

THE LEGACY OF MUSLIM SPAIN

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 MEDIEVAL CORDOBA AS A CULTURAL CENTRE

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“The capital city of Córdoba, since the island of Andalus was conquered, has been the highest of the high, the furthest of the far, the place of the standard, the mother of towns; the abode of the good and godly, the homeland of wisdom, its beginning and its end; the heart of the land, the fount of science, the dome of Islam, the seat of the *imām*; the home of right reasoning, the garden of the fruits of ideas, of the earth and the banners of the age, the cavaliers of poetry and prose. Out of it have come pure compositions and exquisite compilations. And the reason for this, and for the distinction of its people before and since, as compared with others, is that the horizon encompasses none but the seekers and the searchers after all the various kinds of knowledge and refinement. Most of the people of the country are noble Arabs from the East who conquered it, lords of the troops of Syria and Iraq who settled there, so that their descendants remain in each district as a noble race. Hardly a town lacks a skilled writer, a compelling poet, who, had he praised it, the least would have been great.”

So wrote the anonymous author of the *Al-dhakhira 'l-saniyya* from the vantage-point of North Africa in the later middle ages. It is the purpose of this chapter to trace how such an encomium could have been penned and to explore how far it can be justified in modern eyes. The story begins, of course, long before the Islamic period and lasts long after it; but these epochs will here be no more than the prelude and the postlude to the era of Córdoba's heyday under the Umayyad dynasty.

This city—whose originally Iberian name is preserved in Latin Corduba, Visigothic Kordhoba, Arabic Qurtuba—was a Phoenician foundation, then becoming the Carthaginian Baetis, identified by some with the Biblical Tarshish. Situated in southern Spain (Andalusia, Arabic *al-Andalus*) on the northern bank of the River Guadalquivir (Ar. *al-wādī 'l-kabīr*, “the great river”) it is to this day the capital of the province of Córdoba. It was taken by the Roman general Marcellus in 152 B. C. and quickly colonised by Roman citizens; as Colonia Patricia it became the capital of the Provincia of Hispania Ulterior. Under Augustus, when Córdoba was one of the judicial centres of Baetica province, were built the Via Augusta, which marked the north-south axis of the square *madina*, and the great 16-arched bridge, whose span of 223 metres still survives, though with substantial Moorish alterations, notably those made by the city's Umayyad governor, al-Samh, in

102/721. The two Senecas, Hadrian and Trajan were all natives of Córdoba; so too was Bishop Hosius (ca. 255-358), a leading opponent of Arianism and president of the first Nicene council. In imperial times, then, Córdoba was a commercial and cultural centre of some importance.

In the following century it was a centre of the revolt against the Gothic ruler Agila, who reigned from 549 to 554—a prelude to brief Byzantine hegemony—and of the religious struggles between Arians and Catholics around 570. Then, in 571, Córdoba fell to Lewigild, King of the Visigoths, and under this dynasty it became an important administrative centre.

Its pre-Islamic history alone suggests that Córdoba owed its political importance to its favoured setting, and its subsequent history confirms this. To north and south the broad flat plain of Córdoba is bordered by mountain ranges, the Sierra Morena and the Sierra Nevada respectively; and the serpentine course of the Guadalquivir, which in antiquity was navigable right up to the city, makes the approaches to Córdoba still more readily defensible. Its agricultural hinterland produced wheat, olives and wine in abundance, with lead and other mines nearby.

The capture of the city in 927/11 by Muḡhith al-Rūmī, a manumitted slave, at the head of an Arab and Berber Muslim army, began a new chapter in its history. The lenient treatment accorded to the Christians on this occasion augured well for the future. That future was assured when between 987/16 and 1017/19 al-Hurr b. 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Thaqafī, the fifth of twenty-three Umayyad governors of al-Andalus (their tenure of office averaged less than two years apiece), transferred the seat of government from Seville to Córdoba, one of the four major centres of early Arab immigration into the Iberian Peninsula. Al-Andalus—at least until the 4th/10th century—was racked by the tribal rivalries which the Arabs had imported from the Hijaz and Syria, and this disunity was very soon to have portentous consequences. The wholesale massacre of the Syrian Umayyad house by the Abbāsids of Baghdad had failed to extirpate that family entirely, and a sole surviving Umayyad prince, 'Abd al-Rahmān b. Mu'āwīya, managed after many adventures to reach Spain. It took him five years—a solid tribute to a determination which he himself voiced: “I will not indulge in any distraction, be it of the sight or of the heart, until Spain is within my grasp.” Taking advantage of the endemic tribal disputes already mentioned, he overthrew Yūsuf al-Fihri, the last governor of al-Andalus but the longest in office, in 138/756, and made Córdoba the capital of his new emirate. It became known as “the navel of al-Andalus”.

He founded the Alcázar on the ruins of the Visigothic palace, perhaps hoping thereby to emphasise a continuity of secular authority. More significantly, in a decisive move which deliberately copied the actions of his Umayyad ancestors in Syria, he used half of the church of St. Vincent as a mosque, leaving the other half free for Christian use—an unmistakable

symbol of confessional tolerance. As in the case of the Great Mosque of Damascus, the Muslims eventually bought the Christians out (in 168/784), demolished the church (169/785) and then built their Great Mosque on its site (170/786). It is only fair to add, however, that the authenticity of this circumstantial account, with its suspicious parallelism to the early history of the Damascus mosque, rests on somewhat dubious evidence—a corrupt 7th/13th-century version of the 3rd/9th-century text of al-Rāzi. But there seems no reason to doubt that the mosque was indeed built on the site of a church.

In 170/786 'Abd al-Rahmān extended the ramparts of the city (themselves of Roman foundation), which eventually comprised 132 towers and 13 gates, enlarged the Roman bridge, improved and fortified the city's aqueduct and replaced the Visigothic administrative building by his own *dar al-imāra*. The tradition of major building works thus inaugurated was to characterise the entire dynasty, and it is notable that Córdoba profited quite disproportionately from this royal attention: gardens, bridges, baths, fountains, palaces and mosques proliferated in the years to come. Two miles outside the city he built himself a country villa—evocatively named Munyat al-Ruṣāfa after his caliphal grandfather's favourite Syrian town—whose garden was stocked with Syrian plants, including exotic imports like peaches, pomegranates and (so legend asserts) the first palm tree in Spain, to which he composed a nostalgic ode:

In the midst of Ruṣāfa has appeared to us a palm-tree in a Western land far from the home of palm-trees. So I said, this resembles me, for I also live in distant exile and separated by a great distance from my children and family. Thou hast grown up in a foreign land and we are both exiled and far from home.

While 'Abd al-Rahmān followed Visigothic precedent in the division of al-Andalus into provinces, he made Córdoba the administrative, political, military, religious and cultural capital. Here too was the seat of the *qādi 'l-quḍāt*, the supreme judge of Muslim Spain. The judges of Córdoba, such as Ibn Baṣṣīr, were justly renowned—and for their wit and humanity, not only for their probity, as is shown by al-Khushani's 4th/10th-century *History of the Judges of Córdoba*. At that time, too, there was a kind of ombudsman—a special judge (*ṣāhib al-mazālim*) to hear complaints against public officials. Thus in the course of his 32-year reign 'Abd al-Rahmān I consolidated the primacy of Córdoba in al-Andalus.

