

**Itinerary**  
**Castell**  
**Vell**  
English  
MUCC

# Self-guided itinerary

## Characteristics

- Free entrance.
- Walking tour. Wear appropriate clothing and footwear.
- This itinerary is not accessible for people with reduced mobility.
- Walk within the marked itinerary for visitors and archaeological remains security reasons. Be aware of falls, slopes.
- Do not litter.
- Tour duration: 45'
- Explanatory elements: an introductory start panel and 6 marked stops.

## Instructions

The itinerary can be done using audioguide or guide brochure. The itinerary can only be done during the opening hours of the Centre d'Interpretació.

- The audioguide and the digital map can be downloaded from the website [www.mucc.es/castellvell](http://www.mucc.es/castellvell) to your mobile device.
- Access online audio guide and map of the route on: [audioviator.com/audioguia/castell-vell-en](http://audioviator.com/audioguia/castell-vell-en)
- The guide brochure must be requested at the Centre d'Interpretació Castell Vell.

## Centre d'Interpretació Castell Vell

CV-147, 2, 12004 Castelló de la Plana

## Summer opening hours (from 1<sup>st</sup> April to 30<sup>th</sup> September):

From Tuesday to Saturday: from 10:00 to 13:00 h and from 17:00 to 20:00 h

Sundays and bank holidays: from 10:00 to 14:00 h

## Winter opening hours (from 1<sup>st</sup> October to 31<sup>st</sup> March):

From Tuesday to Saturday: from 10:00 to 14:00 h and from 16:00 to 18:00 h

Sundays and bank holidays: from 10:00 to 14:00 h

Closed: 1<sup>st</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> of January | 6<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> of December



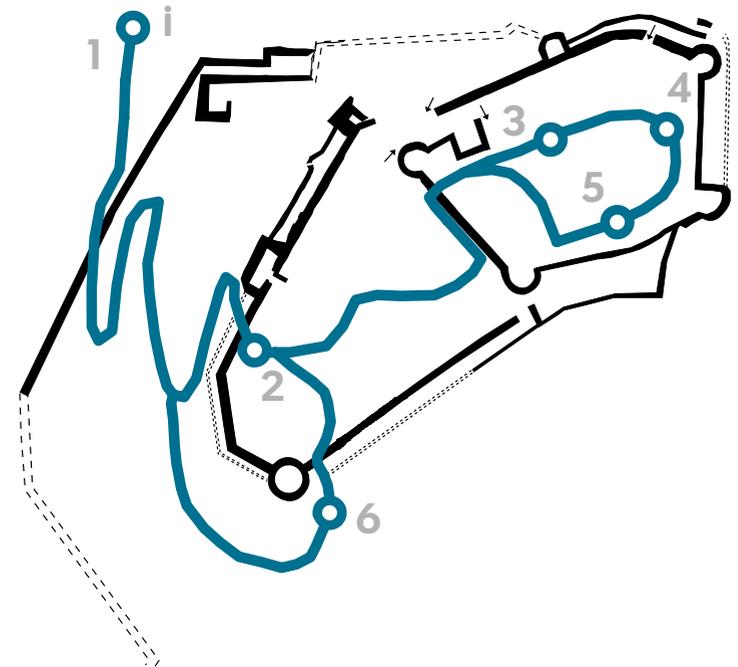
Audioguía i plànol  
Audioguía y plano  
Audioguide and map

[www.mucc.es/castellvell](http://www.mucc.es/castellvell)

# Castell Vell Itinerary

## Introduction

Castell Vell is a fort of Andalusian origin. It was head of the district until the conquest by King James I in 1233, who divided the territory between Almassora and Castelló. Granting its inhabitants the Transfer Privilege in 1251 became the origin of the city of Castelló, a fact which has been remembered annually in the "Romeria de les Canyes" (Pilgrimage of the Canes) since 1375.



i Start panel

● Marked stops: 1. Structure of Castell Vell / 2. The albacara / 3. The citadel / 4. The Andalusian house / 5. The castle territory / 6. The settlement



# i - Castell Vell of Castelló de la Plana

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## Start panel

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Castell Vell is located on the Magdalena hill, one of the last south-eastern buttresses of the Desierto de las Palmas, a mountain range that separates the coastal plain from the Borriol corridor. Much of its surface is occupied by a white pine forest, result of a reforestation that took place in the 60s of the twentieth century. Some isolated carob and olive trees specimens can still be seen, witnesses of old abandoned farms. The undergrowth is a characteristic of the thermo-Mediterranean soil with species such as the mastic tree, rosemary, fan palm, thyme and asparagus plant, among which colony of prickly pears can be found on the sunniest slopes cliffs.

