

# Torre del Cristo (Tower of Christ)



This door gives access to the lower precinct. Inside it is the second bent entrance, a Taifa construction that was renovated in the Nasrid period. The entrance arch, with horizontal voussoirs in the lower section and an alfiz, is made of brick, and its keystone is a stone voussoir into which a key has been sculpted. This can also be found in the Puerta de la Justicia (Gate of Justice) in the Alhambra of Granada, where there is also a depiction of a hand on another arch. The exact meaning of this symbol is not known. It was used mainly by the Nasrids in both monuments, and it may have represented the power to open and close the doors of the sky that was granted to Mohammed, according to the Quran. It is, in any case, an old symbol imported to the peninsula, as the Tariq standard also depicted a key. It was popularised by Washington Irving in his Tales of the Alhambra, since in one of them he proposes that the Alhambra would collapse and disappear on the day the hand reaches the key. We do not know if at one time there was a hand, which is identified as the Hand of Fatima, whose five fingers symbolise the pillars of Islam (Declaration of Faith, Prayer, Fasting, Charity and Pilgrimage to Mecca), also engraved somewhere in the Alcazaba.

Above the entrance arch there are two stone corbels, the remains of a defensive machicolation, which today hold a fragmented coat of arms, placed there during the restoration that took place in the 1940s. The gate, also covered by a sail vault, is made up of a series of arches: the

entrance, already mentioned above; a small space covered by a barrel vault to bridge the difference in level; the interior structural arch, which supports the vault that covers the passage, and the exit, both horseshoe arches; another vaulted space; and the final arch at the exit of the tower. The central sail vault, made of brick, preserves the remains of the decoration it had, painted in almagra (deep ochre): in its centre there is geometric lacería (regular interlacing patterns) surrounded by a stone ashlar bond. During the restorations of the 1940s, the southern white wall was painted with lacería, perhaps with the intention of restoring it. However, this did not occur.

On the left wall, before leaving the tower, you can see the interior of the tower, made of stretcher and header ashlar masonry from the Taifa period. Here, like in some other points along the route, you can clearly see the

problems arising from the use of this stone that has afflicted it since ancient times. It is sandstone from the seabed, incorporating many fossils, which darkens and detaches itself while at the same time its interior decomposes, leaving it very vulnerable. No doubt this is what motivated the new material – the masonry that covered all the Taifa work during the Nasrid period.

The name Puerta del Cristo (Gate of Christ) comes from an altarpiece with a figure of Christ that was inside, in the niche that is still visible today, which turned the space into a kind of street chapel from the 17th century. Until the beginning of the 20th century, this Christ also had three ostrich eggs, possibly an offering from some traveller to exotic lands. Since ancient times these have symbolised the rebirth of life, since ostrich chicks are born from eggs without being incubated by their mother, only requiring the heat of the sun. After the restoration, the altarpiece was removed in the 1960s, leaving the space empty. The Tower had been converted into a dwelling and the upper area had to be demolished, meaning that everything above the height of the window is a new construction.