

Historical Introduction

Google Map: <https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?mid=ztUQLzpJBGmQ.kX7xU7C7NqIY&usp=sharing>

This corner of Spain, the Marina Alta, is characterised by the Mediterranean sea and above all by rugged mountains which reach down to the coast. Scattered among our mountains are the remains of a particularly large number of castles, towers and fortifications perched on small peaks and elevated rocky outcrops. Most are badly ruined, consisting only of parts of walls, water cisterns, and not much else except shards of pottery on the ground.

What are they? Who built them? Few of these castles have been properly excavated, but archaeological evidence reveals that most were founded during the Islamic dominance of Spain between the 8th and 13th Centuries, a period of five hundred years when this eastern part of the peninsular was called *Sharq al-Andalus*., and the mountains of this region known as *Yibal Balansiya*. There are few surviving records of life in these rural areas from those times, and historians have had to rely on documents from after the Christian reconquest. A clue as to the importance of the Marina Alta castles and their lands is that they appear in the 1245 *Pact del Pouet* (the Treaty of the Well) - unique in that it was written in both Spanish and Arabic - between the conquering Christian King Jaume I and Muslim war lord popularly known as *Al-Azraq*. The power struggle between these two is the basis of the "Moors and Christians" festival – but that is another story. An important thing about the treaty is that it is the first written record of these castles, their earlier history being undocumented.

The castles are mostly located on rocky pinnacles overlooking valleys and natural routes, often close to good water sources such as springs. Elsewhere near the farmsteads (*alquerias*) there are the remnants of isolated square watch towers (*atalayas*). The thing that intrigues scholars is that there is a very high concentration of Islamic castles in the Alicante mountains as compared to the rest of Spain. Although this density of fortifications fits the with large number of rural communities.

When were they built and what were they for? This is a question which will only be answered through archaeology. To find some clues we have to look back and trace the historical record.

Early days – the Caliphate: In 711 a raiding force of 1700 men serving the Umayyad Arab caliphate in Damascus (Syria) entered the Spanish peninsula via Gibraltar meeting little resistance. In the following year thousands of reinforcements arrived and in 714 Valencia fell without a fight. In 756 Abd al-Rahman I arrived in Cordoba and established an Emirate which was politically independent from Damascus. In 929 Abd al-Rahman III proclaimed the foundation of the Caliphate of Cordoba and himself as the head of Islam in Spain.

There are few early Islamic remains in the Marina Alta. This late settlement is probably linked to the general de-population of the area which occurred after the decline of the Roman empire. Although there are some intriguing ancient sites such as El Cocoll, the earliest confirmed finding of a fortification in this area is the military fort of Almiserá or Xillibre, built around 920 (some 200 years after the invasion) probably to aid the Cordoba government to suppress troublesome Berbers. At this time, Denia existed merely as a port or dockyard without any urban development and was dependent on the town of Ondara. In the mid 10th century Denia had become an important port and one of the three dockyards harbouring the caliphate fleet between Almería and Tortosa.

Small dominions - the Taifas: In 1009, a period of instability and civil war known as the *Fitna*, led to the collapse of the Córdoba caliphate, and the establishment of small, independent dominions known as *taifas*. Denia taifa was founded in 1014 by Muyahid, a high functionary of the defunct caliphate. Under his rule, and that of his son Ali ibn Muyahid, Denia was converted into an important administrative centre, its scope of influence including Orihuela, Alicante, Elche, and Cocentaina, with the Balearics being politically dependent. It attracted artisans and artists and became an important trading post in the western Mediterranean. During this period, the city became enclosed by walls and the castle began to be fortified.

The Taifas collapse and the arrival of the Almoravids: However, towards the end of the 11th Century the taifas warred with each other and with the Christians. In 1076 Denia taifa became part of Zaragoza; in 1092 the Almoravids (a Berber dynasty from North Africa) annexed Denia and eventually took over all taifas incorporating them into their empire.

In 1094 the Christian El Cid took Valencia, holding it until his death in 1099, and imposed high taxes which helped to unbalance what was left of Denia's prosperity. In 1102 Valencia fell to the Almoravids

Almohad rule: In 1146 the Almohads (a competing Berber dynasty and sect) overthrew the Almoravids and in 1177 established a government in Seville. Under the Almohads, rural society was once more structured and organised into districts which were in turn dependent upon cities such as Denia. They built a series of military watchtowers to better protect the people.

New villages were founded in previously uninhabited areas. Artefacts found in this area show that the Muslim

people living here had a North African culture, and it is quite possible that the numerous towns and villages with names beginning with *Beni* (son's of) were called after the Berber clans which founded them.

Castles or husûn or..? Most of the Marina Alta castles seem to have been founded towards the end of the 11th, or during the 12th Century and it has been hotly debated as to whether they were military structures, or administrative centres (*husûn*) linked to surrounding farmsteads or just simple refuges for rural people and their livestock in times of war, or indeed a mixture of all these things. A recent theory is that some of them were built by refugees.

The incursion of Christian forces in frontier areas in the middle of the 12th Century put huge pressure on Muslim communities there, and major cities fell in quick succession: Tortosa in 1148, Lleida 1149, Teruel 1170 and Cuenca 1171. This forced the Muslim inhabitants to flee and migrate to the south, many hiding in the sparsely populated Alicante mountains where they built fortified refuges. Archaeology will test such theories, and no doubt change the historical narrative.

Sharq al Andaluz gradually fell apart under the combined pressure of Christian attacks, a series of droughts and internal political upheaval. By the final years of the 1230's the Christians had retaken much of Islamic Spain, leaving the kingdom of Granada and an isolated Muslim frontier zone, or "hinterland" which survived in our area for a short, thirty years, while Murcia became the economic centre under a special agreement with the Castilians.

The Christian conquest. In 1238 Valencia was conquered by Jaume I and Denia fell in 1244. The Alicante mountains and all the castles were briefly controlled by Al-Azraq through the treaty of 1245. But the Christian king took the territory in 1258. There were other Muslim revolts in 1276-77 which were very quickly put down and soon the entire area came under feudal Christian control.

