Cacela revisited: A brief study of the architecture and landscape of Algarve, Portugal

M. Reimão Costa
Universidade do Algarve, Faro, Portugal
Ceaucp/Cam, Mértola, Portugal

D. Batista
Universidade do Algarve, Faro, Portugal
Chaia, Évora, Portugal

ABSTRACT: This article focuses on the integrated characterisation of Cacela, in the lower Algarve, by considering simultaneously the scales of landscape, urbanism and vernacular architecture. This analysis integrates a wider research and methodological approach, which combines analysing the cartographic and written sources, with the exhaustive surveying of the village and the recording of oral histories. It will be demonstrated that Cacela's contemporary morphology results mostly from changes dating from the period between the end of the nineteenth century and the second quarter of the twentieth century. These changes were affected by the matrix of designs and structures from different periods of history, including the sixteenth century church and the village's fortress.

1 INTRODUCTION

This article analyses the old village of Cacela and its outskirts. Situated in Ria Formosa's National Park, Southern Portugal, Cacela's historic centre is a conservation area (legally protected for its national and public interest). The methodological approach combines the study of vernacular architecture and of the traditional organisation of seaside and agricultural landscapes. The conservation purposes and the specific qualities of Cacela, as subject of this research, justify the chosen interdisciplinary approach. Therefore, this paper will list relevant architectural and landscape components, acknowledging in the process the relationship between the built environment and its hinterland.

This study seeks first and foremost to establish an integrated understanding of Cacela's built heritage by simultaneously considering three different scales, architecture, urbanism and landscape. Cacela's organisation will be retraced during the middle of the previous century, a period immediately preceding the major transformations, which affected the region in the last decades. The research tools used in this integrated study of architecture and landscape rely mainly on the fieldwork stage. Using the testimonies of local populations it becomes possible to survey, represent and reconstitute the organisation of the buildings in Cacela's historic village. To do this, in addition to testimonies, historical and cartographic sources will also be used.

This study wishes to contribute to the knowledge of traditional landscape and built heritage in the Algarve by focusing simultaneously on domestic architecture, as well as other types of historic buildings. It takes a specific time period into account, but simultaneously addresses the different stages of history that have influenced this transformation.

2 LANDSCAPE OF DISPERSE SETTLEMENTS

The landscape of the Algarve's coastline, in Southern Portugal, illustrates successive transformations caused by the joint action of natural and cultural factors. Cacela's historical landscape is a palimpsest of different civilizations, peoples and generations. It illustrates an adjustment between the environmental and human circumstances, and the simultaneous, or consecutive overlap of different cultures.

The old village is situated on the right bank of Cacela's river, on an elevated spot of the cliff, dominating the fertile costal lowland, the lagoon area and the sea. This location combines the advantages of a commercial location with those of a defensive position. Because of this, and through its history, the urban settlement has been an integral part of the territory, and a two-way relationship was established between the village and its landscape (Batista 1997). The Greek historian Estrabão

believed Cacela's settlement predated Roman occupation (Bellido 1942). The Arab geographer Edrici (1099–1164) described it in the twelfth century as a highly populated fortified settlement located by the sea and in the mid of allotments, orchards and fields of fig trees (Coelho, 1989). Its two existing sixteenth Century descriptions (Guerreiro & Magalhães 1983) confirm nevertheless Edrici's original characterisation.

Due partially to the regular 'visitations' of Moors to the shores (and ensuing dangers), Cacela's population preferred the farming lands surrounding the settlement. People lived in neighbouring farms and hamlets occupied by dry land orchards and cereals, interspersed with vineyards and allotments. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries similar produce were farmed, with the persistent dominance of fig trees and vineyards, occasionally on their own, but generally found together with olive, carob and almond trees, punctuated by arable crops and allotments (Costa & Batista 2013).

In the early twentieth century, a number of changes occurred which would temporarily strengthen the commercial development of Cacela's harbour, and the growth in the fishing and agricultural industries: the Cacela's lagoon benefitted from improved navigation conditions, providing sea access to the harbour of Tavira; a factory located near the lagoon produced bricks for export; dry fruits (almonds, figs, carobs etc.) increased in their value; a gradual increase in fishing occurred, made possible by medium size boats and docks (Cavaco 1976: 254). In this context the population gradually resettled in the old village, contributing to its urban development and influencing the expansion of important maritime activities such as fishing and commerce.

