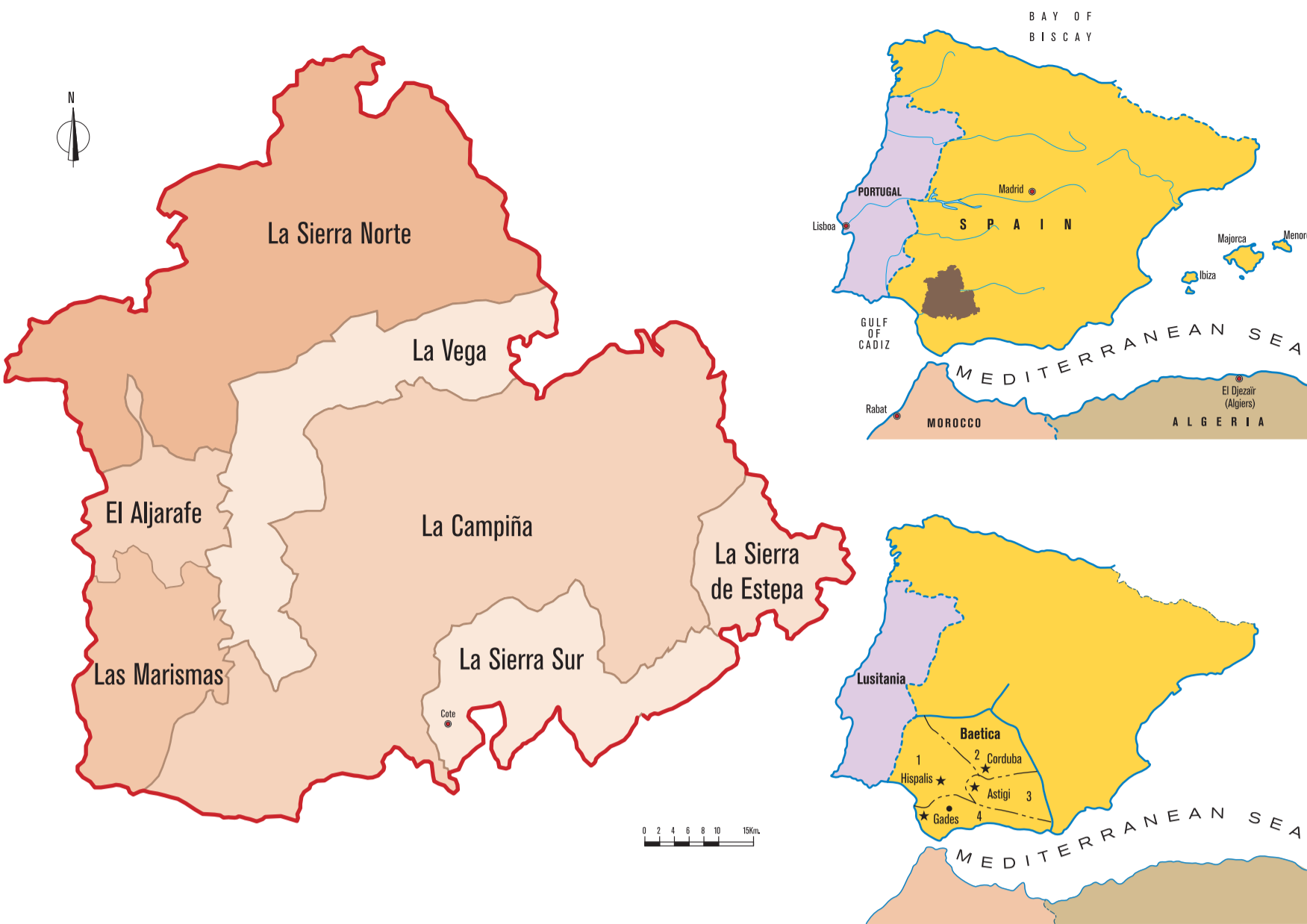


# Cote Castle

## Landscape, territory and settlement in a Medieval Andalusian fortification

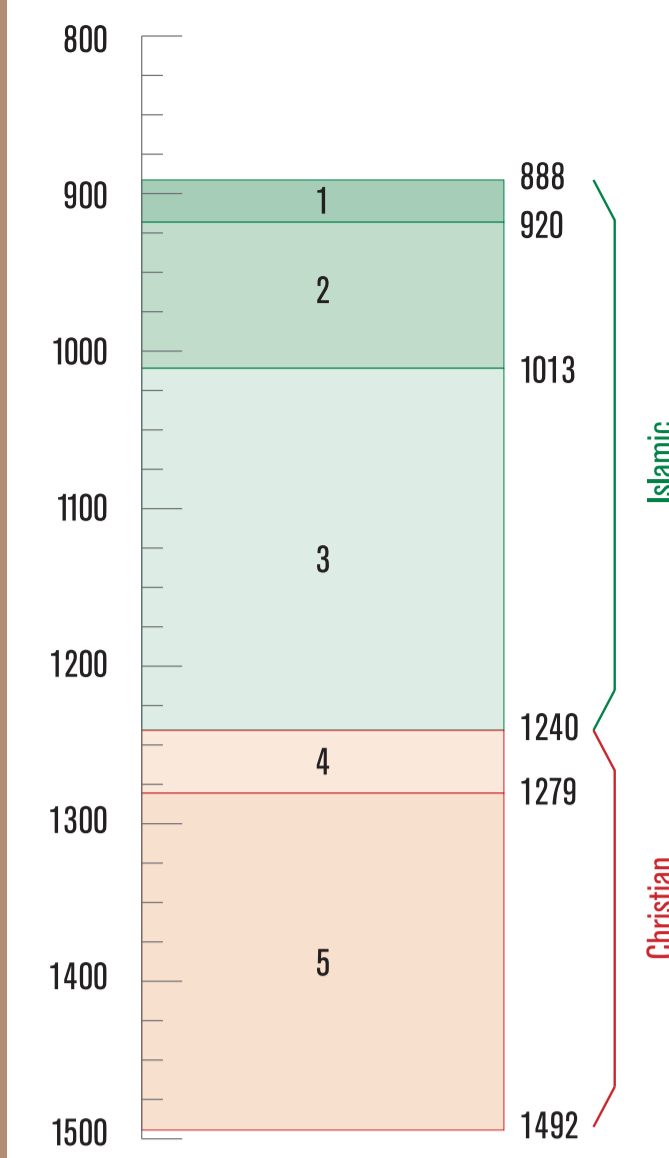
Château Gaillard  
(Maynooth, Ireland) 2002



Cote castle is located in the South-eastern end of the San Pablo Sierra (Montellano, Sevilla, Spain). The fortification is on a 510 m high mountain. From Roman times until it was abandoned after 1492 it was a strategic territorial point, because of its emplacement at the function of three provinces (conventus Hispalensis, Cordubensis and Gaditanus in Roman times, qura Mawrur, Isbiliya and Saduna in al-Andalus); after the Christian conquest it was in the border named Banda Morisca between the Nasrid reign and Castillien.

Archaeological research in Cote and its territory began in 1997. We started by making maps and plans achieved by aerial and earth photogrammetry. A year later in 1998, we did some archaeological research supported by the European Union, with the funds of a P.R.O.D.E.R. applied for by the Montellano city council and developed by the Medieval History Department of the University of Sevilla, under the direction of Dr. Magdalena Valor.

