

Andalusian Fortresses and Towers

Rich With Culture And Enjoyable

Madrid- Dr. Kadhim Shamhood Taher

The Muslims built alarm and control towers on the tops of mountains, hills and passes. Placed on the heights, these towers could see each other, and were located between large fortresses and on public highways. Small towns grew around them. Those which were close to Madrid were regarded as the most famous and most beautiful.

Spanish historians currently list 53 villages and 64 Islamic heritage sites in the neighbourhoods of the capital Madrid, whose Islamic style is evident. These sites are wonderful, popular attractions visited by hundreds of tourists and the residents of Madrid itself.

The area delimited by the Jarama River to the east of Madrid, and the Guadarrama River in the west is known for its diverse geographical features: valleys, plateaus, rivers, forests, narrow mountain passes, agricultural plains and pastures, with delightful landscapes. Muslims built a series of alarm and control towers in this area in order to supervise the movement of Christians, in particular their attempts at infiltration through the mountain passes of the north towards the Muslim cities. Today, only six of these towers are still in existence.

They are called "Atalaya" and are divided into two groups: four are located in the basin of the river Jarama in the east and two in the Guadarrama Basin in the west.

The first group includes the towers of Vellon, Venturado, El Berrueco and Arrebatcapas. This last name seems to be of Arab origin,



The Church Tower

برج الكنيسة

probably "Ribat Al-Kabas" (Fortress of the Torch).

The towers have a homogeneous architecture resembling each other and are located on heights from which their inhabitants can see each other.

They have a circular shape and are made of stone with a diameter of about 6.5m and a height of 12 to 13m. Their bases, which are about 3 m high are made of soil and stones. They have all been restored apart from Venturado which will be renovated in the near future.

Each tower had two or three guards and two riders assigned various military tasks. The alarm was raised during the day by lighting a fire at the top of the tower to emit dense

smoke. At night torches were lit to indicate to the other towers that enemies were approaching.

The towers communicated very quickly with one another and the news reached the south of Andalusia in few hours.

This method of early warning was very much in use in cities and villages located at the seaside: the lighthouses guided the boats or informed them of the presence of pirates.

In 1990, a book was published by two Spanish authors, A. Mateo and L. Caballero: "The towers of the mountainous range of Madrid".

They presented a meticulous scientific study of the history and origin of these towers. The research at the Arrebatcapas tower ➤

enabled them to analyze carbon and they dated the tower to the 10th century. They also found ceramic pieces from the Islamic era.

The second group of towers is located to the west of Guadarrama, North-East of Madrid. Torrelodones tower overhangs the motorway connecting Madrid with Asturias to the north. Atalaya de Collado tower located nearby is in ruins, with only some of its foundations remaining.

The authors, Mateo and Caballero, indicate that these towers date back to the 10th century and were built by Muslims.

In the north of the tower El Berrueco, one finds an old Islamic city, Buitrago. Located 75 km north of the capital, it is regarded as one of the most beautiful provincial towns of Madrid.

Among its Islamic heritage is its wall, the principal gate, the Berrana tower and the church which still keeps the marks of its Islamic origin, as well as the irrigation canals used to water agricultural lands.

The Arabs first introduced irrigation systems to Europe.

In this historical city a museum devoted to the works of Picasso. It is a cultural and tourist attraction, in particular for the inhabitants of Madrid who spend their weekends and holidays there.

The church of Santa Maria del Castillo is built in an Islamic style.

It is composed of a long room built out of stones with a ceiling of wooden carving with Islamic verses and symbols. These include the eight-branch star which is reproduced on multiple scales all along the ceiling.

It was a mosque which had been transformed into a church. The tower still maintains its Islamic style: square form, three story grids inspired by those of Damascus and Toledo, brick construction and stones. Parallel to this long room, one finds another with the ceiling made of decorated, coloured wood. There are 43 stars with eight branches. The name of Allah is written in red Kufic script in the centre.

This is a truly astonishing, antique edifice with the name of God on the ceiling – a prayer niche which is the sign of the glory and permanence of the Creator in the hearts of believing, Muslims as well as Christians. ■



The Castillo

الكاستيو



Arrabatacapas

الرباط القبس



The Vellon

البيون