jiménez 2011, 100–104.

Fig. 57: Monteagudo, entrance courtyard. Southern wall with entrance gate: a. west-east section, looking north. – b. east-west section, looking south.

58

Fig. 58: Monteagudo, entrance courtyard. Aerial view of the remains of brick pavement in the western gallery.

southern gallery is open to the courtyard by means of a rather narrow, 1.3 m-wide bay that adjoins directly the wall of the vestibule. The differences in the width of the three openings of the gallery must have been reconciled somehow in the design of the arches. Their thresholds were formed by a of bricks set on edge that rested on a bed of two layers of bricks placed horizontally. The surface of the pavement of the gallery is now very irregular, ranging from 29.07–29.23 m ASL, but originally must have been located at about 29.15 m ASL. The pavement of the courtyard, located at a considerably lower level, has not been encountered.

7.1.4 Northern Bay

176 Situated to the east of the tower and to the south of the citrus orchard, the northern bay is rectangular, 2.5 m wide, only partially excavated so far, and of unknown function (Fig. 59). It must have served as a transitional space that allowed access to the interior of the palace after passing through the courtyard. In other buildings of state, this room is a hallway with bent entrance[134], or a kind of council hall (Spanish »mexuar«) as in the Comares Palace in the Alhambra[135]. The available evidence suggests a structure of different design.

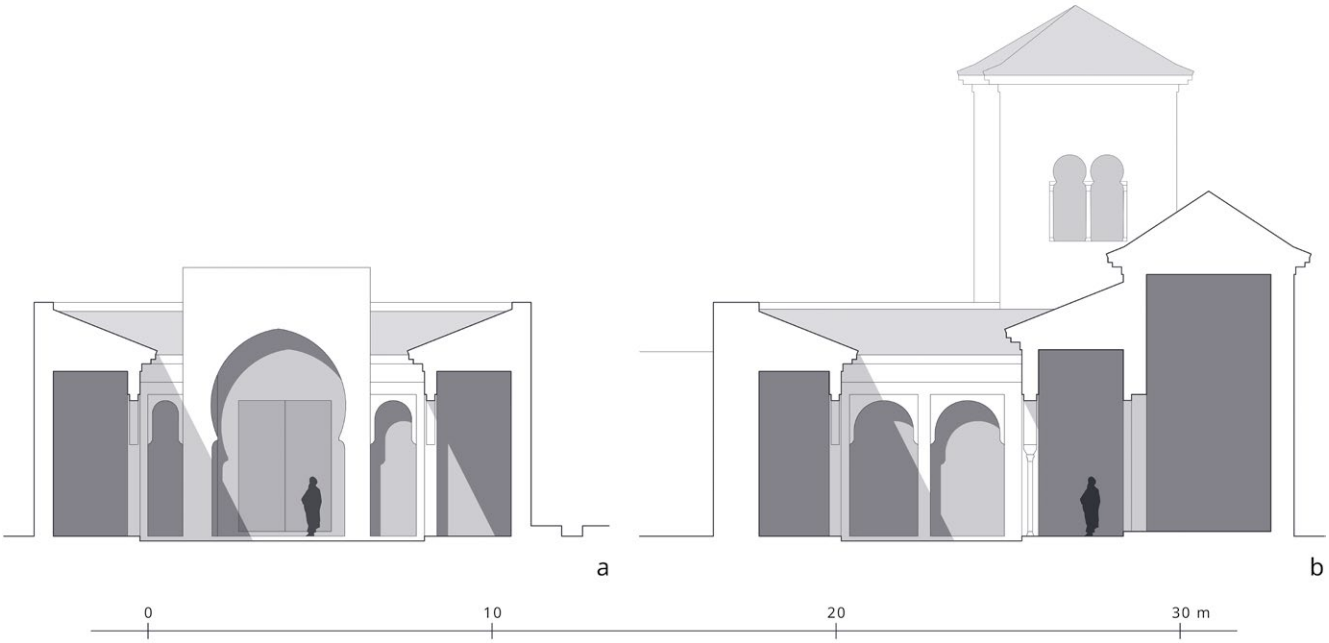
177 The two walls that delimit the bay to the north and south are made of lime-coated earth (›tapia calicostrada‹) with openings reinforced by jambs of brick

134 In the Generalife we find a small hallway and a staircase that gives access to the courtyard. Orihuela 1996, 201 fig. 109 plan 43. On the contrary, in the palace of Pedro I in Seville the bay behind the façade of the Patio de la Montería is a hallway of larger dimensions. Rodríguez 2015, 288 f.

135 Arnold 2023.

Fig. 59: Monteagudo, entrance courtyard. Brick pavement in the northern bay, looking west.

59



60

Fig. 60: Monteagudo, entrance courtyard. Hypothetical restitution: a. east-west section with entrance gate, looking south. – b. south-north section, looking west.

masonry. The position of the openings in relation to the courtyard suggests the existence of a row of three openings, making the room a very permeable space like a portico.