It was not long, however, before the internal tensions of the Muslim state exploded there. The southern suburb (*rabad*) of the city—the ancient Secunda (Arabic *Shaqunda*)—had been settled by Christian converts to Islam, the so-called Muwallads, who were treated as inferior social and fiscal gradations among these believers, depending on whether their ancestors' conversion to Islam had been voluntary or imposed. The pleasure-loving al-Hakam I (180/796–206/822) and his bodyguard—so foreign that they knew

no Arabic—became the targets for several violent revolts between 189/805 and 198/814 in which Berber theologians played a leading part, though the crippling taxes levied on the ruler's behalf by the detested commander of the guard, the Christian *comes* (Count) Rabi', proved the immediate trigger of the major insurrection, the so-called Battle of the Suburbs. This resulted in the total demolition of the quarter in 202/818—it subsequently became a necropolis—and the deportation of its people to Morocco, Egypt and eventually Crete, which they controlled for almost a century and a half. This same al-Hakam I is credited with wide-ranging innovations in the system of government which may explain some of the popular hostility towards him. As al-Maqqari notes, he

was the first monarch of this family who surrounded his throne with a certain splendour and magnificence. He increased the number of *mamluks* until they amounted to 5,000 horse and 1,000 foot ... he increased the number of his slaves, eunuchs and servants; had a bodyguard of cavalry always stationed at the gate of his palace and surrounded his person with a guard of *mamluks* ... these *mamluks* were called *al-khurs* owing to their all being Christians or foreigners. They occupied two large barracks, with stables for their horses.

Relations with the Christians were also strained at times. As Alvaro, the Bishop of Córdoba, remarked in about 235/850, his co-religionists preferred Muslim to Christian writings, "building up great libraries of them at enormous cost ... hardly one can write a passable Latin letter to a friend, but innumerable are those who can express themselves in Arabic and can compose poetry in that language with greater art than the Arabs themselves". A reaction was inevitable, though its form was unexpected. The Christians were only too well aware of the strict limits that controlled any aggression they might feel against Islam, and this in itself was frustrating. Psychological and social tension created a highly volatile situation. Inflamed by an ascetic priest named Eulogius, a small group of Christians—clergy and laity, male and female—who were linked by friendship or by family ties began to court the death penalty by reviling Islam in public. Although the Muslim authorities were manifestly unwilling to take extreme measures and offered reasonable compromises, the would-be martyrs left them no choice but to let the law take its course. 'Abd al-Rahmān II thereupon induced the reluctant Spanish bishops to convene a council which, in 237/852, condemned these fanatics and repudiated their claims to perform miracles or to be true martyrs, for their deaths were self-sought and their bodies suffered the normal process of decay. The movement ended with the execution of Eulogius himself in 245/859; it had claimed some fifty martyrs.

This *odium theologicum* was the catalyst for quite other resentments to do with discriminatory taxes, loss of privileges, the mocking of the clergy, the anxiety naturally felt by any religious minority under the rule of another faith, and the fear of losing culture and language (not just vernacular Latin

but the language of Roman literature) along with religion. But the influence of these Mozarabs (from Arabic *muṣṭarīb*, "the who adopts Arabic language and custom") grew nonetheless. Many were committed to the alternative culture out of self-interest, for knowledge of Arabic could procure for them a career closed to those who spoke only Latin. Nevertheless, the Spanish dialect of Latin maintained itself from generation to generation, usually on the distaff side—for Muslim men frequently married Christian women. Bilingualism was therefore commonplace. In the wake of this sanguinary episode, quantities of monks left Córdoba and its surrounding areas to seek refuge in the Christian north. Many brought with them Islamic influences in architecture and in manuscript painting, as witnessed by many northern churches and by the Beatus codices. The attempt to create a church absolutely opposed to the Muslim government rather than co-existing peacefully with it had failed.

The 3rd/9th century as a whole saw a steady decline in the power of the Umayyad Emirate, with the secession of most of the areas conquered by 'Abd al-Rahmān I. Muwallads, Mozarabs and Berbers were prominent in these revolts, which resulted in the Emirate contracting to the immediate neighbourhood of Córdoba itself by 300/912. Nevertheless, the 3rd/9th century also laid the foundations for Córdoba's golden age. It saw the establishment of a mint and a *tirāz* factory for the manufacture of fine textiles, the rebuilding of the Alcázar, and near-doubling of the state revenues to a million *dinars*. Ambassadors were also exchanged with Constantinople, a sure sign of the growing prestige of the Emirate. Political changes were under way too, as evidenced by the influential figure of the chief eunuch Abū 'I-Faḥ Naṣr, whom Eutolgius described as "the proconsul of the keys, who at the time administered the whole of Hispania"—a clear sign that the harem system of the eastern Islamic world was fully established by the early 3rd/9th century. The power of the eunuchs flourished mightily in the following century. Lavish royal patronage was extended to artists, philosophers and scientists. One of these, 'Abbās b. Firnās, invented a metronome, discovered how to make glass (or crystal?) and fashioned a celestial globe which he could at will make clear or cloudy. He also constructed a flying machine made of feathers attached to light frames, though when he used it he came rather painfully to grief.

Similar consolidation was effected in the religious and social spheres. A disciple of Mālik b. Anas, Yahyā b. Yahyā, established the Mālikī legal rite which henceforth dominated al-Andalus; he exerted much influence on 'Abd al-Rahmān II, which may explain the satirical verses aimed at him by the poet and diplomat al-Bakrī:

Why is it that one only finds rich *faqīhs*?
I should like to know from where their wealth proceeds.

An equally central figure of the age, though in much lighter vein, was another royal favourite, the celebrated Ziriyāb, a poet and singer from Baghdad who became the arbiter of fashion in Córdoba, dictating what and how people should wear, eat and declaim. He introduced, for example, the custom of changing fashions according to the seasons, and created a vogue for brightly coloured clothes. To the four strings of the conventional lute, each dyed a different colour to symbolise the Aristotelian humours, he added a fifth denoting the soul. His repertoire included more than 10,000 different songs, and these were no doubt a vehicle for orientalisising the Andalusī music not only of his time but also thereafter. He introduced toothpaste, under-arm deodorants and new short hairstyles leaving the neck, ears and eyebrows free. He revolutionised the local cuisine, not merely by bringing in unfamiliar fruit and vegetables (such as asparagus) but by insisting, for example, that meals should be served in separate courses, including soup and desserts, and that crystal was a more appropriate container for choice beverages than heavy goblets of precious metal. More important than any of these novelties, however, was what they implied. Córdoba was at the furthest extreme of the Islamic world and at least some of its people were well aware of the consequent danger of provincialism. Only in the cultural and intellectual spheres was it possible to enter into dialogue with the Abbasid east. Hence the constant stream of Spanish Muslims who travelled to Arabia, Syria and Iraq to further their education; hence too the critics of the Islamic east who termed poets of al-Andalus like Ibn Hānī' and Ibn Zaydūn the *Buhūris* and *Mutanabbis* of the West.