We set up an interdisciplinary team, formed by Historians, Archaeologists, Geographers and Biologists. The interest was a holistic approach to achieve the knowledge about the history and the environmental context of this place through the written sources and the archaeological remains. Now we have a completely different view of this site and its surroundings. So, the most important conclusions are:



## The Islamic castle: Hisn Aquit

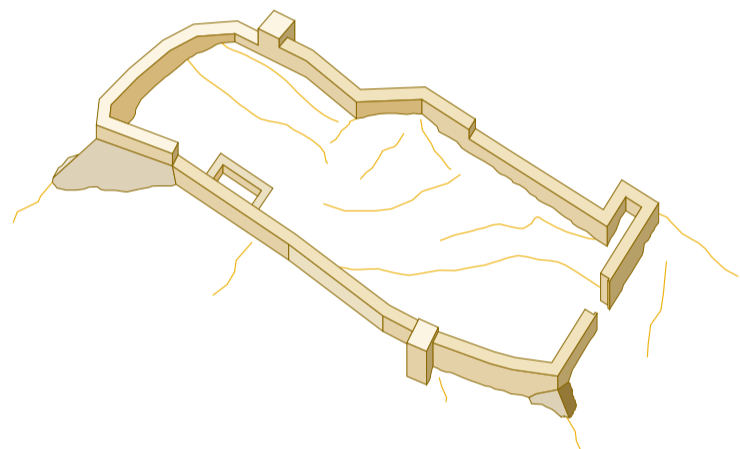
### The castle or alcázar

In Islamic times, Cote castle was a permanent settlement formed by a castle, a bailey and a village outside the walls. Through the written sources, we can estimate a long period, which began at the end of the 9th century until 1240. During this four-and-a-half-century period, many changes took place. In order to understand these, archaeological research is essential as we only have a few written sources. If we combined both types of information, we can reconstruct the following evolution:

1) At the end of the 9th century (between 888 and 895) this site was given by the Omeyyad emir Abd Allah to a mawla (Christian converted to Islam) named Talib b. Mawlut. The castle and its territory were in the hands of this family until 920/921.

At this time the fortification was an enclosure built with large masonry closing the top of the mountain. We detected this first wall in the Southern area inside the second phase, a 45 cm wide wall, and probably both corners of the Southern wall too.

2) After the end of the 9th century until the 11th century. During these years we do not know about the relationship between the established power (in Kalb -political centre of the Mawrur province at this time) and the castle. What we know is that hisn Aquit was a head of a district (iqim) integrated in the Mawrur province. Several villages, cottages, baths, and other castles (like Montefiq and Yebel al-Hiyara) were dependent on Cote.



3) From the 11th until the 13th century (1013-1240). We practically do not have any written sources from this lengthy period. We must wait for the Christian sources after the conquest. Archaeologically, we can demonstrate the significance of this place throughout these centuries. In the 11th century a new castle was built adding 60 cm to the original wall, with one tower in the centre of the Southern wall, and two in the Northern one. It was built with medium size masonry, made of original rock and some shale (taken from a near place).

The new enclosure was a rectangle filled up with earth and converted into a real platform of 1300m<sup>2</sup> surface. This artificial platform was created with earth which came from the surrounding area, full of ceramic fragments. Through archaeological excavation - in 1998 - we detected some architectural structures, namely:

- A lime mortar cistern add to the Southwest curtain, formed by two naves each one with 43 m<sup>3</sup> capacity. It dates from the same time as the walls, i.e. the 11th century. We found some new structures from Almohad times, was the case of two pavements one of them related with the cistern, the second one with the castle-gate.