The first hill occupations date back to an indeterminate time of the Bronze Age, possibly of the final stage. But it was in the Iron Age when a walled town or *oppidum* was built on top of the mountain. The *oppidum* was an Iberian settlement of over 2,500 m<sup>2</sup> that, due to its strategic location, between the sixth and first centuries BC, controlled most of the coastal plain located north of the Mijares River.

As a result of the Roman conquest, the Magdalena hill was abandoned, and it was not inhabited again until the Hispano-Muslim period. The medieval documentation reports the existence of a first castle towards the end of the eleventh century known as *Castilgone ripa di mare*, of which little archaeological evidences remain. In fact, most of the currently visible structures correspond to an Almohad castle from the second half of the twelfth century, which was the district capital until conquered by James I's troops in 1233.

James I divided the territory of Castell Vell among his lords. The Fadrell farmhouse became property of the Calatrava order. Almassora was donated to the bishop of Tortosa and Castell Vell to Nunó Sanç de Roselló, which meant the dismantling of the Hispanic-Muslim administrative system and the germ of the current municipal districts of Castelló de la Plana and Almassora.

In 1251, Castell Vell was owned by Ximén Pérez de Arenós, lieutenant of the king and the person to whom James I granted the Transfer Privilege, a document that allowed the Christian population of Castell Vell to move to the

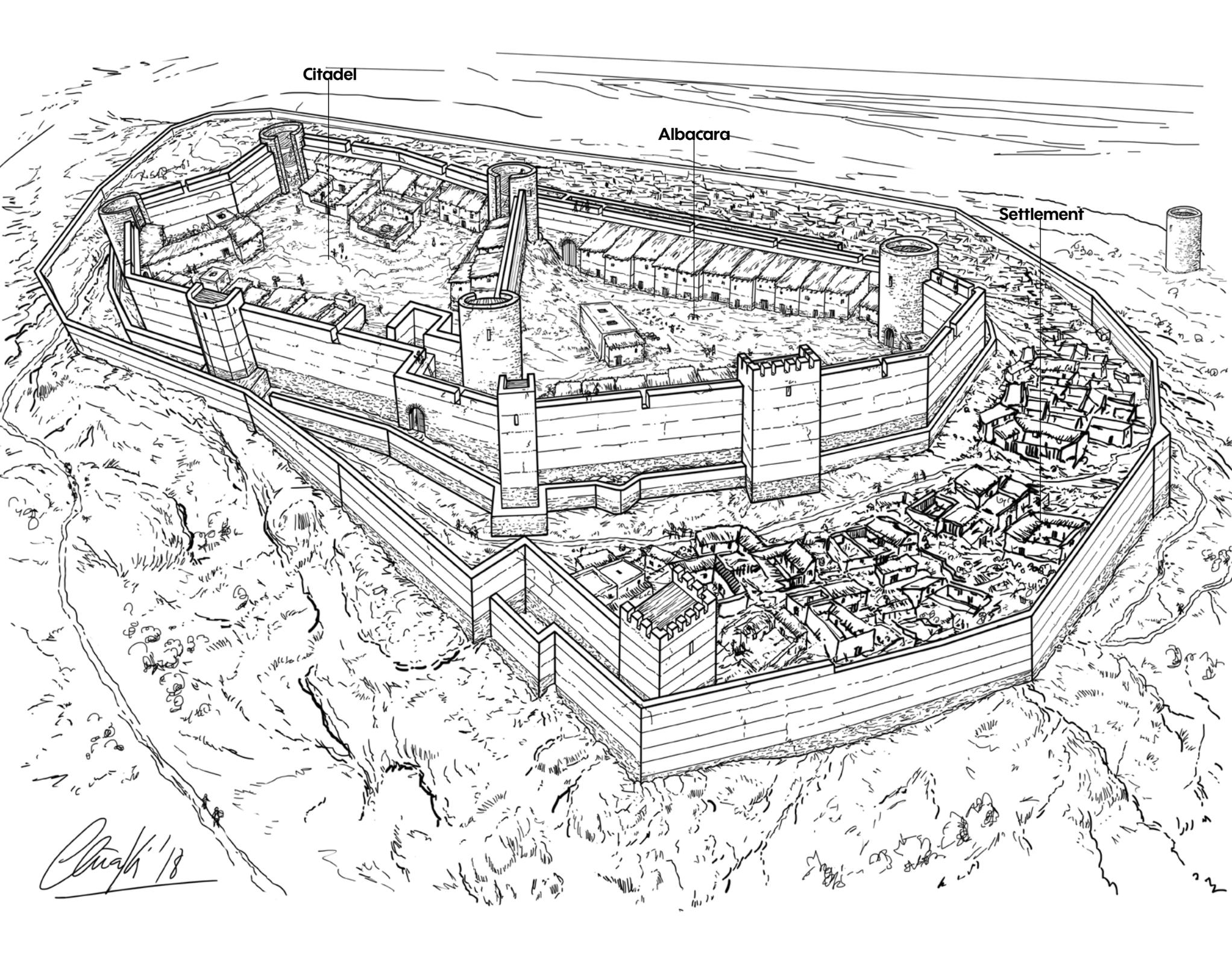
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plain. The place chosen to settle down was the Binarabe farmhouse, which throughout the thirteenth century gave rise to the town of Castelló. This event marked the beginning of Castell Vell decline, as it gradually lost its population until becoming completely abandoned in the first third of the fourteenth century. In fact, municipal documentation reports that the land inside Castell Vell was already being ploughed in 1326, and this has been archaeologically confirmed after finding late medieval agricultural terraces in the albacara.

