Transformations: Suburban Cordoba During the Umayyad Caliphate, 929-1009

Carmen M. Tagle

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Transformations:
Suburban Cordoba during the Umayyad Caliphate
929-1009

by

CARMEN MARIA TAGLE

A master’s thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in satisfaction of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Advisor: Dr. Elizabeth Macaulay-Lewis

It has been noted how long it took for the Muslim presence in Iberia, starting in 711 BCE, to materialize into significant works of architecture. The continuous military campaigns, necessary to consolidate control of the Peninsula, were undertaken by a relatively small group of incoming Arab and Berber troops. This naturally limited the potential scope of construction to repairs of the Hispano-Roman infrastructure found in the conquered areas, mainly in the middle and the South of the Iberian Peninsula. The old walled city of Cordoba, locale of Roman and Visigoth rulers, served as the capital of the new emirate, with the reuse of its existing structures, bridge, walls, palaces, etc.

It would ultimately be the political stability and economic prosperity of tenth-century al-Andalus\(^1\) that would allow Abd al-Rahman III to declare himself Caliph in 929 CE and be able to undertake original architectural projects that would epitomize the centralization of his power and the legitimacy of his rulership. The development of the Cordoba suburbs, where a firmament of munyas, or residential villas, was already being built for affluent patrons in the Guadalquivir valley, was the prelude to the creation of the royal palatial city of Madinat al-Zahra, a large multi-use complex sited at the foothills of the Sierra Morena that would, for a brief moment from its inception in 941 CE until its destruction by fundamentalist Almohad troops in 1009 CE, serve as a center of power, administration and advancement of culture for the Cordoba Caliphate.

\(^1\) al-Andalus: Arabic name given to the geographical area of the Iberian Peninsula that came under Muslim control in the Middle Ages, from 711 CE to 1492 CE. The Oxford Dictionary of the Middle Ages, edited by Robert E. Bjork. Oxford University Press, 2010. www.oxfordreference.com
The Umayyads brought their own Syrian traditions to Iberia. Yet the Muslim conquest of Iberia involved not only the Arabization of the local population, but also, the “Iberization” of the newcomers. Abd al-Rahman III had inherited the blond hair and blue eyes of his Christian mother. This physical fusion was symbolic of the population in al-Andalus: outwardly and culturally Arabic yet fundamentally more complex.

This study will focus on the architectural and site planning developments of Suburban Cordoba during the reigns of Abd al-Rahman III (756–929 CE) and his son, al-Hakam II (912–961 CE). It will address how the architecture and planning of their new buildings combined Umayyad Syrian tradition with Roman classical concepts and local Visigoth methods and materials, adapting them to the specific characteristics of the new land they conquered while also incorporating features of contemporary Persian and Abbasid ceremonial culture. The innovations included not only construction techniques and decorative styles, but more importantly, new concepts in the planning of the buildings and the relationship of their interior and exterior spaces, reflecting the evolving concepts of sovereignty and legitimacy of the Cordoba Caliphate and the unusual nature of its court.
Acknowledgements

Thanks to my advisor, Professor Elizabeth Macaulay-Lewis, for helping me fall in love with Architecture all over again, this time incorporating the political ideas behind the forms. I am also indebted to Professor Anna Akasoy, for the opportunity to research and write papers on many subjects leading up to this thesis.

This work would not have been possible without the support of Alan Rose who, not only accompanied me to Madinat al-Zahra and the Cordoba Valley, but also constantly rescued me with his technical support and continuous encouragement. I am also grateful to our son Ariel, who cheered me on along the way and eagerly read and objectively commented on my papers.

Projects start with inspiration. The first seed was provided by my mother, who first took me to Andalucia at the age of five and then again in 2003 during our last trip together. And thanks to Graciela Mirabete, whose love of Spain continues to inspire me.
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Introduction

The Upper Palace of Madinat al-Zahra in Cordoba and the Sala de los Embajadores of the Alhambra² in Granada were both built to grant royal audiences and receive foreign embassies, yet they could not have had more different royal inspirations. By the time work began at the palatial city in 940 CE, Abd al-Rahman III (912–961 CE) had declared himself caliph and his power was absolute. In contrast, by 1250 CE, the sultan of Granada was governing a very reduced territory surrounded by the advancing Christian northern kingdoms, and he was politically subject to the Castilian king Ferdinand III (1217–1252 CE), to whom he was paying tribute since 1238 CE³. The reflection of these different concepts of power is found in the architecture of each of the two halls. The Cordoba Upper Palace is a monumental space with a central axis that continues beyond the building and gardens with carefully framed views framed of the endless landscape. In contrast, the Granada hall is inward-looking, a beautifully detailed yet circumscribed square space. Although both halls form part of buildings that incorporate gardens and water, these elements are also used quite differently: whereas in the former they seen as part of an infinite universe, in the latter they are isolated precious features. We find sculpted inscriptions in both buildings, but these also have a very different character. The epigraphic decorations the Alhambra refer to God whereas the ones in Madinat al-Zahra do not pertain to Heaven but rather, they speak of the sublime patron of the hall and of the talent of the officials who supervised its construction for the caliph's greater glory. Lastly, there is also a marked difference between the two sites: the Alhambra is built on a steep, naturally raised platform on the site of an old fortress, dramatically overlooking the city below, yet confined within its massive defensive walls and with no possibility of expansion. The placement of

² Alhambra =from Arabic (al kal'at) al hamra "the red (castle)," from fem. of ahmuru "red." So called for the sun-dried bricks of which its outer walls were built. "alhambra". Online Etymology Dictionary. Douglas Harper, Historian.
³ Hugh Kennedy, Muslim Spain and Portugal (Routledge, 1996), 276.
Madinat al-Zahra in contrast located at the foothills of the Sierra Morena and commanding panoramic views of the valley suggested, and actually provided, the possibility of expansion in virtually every direction. Al-Andalus reached its apogee during the tenth century and the buildings of that period were inspired by a newly established and confident polity envisioning a long dynastic reign.

In analyzing the buildings of the Cordoba valley, we will consider the traditions brought from Syria by the Umayyads and examine how those were continued, adapted, transformed and reinterpreted in al-Andalus as they became in contact with new topography and with established local standards. The aspects to be considered are construction methods, use of materials and decoration, concepts of interior space and the relationship of the building to its immediate surroundings and landscape as well as the symbolic use of luxury objects within the architectural settings.

Chapter I will briefly outline the development of the preceding cultures in the Cordoba area, Celtiberian, Roman and Visigoth, describing the material culture remains that would have been seen present by the time of the arrival of the Islamic troops in the eighth century. We will see how those forms and customs were later both adopted and adapted to new uses with new meanings. Chapter II will address how the early Islamic emirate (Abd al-Rahman I was proclaimed emir in 756 CE) established its polities and eventually began its own building program, secular and religious, in the Cordoba area. The Cordoba Mosque, built in the early eighth century by this first Umayyad emir, will be excluded from this study except as a reference point in terms of similarity of detailing and innovation with other Cordoba buildings of the same period.

Along with the examination of building remains, or studies thereof, we need to consider the historic background of their planning and construction and understand the nature of the society of its users. For this, we turn to comprehensive historic overviews of the specific time, such as those
written by Évariste Lévi-Provençal and Ramon Menendez Pidal. Both authors provide information gathered from Islamic chronicles and by historians such as Ibn Hayyan (d. 815 CE), who wrote a set of extensive Palace annals. These reports, often concerning specific events and royal activities, contribute information regarding the protocols and ceremonies that greatly influenced official buildings. The background provided is useful for Chapters II and III.

An integral study of the Cordoba valley includes the existence of the munyat, the suburban estates built by Islamic courtiers and located between the old city and the new caliphal city. An interesting point of view was provided by Glaire Anderson in her book The Islamic Villa in Early Medieval Iberia in which she highlights the unusual patronage of these munyas, several of which belonged to ‘unfree elites’ such as artists, concubines and slaves. Although this is only a part of the story, her scholarship contributes information to the nature of the Cordoba emirate and later caliphate. The importance given to a personal guard consisting of freed slaves and eunuchs who were totally loyal to the ruler is very revealing as it contrasts with the relationship between the emir/caliph and free courtiers who might challenge his power. These munyat, located mainly in the Western Suburb of Cordoba called al-Yanib a-Gharbi will be discussed in Chapter II.