This short spell of economic development reinforced a period of occupation and spatial organisation, which confirms the interdependence between

the urban settlement and its hinterland. The resulting cultural landscape points to the appropriation of maritime and territorial spaces through its built and landscape features. Cacela's historical landscape constituted in the twentieth century a dynamic space. On the one hand, the socioeconomic activities introduced new forms and practices of exploitation of natural resources. On the other hand these activities were influenced by the constant and variable factors that shaped the area along the centuries.

3 CACELA'S HISTORIC CORE (THE CHURCH AND THE FORTRESS)

The typically dispersed-populated landscapes of the Eastern lower Algarve are characterised by a network of central places, of which Cacela constitutes an example of a tiny centre with a church. Several factors have nevertheless influenced Cacela's particular dimension. This settlement has historically congregated a number of key military, political, administrative, and religious roles. Besides having a church, Cacela was the County Seat up until 1774, when this was transferred to the then recently created Borough of Vila Real de S. António.

This settlement was also intermittently used as military base, which significance is attested to the continuous improvement works to its cliff-located fortress. For all its geostrategic position and natural advantages (the fertility of its surrounding lands), Cacela had not however established a significant resident community up until the beginning of the last century.

From the late medieval period onwards, Cacela was increasingly described as unsafe and its buildings were remarked upon for their state of degradation and neglect. Alexandre Massai in the first quarter of the seventeenth century argued that the settlement should be abandoned altogether (Cf. Costa & Batista 2013). In the second quarter of the nineteenth century, Lopes (1988: 388) defended that the Local Authority Seat should be transferred to the neighbouring location of Santa Rita.

By the early twentieth century however, progress made in the railway and road systems would significantly influence the reorganisation of settlements in the rural areas of eastern coastal Algarve. The emergence and development of a new settlement became therefore possible, and the new Vila Nova de Cacela was established, just over two kilometres to the northeast of the old centre. Testimonies to Cacela's military, political, administrative and religious roles are the village's edifices, which are organized around an ample space. The urban morphology reflects lightly the settlements'
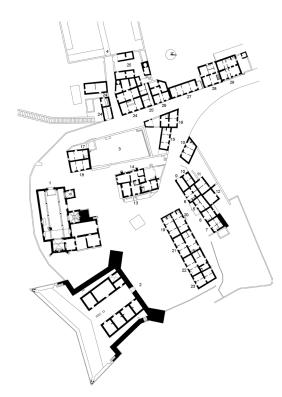

Figure 1. Cacela's landscape in 2003. (Credits: José Santos).

Figure 2. Plan of Cacela (1/600). (Credits: Miguel Reimão Costa & Desidério Batista).

Figure 3. Cacela in 1967. View from the north. (Credits: Joaquim Cabeça Padrão).

arrangements in the Islamic and late medieval periods. The fortress limits this space to the southeast and has undergone a number of alterations since its completion in the middle age (Fig. 2, number 2). It combines the northern towers' quasi-rectangular shape (similar to the drawing recorded by Massai in his map from the first quarter of the seventeenth century) and the late modern fortified delineation of the Southern side over the cliff (Fig. 1).

The church is located to the west of the fortress (fig. 2, number 1), retaining some elements from its predecessor the old medieval church (Cavaco, 1984), but most of it is actually from the *Manueline* period, integrating three aisles with a renaissance main door. This is characteristic of the Algarve in the 1500s and testimony to the originality, distinctiveness and quality of the school of architecture that is best represented by the works of André Pilarte, a native architect and mason (Correia 1982: 28) (Correia 1989: 141). From 1565 graves could be found in the churchyard, while earlier, in the sixteenth century, they solely occupied the interior of the church (Cavaco 1987: 279). The first cemetery was built near the church at the turn of the eighteenth to nineteenth centuries. Its visual artistry makes a significant contribute to the

spatial and architectural qualities of the old village (Batista 1997: 109). By 1928 a replacement cemetery was completed and fully functioning on the opposite side of the street, close to the cliff on the western limit of the settlement. Equally important to studying the fortress, the church and the two cemeteries, is the consideration of the village's streets, the organisation of its community spaces and living areas, and the construction techniques and materials used.