The long reign (300/912-350/961) of 'Abd al-Rahmān III witnessed the apogee of Córdoba. Under this energetic and dazzlingly successful monarch, who symbolically took the title of caliph in 316/929, the territorial expansion and cultural achievement of Spanish Islam reached its zenith. One by one almost all the lands conquered by his great ancestor and namesake were recovered. His fleet was probably the largest in the contemporary world. Every year in May, to the accompaniment of a splendid military parade, expeditions were launched northwards from the city, ostensibly to prosecute *jihād* and to ensure the safety of the frontiers—but also to amass booty and to show the flag in the potentially rebellious provinces to the north. Nevertheless, it has to be admitted that not even under 'Abd al-Rahmān III did the Muslims recover control of the entire Iberian Peninsula—a factor which, even though it can be explained (perhaps by their preference for a frontier south of the Pyrenees or their orientation towards North Africa and the Mediterranean world), should put into perspective the sometimes exaggerated claims made for the political power of the Cordoban Caliphate.

Conversely, it is worth noting that in the year 340/951 the Caliph is said to have possessed a treasury of twenty million gold pieces, which made him (with the Hamdanid Naṣr al-Dawla in Mesopotamia and Syria) the richest

Muslim prince of his time. He was able to amass such wealth by his habit of saving one-third of his annual revenues (which themselves totalled 6,250,000 gold pieces); another third was set aside for ordinary expenses while the remaining third was dedicated to building projects. The latter detail helps to explain why, for Arab chroniclers, Córdoba was “the bride of al-Andalus”, and why even the contemporary Saxon nun Hroswitha called it “the ornament of the world”. Seven centuries later the Maghribi historian al-Maqqari could write of this period: “. . . in four things Córdoba surpasses the capitals of the world. Among them are the bridge over the river and the mosque. These are the first two; the third is Madīnat al-Zahrāʾ; but the greatest of all things is knowledge—and that is the fourth.” And yet the architect of this achievement, ‘Abd al-Rahmān III, could reflect somberly at the end of his life that he had known only fourteen days of freedom from care.

The city was remarkably clean by medieval standards. Ibn Saʿīd, a 7th/13th-century historian who knew Córdoba especially well, notes that “Spanish Muslims are the cleanest people on the earth in respect of their person, dress, beds and in the interior of their houses”. The streets were well paved and lighted, the lights being attached to the outer doors and corners of the houses—which, as al-Muqaddasi notes, had tiled roofs. Córdoba was abundantly supplied with running water, for the supply of which ‘Abd al-Rahmān I had constructed an aqueduct. The city was huge, which in itself is notable, since before the Muslim conquest the principal Iberian city had been Toledo. According to al-Bakrī and al-Himyārī, the megapolis of Córdoba:

consists of five adjoining cities; each possesses a rampart which separates it from its neighbours. Each of these cities contains in sufficient number bazaars, warehouses and inns, public baths and all sorts of industrial establishments. From west to east it is three leagues in length; its breadth . . . is a league.

Yet according to Ibn Saʿīd there were 21 unwalled suburbs outside the inner walled city. The absence of precise chronological indications in some of these descriptions may mean that they are less contradictory than any at first appear. In its early development, Córdoba’s three sectors comprised an upper town and a lower town (Ajarquía) on the right bank of the river, enclosed by a single wall of Roman foundation but divided by a further wall; and the area south of the river. But the 4th/10th century saw spectacular growth, especially in the reigns of al-Hakam II and Hishām II. At that time the *madīna* had seven gates; beyond them stretched in all directions the 21 quarters noted by Ibn Saʿīd. This extra-mural area was known collectively as “The Suburb” (*al-rabad*) and it was sub-divided into nine quarters to the west, seven to the east, three to the north and two beyond the river to the south. To the south-west of the city extended the gardens of the palace, accessible directly from the royal quarters by a gate in the city wall. At the southern extremity of the gardens lay the riparian port. Bordering the palatial precinct to the north was the Jewish quarter; directly to the east of the palace

but separated from it by the city’s major arterial road (*al-mahallja al-ʿuzmā*) was the Great Mosque with (says Ibn Hawqal) the prison nearby. The close proximity of the royal palace and the Great Mosque followed standard Islamic practice. Just east of the mosque were the *sūqs* and the *qayṣariyya*, or lock-up market. Cemeteries reached its furthest point to the north-west and south-east at Madīnat al-Zahrāʾ and al-Madīna al-Zahira respectively; these palace cities themselves became the focus for new urban entities, much in the same way as had already occurred at Qayrawān. In fact, as Ibn Khaldūn notes, Córdoba comprised not one but several towns. The most splendid mansions were those built along the road out to Madīnat al-Zahrāʾ. A chance anecdote recounted by Ibn Hāzim indicates that the houses of some aristocrats included bedverdes with carefully calculated panoramic views of Córdoba; they comprised a series of bays with latticed openings, each so placed that it gave a different view from the next. The *mirador* of Daraxa at the Alhambra is a later echo of such refinements.

Al-Maqqari’s oft-quoted figures on the buildings of Córdoba at this time are apt to mislead by their apparent precision, especially as some modern demographic studies suggest (though perhaps with extreme and counter-productive rigour) that they might even exaggerate tenfold. Nevertheless, they clearly establish the image of Córdoba that lingered in the Islamic world: 1600 mosques (or, according to another version, 417); 900 baths; 213,077 homes for ordinary people; 60,300 mansions for nobles, officials and military commanders; and 80,455 shops. These buildings, we are invited to believe, were scattered throughout a conurbation measuring up to 24 by 6 miles and containing a million people. At the very least one may conclude from the frequent extensions of the Great Mosque that the population of the city was growing by leaps and bounds throughout the 3rd/9th and 4th/10th centuries. To this day there survive only two medieval mosques in the entire Islamic world which are larger than that of Córdoba—those of Samarra and Rabat. Both were built as it were speculatively, with an estimated future capacity in mind, rather than as a response (as at Córdoba) to actual population pressure. Thus Lombard’s guess that this points to a population of some 300,000 may not be far off the mark. Córdoba would thus have been far bigger than Paris, which at that time was easily the largest city in Latin Europe. An intensively cultivated hinterland, its fertility assured by elaborate systems of irrigation involving water-mills and water-wheels (*naʿīras*)—a technique imported from Syria—sustained this population. The celebrated calendar of the diplomat Reccimund, drawn up in 350/961, lists in minute detail the growth of the various crops and the rearing of livestock from one month to the next and offers invaluable insight into the remarkable achievements of al-Andalus in this respect.