Today, the often unimpressive ruins of the the Islamic husûn/castles and atalayas continue to hold the secrets of their origins and uses, waiting to be unlocked by archaeologists.

Characteristics of the Islamic Castle

Islamic rural castles differ from Christian ones, not only in their form of construction (see below), but also in the social model they represent. The basic organization of the rural population was the castle and farmstead unit (*hisn /qarya* complex). Each castle had a number of farmsteads (*alquerias*) associated with it which created a kind of district, *hisn*, bearing the same name as the fortification: "the space where people take refuge in case of danger." Islamic society, unlike Christian society at the time, was not dominated by feudal relationships or vassalage. It was organized around the *aljama*, a sort of council of elders which governed the community and collected taxes.

The structures of all the castles follow a basic pattern. They consist of a small area called the *celoquia* at the highest point containing a building where the *caid* (who was in charge of the fortification) resided and a water cistern (*aljibe*). Below and around this, there is a wider enclosure called the *albacar* which served to shelter the population and herds. Small dwellings built to accommodate a refugee population can be found in this area, and there is usually another water cistern.

The castle would also be responsible for defensive structures such as farmhouse towers in major population centres and remote villages.

The most commonly used technique in building Islamic castles was the construction of walls with *tapial* or "rammed earth" form-work. This technique enabled the construction of very strong walls within a short space of time. Because of the uneven terrain, levelling foundations were first built of stone masonry and lime mortar. Then the form-work was set up. This consisted of a series of wooden planks, aligned one above the other, tied with vertical struts or beams, and supported horizontally by other beams or "put-logs", thus forming an elongated box. The builders then poured a mixture of earth, gravel and lime into this space, ramming it in layers, sometimes they added chunks of limestone. When the mixture had hardened, the planks were removed and relocated to make another form-work box. The traces left by the boards and put-logs can be seen in the finished work, and survive to this day in many castles.

Once the Valencian mountains had been pacified after the Muslim revolt of 1276 - 1277, the feudal Christian powers had to decide what to do with so many Islamic fortifications. Keeping them all would imply an enormous cost. In addition there was the danger that they might return to Muslim hands. They therefore chose to keep the most important ones and to dismantle the rest. The Christianised castle then assumed the role of feudal control with the construction of the most important element i.e. the Castle keep (*Torre de homenage*) which was built in a prominent position.

The earliest Islamic fortifications in the Marina Alta

The oldest Islamic fortifications or refuges in the Marina Alta are structures which are difficult to interpret. They are elongated spaces characterised by having robust dry stone walls defending a vulnerable, easy access side, with the other sides being protected by deep ravines, crags or cliffs.

There are three sites in the Marina Alta that meet these characteristics:

La Bastida is located SW of the town of Pego, on a hill framed by canyons to the east and west, while to the north the hill has a profile with several abrupt crags. The only access is from the south at 344 m, where there is a wall about 113 metres long. Inside this area (north of the wall), there are no structures nor other evidence indicating occupation of the area. The few archaeological materials recovered on the surface are fragments of day-to-day pottery which are difficult to date exactly, but which can be placed between the 8th and 10th centuries.

El Cocoll is located to the east of the municipality of Castell de Castells on the ridge of the Cocoll mountain range at about 950 meters. It is a magnificent dry stone wall (about 87 meters long) protecting the area of easier access to the south-east, while the north-west is protected naturally by the vertical cliffs of the Galitero ravine.

The space bounded by the wall and the cliff is about 1500 square meters, with no observed structures or other elements. There are very few archaeological remains with only a few fragments of day-to-day pottery from between the 8th and 10th centuries.

The final settlement with these features and chronology is the "Tossalet Pere Antoni". This site occupies the south-eastern slope of a hill, at an altitude of between 190 and 160 meters, located at the foot of the south face of the Sierra de Segària between the villages of Sanet y Negrals and Beniarbeig. Terraced agriculture, erosion and vegetation have altered the settlement, which we know by the foundations of a substantial wall of limestone blocks having an approximate north-south orientation defining the west side. Ceramic fragments collected here are characterized by the absence of glazed pottery and a scanty selection of oxidised everyday pottery (jugs, jars, bowls etc); these date the site between the 8th and 10th Centuries.

At the extreme north-west of the Marina Alta on the top of Mount Almiserà (725 m), lie the remains of a very unique fortress known as **Xillibre**. It is rectangular, about 35 by 22 metres, has round towers at each corner and two square turrets on each of the long sides. All the construction is done with medium-sized dry stone, similar to that used in the fortifications described above; but now we are looking at building with a planned layout, which reflects the Umayyad fortresses and castles of the Middle East and the Maghreb, but made with a local construction technique.

Archaeological excavations conducted by A.Bazzana (1985-86) provided sufficient information to date the fort to the tenth century. This researcher interpreted the Xillibre fortress to be linked to the military campaigns of Abd al-Rahman III against Berber dissidents in 928. The Berbers had controlled much of this region almost since the time of the Islamic conquest but Abd al-Rahman, founder of the Caliphate of Córdoba, was able to subdue the territory, which from then on was controlled by Córdoba.

Castles of the Vall de Gallinera – West - the head of the valley

During Islamic times the Vall de Gallinera was a major route linking Denia to the territories of Cocentaina, and beyond that to Xàtiva and the frontier zone with the Christians. There are several castles and fortifications along the river valley.

The **Castell de Alcalà** is known both as the Castell de Benissili - after the village which it overlooks, as well as the Castell d'Alcalà de Gallinera - the name Alcalà coming from the Arabic qalaça meaning fortress city.

It is located on the south side of the head of the Vall de Gallinera on a wide, rocky promontory (780m) surrounded by cliffs. The location provides a good view of the length of the valley with glimpses of the sea in the distance, and it controls the important ancient route to Cocentaina. An archaeological study carried out in 1983 revealed abundant shards of pottery spanning a period of almost 500 years, from 11th / 12th century, until the 16th century when the castle was abandoned. This dates the origin of the castle to Islamic times.

Further clues can be found in the various dimensions Muslim builders used in making blocks of tapia when constructing the walls. Most of the tapial walls can be dated from the mid -12th to the 13th centuries when the ruling Almohads were carrying out intense fortification building. Other walls have longer tapial blocks and were made later, during the time of the Christian reconquest.

