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Guarding the frontier: Castilian settlers on the border with Granada in the fifteenth century¹

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The border between the Crown of Castile and the Sultanate of Granada lasted for two hundred years, from 1246 until the conquest of the latter in 1492. Due to the scarcity of available written records, very little is known about the Castilian frontier towns and their inhabitants, who guarded the border. It has often been assumed that these guards were professional soldiers exclusively devoted to the defence of Castile. However, the study of unpublished documents from the early sixteenth century indicates that many of them were, in fact, settlers who combined their military duties with other civilian occupations, especially agriculture. This paper analyses the composition of the population of Olvera and Archidona, two Castilian towns on the border with Granada, during the second half of the fifteenth century, and shows the fluid nature of these late medieval settlers, who performed regular military service and spearheaded the colonisation of newly conquered territories while retaining their primary role as farmers.

Keywords: frontier towns; conquest of al-Andalus; Castilian settlers; Sultanate of Granada; Olvera; Archidona.

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During the mid-thirteenth century, the Crown of Castile conquered Lower Andalusia and Murcia, but its offensive halted at the gates of the recently created Nasrid Sultanate of Granada. A border that was to remain virtually unaltered for two hundred years was established between both states. Our understanding of the Christian communities that lived near the Castile–Granada border during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries is still very limited. The dearth of written records and the preferential treatment given to the study of border warfare have contributed to the dissemination of the idea that these communities were little more than military garrisons manned by professional soldiers. Associated with this conception is the belief that these soldiers bore no responsibility for any other economic activities and were incapable of settling permanently in the conquered territories, an idea that suggests the existence of two types of settlers: warriors and farmers.² If this were true, it

² Although the majority of historians who study the colonisation of the frontier with Granada acknowledge the double nature of this process (military and economic), in practice many of them consider the communities that settled it to have “an almost exclusively military character” (Montes Romero-Camacho, “Sevilla y la frontera,” 125). M. García Fernández sees these towns as “almost military fortresses [*presidios*]” inhabited by men uniquely devoted to martial activities (*Reino Sevilla*, 97, 102–13). J. Ruiz Povedano, when writing about the village of Alcaudete (Jaén), states that the goal behind its settlement was to create a military garrison that would defend the territory, more than to populate it; and he suggests that the difficulties in providing food for its inhabitants were partially due to the composition of its “first inhabitants, whose unique functions were war and the defence of the village and its territory” (“Poblamiento y frontera,” 69 and 71). There are some more extreme examples of historians who claim that the inhabitants of the frontier region were nothing more than “a conglomeration of turncoats, captives and runaway delinquents” (Sánchez Saus and Rojas Gabriel, “La frontera,” 391–92), or a collection of “prostitutes, criminals and traffickers” (Porrás Arboledas, “La organización military y social,” 485). J. del Estal Gutiérrez goes as far as to argue that the majority of the Muslim population of the region of Murcia could not have been expelled after the Christian

would mean that the traditional model of conquest and colonisation used by the Castilian crown since the High Middle Ages—based on the creation of armed peasant communities that worked the land while also defending the border—was not applied to the border with Granada in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. This would imply that the colonisation of this frontier region was an exception within Iberian medieval history, and that there was a clear division between an initial *military* colonisation—prior to 1492—and a later *agricultural* settlement of the region. This paper analyses the organisation of the population and defence of the frontier towns of Olvera (Cadiz) and Archidona (Malaga) during the second half of the fifteenth century in order to demonstrate that the transition between the pre- and post-1492 colonisation of the frontier was a fluid one, and that these villages were far from only being military outposts before the conquest of the sultanate. As will be seen, many of the colonists who took part in the defence of the frontier also spearheaded the agricultural colonisation of the area after the War of Granada.

This study is based on the analysis of the unpublished records of a 1518 lawsuit in which the Count of Ureña and the Bishop of Malaga contested the tithes of Olvera and

conquest of the 1240s because “they could not be replaced by a bunch of Christian settlers, most of whom were man-at-arms and unable to resume the industrial, mercantile and agricultural activities” abandoned by the natives (Estal Gutiérrez, “Problemática,” 809). This mindset has had an impact on how the study of the colonisation of Olvera and Archidona has been addressed. The authors who have studied their early colonial history have emphasised the essentially military nature of their inhabitants, and, in many cases, have misinterpreted the surviving written records, claiming that there were two distinct groups of settlers—the military garrison and the farmers—which will be demonstrated to be false (Aguado González, “Repoblación fortalezas fronterizas,” 26; Aguado González, *Ascenso linaje*, 816–28; Espejo Lara, “Repoblación Archidona,” 343; Iglesias García, *Villas perdidas*, 115; Rojas Gabriel, *Olvera*, 114–17; Rojas Gabriel, *Frontera Sevilla y Granada*, 248).

Archidona.³ Both villages were declared exempt from the payment of tithes by the bishopric of Malaga in the late-fifteenth century, but following the conquest of Granada in 1492 the episcopal see attempted to reinstate them, initiating a lawsuit of several decades' duration. In response, the Count of Ureña summoned fifty-three Old Christians and eight Andalusi to testify before the tribunal that both he and his predecessors had complied with their duty as frontier nobles, and had capably managed the defence of these villages. Of the witnesses, twenty-four had lived in Olvera or Archidona before the demise of the sultanate, and were thus able to provide detailed accounts of the ecclesiastical, political and military organisation of these frontier villages, including the origins and statuses of their inhabitants and defenders.

1. The frontier towns of Olvera and Archidona (1327/1462–1492)

At the time of their respective conquests, Olvera and Archidona were two Andalusi fortresses that guarded the Western border of Granada. Olvera and its surrounding territory were subjugated by Alfonso XI between 1327 and 1330, but it proved difficult to find Christian colonists to people the conquered land, and this allowed the Nasrids to regain most of the lost territory within a few years. The only settlement in the area that remained under Christian control was Olvera itself. From the mid-1330s until the conquest of Pruna, Zahara and Antequera in the early fifteenth century, Olvera was virtually surrounded by Muslim settlements (Figure 1).

