

## Strategies to value the dispersed heritage of rural Andalusia. Lagares, paseros and vineyards: the architecture of the raisin

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### Abstract

The United Nations Food and Agroindustry Organization (FAO) declared in 2018 the Malaga raisin production system as an Important World Agricultural Heritage System (SIPAM). There are 62 SIPAM worldwide, five of them in Spain and Malaga is the only one in the entire Andalusian autonomous community. The value of this declaration resides in the recognition of a cultural heritage capable of combining agricultural biodiversity with resilient ecosystems and a valuable cultural landscape where its architecture remains linked to artisan production. The SIPAM of Malaga has an area of 280 km<sup>2</sup>, it ranges from the cultivation of the Moscatel grape to its transformation into raisins through drying in the sun, favoring the conservation of the landscape, avoiding erosion or desertification processes and constituting an element of linkage of the population with its territory. Since the 18th century, the production coexisted with other forms of elaboration that complemented it. Said structures associated with this industry were located on agricultural properties following various construction models, ranging from rudimentary forms of sunlight such as the almijares in the paved ring of the press, to buildings of higher production. After the phylloxera crisis and the process of constant production decline, we would end up with the destruction of a large part of Malaga's payments. The wineries, paseros and warehouses were transformed into ruins or were reconverted to other lower-yield agricultural activities. Of that material wealth we recognize scattered examples in the current rural landscape of the mountains of Malaga, which architectural qualities deserve to be rescued and valued as an example of the unique and representative traditional architecture of a declared cultural landscape. These results are directly linked to the work strategies and objectives that we follow in the Transnational research project SIN-PAR (Innovation System for the Heritage of Rural Andalusia).

**Keywords:** Lagares; vineyards; heritage; Andalusia.

### 1. Historical background

The Raisin Route is located in the central area of the Axarquía region, where optimal climatic and geographical conditions for the cultivation of raisins can be found. The predominant variety of grape in this area is called *moscatel*.

Axarquía occupies an area of about 585 square kilometres including the boundaries of thirty one towns, which are located in the territory along the coast from Malaga capital to the border with the province of Granada and from this coastal

limit ascends through the peaks of the Natural Park of Sierras de Tejada, Almijara and Alhama, which forms the natural frontier between the provinces of Malaga and Granada. Specifically, the Raisin Route is formed by the towns of Comares, Cútar, El Borge, Almachar, Totalán and Moclinejo. Around an eighty per cent of the population in these towns is mainly dedicated to this crop. Smallholder farms predominate, and ninety per cent of these are family-owned and do not exceed an extension of two hectares.

The muscatel raisin is a product of enormous traditional and cultural value for Andalusia and particularly for the province of Malaga. Its cultivation has a traditional character, which has impregnated the culture of the Axarquía of Malaga (region where the production of Malaga raisins is concentrated) for more than three centuries.

Vinery cultivation would reach the Iberian Peninsula together with the olive tree, very possibly, brought by the Punic civilization, beginning its own path in the middle of the first millennium BC. By the times when the Roman eagle got established in what we have been calling "bull skin", vine already had its own culture which was maintained even by the Arabs, as evidenced by the enormous number of documents that refer to the importance of this monoculture despite the Koranic prohibitions. The Catholic Monarchs, given the importance of the sector for the region, ordered the creation of the Brotherhood of Viñeros to "watch over and take care of the good planting of their vineyards and the formation of their wines", becoming effective on January 12, 1502. Until the crisis due to phylloxera infestation affecting the crops from 1878, the vineyards constituted the economic support of the province and promoted its economic awakening during the 18th and 19th centuries, as reflected in the work of British travelers who passed through our land including Francis Carter (1772), William Robertson (1841) and Edwin Lee (1855), among others. The description of the works for the cultivation of the vine carried out in 1787 by Joseph Townsend deserves a special mention. The existence of an abundant workforce, as a result of a strong demographic growth between the end of the 15th century and the beginning of the last quarter of the 19th century, meant that all the arable land in this region was dedicated to growing vines.

## **2. The agricultural landscape in the Axarquía**

Axarquía, where practically all of the Malaga raisin is grown, is located to the east of the Malaga province capital. Its Denomination of Origin

covers the area of a total of thirty five municipalities, although the production of raisins is concentrated in fifteen of them. This region is characterized by the proliferation of small, predominantly rural nuclei, with small-sized towns under 250 inhabitants. Alternatives to this crop are very limited, turning the Malaga raisin into the main agricultural activity.

Terrain's orography is very variable, being mostly hilly terrain with heights that oscillate between 100 and 600 meters above sea level, characterized by an average slope excessive for intensive agricultural practices, not allowing mechanization and limiting the possible agricultural alternatives. It can be said that vines constitute the main factor avoiding desertification of these areas, which average slope exceeds of 45% in more than half of its territory.