178 In its interior are walls constructed in a T-shaped layout, possibly the base of a bench. The floor was paved in a similar way to the galleries, with bricks placed in a herringbone pattern at about 29.23 m ASL. In some areas we detected repairs

61

Fig. 61: Monteagudo. Remains of walkways and portico of phase IV to the north and west of the tower, looking northeast.

of very poor quality and even a hearth attached to the inner face of the jamb of the opening to the courtyard, which seems to correspond to a phase of decadence of the palace life possibly during the Castilian occupation in the last quarter of the 13th century.

179 We know nothing about the space further north, except for a narrow strip of brick floor located at a slightly higher level (about 29.27 m ASL) (Fig. 59).

7.2 Western Bay and Its Extension

180 Attached to the westernmost part of the north side of the tower, we excavated a brick pavement that we believe belonged to an oblong hall (Fig. 61) whose north-south development allowed it to close the hypothetical main courtyard of the Late-Islamic palace (phase IV) to the west. We cannot rule out that this room was also connected to the Reserved Garden, as was the case in the Reservoir Courtyard with its western Pavilion Hall, whose main façade opened onto the four-part garden. The bricks of the pavement were placed in a rather irregular pattern, at 29.62–29.66 m ASL, 35–43 cm above the northern bay of the entrance courtyard located further east.

181 In a second stage, the Late-Islamic palace was expanded to the west, invading the north-south walkway and covering the pre-existing canal with a brick pavement, 38–40 cm above the gallery of the entrance courtyard of the palace (29.53–29.55 m ASL). At the front edge of the walkway an arcade appears to have been constructed, of which we encountered the remains of a brick pillar. At the same time, a new, 1.1 m-wide walkway was added to the west, at a level of about 29.40 m ASL, 13–15 cm below the level of the previous walkway and 82 cm above the adjoining garden (Fig. 37. 38). It was constructed of lime-coated earth (›tapia calicostrada‹) that was attached to the old walkway. With this expansion westward, the Late-Islamic palace not only gained some surface area, but probably received a more dignified façade toward the garden.

7.3 Walkways around the Tower

182 In this section we will analyze two walkways that converge at the foot of the tower, in the southeast corner of the Reserved Garden. The evidence shows that the two walkways were built over those of the 12th century, increasing their height and, in some cases, their width (Fig. 37).

7.3.1 North-south Walkway

183 This walkway, running north-south, has two distinct segments, separated by the enclosure wall of the Reserved Garden (Fig. 38. 39). The first segment begins in the north, attached to the south side of the Reservoir Courtyard, and ends at the enclosure wall of the Reserved Garden to the south. At this southern end, next to the western face of the tower, we excavated a section of the walkway in which the pavement was raised about 37–47 cm to reach an elevation of 29.63–29.73 m ASL. The increase was made by erecting two retaining walls on either side made of bricks and lime mortar, which served to contain a filling of earth and small stones. The top was paved with brick arranged in a herringbone pattern, of which some fragments are preserved (Fig. 38). The walkway is 1.95 m wide and not attached to the tower, because a channel was constructed to run along three sides of the tower. The channel was 65 cm wide, 30 cm deep, and rests on a 10 cm-thick lime mortar floor, 36 cm above the level 12th century channel, at 29.23 m ASL.

184 The second segment of the walkway starts from the southwest corner of the tower, outside the Reserved Garden (Fig. 54). At this point, the walkway first runs eastward and then continues southward, parallel to the north-south wall that had divided the area into two spaces since the 12th century. This change of direction is due to the fact that the part of the 12th century palace located to the west of this wall (A3) was never rebuilt after its first destruction, which forced the new walkway to abandon the old trajectory and move eastwards to the limit of the Late-Islamic palace that, in this case, coincides with the wall mentioned above.

185 Parallel to the southern front of the tower we find the remains of the walkway and the channel reused in the solid concrete construction of the 13th century aqueduct (Fig. 62). The channel is well preserved, showing two outlets: the smaller one is located at its western end and must have been used to irrigate the garden; the larger one, lined with a large fragment of a ceramic ›athanor‹, is located at the opposite end and connects to the western gallery of the forecourt of the Late-Islamic palace. Unfortunately, the sector of the gallery immediately next to the ›athanor‹ was destroyed by the recent excavation of a well, which prevents us from knowing the reason why the water was directed to that part of the building.

186 The next segment of the channel runs southward (Fig. 42. 63) and is attached to the wall that delimits the forecourt of the Late-Islamic residence (phase V). Only the channel has been preserved here, while the western boundary of the walkway was destroyed by the 13th-century aqueduct (phase V) that was built on top of it. The walkway may have been about 2.75 m wide, including the width of the channel.

