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## **Jewish quarter in Medieval Lorca (south-eastern Spain)**

**Keywords:** archaeological tourism, Jewish diaspora, medieval Lorca, residential buildings, synagogue

### **Abstract**

This article provides information about the Jewish community living in Alcalá, a district located within the defensive wall of one of the most important fortresses on the border with the Emirate of Granada (the last Muslim stronghold in the Iberian Peninsula). Before the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century the existence of the Jewish community was known only from written sources. However, archaeological research which started in 2002 unearthed the exact location of the Jewish quarter. Systematic archaeological work made it possible to compile precise documentation related to the remains of residential buildings and a synagogue. Moveable historical artefacts discovered during field studies enriched the collection of the archaeological museum in Lorca and they are now a part of a permanent exhibition. As the result of these discoveries, Lorca was entered on the list of significant archaeological sites associated with the presence of Jews, along with places such as Toledo, Seville, Cordoba, Segovia and Ubeda. This article attempts to characterize the condition of archaeological tourism in Lorca and the possibilities of its development with regard to archaeological remains of the former Jewish quarter.

### **Introduction**

An overview of systematic scholarly publications on cultural tourism shows that trips taken to explore archaeological remains are regarded as one of its integral elements. Armin Mikos v. Rohrscheidt defined the phenomenon of cultural tourism and considered archaeological sites to be a specific destination of historical tourism, which is a part of cultural tourism. However, trips to places associated with documented discoveries may also become a part of other forms of cultural tourism. As the result, they include a type of trips referred to as archaeological tourism [Mikos v. Rohrscheidt 2010, p. 150]. Krzysztof Kaczmarek believes that the attractiveness of archaeotourism is related to its varied form and diverse methods of exhibiting archaeological artefacts in time and space, which can be adjusted to individual needs and expectations of visitors. It is one thing to see archaeological exhibitions in museums, it is another to visit an open-air museum or archaeological site and still another to take part in a historical fair [Kaczmarek 2010, p.9].

The development of tourism infrastructure in archaeological sites is regulated by documents related to the protection of archaeological heritage. According to the International Charter for the Protection and Management of the Archaeological Heritage adopted by ICOMOS in 1990, the participation of society is a fundamental aspect of the policy to protect archaeological heritage. Moreover, the European Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage of 1992 obliges countries to introduce protection

systems and run educational programmes to arouse and promote public awareness of archaeological heritage [after Barcz, Cieślewicz 2013, p. 44].

In Spain, the document which regulates matters related to historical and archaeological heritage is the Spanish Historical Heritage Act of 1985. Moreover, specific autonomous communities introduced more detailed legislation. A unique form of archaeological heritage protection in Spain is the creation of archaeological reserves. An archaeological reserve is an archaeological site that is well preserved and of significant scientific value and has a potential for tourism development. The aim of creating such reserves is not only to protect archaeological sites, but also to arouse inhabitants' interests in the history of their region and country (Ruiz del Árbol 2015). However, not all archaeological sites are granted the status of a reserve. Nevertheless, the abovementioned regulations may serve as guidelines for people who manage archaeological heritage, especially when a given site has a significant scientific potential which might also be used in adventure tourism.

An example of a site of great scientific importance are the remnants of the Jewish quarter in Lorca, a city located in southwest part of the Region of Murcia. These remnants are still relatively little known and Lorca is usually associated with ceremonial processions organized at Easter. At that time, the main street of the city becomes crowded with huge floats on which performers enact Biblical stories. The whole show is watched not only by the inhabitants of the city but by all Spaniards thanks to a TV broadcast. The procession was entered on the list of events of international tourist interest (Spanish: *Fiestas de Interés Turístico Internacional*). The second reason why tourists visit this city is its amazing Baroque architecture and the medieval castle whose ruins have been restored recently. However, the history of Lorca goes back further than the Middle Ages. Already in the Bronze Age, Lorca was home to El Argar, a farming culture [Molina and Cámara 2004, pp. 9–17]. In the Romanization period, *Via Augusta* led through this city. It was one of the main Roman roads in this part of *Imperium Romanum*. It was also at that time that the name *Eliocroca*, which referred to the area of present-day Lorca, appeared in *Antonine Itinerary* for the first time [Encyclopaedia Britannica 1910, p. 148]. A testimony of that time is the replica of *columna miliaria* (Fig. 1) which stands on Corredera street. The original column is exhibited in the museum.