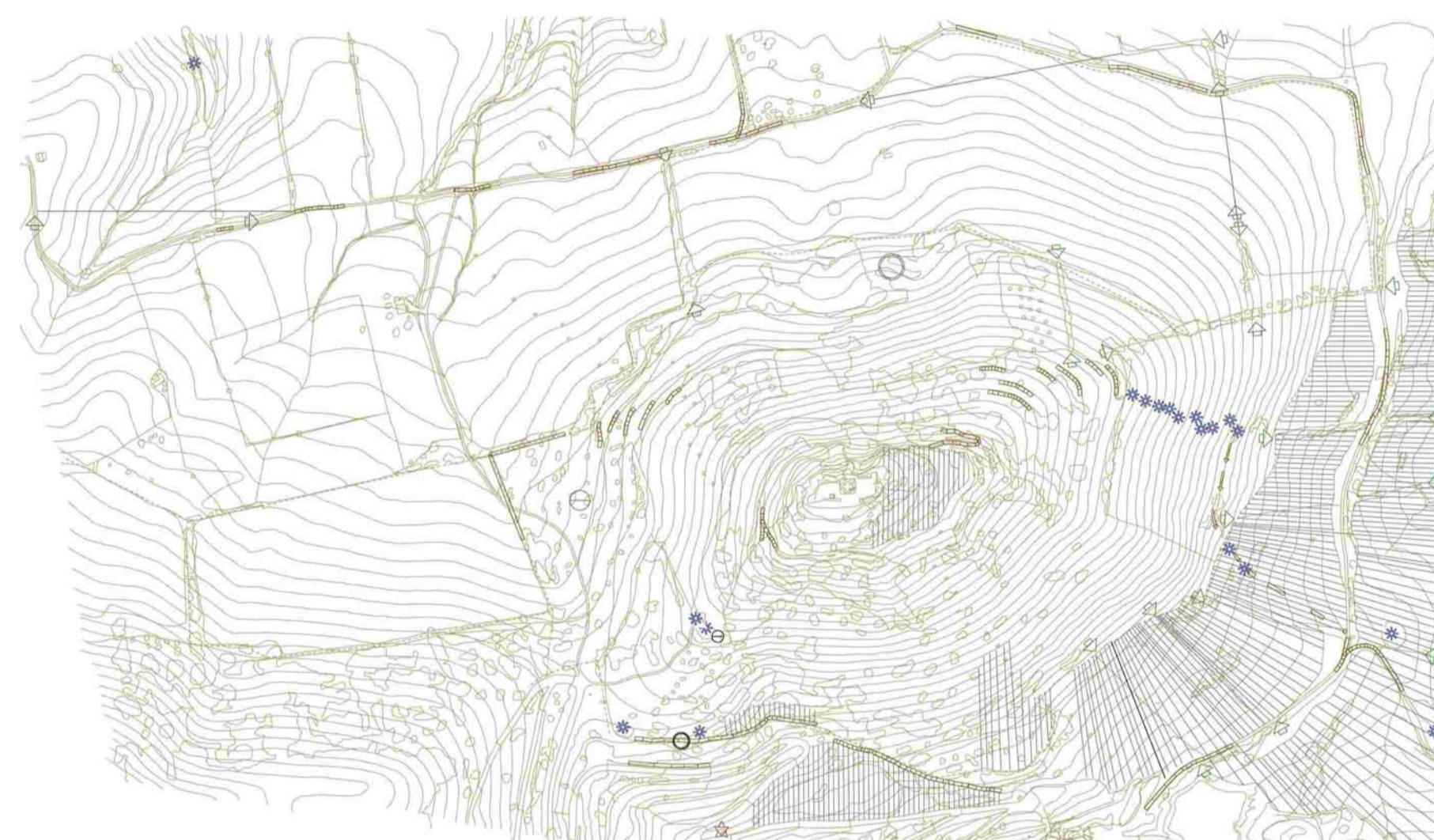


### The quarter outer-wall or arrabal

In 1998 we made an archaeological survey around Cote mountain. We discovered the remains of a quarter in the South-eastern area, which began in the 400 m contour line. Remains of this area are, namely:

- Terraces made with masonry.
- The original path made with a fine red earth and small cobblestones.

- Stone piles, and some walls distributed in contour lines.
- Material culture, very abundant building material and ceramics, dating from Roman, Visigothic and Alandalusi times. Very few examples of Late Christian or Modern ceramics. Therefore, this village was settled at the same time as the castle and was still existing until it was abandoned, after the Christian conquest.



