



### 4th Postgraduate Conference in Conflict Archaeology

Sunday 6th to Tuesday 8th of December 2015

Ioannou Centre for Classical and Byzantine Studies



## ARCHAEOLOGICAL REMAINS FROM THE SIEGE OF *MADINAT BASTA* (BAZA, SPAIN), BY THE CATHOLIC MONARCHS IN 1489

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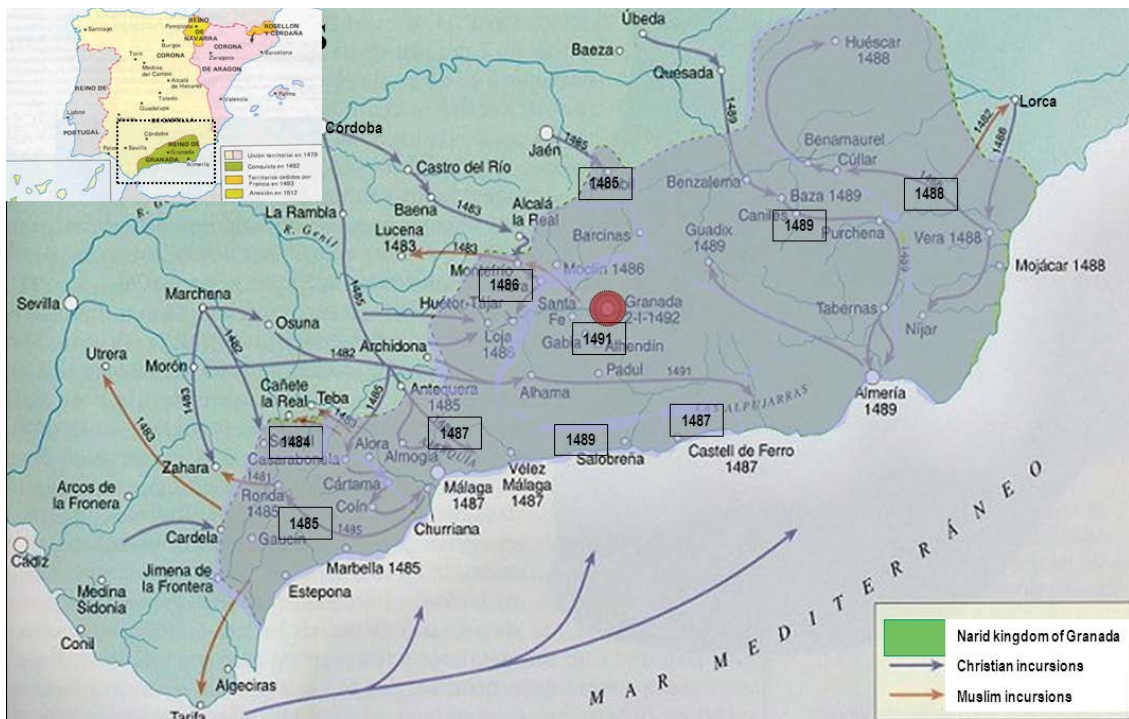
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### ABSTRACT

The Catholic Monarchs (Isabella I of Castile and Ferdinand II of Aragon) besieged the cities of the last Islamic kingdom on the Iberian Peninsula during the War of Granada, until surrender the capital of the Nasrid dynasty, *Madinat Garnata* and *Madina al-Hamra*. The military campaigns were strategically programmed. A series of cities was chosen so that their fall would cause the surrender of a part of the territory, due to a domino effect (Fig. 1).



#### WAR OF GRANADA (1482-1492)

- 1481 – Muslim conquest of Zahara
- 1482 – Christian conquest of Alhama. Starting of the hostilities
- 1484 – Setenil
- 1485 – Cambil / Cártama, Coín, Marbella, Estepona, Gaucín, Ronda

- 1486 – Loja, Huétor, Ilora, Montefrío, Moclín, Barcinas
- 1487 – Málaga, Vélez-Málaga, Álora, Almogía / Castel de Ferro
- 1488 – Vera, Mojácar, Níjar, Cúllar, Benamurel, Huéscar
- 1489 – Baza, Almería, Guadix, Salobreña, Almuñécar...
- 1491 – Granada, fertile plain of Granada, Lecrín Valley and Alpujarras