The earliest written record of this castle is in the Pact del Pouet - Treaty of the well (1244-1245) The castle was ceded to Al Azraq and his descendents (together with Perpuxent - Lorcha castle) "...as an estate for you and all your family-line, to give, sell, pledge, or use entirely according to your will ". Unlike the Gallinera

(Benirrama) castle at the other end of the Vall de Gallinera, the Castell de Alcalà does not appear to have been destroyed by the 1396 earthquake. Instead it was modified, adapted and rebuilt over the ages, many of the changes being documented.

The construction is in an advanced state of ruin, but the layout can be seen as one typical of an Islamic fortified hisn. On the highest peaks there is a complex celoquia with a semicircular tower at one end (I), and what could be the remains of a tower at the other (O). Access to this area is via a dog-leg entrance on the west flank, protected by a rectangular tower (K). The walls and towers are of various sizes of tapia, alternating with stone masonry of the opus incertum and opus piscatum types. (see Glossary)

An extensive walled enclosure (lower albacar) extends eastward on a large plateau. Its boundaries are defined by tapial walls with an offset (dog-leg) entrance (X). This area appears to harbour remains of buildings, possibly dwellings. The third area (upper albacar) houses a cistern (B) and has the same features as above.

Recently, some of the tapial walls have been restored using the original techniques, and a similar mix of sand, rocks and mortar. The project aims also to shore up and clean crumbling walls, and in some places preserve, or re-create the silhouette of battlements to convey the defensive nature of the architecture. An example of the wooden form-work and put-logs has been left in place, so that visitors can appreciate this ancient building technology.

The **Castellot de Alpatro** consists basically of a small square tower with sides of 5.7m - 5.8m. It sits on top of an abrupt flat-topped peak, or butte, between two ravines on the northern side of the Vall de Gallinera. The tower overlooks the course of the Rio de Gallinera and the village of Alpatró beyond.

The remains consists of a slightly circular area, bounded by a low (0.5m) tapial wall. The tower itself is built of tapia on top of opus incertum masonry which provides a level base. The few ceramics found there are probably Islamic and there is no record of this fortification in early Christian documents. It is therefore not possible to date this construction, except to note that a number of square towers of this type were built towards the end of the Islamic period (e.g. Torre de Almudaina).

The Castellot is not very accessible, indeed it has been the nesting site of a pair of eagles.

Forna and the East of the Vall de Gallinera

The **Castell de Fornà** (Adsubia) is the best preserved and most accessible of the Marina Alta castles. It is located on the summit of a strategic hill (232m) overlooking the village of Fornà (Adsubia) and has an excellent view of the lower course of the Gallinera river descending northeast towards Oliva and the sea. The building is quadrangular, with a square tower at each corner, but it is slightly asymmetric with the northeast tower being larger with a water cistern and a room covered by a cross vault. Judging from the remains, this larger tower was originally a military or refuge watchtower (atalaya) during Almohad Islamic times (12th - 13th centuries).

The village of Fornà was taken by King Jaume I from the Muslims in 1258, but the first record of the castle was not until the middle of the 14th century and its extension and conversion into the feudal residential palace we see today seems to have occurred in the middle of the 15th century when the village was owned by the Cruilles family. The castle was excavated in 1981, revealing ceramics from the 14th to 16th centuries. In 2003 it was extensively restored by the Adsubia/Fornà Town Hall with technical assistance from the MARQ (Provincial Archaeological Museum of Alicante)

The four walls have few openings, and the towers are independent from each other architecturally. The entrance is a door in the north wall framed by a pointed arch. Inside there is a large courtyard with the main water cistern in the centre and staircase leading to the upper floor. There are various chambers around the courtyard. On the ground floor there are stables, kitchen, dining room and a spacious room with large windows which faces the patio and gives a view of the bedrooms upstairs. Of particular note is a set of late medieval / renaissance graffiti drawings on the wall of a room in the northwest tower. These depict sailing boats, a sea serpent, armed fighters, and animal motifs. This is one of the best sets of such drawings in Alicante province.

The castle's construction is based on Islamic tapia on top of stonework with the windows and doors framed by brick.

The **Gallinera (Benirrama)** castle is located on top of a rocky promontory (470m) overlooking the lower (seaward) entrance to the Vall de Gallinera. It lies beneath the peak of Almiserà upon which the 10th century Islamic fort of Xillibre is located. The castle is also Islamic in origin, but the date of its foundation is unclear. Although 11th century ceramics have been found nearby, excavations of the castle carried out in 1981 found materials dated no earlier than 12th century. The first historical record is even later, in the 1245 "Treaty of the

Well". Perhaps surprisingly, the castle appears to have been associated with the village and farmlands of Vall d'Ebo as well as farmsteads in the Vall de Gallinera. According to the treaty, the Moslem lord Al Azraq agreed to hand it over to King Jaume I after a three year period, but failed to keep his promise and it was finally taken by King Jaume in 1258. Today, nothing remains of the original castle which was destroyed by the powerful earthquake of 1396. The ruins we see today are the result of a 14th - 15th century rebuilding. Another earthquake in 1644 led to the castle's abandonment.

The layout is elongated and irregular with a rectangular Torre de Homenage or keep containing a water cistern located at the highest, central point on the west side (O) . The rest is a big albacar (walled area) which follows the contours of the ground. It is wider to the north and an entrance to the east (B) is protected by a square tower (C). There are water cisterns at each end, (V and G) and remains of crenellated battlements with walkways and six circular towers. The construction is a mixture of different techniques: Most if it is built of mamposteria (standard stone masonry) with panels done in various types of stonework: opus vitatum and opus incertum. There are tapial remains next to the keep.

The Foradà lookout (la Talaia de la Foradà) was built in a very strategic position jutting out of the Sierra de la Foradà at 738m, overlooking both the Val de la Gallinera to the North and the Val de Alcalà to the south while guarding an important pass between the two. Although the fortification is almost completely ruined, it is easy to find, since it is located at the famous rock arch (Foradà), through which the sun's rays illuminate the remains of a 17th century convent in Benitaia twice a year.