## The situation of Jewish communities in the Iberian Peninsula since the first mentions of their presence

It is estimated that about 30 thousand Jews currently live in Spain [Lisbona Martín 2014, p. 16]. It equals 12-17% of the population of this ethnic group in the 14<sup>th</sup> century [Pérez 2005, p. 55]. It is difficult to pinpoint the exact moment when Jews appeared in the Iberian Peninsula. The legend has it that first Jews appeared on this territory as early as in the 10<sup>th</sup> century BC, but archaeological sources do not support this hypothesis. It seems more probable that they came after the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem in 70 AD or after the defeat of the Jewish Revolt of 132 AD, when Jews were banned from Jerusalem, which from then on was called *Colonia Aelia Capitolina* [Cass. Dio LXIX, 12].

The Roman rule in the Peninsula was a period of relative peace. The Romans, who regarded Judaism as a legal religion, were tolerant towards Jews, even though they did not fully understand their monotheistic faith. However, these times were not free from tensions. The best-known conflict went down in history as the First Jewish-Roman War. The events which took place in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD in Judea [Flavius 1992], one of the provinces of the Roman Empire, became the seedbed for hostility towards Jews which either escalated or died down in various historical periods. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD, the Roman Empire was affected by a serious crisis. As the result, the border in the Pyrenees was crossed by Germanic tribes

and in the next centuries, the Visigothic Kingdom was formed on Spanish lands [Tuñón de Lara *et al.* 2012, pp. 54–65]. The Visigoths, who believed in Arianism when they first appeared in the Peninsula, had an ambivalent attitude towards Jews who lived on these lands. It is estimated that at the beginning of their rule over this territory, the incomers accounted for only 10% of the population [Kokowski 2008, p. 321] and adopted Christianity over time. They became the foundation of the Kingdom which at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century united all Spanish lands under the banner of the cross.

The moment when Reccared I (586-601) adopted Catholicism as the official religion on the Third Council of Toledo [Porres Martín-Cleto 1990, p. 156] was also the beginning of adopting extensive legislation which imposed limitations and sanctions on the Jewish community [Cordero Navarro 2000, pp. 9–11]. Subsequent Visigothic kings laid down further obligations and extended the restrictions to other spheres of life, therefore making the situation of Jews living in the Peninsula more and more critical. Their fortune changed when Spain was invaded by the Muslim army led by Tariq ibn Ziyad, a Berber commander. Taking advantage of internal conflicts in the Visigothic Kingdom, he led his troops through the Strait of Gibraltar and after winning the Battle of Guadalete in 711, he began a few centuries of Muslim domination in the Peninsula [Tuñón de Lara *et al.* 2012, p. 67]. The Muslim troops headed north and conquered further cities with support from oppressed Jews, who were eager to help their saviours. Their approach towards the invaders has never been forgotten and resurfaced during the Reconquista [Suárez Fernández 1992, p. 28]. The first centuries under Muslim rule were very prosperous. At that time, the Jewish community flourished and was free to create autonomous groups, the so-called *alhamas*. Jews could freely practice their religion as the Quran deemed them the People of the Book [Galovská 2007, p. 9]. We do not know whether any legal restrictions were imposed on the Jewish community, but what can be observed is the natural tendency to form groups and structures which over time became separate quarters, the so-called *juderías*. They often functioned outside city walls [Lacave Riaño 2002, p. 28] but sometimes they could be found within them. Such quarters were usually located within the wall of an *alcázar* when a given Jewish community was small or medium. This tradition continued under Catholic rule and one of its examples is the Jewish community in Lorca. *Judería* means a place of residence, whereas the term *aljama* refers to the administrative division. It seems that the Jewish diaspora in Lorca never formed a separate group (*aljama*); it was subject to the group which at that time functioned in independent Murcia.

## The presence of Jewish diaspora in Lorca

Documents stored in various archives<sup>123</sup> contain records which indicate the presence of families of Jewish origin in Lorca, but the exact location of all their places of residence and business on the territory of the present-day city was only partially known<sup>124</sup> [vide Munuera Rico 2002]. All this changed in 2002 when Paradores de Turismo, a well-known Spanish hotel chain, started preparatory works for the construction of one of its hotels. The building was supposed to be located on the castle hill, within the defensive wall (Fig. 2). For two and a half centuries, Castle of Lorca was the most important fortress on the border with the

<sup>123</sup> Documents which confirm the presence of the Jewish diaspora in Lorca are stored in the City Archive in Lorca, the City Archive in Murcia, the General Archive of Simancas (the Valladolid province) and the National Historical Archive (in Madrid).

<sup>124</sup> It was already known that before the Alhambra Decree of 1492 came into force, Jews had lived in the area of the castle hill, but the exact location of their houses was unknown. Written and material sources that had been available prior to the beginning of excavation work were analysed by Francisco de Asís Veas Arteseros, a medievalist and a professor at the University of Murcia.