Chapter III begins with the inception of the Cordoba Caliphate in 929 CE, followed by the construction of the palatial complex of Madinat al-Zahra. This is a time when the relationship of the ruler to his subjects drastically changes. The period coincided with the reign of Abd al-Rahman III (891–961 CE) and his son al-Hakam II (915–976 CE). Drawing on the information provided by Lévi-Provençal and Menendez Pidal on the structure and composition of the caliphate, we can correlate the evolving needs of this new type of royal court to the subsequent edifices that were built for it. We make these connections by also reviewing the observations and descriptions of Antonio Vallejo Triano, whose magnum opus on Madinat al-Zahra remains the most

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comprehensive study from the archaeological point of view. And architecturally, there is no better analysis than that of Felix Arnold, who isolates specific characteristics of the spaces in Madinat al-Zahra and the munya al-Rummaniyya, and compares them to other models of Islamic palaces and residences in the Western Islamic World. We also need to mention, in these days of computer generated representations, the charm and accuracy of the original 1911 study by Velázquez y Bosco, whose hand-drawn details are still very much relevant to the appreciation of both Madinat al-Zahra and al-Rummaniyya, mainly in view of the scant extant Archaeological remains.

There is a direct relationship between the development of the Cordoba caliphate, with its evolving ceremonial protocols, and the buildings designed to accommodate these new conventions. As Oleg Grabar writes in The Formation of Islamic Art, the Islamic conquests of the seventh century provided the expanding polities of the new religion with a large array of pre-Islamic and Mediterranean models symbolizing different aspects of authority and power. The main reception halls at Madinat al-Zahra, for example, embody some of these ideas. The spaces were created to serve the very important pre-Islamic tradition of welcoming visiting dignitaries who arrived offering allegiance (ba’yaa) and who then feasted in the company of the ruler resulting in the forging of important tribal alliances. The original encounters took place in a richly outfitted tent, with an established yet simple exchange of words between visitor and ruler. Three centuries later these audiences became complex protocols in which every movement was carefully choreographed, from the processional approach of the visitor to his placement within the reception space and in view of the caliph. This ceremonial evolution was no doubt influenced by the observations made by diplomatic embassies traveling between Iberia and the established court of Byzantium, as well as with the Abbasid Caliphate with its Persian-acquired traditions. And it is this chain of tradition and ceremonial evolution that generated the specific spatial characteristics of the buildings of our study.
Chapter III also examines the relationship between official buildings and the luxury objects arranged within them. Grabar writes that “…[during visits of dignitaries] treasures and storerooms were emptied out and royal art seems to have been identified by what a prince owned rather than by the physical nature of the setting in which he lived.”5 This idea explains the relatively plain interior surfaces found in the palatial city, which would have been offset by the placement of luxurious movable furnishings such as tapestries, ceramics and caskets, all attesting to the ruler’s prestige. Whether the objects had exotic or foreign origins or whether they were examples of local fine artistry directly controlled by the central government, such as the ivory pyxides, all added to the distinction of the ruler who owned them or bestowed them as gifts. The intellectual endeavors of al-Andalus are also relevant to the study of the architectural spaces at Madinat al-Zahra. Al-Maqqari (1578–1632 CE) wrote extensively of al-Hakam II's love of books and his initiatives to gather in the palace learned men brought from foreign and local areas who were occupied in writing, translating, binding, and illuminating manuscripts6. Susana Calvo Capilla, has contributed greatly by offering possible explanations for the survival of elements of Classical figurative sculpture within Madinat al-Zahra and the possible meaning of specific spaces in which they were found and for which there is no established typology in the Islamic world.

Lastly, Chapter IV will summarize some of the transformations we can observe by comparing the buildings of tenth century Cordoba with the political, cultural and social developments of the court and society and seeing how the Syrian traditions evolved into a different and unique version of their Eastern precedents, by utilizing the character of the Cordoba Valley and its established traditions to create a landscape of buildings and land that would reflect their concept

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of power in a new way.
Chapter I - In the Beginning: Precedents in the Cordoba Valley

Qartoba

The earliest archaeological remains of the city we now know as Cordoba date back to 3000 BCE\(^7\). The physical characteristics that made the area appealing to the original inhabitants continued attracting different groups through the following centuries. Francisco Villar writes that the first settlers, pre-Phoenician, were people of Iberian descent and that they called the city *Qartoba*, meaning “city of the river”\(^8\). This wide river, which we know today as the Guadalquivir (from the Arabic *wadi* = river, *kabir* = big) was both a means of transportation to the Atlantic Ocean as well as an obstacle to continuity from north to south, and therefore the first settlement was precisely established at the location of the only two seasonal areas of river crossing. In that way, both were available: access to fluvial transportation and communication with other settlements across the river. The Iberian Peninsula is divided geologically by chains of mountains and river valleys that run east-west, making transportation and connections easier in that direction than in the perpendicular north-south (Fig. 1). The Cordoba Valley is fertile, and it is located between the slopes of the Sierra Morena in the north and the river in the south. The economy of the first inhabitants was at first based on agriculture and later on the exploitation of minerals found in the mountains that were transported along the river for exchanges with other villages. The architectural settlements found at *Cerro del Cobre* (Copper Mountain) testify to these mineral excavations\(^9\). *Qartoba* received an influx of Greeks and Phoenicians starting in 800 BCE\(^10\), who immigrated attracted by its natural resources. By the fourth century BCE, at the time of the Punic wars between

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\(^8\) Francisco Villar, *Indoeuropeos y no Indoeuropeos en la Hispania PreRomana*, (Publicaciones de la Universidad de Salamanca, 2000), 65.

\(^9\) Antonio Vallejo Triano, *La Ciudad Califal de Madinat al-Zahra* (Almuzara, 2010), 64.

Carthage and Rome, the city and surrounding area were well known and attractive to new settlers from the East.

**Corduba**

The Romans arrived in 200 BCE as a result of the military campaigns against the Carthaginians. The first Roman settlement consisted of military troops coexisting in the indigenous settlement for a period of twelve years\(^\text{11}\). After this time, even though there was no longer a need for further military action, the Romans developed their own interests in this rich territory and concluded that maintaining control over the new lands was politically advantageous. The Roman Senate created two provinces in 197 BCE\(^\text{12}\), the *Hispaniae: Citerior* and *Ulterior*. General Marcus Claudius founded *Corduba* to be the capital of *Hispania Ulterior*. The new city was sited in an area located higher, topographically, than the original indigenous settlements, a few miles North of the river, which was renamed *Baetis*.

The first coins found minted with the name of the city date back to 80 BCE\(^\text{13}\), and the construction of the Roman Bridge (extant today) dates back to a similar period. The new city was laid out in traditional Roman urban style, with a thick perimeter wall and an orthogonal grid, ruled by the *cardo* and the *decumanus*\(^\text{14}\), oriented to the four cardinal points and organized in blocks or *insulae*, approximately 70 by 70 meters\(^\text{15}\) (Fig. 2a). The first archaeological findings date from 100 BCE. This was a time when the city core and infrastructure began being planned in a systematic manner and were built in stone. Limestone quarries were established from which this relatively soft

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\(^{13}\) www.arquecordoba.com/historia/romana/republicana. Research Group of the Universidad de Cordoba.

\(^{14}\) In Roman city planning, the *cardo* was a running street north-south while the *decumanus* streets ran east-west. The main avenue was called the *cardo maximus*.

\(^{15}\) Richardson, 117.
and workable stone was extracted and used to build the city wall and the new buildings. It is assumed that prior to that time, most constructions were made of round river stones, rammed earth floors, mud and wood walls and branch and frond roofing. Sometimes the interior of the mud walls was painted with colors: mainly red and black.

According to William E. Mierse, “there was little attempt to force or even encourage a particular type of Romanization, at least one that can be recognized in the archaeological record.”