Citadel

Albacara

Settlement



*Chahki '18*

# 1 - Structure of Castell Vell

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## Stop 1

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The structure of Castell Vell follows the model of three-section Hispanic-Muslim castles, distributed in three independent walled enclosures: the citadel, at the uppermost point; the albacara, below the citadel, and the settlement, which extended on the south and east sides of the hill. Each of these spaces had a specific function. Thus, while the settlement housed the castle population, mostly engaged in agriculture and live-stock, the citadel and the albacara were related to the administration of the castle and its territory, and it was the place where the taxes paid by the farms were stored and where officials responsible for collecting them lived.

The main materials used in the castle construction were stone, lime, clay and plaster, all of them present in the vicinity of the Magdalena. These materials were combined in different construction techniques, the most common being the formwork masonry, the ordinary masonry and the rammed earth wall.

The **formwork masonry** is a formwork technique consisting in alternating rows of concrete and facing stone. This is also known as stone wall with lime concrete and it is a technique used for the base of fortifications and walls.

On the other hand, the **ordinary masonry** consists in overlapping stones without formwork, bound with mud, plaster or lime mortar, as we can see in the round towers in Castell Vell.

The **rammed earth wall** is the most widespread technique used to build walls and interior partitions of the castle. It is a formwork technique in which the inner core is exclusively formed by successive layers of damp earth rammed to give it consistency. Once dry, the wall was plastered with a thin layer of lime or plaster to protect it from external agents.

Finally, the **crusted rammed earth wall** is a rammed earth wall variant used to build Castell Vell walls. Its external walls feature a lime concrete coating, an effect achieved by laying layers of lime mortar between batches of rammed earth. Thus, the ramming itself displaces the concrete towards

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the rammed earth sides and lines the earth inner core to provide it with greater consistency. A good example of this type of wall can be seen in the large quadrangular tower in front of it, as well as in the town wall that borders the way up.



## 2 - The albacara

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### Stop 2

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The castle albacara is found after crossing the second line of the wall. The albacaras are wastelands enclosed by walls that are generally located between the citadel and the town. The historiography interprets them as pens or temporary shelters for the population of the castle and the surrounding farmhouses, since they did not generally have housing structures inside. In the case of Castell Vell, the albacara is located below the citadel (which is in the highest point of the castle) on the southern side of the hill. The floor plan is triangular, with an approximate surface of 1.400 m<sup>2</sup>.