From the vantage point of the arch you can see the whole of the Gallinera valley: the Castell de Gallinera 6km to the east, the Castell de Alcalá 3km to the west and the Castellot de Alpatró 2km north west across the valley.

The ruins are in two sections. The foundations of a square tower, made of stones and mortar, lie behind and above the rock arch. This is connected to a low wall of solid mortar. At the foot of the arch are the remains of a square water cistern. Archaeological surveys show that this strategic site was settled in prehistoric times, during the Bronze age. Ceramics and the discovery of a bronze arrowhead identifies the lookout as being Islamic in origin, dating from no earlier than the 11th century. There are no early written records of the site and no medieval Christian ceramics have been found, suggesting its abandonment during or before the 13th century Christian reconquest.

Ambra Castle

The history of this this castle, also known as the Castell de Pego, has been radically revised in recent years as the result of archaeological studies. Previously, during the 1980's it was considered to be a 12th or early 13th century Almohad castle/albacar, then possibly a mid-12th century Almoravid construction. But excavations carried out between 1992 to 1997 have revealed that this fortification started to be built almost 100 years later, at the height of the Christian re-conquest.

Islamic coins minted in Murcia between 1228-1238 were discovered in the deepest (earliest) excavation levels, showing that the castle must have been founded during or after this period. Other finds were shards of every day Islamic pottery, of the type made in Denia, but there were no complete pots, glazed luxury items nor any agricultural implements. At upper levels they found pottery from the early Christian era, of a type manufactured in Valencia and other Islamic coins dating from 1262-1266.

The structure of the castle provides more clues as to its uses. It is located on a steep hill overlooking the Pego valley and is inaccessible from the northeast because of vertical cliffs. Therefore it needs only to be fortified on the southern side. Unusually, there is a "pre-wall" or barricade outside the main castle wall (A). This type of structure has not been found in Alicante fortifications built before this time. The pre-wall obliges people entering the castle to come through an entrance protected by a turret, they then have to pass along a vulnerable path which runs between the two walls before arriving at the main entrance near the eastern end. This consists of another dog-leg entrance with three successive gates (C and E). The outer wall is made of tapia on stone masonry with sections with a "zipper" (in /out) layout running parallel to the main fortification.

The main enclosure follows the contours of the land and is protected by a wall with small towers jutting out at intervals. This is made of tapia panels on stone masonry and one can see loopholes (slits for shooting through) in some sections.

Inside the fortified area there are simple dwellings. These have only one or two living rooms and it is not possible to determine what the rooms were used for, although some of them have a circular hearth dug in the ground. There is also a group of rooms backing onto the wall just west of the entrance one of which could be an ermita (chapel) (F), and another room has a bread oven, three metres in diameter, which would have been big enough to supply everyone in the compound. Further away, there is a rectangular water cistern also abutting the wall (I). Coins dating from the end of the 13th century have also been found.

The whole area looks like a complex of collective rooms for community use. The simplicity and scarcity of the Islamic pottery is in sharp contrast to the elaborate fortifications, implying that it was used periodically as a refuge by people with limited resources, such as the country-folk who lived in the twenty farmsteads nearby. It is not known whether the castle was built by the country-folk on their own, or with the help of regional Muslim authorities.

The archaeological record shows that Ambra castle was occupied for very short period between 1230/1240 and 1280/1290. The Christians took control in 1245 soon after the fall of Denia, but the enclave returned to Muslim hands two years later until 1258 when a small Christian garrison was stationed there. It was again in Muslim hands in the 1270's, but the castle lost its importance after the end of the 1276-1277 Muslim rebellion.

In 1279, King Pere (the Great), son of Jaume I, gave the instruction to construct a new town in the Valley of Pego and in 1280 the majority of the Muslim population was expelled. Consequently the castle was abandoned and dismantled.

Segaria Castle and the Blanc de Morrell tower

Segària Castle is located at the western end of the Segària mountain range. The mountain ridge rises to 450m then descends abruptly to a col which is also a pass. There is a small ledge or platform, bounded by a masonry wall on the northern, precipitous face of the mountain. Upon this ledge there are three parallel walls made of masonry and tapia, largely covered by bushes, which form part of the castle. A narrow path leads to the defensive structures from the col.

Two of these walls support a vault of unknown use. A few metres further on, there is a rectangular water cistern on the almost vertical rock face. It is possible, with some difficulty, to climb up from these structures to the upper part of the ridge where one can find the remains of other walls and a cistern covered with rocks.

The castle is on a pass between the plateau occupied by the Pego marsh and the Rectoria valley. The military building protected various farmsteads in the Girona valley on the southern side of the mountain, although this seems incompatible with its location,

The chronology of the construction is unknown because the documentation that is available is from the Christian era and there have not been any archaeological studies. However, ceramics on the surface indicate occupation from the 12th century until the Christian conquest, when it was possibly abandoned and dismantled.

The Blanc de Morrell tower stands on the plain sheltered by the eastern end of the Sierra Segaria next to the Cremadella road, a name by which the building is also known. This was the old road that ran from Oliva to Denia and the Garganta pass, skirting the mountains to avoid the marshy area.

At present, the tower can be seen from the new variant of the N-332 and from the AP-7 motorway. It is rectangular, 6.30m by 7.50m, with the longest side facing north/south, and is 10m high. It is divided into three floors and entirely made of tapia, the put-log holes and marks of the tapia boards still being visible.

The ground floor has two rooms now covered by a solid brick vault, which originally would have been a water cistern with access from the first floor. Later, when it became a domestic dwelling they lost their original function and the current entrance opens to the south. The first floor appears to retain the original southerly entrance. On the second floor the walls lean a little inward with respect to the structure below and the tapia walls seem to have a different shape and dimensions. The four windows that open sideways break through the walls and would have been made in modern times. The current tile roof is gabled, but originally would have been flat, as indicated by the corbels preserved on the upper part of the walls.

The tower guarded the Muslim population nearby and was possibly built in the first half of the 13th century since no documents even mention the farmstead which it would have protected. After the conquest it was occupied by Christians until the 14th century when it was abandoned.