Although the city of Corduba was the recipient of classical Roman public monuments, such as temples, palaces and a forum, the residences in the rural communities surrounding the city continued being built in their local manner and this allowed for the survival of traditional building techniques and as an additional result, local residential architecture was able to develop various hybrid forms. Remains of Republican buildings in Iberia, scant as they are, attest to a certain amount of “local responses to the activities of Romanization”, which would end with the homogenization brought in by the Imperial rulership.

The Roman civil wars between Caesar and Pompey found Corduba on the wrong side of the conflict, and the city was besieged by Caesar’s troops; many of its inhabitants were killed, and a considerable portion of the buildings was destroyed. In a radical turn of events, Augustus founded the city anew as part of the new political division of the Hispaniae, dividing the peninsula into several areas: first Lusitania, Tarragonensis and Baetica, with the addition of Carthaginensis and Gallaecia later. Corduba, as the capital of Baetica, received the added title of Colonia Patricia. In that period the city undertook major construction projects and expanded the territory by enlarging the wall all the way down to the Baetis River. That is the city configuration we see today

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16 Mierse, 1.
17 Mierse, 1.
18 Mierse, 53.
(Fig. 2b). The roads and sewers were built and the *cardo maximus* enlarged. At that time, there were not yet aqueducts but there were many aquifers in the area and the system of wells and cisterns served the original population.

Mierse notes: “As provincial capital, a cultural and intellectual center, and a major city in the wealthiest and culturally most developed region of the peninsula, *Corduba* must have been graced with monumental architecture”\(^{20}\). The reason for this tentative statement is due to the impact that centuries of continued occupation in the area of Cordoba and its valley have had a negative impact in the completeness of the archaeological record. It is known from texts\(^ {21} \) that there was a *forum* and a *circus maximus* and the remains of the Temple of Claudius Marcelus can still be seen nowadays on the Calle Claudio Marcelo (Fig. 3). The Temple was built on a platform on a base supported by foundations of rough local stone. The walls of the superstructure were built in concrete and clad in marble\(^ {22} \) as was all other decoration. Because of older Iberian artifacts found in the recent excavations, it is assumed that the Roman temple was built on the site of an old religious cult. The hexastyle temple had fluted columns and capitals in the Corinthian style, the preferred Augustan Roman order. This building would have been quite imposing and the remains indicate that the *Maison Carrée* in Nîmes, France\(^ {23} \) may have inspired its design (Fig. 4).

At this time of growth and *Pax Augusta*, the city expanded beyond its walls into *vici*, or neighborhoods\(^ {24} \), located along the new roads extending west and north of the city. “More remarkable still [than lavish city residences], and more common in this period are the great villas, which belonged to the elite of Roman Spain, and are to be found in the country outside the

\(^{20}\) Mierse, 238.
\(^{22}\) Mierse, 241.
\(^{23}\) Mierse, 243.
\(^{24}\) Richardson, 163.
These villas were the direct precedent to the Islamic *munyat* of the Islamic emirate and later, of the caliphate.

With the growth in population came the need for a greater systematization of the water infrastructure. During the Republican period, most residents used springs and wells as the ground water was found to be close to the surface. By the Augustan period, this method was no longer sufficient to provide for the larger population and this led to the construction of the *Aqua Augusta* aqueduct, transporting water from the mountains in the Sierra Morena to the walled city, and serving the valley along the way. Later on a second aqueduct was built during the reign of Domitian (81–96 CE), the *Aqua Nova Domitiana Augusta*. *Corduba* was one of the best-supplied cities in Hispania during the Roman period\(^2^6\) (Fig. 5).

*Corduba* was a main production and trading center for wine and olive oil and other products traveling back to Rome. There were considerable economic opportunities available to Roman colonists who came in search of fortune to this provincial area. As a result of the economic importance of *Baetica*, members of local elites acquired political prestige within the Roman Empire. This is evidenced by the fact that two emperors, Trajan (98–117 CE) and Hadrian (117–138 CE), were born in *Hispania*, as were other major figures in the Roman court. Richardson mentions that the western provinces had become thoroughly incorporated into the empire\(^2^7\). As a natural consequence, there was a growing role played by these local elites in determining architectural choices and these selections were a combination of imported Roman styles as well as local developments. Although few surviving examples are to be found in Cordoba per se, the pattern in other cities of *Baetica* “show clear evidence of sophisticated architectural choices

\(^{2^5}\) Mierse, 277.
\(^{2^7}\) Richardson, 317.
that...were probably paid for through local resources, monies of the local elites in many cases”\(^{28}\).

This pattern would be repeated during the Umayyad Caliphate, when local elites participating in the economic prosperity of Qurtuba, invested their fortunes in developing lavish suburban estates surrounding the city.

The fourth century CE brought a new phenomenon to the Iberian Peninsula: the advent of Christianity. This resulted in a new development of architectural forms influenced by immigrant Syrian Christian monks and modified by local techniques. As described by Pedro Castillo Maldonado in *Angelorum Participes*, there are two stages in the development of Iberian Christian practices in this period. The first period relates to the cult of the local martyrs, of which scant historical information can be found, such as San Acisclo and Santa Zoila (Fig. 6). The architectural manifestations of these cults were mostly in the shape of *martyria*\(^{29}\), following traditional pagan temple shapes. After the edict of Milan in 313 CE, Christian buildings started to be built throughout the empire and in Iberia there are some relevant remains corresponding to the Visigothic period (see below) where local cults expanded, foreign martyrs were imported\(^{30}\) and specific rituals such as the *Mozarabic Rite*\(^{31}\) were developed, housed in new buildings of specific characteristics. Évariste Lévi-Provençal writes that some of these suburban Christian churches were allowed to remain by the Muslim authorities during ninth and tenth centuries, as they were

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\(^{28}\) Mierse, 267.

\(^{29}\) Pedro Castillo Maldonado, “Angelorum Participes: the Cult of the Saints in Late Antique Spain” in *Hispania in Late Antiquity*, edited and translated by Kim Bowes and Michael Kulikowsky (Brill, 2005), 187

\(^{30}\) Castillo Maldonado, 187.

\(^{31}\) The *Mozarabic Rite* is the name given to the old liturgical system practiced by Christians in Visigoth and Medieval Spain (Iberia). Aside from differences in prayers and order of the Mass, the *Mozarabic Rite* prescribed a severe segregation between the clergy and the faithful and also between the different levels of initiation of the faithful. This was reflected in the layout of the sixth and seventh century churches built in Visigoth Iberia, where the nave is visually subdivided and altar area was shielded from view except from the priest. Horseshoe arches were used to constrict passage from one area to another, while providing light to pass in the upper portions of doorways. *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, The Gale Group Inc. 2003.
located outside of the old city\textsuperscript{32}. As such, they could have been possible models of construction techniques for the new-comers, as they included specific features as were horseshoe arches and specific masonry wall assembly patterns as will be described in Chapter II.

Although the archaeological record in \textit{Corduba} is scarce on the subject of early Christian churches, there is a very unusual example of a Villa/Palace/Bishopric in the suburban complex of Cercadilla that would have still been extant at the time of the Islamic arrivals. This site, found during construction work for the new train station, underwent a quick and limited archaeological study and was soon after destroyed by the erection of the new buildings\textsuperscript{33}. Some studies (mostly sponsored by the Catholic Church) lead scholars to believe that this was the seat of the \textit{Vicarius Hispaniarum}, the maximum Christian authority in the region. A more credible hypothesis argues that it was a residential \textit{villa} or a \textit{palatium} for Maximianus Herculeus one of the tetrarchs of the Later Empire, who resided in the city for a mere year (296 CE) during a campaign to pacify the North of Africa. In any case, the remains of this building would have had a significant influence in later constructions\textsuperscript{34}, both in planning and in materials. This complex, dated to the final years of the third century CE, was very large and had an unusual semicircular \textit{cryptoporticus}, or covered passageway, with spaces of different functions (such as baths, residences, basilicas, etc.) spun off the circular shape\textsuperscript{35} (Figs. 7–8).