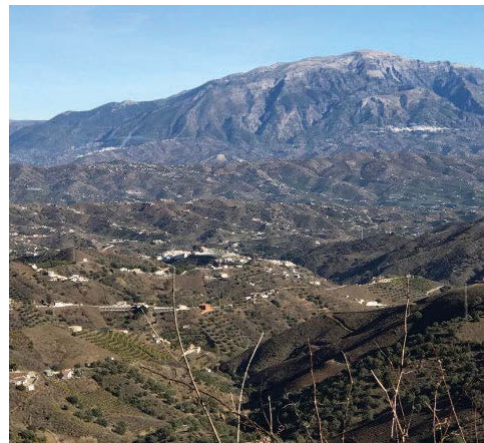


Fig. 1. Axarquía landscape.

The landscape of the Axarquía has to do with the contemporary Andalusian political and cultural identity, but also with the Nasrid and the Muslim identities as well, and even more is determined by the small farms and the scattered habitat. Until the 1870s, the province of Malaga experimented its demographic expansion, expanding farmland and overexploiting the most fertile crops. This increase in farmland was supported and stimulated by the disentailment process of the Catholic Church, which developed in a very complex way in the province of Malaga, although it did not ultimately lead to a profound change in the

property structure<sup>1</sup>. The structure of the property remained in the hands of small owners or tenants, while the economic control or their income was held by the Malaga merchant bourgeoisie, including some landowners, who marketed the products -raisins, grapes and wine. This agrarian wealth is related to a similar architectural wealth, which can be appreciated not so much in the volume and size of the buildings, but in the architectural solutions and diversity of construction typologies.

Within the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie, the Larios and Heredia families stand out. Both owners of large agricultural estates within the municipality of Malaga would commercialize the production of wine and raisins from the Montes and would build their estates in the eastern and northern areas of the municipality. However, after the phylloxera crisis and the ruin of the Heredia house, many of its properties passed into the hands of the Larios family, a fact that would influence production in the western sector from an agricultural point of view. Until 1885, phylloxera devastated practically all of Malaga's vineyards and their owners were unable to replant the fields, which were abandoned along with their most representative architecture.

### 3. Cultivation and harvesting techniques in the Axarquia

On the Raisin Route, mountain agriculture continues to be performed in a traditional way and without machinery. The production of raisins requires a lot of work and dedication, and from February to October the farmers spend most of the day tending and preparing the vineyards. Work begins in February, with the pruning of the vineyards, consisting of cutting dry shoots and leaving the plant ready for new shoots to come out. The *cava* is the next step and consists of removing the soil so that the roots of the vine find more space to improve their growth. The *cava* is

always carried out between the months of December and January. At present, for this process, the *esfrague* technique has become predominant, since it requires less effort and instead of acting on all the arable land, it acts only on each plant. The next step is called *bina*, whose objective is to remove the weeds and cover the vine with soil, taking advantage of the fact that the soil is looser and easier to handle. This work is done during the month of April and is also known as *hacer la piscina* ('making the pool').



Fig. 2. Lagar with *paseros* at Almáchar.

During the months of May and June, the grape clusters begin to fatten and in order to help in the task, pruning is carried out, which consists of cutting the tips of the different branches so that they stop growing and all the strength is carried by the clusters. After this and until August, there is a constant coming and going to see how the harvest evolves in its final stretch. The harvest of grapes is done through several passes, collecting the ripe clusters in each of the plants with the help of a knife. The grapes are then placed in boxes weighting around 20 kg each, that are usually transported by mules dressed in *pedreas* (special panniers adapted for the grape boxes). Once the grapes are harvested, they must be transported to the dryers where the grapes are spread to be transformed into raisins. They are usually the property of the farmer, or at most of a small number of neighbors, and appear laid throughout the

<sup>1</sup> AA.VV. (2000). *Cortijos, haciedas y lagares. Arquitectura de las grandes explotaciones agrarias de Andalucía*.

Provincia de Málaga. Consejería de Obras Públicas y Transportes. Dirección General de Arquitectura y Vivienda. Sevilla. p. 42.