Already in the 5th/11th century the contrast between the present and the past was inspiring much elegiac reflection of the *ubi sum?* variety, as in the

famous lament of Ibn Hazm. Similarly, al-Idrisi calls Córdoba “the most beautiful jewel of al-Andalus” before noting, gloomily, its catastrophic fall. A strong vein of self-reproach may be detected in such musings. Only when it was too late did Muslims become fully aware of what they had carelessly ruined through faction and anarchy. To that extent they tended to contemplate the earlier heyday of the city as a symbol of paradise lost and thus to exaggerate its magnificence. But even when the necessary discount has been applied, it is still plain enough that Córdoba was without peer in the Islamic world west of Egypt.

Caliph al-Córdoba was above all an intellectual centre, as symbolised by its seventy libraries. Education was thus a clear priority. Al-Hakam II, himself a respected historian, invited professors from the eastern Islamic world to teach at the Great Mosque and provided endowments for their salaries. He also built twenty-seven free schools and had in the Alcázar a library of 400,000 volumes whose catalogue itself ran to 44 registers of 50 (some other accounts say 20) leaves apiece. These figures were transmitted to Ibn Hazm by the eunuch Bakīya, who at that time was in charge of the library. Recent research by Abd al-Rahman al-Ekrish has brought to light further information which helps to corroborate these figures; for instance, that the library (somewhat like the Great Mosque) was constantly outgrowing its accommodation, so that its premises had to be moved no less than five times; that on one of these moves it took five days to transport the books of poetry alone; and that, far from being the personal collection of al-Hakam alone, it was in fact an amalgamation of the private libraries of his immediate family—father, brothers and sons—and was thus in the fullest sense a royal library; indeed, some of its books had been in the possession of the royal family for much longer. Although it was apparently not open to the public, its fame was general; centuries later al-Qalqashandī ranks it alongside the libraries of the Abbasids in Baghdad and that of the Fātimids in Cairo as one of the three great libraries in the Islamic world. Some of these books al-Hakam annotated in his own hand, which made them especially prized by later generations. He was not alone in his bibliomania, either in the Muslim world at large (astonishing tales were current of libraries in Baghdad, and al-Hakam’s contemporary, the Fātimid caliph al-‘Aziz, had—according to al-Maqrīzī—a library in excess of a million volumes) or in Córdoba itself. According to Ibn Sa‘īd:

Córdoba held more books than any other city in al-Andalus, and its inhabitants were the most enthusiastic in caring for their libraries: such collections were regarded as symbols of status and social leadership. Men who had no knowledge whatsoever would make it their business to have a library in their homes; they would be selective in their acquisitions, so that they might boast of possessing unica, or copies in the handwriting of a particular calligrapher.

Ibn Fuṭayḥ, who served as vizier and *qādī* to al-Hakam II, decorated his library entirely in green and employed six full-time scribes. He made it an

iron rule not to lend his books, but would make presents of copies executed on request in this private scriptorium. Eventually his grandson disposed of this library for 40,000 *dinārs*. By no means all book-buyers in this period, however, were serious scholars. Ibn Sa‘īd tells a heart-rending tale of how an indigent scholar, after long searching, finally lighted on a book he needed, only to see an elegantly attired gentleman outbid him. The scholar, addressing his rival as “doctor”, perhaps in the hope of persuading him to part with the book, was dismayed to hear him say: “I’m no doctor ... but etiquette demands that I form a library and I have just the space on my shelves for such a book so beautifully bound and written.” The thwarted scholar replied in disgust: “Yes, it’s people like you who have the money. The proverb is true enough: ‘God gives nuts to people without teeth.’ And I who need the book for its contents am too poor to afford it.” To put such stories in context, it is well to remember that the contemporary monastery of St. Gall in Switzerland had one of Northern Europe’s major libraries with perhaps 600 books. The use of paper (and cheap paper at that) instead of vellum in al-Andalus contributed to this astonishing disparity, though in fact vellum continued in use longer there than elsewhere in the major centres of Muslim culture. The expertise cultivated at Córdoba in the arts of the book took some strange byways, if one may judge from a passage in *The Unique Necklace* by the Cordoban Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih:

As to the concealing of secrets in writings, so that none other may read them than those for whom they are written, there are methods for this that one must know ... The finest of these consists in your taking fresh milk and writing with it on papyrus; and he to whom it is written shall sprinkle hot ashes of papyrus upon it, whereafter that which you have written will become visible, if God wills. And if you wish, you may use white water of vitriol, and when he to whom you have written shall have it on hand, he shall put vitriol powder over it. And if you desire that the writing shall not be read during the day but shall be read at night, then write it with gall of the turtle.

At least an equally significant factor in the spread of literacy were the Islamic schools which employed scores of female copyists; such schools were the medieval equivalent of publishing houses. Nor was this exceptional; the poet Ibn Hazm wrote: “women taught me the Quran, they recited to me much poetry, they trained me in calligraphy.” Apart from the women who earned a living as copyists in the book market of Córdoba (and the size of that market can be imagined from the report that there were 70 copyists at work in it who specialised exclusively in transcribing Qurans), other women who were more highly educated worked as secretaries (one, Labbāna, for example, who worked both for the ruler himself and for Taīb, at one time the royal librarian), as teachers and as librarians (like a certain Fātima, who was in charge of acquisitions in the royal library and travelled widely in that capacity; and her colleague Laylā); yet others practised medicine and law. Some, like the princesses Wallāda bint al-Mustakfi and ‘Ā’isha, were famous for

their poetry. Indeed, the pages of Ibn Hazm's *The Collar of the Dove*, which focuses alike on the art of love and on social *mores*, repeatedly reveal the greater degree of latitude allowed to women in Córdoba vis-à-vis the Muslim norm elsewhere. An independent confirmation of this can be found in the 7th/13th-century illustrations of the courtly romance *Bayāḍ wa Riyāḍ*, which include a scene of a youth playing the lute amidst a bevy of unveiled beauties. Yet for all this apparent liberty, the lot of women was unenviable. The 6th/12th-century Cordoban philosopher Ibn Rushd analysed the problem with remarkable objectivity:

Our society allows no scope for the development of women's talents. They seem to be destined exclusively to childbirth and the care of children, and this state of servility has destroyed their capacity for larger matters. It is thus that we see no women endowed with moral virtues; they live their lives like vegetables, devoting themselves to their husbands. From this stems the misery that pervades our cities, for women outnumber men by more than double and cannot procure the necessities of life by their own labours.