It is delimited by two wall sections that enclose the northwest and southeast sides. On our left we can see the northwest section wall, with a length exceeding 45 m. The access through which we entered should not exist, since the original layout connected the area of the current chapel with the citadel access, located at the upper end of the wall. Along the route we can see two towers and an outside countermure that united them, enhancing their defensive conditions. The first tower that can be seen is located on our left, it has a rectangular floor plan and could be accessed from the albacara through a horseshoe arch. The upper tower, only visible from the outside of the enclosure, was solid and has smaller dimensions, and the upper floor could only be accessed through the passage of the wall. The functionality of both towers was probably related to controlling the access road to the citadel from the town.

On the opposite side we find the southeast wall, with a linear route of 42 m that connects the chapel bell tower with the other original access documented in the albacara. The most outstanding defensive element of this wall canvas is the tower currently used as Magdalena chapel bell tower. It is a circular tower with characteristics similar to those documented in the citadel, and still retains a unique horseshoe arch shaped shutter. A third section of the wall completes the albacara enclosure joining the previous two. It is located behind us and currently constitutes the chapel façade.

Among the constructive structures existing inside the albacara, it is worth noting the warehouses that we can see attached to the walls. The excavations done in 2005 and 2017 have allowed identifying approximately 15 of these rectangular rooms, originally with two floors, that formed a kind of collective

granary in which in-kind tributes collected by the Almohad state were deposited.

Other outstanding structures of the albacara are the cisterns, used to store rainwater. Two are still preserved. The smaller cistern can be seen at the centre in the highest area of the enclosure. Its walls are more than 2 m high, built with formwork masonry and maintain a thick internal lining of hydraulic mortar to prevent leaks. It was originally covered, possibly by a barrel vault, being part of a larger construction, but this has now disappeared, although some vestiges can be noticed in the west wall.

The second cistern is the largest of those documented up to now in the castle, with a surface exceeding 100 m<sup>2</sup>. It was originally attached to the albacara wall and, since the reforms undertaken by Frare Barbut<sup>1</sup> in the mid-fifteenth century, it houses the Santa Maria Magdalena chapel located under the terrace behind us. Thanks to its reuse, the cistern has retained its original structure. As it can be seen inside the chapel, the cistern consists of two parallel naves covered with barrel vaults and interconnected by means of three horseshoe arches coarsely built and seated on masonry and lime concrete columns. Its capacity exceeded 200 m<sup>3</sup> that, in Islamic times, served to supply water to part of the village settled at their feet.

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<sup>1</sup> Friar named Antonio, dedicated to build a chapel under the invocation of Maria Magdalena, a work that ended during the first months of 1456.



# 3 - The citadel

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## Stop 3

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We are in the citadel, located in the uppermost part of the castle and where the castral district was administered. The floor plan is quadrangular, with an approximate surface of 1,300 m<sup>2</sup> and delimited by a powerful wall protected by four circular half towers in the corners. On the outside, a fifth polygonal morphology tower and a perimeter countermure complete its defences. The crown of this polygonal tower can be seen on the left attached to the west wall and only visible from the outside of the citadel.

At the time of building it, the citadel had two accesses, none of which coincides with the one we currently use during the visit, which was originally closed by a section of wall. Thus, the main access was on our left. It is a bent entrance, a characteristic of the Almohad period, which communicated the citadel with the northern area of the town. As you can see, in addition, it was defended by a circular three-height circular half tower and equipped with small windows, openings in the wall that enabled shooting arrows and controlling access from the town.

The second access was an open postern<sup>2</sup> in the north wall, opposite the stopping point. In this case, it was a direct access possibly used as a service door communicating the citadel with the natural moat of the Sang dels Moros through a descending zigzag path.

If we look inside the citadel we will see that it has a gentle ascending slope in a southerly direction, where the highest point of the hill is located, at 111 m above sea level. In this space we can see different types of construction remains. To our left and attached to the wall, there are a series of walls that delimit three warehouses with characteristics and functionalities similar to those previously seen in the albacara, each with an area of approximately 15 m<sup>2</sup>. Completing it, next to the north postern, there is a small quadrangular enclosure of 6.5 m<sup>2</sup> that has been interpreted as a guard corps to control access.