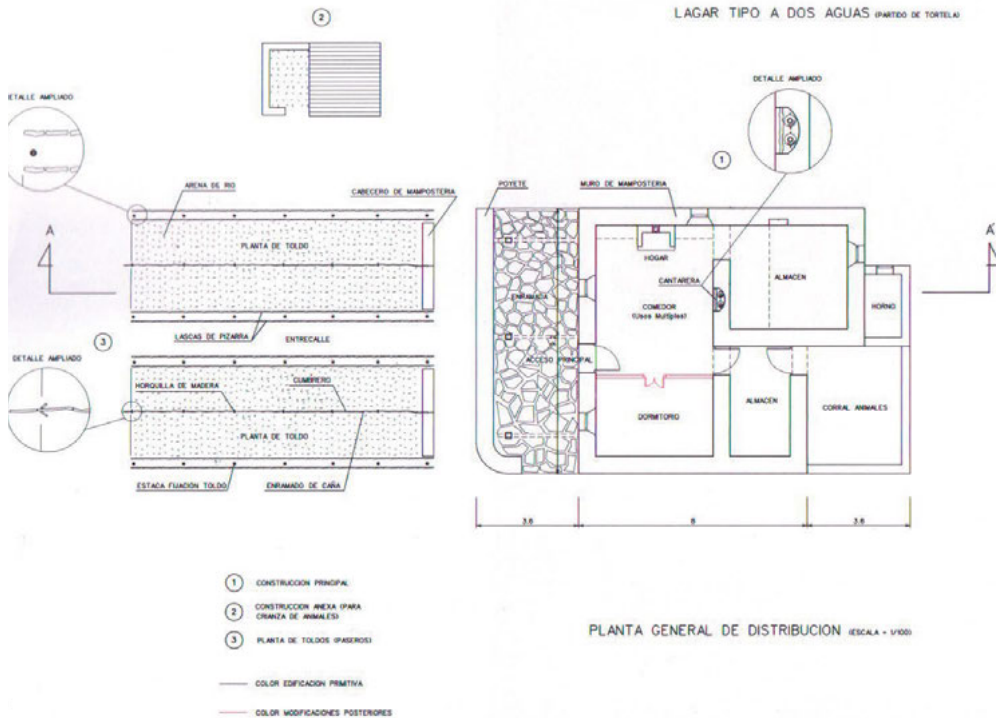


Fig. 3. Typical layout of a gable-roof *Lagar*. (Source: Gámez, J. 2004).

countryside and close to the small farmhouses that serve as temporary housing for farmers during the harvest and raisin seasons.

#### 4. The architecture of the raisin: *Lagares* and *paseros*

The structures associated with the grape and raisin industry are located on agricultural land following various construction models, from rudimentary ways of taking advantage of sunlight such as soil flat areas or masonry ones, to the winery press (*lagar*) or industrial-type buildings intended for the large-scale production.

The basic model of exploitation of the vine in Malaga is the *lagar*. It is defined by its small size. Its characteristic elements are a counterweight wall for the press beam, the floor presses and the beam itself that will determine the layout of the building.

The first preserved examples date back to the 18th century, but its true development took place

during the 19th century, when a true popular language articulated around the production of wine and raisins was defined.

The *lagar* is a small space in which residential aspects are mixed with work functions. Almost all of them have a kitchen with a fireplace, which has a double function: heating in winter and at the end of summer and kitchen service, with stone shelves arranged to place pots or pans.

As the kitchenware was minimal, hardly a place was dedicated to the utensils, which could be on a table or in a hole in the wall as a cupboard. In this space there was always room for the water pitchers called 'cantareras', and above them the 'vasar' for plates or glasses. These domestic spaces are shared by all the Axarquía wineries. In addition to this interior space, we have the bedrooms, of a varied number (from one to three) depending on the size of the cellar. They are usually small and share their main function with the wine press. Spaces such as the stable or the corral

linked to the economy of the countryside are annexed to the warehouses. The exterior spaces of the winery are equally important given its dimensions, and the front arena was essential in it. The rural house has a terrace that is located in front of the entrance. In this space, multiple activities related to the tasks of the raisins are carried out during the day and it is common to place some benches on the exterior walls of the house, acting as seats or as a store for work tools. Attached to the press is the firing oven, although it can sometimes appear to stand alone. In the past, each cellar had an attached oven or an independent construction, but the ones that remain are totally abandoned, because they no longer serve. In some wineries there are also more specific interior rooms dedicated to drying the grapes by artificial means, with stoves that produce hot air. Here the shelving system is replaced by metal trays that are placed one on top of the other allowing hot air to circulate between them.

The *pasero* or *almijar* is the architectural space dedicated to the drying and transformation of the grape into raisins. The raisin dryers are located in the vicinity of rural buildings, in areas with a considerable slope, isolated or forming groups of four or five dryers. There are two types: the *pasero de mesa*, which uses boards to cover the raisins at night or on rainy days, and the *pasero de lona*, which have walls at the top and bottom with a triangular profile to protect the raisins with tarpaulins all over the catwalk.

The preparation of the raisin poses its own demands, so the position of the raisins is carefully studied to make the best use of the available space. *Paseros* are usually characterized by being located on lands with about 12% slope, with approximate dimensions between 3 and 4 meters wide by 10 to 14 meters long and always oriented to optimize sun exposure.