In the late fourth and early fifth centuries there was evidence of the retreat of the general \textit{Corduba} population into the walled precinct and the abandonment of many of the suburban \textit{vici}. These dynamics, evident in the archaeological record, show that larger monumental buildings were


\textsuperscript{33} Kim Bowes and Michael Kulikowski, “Introduction” in \textit{Hispania in Late Antiquity}, 19.

\textsuperscript{34} Rafael Hidalgo Prieto, “El Problema de la funcion del Complejo de Cercadilla en Corduba”, \textit{Archivo Español de Arqueologia}, vol.87 (2014), 218. \url{www.academia.edu}.

\textsuperscript{35} Michael Kulikowski, “Cities and Government in Late Antique Hispania” in \textit{Hispania in Late Antiquity}, translated and edited by Kim Bowes and Michael Kulikowski (Brill, 2005), 61.
abandoned, becoming quarries for valuable materials such as marble, columns and other decorative elements. Some of these abandoned buildings were appropriated (by squatters) as residences in the city and any of the rare new houses were built in more modest styles and materials. In the years of the late Roman dominion of Corduba, maintenance of the public infrastructure decreased, with the resulting necessary abandonment of the two main aqueducts serving the villas in the vici in the valley no longer needed because of the diminished population. The lack of aqueducts also caused the disappearance of fountains in the city. All these would later need to be rebuilt and reinstated in the eighth century. In addition, the archaeological record demonstrates that the Roman orthogonal grid in Corduba began disappearing at this time. Houses and porches extended into the main roads in the absence of a strong municipal authority and responding to the evolving needs of a medieval city. This phenomenon was also evident in the East, as documented by Hugh Kennedy in From Polis to Madina. In Corduba, with the Roman sewage system being poorly maintained, new ad-hoc sewers began draining directly into the Baetis river, something that made the river water unusable for domestic use, and forced the population to rely on established wells and cisterns.

On the other hand, with the imperial power disintegrating and the resulting reduction of imported goods, new artisan workshops started appearing in the city. There were centers that worked stone and marble (from the newly available ‘abandoned building quarries’ in the city), as well as others that worked textiles, bone (including ivory) and metal. The paucity of external trade translated into a more self-sufficient economy and the development of local techniques in the manufacture of highly developed luxury objects that took on special importance during the Islamic rule in Iberia. This was all a sign of the retreat of Roman political power in the Peninsula as the remaining troops were fighting not only the incoming barbarian tribes, but also Northern Iberian

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36 Kulikowski, 59.
populations.

Alexandra Chavarria Arnau writes that the fourth century witnessed the apogee of the Roman villa in Hispania. She interprets this as a tendency towards the concentration of wealth in the hands of local Hispano Roman elites, resulting in “bigger and more complex architectural forms and richer decorative programs.” A new political system soon unified the peninsula when the Visigoths moved in to occupy the political vacuum created by the retreat of the Roman establishment. Yet, in spite of the new developments, we may say that although the Romans arrived on a particular date, “they never left.” In John Richardson’s view, the Visigoths acquired Roman power, systems, law and even their new religion, ruling as a minority over a majority population that was Hispano-Roman, spoke Latin (as well as budding new vernacular languages) and was Christian. This is paralleled by the evidence of the continued occupation of the Roman villas “without significant changes” through the end of the fifth century and their occupation with minor changes in the subsequent period.

It is interesting to note that the Visigoths’ presence in the Iberian Peninsula began, much as that of the Romans, “as a military occupation rather than as a territorial settlement.” After the fall of the Roman Empire, the city of Corduba remained briefly as an independent urban entity. There are not many extant remains of sixth and seventh century “new” local architecture. There was a considerable reuse of existing structures throughout the city, including public buildings such as the theater that were used as tenements. The villas outside the walls remained in continuous use in the

38 Alexandra Chavarria Arnau, “Villas in Hispania during the Fourth and Fifth Centuries”. In *Hispania in Late Antiquity*, trans/eds. Kim Bowes and Michael Kulikowski (Brill, 2005), 519.
39 Chavarria Arnau, 551.
40 Richardson, p. 318
41 Chavarria Arnau, 552.
42 Richardson, 304.
sixth and seven centuries, and they were later adapted into Islamic munya.43

The Visigoths established their capital at Toledo. After some years of isolation, Corduba came back into prominence when Visigoth king Roderick chose the city as his residence in 710 CE, occupying the area of the Alcazar, where archaeological remains “suggest that palatial structures of considerable size and ambition (were) constructed here during the Visigothic period.”44 Comparative studies made of the loggia columns indicate them to be similar to other Visigothic structures of 578 CE, with a possible precedent being the imperial palace in Constantinople.45 Visigothic rulership of Corduba was brief. By the late seventh century, North Africa was ruled by a coalition of Arab and Berber tribes. Tariq ibn Ziyad (670–720 CE) was the governor of Tangier.46 In 712 CE, the first Islamic troops, led by one of Tariq’s generals, Mugit al-Rumi (named ‘the Roman’) arrived in the city and moved into the Visigoth palace calling it the “Balat al-Ludrig” (balat from the Latin palatium= palace and ‘Ludrig’, a misspelling of Roderick’s name). When the new governor of the area, al-Hurr, arrived, al-Rumi was forced to leave, settling at first in Seville but later moving back to Cordoba in 717. That was the year when the city was made the capital of the new conquered territory. The archaeological remains indicate that this early occupation of the building was made with no architectural modifications to the existing structure. At the time, all efforts were put into repairing the Roman bridge and many areas of the city wall.

43 According to D. Fairchild Ruggles, “the term munya refers to a country house that is surrounded by gardens that are agriculturally productive and revenue producing as well as recreational and that provides a seasonal or temporary residence for the owner.” D. Fairchild Ruggles, Gardens, Landscape and Vision in the Palaces of Islamic Spain, Pennsylvania University Press 2003, 36.
44 Felix Arnold, Islamic Palace Architecture in the Western Mediterranean (Oxford University Press, 2017), 17.
45 Arnold, 17.
46 Hugh Kennedy, Muslim Spain and Portugal (Routledge, 1996), 5.
47 Roderick, the last Visigoth king, is depicted in the fresco at al-Walid II’s Qusayr-Amra in a grouping of monarchs including the Umayyad caliph himself, symbolizing the legitimacy of Umayyad rulership within the realm of other important contemporary rulers. Garth Fowden, Art and the Umayyad Elite in Late Antique Syria: Qusayr Amra (University of California Press, 2004).
By the early eighth century, the urban center was certainly focused on the southern end of the city, near the port and the river and the military/palace complex (the Alcazar).

As we research the architectural contribution of the Visigoths, who lasted only two centuries as a dominant polity, we face an impasse: lack of extant evidence complicated by a century-old peninsular polemic of historic interpretation regarding what constitutes ‘true’ Spanish character. There is a very small sampling of examples of (officially documented) Visigoth architecture researched by this author in a paper on the subject. This consists of a handful of seventh-century Christian churches that have been significantly restored, a fact that complicates accurate dating. Scholarly interpretations of these buildings fall into two categories: the first one sees the churches as “the offspring of the fusion of the two [Roman and Visigoth] cohabiting cultures”. The second one considers that the Visigoth state was only a political entity, and that the culture during the period from the late sixth to the early eighth centuries was essentially a continuation of Hispano-Roman culture, with no contribution from the incoming Germanic tribes.

There is one extant example of secular Visigoth architecture in Valencia that is relevant to subsequent Umayyad constructions. That is Pla del Nadal, a sixth century residence with walls in Ashlar masonry, stone columns, Corinthian capitals and carved ornament (Fig. 9). Pla del Nadal is variously described as “Late Antique”, meaning “Roman”, or sometimes as “Visigoth” depending on the sources.