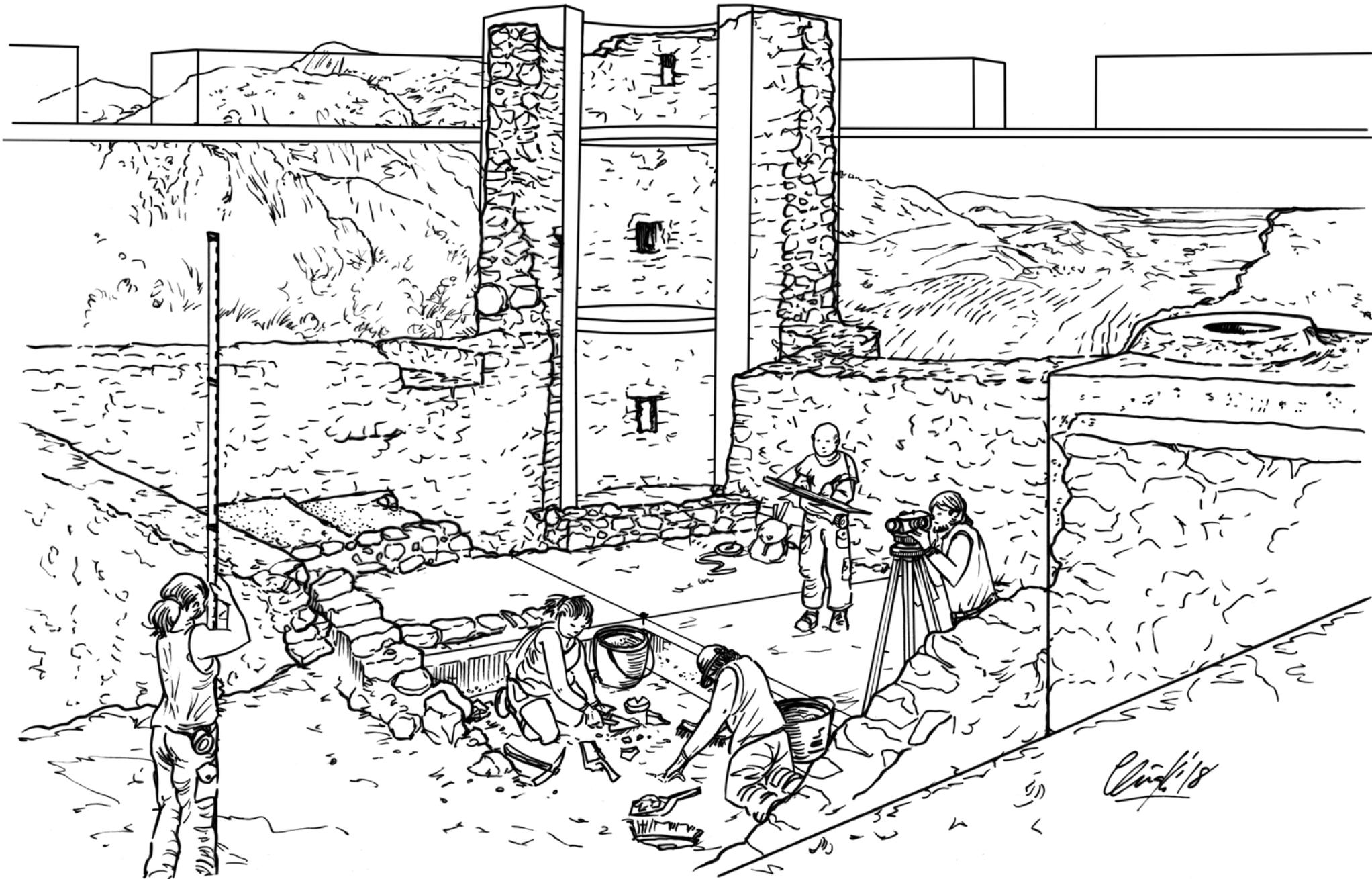
One of the citadel most outstanding elements are the cisterns, five of which are still visible, protected by metal grills. Partially chiselled into the rock, all have thick perimeter walls made of formwork masonry to withstand the pressure of the stored water. The inside was covered by a concrete lime and

stoneware coating that, apart from ensuring waterproofing, gives the characteristic reddish shade to its walls. Some, such as the one on our right, still has part of the original roof, consisting of a lowered formwork masonry vault and a flat roof to enable crossing it. The traces left by the hurdles used in the construction of the centring can still be observed inside, from which a sample has been left to appreciate the construction technique.