³ Archivo Histórico Nacional, Sección Nobleza, Osuna, C.93, D.48-54, 1518, 2v–251v (hereafter, *Lawsuit*). This lawsuit and the tithes of Olvera and Archidona are analysed in Malpica Cuello and Peinado Santaella, “Relaciones Ureña y catedral;” Rojas Gabriel, *Olvera*, 144–45; Aguado González, *Ascenso linaje*, 1000–05. However, none of them refer to the testimony used in this article.

After banishing its indigenous population, the Crown entrusted Olvera to various frontier noblemen: first, to the Pérez de Guzmán family, and then to the Zúñigas. Eventually, it was purchased in 1460 by Pedro Girón, Master of the Order of Calatrava and founder of the lineage of the Counts of Ureña.⁴

Two years later, Pedro Girón took Archidona—which was still an important frontier bastion for the Nasrid sultan—and Henry IV “authorised the *Maestre* . . . to people the village with Christians, and distribute among them the houses and lands of the Moors,” who had been expelled.⁵ The fortress became a launching pad for Christian offensives, including the expedition that took Alhama in 1482 and those commanded by Ferdinand the Catholic against Loja and Vélez-Málaga in 1486 and 1487.⁶

The Christian lords of Olvera and Archidona spared no effort in attempting to repopulate them. The settlement of Christian colonists in the occupied zones was a key element in the conquest strategy implemented by the Christian kingdoms against al-Andalus between the eleventh and fifteenth centuries: the armed colonists who took possession of the Crown’s new territories helped the king to subjugate, segregate, expel, exterminate and replace the indigenous population, thereby consolidating the conquest.⁷ Frontiers are, however, hostile environments, and the colonisation of places such as Olvera and Archidona

⁴ More information about the history of Olvera in Iglesias García, *Villas perdidas*; Rojas Gabriel, *Olvera*.

⁵ Rades y Andrada, *Chronica tres Órdenes*, 75r.

⁶ *Lawsuit*, 119r, 123v and 125r.

⁷ García Fernández, *Reino de Sevilla*, 105; García Fernández, “Población Banda Morisca,” 74; González Jiménez, *Orígenes Andalucía*, 146; González Jiménez, “Frontier and Settlement,” 57 and 67; Torres Fontes, “Repoblación murciana,” 8; Torró, *Naixement d’una colònia*, 68–72; Virgili, “Conqueridors i colons,” 56; Virgili, “Gent Nova,” 80 and 83–84.

was often slow and arduous.⁸ The Castilian Crown and nobility were forced to adopt extraordinary measures to guarantee the settlement and permanence of a minimum number of residents in these frontline outposts, who were chiefly attracted by tax exemptions and the potential profit of war spoils.

2. Populating the frontier: franchises and settlers

Throughout the second half of the fifteenth century, Olvera and Archidona had small but stable populations, which began growing in the early 1490s, at the end of the War of Granada. This trend persisted until the mid-sixteenth century, and within a few decades the populations of both settlements had grown fivefold. Large suburban residential quarters appeared outside the city walls and became the main population nuclei, replacing the former residential areas within the fortified precinct (Table 1).⁹

Besides facing the persistent threat of war and enemy raids, the colonists also incurred considerable expenses in moving to new homes and beginning new lives. Many were unable to shoulder this expense and were forced to take on loans, which sometimes threatened to

⁸ On the difficulties faced by the Iberian Christian kingdoms when trying to populate their borders: Flores Varela, *Estudio demográfico*, 103–107 and 111–12; García Fernández, “Población Banda Morisca;” González Jiménez, *Orígenes Andalucía*; González Jiménez and Ladero Quesada, “Población Gibraltar y Vejer;” Torres Fontes, “Repoblación murciana;” Torró, *Naixement colònia*; Virgili, “Gent Nova.”

⁹ Aguado González, “Repoblación fortalezas fronterizas;” Espejo Lara, “Repoblación Archidona.”

leave them destitute and even forced some to flee to avoid default charges.¹⁰ For this reason, the concession of tax exemptions was the first step in creating new settlements.

In 1327, Alfonso XI issued a charter to Olvera, in which the right of the residents to not pay royal taxes was recognised.¹¹ This privilege was confirmed by each new king at the request of the lords of the village, who argued that the very survival of the community depended on this exemption.¹² Archidona was granted a similar franchise after its conquest in 1462; and in 1464 and 1485 the bishopric of Malaga also agreed to exempt both villages from paying the tithe.¹³ Many of these prerogatives remained in place for a long time after the conquest of the Sultanate of Granada, in some cases even up to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.¹⁴

In the second half of the fifteenth century, the population of both villages was highly mobile. Of the fifty-three Old Christians questioned in 1518, twenty-four had lived in Olvera (eleven) or Archidona (thirteen) before 1492, but by that date only four remained in the former and none in the latter. Most of the witnesses came from elsewhere in Andalusia, and between 1485 and 1518 many relocated. Most moved into the recently conquered sultanate of Granada as beneficiaries of the land distributions that followed the conquest, but others moved to various former frontier posts. This constant circulation of colonists was not

¹⁰ The indebtedness of peasant colonists has been linked to the disappearance of small agricultural properties in newly colonised areas: Torró, *Naixement colònia*, 132–34; Villalonga, *Haçer un buen pueblo*, 82, 119–22 and 153; Virgili, “Gent Nova,” 90–91 and 98.

¹¹ Escalona, *Historia Sahagún*, 652–53.

¹² Rojas Gabriel, *Olvera*, 161.

¹³ Alijo Hidalgo, “Privilegios,” 31; Malpica Cuello and Peinado Santaella, “Relaciones Ureña y catedral,” 421–23; Rojas Gabriel, *Olvera*, 144–45.

