



# The production and distribution of cooking pots in two towns of South East Spain in the 6th–11th centuries



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## ABSTRACT

This paper presents a first approach to the petrographic analysis of ceramics in the early medieval Vega of Granada (south east Spain) between the 6th and the 11th centuries. The cooking wares of two sites of the Vega with urban character, Ilbira and Garnata, are considered. They were, at different times, political capitals of the area and the production and distribution of their ceramic products have much to tell us about the nature and extent of their authority. The petrographic study shows that the assemblages of cooking pots retrieved at each site have characteristic fabric groups that allow us to relate to production centres in the vicinity of the site, if not in the site itself. Furthermore, the petrographic analysis proves that a small number of vessels move between the sites. The pattern of this movement is consistent with the historical and archaeological background of the Vega of Granada.

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## 1. Introduction

This paper presents a detailed overview of evidence already analysed and discussed in a former paper by the authors (Carvajal López and Day, 2013). Concretely, this paper contains a study of the composition, potential provenance and distribution of cooking pots in the basin of the Vega of Granada (south-east Spain) during the period of Islamicisation after the Muslim Conquest of 711 CE, which roughly covers the 8th to 11th centuries CE. The archaeological deposits analysed here extend back to the 6th century CE, as this offers a better consideration of the historical development of pottery production and distribution and the changes wrought in the Islamic period. Pottery was sourced from excavations in two sites of the Vega that had an urban character in this period: Ilbira (Atarfe) and Garnata (Granada). Evidence discussing other sites of the Vega of Granada as discussed in Carvajal López and Day (2013) will be presented in a future continuation to this article. The study presents petrographic analysis of cooking wares found in the two sites primarily to investigate whether these pots were made in the vicinity of each site. Furthermore, it demonstrates that while cooking vessels were used mainly in their area of production, a small number of pots made their way to the other centre and perhaps to neighbouring sites. This is, in turn, consistent with other archaeological and historical information available.

## 2. Archaeological background

Ilbira and Garnata were located in the eastern part of the Vega of Granada, a region in south-east Spain (Fig. 1). While the two towns are separated by only around 15 km, their geological setting is quite different, which is useful for the analytical project presented here. Ilbira was inhabited at least between the 9th century and the beginning of the 11th century and is now abandoned (Carvajal López, 2008a: 253–293). Garnata, the Islamic site of modern Granada, was an important Roman site at least until c. 600 CE (then known as Illiberis). Its later occupation is less well known until it starts to be mentioned in the written sources in the late 9th century, although the pottery found in excavations suggests that it was never totally abandoned (Adroher and López, 2001; de la Torre, 2011). The comparison between Ilbira and Garnata is important, as they are successive political capitals of the area: Garnata first, then Ilbira since around the 8th century and, after the start of the 11th century, Garnata again (Carvajal López, 2008a; see Table 1). In the Vega of Granada previous pottery studies have shown that the production and distribution of wares became increasingly centralised during the period under study in four distinctive regional phases, but the details of this centralisation are still not well known (Carvajal López, 2008a, 2009). This study aims to examine issues concerning the relationship of craft activity and political pre-eminence through the examination of assemblages of utilitarian pottery. Cooking pots are chosen specifically as they fulfil basic, everyday needs, while still requiring very specific properties in order to survive the rigours of their use.

There exists a tight chronology of these cooking wares (Fig. 2). The oldest type is V, which is a continuation of the previous Late Roman

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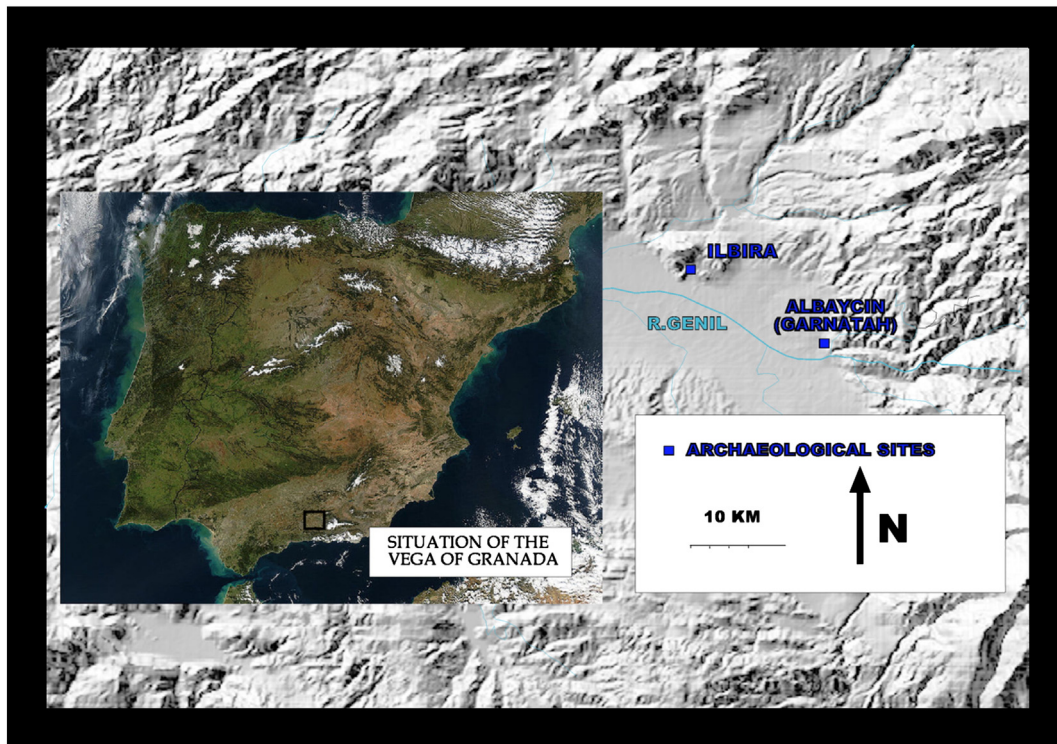


