

'LAND THAT HAS NEVER BEEN USED BEFORE'. COLONIAL SETTLEMENT AND LAND CLEARING IN ANDALUSIA AND GRAN CANARIA (16TH C.)

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The conquest of Andalusia and the Canary Islands by the Castilian Crown in the Late Middle Ages was followed by the immediate establishment of thousands of settlers, who farmed the seized lands and defended the conquered territories. The creation of these colonial settlements implied the progressive transformation of the indigenous agricultural landscape that surrounded them, in order to adapt it to their economic objectives and productive strategies. One of the ways in which the transformation of the landscape took place was through the ploughing of uncultivated land to mass-produce cash crops, such as cereals, wine and sugar cane. The systematic clearing -and enclosing- of lands is a phenomenon closely linked to European settler colonialism, and it has been documented in many regions that were conquered before 1492 -such as the British Isles, Eastern Europe and Iberia- and after that date, and in both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. This poster presents two case-studies of indigenous settlements that were emptied and repopulated with colonists, one in Southern Iberia -Olvera (Cadiz)- and on another one in the Canary Islands -Agüimes (Gran Canaria). In both cases, the newcomers brought under cultivation hundreds of hectares of unfarmed land during the sixteenth century; land that, according to them, 'had never been used before'. We will analyse how these processes of land clearing were organised and how they actually reused, modified or destroyed the pre-existing landscapes.

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