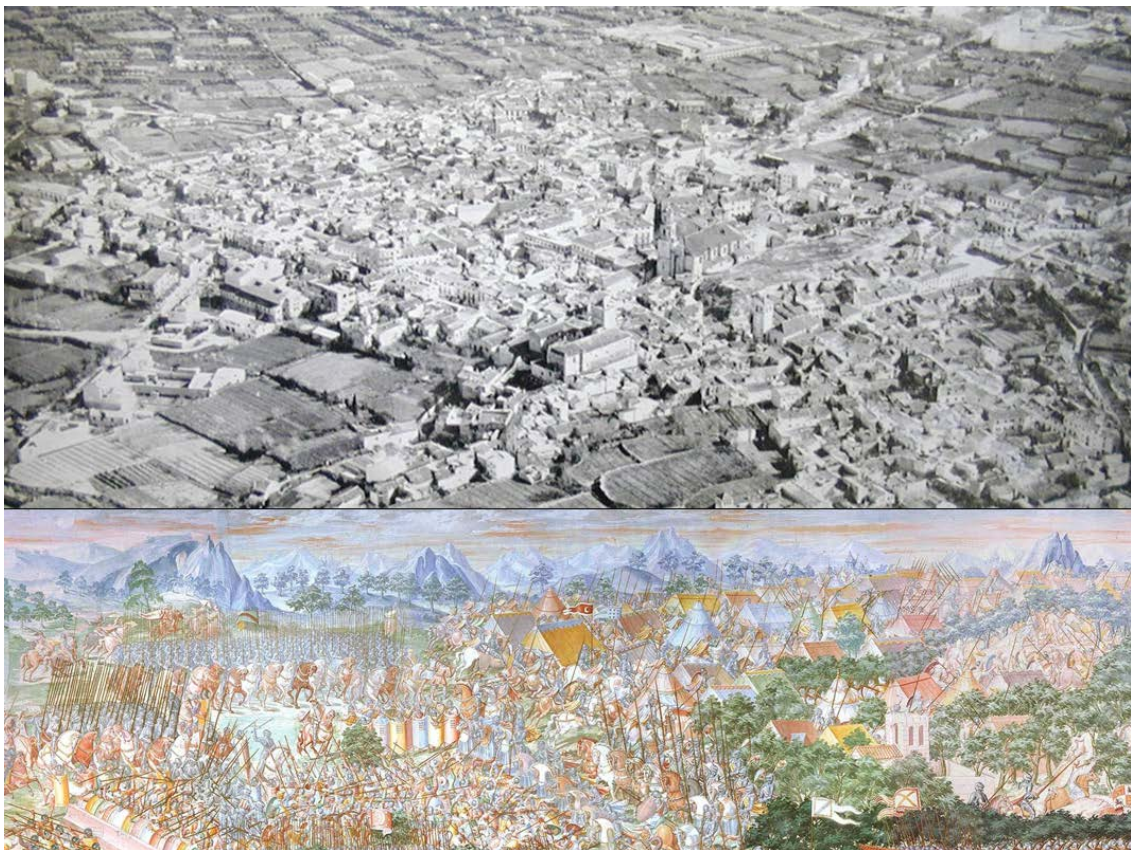


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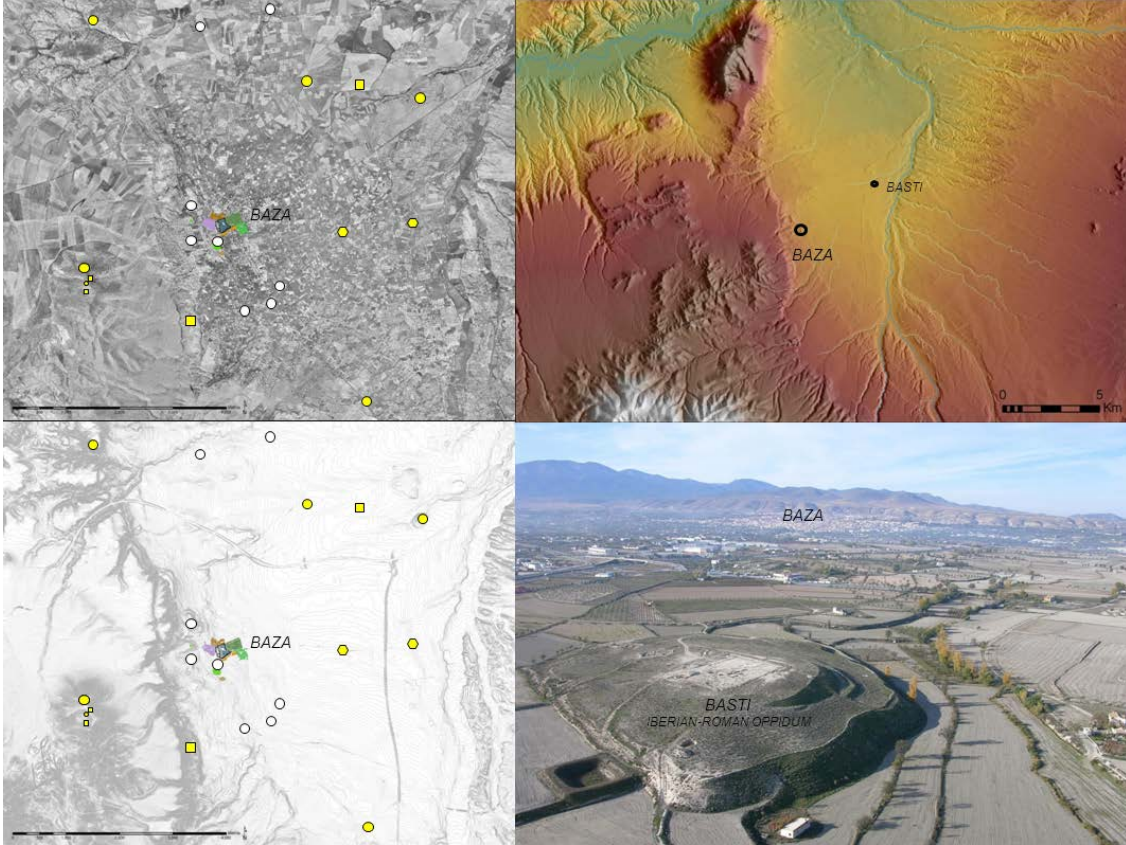
The capture of *Madinat Basta* (Baza), to the extreme North of the Nasrid kingdom, was seen as an easy target by the strategists of the Catholic Monarchs. However, the battle-hardened defence of the population and the special configuration and territorial layout of the city resulted in one of the hardest sieges of the campaign, lasting from mid-June to the beginning of December, 1489 (Fig. 2).



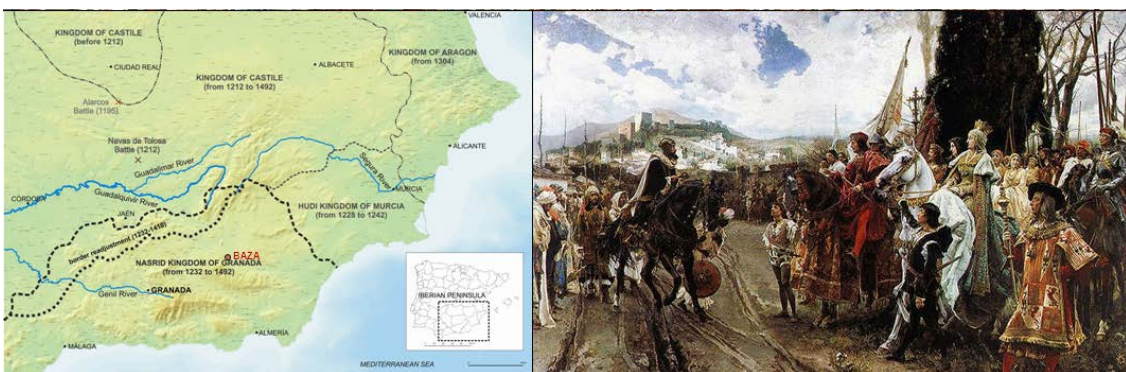
Around Baza there are archaeological remains of different structures that can be linked to this conflict. In this paper we have analysed the fortification works that could have been built during the Christian siege of 1489, on the basis of the archaeological evidence and the historical written sources (fig. 3).



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## THE SIEGE OF BAZA



The Nasrid kingdom of Granada, developed from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century, was conquered after a long lasting war of attrition carried out from 1482, with the capture of Alhama, until the beginning of 1492, when the last Nasrid Sultan, Boabdil, hand over



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the keys of Granada and the Alhambra to the Catholic Monarchs (Fig. 4).

The second city in importance and main port of this kingdom, Malaga, was conquered in 1487 (Fig. 5).