CASTILLO DE COTE  
INTERVENCIÓN ARQUEOLÓGICA 1998 - MONTELLANO - SEVILLA

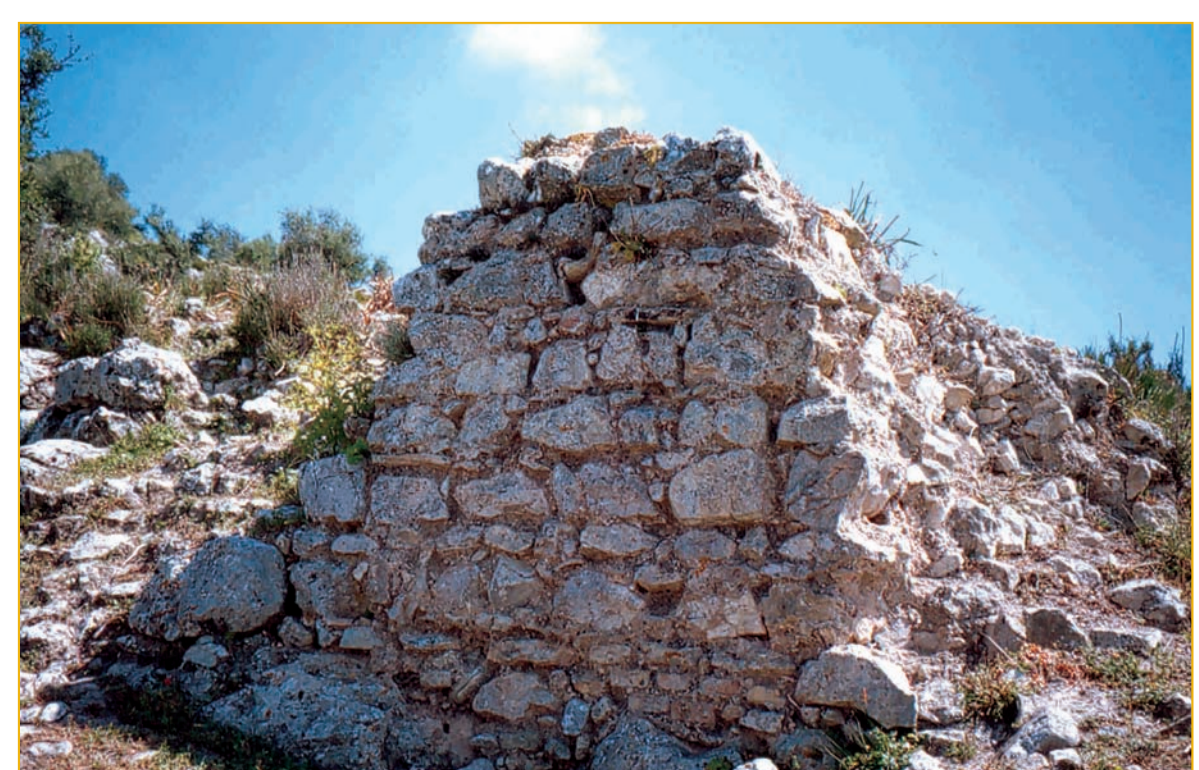
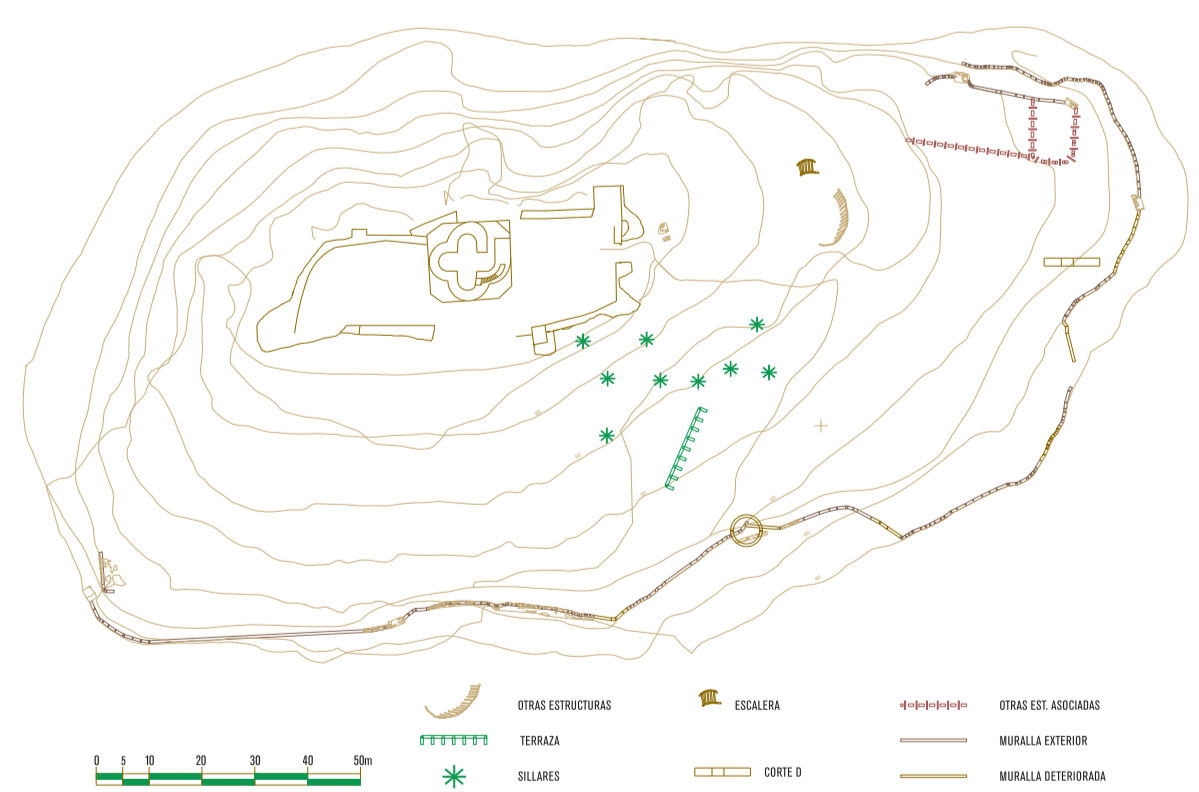
□ EPOCA ROMANA  
 □ EPOCA MEDIEVAL  
 ◇ VESTIGIOS DE PARCELARIO ROMANO  
 ◇ VESTIGIOS DEL PARCELARIO MEDIEVAL  
 ● ELEMENTOS CONSTRUCTIVOS  
 ★ TORREJA AISLADA  
 — CAMINOS