Córdoba now disputed with Baghdad the intellectual leadership of the Islamic world. Its mosque was famed as a centre for higher learning on a par with Cairo and Baghdad and was the earliest medieval university in Europe. Here thousands of students at a time were taught not only the orthodox Islamic sciences such as *tafsir*, *fiqh* and *hadith* but, as a casual anecdote of Ibn Hazm reveals, even Arabic proverbs and Jāhiliyya poetry. Cordoban scholars continued the work of the Bait al-Hikma, the Abbasid translation institute, and thereby brought (often at several removes) Greek and Oriental learning to the West, a practice continued under Christian rule in a similar institute in Toledo. Major contributions were made in music, philology, geography, history (especially al-Ta'rikhī, who wrote a lost description of Córdoba, and Ibn 'Abd Rabbihī), alchemy, chemistry, medicine (the great surgeon known to medieval Europe as Abulcasis was one Abū 'I-Qāsim al-Zahrāwī of Córdoba), astronomy (the first surviving dated astrolabe from the Islamic world was made in Córdoba), philosophy, botany and mathematics. Even so, a sternly orthodox government curbed free speculation, especially in Mu'tazilī and Sufi studies, occasionally burning books on "logic, astronomy and other sciences cultivated by the Greeks" and banishing those who worked in such fields. Particularly thoroughgoing was the book purge instituted in the late 4th/10th century by the ostentatiously pious regent al-Mansūr (who was known to have transcribed the Qur'an in his own hand and to have taken that copy on campaign with him). In his campaign against such secular works from the royal library he was aided by local theologians; his motive, according to Ibn Sa'īd, was "to ingratiate himself with the people of al-Andalus and to discredit in their eyes the principles followed by al-Hakam". In this atmosphere of narrow-minded orthodoxy it is not surprising that Ibn Sa'īd should note how "the majority of those then engaged in the

study of philosophy lost their ardour, and kept secret what they knew of these sciences". Appropriately enough, the expertise of Cordoban scholars in *tafsir* and *fiqh* was renowned—for Córdoba was conservative even to its calligraphy, and its Great Mosque contained four leaves of the Qur'an of 'Uthmān, stained with his blood. The extraordinary significance of this mosque in Muslim eyes may be judged from the fact that almost three-quarters of al-Himyari's account of the city is devoted to that building. Obviously it functioned *inter alia* as a symbol. According to one Muslim source, some of its lamps were fashioned from the bells brought back as booty from the great pilgrimage church of St. James of Compostela in Northern Spain, while that church's doors were re-used in the mosque. Another account notes, however, that the bells were carried back to Santiago by Moorish prisoners after the fall of Córdoba. Such symbols of domination were frequent; in much the same spirit, Alfonso VI of Castile placed his throne on the tomb of al-Mansūr when receiving an embassy from the Moors of Saragossa.

The arts and crafts flourished apace. The city boasted some 13,000 weavers, and its woollens, silks and brocades were famous. So too was its craftsmanship in embossed goat-leather, memorialised in the English words "Cordoban" and "cordwainer". The production of iron and lead, and of gold and silver filigree, often inlaid in the manner of Damascus, was a speciality; indeed, Cordoban gold and silver were acceptable currency in Northern Europe. To this day the names of certain streets in Córdoba perpetuate the memory of the trades and crafts practised there in Muslim times—streets named after booksellers, shoemakers, weavers and butchers. Jewellery and ivory carving were widely exported and the process of manufacturing crystal was discovered here. The Christian reconquest depressed most of these industries.

The role of non-Muslims in this cultural flowering was crucial, especially as Arabs, Christians and Jews alike were bilingual in Arabic and the local Hispano-Latin dialect. Cordoban poets like Ibn Hazm developed forms unknown to the Muslim east which, according to some scholars, strongly influenced the poetry of the troubadours, notably in their emphasis on romantic love; the delight in the beauties of nature is also a distinctive feature of the school. Other Christians served as administrators (occasionally reaching high office), financiers, physicians, artists and master-craftsmen. The Christians were at first allowed to retain their churches, complete with statues of the saints; and the clergy were permitted publicly to wear their ecclesiastical vestments, burn incense and chant funeral dirges. The city had many churches as well as three monasteries. At times, it is true, Christians were forbidden to ring bells, and the Muslim authorities did sparingly exercise their right to control the appointment of church officials. But in the early centuries of Muslim rule the general level of tolerance was remarkably high. Christians had their own schools and libraries. But the increasing pressure of the *reconquista*

eroded Muslim tolerance, so that under the later Umayyads Latin was banned and Christian children had to attend Arabic schools. The Mozarabic community, segregated like its Jewish counterpart in its own section of the city, consisted principally of shopkeepers, clerks and craftsmen. In the countryside the Mozarabs (again like the Jews) were sharecroppers or serfs. This Christian community had its own *qādī*, presumably administering Visigothic law, and was organised under its *comes*, the community spokesman in dealings with the government. In 359/970 the *comes* was Mu'āwīya b. Lope, while the Bishop of Córdoba was 'Īsā b. Mansūr and the foremost Christian, whom 'Abd al-Rahmān III sent as ambassador to Otto I of Germany and later to Byzantium and Syria to obtain *objets d'art* for the embellishment of Madinat al-Zahrā', was one Rabī' b. Zayd, baptised Reccimund; he was later rewarded with the bishopric of Granada. Such names speak for themselves.

But Córdoba was also the centre of a brilliant Jewish culture epitomised by Hasday b. Shaprūt, a scholar and physician serving 'Abd al-Rahmān III and al-Ḥakam, who attracted numerous Jewish intellectual, poets and philosophers to the city. He carried out diplomatic missions on behalf of the Caliphate to Ordoño IV of León and Queen Toda of Navarre, whose grandson Sancho he cured of fatness, and even wrote a letter (still extant) to his co-religionists, the Khazars of Central Asia, telling them about al-Andalus. He also superintended translation activities. When a sumptuous Greek version of the *De Materia Medica* of Dioscorides, was sent to the Caliph in 337/949 as a gift from the emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus of Byzantium, it proved to be something of a white elephant—for clearly nobody in Córdoba knew enough Greek to translate this precious manuscript. Accordingly, two years later the Byzantine emperor had to send a monk, one Nicholas, whose knowledge of Latin enabled Hasday b. Shaprūt to ensure that the imperial gift could be put to use. This anecdote offers a useful corrective to the high-flown claims made for the international culture of Córdoba at this time. Talmudic studies, too, revived under Rabbi Moses and his son Rabbi Hanokh, to the extent that they surpassed the standing of the Mesopotamian schools, while Hebrew poetry was cultivated by such men as the rival scholars Dunash b. Labrat and Me'achem b. Saruk. A certain Joseph b. Shatnash, a pupil of Rabbi Moses, even interpreted the Talmud in Arabic for the Caliph. That same caliph sent another doctor, Ibrahim b. Ya'qūb, to Europe on a diplomatic mission in the course of which he was received by the Emperor Otto I. Jewish merchants dominated the trade in luxury goods and slaves, with the help of the Vikings as purveyors of that commodity. A new synagogue was also founded at Córdoba at this time, even though the Christians were not allowed to erect churches. On the other hand, there is some evidence that these two minority faiths were brought nearer together by their intimate co-existence under Islamic rule; for

instance, a surviving letter of 147/764 rebukes Christians who wished to fast with Jews on the Day of Atonement.