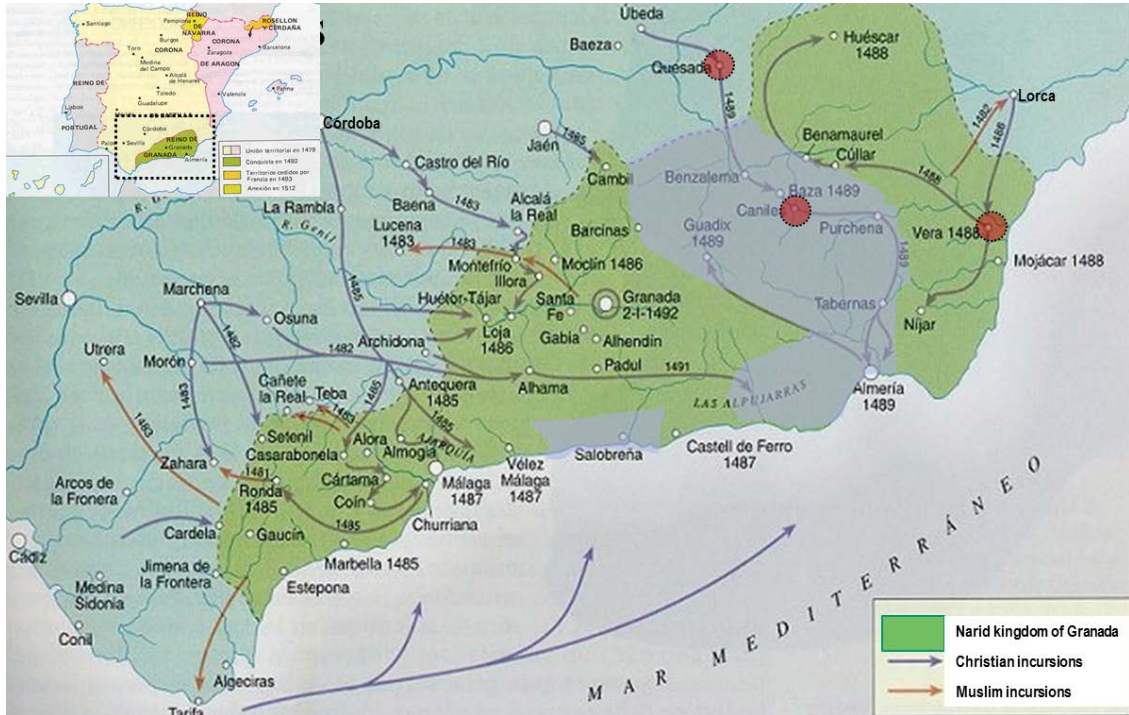
After that, the Catholic Monarchs were hoping that the war would conclude with a general capitulation. Nevertheless, some areas of resistance worsened and the uncle of the Sultan of Granada, Muhammad ibn Sa'd (known as El Zagal by the Christians, The Brave), which was controlling the cities of Almeria, Guadix, Baza, Almuñecar and Salobreña, departed in 1488 from his headquarters in Guadix to plunder the fields of many border places. As a response, in the winter of 1489 the Catholic Monarchs began preparations to conquer the territories under his rule, after being sure that his nephew would not offer to him any support (Fig. 6).



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They determined to siege the city of Baza for being next to the border, thinking that with its conquest it would be easier to surrender other important cities such as Guadix and Almeria. This decision was determined by the easy communications between Baza and Vera, conquered the previous year, which allows provisions by sea, and Quesada to the north, where the Catholic Monarchs brought together around 13.000 knights and over 50.000 foot-soldiers, followed by labourers and traders to supply needs to the troops.

Different castles that created a first defensive perimeter of the city were conquered on the way to Baza. The iron will defence offered by the Muslims held up the Christian troops more than a week, allowing Baza to lay down plentiful extra supplies of provisions and fighting men. Even so, the ratio between besieged and besiegers



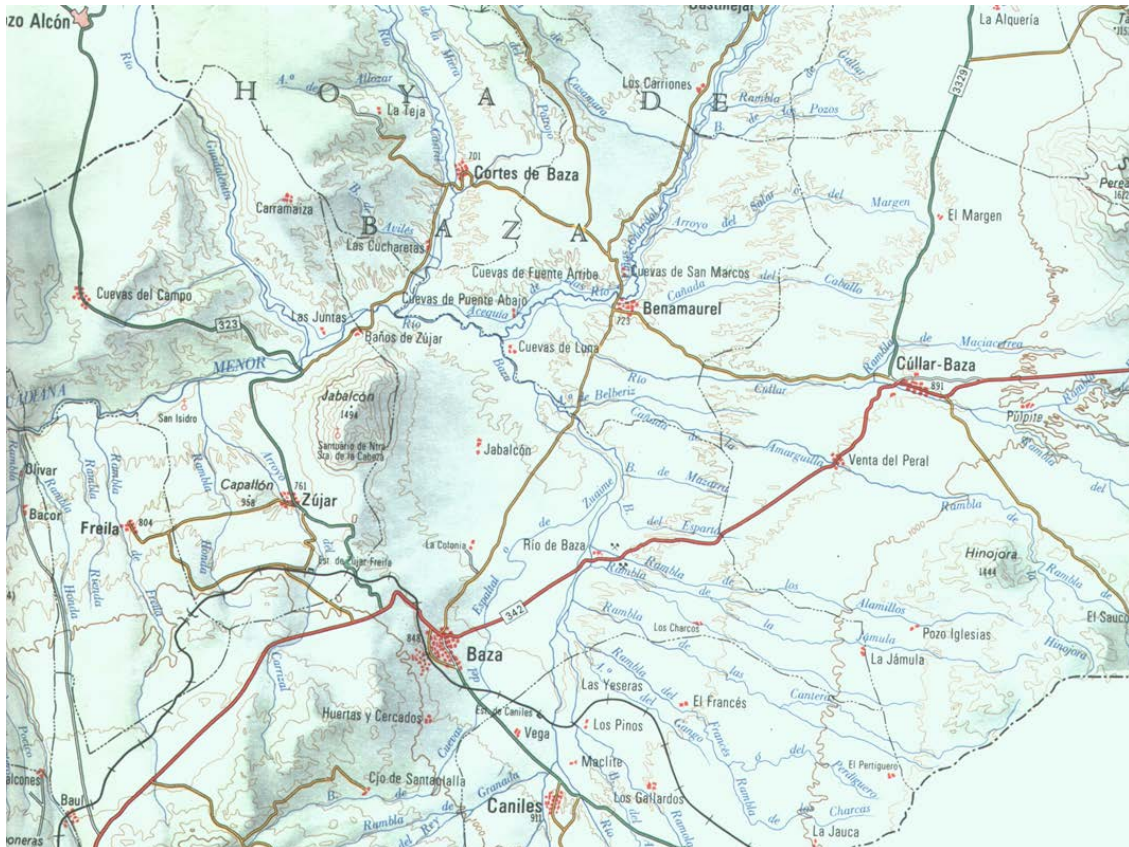
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there must have been one to five, which seemed to predict a quick victory. Nevertheless, the siege of Baza was the hardest and most prolonged of the War of Granada up to 1489 (Fig. 7).