¹⁴ Alijo Hidalgo, “Privilegios,” 25 and 32.

exclusive to Olvera and Archidona. By 1518, only nine of the old Christian witnesses summoned by the court lived in their birthplaces, and two of these people had lived elsewhere before returning. Despite this demographic fluidity, the administration of the local councils was fully formed before 1492. By 1460, Olvera had a council with mayors, magistrates, bailiffs, and several “good men,” as well as an *auditorio* for the celebration of court sessions and, at least, one public clerk.¹⁵

During their period as frontier outposts, the population of Olvera and Archidona included large proportions of single men. In the early 1470s, the Castilian Crown gauged that only 33 percent of the residents of Olvera and 19 percent of those of Archidona were married,¹⁶ and it deemed this sufficient, although these figures were proportionately very low for the period in question.¹⁷ Thus, it was anticipated that many potential colonists would have no family or, if they did, that they would leave them behind while moving only temporarily. The record attests to married men who settled on the frontier without their families. Hernán Gómez recounted that, when he was a teenager, his father left Écija for Archidona to work for the Count as a “guard” and that he was there for fifteen years. During this time, the witness “went back and forth” to spend time with his father.¹⁸

This does not mean that there were no families at all in these villages prior to 1492. The presence of married couples is implicit in the fact that six of the witnesses were born in

¹⁵ Archivo Histórico Nacional, Sección Nobleza, Osuna, C.93, D.16, 1460, 19r; C.93, D.19, 1460, 16r.

¹⁶ Archivo Histórico Nacional, Sección Nobleza, Osuna, C.61, D.22, 1470, 1v–23r; C.93, D.30, 1477, 27r–35r.

¹⁷ The average percentage of married men in Andalusian cities during the second half of the fifteenth and the early sixteenth century was seventy-five percent (Flores Varela, *Estudio demográfico*, 168).

¹⁸ *Lawsuit*, 146r.

Olvera (five) or Archidona (one) between 1452 and 1478. The record also attests to colonists settling in Archidona with their families before 1492. Pedro de Estepa spent part of his childhood in Archidona where his father served as a “guard.” Marcos Gómez also lived there with his parents, and Aníbal Méndez spent seven or eight years there because his father, *mosén* Diego Méndez, “paid the people [who were there] on behalf of the Count.”¹⁹ Furthermore, some witnesses referred, more or less explicitly, to the presence of their relatives in these villages. In 1493, Fernán López settled in Archidona, where his father’s brother, who had participated in the conquest of the place, lived. Similarly, the *hidalgo* Antón de Medina moved from his native Utrera to Olvera in the 1470s, and his father and grandfather either moved with him or were already residents there.²⁰

Nothing suggests that people at the time found family life to be at odds with living on a dangerous frontier, and it was not rare for children to witness battles and live in military camps.²¹ Several of the witnesses summoned to the 1518 court case had followed their relatives on military expeditions when they were still minors: Juan Ruiz de Lucena, Martín Sánchez Navarro and Pedro de Estepa were seventeen, fourteen and six, respectively, when they accompanied their fathers to the siege of Archidona in 1462.²² Álvaro Páez was the page

¹⁹ *Lawsuit*, 141r.

²⁰ *Lawsuit*, 153v and 218r.

²¹ Medieval examples of colonists moving to frontier regions with their families are abundant. About 40% of the settlers of Vejer de la Frontera between 1288 and 1293 lived with their relatives (González Jiménez and Ladero Quesada, “Población Gibraltar y Vejer,” 283). The castles of the southern regions of the Kingdom of Valencia in the thirteenth century were inhabited by “permanent garrisons of men with their families” (Torró, “Hábitat fortificado,” 57). In 1401, a group of Muslim *almogavars* “attacked four men who were going to Orihuela with their wives and sons to become residents there” (Bellot, *Anales Orihuela*, 192).

²² *Lawsuit*, 133r, 230v–231r and 241v.

of Pedro Girón and, despite being only fourteen, witnessed the Battle of Madroño and the conquest of Archidona.²³ During emergencies, the “civil” population of frontier villages was expected to participate in the defence of the community as auxiliaries of the fighting forces:²⁴ for example, during his childhood, Juan de la Torre used to climb with his friends “to the church spire of Antequera, and keep an eye on the dust created by the Moors who raided the land, and warn [the community] that ‘the enemy was at hand’.”²⁵

It is impossible to ascertain whether the Crown’s calculations concerning the proportion of married residents in Olvera and Archidona are accurate. Some witnesses may simply have omitted to mention that their wives and children had lived with them in these villages. Furthermore, the cross-section of the population provided by the sample of witnesses is misrepresentative, because many of those who would have been mature men in the 1470s and 1480s were dead by 1518. In general terms, the men who testified had been very young before 1492, since most of them were in their early twenties at the time. As such, they had not had time to marry. At any rate, almost all the witnesses ended up forming a family and, by 1518, twenty-two of the twenty-four witnesses who had lived in either of the two villages before 1492 were married or widowers.

Among the least understood aspects of life in these communities is the management of agricultural land prior to the conquest of Granada. The scant population and the Muslim raids limited the extent and forms of cultivation available to the residents of Olvera and Archidona. During periods of open warfare, cultivation was limited to “a little bread” and

²³ *Lawsuit*, 85r–85v.

²⁴ In 1359 and 1360, the council of Orihuela ordered that foreigners, widows, orphans and clergymen should contribute to the defence of the city, by watching and patrolling the precinct (Bellot, *Anales Orihuela*, 95 and 113).

²⁵ *Lawsuit*, 196v.

