Alqueria, an introduction

Eight kilometres south from Turrillas in the province of Almería sits the whitewashed village of Alqueria. Like many others villages in the Sierra Alhamilla it has Moorish origins. However unlike most other towns in the area Alqueria squats in a valley. In AD932 the village was indeed on a hill top, overlooking the Sierra with wonderful views southward towards the coast. The scented evening breeze drifted up the cliff side carrying the aroma of honeysuckle and wild gladioli. Fragments of Roman 'black burnished wear' lay scattered around the hillside along with terracotta roof tiles. Occupied since Mesolithic times, this was indeed a favoured position.

What occurred during the fateful year of AD932 is not on record. Compelling archaeological evidence suggests that the village underwent a complete but precise dissection and a later reconstruction in the valley below. Local legend suggests that the Caliph Abd-ar-Rahman III ordered the village moved after one of the inhabitants upset the venerable gentleman. A sheep’s bladder, an amphora of olive oil and one of the Caliph’s wives formed the basis of the tale.

Precisely following the original layout the builders faithfully reconstructed the village including the *mirador* and castle. The views from the mirador allow for scrutiny of the cliff face. While the village boasts the only castle which can be attacked from above making it useless as a piece of military architecture. Since its displacement, the village has expanded to the east the only direction available. The population of Alqueria is a divided one. *Los Recién Llegados* or the newcomers are descendants of those who settled the village after its rebuilding. It is they who have the smart villas and disposable wealth. *El Gente del Cerro,* the hill people are the ancestors of the original inhabitants. Set in their ways, they occupy less grand terraced properties.

This demarcation represents a real division in the village, a source of perpetual antagonism and rivalry. The two factions will take a contrary position on any issue as a matter of principle. All public bodies are equally split making the smallest decision

a hotly debated matter. Day to day life in the village is one of constant strife and amusement, each undermining the best efforts of the other. From local elections to their fiestas nothing is straightforward or predictable.