The Christian troops found a difficult battlefield with many more natural and man-made defences than expected. Apart from the fortress of Baza and the city walls, the surrounding suburbs were full of houses and low walls. Outside and inside them, the irrigated area was a dense and intricate labyrinth of alleys between enclosures, water channels, houses and towers, with the addition of some strengthen walled structures specially designed to protect the defenders that were fighting outside the city walls (Fig. 8).





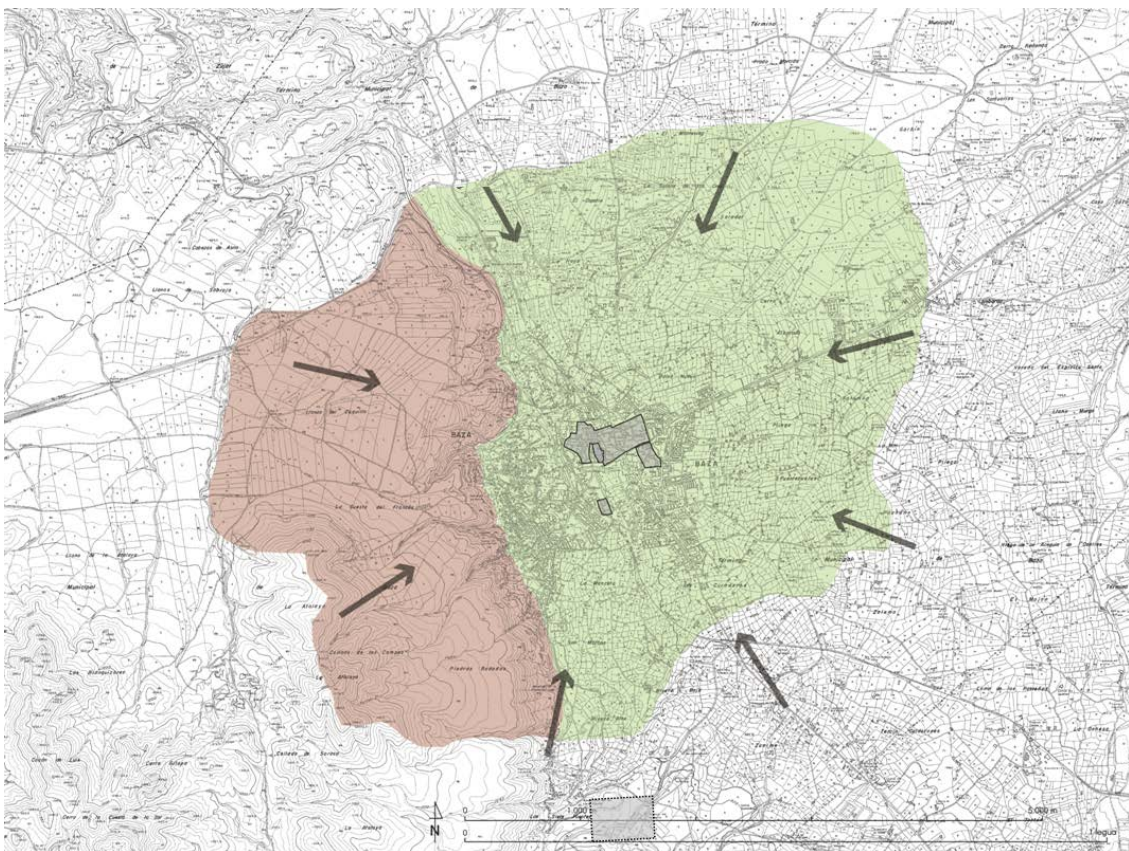
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and the body combat lasted more than twelve hours in an area unknown to them and favourable to the Muslims. After that contest, the Christian troops were scarcely able to maintain the positions that had been taken, or built proper military camps due to the irregularity of the ground, so, King Ferdinand fell back with his army to the first camp outside the fertile plain (Fig. 9).



After these setbacks, other military camps were established outside this dangerous area, one of them was supervised by the Marquis of Cadix next to the coast road, where the big artillery and other munitions brought over by ships were finally placed. The other was under the control of the Count of Cifuentes and was probably situated close to the road to Zujar. Then, the King ordered the Commander of Leon to fell the orchards with 5.000 labourers





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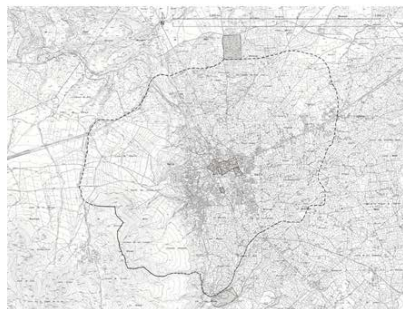
protected by 2.000 knights. According to the chronicles, the thickness of the crop area and the continuous skirmishes of the Muslims allowed them only to advance 10 steps per day, and for that reason they took 40 days to destroy the orchards in their exterior perimeter. After that, the Christians built a double palisade of almost 6 km long with a pit flooded by the water from the irrigation channels, joining the three military camps.

According to the chronicler Hernando de Pulgar, “fifteen castles with their towers and battlements” (wall enclosures with a defensive tower) were built close to this palisade, to average distances of approximately 250 m. Another “castle” was established in the mountainous area. Each of them was supervised by a captain with a contingent of 300 soldiers. This fact was represented in the shield of the city of Baza, where sixteen towers can be seen close to the pits where the waters ran (Fig. 10).