Emirate of Granada. Excavation work run by Juan Gallardo Carrillo and José Ángel González Ballesteros, two municipal archaeologists, led to a discovery which allowed scientists to answer the question about the location of the Jewish diaspora in Lorca. The interpretation of remnants of residential buildings that the archaeologists came up with stirred a lot of interest not only among scientists, but also among all those who were looking for traces of Jewish presence in the Iberian Peninsula. Due to scarce tangible remnants of Jewish culture in Spain, the discovery of the ruins of a synagogue was one of the things which intensified the tourist flow to Lorca.

Before systematic excavation work began, it was established on the basis of written sources that the Jewish quarter had been located within the castle wall but not on the hill itself [Veas Arteseros 1992, pp. 34–36]. It was definitively confirmed in 2002 when the archaeological intervention started.

Based on stratigraphy and the dating of movable historical artefacts, it is assumed that the Jewish quarter in Lorca functioned throughout the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. After the surrender of Lorca in 1244, Alcalá, the quarter located within the castle wall, was settled by incomers from other parts of the Crown, including members of a Jewish community [Torres Fontes 1994, pp. XCI–XCVIII]. At some point at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century Alcalá was transformed into an area inhabited solely by Jews. They left this territory in 1492 as the result of the issued decree [Suárez Fernández 1992, pp. 37–38]. The quarter illustrates a model developed during the Reconquista, when Jews were offered to settle in the immediate vicinity of a castle or another fortified building in order to separate them from the rest of the city [Léon Tello 1989, p. 451]. It is difficult to establish the size of the diaspora in Lorca, but some researchers estimate that there were from 120 to 180 inhabitants [Veas Arteseros 1992, p. 157]. We know for certain that the diaspora in Lorca was a substantial part of the Jewish community in the Kingdom of Murcia in the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

## Urban planning and architecture of the Jewish quarter in Lorca

In source literature one can often come across the term *judería*, a borrowing from Spanish used to describe a Jewish quarter. It means a place in which Jews resided or an area inhabited mostly by Jews, but representatives of this minority did sometimes settle outside it. When a Jewish community established its independent institutions, it was called *aljama*. The most important element of *judería* was the synagogue, which often serves as the only architectural landmark which indicates a Jewish quarter. Another characteristic element is the mikveh, a source of living water used for ritual ablutions. In the Jewish quarter, there might have been a butcher selling kosher meat, as well as a kosher bakery, but it is often impossible to clearly attribute the remains of such buildings and constructions to a particular culture. The presence of the Jewish community is also clearly evidenced by tombstones on graveyards but these were located outside the Jewish quarter.

In Lorca, the Jewish quarter was located within the defensive wall on the castle hill. Miguel Angel Motis Dolader analysed various types of Jewish quarters which functioned inside cities. According to him, the quarter in Lorca is an example of the central type, located within a fortress [Motis Dolader 1998, pp. 124–125]. This type was not as popular as Jewish quarters located *intra* or *extramuros*, the instances of which can be found in Zaragoza, Girona, Valencia, Tarragona, Pamplona or Toledo, among others. However, the central type did appear outside Lorca as well, for example in Burgos or Soria [López Gallego, Martín Montero 2001, pp. 143, 148]. The presence of the Jewish community in Lorca was confirmed when the first settlers appeared there after the Reconquista of these lands. The Jewish community was given the area within the castle wall. Earlier urban structures became the foundation of the new Jewish quarter. Existing fences and passages between older buildings imposed a specific

form on new residential buildings which were taking their place. Due to steep slopes, the growth of Jewish quarter was very limited. This is why written sources mention individual buildings belonging to the Jewish community which were located in different parts of the city [Gallardo Carrillo, González Ballesteros 2009, p. 114]. The Jewish quarter could have been entered from three sides. The first entrance was through one of the castle gates, called the False Gate. It was located near Torre del Espolón, a tower on the western side of the citadel. The second gate, known as the Gate of the Cat (Spanish: *puerta del Gato*) connected the castle and the city from the east side. The third entrance led directly to Alcalá through the northeast Gate of the Fish (Spanish: *puerta del Pescado*, sometimes also called *puerta de la Judería*) [Martínez Rodríguez 2004, pp. 146–147, 154–155]. Apart from the outer castle wall, the Jewish quarter was separated from the castle itself by an interior fence with two one-metre gateways. In one of them, archaeologists discovered remnants of the doorframe and brick steps. It seems probable that both gateways had doors [Gallardo Carrillo, González Ballesteros 2009, p. 119].