### The bailey or albacar

The bailey seems to be constructed in the third period. After the second half of the 12th century, Christian incursions used to be very frequent and violent, this must be the reason why the Aquit's population needed to be protected by a wall in a higher position. Therefore a new enclosure was built in the 490 m contour line of 227,30 m perimeter. Walls were built on three sides of the mountain, on the fourth it was not necessary because it is a vertical escarpment. This enclosure is badly preserved, as a result of being abandoned and its stones being re-used systematically. Therefore, at present there are still only a very few existing remains of the enclosure. We can recognise its shape thanks to its location on a contour line. The bailey's walls were constructed with limestone masonry (middle size, without mortar).

The bailey had two entrances. One in the West, accessible only to pedestrians and horses; and a second one in the East, accessible to wheelbarrows. The West gate is little preserved, and the East one needs to be excavated in order to recognise its shape. Inside the bailey there are many limestone piles arising from the demolished buildings there. Some pavements and a staircase worked in the original rock are preserved. The highest settlement concentration seems to be the East area, where the wider and topographically more appropriate space is to be found.

An intensive archaeological survey was carried out in this area. We found lots of ceramic sherds. Chronologically, the presence of Almohad ceramics it is very clear and there are only a few Late-Medieval examples.



### The Christian castle: Cot, Cote

The Christian conquest of this area -Sierra Sur y Sierra de Estepa- took place in 1240. Afterwards we can discern two periods (we mentioned three Islamic periods), namely:

4) From 1240 until 1279. This territory was conquest with agreements, that means that local population could stay in their own properties and with their own rights and religion. Then, after 1240 everything seemed to continue as before. But, in reality this territory was slowly transformed into a frontier because of the vicinity of the Nasrid kingdom of Granada.