Captains of the 16 «Castles» referred in the chronicle of Hernando de Pulgar:

- 1-«Bonifacio, capitán de la gente de Burgos
- 2-Juan Carrillo, con gente de Castilla la Vieja
- 3-Antonio Arévalo, capitán de la gente de Guadalajara
- 4-Pedro de Ayala, capitán de la gente de la provincia de Castilla, que es de la Orden de Santiago
- 5-Alonso de Barahona, con gente del Arzobispado de Toledo
- 6-Alonso Álvarez de Ávila, con gente de la ciudad de Toro
- 7-Juan de Villacortes, con gente de la ciudad de León
- 8-Pedro de Gamarra, capitán de la gente de Murcia
- 9-Antonio de Morales, con gente de la ciudad de Zamora
- 10-Francisco de Bouadilla, con gente de la ciudad de Córdoba
- 11-Juan de Calatayud, con gente de la ciudad de Cuenca
- 12-Juan de Robles, con gente de la ciudad de Jerez de la Frontera
- 13-Antonio de la Peña, con gente de la ciudad de Trujillo
- 14-Hernando de Barradas, con algunos escuderos de las Montañas
- 15-Bernaldino de Lerma, con la gente de la ciudad de Soná
- 16-E por la parte de la sierra mandó el Rey hacer otro castillo, en el qual mandó estar a Bernal Francés, con la gente de cauallo e de pie que estaua a su capitania»





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Nevertheless, the only control point established in the mounts turned out to be insufficient. Therefore it was necessary to enclose this rough terrain with fencing. A thousand labourers worked hard for two months to accomplish this task.

The archbishop Bernaldino López de Carvajal, who lived these events and compiled them in his book *Conquista de Baza* (Conquest of Baza), compared the operation undertaken to that one carried out by Julius Caesar fifteen centuries before, during the siege of Lerida, a strategy that Scipio Africanus the Younger had already developed in 133 BC, when he surrounded the Celtiberian city of Numantia.

Baza remained completely isolated at the beginning of October, when the King had already order to build houses and caves for the troops, prior to the arrival of the autumn and with the prevision that the siege would last during the winter. After having placed the big bombards (stone balls cannons) in a small hill situated less than three kilometres from the fortress of Baza, and with the arrival of Queen Isabella with reinforcement troops on November, Baza was surrender on December 4th, Almeria on the 22nd and Guadix on the 30th.

From these events there is only a graphical document carved on the choir chairs back at Toledo Cathedral, shown the Christian military camp, with three tents to the right of Baza city walls. Also represented is a bombard pointing at the city, as well as a cannon chamber and two stone cannon balls (Fig. 11).

Still today there are medieval remains of military structures in the surroundings of Baza. There are questions whether they were built



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prior to this episode by the Muslims or by the Christian troops during the siege of the city.



As a result of the proximity of the border with the kingdom of Castile after their victory in the Battle of Navas de Tolosa in 1212, during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries several towers were built in the territory of Baza. Today there still exist the remains of 37 of them. They have similarities in their morphology with a circular or polygonal shape and their constructive system. They used to be built with masonry and gravels stretched with lime, in more or less definite rows, with a low massive floor filled of lime and pebbles. The entrance doors were situated high to the ground in the first floor, and in the rest of the elevation faces there used to be loop-holes. The last floor was the terrace. Among the towers probable built by the



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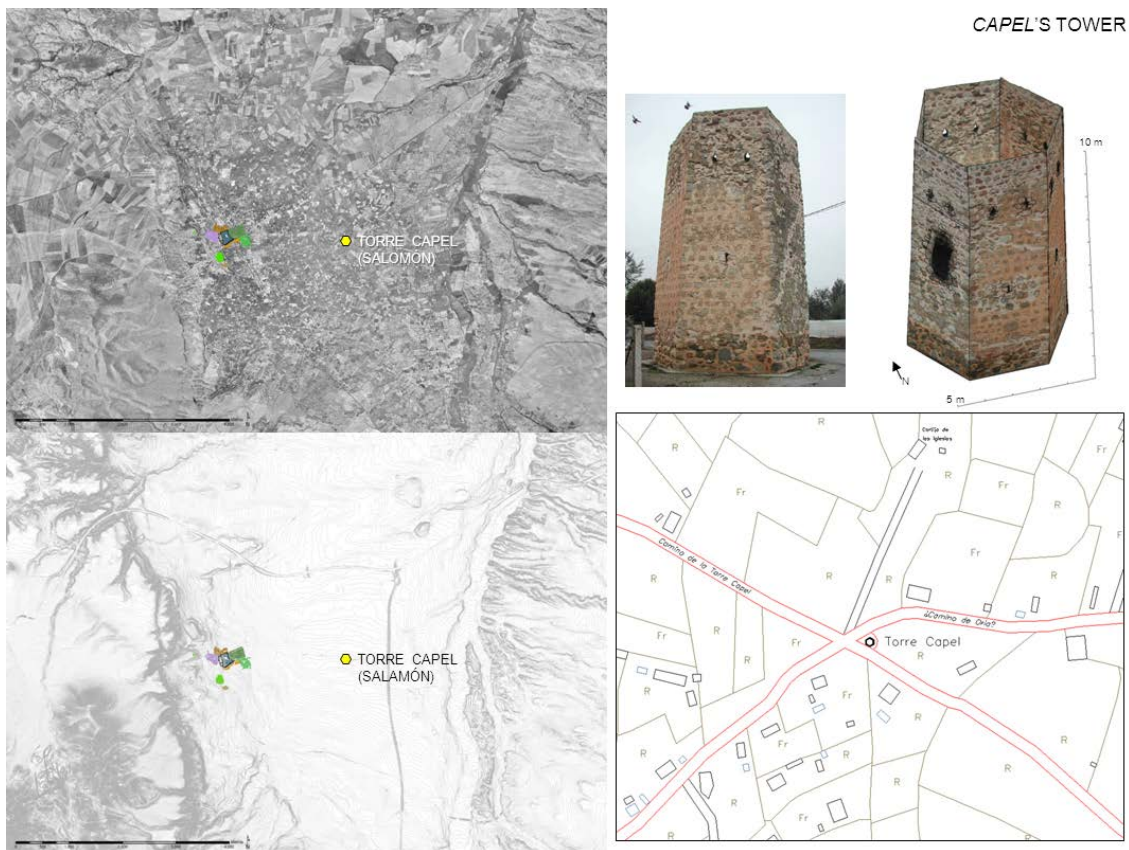
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Muslims around Baza and possibly re-use by the Christians in the siege of 1489 we can find:

### 1.1. CAPEL'S TOWER

Situated 3 km to the south of Baza, and one of the best preserved (Fig. 12).



### 1.2. CEPERO'S HILL TOWER

It is on the temple of the Iberian-Roman oppidum of Basti, 4.5 km from Baza (Fig. 13).