“some fodder for the horses” in the areas immediately surrounding the town walls.²⁶ The residents took advantage of “times of peace” to venture a little farther away from the walls, and sow wheat, barley and sesame.²⁷ However, even during peaceful periods, harvests were never sufficient to satisfy the tithe.²⁸

As was the case with most frontier towns and villages, the territories of Olvera and Archidona were chiefly used for stock-breeding.²⁹ Cattle-raising intensified during periods of peace, and the Counts of Ureña took advantage of truces to lease out the meadows and uncultivated land around Olvera and Archidona to foreign stock-breeders.³⁰ The main grazing area in Olvera was the *donadío* of Vallehermoso, which was the target of a raid launched from Setenil by Pero García Ataxaty and other Andalusí men before the War of Granada. The raiders succeeded in stealing 1,500 sheep after killing the shepherds.³¹ The territory surrounding Archidona was similarly used for grazing during truces, especially the *pagos* of Los Alimanes and La Vega, which the Count of Ureña also leased out to foreign stock-breeders. The witness Martín Sánchez Navarro, a resident of Montilla, recalled taking his animals to graze in Archidona during a temporary cessation of hostilities, and Aníbal Méndez

²⁶ *Lawsuit*, 123v and 134v.

²⁷ *Lawsuit*, 183v, 207v, 220v and 224v.

²⁸ *Lawsuit*, 91v, 92r, 94r, 96r, 99r, 101r, 105r, 108r, 112r, 113v, 122r, 130v, 134v, 158r and 213v.

²⁹ Many scholars have highlighted the important role stockbreeding played in the economy of Iberian frontier towns: Argente del Castillo Ocaña, *Ganadería medieval andaluza*, 471–80; Lacarra, “Les villes-frontière,” 219; Carmona Ruiz, “Actividad ganadera” and “Repercusiones de la frontera;” Morilla Cala, “Tierras, paisajes y líneas;” Powers, *Society*, 21–22, 38, 66 and 210–12; Rojas Gabriel, *Frontera Sevilla y Granada*, 352; Villalonga, *Haçer un buen pueblo*, 54–55 and 71–74.

³⁰ *Lawsuit*, 90v and 220v–221r.

³¹ *Lawsuit*, 157r.

recounted seeing 300 cows that belonged to a man called Valderrama grazing in La Vega of Archidona in the 1480s.³²

During the second half of the fifteenth century, the Count of Ureña and the few residents of Olvera and Archidona took advantage of peaceful periods to use the territory more intensively, either as arable land or as pastures. However, there were long periods, sometimes lasting years on end, during which cross-border violence was a constant reality and the land had to be abandoned. The witnesses to the 1518 court case declared that both Moors and Christians “cut down and destroyed each other’s crops, and thus did not dare to sow anything . . . and the land turned wild.”³³ The inhabitants of Olvera recalled that the Nasrid parties ran the territory “down to the very walls of the village,” so Christians were unable to sow anything.³⁴ Residents of Archidona also claimed that, at times, “they did not dare to go out to collect a load of firewood for fear of the Moors.”³⁵ During the wars with Granada, frontier outposts lacked the ability to feed themselves, and depended on external supplies. For this reason, the concession of franchises and the settlement of colonists was simply the first step in a long process, and the Crown and nobility had to devise mechanisms to prevent desertion owing to war and bad harvests.

3. Defending the frontier: *pagas* and *lievas*

In 1325, Alfonso XI assumed the task of supporting the royal and seigniorial fortresses on Granada’s frontier. The Crown transferred the management of some of its sources of income

³² *Lawsuit*, 140v and 241v.

³³ *Lawsuit*, 158v.

³⁴ *Lawsuit*, 182v (See also 91v, 177r–177v, 179r and 210r).

³⁵ *Lawsuit*, 99r.

in Andalusia to the governors (*alcaldes*) of these outposts to ensure that their residents received their wages and supplies. These payments were known as *pagas* and *lievas*.³⁶ With this measure, Alfonso XI was trying to ensure the long-term settlement of colonists on the frontier and thus avoid a depopulation that would leave it undefended. The consequences of delayed payments could be disastrous, as evinced by the example of the town of Huéscar—located in the northeastern sector of the frontier—which fell into Nasrid hands in the mid-fifteenth century because the “supplies that the village needed” were neglected “and the place became so depopulated that the Moors could gain it back.”³⁷

In Olvera, the Count of Ureña inherited these payments from the preceding lords when he purchased the town in 1460.³⁸ And four years later, he was also granted the *pagas* and *lievas* corresponding to Archidona, which were substantially greater than those of Olvera.³⁹ In two documents from the early 1470s, Henry IV ratified the Count of Ureña’s right to receive an annual payment of 1,150,965 maravedis and 2,170 *cahices* of bread for the defence of these villages; and, in 1482, the Catholic Monarchs granted him an extra 400,000 maravedis per year.⁴⁰

The documents referring to *pagas* and *lievas* reflect the colonisation project that the Crown had devised for each town. The residents of these settlements were divided into social

³⁶ García Fernández, *Reino de Sevilla*, 92.

³⁷ Valera, M. Diego de. *Memorial de Diversas Hazañas*, III. Ch. XIV (as cited in Quintanilla Raso, “Fortalezas andaluzas,” 260).

³⁸ Aguado González, *Ascenso linaje*, 815–27; Rojas Gabriel, *Olvera*, 136–39; Rojas Gabriel, *Frontera Sevilla y Granada*, 335–37.

³⁹ Rojas Gabriel, *Frontera Sevilla y Granada*, 126.

⁴⁰ Archivo Histórico Nacional, Sección Nobleza, Osuna, C.93, D.30, 1477, 27r–35r; C.61, D.22, 1470, 1v–23r; C.61, D.37, 1482, 3r, respectively. Rojas Gabriel published a transcription of the grant to Olvera in *Olvera*, 185–92.

categories according to their wealth and, therefore, their military status; based on these categories, individuals were assigned a wage and a certain quantity of grain. The system reproduced the ancestral method for distributing booty between the members of Christian war parties, which had been adapted for the division of conquered territories among the colonists.⁴¹

According to the grants issued in the 1470s, Archidona's population should have included 120 horsemen, 300 crossbowmen and 200 spearmen, and Olvera's 20 cavalrymen, 24 crossbowmen and 66 spearmen.⁴² The statements presented to the court in 1518, however, indicate that these figures were unrealistic. During the second half of the fifteenth century, there were around 139 heads of household in Archidona—roughly 54 horsemen and 86 footmen, and 61 in Olvera—35 and 31, respectively. Even if we were to accept the highest figures offered by the witnesses—250 heads of household in Archidona and 90 in Olvera—the figures barely reach 40 percent (Archidona) and 75 percent (Olvera) of the Crown's provisions.⁴³

Most fortresses along Granada's frontier housed only a fraction of their full complement of residents.⁴⁴ The discrepancy between the actual figures and the Crown's provisions has been interpreted as evidence of the fraudulent management of the royal taxes on the part of the governors of the frontier outposts. By recruiting fewer men than was

⁴¹ García Fitz, "Organización militar," 116; Powers, *Society*, 167.