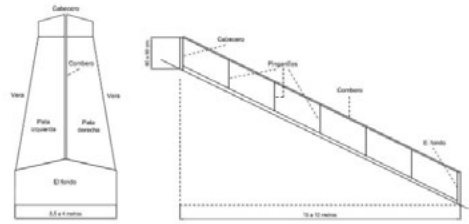


Fig. 4. Sketch of a typical dryer (Rueda García, F. 1996).

The floor of the *pasero* is prepared with slate or coarse sand and its interior is delimited by a small whitewashed perimeter wall called *vera*, which distributes the interior space in two streets or legs, separated by stakes in the center or by a higher wall, to extend the canvas to the sides. The front wall<sup>2</sup> made of masonry, serves as support for a rod or cane that receives the name of *combero*. The images of Malaga that illustrate the postcards and advertising of exporting companies from the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century bear witness to this tradition in the Axarquía area, with the advertising material of companies such as F. C. Bevan or the Sociedad Azucarera Larios being of special interest. The grapes are placed in full clusters that the farmers carefully spread out on the *paseros*, which are covered with a tarpaulin at night (wooden boards were used in the past), avoiding damage due to low temperatures or rain. As the days go by, the rotten grapes are removed and the clusters are turned over so that they dry evenly.



Fig. 5. *Paseros* with grapes drying (Source: Archivo Díaz Escovar, N.945. 1964).

<sup>2</sup> The *paseros* with a triangular head wall or *peineta* (typical of the Axarquía), are also documented in the territorial area of the Montes and Hoya de Malaga.

The elaboration of the raisins requires approximately three weeks and is usually carried out between September and October, depending on the hot weather and the degree of ripeness of the grapes. The time of exposure to the sun to achieve optimal drying depends on the weather conditions. Raisins obtained with natural drying reaches a purplish tone close to black, this quality being one of the greatest values of the Malaga raisin, differentiating it from other raisins dehydrated in artificial dryers. Once the raisins have been collected from the dryers, they are chopped manually, process consisting of shelling the bunch with pruning shears. These are functions normally assigned to women and children in a family. After chopping, the raisins are classified according to size: small, normal, large/extra, which in the language of winegrowers are called: *aseado*, *medio* and *reviso*. For this classification, sieves are used, which are shaken leaving only those that have an adequate size inside. Those raisins without a suitable size for sale, will be used to make wine. It is worth mentioning, as an architectural variable related to the *paseros*, another typology of buildings called *cascareros*, where oranges and lemons are handled instead of grapes. They usually appear in the areas of orchards, irrigation and terraces linked to rural areas, and are frequently present throughout the Guadalhorce Valley, in the municipalities of Álora and Pizarra<sup>3</sup>.



Fig. 6. Distributing the grapes in the *pasero* (Source: Archivo Díaz Escovar, N.947. 1964).

## 5. World Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (SIPAM)

In 2017, the Food and Agroindustry Organization of the United Nations (FAO) declared the Axarquía raisin as an Important System of World Agricultural Heritage (SIPAM). Specifically, the area included in the SIPAM scope has a total extension of 28,039 hectares and is made up of 21 municipalities throughout the Axarquía region of which 1,113 hectares are dedicated to grape production for raisins. Most recently, in November 2021, the Sipam Axarquía Association was established, as a management body responsible for promoting measures to improve the production process, increase the profitability of the crop and increase the promotion and consumption of Moscatel raisins.

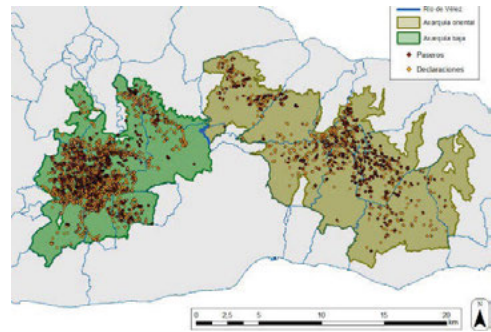


Fig. 7. Map of the SIPAM extension.

## 6. Conclusions

The vineyard constitutes a fundamental part of the landscape in the Axarquía region, and the Axarquía presses and dryers are an example of the unique and representative traditional architecture of an agricultural landscape of hillside vineyards, marking the identity of the declared cultural landscape. The Malaga raisin is a traditional cultivation that fulfills a set of functions beyond mere production, such as the conservation of the environment and cultural landscapes, the contribution to rural development and even the reflection of history through its own architecture.

<sup>3</sup> Royo Naranjo, Lourdes (2021). Tourism and territorial development: Dynamization strategies for an agrarian cultural

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