Finally, on the southern part of the citadel we find a group of houses. The archaeological actions performed so far have allowed identifying three, without ruling out the possibility of locating more in future interventions. It is likely that state officials in charge of administering the castle and its territory lived in them: the *musaddid*, a kind of rural judge; the *ma'ārif*, in charge of collecting the tributes, and the *qā'id*, military governor and maximum authority of the castle.

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<sup>2</sup> A postern is a secondary door in a fortification such as a city wall or castle curtain wall. Posterns were often located in a concealed location which allowed occupants to leave or enter without attracting attention or being seen. In the event of a siege, a postern could act as a sally port, allowing defenders to make a sortie on the besiegers.



# 4 - The Andalusian house

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## Stop 4

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We are in front of the best-known citadel house, thanks to the excavations ordered by Joan Baptista Porcar in the mid-twentieth century and André Bazzana in 1977. With a rectangular floor plan and approximately 85 m<sup>2</sup>, different articulated spaces around a patio have been found in it, following the model of a central Andalusian patio house. The door was on the left, which gave way to an entrance hall or *ustuwān*, which was probably bent to protect the inhabitants' privacy. Next to it, also on the west side, the remains of the staircase leading to the upper floor or *'ulw*, which was used as an attic, have been preserved. The *bayt al-mā'* or latrine was located in the stairwell, and only the drainage that evacuated the sewage outside the house is still in place. In front of us, we can find the main hall or *maǧlis* in which the tower was integrated. This was the place where the lord of the house received the guests flaunting his richness. The remains of the only adobe wall documented so far in the castle and that separated the main room from a small bedroom used as a bedroom are preserved inside. These walls are currently protected by a thick masonry lining. On the opposite side of the house the cistern has been preserved, restored during the intervention of 2017. With masonry formwork walls and vaulted roof, the cistern supplied water to the house and was an indispensable element of daily life. Finally, the remains of a rectangular room that due to its proximity to the tank and by comparison with other similar houses we interpret as the kitchen, are preserved.