Only the central part of the area referred to as Alcalá was archaeologically examined. On the west, there is an area with visible remnants of one of the houses and near the north part of the castle wall there are a few water tanks. An irregular piece of land on the east is occupied by St Clement's Chapel. The central part, made up of three terraces to alleviate the difference in levels, was the core of the Jewish quarter. Apart from residential buildings, there was also the synagogue and the mikveh. Archaeologists who performed excavation works in this area claim that Alcalá was divided into four terraces which declined towards the east. It is, therefore, a classic example of urban development on a hill. The necessity to adjust buildings to the topography of the hill made it impossible to build streets which would enable wheeled vehicles to pass between the buildings. It is assumed that most communication routes in this part of the castle hill were very narrow. At some points they widened slightly and formed small squares which were a space shared by houses that surrounded them. These communication routes in the Jewish quarter were running mostly from the northeast to the southwest or from the southeast to the northwest [Gallardo Carrillo, González Ballesteros 2009, pp. 123, 125, 130].

### **Residential buildings**

The analysis of the remnants of residential architecture is often problematic for archaeologists. Those working in Lorca encountered similar difficulties which were due to the poor state of preservation of the discovered buildings. After examining written sources, they knew approximately where the Jewish quarter was located, but the hypotheses which have been posed for a long time could only be confirmed by clear or very probable evidence. In the case of Lorca, determining the cultural status of the excavated fragments of residential buildings was all the more difficult since Alcalá was created in the area that had previously been used by Muslims, that is a community with a different cultural background. Therefore, one might have expected that some of the left-over architecture had been reused to build houses for Jewish newcomers. The intellectual effort of local researchers focused on the urban evolution of the city [*vide* Eiroa Rodríguez 2006], military architecture and the hydraulic network but disregarded a deeper analysis of the issue of domestic environment. The region of Murcia cannot be counted among areas which were thoroughly archaeologically examined with view to late medieval residential development, which did not help researchers in their analysis. Potential analogies had to be sought in other parts of the Crown [*vide* García Camino 1998]. So are there any elements which allow us to clearly classify buildings as belonging to a particular culture? Based on architecture alone it would be extremely difficult because a house inhabited in the Middle Ages by a Jewish family did not differ from a house belonging to a Christian family [Ladero Quesada 1998, p. 115; Izquierdo Benito 1998,

p. 271]. This is where movable historical artefacts turn out to be very helpful, especially those related to religious rituals and written sources. In Lorca, these two elements were equally important in the process of identifying Alcalá as the medieval *judería*.

Excavations on the castle hill in Lorca brought to light the remnants of twelve houses of different sizes. Based on observations it is assumed that almost all of them (apart from house V) were inhabited by individual families and in some cases they might have had more than one floor. When it comes to construction techniques, they did not differ from those used to erect other buildings. Walls were made of stones processed in different ways and bound with mud mortar. Iconographic sources related to residential buildings provided information about windows and doors [López Álvarez 1998, p. 235]. Their depiction was confirmed by fragments of doors and wooden window frames excavated *in situ*.

It cannot be said that there existed a particular type of a Jewish house [Izquierdo Benito 1998, p. 271]. In Lorca, Jewish houses were mostly buildings made up of rectangular rooms. To enter the house, one had to climb a few steps. Only some of the bigger houses had interior patios. In some rooms archaeologists discovered ceramic vessels dug into the floor which served as indoor hearths. In most cases, rooms did not have a particular function because they simultaneously served as a place to sleep, eat and cook [Gallardo Carrillo, González Ballesteros 2006, p. 133; 2009, p. 144].

The aforementioned house V stands out from the rest of the buildings due to its large size (the maximum area is 460 m<sup>2</sup>) and a mikveh located in the heart of it. It is located in the centre of the Jewish quarter and is made up of at least ten rooms. Due to the bath which was used for ritual ablutions, its cultural background is clear. In the small central room there was a stone platform whose centre was hollowed out. The diameter of the tub was 1.5 m and it was 0.7 m deep. The walls of this small structure were plastered with red ochre and there was a narrow tunnel to carry away water. Three stone steps led to the platform. Below them, there was a ceramic vessel dug into the floor. It served as a heating element. It was assumed that the room had a religious function and it was described as a mikveh [Pujante Martínez, Gallardo Carrillo 2004, p. 185]. Currently, there are not many examples of analogous structures excavated in the Iberian Peninsula. Over the last decades, a few structures which could have served as mikvehs were discovered in the Iberian Peninsula, but most of them could not have been identified as such without ambiguity. It is often related to the fact that Arabic baths also served as baths for ritual ablutions. Moreover, mikvehs, which constituted an integral part of any religious complex, did not have to be located in the immediate vicinity of a synagogue. In the 1960s, a mikveh was discovered in Besalú in Girona and up to date it is the only one whose function leaves no room for doubt [*vide* Munuera Bassols 1968].