Fig. 1. Map of the Vega of Granada, showing the location of the sites discussed in this paper. The smaller map on the bottom left shows the location of the Vega in south east Iberia.

types and can be found in the earlier years of the Islamic period and until the 9th century in some contexts (Jiménez, 2000; Carvajal López, 2008a: 232, presented as a subtype of type E). Types S and M follow, dated to the late 8th century and extending to the 11th century (Carvajal López, 2008a: 233–234). Finally, types E and R represent the latest product, being found in the late 10th and 12th centuries (Carvajal López, 2008a: 232–233, as second type E, and 235).

The macroscopic technological assessment of the cooking vessels suggested that they were mainly produced and distributed on a local basis, even if morpho-typologies are the same across sites. Seventy-seven samples of cooking wares were taken from well contextualised deposits in Ilbira and Garnata, particularly from infill contexts of construction containing abundant sherds of discarded pottery. These contexts of construction are well excavated, placed in a sound stratigraphy and contain well defined materials that can be used for establishing a good chronological sequence. In the first site, these deposits come from the 2001 excavations in the *Sombrerete* area (c. 850–925 CE; see Carvajal López, 2005, 2008a: 275–288, 2008b; Malpica et al., 2001;

Malpica et al., 2005) and from the 2007 excavations in the *Tejoletes* area (circa 925–1110 CE; see Carvajal López, 2008a: 288–293; Malpica et al., 2008; Malpica et al., 2010; Malpica et al., in press; Martín et al., 2010). The chosen deposits from Granada were selected from two excavations: *Callejón del Gallo* in the 1998 season (Adroher and López, 2001; Carvajal López, 2008a: 334–338) and the 2006 excavation in Calle María de la Miel (de la Torre, 2011). From the first deposit from the late antique and early medieval levels was selected (c. 500–800 CE) and another one from the Zirid period (roughly 11th century CE). From the levels of *María de la Miel* a deposit was selected dating from the period between c. 800 and 925 CE. The characteristics of these deposits are summarised in Table 2.

### 3. Geology of the surrounding area

The Vega of Granada is located in the Basin of Granada, which is in turn part of the Intrabaetic Depression in the Baetic System, one of the westernmost areas of the Mediterranean alpine range. The Baetic

**Table 1**  
Summary of historical and archaeological evidence available, as presented in Carvajal López (2008a).

Phase	Historical and archaeological events in the Vega of Granada	Features of ceramic technology and morpho-typology
Before the Islamic conquest (c. 400–711)	The Roman town of Garnata (named <i>Iliberis</i> ) goes into decline. The capital is transferred to Ilbira during the seventh century CE.	Later Roman morpho-typologies become restricted during this period.
I (c. 711–800)	Muslim groups settle in the Vega. Very few data are available from Ilbira or Garnata	Cooking pots types are reduced to type V.
II (c. 800–925)	Settlement is well attested in Ilbira and in Garnata. The influence of the Umayyad state of Cordoba is relatively weak until the end of the period.	Previous traditions in morphology and technology remain. Evidence of introduction of new shapes. Type V is predominant.
III (c.925–1110s)	The influence of Cordoba is evident. Ilbira develops and expands as capital of the area. There is archaeological evidence to argue for a limited expansion of Granada.	Pottery morphology and technology show intermixing of traditions. Different technical solutions are used in the same shapes. In cooking wares, the predominant morphological types are M and S. Pottery morphology and technology show standardisation in Ilbira and in other sites.
IV (c. 1110s–1100)	The Zirid dynasty takes control of the area and moves the capital to Granada. Ilbira has continued occupation during this period (Malpica et al., 2008).	In cooking wares, the predominant morphological type is E, although S, M and R are also found. The standardisation in techniques observed in the former period continues, although new types are developed. In cooking wares, the predominant shape is Type R.

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