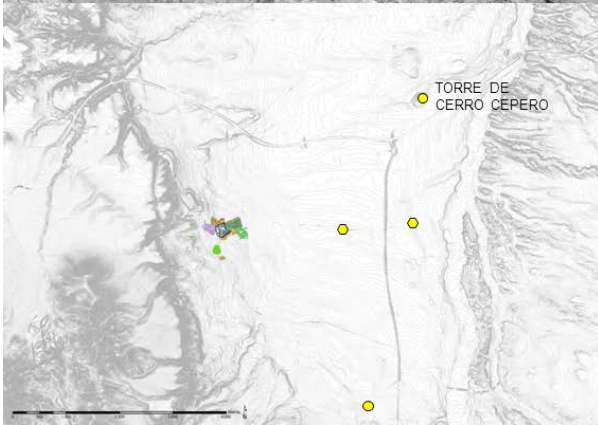


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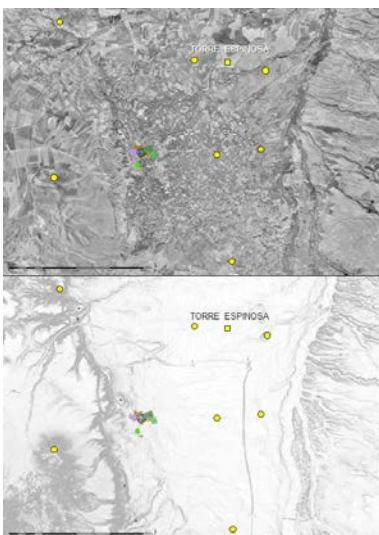


TOWER ON CERRO CEPERO



### 1.3. ESPINOSA'S TOWER

Located 3,5 km to the north of Baza, on a gentle hill close to the historical way to Benamaurel (Fig. 14).



ESPINOSA'S TOWER





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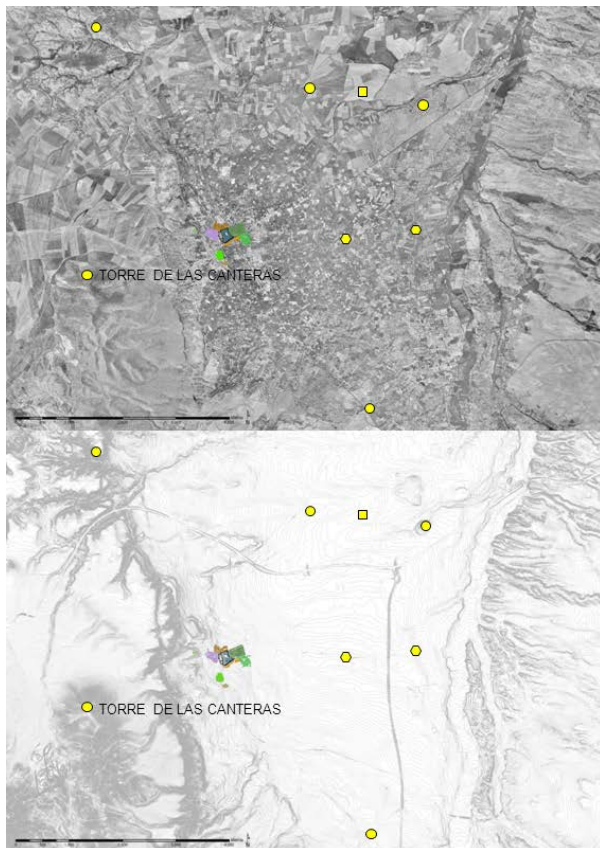
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### 1.4. WATCHTOWER HILL OR THE QUARRIES TOWER

Situated in the Hill of the Watchtower, 2.7 km to the west of Baza. It is placed at the highest point of the wall built in the Sierra de Baza during the last part of the siege (Fig. 15).



THE QUARRIES TOWER



### 1.5. CANILES' TOWER OR TOWER OF THE MOORS

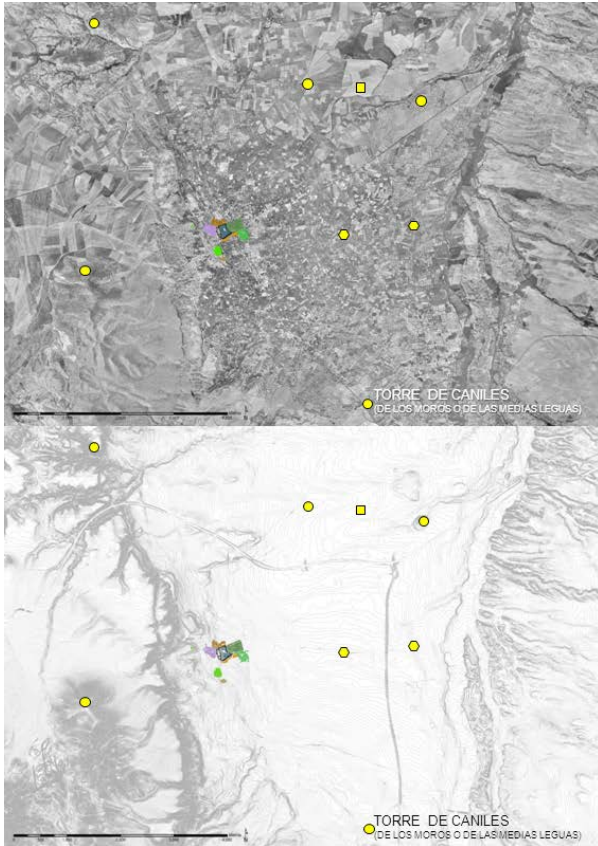
Situated 4.25 km to the south of Baza, close to the historical road to Caniles (Fig. 15).



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CANILES' TOWER OR TOWER OF THE MOORS



## 1.6. CASTLE OF THE ALMOHACEN

It was built by the Muslims during the siege to protect the fountain of the same name that was the only water supply to Baza after the rest of springs were taken by the Christian army. It was situated next to a ravine, an important irrigation channel and the road to Zujar. It would have been built in the highest part of the city, 750 m away from the fortress of Baza. It might correspond to St Christopher Castle, referred to in the Properties Distribution Book of Baza as donated to Lázaro López, mediator of the goods of the city (Fig. 16).



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## 2. CHRISTIAN MILITARY CONSTRUCTIONS

### 2.1. MILITARY CAMP OF THE KING FERDINAND II OF ARAGON

On a hill to the south of the meadow of the Seven Fountains there are pottery fragments that can be linked to a Nasrid farmhouse. This place was re-occupied during the siege of Baza by one of the “Castles” to control the water springs and a big plateau of 5,4 hectares in its eastern part, where there still exist concentrations of stones, tiles and pottery associated with the royal military camp of the King.