The Castle of Ocaive and its administrative district

Between today's towns of Pedreguer, Gata, Lliber and Ondara, in the central part of the Marina Alta, was once a small Islamic administrative district - **the hisn of Ocaive**. The 13th century Llibre del Repartiment (land distribution document) notes five farmsteads and one rahal (rafal *) : Benimazmuth, Cannellis, Carracha, Gorgo, Pedreger and the Rahal Abenaxochi.

These names combined with archaeology have enabled the location of almost all these settlements, in some cases there are architectural structures and other physical evidence.

To the south is the farmstead of Cannelis - now known as the Barranc de Canela, as well as that of Gorgo, which probably corresponds to the remains of a settlement located on the northern edge of the Gorgos (Jalon) river. To the north, from east to west, there is the farmstead of Carraca, currently between the municipalities of Pedreguer and Ondara; Pedreguer (the current town of Pedreguer); and Benimazmuth, today's area of Benimarmut.

The location of Rahal Abenaxochi is more problematic. It could be in today's area of Rafalet to the northeast of Pedreguer district, or at Font d'Aixa (Aixa spring) which appears in post conquest documents as the farmstead of Benaxar.

Ocaive Castle is located on the top of a rocky pinnacle at an altitude of more than 300 metres. From here it dominates and controls the natural corridor of the narrow Llosa valley through which once passed the road linking the territory of Dàniyya (Denia) with the south.

Most of the architectural remains of the castle are located on the summit. There are remnants of the walls of a square tower, which originally would have had two floors, with a south-facing door. A few metres towards the south lies another square structure, originally covered with a barrel vault, which corresponds to a water cistern.

All this space is bounded to the west and north by natural crags together with a masonry and lime mortar wall which also closes it to the south and west - areas which are now occupied by agricultural terraces. On the east side, about 20 metres from the tower, there is a rectangular water cistern, which is larger than the other one, with a construction and finish which would date it as Islamic, probably from the first half of the 12th century while the structures on the top would probably be Christian-feudal (second half of the 13th - 14th century)

Hence the primitive Islamic refuge/fortification appears to have been maintained and renovated by the Christian feudal conquerors and continued to be used until the mid-fourteenth century.

Just two kilometers northeast of the castle, in a flat agricultural area, is the **tower of Benimarmut**, a robust rectangular building made of a tapia of lime mortar and stones, which has been re-used as a farmhouse. The modern modifications lopped the top off the tower - the current height is 6 metres - and destroyed the south wall. The original floor of the building would have been 10.5 metres north-south and 6 metres east-west. This tower can be considered as a building from the late Islamic era, having a defensive and control function linked to the Benimazmuth farmstead.

The last defensive structure of the Ocaive hisn is about 5,300 metres southeast of Ocaive on the apex of the **Tossal del Moro** at an altitude of 389 metres. This peak has a panoramic view of territory extending from the Xàbia valley to the North to the Benissa lowlands to the south. The Barranc de Canela lies at the eastern foot of this tower (see Cannellis farmstead, above).

That which remains are the foundations of a trapezoidal structure: 18.20m x 15.20m x 17.70m x 10.70m built with stone masonry bound with mortar, plastered both inside and out. The maximum residual height is 1m. Inside there is a small bench attached to the north wall. This is also of masonry and perpendicular to the wall indicating that it may be the foot of a staircase. The archaeological material recovered from the site date the tower from between 12th and early 13th centuries.

** Note on rahal / rafal : - Translates variously as a shelter or shed, but also refers to private estates which were typically the property of important personages. They had personal names, or that of a functionary and were smaller than the alqueria farmsteads, and geographically marginal. (From Glick)*

Castles of the Laguar Valley and Orba

The **castle of Atzavares or la Plana**, occupies a hill 350 meters high, which controls the entrance to the Laguar valley (Vall de Laguar) from the coastal plain, as well as the headwaters of the Laguar or Girona River which feed into the Barranco del Infierno.

Although the building was demolished in 1283 by order of King Pere (the Great), two enclosures are still visible. The outer enclosure, corresponding to the albacar, is delimited by a tapial wall which is now razed to ground level. In the north this is replaced by a cliff which creates a natural defence. The slope is not as steep to the west. This was where the entrance would have been, and where you can see a half demolished water cistern.

The upper enclosure is on the top, and some inside walls remain, but they are so badly torn down that it is not possible to make out any structures apart from another water tank. The castle was the place of refuge for

the farmsteads of Campell, Fleix and Benimaurell located in the Vall de Laguar, and Portella, Tormos, Orba and Isber from lands lower down. Its date of construction is unknown, but ceramics found on site suggest the 11th century. The castle was occupied by Al-Azraq during the revolt of 1276, and was demolished once it had been captured by the Christian King. However, this did not stop the Morisco rebels occupying the place in 1609 during their efforts to evade expulsion.

The **Casota tower** is located on a promontory 400m high not far from the town of Fleix, about 30 meters to the east. It stands near the old road that went up the valley from Campell and Fleix to Benimaurell. The building had become part of a farm house that masked it until the modern structures were demolished and the tower was revealed for everyone to see.

Archaeological work documented a rectangular tower, 10.30m x 7m, with a wall thickness of almost a metre. The maximum preserved height of 3m is preserved on the north and east sides, while the other sides have been demolished almost to ground level. The foundation of the building is masonry built on the bedrock to level the land prior to construction with tapial form-work. The east wall has an entrance which was probably opened when the tower was dismantled.

The original structure would have had a ground floor and two floors with a flat roof. Its function would be to provide shelter from the farmsteads near Fleix and Campell. There is no documentation about the tower, but according to archaeological evidence it was built between the second third of the 12th century and the middle of the 13th century. It fulfilled its function over a short period since it was destroyed between the second half of the 13th century and the first third of the 14th century. Its present state of ruin cannot be explained except that it would have been demolished after the revolt of Al-Azraq or after 1276.

Orba castle stands on a hill at an altitude of 416 m to the north-west of the Sierra Seguí, known in documents as puig d'Orba (Mount Orba), which controlled both Orba itself and Murla.