We do not know about the consequences of the Mudejar rebellious of 1264-1266, but in the case of this fortifications it was not as critical as elsewhere in the kingdom of Sevilla. Probably, depopulation was the worst consequence of this conflict in this area. Through the written sources we know a tragic event, which took place in August 1277. The Merinies troops made a razzia around Cote, they destroyed fields, trees, orchards and everything outer-walls. This event marked the history of Cote forever; afterwards, this site was slowly abandoned and converted into a control point, due to its privileged position.

5) From 1279 until 1492. In 1279 Morón and Cote were given to the military order of Alcántara, in whose hands stayed until 1461. After this date, Cote came in privately owned when it was sold to the count of Ureña.

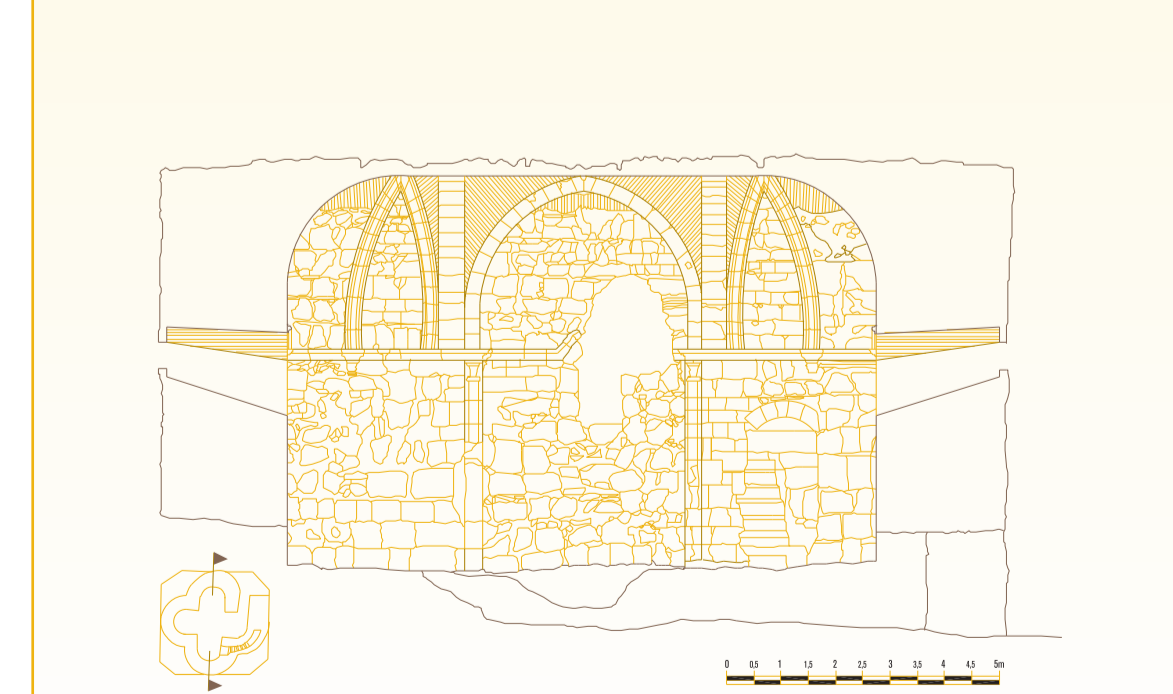
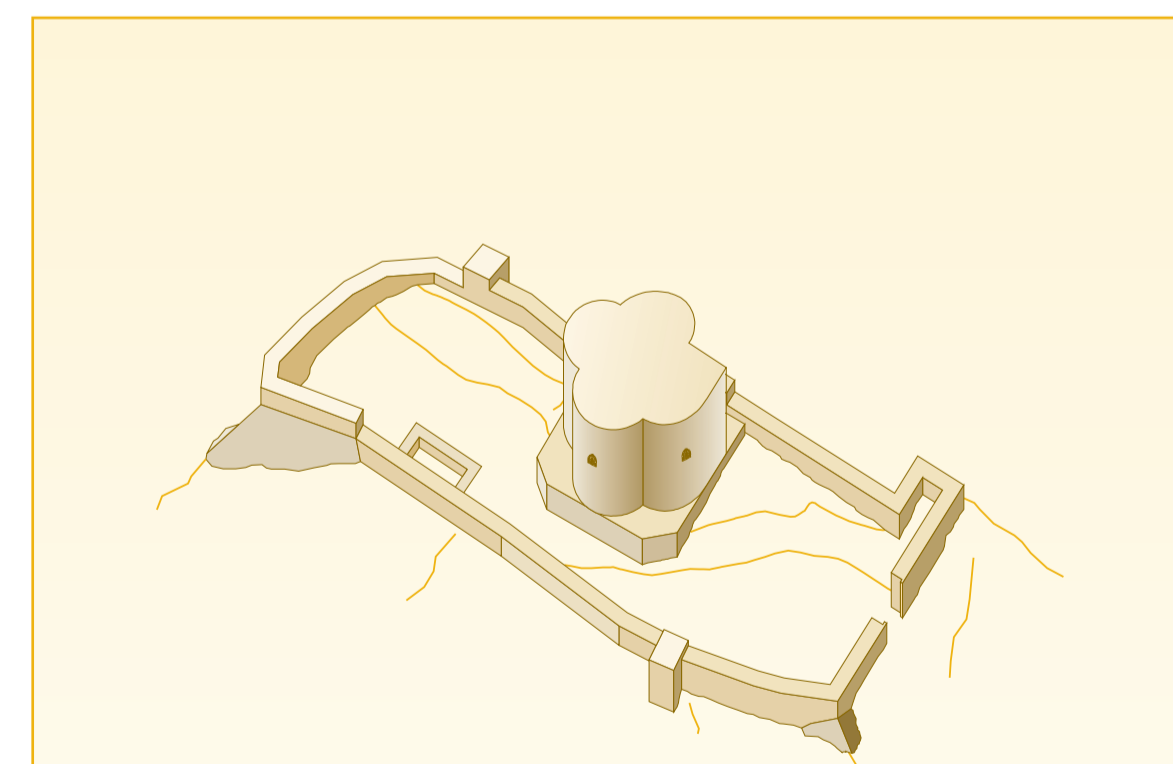
At this time, Cote was considered as a watchtower depending on Morón. Completely depopulated only in 1378 the king Enrique II tried to recuperate this settlement, but in those days the fields around Cote were abandoned and transformed into a woodland, named Algaida de Cote.