7.3.2 East-west Walkway

187 From the north-south walkway located within the Reserved Garden, a walkway runs perpendicularly westward, on top of the east-west walkway of the 12th century. It is a rammed earth construction that has been partially preserved thanks to the 13th-century aqueduct that was built over it (Fig. 37). As in the previous phase, its southern boundary was the lime-coated, earthen wall (›tapia calicostrada‹) that enclosed the Reserved Garden, a structure whose outer face was repaired with brick at this time.

62

Fig. 62: Monteagudo. Remains of water channel running along the west and south side of the tower.

7.4 Pergola Garden

188 In the Late-Islamic phase, a garden was developed on top of the platform that had been created by the Central Sector and the surrounding walkway. To do so, it was necessary to remove the ruins of the old building, fill and level the reservoir of the Reservoir Courtyard with rubble, and plant a garden on top (Fig. 54). The existence of this new garden is demonstrated by a pergola that was constructed along the southern sector of the platform, extending in an east-west direction. Preserved are the imprints left in the ground by the wooden posts of the pergola (Fig. 19. 64). Six imprints are arranged in a row, about 1.5 m apart, running along the edge of the old southern walkway of the Reservoir Courtyard and even the old hallway. Parallel to the previous one to the north and south there are two additional rows at distances of about 3 m, of which we have only found two imprints with the same characteristics, located on the western walkway of the Reservoir Courtyard and in the new hallway.

189 The tradition of this type of pergola goes back to classical times, as can be seen for example in the house of Octavius Quartio/Loreius Tibertinus in Pompeii[136]. It is also documented in detail in Andalusi agricultural treatises. The Granada-born aṭ-Ṭiġnarī (d. 1118) differentiates pergolas that were placed along walkways and those placed within garden areas[137]: »In large almunias (*al-munà al-kibār*) the frames (*farākīn*, pl. of *furka*) of the arbors (*ġarīš*) should be placed [at a sufficiently height], so that the person walking can [easily] pass underneath. In the case of gardens (*riyāḍāt*) and [in places] where people do not enter, [it shall be done] in such a way that the person walking has between the bunches of grapes (*ʿanāqīd al-ʿinab*) and his head [a distance] of not less than two palms«[138].

190 The continuity in the use of such pergolas in late-16th-century Granada is attested by the depiction of the estates that extended along the Darro River in the »Plataforma de la ciudad de Granada hasta el monte sacro de Valparaíso«[139]. It is rare to

136 Jashemski 1993, 82 f.

137 An example of this is the bower depicted on the left side of folio 13r of the aforementioned manuscript of the tale of Bayāḍ and Riyāḍ.

138 Translation from Arabic to Spanish by Inmaculada Camarero. Al-Ṭiġnarī 2006, 343 f.; Jiménez-Castillo – Camarero 2021, 19.

139 See Tito – Casares-Porcel 1999.

63

Fig. 63: Monteagudo. Water channel of phase IV running north-south, looing east. Behind the wall the remains of the entrance courtyard (left) and the late-Islamic house (right).

archaeologically document aspects related to Andalusi gardens beyond the architectural elements and information on the plants derived from archeobotany; for this reason, the discovery of this pergola in Monteagudo is of particular interest.

191 It is possible that the restauration of the southwest corner of the Central Sector should also be dated to this period, as noted above (Fig. 50). If so, it would have to be deduced that it was only repaired at the foundation level, as a retaining wall of the platform while the exterior walkway was still in use.

192 Finally, the pavilion's water basin may also have remained in use during this time, given that inside it a fill of cultivated soil was found distinct in character from the rubble fill of the reservoir of the Reservoir Courtyard.

8 Residence of the 13th Century (Phase V)

193 The building is a simple residence organized around a rectangular courtyard of 5.2 m × 6.3 m, whose main axis follows the principle north-south orientation (Fig. 41. 42. 63). Its walls are made of lime-coated earth (›tapia calicostrada‹), with openings not reinforced by brick. The excavated area shows that the building comprised at least three bays in the west, north, and east. We know nothing about the southern side, except for the existence of the southern wall of the courtyard.

8.1 Western Bay

194 The bay to the west of the courtyard was a 3.15 m × 9.7 m-large room which was completely excavated. Its door is 1.12 m wide and is located approximately in the

center of the east wall. The door is an undivided opening without frame, with hinges attached to the façade facing the courtyard[140].

195 Although the main room of a house is usually located to the north, we believe that in this case it was placed in the west, since it is the largest space and has a more centered doorway, allowing alcoves to be placed at either end. Unfortunately, we have not located any remains to prove their existence. The western wall was constructed of concrete and placed directly above a wall of the 12th century. The new wall was constructed at the same moment as the aqueduct to be described in the following section, proving the house and aqueduct to have been part of the same building project.