The remains we now see correspond to a building which was authorised by the Christian King to Berenguer Mercer in 1289. The building was the residence of whomsoever was the lord of Murla, representing the feudal power in the area.

The structures are very damaged, but from west to east can be seen a large tower, a large rectangular room, a small square tower, a stretch of wall and a water cistern. In addition, there is another cistern at the bottom of the southern side in the place where the access road to the fortification begins. The slope overlooking Orba is steeper and difficult to ascend.

Much of the castle is of the Christian era and no previous constructions have been found, although there are many Islamic ceramics on the ground which could indicate the existence of a previous Islamic fortification.

(Note: This castle is sometimes called the Castillo de Awraba, since the name Awraba or Awrba was once thought to have been the original Islamic name for Orba. However, ancient texts describe the location of "Awrba" as being on the route between Xàtiva/Denia and Valencia/Denia. The texts also describe the location of an iron mine – all of which suggests that Awrba was actually Oliva)

The Xalo (Jalon) Valley – Aixà, Murla and Pop

In the middle reaches of the Xaló (Jalon) river valley, between the municipalities of Lliber to the east and Benigembla to the west, there are two castles on the top of separate mountain ranges, each of which command wide visual areas. These are the castles of Pop on the Sierra del Penyó (Caballo Verde ridge) and Aixà on the Sierra de la Solana.

Pop (Benigembla - Laguar Valley) is the only castle in the Marina Alta of which there are no structural remains. And this is despite numerous documented references. In the Treaty of the Well (1244/1245) it appears as one of the castles which Al-Azraq gave to Jaume I. Later, in fully Christian times (1258), the king donated control of the castle and village of Pop to Encarçó. Referrals continue until the beginning of the 15th century and it was mentioned during the tragic events of the revolt of the Moriscos in the Laguar valley and their expulsion at the end of 1609.

Archaeological evidence (abundant medieval ceramics and even pottery from earlier times) and other sources such as the famous canvas of the expulsion of the Moriscos, place the castle on the twin peaks and coll of the Caballo Verde ridge, facing south, at an altitude of between 740 and 725 m. The district of Pop embraced the current municipalities of Benigembla, Murla and Parcent with a total of eight farmsteads and a *rahal* mentioned in the Llibre del Repartiment: Alcanicia, Benalbacar, Benigela (Benigembla), Benilacruç, Ceylent, Merniça (Vernissa), Parsen (Parcent), Morna (Murla) and Raal Habelbagar.

Aixa Castle (Xaló) occupies the top of a mountain range which is flanked to the west by the valley of Llosa and to the east by the river Gorgos. Its location at an altitude of between 605 and 595 m, emphasises its control and refuge function. It was built by the Muslims, probably in the 12th century, although after the conquest it lasted until the 14th century. Such a strategic situation explains the earlier use of this site from late prehistory through Iberian and Roman periods. Few visible structures remain. There is a rectangular cistern 9.50 x 2.50 x 2.30 m, without a cover, constructed with a robust facing of pebbles and lime mortar over a metre thick, and the footings of a straight wall about 20m long that delimit the enclosure on the south side.

The Llibre del Repartiment lists five farmsteads and two rahals in the Xaló valley area: Cavuy, Curi, Cuta, Moschayra (Mosquera), Beniguagi, Raal Zanaygi y Raal de Nahamen. But these were not all, because the donation of the castles of Tàrbena and Xaló that Jaime I made a few years later (May 1269) to the Princess Berenguera Alfonso de Molina includes others: Atrayello, Alquellèlin (Alcalalí), Rahal Alinhegui, Rahal Abencurbulin, Allibayt (Llíber), Duran, Benixaloni, Arahal, Albayren, Allanz, Albignen y Axaut.

In the valley at the foot of the Caballo Verde Ridge, lies another fortification - **Murla Castle**. This farmstead, the only one in the Jalon Valley repopulated with Christians after the conquest by King Jaime I, retains a fortified church that was built in the 16th century, and which according to researcher S.Giner Guerri, corresponds to the actual site of the Castell de Pop.

Serella Castle

This castle is variously known as **El Castellet** or the **Castell de Castells de Serella**

It is located on a rocky outcrop (Penya del Castellet) on the crest of the eastern arc of the Sierra Serella (1050 m). It has extensive views in all directions. To the north it overlooks the valley and village of Castell de Castells, with glimpses of the sea in the distance; to the south the valley and village of Guadalest and the sea at Albir can be seen. The bulk of the Serella mountain range runs westwards, and the sites of further Islamic remains can be seen, including the lookout of Pla de la Casa.

Little is known of its early history, the first record of the castle was in the Treaty of the Well 1244-1245. The fortification, which was named as Castell (Qastâl) and its associated lands, including various farmsteads such as d'Aialt, Bitla and Espelda was ceded to Al Azraq for his use for three years. It was taken by King Jaime in 1250 and abandoned soon after the Christian reconquest.

The fortification is built almost entirely of tapia and consists of two distinct areas.

The highest point consists of a small plateau where there is a rectangular tower (A), some remains of walls and a water cistern (B). This would have been the celoquia where the caid lived. The ruined tower walls still stand to a height of about 4m. This area can only be reached by scrambling up steep rocks.

The lower albacar (walled refuge) is a large space which lies on the northern slopes, bordered by a low wall which can be seen in sections. It has a well-preserved water cistern (G) which retains water to this day and is located next to the entrance to the enclosure.

The castle has not been excavated and it is not known exactly when it was built, but ceramics found on the surface indicate a date from the second half of the 11th century.

Like most of the other Marina Alta castles it is protected by the 1985 Law (Ley 16/1985) on Spanish heritage. Mascarat and Berdia – Castles of the Southern Region

Mascarat and Berdia – Castles of the Southern Region

Mascarat: To the Southeast of the Marina Alta stood the hisn of "Calb", a large territory which included the present municipalities of Calpe, Benissa, Teulada and Senija. The 13th century Llibre del Repartiment listed ten farmsteads (alquerias): Portu de Calp, Benayça, Canahor, Lenes, Lleus, Merre, Moraira, Paratella, Senija and Teulada. The names of many of these farmsteads survive as rural districts to this day, and even a square tower of Islamic origin has been conserved in Canor.