There are several references in the Properties Distribution Book of Baza of 1491 to this main military camp, situated next to these

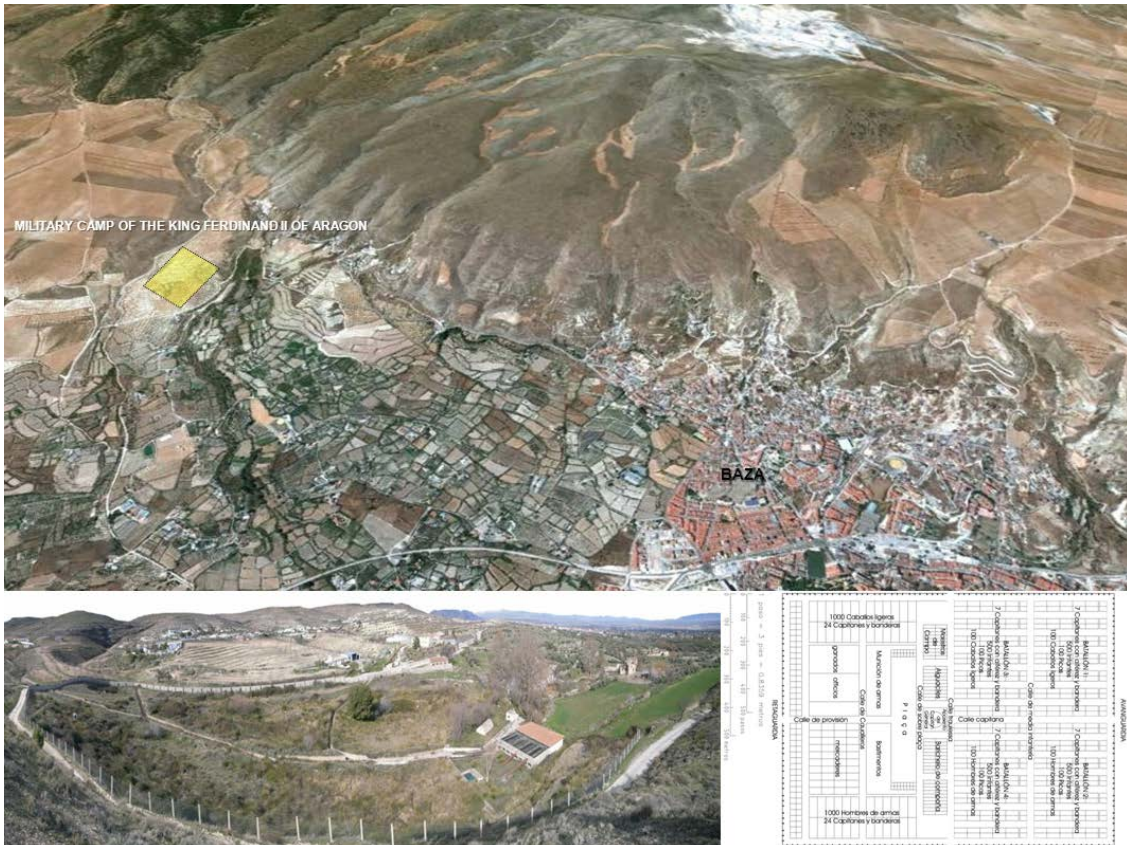




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fountains, the Coayme's irrigation channel and at the end of the pathway of the mills, since these were mainly placed in the headwaters of the major irrigation channel. The Campaign Hospital for the troops was also established in this area (Fig. 17).



## 2.2. CASTLE AND MILITARY CAMP OF THE ARTILLERY

The place name of Cerro de las Lombardas (Hill of the Bombards) is still associated to with a small promontory close to the main road towards the coast, situated nearly 3 km from the fortress of Baza, where can be found pottery fragments from the fifteenth century. In the Museum of Baza some of the chambers and stone balls of these big bombards are preserved (Fig. 18).



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## 2.3. CASTLES PROTECTING THE CHRISTIAN PALISADE

### 2.3.1. BERNAL FRANCÉS' CASTLE

Recently we have located the remains of this fortification, recounted by its singularity in the chronicles and other documents, as being the only castle of the Sierra de Baza. A part of its walls inside a farmhouse has been preserved, built on a small plateau situated 380 m from Morayja's Spring (called St John by the Christians), controlling this other important water source. The wall is 30 m long between 0,8 and 1 m width. To the north of the farmhouse, there are some remains of what might have been a corner tower of this walled enclosure, faced towards Baza.

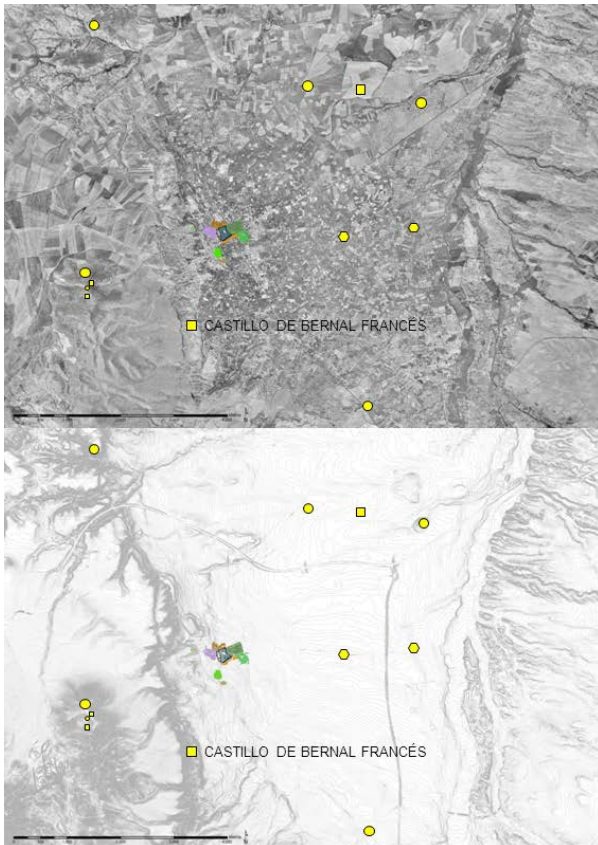


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On the hillside there are several caves with buildings remains and terraces for harvesting. They could be some of the rooms mentioned by the chroniclers, built by the different garrisons during the siege of Baza when winter began (Fig. 19).



BERNAL FRANCÉS' CASTLE



### 2.3.2. GARBÍN'S TOWER

It is situated 3 km to the north of Baza, 1 km to the east of the tower of Cepero's Hill and approximately 800 m to the west of Espinosa's Tower. It has a rectangular shape of 6.4 and 4.1 m and the preserved height is approximately 2 m. It has been linked to a Nasrid farmhouse that would have existed in this part of the surroundings of Baza, though the archaeological material does not show that.