Until the end of the nineteenth century, Cacela had only a small number of buildings. In fact, during the eighteenth (Cavaco 2005: 392) and nineteenth centuries (Lopes 1988: 387), only the old municipal buildings (*casas da câmara e da cadeia*), a vicarage and half a dozen houses could be found there. Between the last decade of the nineteenth century and the second quarter of the twentieth century significant transformations influenced Cacela's current organisation (Costa & Batista 2013). The revitalisation of the harbour sustained by surplus produce, together with a renewal of the fishing trade, favoured a significant population increase manifested in the construction of over twenty homes. This new stage brought therefore, a number of developments to Cacela's historic village. New buildings were constructed between the fortress and the alignment of the old municipal buildings, reconfiguring the village's central space. New housing was erected to the north and south of the old cemetery (fig. 3), while a new cemetery was now located to the west of the village. Finally, linear expansion developed alongside the recently improved road to Cacela.

4 VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE

4.1 *Morpho-typological analysis*

The transformations affecting Cacela's historic centre between the end of the nineteenth century and the first quarter of the twentieth century coincided with a period of significant change in traditional architecture in the Algarve. The increase

in population in the rural areas, the relocation of settlements to the vicinities of newly built roads, and the expansion of southern urban centres were all factors which influenced such changes. Decorative elements entirely absent or scarcely present in buildings in the Algarve until then, and a wealth of constructive solutions could then be found. Such ornamentation included the use of chimneys with lace-styled decorations, fascias, roof terraces, rich colours, faux motifs and plasterwork. Regarding the organisation of the living space, these changes resulted in the decreased use of incidental construction processes, such as the successive accumulation of rooms. Instead, standardised models or solutions were applied to structural morphology, distribution and construction (Costa 2010).

Since the end of the 19th century, the urban transformation and the growth in Cacela's village reflected these changes. These are particularly visible when considering townscape and urban heritage (Cf. Padrão, 1967), together with the morpho-typological traits of the built environment. Among the vernacular constructions preceding this period, it is worth mentioning the alignment of the old municipal buildings (Fig. 2, number 1), and the neighbouring buildings to the east and west, already depicted by José Sande Vasconcelos in his map from 1775. Inside the fortress, the barracks and surrounding military premises constituted two parallel rows of buildings. This design resulted from two renovation schemes, one developed during the inclusion of half bulwarks and the other following the 1755 Lisbon earthquake (Cf. Costa & Batista 2013).

Here, like with the built alignment of the old municipal building, the linear juxtaposition appeared, even if using variable roof forms (especially lean-to and gable roofs). Contrastingly, the vicarage (Fig. 2, number 13/14, Fig. 4) underwent a process of accretion with lean-to roofs. These different roof forms gave it an irregular perimeter and formal diversity. The internal organisation of the constructions resulted mainly from the geometry of the structural walls of the different units. Partitions and non-structural walls were therefore of minor importance here.

Figure 4. Cacela in 1967. (Credits: Joaquim Cabeça Padrão).

This pattern, very typical of Rural Algarve, would be progressively replaced from the end of the nineteenth century. A more stable typology, albeit with different manifestations, could be found in the several regional subunits from then onwards. These structures were characterised by a rectangular-shaped construction with a gable roof corresponding to two sides of divided compartments by partitions or adobe walls. The most common solution chosen was placing the three compartments on the nearer wing, which corresponded to the entrance room (sometimes converted into a corridor), surrounded by one bedroom on each side while relegating the kitchen to the further wing. Generally, this organisation was reflected in a symmetrical principal façade with a centrally located door, one window on each side and by the above-mentioned decorative detailing.

Cacela's newly built area, developed in the first quarter of the last century, mostly belongs to this typological classification. Restrictions on implementation or limited resources justify possible variations (Fig. 2). The majority of edifices built during this time to the north and south of the old cemetery and alongside the road leading to the village also conform to this pattern. The row of structures erected to the south of the old municipal building also illustrates some of these variables. To the western limit of these buildings, each wing has been converted into a separate residence, subdivided into three rooms. (Fig. 2, number 19/20). To the east, and because narrower, each wing has two rooms alone (Fig. 2, number 23). And this is in fact typical of the region's urban centres. The buildings' execution in a steep gradient area instigated the development of two-floor constructions (Fig. 2, number 21/22/23/ 28), where the lower underground floor occupies only one portion, forming sometimes a separate dwelling.