## Synagogue as the landmark of Jewish quarters

It might seem that the architectural design of a synagogue does not give rise to any interpretation problems. We know excellent examples of synagogues from Cordova or Toledo which attract scores of tourists from around the world. However, the history of relationships between Jews, Christians and Muslims was so complicated that it often happened that some buildings were falsely referred to as synagogues [Sabaté i Curull 1999, pp. 148–158]. Asynagogue, the emblem of Judaism, was the most important architectural element in urban development of medieval Jewish quarters. One of the consequences of the Alhambra Decree of 1492, which was issued by the Catholic Monarchs, was selling these places of worship in order to destroy them and make room for new buildings or to transform them for the use of other denominations, for example change them into Catholic churches [[www.sephardicstudies.org/decreed.html](http://www.sephardicstudies.org/decreed.html), 30<sup>th</sup> October 2018]. Other synagogues, especially in smaller towns, were deserted, fell into ruin and became forgotten. The Alcalá quarter

in Lorca was not repopulated after Jews had left the town, most probably due to unfavourable topography. Apart from the synagogue discovered in Molina de Aragón [*vide* Arenas Esteban *et al.* 2007], the building in Lorca is one of the best studied synagogues in Spain, all because of systematic excavation works and detailed field documentation. Archaeological remnants of some synagogues which belonged to *juderías* but were located outside big Jewish centres of the Medieval era make it possible to conclude that one of the best preserved elements in such buildings is the long brick bench placed along the main walls. Researchers associate the presence of such benches with the function of the synagogue which was not used for religious purposes alone, but was also the place where decisions concerning the Jewish community were made and local disputes were settled.

There is no conclusive answer to questions about the size of the synagogue. Some researchers agree that most activities took place in one room [Romero Castelló 1998, p. 118], but there are also known examples of a synagogue itself being made of more rooms. It could also have auxiliary buildings which were a part of the synagogue complex. The first example of a synagogue complex is the abovementioned Molina de Aragón, where archaeologists discovered a large building next to the synagogue. Its intended use has not been definitively determined yet, but it is assumed that it was a *beth midrash*, a study hall [Arenas Esteban, Martínez Naranjo 2004, p. 444]. The second example, which is probably better known, is Plaça de Jueus, located in the Catalan town of Besalú. During research conducted there archaeologists managed to document the existence of a complex made up of a patio surrounded by a prayer room, a Talmudic school and an underground mikveh [Lloveras Chavero 2008, pp. 295–306].

Bigger Jewish quarters could have had more than one synagogue and their design differed. In the Iberian Peninsula itself we can distinguish at least three types which have their roots in antiquity. Miguel Angel Espinosa Villegas, a researcher at the University of Granada, made a typological comparison of synagogues discovered in Spain and distinguished three basic types of these buildings [Espinosa Villegas 2009, pp. 60–61]: with a single nave, with a basilica-like plan, and the third type which is a combination of a basilica-like plan and Muslim elements (sometimes also referred to as the baldachin type)<sup>125</sup>. Each of these types is represented by Jewish places of worship discovered in the Iberian Peninsula, but for the purpose of our article, only the type associated with the remnants discovered in Lorca will be discussed.

### The synagogue in Lorca

The building located in the central point of the Alcalá quarter was identified as a synagogue. As a rule, Jewish places of worship should be directed towards Jerusalem, but examples excavated during field research do not always satisfy this requirement. The synagogue in Lorca is oriented from southwest to northeast, similarly to the best known places of worship in Toledo. In the wall which was the farthest from the door there was a small niche in which Torah scrolls were kept. In source literature it is described as *aron ha-kodesz* (“the holy ark”). Customarily, the niche is located in the east wall, but in Lorca it was the northeast wall [Gallardo Carrillo, González Ballesteros 2006, p. 208]. Out of the abovementioned types, the synagogue in Lorca should be counted among the most popular one in the Iberian Peninsula, namely the synagogue with one nave. Changing attitudes towards the Jewish community which were reflected in more and more restrictive legislation [Suárez Fernández 2005, pp. 38–39] made it impossible to build monumental places

<sup>125</sup> We need to remember that the abovementioned typology does not exhaust the topic of this kind of buildings. It is a classification which only includes examples from the Iberian peninsula, but there are also other types of synagogues in different parts of Europe, for example in Worms in Germany or in Prague in the Czech Republic [*vide* Krinsky 1996].