Interpretation of the Visigoth legacy in Iberia is further complicated by the Syrian

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49 The Visigoths were originally Arian Christians, who converted to Nicene Christianity with king Recared I in 589, thus adopting the religion of the majority of their Hispano-Roman subjects. Roger Collins, *Visigothic Spain 409-711* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2006).
51 Dodds, 14.
influence. As recorded by the Arab historian al-Baladhuri (d. 892 CE)\textsuperscript{53}, the Persian and Arab invasions of the seventh century and resulting political instability caused may Christian Syrians to leave for the West. Ignacio Peña writes of the specific similarities between three of the seventh-century churches mentioned above and Syrian prototypes. These similarities include the general layout, including the segregation of the clergy from the laity and the side rooms flanking the apses\textsuperscript{54} as well as the low relief geometrical and vegetal relief ornamentation. The building construction in the churches consists of medium-sized ashlar masonry, carefully fitted with very small joints, using a type of technique, well-known in Syria but no longer in use in the last years of the Roman rule in Hispania.

Also relevant to this study, the Iberian churches (as well as the residence Pla del Nadal\textsuperscript{55} mentioned above) all include horseshoe arches in their interior elevations (Figs. 10–12). E. T. Dewald, in his provocative essay on the origin of the horseshoe arch\textsuperscript{56} argues the possibility that this architectural element entered the Iberian peninsula from Syria not once, but multiple times. These arches fit the Mozarabic Rite in that they provided visual closure between the laity and the clergy, while opening up the higher areas for light (see Note 31 above). Later on, Dewald argues, the Umayyads brought the tradition of the horseshoe arch from Damascus, as utilized by their ancestors in the first caliphate buildings.

As such, there are two parts to the Visigoth ‘architectural contribution’ that would have been found by the eighth-century arrivals. One can be considered “a continuation of their Late Roman equivalents”\textsuperscript{57} as evidenced by the reuse of Roman structures, both urban and rural. On the

\textsuperscript{54} Peña, 236.
\textsuperscript{55} Anderson, 65.
\textsuperscript{57} Collins, loc.2228.
other hand, there is also the introduction of techniques and detailing brought in by Christian Syrians (and Armenians) present in the early Christian churches mentioned above. D. Fairchild Ruggles helps us make the connection and she allows for a certain morphological influence from the Visigoths to Hispano-Islamic architecture. Where the horseshoe arches were used in the early Christian churches to enclose space and delineate individual apses and portals, the shape is now multiplied to create a sense of endless space and homogeneity.

The shape of the main living rooms in the local Iberian residential courtyard house evolved in the sixth century. The new rooms were built as rectangular broad halls with their long sides opening onto the courtyard and their entrances in the middle of this long side (Fig. 13). As amply documented, elite Romans reclined on couches when eating and these, called *triclinia* (plural of *triclinium*) were arranged in groups of three and laid out in a U-shape, leaving one side open for a door usually placed off-center for use by the servants. As such, the optimal shape for these original Roman dining rooms was the square or rectangle. The new broad halls would not have been conducive to this type of arrangement and it can be deduced that this type of layout evolved following lifestyle changes. The origin of the broad hall has not been pinpointed, but Arnold writes that it was not brought from the outside either by Visigoths or by other barbarian tribes, as no such prototypes have been found in their lands of origin although some have been found in North Africa. Along with the plan shape, broad halls also caused a change in the roof types: the Roman gable roofs became hip roofs (where the rafters slope in all four directions instead of only in two).

A last item of evolution is said to have occurred at the end of the late antique period regarding the

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59 Ruggles, 38.
60 Arnold, 30.
61 Arnold, 30
62 Arnold, 31.
roofing material or roof tiles: the large Roman flat *tegulae* were replaced by smaller semi-cylindrical baked earth tiles, which easily nest into one another and are lighter and easier to produce.\(^{63}\)

This re-use of forms and its interpretation is one of the crucial questions in the analysis of Islamic buildings in Iberia and in general in the Western Mediterranean. Ruggles points out that although examples of pre-Islamic architectural findings are mentioned in texts by Ibn Idhari or al-Idrisi\(^{64}\), no significant references are made in the same texts to ‘Roman or Visigoth’ precedents. We know that *spolia* (the reuse of building elements from abandoned or destroyed structures) were frequently utilized, as in the Cordoba Mosque and other buildings. The question is whether this entailed only a pragmatic use of available materials or whether it represented the symbolic replacement of the new Islamic society over the old. Arnold takes the practical approach that the new civilizations “did not replace local traditions with a completely new architecture but instead reinterpreted local traditions according to their new needs and goals”\(^{65}\). On the other hand, symbolism can be found in the appropriation of the forms as a reflection of power. This hypothesis, of course, would only be valid at the higher, more educated levels of Umayyad society, as it is difficult to accept that the various materials and *spolia* would have elicited the same type of reaction and reflection from the average attendee of the Friday service at the Mosque.

We will see in Chapter III that as the Islamic rule was consolidated in *al-Andalus* and economic prosperity and peace allowed for new constructions, a new hybrid type of buildings would arise in Iberia, integrating a blend of Syrian traditions with local techniques and materials and the inherited forms mentioned above would be utilized in new ways reflective of a different concept of power.

\(^{63}\) Arnold, 31.
\(^{64}\) Ruggles, 38.
\(^{65}\) Arnold, 31.
Chapter II- Transitions: From Villas to Munyas

Qurtuba and al-Yanib al-Gharbi

The arrival of Abd al-Rahman I (731–788 CE) in 756 CE was decisive for the fate of the city, now Qurtuba. The new emir unified the majority of the Iberian Peninsula, now known as al-Andalus within twenty years and he made Qurtuba its political and cultural center. The Umayyad dynasty continued their rule for two and a half centuries culminating in the reigns of Abd al-Rahman III (891–961 CE) and his son al-Hakam II (966–1013 CE). This coincides with a relatively prosperous and peaceful period during which the arts flourished as part of the impetus given to the pursuit of cultural prestige as part of the legitimacy of the newly proclaimed Cordoba Caliphate in 929 CE. The Islamic-controlled territory was somewhat reduced but the borders were more stable and there were diplomatic relationships established locally with the surrounding Christian kingdoms and internationally with foreign rulers.

Starting in the later eighth century the prosperity of the economy based on trade and agriculture resulted in a population growth that brought new residents to the old walled city, mainly in the northern and eastern areas. These had been emptied during the sixth and seventh centuries as the Roman Empire retreated. In addition, development increased in the Yanib al-Gharbi with the renovation of the existing infrastructure of roads and aqueducts serving the ancient Roman vici, and the reutilization of abandoned villas, as well as he construction of new munyat, the Islamic version of the former estates.

As Anderson writes, there is a clear building connection between the munyat and the

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66 al-Yanib al-Gharbi = Arabic name for the Western suburbs of Cordoba.
67 Arnold writes that the term munya was coined by the new emir and that the word may originate in the Latin manere, meaning ‘to remain’ (Arnold, 19).
Roman villas found in Iberia. Two examples cited are Cercadilla, discussed above, and Sao Cucufate, located in present day Portugal (Fig. 14). Anderson also names Pla del Nadal as an illustration of a seventh-century ‘Visigoth villa’ (Fig. 15). All three include examples of the rectangular broad halls around courtyards that were built in the munyat and also in the palace of Madinat al-Zahra (see Chapter III). The munya al-Rummaniyya, for instance, creatively used a rectangular hall with arcades framing two opposite views: one over its courtyard water basin and one over the valley, symbolizing the dual authority and possession of the private realm and also extending at least figurative authority over the landscape, as far as the eye could see (Fig. 16).

Abd al-Rahman I brought to Iberia the Umayyad royal peripatetic tradition of moving around the governed land, although this custom when imported to the Western lands would function on a smaller scale. In Syria the Umayyads built ‘country estates’, traditionally called the ‘desert castles’ by scholars (from the Arabic word qasr). The Iberian version could be said to be ‘suburban estates’ due to their proximity to the old city. One of the first buildings the emir built, even before the Cordoba Mosque, was al-Rusafa, a complex located a mile outside the walled city and named after his grandfather’s estate of Rusafa in Syria which was located quite far away from the capital, Damascus. This imported eastern tradition would uniquely correspond with the already existing Roman villas in the Cordoba area. As Arnold notes, “.. al-Rusafa was built at the site of such a villa, the Balat Rasin al-Burnusi. Parts of this villa have actually been detected during salvage excavations at the site”.