4.2 House organisation

Except for riverside dwellings, such as reed huts, very common in the Algarve up until the 1800s, one-compartment houses were an occasional find in the region's built settlements. Traditionally, in both rural and urban areas, small houses were organised by contrasting two distinct spaces. Often, this arrangement meant there was an entrance room benefitting from lots of natural light, because of its proximity to the main entrance; and a dark interior room with no windows. This disposition fitted in with the traditional small housing of the late-medieval and modern periods, which included the front house (*casa dianteira*) e and the inner house (*casa de dentro*, *camera* or *celeiro*).

Also in Cacela, during the twentieth century, smaller residences had two rooms. Fairly large

families lived in these houses. They did not possess any other land and were dependent for their survival on fishing and collecting seafood (Fig. 2, number 21 ground floor), or may have also worked as seasonal workers in nearby farms (Fig. 2, number 6). Generally, in these residences, fires were lit in the entrance hall (in the fireplace if there was one), and the interior room was used both as a bedroom and a storage area. In some cases, when new edifices were built, these sets of two rooms would be integrated into bigger residences, constituting two nucleuses without any internal communication, a preferred solution by rural settlements in the higher Algarve.

In the first half of the twentieth century the region's most common typology appears connected to a tendency for the increased specialisation of the internal space. In the smaller residences this is translatable into an entrance room, a kitchen and a bedroom (Fig. 2, number 19/20). The larger residences had more rooms, and the entrance room was frequently converted into a corridor as a result of the addition of a dining house in close proximity to the kitchen (Fig. 2, number 21/22).

The fishermen and shellfish catchers' houses consisted mainly of the residential spaces, but occasionally also had storage spaces for fishing nets and fishing equipment and/or farming tools (hab. x). House size, tenure (proprietors or tenants) and organisation would diverge greatly however. Different situations reflected variable incomes. Whether one was a *master* or a *comrade* in Vila Real de Santo António's boats (Fig. 2, number 8/22/26/27); whether one owned a small local boat (Fig. 2, number 19/20/21/29); or, as a shellfish catcher (Fig. 2, number 28-ground floor/21-ground floor), your income could also be supplemented by seasonal work, gathering figs, almonds, grapes and olives of nearby farms. Larger buildings made up farming estates (Fig. 2, number 24/25). Besides lodgings, these could include storage, and workspaces, such as barns and olive presses. They could also comprise livestock quarters (huts, pens, barns and pigsties). This type of dwelling was also the only one in Cacela to have included bread ovens. Farming houses had several buildings scattered among the urban space. This was typical of the different regional subunits of the Algarve and has also been observed here (Fig. 2, number 24/25).

As their proprietors performed other professional activities besides farming, this also explains why they owned the biggest homes in the village. Linked to the segment surrounding the west of Cacela's constructed nucleus is house 24, which belonged to a small-scale farmer (Fig. 2, number 24). Besides farming, the property owner of house 1 was a magistrate. He also owned a grocery shop, a tavern (located inside the house), and other

properties, which he rented out. House 25 belonged to a customs officer, who tended a sand allotment located at the bottom of the slope leading to the church and the fortress (fig. 2, number 25). For this, he paid a rent to the Captaincy of Vila Real de Santo António. Finally, house 21 was home to a family of fishermen who cultivated the small area located to the north and included a thatched sheep enclosure (Fig. 2, number 21).

The section limiting the village to the north and west, called *Várzea*, integrated the *Terra Branca* estate, situated just over a kilometre to the northwest of the village. This segment contained two other constructions, which were attached to the alignment of the old municipal building. The first one was used as a refuse centre (Fig. 2, number 12), and the second one was a two-compartment house rented to a family of fishermen (Fig. 2, number 11). No other house in the village had access to a garden area. Because of this, the proprietors of Terra Branca estate provided free use of the Várzea to some families of fishermen and shellfish catchers. These families could in this way increase their income through farming.