⁴² Archivo Histórico Nacional, Sección Nobleza, Osuna, C.61, D.22, 1470, 10v–11r; C.93, D.30, 1477, 30v.

⁴³ *Lawsuit*, 107r and 215v.

⁴⁴ Ladero Quesada, "Frontera de Granada," 66; Quintanilla Raso, "Fortalezas andaluzas," 257–58; Rojas Gabriel, *Frontera Sevilla y Granada*, 338; Torres Delgado, "Fortaleza de Zahara," 360–62.

considered necessary, they could minimise costs and profit from them.⁴⁵ However, the analysis of the statements issued at the 1518 court case suggest an alternative explanation.

Four witnesses recalled that the wages paid to the “guards” at Olvera and Archidona in the second half of the fifteenth century were significantly higher than those prescribed by the Crown. Henry IV calculated a monthly wage of 90 maravedis for the horsemen of Archidona, 30 for crossbowmen and 24 for spearmen, but according to the witnesses, each cavalryman was paid around 278 maravedis every month, while footmen were paid 208. The information available for Olvera, although less abundant, seems to confirm this. The wages mentioned in the 1471 grant are 60 maravedis for cavalrymen, 44 for crossbowmen and 14 for spearmen, although the reality was closer to 167 maravedis for horsemen and 83 for footmen.⁴⁶

The royal grants also introduced the possibility of paying bonuses (*demasías*) to the residents according to their civil state and profession, and as a reward for completing extra tasks on a voluntary basis. Married men received an extra measure of wheat, and cavalrymen were given more barley to feed their horses. Monetary rewards were given to those who took part in non-compulsory military duties (escorting supply vans and doing sentry duty during peace times), practised certain trades (builders, carpenters, engineers) or served in the village government.⁴⁷ According to the grants, a married horseman who held the position of *regidor* in Archidona—which had a salary of 1,000 maravedis—and who also undertook sentry duties, would receive 2,380 maravedis and 84 *fanegas* of wheat and barley each year, a sum

⁴⁵ Quintanilla Raso, “Fortalezas andaluzas,” 258; Rojas Gabriel, *Frontera Sevilla y Granada*, 354–55; Torró, “Hábitat fortificado,” 55–56.

⁴⁶ *Lawsuit*, 99r, 108r, 111v and 193v.

⁴⁷ Archivo Histórico Nacional, Sección Nobleza, Osuna, C.61, D.22, 1470, 11r–13r; C.93, D.30, 1477, 30v–31r.

still far smaller than the 3,000 or 4,000 maravedis and 104 *fanegas* of bread paid by the Count of Ureña as regular wages. In Olvera, the stipulated wage of a married cavalryman who undertook sentry duties amounted to 840 maravedis and 84 *fanegas* of bread, nothing compared to the 2,000 maravedis and 88 *fanegas* that the count paid them (Table 2).⁴⁸

The salaries with which the Count of Ureña rewarded the “guards” of Olvera and Archidona were substantially higher than those earned by artisans in the main cities of Andalusia and Murcia during the second half of the fifteenth century. While a footman in Olvera and Archidona was paid between 1,000 and 3,000 maravedis per year, the annual salary of a master builder in Seville was 720 maravedis, and that of a cuirass-maker in Murcia was barely 600.⁴⁹ The witnesses to the lawsuit agreed that the defenders of these villages were “very well paid” and well supplied, owing to the vans of “supplies of bread, wine, bacon and cheese” arriving every few months from Osuna, Morón and El Arahál.⁵⁰

The Count of Ureña’s management of *pagas* and *lievas* exemplifies a different approach to defending the frontier than the one designed by the monarchy. The Crown appears to have based the wages in Olvera and Archidona on the redistributive system followed in royal and seigniorial military campaigns. Each enlisted man received a salary, while service lasted, in line with his social and military status, which compensated him for the disruption that the expeditions caused to his family finances.⁵¹ In Olvera and Archidona, the salaries established by Henry IV were more than double what the Catholic Monarchs paid

⁴⁸ *Lawsuit*, 99r.

⁴⁹ Collantes de Terán Sánchez, “Aspectos económicos,” 180; Piqueras García, “Estudio salarios,” 128.

⁵⁰ *Lawsuit*, 141r and 222r.

⁵¹ Sánchez Prieto, “Ejército nobiliario,” 175.

the members of the royal host during the War of Granada,⁵² but even these do not appear to have been sufficient enticement to attract enough settlers.

Instead of keeping 740 men and paying them relatively modest wages, the count of Ureña had approximately 200 men who were generously paid and well fed. If the evidence provided by the witnesses is accurate, his investment in the populations of Olvera and Archidona was greater than the Crown had forecasted. The count spent almost 400,000 maravedis annually on the wages of Archidona's defenders—7 percent more than the 369,020 maravedis earmarked for this purpose in the royal grants—although the actual proportion of defenders was just over one-third of the village's full complement of 620. In Olvera, the difference was even greater: the monarchy had calculated the wages and *demasías* for 120 at 43,430 maravedis per year, but the count paid 101,000 maravedis for just over fifty men.