196 The stratigraphy inside the room shows that it remained in use from the 13th to the 20th century. At some point it was transformed into a storage space in which large storage jars (›tinajas‹) were placed cutting into the medieval floors. The most recent of these vessels date to the second half of the 19th century or early 20th century. Although the archaeological deposit is very altered by the mentioned contamination, different moments of occupation have been identified, as indicated by the remains of pavements and by the imprints they left on the wall plaster.

8.2 Northern and Eastern Bays

197 The northern bay was only partially excavated, as it extends eastward into the unexplored area, so it could have had a similar length as the western one in spite of being somewhat narrower (Fig. 41). Its door, with a width of 1.20 m, is also an undivided opening very similar to the one documented in the western bay.

198 Of the eastern bay, we have only located a fragment of the wall facing the courtyard; the remainder is located beneath a lemon orchard.

8.3 Courtyard

199 The complete excavation of the courtyard also provided evidence for a long period of occupation, from the 13th century to the orchard house demolished in the second half of the 20th century. Remains of a platform were found close to the surface in the southwest corner of the courtyard, attached to the wall of the western bay, at 29.78 m ASL. At a lower level[141] in the eastern part of the courtyard, remains of architectural structures were found, whose bricks are of different size and composition than the bricks used in the galleries of the previous phase in the northern sector; they also differ from the bricks usually found in buildings of the late 12th and first half of the 13th century in the city of Murcia. This type of brick may, in principle, date to the second half of the 13th century, after the estate passed into Castilian hands.

200 The construction of this building to the south of the monumental gate of the Late-Islamic palace meant that this entrance was blocked and the adjoining palace area abandoned. The simple door openings fit to an Early Nasrid date, replacing the twin openings of the Almohad period. Based on this evidence, that building may be dated to the period of Ibn Hud or even to the Castilian period, to the reign of Alfonso X.

140 The change from twin-openings to undivided single-span doors is well documented in Islamic architecture for the second third of the 13th century, for example in the new palace of Santa Clara, and especially in house no. 6 of Siyāsa. Navarro 1991a, 24 f.

141 It is located at an elevation of 29.65 m ASL, about 29 cm above the level of the gallery of phase IV.

9 Aqueduct and Abandonment of the Palatial Area

201 This medieval hydraulic structure remained in operation as an irrigation ditch until 2019, as part of the traditional irrigation network of the area. The best-preserved segment is between the Reservoir Courtyard and the tower. It is a north-south branch that runs partially over an arcade that has remained visible for centuries and was described since the 18th century as deriving from antiquity[142].

202 The solid concrete formwork and the technical complexity of the brick arches show that the aqueduct is not a work of farmers, like most of the irrigation canals in the orchards of Murcia, but a very elaborate construction consistent with its location within a royal estate such as the one under investigation. The archaeological intervention has shown that, through its construction, many of the structures essential to a palatial life in the gardens and buildings fell into disuse. Despite its unique building characteristics, there is nothing to indicate that it has had any other function than to serve as an irrigation channel, as it has been doing to this day. Therefore, it was built at a time when the estate still survived but the palace life was no longer relevant, while agricultural activity seems to have been expanding. In fact, the channel has larger dimensions than any of the previous ones and runs at a higher level, allowing it to conduct a greater flow of water and irrigate more land.

203 It consists of five segments that will be described separately below, starting from the north and following the direction of water flow. The first three were in operation until 2019, when we diverted the water in order to protect the arches of the aqueduct from further deterioration; the last two segments had already been abandoned and in a state of ruin at this time.

204 **First section.** This segment runs north-south and is located within the former Reservoir Courtyard, along the eastern boundary of the excavated area and in contact with the neighboring citrus orchard (Fig. 19. 22). The identified remains were found beneath a simple ditch that had functioned as a water canal until 2019, which shows that the medieval channel had fallen into disrepair at some point. The eastern wall of the original channel is made of lime-coated earth (›tapia calicostrada‹) with a thickness of 68 cm. The western wall, which is not as well preserved, is also made of concrete rammed earth with abundant boulders. Along its western edge is an alignment of bricks set on edge (24.5 cm × 12 cm × 4.5 cm) that we identify as the foundation of the western face of the canal, making the wall 74 cm thick. At its southern end, the channel bifurcates generating two channels: one headed eastward[143] beyond the excavated area, the other turning in the opposite direction, toward the second segment located to the west.

205 **Second section.** Here the channel is a very solid construction, built of concrete and medium-sized stones, running east-west (Fig. 64). It was constructed directly on top of the pavement of the southern walkway of the Reservoir Courtyard, unequivocal evidence that the 12th century palace was in ruins. The two walls that make up the channel, each about 84 cm thick, were constructed against an accumulated layer of earth, with formwork placed only on the inside of the canal. After running about 10 m to the west, the canal turns south, forming a perfect right angle.