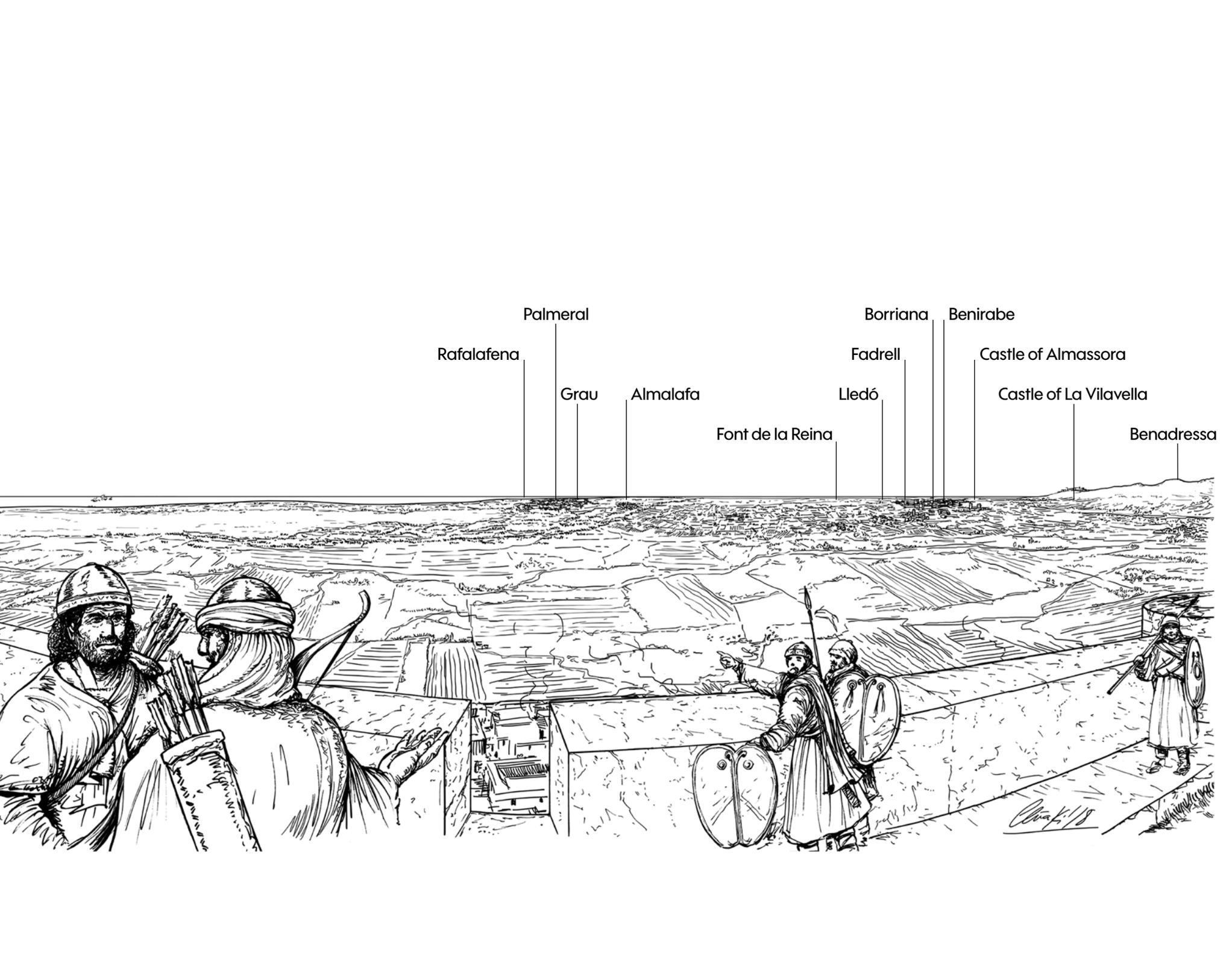
Collecting this information has been possible thanks to the archaeological documentation of all the remains that have appeared. Archaeology is an auxiliary scientific discipline of History, Prehistory and Anthropology, devoted to the study of the past cultures by observing and analysing its material remains. These remains, known as "material culture", consist of all those vestiges susceptible of being obtained or studied with archaeological methodology: domestic utensils, tools, construction remains, waste, funeral structures, walls, etc. Archaeological excavations are done to recover them, which allow archaeologists to contextualise them from the identification of the stratigraphic sequence in which they were deposited.

In the excavations conducted at the Castell Vell, abundant archaeological materials have been recovered, among which the ceramics stand out due

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to their volume and the information provided. Thus, the green glazed plates, the graphite jars or decorated with dry rope, the tall standing lamps or the stamped jars have been of great help to date most of Castell Vell structures from the Almohad period, including the house in front of us, period dated between the second half of the twelfth century and the first third of the thirteenth century, shortly before the Christian conquest.

In addition to recovering and studying buried remains, archaeological interventions in castles also aim to document the different architectural elements used in them. Thus, the so-called "archaeology of architecture" aims to identify the different construction phases that make up a certain structure, as well as to establish their different uses throughout history. Following these precepts, the architectural ensemble of Castell Vell is considered built history, where recent restorations have been a new but a construction phase.



Rafalafena  
Palmeral  
Grau  
Almalafa  
Font de la Reina  
Borriana  
Fadrell  
Lledó  
Benirabe  
Castle of Almassora  
Castle of La Vilavella  
Benadressa

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# 5 - The castle territory

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## Stop 5

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The *Šarq al-Andalus*, name given by the Andalusians to the peninsular east, was conquered by the Almohads in 1172 following the death of Ibn Mardaniš, the Wolf King of Christian sources. The Almohads introduced a centralised and hierarchical administration around the cities, where a governor oversaw controlling their territory or *mamlaka* on behalf of the Sultan. The *mamlaka* of Valencia was subdivided into *'amāl*, districts managed by secondary cities such as Alzira, Xàtiva or Borriana. The Castell Vell belonged to the *'amal* of Borriana, which included all the coastal plain of Mijares.