For all its multi-racial quality, however, this society was still quintessentially Islamic in its governing institutions. Supreme power was vested in the caliph, who—very much on the Abbasid model—became an increasingly remote figure hedged about by protocol and ceremony. In the earlier stages of the dynasty a council of four viziers, responsible for finance, military affairs, justice and foreign policy, had advised him, with secretariats below this level to deal with chancery matters and the affairs of the non-Islamic faiths. But in the later Umayyad period the division of power might rather favour the *hājib* or chamberlain, effectively the caliph's first vizier, who from his base at Córdoba's Alcázar supervised the various *diwāns*, including that for the royal household, and the *qādī al-jamā'a*, whose authority extended over justice, the running of the markets and the police. Already in the 3rd/9th century, to judge by the remarks of Ibn al-Qūṭīyya, dynasties of bureaucrats were becoming known. Perhaps the most considered assessment of the political workings of the Umayyad Caliphate in Córdoba comes from the pen of the historian Ibn Ḥayyān:

It is generally known that the strength and solidity of their empire consisted principally in the policy pursued by these princes, the magnificence and splendour with which they surrounded their court, the reverential awe which they inspired in their subjects, the inexorable rigour with which they chastised every aggression on their rights, the impartiality of their judgments, their anxious solicitude in the observance of the civil law, their regard and attention to the learned, whose opinions they respected and followed, calling them to their sittings and to their councils, and many other brilliant qualities.

The society over which the caliph presided was rigidly stratified in a descending hierarchy of Arabs; Muwallads; Mozarabs; Christians, Jews and Berbers; and finally the slaves on whom the entire economy depended. The ethnic diversity of this social structure was epitomised by the ruling class itself, in whom the original Syrian strain had become progressively weaker as a result of constant intermarriage. As Ibn Ḥazm says:

All the caliphs of the Banū Marwān ... were without variation or exception disposed by nature to prefer blondes ... every one of them has been fair-haired, taking after their mothers, so that this has become a hereditary trait with them ... all had fair hair and blue eyes.

As for the Muwallads, the descendants of local converts, it was perhaps they above all who imparted that distinctive character to Andalusī civilisation which in medieval terms approximated to a sense of nationhood. Some of their importance in Moorish society can be inferred from the frequency of the ending *-īn*, which denoted Muwallad descent, and is encountered in such names as the poets Ibn Zaydūn, Ibn 'Abdūn and Ibn Badūn, the insurrectionist Ibn Ḥarfūn and even the later medieval Maghribī historian Ibn Khaldūn.

The golden prime of Córdoba was somehow encapsulated in Madinat al-Zahra', a palace city just outside Córdoba named after the favourite wife of 'Abd al-Rahmān III and founded in 324/936. Its open-plan palaces, 4313 marble columns (taken from classical buildings as far afield as Carthage and Sfax in modern Tunisia), automata like roaring lions, singing birds, levitating thrones and the like, quicksilver ponds (their mercury probably supplied from the cinnabar mines of Almaden north of Córdoba), translucent alabaster windows, jewelled doors, marble Roman Venus, spacious gardens and matchless views were justly celebrated. The *qāḍī* al-Ballūi even had to ensure the Caliph for covering a roof of the palace with silver and gold and thus succumbing to a temptation from the Devil. The whiteness of its buildings set off by the surrounding gardens led an Arab poet to call it "a concubine in the arms of a black eunuch". The political function of these splendours is clearly brought out by Ibn al-'Arabi when he describes the visit of a Christian embassy. The Caliph

had mats unrolled from the gates of Córdoba to the entrance of Madinat al-Zahra', a distance of three miles, and stationed a double rank of soldiers along the route, their naked swords, both broad and long, meeting at the tips like the rafters of a roof. On the Caliph's orders the ambassadors progressed between the ranks as under a roofed passage. The fear that this inspired was indescribable. And thus they reached the gate of Madinat al-Zahra'. From here to the palace where they were to be received, the Caliph had the ground covered with brocades. At regular intervals he placed dignitaries whom they look for kings, for they were seated on splendid couches and arrayed in brocades and silk. Each time the ambassadors saw one of these dignitaries they prostrated themselves before him, imagining him to be the Caliph, whorupon they were told, "Raise your heads! This is but a slave of his slaves!" At last they entered a courtyard strewn with sand. At the centre was the Caliph. His clothes were coarse and short: what he was wearing was worth no more than four *dirhams*. He was seated on the ground, his head bent, in front of him was a Quran, a sword and fire. "Behold the ruler", the ambassadors were told ...

One may compare with this the account by Ibn Hayyān of the supplicatory visit made to al-Hakam II by Ordoño IV, "The Bad", of Navarre. The later caliph clearly had no taste for the calculated understatement practised by his predecessor. Ordoño, having prostrated himself before the Caliph and proffered his petition:

rose to retire, walking backwards so as not to turn his face from the Caliph ... he plainly exhibited on his countenance the reverential awe with which he had been struck, and his utter astonishment at the magnificence and splendour displayed before him as indicative of the power and strength of the Caliphate. In passing through the hall, the eyes of Ordoño fell on the vacant throne of the Commander of the Faithful: unable to repress his feelings, he advanced slowly towards it, and having prostrated himself before it, remained for some time in that humble position, as if the Caliph were sitting on it.

To a medieval Christian the primary associations of an empty royal throne were with the prepared throne—the *hetoimasia* of the Book of Revelation

—ready to receive the majesty of Christ on the Last Day, and this would have added an incalculable charge of meaning to the king's gesture—though whether Ibn Hayyān realised this, or indeed whether Ordoño, in the heightened atmosphere of the moment, was fully aware of the implications of his apparently involuntary action, remains unclear.

For all the carefully orchestrated magnificence described in the literary sources, modern excavations suggest that these sources exaggerate in stating that a court of 25,000 lived and worked here. Nevertheless, the fact that a merchant wishing to do business there had to pay an introductory tax of 400 *dirhams* suggests the existence of a thriving commercial quarter. In 369/978 the usurper Ibn Abi 'Amir al-Mansūr built a similar city al-Madina al-Zahira—south-east of Córdoba; this, like Madinat al-Zahra', was destroyed during the sack of Córdoba in the Berber revolt of 403/1013. The simultaneous and still enigmatic decline of the 'Amirid family and the Umayyad dynasty had precipitated this. The court mercenaries, mainly Saqāliba (literally "Slavs" but in fact mainly Italians), the populace of Córdoba and the Berbers all had their candidates for the Caliphate and the brief reign of Hishām III (418/1027–422/1031) (who was preceded by no fewer than eight caliphs, five of them boasting Umayyad lineage) failed to wrest order from chaos. With his death the Umayyad Caliphate was extinguished and by degrees Muslim Spain broke into a mosaic of at least 23 separate principalities. Córdoba itself never recovered from the trauma of these conflicts. As Ibn 'Idhārī laments in his work *Al-Bayān al-mughrib*:

Weep for the splendour of Córdoba, for disaster has overtaken her; Fortune made her a creditor and demanded payment for the debt. She was at the height of her beauty; life was gracious and sweet. Until all was overthrown and today no two people are happy in her streets. Then bid her goodbye, and let her go in peace since depart she must.