of worship. The synagogues whose construction had been permitted were buildings which did not stand out from local architecture on the outside. Similarly, the synagogue in Lorca is a small place of worship whose stylistic expression is really modest. The lower parts of the walls were preserved, so archaeologists could determine the dimensions of the building, which was almost 20 m in length and 10 m in width [Pujante Martínez 2005, p. 303]. Based on the width of the load-bearing walls and pillars inside the room, it is estimated that its height could have been around seven meters, whereas the outside height of the building was one metre shorter. It was due to the fact that the floor was laid directly on the stony ground. When the people entered the synagogue directly from the square, they had to take a few steps down [Gallardo Carrillo, González Ballesteros 2006, pp. 222–223]. A small rectangular vestibule was the first room of the synagogue that led directly to the prayer room (Fig. 3). The central place in the room was the podium to read out the Torah. In present-day synagogues *bima* is usually covered by a specific type of baldachin, but there is no evidence that the podium in Lorca was covered by an additional construction. When it comes to the roof, archaeologists assume that it was similar to the roofs of other buildings from this period, namely that it was a gable roof covered with ceramic slates and supported by wooden beams. Individual fragments of this construction were found in the rubble layers.

Various materials were used to build the synagogue, mainly brick and stone. A masonry technique that uses mortar to bind bricks was employed to erect the walls. Yellow and red bricks were also the main material used to make floors and the benches placed along the walls. The foundation of the whole construction was natural rock which was cut in some places to serve as structural elements of the walls. The beams which supported the roof and the parts of the benches which served as seats were made of wood, but we only know that from traces of this material [Pujante Martínez 2005, p. 307]. It is assumed that the door and furnishings of the synagogue were made of wood as well. Since this material is highly perishable, there is no trace of furniture and the only evidence of the door are the holes in the stony floor. The walls were covered with plaster whose layers were preserved on excavated fragments of walls. The building was really modest, which is evidenced by the fact that there were no mosaics on the floor, even though they were commonly encountered even in early synagogues in Palestine. The synagogue in Lorca had a floor made of oblong bricks laid so that they created a herringbone pattern and only the fragment which constituted *via sacra*<sup>126</sup> was made of ornamental tiles [Gallardo Carrillo, González Ballesteros 2006, pp. 226–227]. The lustreware tiles were decorative, but the most important thing was to mark off this fragment of the floor. Pieces of tiles with floral, heraldic and epigraphic motives painted with blue glaze were an important source which allowed archaeologists to determine the correct age of the synagogue. It was because on some of the tiles there were elements associated with the Paterna and Manises pottery [*vide* Lerma *et al.* 1986].

In the wall opposite the synagogue door there was a separate door leading to the women's gallery which most probably occupied the whole area above the vestibule. Not much can be said about the size and design of this part of the synagogue because few structural elements survived. The synagogue and house VII, located on the opposite side of the square, are an example of a synagogue complex similar to the abovementioned sets of buildings in Besalú and Molina de Aragón. Both buildings were erected on the same terrace and the space between them served as an interior patio. A similar pattern can be found in African synagogues [Gallardo Carrillo, González Ballesteros 2006, p. 218]. Archaeologists managed to set apart individual rooms inside house VII, but the function of some of them is ambiguous. The element which distinguishes this building from residential buildings is the existence of at least two doorways. Each of them enabled independent communication.

<sup>126</sup> The term “*via sacra*” is used to describe the passage between *bima* and the stairs located in front of the niche where Torah scrolls are kept.



Archaeological research in this area brought to light not only the remnants of the Jewish quarter but also interesting movable historical artefacts. The function of buildings, especially those which are not characteristic, such as residential buildings, is often evident from objects of material culture found in such structures or in contexts which are related to them. When it comes to Alcalá, the presence of the Jewish community was evidenced by the synagogue, but numerous objects discovered in the excavation site were not without significance as well. One of the most interesting artefacts is a collection of glass lamps (Fig. 4) which illuminated the interior of the synagogue. In antiquity, oil lamps were mostly ceramic, but the glass blowing technique invented at the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC [Vigil Pascual 1969, pp. 85–87] revolutionized glass making and made it possible to create shapes which had not been known before. From the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD, glass lamps began to replace earlier ceramic ones [Isings 1957, pp. 126–131] and the popularity of this material kept growing in subsequent centuries. The lamps were hung on metal chains or placed in round candelabra. A simple glass goblet evolved into more and more fancy shapes. Juan García Sandoval [2009, pp. 273–293] devised a typology of artefacts from Lorca.