The wages paid to these settlers were not simply bonuses to their regular salaries, as was the case in military expeditions; on the frontier, duty was permanent and alternative means of income were unreliable. Governors had to guarantee their men not only their daily sustenance, but also a greater profit than they would reap had they stayed in the interior regions. In 1486, the city council of Jaen filed a complaint because the fortress of Cambil was manned by only thirty residents, when the full complement was eighty. The governor replied that he was forced to pay wages that were over twice as high as had been budgeted to ensure that the residents stayed.⁵³ Life on the frontier was hard, and substantial incentives were necessary to entice potential colonists to forget about the dangers. Accounts of the loss of Zahara to Granada in the late-fifteenth century are eloquent: "No one wished to come and

⁵² Collantes de Terán Sánchez, "Aspectos económicos," 178.

⁵³ Quesada Quesada, *La serranía de Mágina en la Baja Edad Media* . . . , 258 (as cited in Flores Varela, *Estudio demográfico*, 105).

live there in exchange for the offered wage, since they could own no property there but their own lance, which they had to use constantly to defend the village.”⁵⁴

Wages were, therefore, a key factor in attracting colonists to the frontier. The witnesses to the 1518 lawsuit referred to the years they spent in Olvera and Archidona as the time they were in the count’s employ, “being paid the count’s wages.”⁵⁵ Juan López Vasco, for instance, said that he “had earned the count’s money, wheat and barley, for defending Olvera with his horse and arms.”⁵⁶ In agreeing to go and defend these villages, the colonists were making an investment they hoped would yield returns in the form of booty and regular wages. The city council of Orihuela clarified the motivations of these men in a letter dated to 1359 and addressed to Peter the Ceremonious: “many [residents] had bought horses in expectation of receiving a salary [as a horseman], but they are leaving the town because they are not being paid and they have nothing to live on.”⁵⁷

4. Professional soldiers?

The wages paid to the residents of frontier villages played a central role in the organisation of settlement and defence efforts, acting as the main incentive behind colonists’ attraction to the villages and their continued residence there. For the Crown, the duty of defending frontier settlements fell by default to their inhabitants, who were to be paid a wage according to their ability to fulfil this duty. However, of the fifteen witnesses to the 1518 court case who were of appropriate age to take on “guard and defence” duties in Olvera and Archidona, only nine

⁵⁴ Torres Delgado, “Fortaleza de Zahara,” 360.

⁵⁵ *Lawsuit*, 95v, 107r, 148r, 153v and 200r.

⁵⁶ *Lawsuit*, 98v.

⁵⁷ Bellot, *Anales Orihuela*, 93.

claimed to have received wages from the Count of Ureña.⁵⁸ If these figures are representative, a substantial proportion of adult males living in Olvera and Archidona during the second half of the fifteenth century did not receive a salary from the count and, in principle, were not directly involved in the defence of the villages (Table 3).

The records, in any case, do not make any explicit distinctions among the inhabitants of the villages according to the intensity of the military duties they carried out.⁵⁹ Nor did the witnesses to the 1518 court case, who as a rule declared that the number of “guards” was equivalent to the number of residents. The testimony of Antón de Medina is the only exception: describing the population of Olvera in the 1470s, he claimed that the village had thirty cavalry men and between ten and twenty footmen, and that “these were frontier men (*fronteros*), who were different from the residents and ... were paid wages in money and bread.” His statement is somewhat confusing, as he continued by saying that many of these frontier men also tilled the land, and when asked about the population of Olvera, explained that “in wartime, [there were] no more than forty or fifty residents”—that is, the number of frontier men he had given previously.⁶⁰ Consequently, if there was a *de facto* distinction

⁵⁸ In the late-fifteenth century, every male over the age of twenty had to own weapons according to their social status and could be called to arms (Quatrefages, “Organización militar siglos XV y XVI,” 15).

⁵⁹ The medieval sources generically refer to the inhabitants of Olvera and Archidona as “residents” or “residents and inhabitants” (*Lawsuit*, 72r–83v). The grants of “*pagas*” and “*lievas*” are, arguably, the best example of the identification between the settlers and the defenders of the frontier. The grant to Olvera, refers to “the 120 residents who live in this town: 20 of them cavalrymen, 24 crossbowmen and 66 spearmen” (Archivo Histórico Nacional, Sección Nobleza, Osuna, C.93, D.30, 1477, 30v).

⁶⁰ *Lawsuit*, 217v and 218v. This is the only time the term “*frontero*” is used to refer to the residents of Olvera and Archidona.

between “guards” and “residents” in Olvera and Archidona, this difference was never officially recognised, and was, in any case, not expressed by the inhabitants of the villages.

The men who acted as “guards” in these towns bore heavier military duties than the rest of residents. In addition to their obligation to guard the village, all joined at least one major military expedition, under the command of either the Count of Ureña or the king. Also, four of these men were part of the mounted force that escorted supply vans to Olvera and Archidona. In contrast, only one-third of the men who did not receive a salary from the count claimed to have taken part in this sort of operation.

The proportions of “guards” in each village varied markedly. Almost 80 percent of the men in the count’s service dwelled in Archidona, and all of them emigrated after 1492. In contrast, all the witnesses who did not receive a salary from the count lived in Olvera, and half of them still lived there at the time of the court case. This contrast seems to confirm the accuracy of Antón de Medina’s distinction between “frontier men” and “residents” in Olvera—a distinction that was never observed regarding Archidona—as well as the Crown’s data, which states that, in 1471, there were more married men in Olvera than in Archidona.⁶¹ It is likely, therefore, that the demographic structure of each village was different. In 1492, Archidona had been under Castilian domination for barely thirty years, and it is likely that its population was still heavily dependent on men who settled there for more or less long periods of time in exchange for a salary. Olvera, for its part, had been under Castilian sovereignty for over a century and a half, and had had time to consolidate a more stable, diverse and autonomous population, including residents who played no part in the defence of the village. Despite this, men in the service of the count were not segregated from the rest, and were regarded by the other inhabitants as “residents of the place.”⁶²

⁶¹ See page 4.

