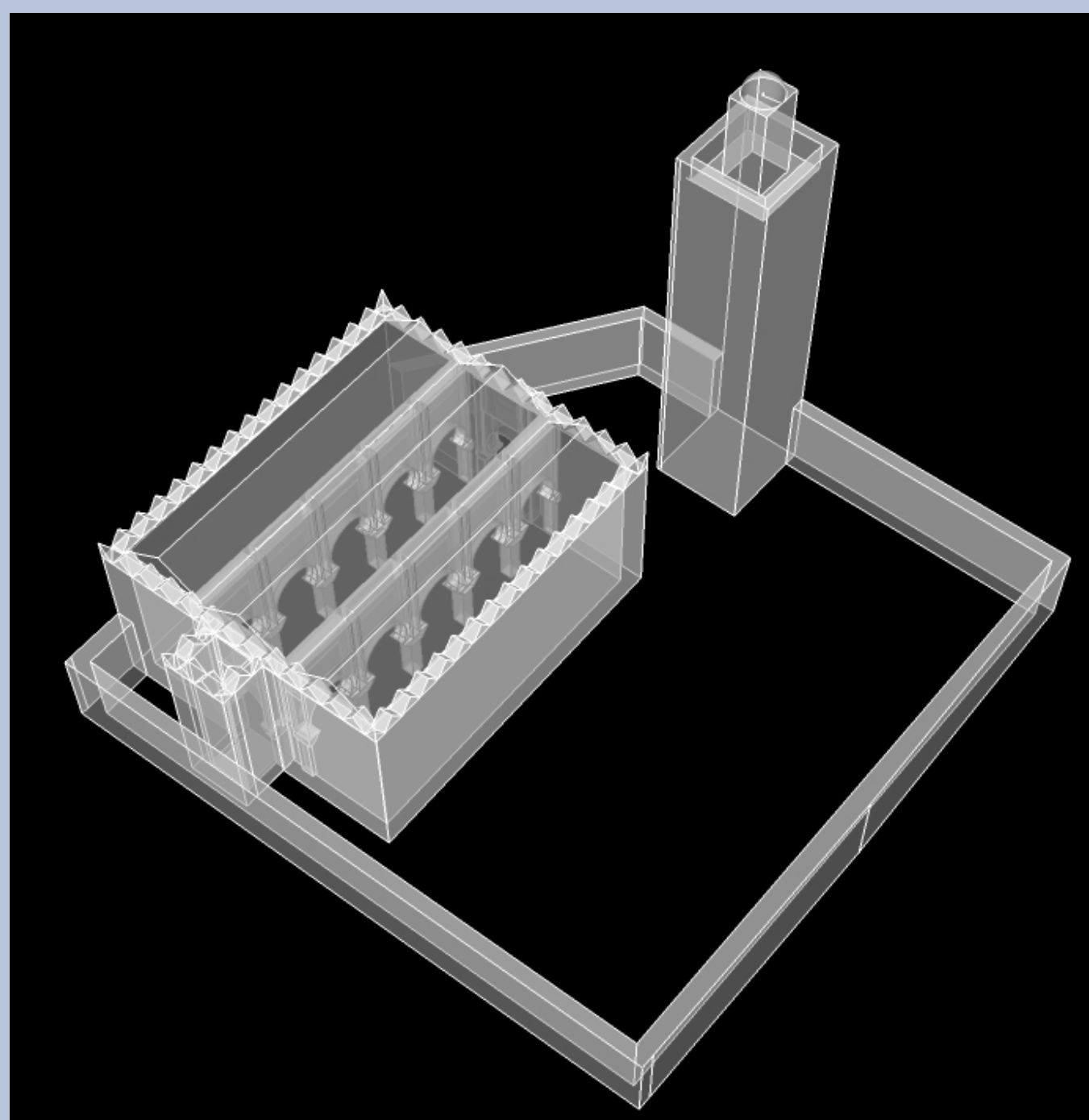


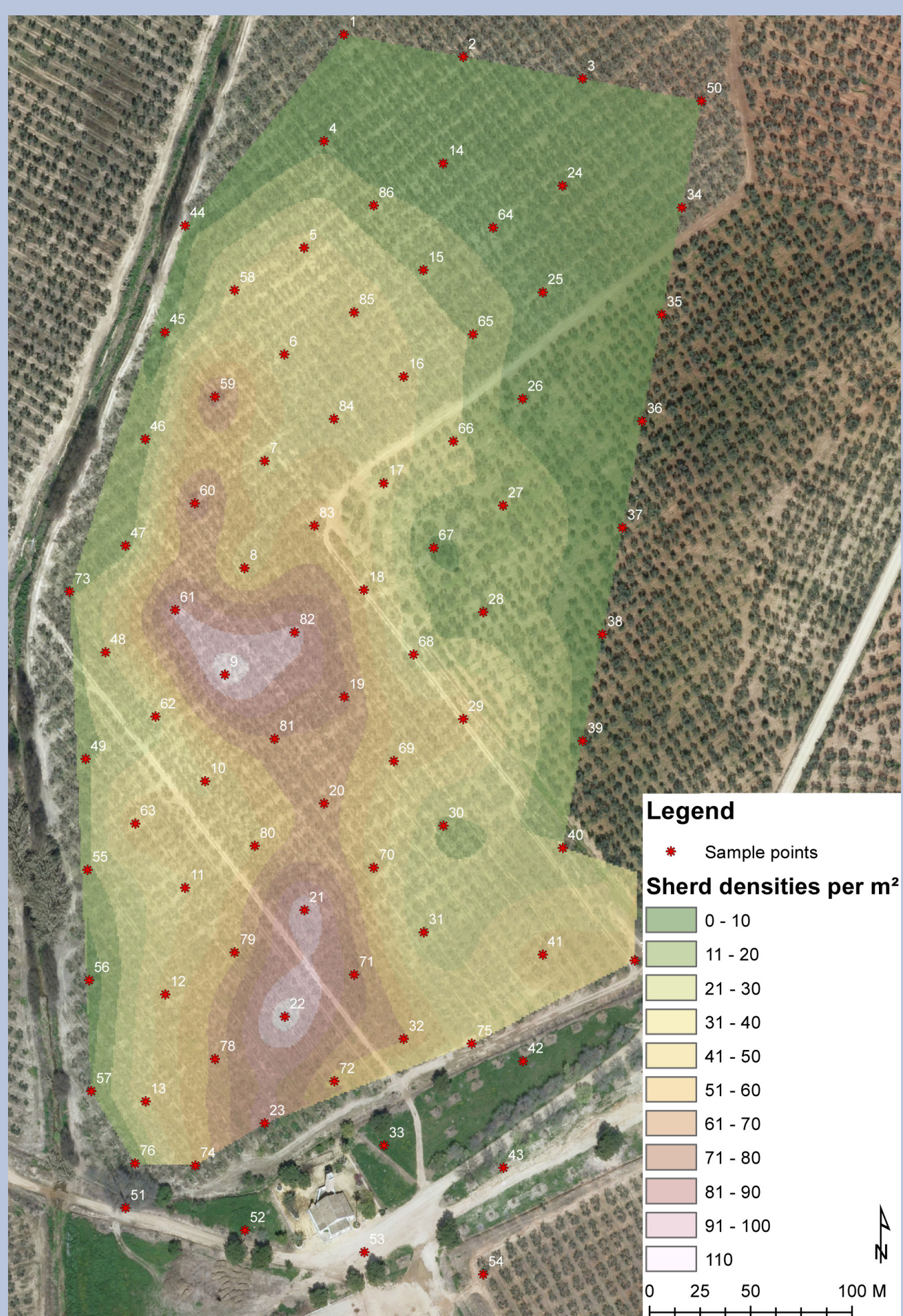
# THE ALMOHAD VILLAGE OF CUATROVITAS (SEVILLA)- AN ABANDONED RURAL PLACE WITH PRESERVED MOSQUE IN THE ALJARAFE



Complete 3-D-Scan of the present church.