Rubble inside the synagogue and residential buildings revealed fragments of architectural decorations, mostly made of stucco, known as *yasería*. This decorative element does not appear in Jewish buildings in other parts of the world because it has its roots in the Muslim culture. Long Muslim rule in the Iberian Peninsula encouraged cultures to borrow from one another. The Moorish style can be found not only in mosques and Arab castles but also in Jewish and Christian buildings [Borrás Gualis 2006, p. 299]. *Yasería* is made mostly of geometric and floral motifs [Pérez Asensio *et al.* 2009, p. 223]. In Lorca, no fragment of the decorations was preserved *in situ*, but to get an idea of what they might have looked like we can visit the synagogue in Cordova (Fig. 5) or Toledo, where the decorations survived in their original location. Fragments of *yasería* that were rescued during excavation work enriched the collection of the local archaeological museum in Lorca and complemented the exhibition of glass lamps. The exhibition devoted to excavations in the Jewish quarter of Alcalá was opened at the beginning of 2009 but was severely affected by the earthquake which hit the city in 2011. Due to huge damage suffered not only by public utility buildings but most importantly by residential buildings, the museum was closed for a few years, waiting for financial aid necessary to restore the building. Finally, three years ago exhibition rooms were once again opened to visitors and the restored exhibition is even more stunning than the original one.

This place has a huge tourism potential due to its uniqueness on the regional level but also due to meticulous excavation and renovation work (Fig. 6). It needs to be emphasized that it was not until excavation work started that the interest in medieval past of the Jewish community of Lorca grew significantly, which in turn led to an increase in the number of visitors. In Lorca, skillfully executed restoration respects the original matter and sets clear boundaries between medieval architecture and newly erected structures. This boundary is apparent to every visitor, not only to specialists. Such actions are appreciated and praised by visitors. Tourists are not left on their own; they have the museum at their disposal and they can see the medieval remnants of the Jewish community in Lorca as part of a guided tour. This aspect of the history of Lorca, which used to be relatively little known, became one of the biggest tourist attractions of this city and it is all due to thorough archaeological works and efficient restoration projects. It seems appropriate to incorporate the Jewish quarter in Lorca into the Routes of Sefarad, a nationwide route which makes it possible to explore the Sephardic Jewish heritage.

The remnants of the synagogue are of vital importance not only to the history of the city, they can also be a regional tourist attraction. It is not because of its architectural design or grandeur that the religious building in Lorca is seen as having great tourist value. This

house of worship is unique because its original medieval structure was preserved without a trace of modern interference. Therefore, visitors can see the remnants of a unique religious building which most probably served its primary function until the very end of its existence. This is why it is visited not only by tourists, but also by Jewish pilgrims. The building and the former Jewish quarter show the historical and archaeological heritage of Lorca in a broader context and definitely strengthen the tourism potential of this multicultural city. The area where excavation works were conducted was musealized, which led to an increase in the number of people interested in visiting this place. The reconstruction of the synagogue turned out to be very interesting. It respected the preserved material and the new wooden construction was erected on the original stone foundation. The building arouses curiosity due to both the uniqueness of the former synagogue walls and the truly aesthetic reconstruction of the destroyed part of the building.

Tourism infrastructure in the area where excavation works were conducted, on the impressive hill, should really be appreciated. Right next to the former archaeological excavations there is a high standard hostel which can accommodate over 150 guests. Tourists also have at their disposal a parking, two restaurants, a playground, a swimming pool and a health and leisure centre. The archaeological site has long opening hours and readable information boards, which encourages tourists to visit this place. During the tourist season, various cultural events, for example historical fairs, are organized next to the old walls. A few hundred metres from the hill, there is the centre of Lorca with hotels, restaurants and entertainment facilities.

## Summary

In densely built-up Spanish cities, it is usually problematic to find convenient locations to exhibit archaeological and architectural relics. In the case of Lorca, the restoration of the synagogue led to an increase not only in the number of tourists, who wanted to see the archaeological remnants, but also of pilgrims, since the synagogue in Lorca has never been desecrated. The synagogue and parts of the Jewish residential quarter have been museumized, thanks to which the tourism potential of the place has increased significantly. Wooden walls and the gable roof supported by three-pointed arches imitate the original synagogue, whereas modern lighting adds charm to the whole place. The synagogue, which was only partially preserved to this day, is now restored so that visitors can imagine it in its original form. The local government skillfully used archaeological, restoration and reconstruction works and made every effort to receive funding for the promotion of this amazing place, which could in its own right become a destination of archaeological tourism. Lorca, which up till now was known as the city of colourful Easter parades, gained a monument which attracts tourists not only from Spain but also from abroad. The Days of Sefarad Culture which are organized in the city additionally strengthen this trend.