⁶² *Lawsuit*, 179v.

The distinction between “guards” and “residents” becomes especially nebulous when it comes to analysing the social extraction of the witnesses and, especially, their trajectory after the War of Granada. Regardless of whether they had undertaken any military duty, none of the witnesses offered any details concerning their economic activity during their time at the frontier. However, by 1518, most of them worked, generally as farmers. This included three out of every four “guards” in both Olvera and Archidona, some of whom had been cavalrymen. The squire Juan López Vasco, a descendant of “the *alcalde* Juan de Palma,” served as a “guard” in Olvera, but “[in 1518] lived off his land, which he sowed and harvested” and claimed to be “an expert on newly broken-up land.”⁶³ Similarly, the farmer Diego López Manjón served as a mounted “guard” in Archidona in the 1480s, but signed a lease with his father on the *donadío* of Ortegícar—owned by the count—around 1488, and they were the first to cultivate this estate.⁶⁴ Even if these men had served as full-time guards while they lived at the frontier, this did not stop them from leading lives as farmers afterwards.

The profiles of the witnesses summoned to the proceedings in 1518 do not match the classic view of a Late Medieval Castilian society divided sharply between warriors at the frontier and farmers, merchants and artisans in the rear-guard. Pigeonholing the colonists who inhabited frontier outposts into categories based on their involvement in military actions is a futile exercise. “Guards” and “residents” in Olvera and Archidona shared the same social and geographical origins and, regardless of their roles in the defence of the frontier, followed similar paths after the War of Granada. There were never two kinds of settlers: men-at-arms and farmers belonged to the same families, and a single individual could easily move between groups.

⁶³ *Lawsuit*, 96v and 97v.

⁶⁴ *Lawsuit*, 198v–199r.

The witness Alonso de Morón, for example, was born around 1433 in Morón to a family of farmers. Around the age of thirty, he went to Archidona, where he became “one of the horsemen who guarded [it],” alongside another thirty cavalrymen and forty footmen. Following the death of Pedro Girón in 1466, Alonso moved to Utrera. He provided no details about his life in this city, but his involvement with the defence of the frontier villages seems to have continued, for on more than one occasion he escorted the Olvera supply vans, and he joined the host that took Ortegaícar around 1478. In 1518, at the age of eighty-five, he “[lived] on his land” in Zahara—taken in 1483—with his wife, and his possessions were worth thirty gold ducats.⁶⁵ Juan Alonso, to cite another example, was born “to farmers” in Montilla in 1448. He was present at the siege of Archidona in 1462, probably in the company of a relative. At the age of twenty, he left Montilla to go “to Archidona, to earn a wage,” and “was there for a while, a total of five years, in two different periods.” In the mid-1470s he left for Malaga “to negotiate with the Moorish governor,” and around 1478 participated in the conquest of Ortegaícar. In the late-fifteenth or the early sixteenth century, he was in Casarabonela, a village near Malaga conquered in 1485, where he lived for some time. Finally, he settled with his wife in Cañete la Real, where he owned land worth 200 gold ducats “living from his land . . . sowing seeds and keeping livestock.”⁶⁶

5. Conclusion: The *pardos milites* of the frontier of Granada

The biographies of these witnesses demonstrate that, for them, being a frontier “guard” often was often a temporary occupation. After living on the wages and booty for a few years, many reverted to their original livelihoods as farmers. It took the above-mentioned Diego López

⁶⁵ *Lawsuit*, 233v–236r.

⁶⁶ *Lawsuit*, 105v–109v.

Manjón barely a few years—if not a few months—to shift from his position as a cavalryman in Archidona into his new role as a well-to-do farmer in charge of the cultivation of the *donadio* of Ortegícar.

This does not mean that during their employment in defence of the villages these men were not fully committed to their military duties. Describing the communities that lived in Olvera and Archidona, several witnesses declared that “there were no farmers [in Olvera]; there were but a few residents who took care of its defence,” and that “people [in Archidona] were more war-like than farm-like.”⁶⁷ The fifteenth-century sources provide evidence for the participation of Olvera residents in raids and conquest expeditions. In 1407, some joined a host from Carmona and Marchena in the sacking of neighbouring Andalusí settlements, returning with “eighty horses and much booty besides.”⁶⁸ In October of that same year, the inhabitants of Olvera took Torre Alháquime on their own initiative, having received intelligence that its Muslim inhabitants had departed.⁶⁹ Residents from Olvera also took part in the siege of Archidona in 1462.⁷⁰ Furthermore, both towns were used for launching raids on the Sultanate of Granada, and several witnesses recalled having gone there to “enter the land of the Moors” or to “join the king’s war against the Moors.”⁷¹

Regular, paid military duty in the frontier villages could be combined with having a stable residence, a family and even other occupations. These *paysans-soldats*, whose participation in military operations was determined by the agricultural calendar, constituted the foundations of the medieval council militias and the expansion of the Christian Spanish

⁶⁷ *Lawsuit*, 181r and 171r, respectively.

⁶⁸ Pérez de Guzmán, *Crónica don Juan*, 37.

⁶⁹ Pérez de Guzmán, *Crónica don Juan*, 46 and 48.

⁷⁰ *Lawsuit*, 85r.

⁷¹ *Lawsuit*, 139r, 174v and 227v.

kingdoms in the eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth centuries.⁷² Medieval sources are packed with examples of frontier horsemen who combined war with agriculture. One such example may be found in Orihuela in 1364, when not enough men turned up to muster because “most horsemen were working in their gardens.”⁷³

By the fourteenth century, council militias had lost some of the independence and vigour that had characterised them throughout the mid-centuries of the Middle Ages. As the Crown curtailed the possibility of social promotion and tax privileges, the drive to join expeditions declined, and the monarchy was forced to implement a conscription model that combined the obligation to possess arms and other equipment with a wage for armed service.⁷⁴ Wages became increasingly important for Castilian military organisation during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as a result of the growing disaffection of militiamen and the need to find substitutes for them.⁷⁵ The payment of wages above the “official” rate to anyone willing to settle in the frontier and commit to its defence must be viewed within this historical context.