206 **Third section.** The channel now runs north-south for about 32 m (Fig. 65. 66). This segment was constructed on top of an arcade that served at the same time as a retaining wall between the platform to the east and the garden to the west. The walls on either side of the canal are only 48 cm thick, significantly narrower than those

142 Navarro – Jiménez 1995a, 95 f.

143 The diversion outlet is perfectly constructed in the wall, but we have not been able to document the continuation of the channel because it enters a private property for which we did not have the permission to excavate by the owners.

64

Fig. 64: Monteagudo, second and third segment of the aqueduct of phase V, looking south. Visible are remains of the pavement of phase II (A), the brick door jambs of the hall added in phase III (B), holes for wooden posts of the pergola of phase IV (C), and the aqueduct (D).

of the previous sections. In its initial path it crosses the former southern bay of the Reservoir Courtyard and is placed on top of its two walls, causing the southern wall to be crushed due to the pressure it exerted on its weak earthwork (Fig. 51). Once it leaves the perimeter of the palace, the canalization is set upon the adjoining walkway which, as it crumbled over time, ended up ruining the hydraulic work.

207 From the walkway, the aqueduct begins with a brick pillar, which was attached to the south side of the former walkway and from which the first of the nine arches that make up the arcade starts. All arches are built of bricks, in the upper part with flat stones placed in the joints between the bricks. The shapes of the arches range from semicircular to elliptical, being very irregular and sometimes deformed. The span varies, gradually decreasing from 1.37 m in the first arch to the north to 1.21 m in the last arch to the south. It is likely that the original plan contemplated spans of 1.25 m (1.5 *varas* à 83.59 cm). The width of the supporting pillars ranges from 71 cm to 84 cm (about 1 *vara*). The total width of the aqueduct measures about 1.8 m. The analysis of the elevation of the entire structure has shown that the pillars and arches were erected first, and then a thick layer of concrete was laid on top of them to serve as a base for the canalization, which had to be given a slope towards the south, making it necessary to reduce the thickness of the arch construction. The last step was to erect the two walls that delimit the water channel.

208 After the ninth arch, the arcade rests on a solid block of concrete that was placed against the northern face of the east-west walkway that starts from the tower. As seen in the northern end, the channel was again constructed on a pre-existing walkway that deteriorated over time and ended up damaging the aqueduct (Fig. 37). At the southern end, the channel was set on a solid foundation of mortar and stone, turning eastward.

209 **Fourth section.** The canalization now makes a 90° turn and continues for 8 m eastwards (Fig. 42. 62). The western half is a continuation of the work of the previous section, with the same thickness and identical construction technique that explains why its base and the northern wall that formed its channel have been preserved. At the westernmost end there is an outlet to the south made later, which remained in use until 2019. The eastern half of the channel segment is mostly missing, as it was built on a section of the Late-Islamic walkway that, being less solid, ended up causing its ruin; the plan shows how the lime and stone concrete covers the brick wall of the Islamic walkway, a solution that we see also in the fifth and last section.