In her book Palaces and Estates of Cordoba, 711–936, Ruggles wonders “What impression did such estates [the 194 Roman villas or remains thereof, which would have been seen by the new
arriving immigrants in the area between Seville and Cordoba, probably half ruined in the eighth century, make on the newly arrived Muslims?"\(^72\) We know from court texts that the new emir set out to recreate the building traditions of Umayyad Syria, yet his nostalgia for tradition was flexible enough to allow the incorporation of local techniques introduced during construction. Arnold quotes from chronicles that described these first munyat, with the notation that they were built according to Syrian prototypes\(^73\) but in reality, the Iberian versions were different in several aspects. They were mostly located in elevated sites with panoramic views of the landscape, and they were oriented towards these prospects, a detail that quickly took on a new importance as a symbol of power and prestige\(^74\). From this angle, the Andalusi estates offered a contrast to their Eastern counterparts, most of which were oriented towards their exquisitely designed courtyards, while “views” of the surrounding landscapes, not always as green or fertile as Cordoba, were of secondary importance. On the other hand, a common feature in both the eastern and the western versions was the inclusion of extensive gardens, including decorative plants, fruit trees and bodies of water. In the case of the Iberian al-Rusafa, archaeological findings indicate that special hydraulic installations were made to support the new gardens and a new quarry was opened specially to provide the limestone for the new building\(^75\).

The first emir’s successors continued the practice of building munyat and Arnold provides an extensive table\(^76\) of such estates located in the Qurtuba area. According to Expiración García Sanchez, there were at least fifteen documented munyat in the area and all are cited in Ibn

\(^{72}\) Ruggles, 37.
\(^{73}\) Arnold, 20.
\(^{74}\) Ruggles, 38.
\(^{75}\) Antonio Vallejo Triano, “Transformation of a Caliphal City” in Revisiting al-Andalus, eds. Glaire D. Anderson and Mariam Rosser-Owen, (Brill 2007).
\(^{76}\) Arnold, 24-25. See Appendix for Table of documented munyat.
Hayyan’s *al-Muqtabas V* and in the *Court Annals* of al-Hakkam II\(^\text{77}\). The *Calendario de Cordoba*, of which only the Latin translation remains\(^\text{78}\), also records the existence of these *munyat*. From the dates in the court annals it appears that these estates were used all-year-round, as opposed to seasonally as a result of their proximity to the old city: a day’s horse ride\(^\text{79}\). These domains were much different than a place such as *Qusayr Amra*\(^\text{80}\) in Jordan, for example, which was a hunting lodge and palatial residence including baths and reception hallway and was used only for brief periods of time. In contrast, the area of the *Qurtuba munyat*, the old Roman *vici*, functioned as a true suburb to the city. As in the Roman era, *villas* were often built in order to ‘escape’ from the city, usually seen as an overcrowded and not always pleasant space, *Qurtuba* and the *Yanib al-Gharbi* functioned as a unit\(^\text{81}\) and closeness to the city increased the value of the land (Fig. 17).

There was a difference between the residential suburbs and the rural agricultural fields, located much further away from both city and suburbs, yet they were intrinsically related. An important element of royal power was the symbolism of the prosperity of the land. The agricultural functions of the *munyat* in the *Yanib al-Gharbi* were very important, as they were in the Roman *villas* that preceded them. Even beyond the practical advantages of production, as Anderson has noted, “the fertility of the land was interpreted as a sign of divine approbation, the reward bestowed by God for successful human enterprise”\(^\text{82}\). According to Islamic historians, it was the emirate that

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\(^{78}\) García Sanchez, 21. The *Calendario de Cordoba* was a text written in Arabic by bishop Recemund in 961 CE, and later maintained by others, in which were recorded the agricultural production, the events of the seasons, and also the existing buildings in the area in as much as they were related to any aspect of the agricultural production.

\(^{79}\) Anderson, 30.

\(^{80}\) Garth Fowden, *Art and the Umayyad Elite in Late Antique Syria: Qusayr Amra*, (University of California Press, 2004), 78.

\(^{81}\) Ruggles, 10.

\(^{82}\) Revisiting Al-Andalus, *Perspectives on the Material Culture of Islamic Iberia and Beyond*. Edited by Claire D. Anderson and Mariam Rosser-Owen, Brill, Boston 2007, 78.
had brought this flourishing to the new lands, and accomplishment was an integral claim of the legitimacy of the caliph. The importance of growth and fertility also extended to the symbolism of gardens, both in the munyat and later in Madinat al-Zahra. Both “shared a mythic concept of the sovereign as creator and steward of the land, expressed in the visual continuities that united architecture and garden”\textsuperscript{83}. “….they [the Umayyads] were not so much restoring Cordoba to its former glory as imposing themselves as bringers of a wholly new order. For this reason, Arabic historians and geographers stated that the bridges, walls and gates of Qurtuba were Islamic…”\textsuperscript{84}. There are no texts specifically acknowledging the previous Roman or Visigoth constructions, only vague references to the work ‘of others’.

**Examples of Munya Architecture**

Although Arnold, Canto and Vallejo Triano agree on Cercadilla (see Chapter I) as a local precedent of the munyat\textsuperscript{85}, the authors emphasize the differences rather than the similarities. They argue that the presence of water, the differences in levels and the views over the landscape were new and important elements taking priority in the planning and design of new Islamic buildings in Iberia, even as they combined nostalgic memories of previous Umayyad traditions such as the inclusion of gardens. Historically, \textit{al-Rusafa} is said to have been the first ‘garden state’ in al-Andalus\textsuperscript{86} and there are extensive records of the varieties of plants the emir commanded to have brought from his home in Syria. This tradition was continued in the next two centuries by combining ornamental plantings with serious agricultural undertakings, both made possible by the irrigation infra-structure inherited from the Romans.

\textsuperscript{83} Ruggles, 222.
\textsuperscript{84} Ruggles, 9.
\textsuperscript{86} Ruggles, 164.
As is the case with many Islamic court texts, historian Ibn Hayyan’s (987–1075 CE) writings are extensive but they do not contribute much to our understanding of munya architecture. On the other hand, they do provide information on the human events that took place within the architectural settings. In general, the munyat shared some basic characteristics, summarized by Glaire Anderson in “Villa (Munya) Architecture”\(^\text{87}\). They were walled estates encompassing land that could be used for hunting purposes and agricultural cultivation, as well as decorative gardens with exotic plants, many imported from Syria\(^\text{88}\). Within the estates, there were courtyard residences, as is typical of Umayyad secular architecture, with rooms arranged around an open courtyard of varying shape (square, rectangular or trapezoidal). There was often a water feature in the courtyard, as illustrated in more detail below in the case of al-Rummaniyya. The dimensions of the rooms were often determined by practical limitations of the length of available roofing beams, or the maximum diameter of vaults. Arnold writes extensively about the proportions of these rooms, mainly those used as main reception halls, where the exact viewing angles and positions of the host and the guests within the entrances were carefully arranged in order to maximize the resulting impressions of the prestige of the host by the visiting guests\(^\text{89}\) (Fig. 18). The author also points to the significant difference of the disposition of the rooms: the findings at al-Rummaniyya (and later at Madinat al-Zahra) indicate the use of the ‘broad rooms’, that is, having the rooms surrounding the courtyard be placed with their long sides adjacent to it, and annex spaces are then added at the two ends of the halls\(^\text{90}\).

At al-Rummaniyya, located two kilometers west of Madinat al-Zahra, the steep site lent itself to incorporating four rectangular terraces, with a large pool of water in the uppermost terrace,


\(^{88}\) Ruggles, 36.

\(^{89}\) Arnold, 90.