Perspective reconstruction of the almohad mosque, late 12th/early 13th c. with hypothetical separate roofing of aisles.



Results of interpolated ceramic survey, showing density of sherds distribution in the northern settlement area.

In a cooperative research project, the University of Bamberg and the University of Sevilla have investigated the former mosque, presently church of the ‘Ermita de Cuatrovitas’ (municipality of Bullulos de la Mitación, province of Sevilla) and the associated abandoned medieval settlement. During four campaigns in two years (2013-2015), a wide range of research methods and techniques from various fields was applied: survey prospection, archaeological excavation, and traditional and modern techniques of building documentation. Previous research on this site had consisted in small-scale mapping of the former mosque and its minaret, and in limited excavations of structures in the vicinity of the building.

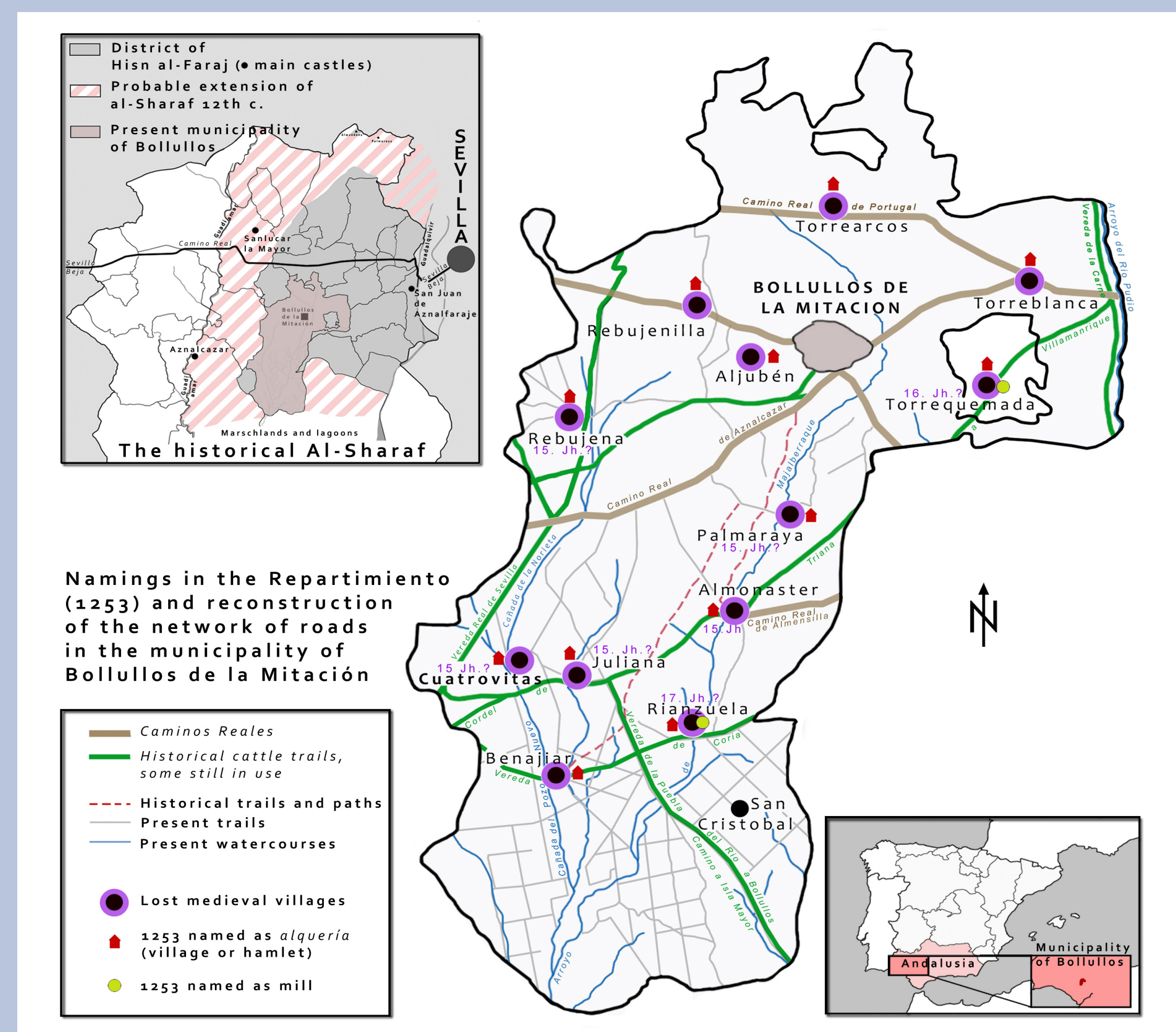
The minaret of the former mosque has long been compared with other monuments of the Almohad period due to its particular construction and the polylobed double arcades on its façades. It has been emblematic for the site, now associated with the Holy Virgin of Cuatrovitas.