5 CONCLUSION

Regardless of being an important meeting point for military and religious activities due to its fortress and parish church, Cacela has remained scarcely populated from the late medieval period onwards. Cacela's special condition has been influenced by its relationship to the cliff, the seaside and the river, together with its nearby fertile lands and the historically disperse settlements. It is between the end of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century that a small agricultural and maritime community settled here. These settlers were drawn by the enhanced navigability of the adjacent channel and the removal of threat attack from the sea.

The morphology of Cacela's village has its origins mostly in the changes occurring in the first quarter of the twentieth century. These transformations affected the historical continuity of layout, structures and buildings dating back from at least the Islamic period. Dating between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a large part of houses were organised according to the architectural typologies prevalent in the diverse regional subunits. However, the housing was affected here by its location in the urban space and by the heterogeneous social, economic and productive structures, typical of agricultural and maritime communities, such as Cacela's (Fig. 1).

This remarkably original and symbolically significant settlement has its origins in the many changes and continuity operational in the territory.

Furthermore, Cacela is integrated into a landscape that bears the imprint of historical communities and their actions. It was finally classified as a conservation area in 1996. Cacela's gradual conversion into a seasonal tourist centre, with its holiday homes and restaurants, may nevertheless threaten its future connections to the landscape. As a result, the village's character and features, and its immediate natural and cultural spaces, will most likely lose its significance. This is why the village has been and must remain the starting point and guiding principle for the sustainability of the landscape where it is located. It is urgent therefore, to maintain and reinforce the unsurpassable role the urban space plays for the land and region.

REFERENCES

Batista, D. 1997. *Bases para uma Proposta de Salvaguarda e Valorização do Núcleo Histórico de Cacela e da Zona Especial de Protecção*. Évora: Universidade Évora.

Bellido, A.G. 1942. *España y los Españoles hace dos mil años. Libro tercero.* Madrid: Collection Austral.

Cavaco, C. 1976. *O Algarve Oriental: as vilas, o campo e o mar*. Faro: Gabinete de Planeamento da Região do Algarve.

Cavaco; H. 1984. *A antiga Vila de Cacela e o seu Alfoz*. V.R.S. António: Câmara Municipal.

Cavaco, H. 1987. *Visitações da Ordem de Santiago ao Sotavento Algarvio*. V.R.S. António: Câmara Municipal.

Cavaco, H. 2005. *A vila de Cacela-a-Velha: antologia de fontes históricas*. V.R.S. António: Câmara Municipal.

Coelho, A.B. 1989. *Portugal na Espanha Árabe. Volume 1. Geografia e Cultura*. Lisboa: Editorial Caminho.

Correia, J.E.H. 1982. *A arquitectura religiosa do Algarve de 1520 a 1600*. Lisboa: Universidade Nova de Lisboa.

Correia, J.E.H. 1989. A arquitectura do Algarve como expressão privilegiada da sua especificidade cultural. In *O Algarve na Perspectiva da Antropologia Ecológica*. Lisboa: Instituto Nacional de Investigação Científica.

Costa, M.R. 2010. Alguns temas para a interpretação dos assentamentos rurais no sul de Portugal. In M.P. Vieira (Ed), *As Idades da Construção*: 92–107. Lisboa: Instituto do Emprego e Formação Profissional.

Costa, M.R. & Batista, D. 2013. Contribución al estudio del patrimonio de Cacela: cartografía, arquitectura y paisaje en el contexto del Algarve Oriental. *Apuntes* 26 (1) in press.

Guerreiro, M.V. & Magalhães, J.R. (ed) 1983. *Duas descrições do Algarve do século XVI*. Lisboa: Editora Sá da Costa.

Lopes, S. 1988. *Corografia ou memória económica, estatística e topográfica do reino do Algarve*. Faro: Algarve em Foco.

Padrão, J.C. 1967. *Prospecção, preservação e recuperação de elementos urbanísticos e arquitectónicos notáveis, em áreas urbanas e marginais viárias, na região do Algarve. 11° Volume—Cacela*. Lisboa: Direcção-Geral dos Serviços de Urbanização.