

## Reviews

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### Irrigation and Society in Islamic Granada.

Trillo San José, Carmen. *Agua, tierra y hombres en al-Andalus. La dimensión agrícola del mundo nazarí*. Granada: Ajbar, 2004. ISBN: 84-609-0718-X. 307pp + 11 maps and figures + 12 colour photographs.

Idem. *Una sociedad rural en el Mediterráneo medieval: el mundo agrícola nazarí*. Granada: Libro de Bolsillo, 2003. ISBN: 84-607-8623-3. 221pp + 11 maps and figures.

The Nasrid Kingdom of Granada (1238–1492), although famous for its most grandiose monument, the Alhambra palace, has traditionally been relegated to the sidelines of history. Regarded neither as pertaining to the historical Europe nor to the Islamic world proper, historical hindsight in view of the conquest of 1492 has made of it little more than a postscript to the grand history of Golden Age Muslim Iberia. This is an historiographical injustice that Carmen Trillo endeavours to right in her investigation of the rural society and economy of late Medieval Granada. This is no easy task: there are relatively few sources for the political history of the kingdom, but for agricultural history the panorama is even more bleak. As Trillo explains, a number of factors including the nature of Islamic law and custom, the effects of the conquest and the tendency for land to be exchanged among family members has meant that few archival records from the Muslim period were maintained and almost none have survived. Thus, these two works draw heavily on Castilian documentation originating in the wake of the conquest, which was carried out in spurts from the mid-thirteenth to the late-fifteenth century. Most notable among these sources are the *libros de repartimento*, the surveys drawn up by the Christians in order to distribute the conquered lands among the victors. Trillo acknowledges the dangers of using Castilian documentation to shed light on the pre-conquest era, but argues convincingly that valuable and valid insights can be gained from it. Because of the spotty nature of the surviving material Trillo focuses on a handful of specific locales mostly in the environs of the capital, for example the area of El Quempe, Cenete, and the irrigation system of Aynadamar, which serve as case studies illustrating the broader themes addressed in the work.

Trillo argues that the arrival of the Muslims in the early eighth century precipitated a veritable agricultural revolution in Iberia, one in which the large-scale dry cereal farming and viticulture which had been the hallmark of the Roman period declined in importance. The transformation was produced thanks to the “green revolution” (as Andrew M. Watson has described it) which resulted from the introduction of plants and products from across the Islamic world. High-value market-garden crops demanded the development of the same sorts of complex irrigation systems which had developed in North Africa and the Middle East. These systems, however, could only emerge as a result of the colonization which followed the Muslim conquest in the areas where Arabs and Berbers settled. The agricultural and hydraulic profile of the new settle-

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ments reflected the agnatic endogamous extended family structures typical of the Islamic world (as Guichard, Glick, Barceló and Acien have described). Thus, by the tenth century the Andalusí countryside, as a result of this "revolution" came to be comprised of small villages each related to a single clan, directed by a council of elders, and only loosely supervised by the caliphal state. Here a relatively homogenous community of small proprietors worked intensively irrigated market gardens raising diversified crops aimed not at supplying a commercial or industrial market but rather at guaranteeing self-sufficiency for the small-holder through diversification. In addition to the land that was held by individuals (*mamluka*), lands held in common, by the community or of unascended ownership (*harim*, and *mawat*), provided each village with grazing land, fields for dry crops, and a margin for expansion.

This reflects the characterization of Andalusí society accepted by most scholars. The larger question which Trillo endeavours to answer is: was there a subsequent revolution in the Nasrid kingdom that by the fifteenth century, had led to the decline of the agnatic and endogamous system that, according to Guichard and others was essential to Andalusí society? (*Una sociedad rural*, p. 24) This is an important question as it relates directly to the nature of the impact that Castilian domination would have on the socio-economic panorama of southern Spain. By the sixteenth-century large-scale mercantile plantation operations had emerged, geared, for example, to supplying sugar to an export market. These might possibly be linked to the sprawling aristocratic estates, Muslim *latifundia*, which are commonly believed to have been a defining feature of the countryside south of the Gaudalquivir. Trillo argues that there was indeed a social revolution in Nasrid Granada, but that the role and importance of the aristocratic estates was exaggerated by contemporary chroniclers and geographers and hence has been misunderstood by modern historians. Here detailed reconstruction of irrigation and fields systems and, where possible, the patchwork of field ownership, shows that with the exception of royal estates, these country manors were much more modest than has been previously assumed. Moreover, even on larger estates, the fields themselves were typically worked by *shirka*, share-cropping, in which the tenants managed the land using the same strategies and approaches as the small free-holders.

The revolution it seems consisted in the gradual weakening of the clan system. Despite the various strategies that were employed to ensure that landed patrimony remained within the ambit of the broader patrilineal extended family (including mainmorte, pious donations, gifts *inter vivos*, etc.) tendencies such as the right for women to inherit property under Islamic law, contributed to its gradual dispersal. Once the lands held by a given clan were no longer contiguous, and could not be managed or controlled as a whole, individual land ownership became more important. The sale and purchase of land became more common as the stigma attached to the loss of clan patrimony disappeared. As a consequence, social inequalities became more acute, and new local elites emerged. The members of these local elites, consisting of wealthier farmers who often also occupied religious or administrative positions, became increasingly interested in exogamous marriage as a means of forming alliances with nuclear families of similar social and economic standing rather than strengthening their bonds with poorer members of their own clans.

By the late fifteenth-century the Granadan social revolution was well

underway and the Andalusí countryside presented a diverse panorama of property types and increased concentration of land ownership in the hands of a privileged few. This occurred on a much more modest scale than in the Latin world where the emergence of feudal structures acted as a catalyst for social differentiation and the eventual emergence of a capitalist class that shared no affinity with the productive classes. In principle the realignment of Nasrid society reflected the same shift towards exogamy that Goody describes Latin society undergoing after the eleventh-century, but with the difference that here this process was not deliberately sponsored by a religious institution. Whereas in the West the Church imposed the exogamous model, in al-Andalus the ideal of the agnatic endogamous society continued to exercise a profound influence as a social model whether it was actually practised or not. In the end, the process of transformation in Granada was dramatically truncated by the Christian conquest, which imposed a new model of administration, social organization and economic exploitation. For Trillo, the proto-capitalism of the sixteenth-century plantations could not have emerged out of the Kingdom of Granada which was, drawing on the language of Samir Amin, a tributary society, fundamentally different from that which was emerging in the West.

Of the two works under consideration here, both cover essentially the same basic subject although they differ in format and emphasis. *Una sociedad rural* serves more as an introduction to the topic, while *Agua, tierra y hombres en al-Andalus* will be of more interest to scholars and to North American readers, given that it is more complete, more scholarly in format and presentation and that it presents a broader and more coherent approach to the topic at hand. Trillo not only draws on a whole range of theoretical approaches (archaeology, sociology, economics) effectively but draws convincing and thought-provoking comparisons to similar or contrasting situations in contemporary England, France and the Low Countries, and Byzantium, not to mention the contemporary and modern Maghrib, Egypt and Palestine. As such her work not only addresses a notable historical *lacuna* but does so with a degree of sophistication and a scope that local studies typically lack. This work will be of interest not only to experts in Islamic Spain, but to students and scholars of the economy and rural society of Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe, the Mediterranean and the Islamic World.

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