The principal achievement of the project is that, for the first time, a deeper knowledge of the historical site of Cuatrovitas and its chronology has been gained. In its heydays during the 12th and the first half of the 13th century, the mosque formed the religious and cultural nexus of at least two separate settled areas. Each of these spread over c. 10 ha, an extent that exceeds all previous estimates. Structures of the northern village were also recognizable on geomagnetic images, which confirmed the findings of the ceramic survey. These finds were substantiated in more detail by several archaeological investigations, mostly in the vicinity of the mosque but also in two trenches further north.



3-D-visualization of the northern settlement area, view from SSE.

The building tissue of this settlement consists of single-floor courtyard houses of the Mediterranean type that were built of rammed clay on rubble foundations and covered by a tiled roof. Nearly all excavated fragments of house structures seem to date to the late Almohad period, and they were planned and constructed according to a grid oriented approximately in North-South direction, following the qibla orientation applied by the Almohads in al-Andalus (157° from North). The mosque building has been partially preserved in the present little church, although many alterations and 20th-century restorations have obscured its original appearance. Its prayer hall consisted of a three-aisled nave with horseshoe arcades in five bays. While the exterior walls were originally built of rammed earth, the mihrāb niche on the south side was adjuncted on foundations of massive ashlar. While the courtyard to the north of the mosque was certainly very small, a larger walled area extended on its eastern side. On the north-eastern corner of the mosque precinct, the brick minaret has been preserved with little changes of the Almohad substance; it can be reconstructed with a recessed top on the platform. Archaeological finds documented during the campaigns are the first to demonstrate that the habitation of Cuatrovitas also predates the Almohad period. On multiple locations, older pit fills were secured, and pre-Almohad material could be documented among more recent finds in horizontal filling layers. This pre-Almohad material consists, among others, of 10th and 11th century ceramics and single finds of the emiral period (8th century). These single finds thus clearly indicate that there must have been a pre-Almohad settlement, even if concerning building structures could not (yet) be localized.



Map of abandoned settlements in the area of Bollulos de la Mitación, with the historical and present road network, and the limits of the historical region of Aljarafe with its principal castles.

A post-Almohad stage was recognized from the time after the Christian reconquest and establishment of Castilian power in 1248. The environment of the sacral building, by then converted from mosque into church, was in use as a graveyard, as several burials confirm. These can be attributed Christians according to burial positions. Ceramics dating from the second half of the 13th century only offer a few sherds of the so called transition ceramics, produced by Islamic potters near the street of Gibraltar. These ceramics in themselves do not allow unequivocal conclusions on the religion of their possessors, so that the cultural characteristics of this period remain to be determined more closely. In the 14th century, late-medieval ‘Christian’ ceramics are clearly dominating and were found after all in layers close to the little church, former mosque of Cuatrovitas.