Despite the transition from a system of incentives based on booty and fiscal and political privileges to another based on regular wages, the social origins of members of council militias do not seem to have changed significantly. During the late-fifteenth century, these militias were still formed by armed farmers who combined military duties and agricultural tasks; for these men, harvesting their own crops and stealing those of the enemy were two sides of the same coin, and the decision to opt for one or the other at any given time

⁷² Durand, “Guerre et fortifications,” 185; Powers, *Society*, 145 and 190.

⁷³ Bellot, *Anales Orihuela*, 133.

⁷⁴ García Fernández, *Reino de Sevilla*, 310–11; González Jiménez, “Caballería popular;” González Jiménez, “Alfonso X.”

⁷⁵ Collantes de Terán Sánchez, “Aspectos económicos,” 174–75.

was determined by their personal situations and the political context.⁷⁶ Although they had family and property, they were willing to relocate and even change political allegiance for better pay.⁷⁷

The military potential of these armed farmers, useful as it was when launched against a foreign enemy, could easily be directed towards their neighbours and even Castilian authorities. In 1473, many residents of Antequera became bandits and robbed the Christians who ventured through their territory “driven by poverty,” for the Crown had not paid any wages for a whole decade.⁷⁸ In 1517, open war broke out between the villages of Arcos and Villamartín, in Cadiz, following a dispute regarding land boundaries. Dozens of men, under the command of their council officials and “armed with spears, crossbows, swords and other offensive weapons” raided the land of the “enemy” killing residents and destroying houses, agricultural equipment and crops and boundary stones, and stealing livestock, as they had done barely a quarter century earlier against the Andalusi.⁷⁹

Resident “guards” in Olvera and Archidona during the second half of the fifteenth century were heirs to a tradition of predatory raids that dated back to the councils of Castilian Extremadura in the eleventh century. These were the men who made up the royal hosts that conquered al-Andalus, who retained by force of arms the territory taken by the Christians and then began cultivating the new land. The Manichean vision of villages in the Castile–

⁷⁶ According to J. Torró, specialisation in frontier warfare was not “a permanent occupation,” but a “life stage” (“Viure del botí,” 24).

⁷⁷ In 1429, some horsemen from Orihuela “had gone wherever they got better pay,” and the council urged them to return and defend “their native land, where they have property” (Bellot, *Anales Orihuela*, 326).

⁷⁸ Rojas Gabriel, *Reino Sevilla y Granada*, 356–58.

⁷⁹ Villalonga, *Haçer un buen pueblo*, 193.

Granada frontier manned by soldiers and criminals, outside the margins of a society made up of a peaceful majority of peasants, is contradicted by the testimonies presented at the 1518 court case, which describe a community of men who could easily transition from farmer to warrior to bandit—and vice versa.⁸⁰ Gerald of Wales drew similar conclusions regarding the Flemish settlers arriving in Wales in the twelfth century: “a people as well-fitted to follow the plough as to wield the sword;” “[they] spared no labour . . . in their search for profit (*lucrum*).”⁸¹

The Spanish brought this ability to alternate depredation and production to America in the early sixteenth century, where colonists acted simultaneously as peasants and warriors, as city-dwellers and vagrants, as family men and miscreants.⁸² When Bartolomé de las Casas attempted to found a colony “of peaceful farmers” on the coast of Colombia in 1520, he failed because, a few months after arriving in America, his farmers left “with bandits to rob and kidnap the Indians, which was the most common occupation at that time.”⁸³ In almost no time, a group of peaceful farmers had become a head-hunting party.

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⁸⁰ This fluidity between the settler and the outlaw is characteristic of medieval and modern colonial frontiers (Torró, “Viure del botí,” 25; Barceló “Loquella barbarica,” 96).

⁸¹ Davies, *Domination and Conquest*, 10–11.

⁸² Powers, *Society*, 213.

⁸³ Las Casas, Bartolomé de. *Historia de las Indias*, III. Eds. M.A. Medina; J.A. Barreda; I. Pérez Fernández. Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1994, 2455 (as cited in Barceló, “Loquella barbarica,” 93).

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Table 1. Evolution of the population of Olvera and Archidona (c. 1460–1534). Sources: Aguado González, *Ascenso linaje*, 747 and 857–58; *Lawsuit*, 84r–243r.

	1460–92 ¹	1511–17	1534 ²
Archidona	139	500	558
Olvera	61	250	278

¹ Arithmetic mean of the data provided by the 1518 witnesses.

² Additionally, in 1534 there were ninety-four widows and twenty-one orphans in Archidona, and forty-eight widows and twenty-four orphans in Olvera (Aguado González, *Ascenso linaje*, 857).

Table 2. Average wages paid by the Count of Ureña to the “guards” of Olvera and Archidona. Source: *Lawsuit*, 99r, 108r, 111v and 193v.

	wheat (<i>fanegas</i>)	barley (<i>fanegas</i>)	maravedis	
Archidona	38	66	3,333	Knight
	33	-	2,500	Footman
Olvera	40	48	2,000	Knight
	36	-	1,000	Footman

Table 3. Social status of the fifteen witnesses who came of age before 1492 while living in Olvera and Archidona. Source: *Lawsuit*, 84r-243r.

	“Guards”		Other adult men	
	Number	Workers	Number	Workers
Loggers	-	-	1	1
Peasants	5	5	4	4
Men of “squire and peasant descent”	1	1	-	-
Squires	2	1	-	-
Noblemen	1	-	1	-
	9	7	6	5

Figures:

Figure 1. The border between Castile and Granada circa 1481. Source: Map by I. Díaz

Sierra using SIOSE from © Instituto Geográfico Nacional and QGIS.



Key: Triangles: Olvera and Archidona. Squares: Castilian towns. Pentagons: Nasrid towns. 1: Torre Alháquime.