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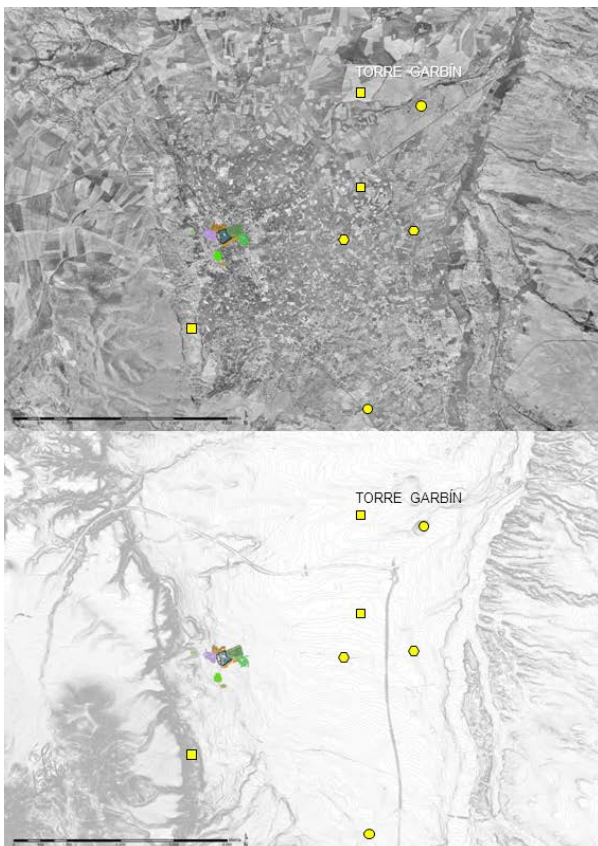
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It was built with non-crustrated lime rammed-earth, with rows of small size white stones and light ochre-coloured earth, mixed with a bit of lime. It has remains of covering plaster of white lime mortar.

In 1997 an emergency excavation was carried out after part of its contents had been emptied by some thieves that had confused it with a sepulchral tomb.

Its constructive technology is quite similar to Bernal Francés' Castle, and very different to the referred cylindrical-shaped Islamic towers. As a result, we think that it might have been the only preserved fortification built by the Christian troops during the siege in the lowlands of Baza (Fig. 20).



GARBIN'S TOWER





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In addition, the Properties Distribution Book of Baza give some little mentions of a part of these castles built to reinforced the palisade, donated to important Christian settlers after the city was captured. This book doesn't refer to the captain who was in charge of these fortresses (recounted in Hernando de Pulgar's chronicle), so it is difficult to place them with accuracy. Among them we can highlight:

2.3.4. A castle donated to Hernando de Zafra (secretary of the Catholic Monarchs).

2.3.5. A castle donated to Luis de Bocanegra (keeper of the Castle of Socovos).

2.3.6. A castle donated to Lope Sánchez del Castillo (deputy of priest of the city).

2.3.7. Two castles donated to Gonzalo de Segura and Diego Pérez de Santisteban (servants of D. Enrique, main noble of the city and cousin of the King).

### **2.3. THE WALL ON THE SIERRA DE BAZA**

On the Sierra de Baza there are remains of the constructions mentioned by the Christian chroniclers. They exaggerate this work saying that it was built of a double wall made of stone, earth and wood, with an inner military pathway of approximately 3.35 m width, and an exterior pit following the example of that one excavated previously in the fertile plain of Baza. Nevertheless, the preserved remains along nearly 4 km in the summits of these mounts are reduced to a collapsed wall of scanty height. They might have corresponded to the basement of a simple wall 1.2 and 2 m thick. It



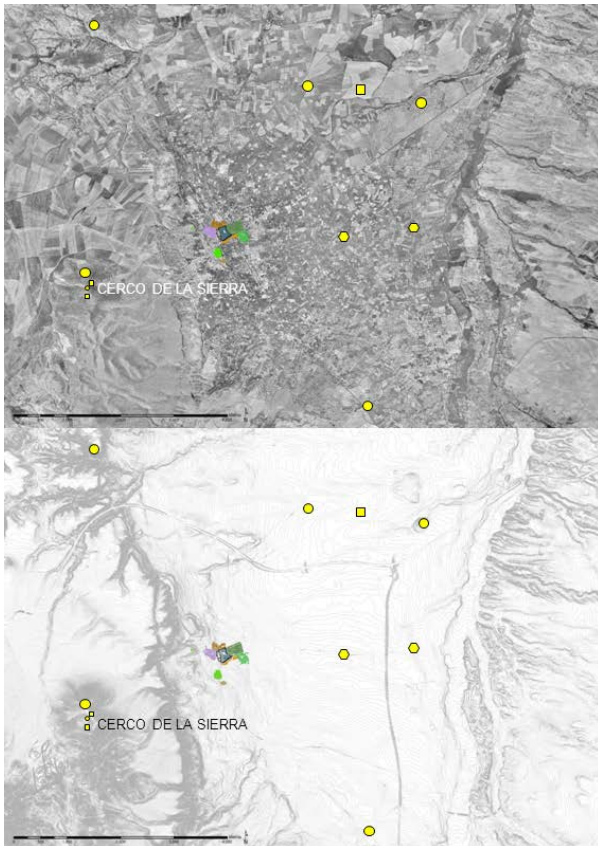
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was built with irregular ashlar in the parapets, filled with earth and rubble, with a low rate use of lime, which explain its collapse. Maybe the rest of the wall would have been made with rammed-earth, following the examples of Bernal Francés' Castle and the Garvin's Tower. There are no evidences of the double wall or the pit described by the chroniclers, the Christians must have decided not to build them because of the difficulties on working in this orography (Fig. 21).



WALL ON THE SIERRA DE BAZA



Mariano Martín García. «El Cerco de Baza. Los restos conservados». *Alzada*, 32, 1994, pp. 33-39.





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## CONCLUSION

The difficulties in the conquering of Baza forced to bring together numerous military actions that had not been put in operation in the Iberian Peninsula since Antiquity, like:

- The development of different tactics adapted to the own nature of the place in each time of the siege, and against the well-developed defence put in action by the Muslims.

- And the quick construction of different military works on a huge scale, with both strategic and propagandistic purpose.

- Or the management of wide contingent of troops from different Christian kingdoms, which had to be provided for supply during a long-lasting siege.

- As well as the use of massive artillery brought to the place from a long distance, both overseas and overland.

As we have showed, this was an approach specifically designed for the circumstances and different to elsewhere in the Iberian Peninsula at this time.