After the conquest of the Granada kingdom, many castles were abandoned in this area, Cote was one of them.

In relation with the results of the archaeological research, some extra information can be added. The outer-wall quarter seems to be abandoned after the emigration of Mudejars, few findings come from the villa, and only in the castle can we find some architectural structures, namely a donjon, the gate and a containing wall next to the donjon.

The donjon is a very peculiar building, a singular exempla in the Iberian peninsula. It is a four-apse tower built on top of an artificial platform made from local masonry and earth. It is a small well-preserved Gothic palace. It has only one floor formed by a central space and four apses. Vaults with typical Gothic stone decoration have parallels in other buildings made in Sevilla and Córdoba by the royal family, concretely by Ferdinand the 3rd and Alfons the 10th and his brother Fadrique.

Before our research, this building was dated in 1279, when Cote came to the hands of the Military order of Alcántara. Now, we do not agree with this data, in our opinion this tower was built before 1279.



In relation with the environmental context, we registered the present vegetation and some well-dated samples coming from Andalusi and Christian levels. The result is the complete change of vegetation which took place at the end of the 13th century and through the 14th century. Islamic samples show a variety of cultivated plants, result of intensive agriculture specifically orchard species. After the conquest, wild vegetation and some cereals common in cooler temperatures than in Islamic times started to predominate.