\(^{90}\) Arnold, 8.
which functions both as an ornamental body of water and, it is assumed, also as a natural cistern as well as a temperature coolant for the adjacent spaces during the summer (Figs. 19–20). There is evidence in the remains of this munya that Roman techniques in wall construction, including the use of large ashlar limestone blocks from local quarries, were in continued used in the Cordoba area. Marble was used for special decorative areas such as columns and lintels and these were brought from quarries located farther away in the Sierra Morena or even the area that is now Portugal. In many cases, marble columns were salvaged from Roman buildings, as is the case in the Cordoba mosque, where the columns are of different sizes and colors and their bases and capitals are built at different heights in order to accommodate the necessary dimensions to support the arches. As documented by Vallejo Triano, the system of wall construction at al-Rummaniyya was quite similar to that used at Madinat al-Zahra with units laid in the usual alternation of ‘soga y tizon’ (Figs. 21–22). The stone was finely carved on the exterior layers with minimal size joints. The blocks were covered with stucco made of plaster, sand and ground stone and brick. Most of this stucco was painted in the traditional dark red color (almagro). Velazquez y Bosco writes that the main areas of the terrace were paved with marble slabs, and other areas were paved with white limestone as well as a distinctive local violet limestone. The use of this violet limestone was a new development found after the Roman period. This material is found in the foothills of the mountains, farther north than the Roman development had ever extended, and it is therefore possible that its usefulness was not found until much later on, during the Islamic building development. The particularity of this limestone, unlike others of its type, is that it acts as slate in

91 Arnold, 59.
92 ‘soga y tizon’ = stretchers and headers (referring to masonry units and how they are laid out in a wall: stretchers are laid parallel to the wall and headers are laid perpendicular to the wall. (See Figures 21-22).
93 Arnold, Canto Garcia and Vallejo Triano, 186.
that it can easily be split horizontally into thin layers, making it appropriate for use as a flooring material, and conversely not for the thick masonry units needed to build walls.

**The Significance of Water**

Water was a vital element in the *munyat*. There are two aspects to be considered, the first is the practical availability of water for residential consumption, and the second is the use of water for symbolic or aesthetic purposes. Arnold, Canto Garcia and Vallejo Triano discuss both aspects, contrasting the previous “useful and technically proficient” aqueducts and water systems built by the Romans in Iberia with the use of water as a symbol of Umayyad power as illustrated for example by *al-Rummaniyya*\(^95\). In this *munya*, the hydraulic installations were complex and very sophisticated as they incorporated both the use of two underground aquifers as well as the retention of rainwater during the rainy season\(^96\). Water was brought into the main pool by different methods. The creation of this large pool, surrounded by main halls, so that guests could be awed by it, as well as the placement of the flowing intakes and distribution canals were all designed to symbolically connect the owner of the *munya* with the origin of the water, and to thereby express prestige. Beautifully described by Ricardo Velazquez y Bosco\(^97\) in his 1911 sketches, the pool included a cantilevered walkway along its perimeter, which provided the visitor with the illusion of walking on water (Figs. 23–25). There were also fountains at *al-Rummaniyya*, which echoed the ones at *Madinat al-Zahra*, decorated with lions and eagles\(^98\).

*Al-Naura*, built in 940 CE, is also deserving of mention. The sixteenth-century scholar Al-Maqqari, who compiled chronicles from the Cordoba emirate, describes the multiple water systems in this *munya*, which consisted of an aqueduct as well as a waterwheel and associated canals and

\(^{95}\) Arnold, Garcia Canto y Vallejo Triano, 191.
\(^{96}\) Velazquez y Bosco, 24.
\(^{97}\) Velazquez y Bosco, 24.
\(^{98}\) Arnold, Garcia Canto and Vallejo Triano, 190.
fountains. This munya was named after the concept of the waterwheel, an Islamic innovation that replaced older hydraulic technology. Roman aqueducts, ingenious as they were, depended solely on gravity to convey water from higher areas to lower ones over long distances. Islamic technology developed ways to move water in other directions, not always limited to gravity. The name of this important development remained in the Spanish language as noria, with the same meaning for waterwheel. Aside from the complex techniques of water conveyance in al-Naura, the actual appearance of the water was highly theatrical:

Water flowed through fabricated channels on a fantastic arrangement of connecting arches, emptying into a large pool at the edge of which was a lion enormous in size, unique in design and fearful in appearance...It was plated with gold and its eyes were two brilliantly sparkling jewels. Water entered through the rear of the lion and was spewed into the pool. It was dazzling to behold its splendor.

Pragmatically, after the aesthetic gesture was accomplished, the design system was planned to allow the water to flow onto the gardens, irrigating them and symbolizing the fact that the owner of the munya, in this particular case the emir, was the sole provider and controller of this life-giving precious substance. These munyat were an important precedent to the later gardens and pools of the Nasrids in the Alhambra in Granada where the water displays reached an extreme importance, giving the buildings an added dimension of movement and sound.

Miradores

The use of miradores is another important aspect of the architecture of the valley, with framed views created by the careful placement of the openings in the walls of the villas of suburban

99 Ruggles, 50.
100 Ruggles, 50.
101 From the Spanish verb ‘mirar’, that means to direct one’s view.
Qurtuba. These vistas over the landscape on the steep sites were manipulated so that the owner was provided with a view that was only his, from his own chair, and which encompassed all he owned, or more importantly, all he could perceive to own. These miradores are described in Arabic texts, such as that of historian-polymath al-Razi’s (d.925 CE), and are called manzar/manazir, derived from nazara (to perceive)

“When the mirador is a place associated with a king (or caliph, or chief), such as a throne room, reception hall or portal, the spatial or visual centrality of the mirador replicates the social centrality of the king.”

The munyat took great advantage of the topography of the Cordoba valley and utilized the natural slope to provide the buildings with great views over the surrounding landscape. This acted in two ways: from the inside, a visitor would be impressed by the panoramic expanse. From the outside, the buildings would appear prominently to approaching visitors along the ceremonial road from Cordoba, symbolizing authority, prestige and power. This was the case both for the court elite in their suburban estates as well as for the ultimate ruler, the caliph, in his palatial city.

**Munya Patronage**

*Al-Rusafa* was very important for the first emir; and the scant available information about it is limited to texts from Umayyad chroniclers such as al-Razi. For the Andalusi royalty, the Syrian al-Rusafa was symbolic of the dynastic continuation for power: the Abbasids had moved their capital to Baghdad from its original site in Damascus and therefore Abd al-Rahman I was able to still connect with Syria and his own lineage, distinct from the ‘usurping’ Abbasids. By extension *Al-Andalus* could then, at least theoretically, embrace the continuation of the Umayyad lineage.

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102 Ruggles, 101.
103 Ruggles, 107.
104 “Al Razi said: The plot of the villa of this al-Rusafa in Islam belong to Razin al-Burnusi, one of the Berber leaders…..Thus the emir, the Immigrant, Abd al-Rahman b. Mu’wawia purchased it…” (Anderson, 189- From Ibn Hayyan, *al-Muqtabas*, 234).
105 Dodds, 95.
Following al-Rusafa however, and in later generations, munya ownership extended to a much wider circle of court aristocracy, including individuals that formed a part of the “unfree elite” as Anderson calls them. Most munya owners were men, although, as documented, there was at least one woman. These individuals had started life in inferior positions, such as slaves and concubines, and had received royal privileges during their service in the caliphal court. Through policies instituted prior to the reign of Abd al-Rahman III, the upper levels of the military were occupied by elites of Slav origin known as saqaliba. The reason these individuals were successful in their court advancement is that, having originated outside of the Andalusi community, they did not have any competing local allegiances and could be trusted to be absolutely loyal to the Umayyad ruler to whom they owed everything. Exceptional saqaliba were able to reach high positions in the court, could even be adopted by the Caliph and could eventually attain manumission. Many were eunuchs, a fact that simplified matters since not being able to have descendants, there could be no hereditary ownership disputes.