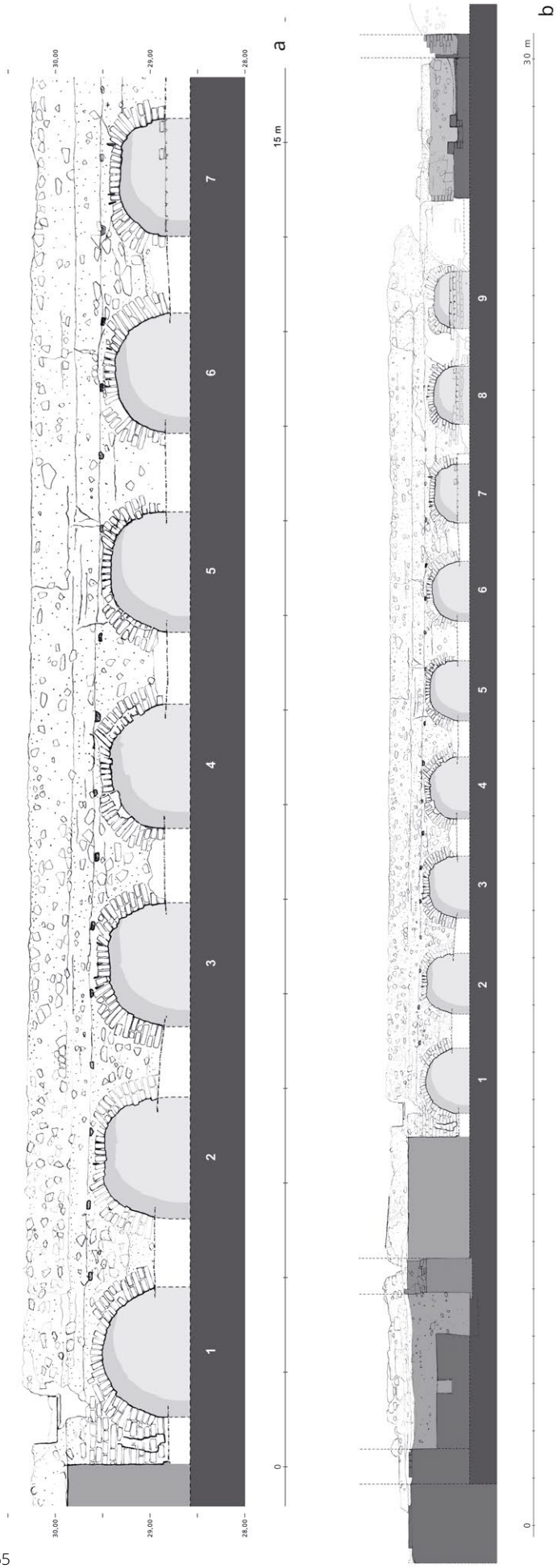


Fig. 65: Monteagudo, aqueduct. Elevation drawing the second segment.

65

66

Fig. 66: Monteagudo, aqueduct. Southernmost arches 7, 8 and 9, looking east.

210 **Fifth section.** This is the worst preserved segment, although enough remains to prove that the channel, when it reached the southeast corner of the tower, turned again south, continuing in that direction for at least 17 m. We know that it was built on part of the walkway and the Late-Islamic channel, reusing these as foundations, which meant they were completely covered (Fig. 63). The plan shows how a new face made of concrete covers the remains of the old channel, while closing a ceramic pipe outlet that had been used to irrigate the garden.

211 The preservation of the channel in this section is very uneven because, while its upper part has completely disappeared in the northern third, in the rest it remains partially visible along the wall of the 13th-century residence[144]. It is a very solid concrete construction that served both as the wall of the house and as a channel, with a smooth surface on the side of the house and a highly eroded side toward the channel.

212 In summary, the aqueduct was a construction of a magnitude and quality that it must certainly have been part of the estate and a work of the state. Its construction, in addition to completely covering the courtyard of the 12th-century reservoir, affected the Late-Islamic walkways, cutting off the communication between the residence located to the east and the garden located to the west, indicating substantial changes to the palatial life of this sector. The new aqueduct, while running north-south like the previous channels of the 12th century, increased the flow of water and raised the level at which it circulated; changes that occurred because now the water came from the Caracol irrigation channel, which is a branch of the Churra la Vieja canal that expanded the irrigated land, supplying the entire area around the Castillo de Larache. We believe that the construction of this fortified building and its large basin, the ›Huerto Hondo‹, were part of a large unfinished palace complex that Ibn Hūd must have promoted once he made Murcia the capital of his state. We are therefore inclined to suggest that both the Caracol irrigation channel and the aqueduct in question were built by this emir as

144 This difference in preservation is due to the fact that one part rested on the solid wall of the 12th-century palace, while the other rested on the weak structure of the older channel. This uneven foundation explains the ruin of this section.

part of an ambitious project, which involved the establishment of a new palatial area around the fortified residence of Larache and the transformation of Ibn Mardanīš's former palatial complex into orchards and gardens. This would explain the quality of the aqueduct, which indicates a desire to create a new canalization, largely for productive needs for a garden that was now a subsidiary space to a new palatial complex.

10 Conclusions

213 Revisiting the written sources and the information obtained in the excavation campaign of 2023 have allowed us to advance significantly our knowledge of the ›almunia‹ of Monteagudo, especially in the sector that we call the ›Palace of the Plain‹. Thanks to the new interpretation of the information provided by the »Libro del Repartimiento«, we have more precise data on the extension of this Islamic estate, since we now know that after the Christian conquest in the mid-13th century it was divided into at least two parts: one given to the queen, the other to Gil García de Azagra. The sum of both exceeded 1,000 ›tahúllas‹, or 120 ha, not counting the plot that the king reserved for himself, until he gave it to the Church of Cartagena in 1311. Written sources indicate that, in addition to the palatial complex, there were also other areas that formed part of the estate, such as orchards, dry land, vineyards, forests, hunting grounds, and marshlands. The location of the ›almunia‹ on the periphery of the Segura valley, in contact with the first foothills that surround it, is a clear indication that the most agriculturally relevant part was land for dry farming.

214 The need to control the natural riverbeds, in order to protect the orchards and buildings on the plain from destructive floods, made it necessary from the beginning to build dams diverting rainwater to the dry lands in the higher areas of the estate. This strategy made it possible to occupy the lower sections of some riverbeds, as has been demonstrated by studying the palace complex in the plain, where a 12th-century four-part garden was designed on top of the bed of the Rambla de Caracol.

215 The old Castillo de Monteagudo of the 11th century was enlarged in the middle of the 12th century as part of the great remodeling of the ›almunia‹ promoted by Ibn Mardanīš. In addition to being an image and expression of its power, it was designed as a defensive construction and a large grain store. The prominence of its silhouette in the entire plain of Murcia allowed the ›almunia‹ of Monteagudo to be distinguished from other properties of this type and, surely, is what explains why the estate was known in Arabic sources as *Ḥiṣn al-Faraǧ*, »Castle of Fortune«.