Córdoba now became a republic under the presidency of three successive nobles of the Jahwarid family, but in 462/1070 it passed to the 'Abbāḍids of Seville and thence to the Almoravids in 484/1091. They in turn yielded Córdoba to the even more repressive and puritanical Almohad regime in 567/1172. These turbulent 150 years, dominated by party strife and the growing momentum of the Christian *reconquista*, robbed Córdoba of its military and political importance but nevertheless produced some of the city's greatest scholars, such as the philosopher and physician Ibn Ruṣṣd (Averroes) (520/1126–595/1198), internationally famed for his commentaries on Aristotle and his creation of a rationalist movement, yet also twice appointed to serve as *qāḍī* of his home town. Such intellectuals tended to move in the orbit of the court, and often cultivated the two most profitable studies: astrology and medicine. Their learning made them members of an exclusive club and allowed them sometimes to rise to high offices of state such as vizier; this was especially the case with the Jews. Although the Almohads forcibly converted the Jews and thereby eradicated the Cordoban

1707/86-7, but it was presumably a smaller and less striking structure than that erected by 'Abd al-Rahmān I.

Recent research suggests that the subsequent enlargements were carefully calculated so as to respect the original proportions of Córdoba I, whose northern perimeter (as revealed by excavations in the late 1930s) was situated around the middle of the present courtyard. Thus each enlargement was related in precise proportion to the previous state of the mosque, with the dimensions of Córdoba I as the touchstone of quality. For that reason the next two enlargements—by 'Abd al-Rahmān II in 233/848 and by al-Hakam II in 350/961-355/966—seem to have been (the matter is disputed) of the same 12-bay depth as the sanctuary of Córdoba I. Only the final enlargement under al-Mansūr (377/987-378/988) broke this mould, for the River Guadalquivir prevented any further extension to the south, and so the mosque was expanded to the east.

Reference was made earlier to the echoes of the Great Mosque of Damascus in the Córdoba mosque. It might be thought curious that the major public building of the city should evoke memories of exile. But the mosque, by being overtly Syrian in character, asserted where the loyalties of the Umayyad rulers lay in their multi-tribal and multi-confessional state. These echoes are multiple, but they certainly do not make the later mosque in any sense a clone of its great original. It would be more accurate to interpret them as pointers to how the art of Umayyad Syria might have developed but for the Abbasid take-over—for such echoes are rarely a matter of straight copying. They include the geometrically patterned marble window grilles, the *ajoure* style of densely carved stonework, the use of wall mosaics (far more unusual in 4th/10th century al-Andalus than in 2nd/8th century Syria, and set moreover by craftsmen imported from Byzantium), the transfigured vegetal themes of those mosaics, the archaic style of the Cufic inscriptions, the two-tiered system employed to support the roof, and the use of a wider central aisle, perhaps even marked in elevation by a gable or at least by a rise in roof level, which resulted in a T-plan arrangement. Most striking of all, though, is the choice of a *qibla* direction facing due south—a direction which at Damascus was accurate but which at Córdoba pointed at Ghana rather than Mecca. Furthermore, this grossly erroneous *qibla* was maintained without change in all the subsequent enlargements of the mosque, even though each such enlargement offered another opportunity to correct it. This *qibla* therefore functioned as a continuous reminder of the Syrian heritage. Yet by the time of the final enlargement of the mosque in the late 4th/10th century these multiple references to the Damascus mosque were old-fashioned; mosque design had moved on. Nevertheless, in other respects Córdoba uses the Damascus mosque merely as a point of departure—for example, in the decision of 'Abd al-Rahmān III to build a monumental minaret of Syrian type on the axis of the *qibla* (the enlarged the courtyard to the

north at the same time), or the remarkable expansion and intensification undergone at Córdoba of the theme of a two-tier arcade used in such simple fashion at Damascus. There it is merely a device to heighten the room of the prayer hall; but at Córdoba it becomes the chosen instrument for the entire transformation of the upper zone of the sanctuary, which takes on a quite unexpected vigour and complexity of its own. Moreover, it would be mistaken to present the architects of Córdoba as entirely fixated on Damascus. In its basic shape the Spanish building has a much closer kinship with the Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem, notably in its choice of multiple aisles perpendicular to the *qibla* wall, and of a transept in front of the *qibla*, while the type of plant ornament in the mosaics has closer affinities to the Dome of the Rock mosaics than to the Damascus ones.

As befits its status as a supreme architectural masterpiece, the Córdoba mosque operates on several different levels: some formal, some political, some religious. The general nature of this chapter does not permit a detailed discussion of the first of these aspects. On this formal level it must suffice to draw attention, if only very fleetingly, to the remarkably varied exploitation of space in the mosque. This depends directly on its vast size, and specifically on its apparently endless interior vistas which do actually disappear into obscurity—a telling image of infinity. Close analysis reveals that, apart from size, the distinctive spatial impact of this building rests on a deliberate ambiguity in how to read a given space or element in the structure, since categories are constantly blending and separating; on the manipulation of light sources; on the contrast of open and closed spaces; on the related aspects of symmetry, repetition and axiality; and finally, even on the type and distribution of ornament. Nevertheless, the factor of size provides the indispensable framework within which these other subtleties can operate. And as the mosque grew, so to speak inexorably, so too did its range of expression. Moreover, this growth was largely confined to the covered sanctuary itself, to such an extent that no other medieval mosque so thoroughly upstages the role of the courtyard, eventually reducing it to the status of an afterthought. This repeated expansion and embellishment can be seen as a statement of Umayyad power aimed at the rival empires to the east—first Abbasids and then Fātimids. At all events, the result was to give the Córdoba mosque the largest covered area of any recorded medieval mosque. It is almost as if the intention was to make worshippers lose their bearings in this cavernous space. The normal axial devices simply would not operate in these circumstances.

One particular formal development at Córdoba deserves to be singled out: its unique array of domes and vaulting systems. These constitute some of the earliest Islamic examples still in their original form. Thanks to their busy multiplication of planes they confer monumentality on domes which are actually quite small. But more important still, they become bearers of

meaning. For example, the star-shaped articulation of the three great *maqsūra* domes—with stars of several sizes at different locations of the vault—not only calls to mind the familiar analogy between the dome and heaven but, especially when placed above the *mihrab*, the Quranic suras of Light (quoted in the countless *mihrabs*) and The Star. In this heightened religious context the ribs of these vaults can be read simultaneously as rays without any diminution of their technical structural function. But they could also be read as forming an honorific canopy—a distant echo, perhaps of the domed tabernacle (*qubba*) which in Arabia, during the Jāhiliyya, covered a sacred object under the protection of a political leader.

The political resonances of this mosque make themselves felt from afar. The building is encompassed by highly crenellated walls regularly buttressed—more of a fortress than a mosque, and an apt reminder of the constant wars against the Christian infidel. Such a degree of fortification is thoroughly unusual, and may refer equally well to Islam in its militant aspect as to the military strength which underpinned Umayyad rule. Its curtain wall is repeatedly broken by gates treated in the manner of elaborate triumphal arches, complete with tripartite elevations, dwarf arcades with their cornucopias of royalty, and lengthy inscriptions: a new use, in short, for a long-familiar building type.