The main fortification of this hisn was located west of the town of Calpe, almost at the border with Altea, on a 253 metre high limestone outcrop which controlled the Mascarat pass. This was the only route from the north to the south which avoided having to cross the steep mountains of the interior. Access to the fortress, which barely currently exists, was from the east; reaching a more or less flat platform where there are the remains of a straight wall of a square tower. In total the castle covers an area of 750/700 m². The tower is made of tapia of lime mortar and pebbles and is about 4.5 meters tall and 4.8 meters in length. A few meters to the west lies a possible water cistern that makes use of a natural hole in the limestone.

After the conquest by King Jaume I, instability caused by the revolts of Al-Azraq, compelled the castle to be reinforced, giving it a relatively large garrison composed of fifteen men. From the late 13th century onwards the castle lost its military function and there are only a few documentary references to it. In the 16th century one of the coastal watchtowers of the Kingdom of Valencia was built in its enclosure. The extensive administrative district from the Islamic era was maintained into the Christian feudal period creating the Barony of Calpe. In 1386 the territory was divided to form the new areas of Benissa, Calpe and Teulada.

Bèrdia castle: This small castle of Islamic origin lies at the top of the steep mountain range of the Bernia, just above 1,129 metres. The structures which are still visible are the foundations of various walls which together comprise an overall rectangular layout about 44 metres long (east / west) and 8.5 metres wide (north / south); a total of 375 square metres. There are no known water cisterns. Documentation reveals that the water was stored in large ceramic jars, some fragments of which have been found in the castle. The walls were built using standard masonry made with lime mortar and in some cases gypsum mortar, but also form-work of limestone bricks and lime mortar.

Access to the fortress is from the west by a steep path which goes along the ridge towards the end. It shows some adaptation to the rock to facilitate access which is always difficult. The castle sits on an elongated space, separated to the west by a hole in the rock which was probably natural, but could have been intentionally enlarged to improve defence by hindering access. At the other end the terrain drops sharply, creating a hillock which separates the castle from the ridge which continues to the east.

Many documents from the Christian feudal era refer to the castle of Bèrdia. Its strategic importance is clear from the time of the conquest by Jaume I until the middle of the 14th century, when it seems that the castle was destroyed by the Crown. There is only archaeological evidence regarding its use in Islamic times, but there are abundant pottery shards around the castle, on the west slope and at the foot of the fort which dates a Muslim occupation between the 11th and 13th centuries.

Farmsteads and Towers in Xàbia

In Islamic times the Xàbia valley was characterised by many small settlements (we know of more than 20) which formed part of various farmsteads into which the area was organised. The majority were situated at the foot of the mountain, near agricultural lands. However, some were on rugged areas, such as the Plana Justa and the Montgó, where farming would be oriented towards grazing animals. There were also settlements on the coast dedicated to fishing and trade, such as those documented on the island of Portixol or la Fontana point.

The defining elements of these settlements is the amount of ceramics on the surface, and the silos or 'pou de moros', as they are popularly known. These structures were excavated in the white marl subsoil. They have a circular mouth about 0.50 metres wide, are bell-shaped or globular in profile and 1.5 to 2 metres deep. The pits were used to store cereal crops, keeping them away from damp, rodents and insects. They were used as food stores for the community, as well as supplies to sell and earn money to pay taxes.

There is no documented evidence about the political and social organisation of Xàbia in Islamic times. It is thought that the castle upon which the farmsteads depended was that of Denia, whose distance away meant that larger settlements erected watch towers as refuges in case of danger.

The only defensive structure recorded archaeologically is the **tower of Capçades**, situated on the slopes of one of the small hills which bound the southern area of the Plá, some distance from the most fertile lands. The tower consists of a solid foundation of 5.60 x 3.85 metres and a maximum preserved height of around 1.70m constructed with lime mortar and pebbles, finished on the exterior with a coat of lime mortar. Originally it was least two stories high with a flat terrace giving a view of the valley and a good part of the bay, and serving as a refuge for nearby inhabitants.

The west side of the tower supports a building of which only two walls remain, with a threshold and a bread oven built against the outer wall. This construction is typical of the few remains of farmsteads built around towers. Archaeological finds indicate that it was inhabited from the end of the 11th century until a little after the Christian conquest.

Thanks to Christian records, we know of the existence of other towers. There are several references to the **Torre de en Cayrat** in the courtyard of the former Augustinian convent, now the covered market, on the top of the hill where Xàbia old town is located. This building possibly served as a refuge for the inhabitants of a farmstead of which we know nothing except two silos and some Islamic ceramic materials found in urban excavations. Records from Christian times also mention other farmsteads, almost certainly of Islamic origin, which in one case continued to be used during the early period of the Christian feudal conquest.

The **tower and farmstead of Benimadroc** were ceded to Galcerà of Cruanyes by King Jaume I in July

1264. This is located in the area of the same name at the rock shelter of the Montgó and Islamic ceramics have been found on the surface there. We also know of the existence of the farmsteads of Cansalada, Terradola and the Font d'Andó.

Without doubt, one of the most important sites has to be the farmstead of Lluca, given by the king to Alvar de Sapena in 1256. The remains of a tower - popularly known as **el Carcel** (the prison) were conserved there until the 1960's. The settlement was located next to the road to Benitatxell on a hillside facing east. Archaeology confirms the remains of a 12th century Islamic rubbish dump, and structures and materials from later Christian occupation in the 14th and 15th centuries.

Glossary

albacar: walled area / refuge: which comes from the Arabic root baqqâr, meaning livestock or herder. Usually provided with a cistern. Often with low walls and habitations.

alcazaba (from Arabic al-qasbah): Walled fortification in a city. e.g. Denia Castle.

aljibe (aljub from Arabic al-ğubb): water cistern.

alquería: (from Arabic, qarya (plural qura) Farmstead, hamlet or small village and its associated farmlands. There were no fixed boundaries for alqueria lands. Instead they were collectively owned by the tribal group after which they were often named. As a rule of thumb there were 7-10 alquerías per hisn.