Its strategic location allowed Castell Vell to maintain visual communication with other nearby castles such as Almenara and La Vilavella, as well as to exercise direct control over all the farmhouses of its castral or *iqṭīm*, thus completing the fiscal network designed by the Almohad power. The *iqṭīm* of Castell Vell included the coastal plain located in the north of the Mijares River and the municipalities of Almassora and Castelló de la Plana. In Islamic times, most of this territory was occupied by the marshlands, which stretched along the coastline and are still visible in the Cuadro de Santiago of Benicàssim painting. Further inland, were the farmlands, supplied by the waters of Font de la Reina and the Mijares River through an incipient irrigation network. Finally, at the foot of the mountains were the dry lands, much more extensive than what we can appreciate nowadays and possibly used for traditional crops such as carob and olive trees.

These agricultural areas were occupied by more than twenty farmhouses. The farmhouses were small settlements, usually inhabited by families belonging to the same clan or ethnic group engaged in agriculture and livestock. Their extension could be variable, and the largest ones could include around twenty families, which allowed performing certain craft activities such as manufacturing ceramics, as evidenced by the oven documented in the Safra district. Thanks to medieval documentation we know the names of some of them, such as Almalafa, Benicatol, Benihayren, Benimarhua, Benimarra, Binaciet, Benihut, Binarabe, Remomir, Fadrell, Almassora and Benimucarra.

Perhaps the most important were those of Almassora and Fadrell, since they had a fortified enclosure of their own and were set up as independent

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entities following the Distribution of James I. A third fortified farmhouse was located in Pla del Moro, in Benadressa, but unfortunately, we do not know its name.

The settlement pattern of Castell Vell was completed with other minor fortifications intended to control the main communication routes, such as Castellet de Almassora, next to the ford of Mijares, and Castellet de Nadal, which controlled access to the Borriol corridor along the Palla path.

## 6 - The settlement

### Stop 6

The settlement is currently the most unknown enclosure. Most of Castell Vell population probably lived in it, and it was its *aljama* or community. According to other similar settlements, the main public buildings would be located in the settlement, such as the mosque (*masyid*), the baths (*hamman*) or the bazaar (*sūq*). Unfortunately, the archaeological information regarding the settlement only consists of a plan published by Joan Baptista Porcar in 1931 and the result of the archaeological excavations undertaken around the large square tower in 2010. Porcar's plan is especially interesting, since it reflects the structures that remained visible before the pine trees reforestation that took place in the 60s of the twentieth century. Thanks to it we know that the town spread, taking advantage of the sunny side, in a half-moon shape on the lower part of the southern and eastern areas. From this it also follows that the extension had almost 10.000 m<sup>2</sup> and had an irregular urban design, with the houses settled on terraces adapted to the contour lines. According to this plan, the town was completely walled and had a main access from the plain, next to the current way up to the chapel, and two secondary posterns open on the north and northeast walls. Nowadays it has not been possible to clearly identify any of these accesses, although it is true that in the vicinity of the alleged main access the remains of a circular watchtower are preserved outside the walled enclosure, which could relate to the abovementioned access.

The door next to the bell tower used to communicate the albacara and the settlement in the tourist route was opened during the restoration performed in 2017 with the purpose of allowing the pilgrims to continue with the tradition of ringing the bell on the day of St. Magdalene. The wall originally connected the bell tower with the access located at the opposite end. This access communicates the settlement with the albacara. It uses the bent access model that we have seen before and it is located at the end of a long corridor delimited by the wall and the countermure, still pending to be excavated. As it can be seen, it was well protected by one of the citadel towers, as well as by a rectangular guard corps that was located between the albacara and the south side of the citadel. It must have been frequently crossed since, due to its width, it allowed easy access of goods and cattle towards the pen and warehouses of the albacara.



# Credits

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CS 709-2018

# More information

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