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Interest in Andalusian pottery owes much to such early pioneers of medieval archaeology in Spain as Gómez Moreno (1924), González Martí (1933, 1944), Torres Bálbas (1934), Casamar (1959), Jorge Aragoneses (1966) and Llubiá (1967). Typically, their studies focused on fine wares in museum collections, which were thus interpreted and dated stylistically without an archaeological context. The real advances in the understanding of ceramic production came with the development of modern Medieval Archaeology, between 1970s and 1990s (eg Duda 1970, Bazzana 1979/80, Rosselló Bordoy 1978, Zozaya 1980, Navarro Palazón 1986b, Torres 1987, Fernández Sotelo 1988, Varela Gomes 1988, Retuerce 1998). Naturally these first systematic studies were generally aimed at the classification of the material and the alignment of typologies with specific periods of time.
From the early 90s, however, there was a significant slowdown in enthusiasm. It had been discovered that, unlike the Roman period, the Middle Ages was characterized by a proliferation of local products, ruling out the possibility of defining a typology valid throughout al-Andalus. While settlement archaeology flourished, pottery studies were heavily criticized for being descriptive and unable to address historical questions. Add to this the tedium of creating massive inventories of sherds, and one can see why the subject was losing its vocational attraction. This was the state of affairs when Rosselló Bordoy (1991) showed that while production in the Caliphate era and the first half of the thirteenth century was becoming well defined, major questions remained about pottery production in other periods, particularly the eleventh and twelfth centuries and the Nasrid dynasty (thirteenth-fifteenth centuries).

Signs of a new agenda can be noted in publications from the 1990s. There is a greater emphasis on archaeometry, more attempts to identify centres of production and areas of distribution and marketing, more interpretation of the social and political implications of form and decoration, a greater attention to historical questions and a significant increase in synthesis.

Pottery of the Caliphate period (tenth century) initially attracted attention thanks to the excavations at Madinat Ilbira and Madinat al-Zahra. It featured a type of ornamentation, applied equally to open and closed forms, and termed green and manganese (verde y manganeso) or otherwise Medina Azahara ware (Cano Piedra 1996). It has a variety of decorative themes: vegetation, geometric, figurative and inscriptions (AME1, 240).

Unfortunately we can say little as yet about the eleventh century, as comparable settlements and ceramic assemblages have yet to be investigated, and this is also largely true of the Almoravid period (first half of twelfth century). However, recent excavations in Platería Street, Murcia, have turned up a pottery-rich midden heap of the last quarter of the eleventh century or, more likely, the first quarter of the twelfth (Jiménez & Navarro 1997). The assemblage included a group of glazed bowls with patterns realised in gold paint (lustre wares) that recall a group of those used in the facades of Italian churches dateable to the last quarter of the eleventh century. Murcia is accredited in Arab sources as one of the most prestigious centres for the production and export of gilded fine wares in the twelfth and the first third of the thirteenth centuries. The coarse wares in the same assemblage are thick-walled, made on a slow wheel and show no signs of interior glazing. The most common hollow-form table-ware is the little jar, and the predominant decoration is cuerda seca, already common in the eleventh century. The oil-lamps derive from those of the Caliphate period, but they are narrower (see below).

Coincident with the expansion in the Peninsula of the Almohad empire in the second half of the twelfth century, there are changes in some ceramic series, both formal and decorative, and the emergence of new types that profoundly transformed the Andalusian ceramic landscape. New forms (cooking pots, lamps, pot-stands or reposaderos) and decorative techniques (tin glazing, sgraffito, stamps, applied strips) reach the Peninsula already formed, so they are not the product of an evolutionary local process; some evidence points to the east – north Africa, Egypt and even Persia. By contrast
Fig 7.9a  Products of Andalucia (a) dishes of the 13th century from the excavations at the house of San. Nicolás (Murcia).

Fig 7.9b  (b) Pitchers, jars and bowls of the 13th century from the excavations at the house of San. Nicolás (Murcia).
c) Ablution set of the 13th century, with water jar and stand (reposadero) and containers for unguents. Fig 7.9c
with earlier periods, ceramic production of this time is now well-known, thanks to its abundant appearance in archaeological excavations (Figs 7.9 A-B). It occurs in town and country, often in contexts of destruction and desertion linked to the conquests of the Castilians, Aragonese and Portuguese in the second quarter of the thirteenth century that reduced al-Andalus to a territory from the river Tagus to the Kingdom of
Granada. Good examples of these assemblages are that discovered in 1937 in the city of Mallorca (Rosselló Pons, 1983) and that recovered from a house-site next to the church of San Nicolás in Murcia (Navarro 1991; and see p 314 below). In general, the material is characterized by the fine quality, variety and specialization of types. The cooking pots are quite different from those of previous phases (which flowed directly from the tradition of late antiquity); they are made on a fast wheel, with fine thin walls, and glaze covering the whole surface of the interior (Fernández Navarro 2008). The oil lamps, now with an open bowl and always glazed, are different to the early lamps, unglazed and with a closed body and a spout, as in Roman types. Also introduced at this time are ceramic incense burners and chafing dishes for portable warming or cooking, as well as big jars with their stands (reposadero), and wash-basins with water jugs (Fig 7.9C).

One of the most characteristic types of decoration of this period is *sgraffito*, which was effected by applying a coating of manganese oxide and engraving it while still fresh with a chisel or stylus. This showed up the colour of the clay fabric beneath, generally off-white or beige (Navarro 1986a). It seems indisputable that Murcia achieved prominence in this art, although there were undoubtedly other production centres: in the Balearics, Valencia and southern Spain (Rosselló Pons, 1983; Fernández Sotelo 2005; Hita Ruiz et al. 1997). Jars and jugs, particularly those intended to contain water, were often decorated with protective symbols. The repertoire included the *khamsa* or hand of Fatima, the seal of Solomon, the key to paradise and the tree of life flanked by confronted birds. All these signs were designed to protect the water contained in the vessels, and prevent the ingestion of a *jinn* (evil genie), reflecting an almost universal belief documented in ancient Egypt and contemporary cultures of the Fertile Crescent. Other themes, such as the lute player or banquet scenes were also of probable Fatimid inspiration and arrived in al-Andalus through lustre-ware and metalwork in the thirteenth century. This iconography reveals a powerful flow of ideas new to al-Andalus, originating in Eastern and Berber society. *Sgraffito* appears in al-Andalus in the late twelfth century and its use in the eastern region decreases significantly after the Christian conquests of the mid-thirteenth century, and it thereupon declines to a repertoire of very basic geometric shapes (Navarro & Jimenez 1995, 211). The technique continued to be employed in north African workshops throughout the fourteenth century, but never achieved the heights of perfection reached by the workshops of Murcia.

From the mid-thirteenth century until 1492, al-Andalus was reduced to the Kingdom of Granada, which comprised roughly the present provinces of Almería, Málaga and Granada. Products of this, the Nasrid period, caught the attention of early scholars, especially ornamental tiles and the large vessels, decorated in blue and luster sometimes known as the “vases of Alhambra” (Gómez Moreno 1924, Frothingham 1951, Llubiá 1967, Martínez Cavirot 1983; Flores Escobosa 1988; Flores Escobosa et al 1989; AAVV 2006a) (Fig 7.9D).