216 The toponym *Qaṣr Ibn Saʿd*, which is also mentioned in written sources, seems to refer exclusively to the fortified palace of the Castillejo. Its monumentality and the fact that it was intentionally erected on a hill separated from the palaces on the plain indicates that one of its specific functions was to project the political power of Ibn Mardanīš in the landscape as a scenographic complement to the neighboring Castillo de Monteagudo. In addition, it also played the important role of belvedere, common in many important estates, from which all elements of the estate could be contemplated.

217 The main contribution of the archaeological work published here is the identification and precise location of the palatial area of the ›almunia‹, which comprised both the palaces and gardens in the agricultural plain and the fortified residence of the Castillejo. The sector that developed in the plain, with a building complex designed on a tripartite plan, is presided over by a central pavilion that, preceded by a portico and a water basin, projects towards the interior of the four-part garden. This design, in addition to articulating all the architectural elements that we have identified in the plain, created an axial perspective through its main east-west axis, starting from the lower level where the garden was located and passing through the Pavilion Hall and

the Reservoir Courtyard and culminating in the Castillejo, thus creating an ascending scenography favored by the natural topography of the site.

218 Although we do not yet have absolute dates for the Palace of the Plain, we do have valuable information obtained from stratigraphic studies and the analysis of the building structures. Relevant are also the conclusions that can be drawn from the large dimensions of the palatial area, the splendor of the architectural program and the monumentality of its buildings, as they are a clear expression of the needs in matters of protocol and representation of a strong and independent power that had to compete politically with one of the most powerful empires of the Middle Ages, the Almohad caliphate. Taken together with the information extracted from the Arabic and Castilian written sources, this allows us to propose, with a fair degree of certainty, that we are dealing with a project promoted by Ibn Mardanīš[145]. However, there are three buildings of uncertain chronology that suggest are of earlier date: the tower in the southern sector (No. 11), the northern pavilion (No. 14), and a building discovered during the restoration work of the lower enclosure of the Castillejo.

219 Due to the importance and significance that the Monteagudo estate had as the maximum expression of Ibn Mardanīš's power and symbol of his sovereignty, it is expressly mentioned in the chronicle of Ibn Ṣāḥib aṣ-Ṣalā', noting that it was destroyed by the Almohads in the two siege campaigns of Murcia. We believe that both the fortified residence of the Castillejo and the Palace of the Plain with its four-part garden were erected around 1150 and that the destruction of both must have occurred during the first Almohad assault on the ›almunia‹ in 1165. After that date, it seems that the first was never rebuilt, while the second was restored and enlarged by two lateral bays that were attached to the original Reservoir Courtyard (phase III).

220 The second destruction must have occurred during the Almohad raid in 1171. Subsequently, in the Late-Islamic period, a new, probably smaller palace was built over part of the ruins, of which we partially know its entrance courtyard; further north is where the main nucleus of the new residence must have been located. The parts of the 12th-century palace that were not rebuilt in this phase (IV) were the plot occupied by the Pavilion Hall and Reservoir Courtyard, where only a garden with a pergola was laid out. The 12th-century walkways were rebuilt in this phase and at least one of them was widened.

221 Later (phase V), a residence was built to the south of the entrance courtyard, and at the same time an aqueduct was erected in one segment on arcades. Both works were carried out in the 13th century, probably in the reign of Ibn Hud as part of an ambitious construction project that included the new palatial area of the Castillo de Larache. The displacement of the palatial center to the north meant the abandonment of the palatial area of the Castillejo, which was then transformed into a subsidiary space comprising buildings of a domestic and agricultural nature, such as the residence at the southern end, as well as garden areas that were largely incorporated into the old four-part garden.

222 The investigation in 2023 of the 12th-century Palace of the Plain has added significantly to our knowledge of palatial architecture of this period, particularly the design of gardens and country estates. Among the most innovative features is the definition of a ›reserved garden‹, reminiscent of the Italian ›giardino segreto‹. Within a much larger four-part garden, a more restricted area was surrounded by an enclosure wall. This segregated space was of a more intimate character, and possibly planted in a different way from the wider orchard.

145 This dating does not exclude the possibility that the foundation of the estate is earlier, although for the moment we have no archaeological evidence in this regard.

223 Another novel feature is the integration of towers in the garden design, at least one of which predates the construction of the 12th-century palace. Beyond serving as watch towers to safeguard the security of the country estate, they created the possibility to contemplate the vast garden area and the landscape beyond. As viewing towers, they are precursors of the ›miradores‹ of later periods.

224 The focus of the 12th century estate was a sequence of halls and water basins that were arranged along the central axis. Partially excavated have been a large water reservoir, the adjoining Pavilion Hall and a water basin to the west. A larger hall may have been located to the east. The reservoir was surrounded by a walkway and a wall, thus creating what we call the Reservoir Courtyard. The whole arrangement projected into the space of the garden area, in a way not found in palaces of previous periods.