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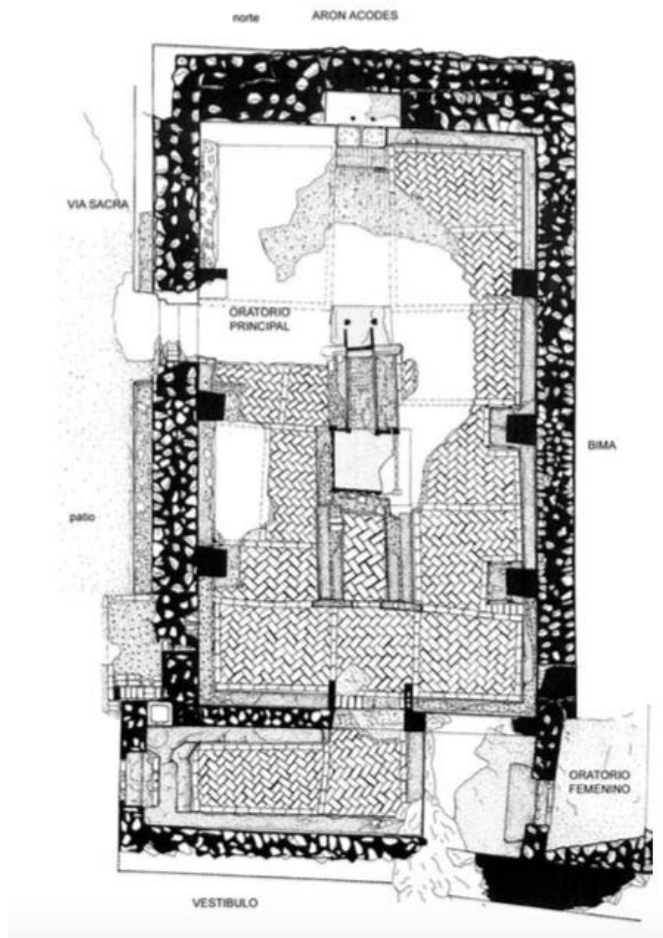


**Fig. 1.** A replica of *columna miliaria* on Corredera Street in Lorca  
[Source: Alfonso José Pernías Martínez]



**Fig. 2.** An aerial photograph of the castle in Lorca taken during research in 2013  
[Source: Krystian Trela]





**Fig. 3.** Plan of the synagogue in Lorca  
 [Source: Ana Pujante Martínez]



**Fig. 4.** Glass lamps from the synagogue in Lorca. Exhibition at the Archaeological Museum of Lorca from 2016  
 [Source: Aleksandra Chohuj]



**Fig. 5.** *Yesería* in the Synagogue in Cordoba  
[Source: Aleksandra Chohuj]



**Fig. 6.** Reconstruction of the interior of the synagogue in Lorca  
[Source: Aleksandra Chohuj]

## Gmina żydowska w średniowiecznej Lorcie (południowo-wschodnia Hiszpania)

**Słowa kluczowe:** turystyka archeologiczna, diaspora żydowska, średniowieczna Lorca, zabudowa mieszkalna, synagoga

### **Abstrakt**

Artykuł prezentuje informacje na temat społeczności żydowskiej zamieszkującej dzielnicę Alcalá, znajdującą się wewnątrz murów obronnych jednej z najważniejszych fortec na granicy z Emiratem Grenady (ostatniej ostoji muzułmańskiej na Półwyspie Iberyjskim). Przed latami dwutysięcznymi obecność gminy żydowskiej była znana jedynie ze źródeł pisanych, dopiero wykopaliska archeologiczne rozpoczęte w 2002 r. przyniosły rezultaty w postaci odkrycia dokładnej lokalizacji dzielnicy żydowskiej. Systematyczne prace pozwoliły na skrupulatną dokumentację pozostałości zabudowań mieszkalnych oraz synagogi. Zabytki ruchome odkryte w czasie badań terenowych zasilają zbiory miejscowego muzeum archeologicznego, a obecnie są eksponowane na wystawie stałej. W rezultacie odkryć Lorca znalazła się na liście istotnych stanowisk związanych z obecnością Żydów obok takich miejsc, jak Toledo, Sewilla, Kordoba, Segowia czy Ubeda. Pozostałości dzielnicy żydowskiej mają duże znaczenie nie tylko dla historii miasta, ale również mogą stanowić regionalną atrakcję turystyczną. Zagospodarowanie turystyczne terenów powykopaliskowych znajdujących się na okazałym wzgórzu stoi na wysokim poziomie.