Political factors expressed themselves also in the continuous association between the mosque and Christianity. Architectural forms were repeatedly employed as metaphors of domination. More than that: the wheel turned full circle, from the original building of the mosque on the site of a Christian church to the building first of a 15th-century Gothic chapel and then, a century later and in a different part of the sanctuary, a full-scale church for the Canons. Thus the Christian buildings within the mosque have something of the same palimpsest quality as the Muslim structure itself. Perhaps it was no accident that, between them, these Christian buildings definitively ruined the impact of the great sanctuary. It might even be argued that the second major enlargement of the mosque in 233/848 helped to trigger the Christian revolt in the following year.

But beyond doubt it is the area around the *mihrab* in which the political significance of the mosque is concentrated. The Chapel of Villaviciosa, which marks the boundaries of al-Hakam's much-enlarged *maqsūra* (indeed, his entire extension was itself one vast *maqsūra*), is little short of a stockade, glittering and sumptuous, but nevertheless clearly driving home the message that the ruler within was definitively separated from his people. Its splendid decoration carries a sub-text of wealth and privilege, while also claiming—by virtue of the orb set against a radiating vault and stellar designs, the whole executed in the celestial colours of gold and blue—cosmic status for the Umayyad caliph. This gigantic *maqsūra* (astomishingly large for its time) asserts the invulnerability of the ruler. And good care was taken to announce

it in advance. A complicated hierarchical ordering of space, involving carefully chosen types of capital and arch, and underlined by piers of unusually rich decoration, partitions the central nave into a sequence of discrete stages. Thus architecture—and specifically the highly-charged architecture of the *maqsūra* in which the theme of interlacing polylobed arches is taken to dizzy heights of complexity and virtuoso display, the whole disciplined by an extreme intellectual rigour—is manipulated to augment and exalt the role of the caliph in the liturgy of the mosque. Nor should it be overlooked that the mosque and the adjoining caliphal palace were physically linked, for a covered bridge-like passage, the *sābāi* introduced by Abd Allāh and restored by al-Hakam II, functioned as the umbilical cord between the secular and the religious arms of the state.

The surpassing size of the Great Mosque also has a political edge to it, especially since (as already noted) it is largely the result of increasing the covered rather than the courtyard space—and it is worth noting that the largest extension of all, that by al-Mansūr in 377/987-378/988, was the work of a vizier and not a member of the Umayyad house. Perhaps he realised that al-Hakam's *maqsūra* was unsurpassable and thus set himself the task of outdoing his predecessors in a different way, namely by the sheer scale of his work. Perhaps this too was a political statement, as if to set his own personal seal on this continually evolving monument, the symbol *par excellence* of Muslim al-Andalus—and, incidentally, thereby outflank the *mihrab* of al-Hakam II. These continual enlargements of a steadily more unsuitable site, carried out in preference to building extra Friday Mosques (as was done, for example, at Baghdad), made of this mosque an increasingly open challenge to the huge Abbasid mosques at the other end of the Arab world. Nor should it be forgotten that there were large Christian and Jewish minorities in the city, so that this gigantic mosque, besides serving physically to unite the Muslims, also expressed an unanswerable confessional dominance.

While the political dimension of this mosque can be demonstrated with relative ease, its more intangible messages are intrinsically harder to pin down. Nevertheless, two themes seem persistently to suggest themselves in various guises—Paradise and light—and may be worth closer scrutiny. But the speculative nature of such an enquiry should be stressed at the outset.

Much of the original decoration of the mosque, notably on the courtyard facade and on the underside of the ceiling in the sanctuary, has disappeared, and so theories as to the meaning of the surviving ornament in the building have perforce to be based on incomplete evidence. Nevertheless, the theme of trees is plainly dominant both inside and outside the mosque. The Quran states: "We have sent the rain ... and broken up channels in the ground, bringing forth ... orchards with dense foliage, fruits and pastures"; and again (Sura 77:41): "The righteous live in the shade of giant trees." The courtyard of the Córdoba mosque was planted with trees and maybe even—as in the

Great Mosque of Seville—broken up with water-channels. Here, then, perhaps is a foretaste of Paradise. Within the mosque proper, the strainer arches are treated in such a way that at the top their very structure seems to depict the leaves of a palm tree: a translation into stone of an idea present at the very genesis of Islamic architecture, in Muhammad's house at Medina. The organic quality of the stone carving can only strengthen such associations, while the polylobed arches with their ornament seem to open up like flowers. Thus, what with the living trees in the courtyard and the petrified simulacra of plant life within the sanctuary, the whole mosque becomes a sacred, a paradisaical garden. Nowhere is the vegetal ornament stronger than in the Chapel of Villaviciosa, and that from the dado level upwards, so that this *magṣūra* becomes a kind of earthly paradise. Its cynosure is the *mihirāb*, so often interpreted as the gateway to the Divine Presence; here it is a door in a literal sense, since it leads into a small chamber. Even the minaret took up such a theme, for according to al-Maqqarī it bore gold and silver apples, lilies and a pomegranate—the fruit of Paradise itself.

The theme of light is also taken up throughout the mosque. The Quran (Sura 57:19) promises the faithful "their garden and their light". As is entirely appropriate, that light is concentrated in the *magṣūra* area, where natural and artificial lighting systems converge. This is the airiest and loftiest section of the mosque, and here alone is to be found the decoration in mosaic, a medium which above all others absorbs and reflects light. The radiating voussoirs of the *mihirāb* are set in mosaic in such a manner that the *imām* standing in the niche would have looked as if rays of light were issuing from his head. And this so to speak symbolic light is reinforced by the actual light which plays on this area through the openings in the domes. The window grilles in the mosque would have filtered, shaped and even (through stained glass infill) coloured the light that entered the mosque through them. The room behind the *mihirāb* takes up the radiating theme somewhat differently, in its fluted shell ornament. In this area gold and white, the best reflectors of light, recur repeatedly, for example in inscriptions which highlight the sanctity of God's Word. References to celestial light proliferate in the dome above the *mihirāb* and are in turn strengthened by the lamp hanging from the dome. And gradations in light serve to drive home architectural distinctions. The huge surface area of the sanctuary and the low roof (despite the two-tier system of support) made for a dim mysterious light which, by not defining space precisely, contrived to make it seem still more ample. Individual areas could then be illuminated at different strengths by some of the thousands of oil lamps which used to hang in the mosque. But perhaps the principal unifying feature in this context is the ubiquitous horseshoe arch with radiating two-tone voussoirs, whose endless repetition makes the entire mosque a network of radiating lines and, by degrees, a metaphor of light. Small wonder, then, that the Emperor Charles V

(who assuredly was no Islamic art historian) could say, when he saw the Church of the Canons set amidst the mutilated mosque: "If I had known what you wished to do, you would not have done it, because what you are carrying out there is to be found everywhere, and what you had formerly does not exist anywhere else in the world."

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