

REVIEW

**Anja Heidenreich (ed.): *Cuatrovitas (Bollullos de la Mitación, Prov. of Seville, Spain). New Investigations into the Almohad Mosque and Abandoned Village***

**(Studies in Islamic Art and Archaeology.) iv, 248 pp. Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 2022. ISBN 978 3 7520 0595 0.**

José Cristóbal Carvajal López

Scientific Researcher, Incipit, CSIC Santiago de Compostela, Spain

Email: [josecristobal.carvajal-lopez@incipit.csic.es](mailto:josecristobal.carvajal-lopez@incipit.csic.es)

This book, edited by Anja Heidenreich and with a foreword by Lorenz Korn, contains the results of the research undertaken by the teams of the Universities of Bamberg and Seville at the site of Cuatrovitas between 2013 and 2018 under the direction of Heidenreich and with the funding of the German Research Foundation. The site of Cuatrovitas is located in the Sevillian Aljarafe, a hilly region immediately west of the Andalusian capital, and contains an Almohad mosque conserved as a Christian *ermita* (rural sanctuary) and the remains of an abandoned settlement. Scholarly attention to this site was late, and focused almost exclusively on the minaret of the mosque until the beginning of the twenty-first century, when Magdalena Valor Piechotta included it in a programme of archaeological research in the region. This programme is precisely what led to the scholarly projects on which this book is based.

The book includes seven sections explaining different aspects of the project, a summary in English and in Spanish, and references and image credits. The final section, “Archaeological documentation”, includes 18 pages of tabulated information and 82 plates. A brief explanation of the seven sections gives an idea of how the project was organized. The first section is an introduction that gives a (too) brief history of the research on the site and on rural settlements of al-Andalus, where this project would fit. The second section, on the natural environment, includes the separate reports of two teams of researchers working on landscape studies, one on the historic landscape and the other on recent processes, both preceded by a short introduction by Heidenreich of previous archaeological information. The third section is only two pages long and contains a report about the road network – which could easily have been included in the next section, a historical overview. This overview contains short studies on the Aljarafe and Cuatrovitas, all of them by the editor except for the study of the place name of Cuatrovitas, signed by a specialist. Among these short studies a chapter on the Fraternity of Cuatrovitas and its relationship to the *ermita*/mosque is very welcome, because it helps link the site to the living community (and stakeholders of the archaeological study, as noted in the Foreword). The fifth section is the most extensive, and with good reason, as it contains the report on the core of the archaeological activities: the research into the building and of the settlements. There are chapters on the survey of the settlement, including non-invasive research methods (Ground-Penetrating Radar

analysis, Electrical Resistivity Tomography, Frequency Domain Electromagnetism study and seismic survey); on the building techniques and plan of the *ermita*/mosque and the structures found in excavations; on the underground structures, which include wells and galleries; and on the finds. The chapter on finds offers a section dedicated to general finds authored by Heidenreich, and then a number of reports by different specialists: an archaeological report on the ceramic assemblage (which unfortunately lacks quantification data), an analysis of ceramics with a wide range of scientific techniques (studies of texture composition by analysis of thin sections in a petrographic microscope and scanning electron-microscope, mineral composition by X-ray diffraction and chemical composition by a combination of wavelength-dispersive X-ray fluorescence, X-ray micro-fluorescence and energy dispersive X-ray fluorescence), an archaeozoological study, an anthropological study of skeletons found at the site (from the late medieval period, when the *ermita*/mosque was Christian already) and an isotope analysis (carbon and nitrogen) of human and faunal remains. The last two sections present results that could easily have been included in previous ones. Section 6 develops the analysis of the settlement and its surroundings, with more in-depth discussion of the survey and excavation activities. And finally, the seventh section presents the history of the *ermita*/mosque building as it emerges from its archaeological study.

I will highlight here two aspects of this interesting book. The first is that Heidenreich clearly believes in presenting openly as much information as possible: the pages are full of photographs, drawings, maps, graphs, tables, and of course there is also a whole section at the end with tables and plates. This is commendable, if not always successful. While images in the text are elegantly disposed and do not hinder the reading, sometimes they are too small to be clearly read (this is particularly irritating in the section on scientific analysis of the ceramics). Given that digital repositories are now available and are widespread in archaeology, it is worth considering if the images that accompany the reports (or the reports themselves) could be made accessible via the Internet to complement the reading of the book. The second aspect, a bit less positive, is a lack of organization, including in the writing up of the results. The building history of the *ermita*/mosque seems to have been the only part of the project where an effort to collate and organize data has been made. The rest of the valuable information in the book is presented without an organized plan: the reports do not seem to have been edited to fit in and there are no sections explaining how the different parts of the project were designed, developed, and brought together as a whole. To give just one example, the finds presented in Section 5 are discussed without links to any archaeological context, and in the case of the human bones one does not know where they come from until reading Section 7. The results of the numerous reports are not discussed together in any section, barring the reader of the valuable insight that only a project director can bring.

This book is an important contribution to the rural archaeology of Iberia, and in particular of the Almohad period, of which very little is known. It is true that the lack of organization and, especially, of an over-viewing conclusion, diminish somehow the impact of the book, but the editor still deserves commendation for caring about making as much information available, and in a relatively short period of time after the end of her project.