Atalaya: (from Arabic ṭalā'i) Rectangular watchtower.

celoquia (from Arabic saluqiya): The fortification on the top of an Islamic castle. A form of redoubt in which the administrator or **caid** (qāyd / qā'id) lived.

hisn (plural husûn): Stronghold, an organisational and defensive centre of an area - Husûn were often castles.

hisn/qarya complex: The social unit formed by the hisn (castle) and its associated farmsteads (alquerias).

Llibre del Repartiment: 13th century feudal Christian land distribution document. A record book in which the King's scribes recorded promises of donations of properties at the conclusion of the Valencian conquest. The scribes later indicated the names of the persons who actually took possession.

Moriscos: Descendants of the Spanish Muslim population that converted to Christianity under threat of exile or death. In the Valencian Kingdom the Muslims were obliged to be baptised as Christians after the revolts of 1525.

Opus vitatum: type of wall construction using small blocks arranged in horizontal rows, sometimes alternating with brick. Used by the Romans and in the middle ages.

Opus incertum: type of wall construction based on small irregular stones, embedded and arranged in horizontal lines in a wall made of concrete. Used by the Romans and in the middle ages.

Opus piscatum (spicatum): type of wall construction consisting of bricks or stones placed in the form of the spine of a fish. Used by the Romans and in the middle ages.

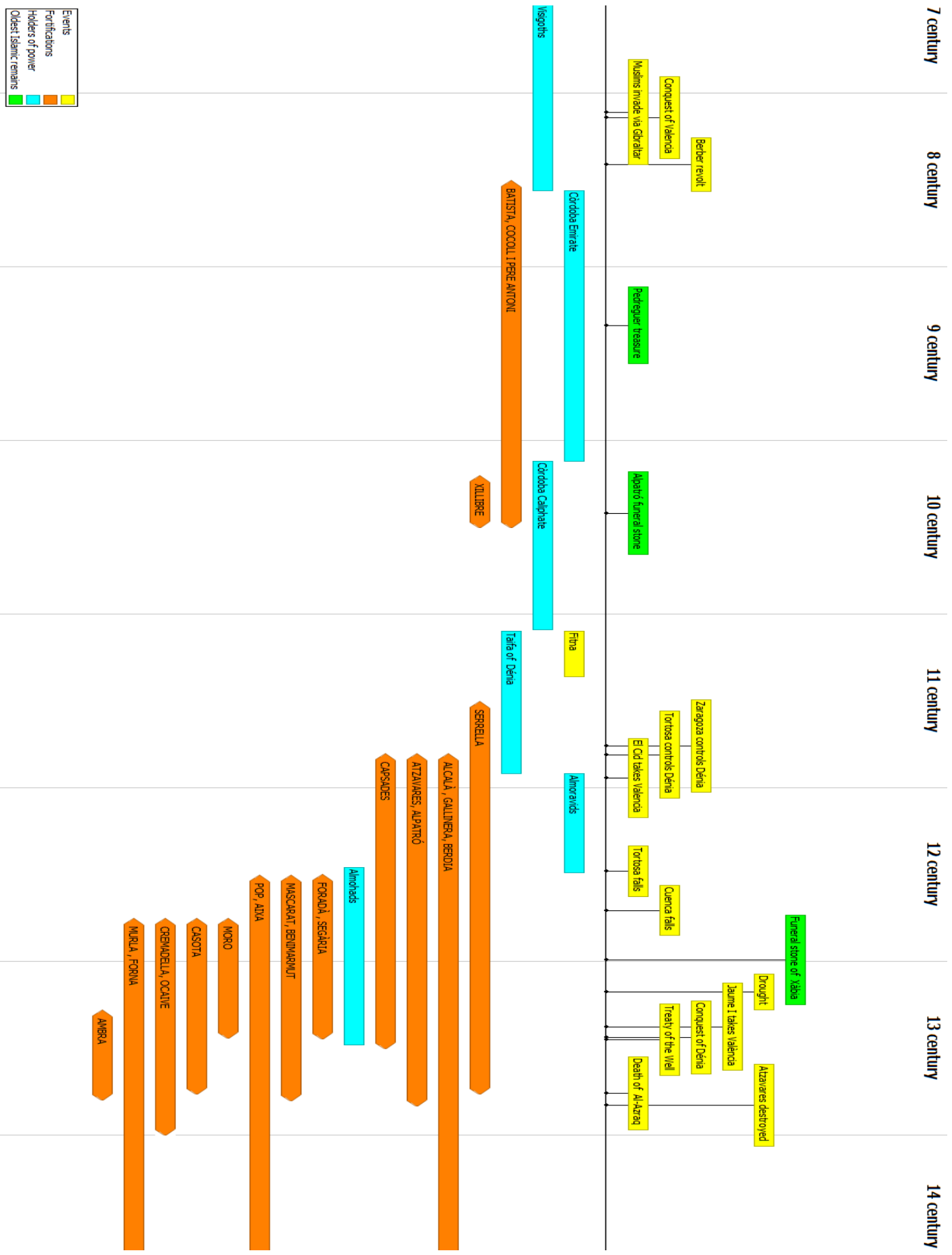
Pact del Poet: Also known as the "Treaty of the well" or "Al Azraq treaty of 1245". A treaty between the Christian King James I of Aragon (Jaume I) and the Muslim commander Mohammad Abu Abdallah Ben Hudzail al Sahuir popularly known as Al-Azraq in 1245. Unique in that it is the only treaty to survive with its bilingual (Spanish and Arabic) texts fully intact.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Azraq_Treaty_of_1245

rahal / rafal / raal : Translates variously as a shelter or shed, but also refers to private estates which were typically the property of important personages. They had personal names, or that of a functionary and were both smaller than the *alqueria* farmsteads, and geographically marginal.

Tapia / Tapial: A type of "rammed earth" technique for building walls using natural raw materials such as earth, chalk, lime or gravel. Involves compressing a damp mixture into an externally supported frame or mould, usually made of wood. Simple and fast to construct, strong, and durable.

Torre de Homenage: A feudal Castle Keep



- Events
- Fortifications
- Holders of power
- Oldest Islamic remains

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