225 It is quite possible that the example of Monteagudo served as a model for the construction of other important gardens of the same period. In fact, we located another ›almunia‹ on the other side of the Segura valley within the estate of the convent of Santa Catalina del Monte (Verdolay), whose aristocratic residence, smaller in scale than that of Monteagudo, was built on a steeply sloping hillside. There were excavated, in addition to a bath, the remains of a hall preceded by a portico and a basin open to the landscape[146]. The Monteagudo complex must have been begun around 1150 and would have been completed in its original form shortly thereafter. Subsequently, the Almohads ordered the construction of other ›almunias‹, which they called *buḥayra* in allusion to the large dimensions of their water basins: the Agdāl of Marrakech in 1157[147], the Buḥayra of Rabat in 1171 and the Buḥayra of Seville in 1171–1172, the latter built by the master builder Aḥmad ibn Bāso and al-Haǧǧ Ǧaᶜīš[148]. In Palermo, William I ordered the construction of La Zisa in 1165 and William II promoted the erection of the Cuba in 1180, two palaces with basins of significant size[149]. This chronological sequence allows us to suggest that the ›almunia‹ of Murcia was the model for all these gardens.

146 Jiménez 2013, 337–342.
147 Navarro – Puerta 2018.
148 Arnold 2017, 211–213.
149 Ibn Ṣāḥib al-Salā' 1969, 189 f.

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RESUMEN

La almunia de Castillejo de Monteagudo (Murcia).

El complejo palaciego de la llanura agrícola (siglos XII y XIII d.C.)

Julio Navarro Palazón – Felix Arnold – Pedro Jiménez-Castillo

El presente artículo da a conocer los hallazgos producidos en la almunia de Monteagudo (Murcia) durante las campañas arqueológicas de 2018, 2019 y 2023, llevadas a cabo en dos parcelas de huerta situadas en el llano. Allí, se puso al descubierto parte de un complejo áulico con su gran jardín de crucero que, unido a la residencia fortificada del Castillejo, conforman el área palatina de la finca. Los edificios y espacios cultivados del llano estuvieron articulados por un eje principal (este-oeste) en el que se alza el palacio del Estanque y un pabellón abierto al jardín a través de un pórtico al que se le adosa una alberca. La fase constructiva principal data del emirato de Ibn Mardanīš (1147–1171), aunque hay algunas estructuras que se pueden adscribir a un momento anterior. Tras las destrucciones realizadas por los almohades en dos momentos diferentes (1165 y 1171), algunos edificios fueron rehechos, mientras que otros se abandonaron y pasaron a ser espacios de cultivo. Después de la conquista castellana (1243), los palacios andalusíes fueron reutilizados temporalmente por la corte del rey Alfonso X, e incluso se construyó un pequeño núcleo residencial y un acueducto de cierta importancia.

PALABRAS CLAVE

arquitectura palatina islámica, almunia, raal, Ibn Mardanīš, Castillejo de Monteagudo, patio de crucero, siglo XII, almohade

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Das Landgut Castillejo de Monteagudo (Murcia)

Der Palast in der Ebene (12. und 13. Jahrhundert n. Chr.)

Julio Navarro Palazón – Felix Arnold – Pedro Jiménez-Castillo

Der Beitrag präsentiert die Ergebnisse archäologischer Forschungen, die in den Jahren 2018, 2019 und 2023 in zwei Obstplantagen der landwirtschaftlichen Ebene des Landgutes Monteagudo (Murcia) durchgeführt wurden. Gefunden wurden die Überreste eines Palastes mit einem großen, vierteiligen Garten, die zusammen mit der befestigten Residenz von Castillejo den Palastkomplex des Anwesens bildeten. Die Gebäude und Anbauflächen waren entlang einer zentralen, Ost-West-orientierten Achse angeordnet, an deren Ende sich ein Wasserreservoir, ein Pavillonbau und ein vorgelagertes Wasserbecken befanden. Die Hauptbauphasen datieren in die Regierungszeit des Ibn Mardanīš (1147–1171), nur einige Strukturen stammen aus älteren Epochen. Nach der Zerstörung durch die Almohaden in den Jahren 1165 und 1171 wurden einige Gebäude restauriert, andere aufgegeben und landwirtschaftlich genutzt. Nach der kastilischen Eroberung im Jahr 1243 wurden die Palastbauten vom Hof Alfons X. vorübergehend genutzt, und sogar durch den Bau eines kleinen Hofhauses und die Anlage eines Aquäduktes erweitert.

SCHLAGWÖRTER

Islamische Palastarchitektur, Landsitz, Ibn Mardanīš, Castillejo de Monteagudo, viergeteilter Garten, 12. Jahrhundert, Almohaden

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