Anderson in *The Islamic Villa in early Medieval Iberia* points out the unusual nature of the Umayyad Court by highlighting the examples of munya ownership. For instance, there was Ajab, an important concubine of emir al-Hakam I (796–822 CE). She bore him a son, which gave her both prestige and the title of umm-walad but more importantly, it guaranteed her manumission upon the death of the emir. The information is recorded in the court chronicles, which, according to Anderson, begin to mention women during al-Hakam’s reign. “Among [al-Hakam I’s] most favored concubines, among those remembered for their merit….and after [his death], were Ajab, mother of his son Abu ‘Abd al-Malik Marwan,…..for whom was named the Munya of

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106 Anderson, 32.
107 Anderson, 32.
108 Anderson, 18.
Ajab…given by her as a pious endowment for the sick”\textsuperscript{109}. It is quite possible that Ajab was Berber and was of noble birth\textsuperscript{110}. Her munya combined ornamental and recreational uses with agricultural activities\textsuperscript{111} and she dedicated the resulting profits to maintain a nearby lepper colony, to which the villa was ultimately donated. In Anderson’s view, Ajab’s case illustrates a new role of women within the Caliphal court, not only as mothers of favorite sons, but also as patrons of the arts, including architecture. This is also an unusual case where the munya did not revert back to royal ownership after the death of its patron.

The eunuch Nasr Abu al-Fath\textsuperscript{112} was another well-known munya patron. Nasr started his career in the military, eventually becoming involved with the cultural activities of the court, overseeing the second expansion of the Cordoba Mosque under Abd al-Rahman II. Nasr’s munya, sadly no longer extant, was extremely well known, even having poetry written about it:

…in the Munya of Nasr,…there a palace was finished that resembles the moon rising in its splendor. It is very near for one who is able to see it (from Qurtuba) in a welcoming place, surrounded by flowerbeds and a river running below its parks\textsuperscript{113}.

As many of the properties of these ‘unfree elites’, Nasr’s villa returned to the court’s ownership after his death, Abd al-Rahman gave it to famous Ziryab (Abu Hasan Ali ibn Nafi), the exiled cultural guru who came from Baghdad and transformed the fashion and music life of Qurtuban society. Ziryab was an educated North African slave who rose in the Umayyad court due to his artistic talent.

\textsuperscript{109} Anderson, 18. The quote is from Cordoba historian Ibn Hayyan (987–1075 CE), Muqtabis II.
\textsuperscript{110} Anderson, 19.
\textsuperscript{111} Garcia Sanchez, 21.
\textsuperscript{112} Anderson, 20.
\textsuperscript{113} Anderson, 20.
Ja’far is another Slav eunuch mentioned by Ibn Hayyan\textsuperscript{114}. He was in charge of many architectural projects for the Cordoba caliphs, possibly including the building that is said to be his own residence within Madinat al-Zahra. (The ownership of the building named “House of Ja’far” is not documented). His most important project was to oversee al-Hakam II’s expansion of the Cordoba Mosque, including the magnificent mihrab. Not only is this recorded in the court annals, but Ja’far’s name in fact appears in the inscriptions in the mosque in several places, “equating architectural patronage with piety”\textsuperscript{115} as Anderson writes.

\textit{Munya Decoration}

There are very few remaining examples of decorative sculptures or details from the munyat, as most of these buildings are no longer extant. Of the surviving examples, most have vegetal motifs, but in the case of al-Rummaniyya, animal themes are also present\textsuperscript{116} including birds, dogs, lions and rams (Fig. 26 a, b and c). Writers on Western Islamic art combine discussions of architectural ornament found in column capitals and fountains of this period with the detailing of contemporary ornamental luxury items, such as the many ivory caskets\textsuperscript{117} which have been found in the area of these munyat, as well as in Madinat al-Zahra, and which bear witness to the development of the special development of the decorative arts in al-Andalus.

Taking into consideration that the individuals in charge of these artistic developments were personages such as Ja’far (in charge of the textile workshops as well as architectural detailing) and Durri al-Saghir (in charge of the royal caliphal ivory workshop at Madinat al-Zahra), we see a court that included a cultured elite, rewarded and promoted by the caliph for their talent and loyalty and regardless of their origins or ethnicity. These members of the court were able to own properties

\textsuperscript{114} Anderson, 33.
\textsuperscript{115} Anderson, 35.
\textsuperscript{116} Anderson, 67.
\textsuperscript{117} \textit{Al-Andalus, The Art of Islamic Spain}, (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992), 190-204
(munyat) on their own, in which they could receive and entertain their peers and also their ruler, furthering their own prestige and influence. In the case of Durri al-Saghir, it is said that that the minister fell out of grace with the Caliph due to accusations of embezzling and he offered his estate in return for forgiveness in May of 973 CE. There are specific texts documenting the many visits of the Caliph to al-Rummaniyya as a guest of al-Saghir, and it can therefore be assumed that this was indeed, a most valuable present.

**Evolution of Munya Functions**

Anderson writes “The extent to which the munya had become the Cordoban expression of an international Islamicate notion of refinement and cultural capital, and the way in which the munya was then tied to Umayyad ideals of political authority and good governance is evident in the increasing visibility of the munya as a setting for official state events, and not simply pleasurable court retreat”. Examples of these new functions included housing for foreign ambassadors, in a manner learned from emirate envoys to the Byzantine court, such as reported for example by Andalusi poet al-Ghazal, who was sent by Abd al-Rahman II to visit Emperor Theophilus (829–842 CE). The envoy was lodged luxuriously in a residence near the Imperial Palace. In return, envoys from rulers outside al-Andalus were often housed in local munyat (plural of munya). Al-Maqqari (1578–1632) writes at length about the visit of King Ordoño in 952 CE, who was visiting in order to plead for assistance in his political struggles in Galicia. Ordoño stayed in al-Naura, the munya of the Waterwheel. “…he continued his march towards the dwelling assigned to him by the Khalif, which was the palace called an-An’urah. Preparatory to the reception of his guest the Khalif had caused the palace to be strewn with every variety of carpet and cushion and provided with

\[^{118}\text{Arnold, Canto Garcia, Vallejo Triano, 183.}\]
\[^{119}\text{Arnold, Canto Garcia, Vallejo Triano, 185.}\]
\[^{120}\text{Anderson, 137.}\]
\[^{121}\text{Anderson, 138.}\]
every description of furniture….the Christian king and his suite being treated with the greatest
attention and respect.”

The beautiful descriptions of the various physical features of the munyat do not mean that
these estates were not used for other, more chilling activities such as executions. Anderson writes
about the events of March 2, 939 CE, when one hundred prisoners of war were taken to al-Naura
and were beheaded one by one as Abd al-Rahman III watched “from a literally superior position,
the execution of those presumably hostile to Umayyad hegemony.” The view of the blood
soaked gardens of the munya while presided by the ruler must have emphasized where the political
control of the caliphate truly lay, and that pleasure and official acts could be combined upon the
wishes of the ruler.

**From Emirate to Caliphate**

During the ninth century, and starting during the reign of Abd al-Rahman II (792–852 CE),
there was a new formative period during which new traditions evolved in the emirate. It was a time
when increased information flowed westwards from the Abbasid Empire regarding administrative
forms and functions, many of which in turn were based on Persian models. Also borrowed from
the East were some models of dealing with neo-muslims (muwallads). Lévi-Provençal considers
that as a political entity, the reign of this particular Andalusi emir resembled more that of the
Abbasid caliph than those of his own dynastic Umayyad precursors, with their Bedouin and
‘primus inter pares’ traditions. The Iberian rulers, starting with Abd Allah (888–912 CE), started
showing themselves less and less to their subjects and according to Isa al-Razi and Ibn Hayyan,

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122 Al-Maqqari *The History of the Mohammedan Dynasties in Spain, V.2*, translated by Pascual de
Gayangos, (The Oriental Translation Fund, London, 1843)
123 Anderson, 144.
124 Lévi-Provençal, 7.
began following more and more detailed ceremonial court protocols. The refinement of these protocols continued in subsequent reigns. For example, there is a recorded narrative from Jean de Gorze where he describes his meeting in Cordoba with the *emir* and he is partially reclining in a *divan*. But later on, by the time of al-Hakam II, the caliph is no longer reclining but rather he is sitting on a throne (*sarir*), as are the Christian Kings and also the Baghdad caliph. Part of this evolution also included the growth of bureaucracy, which becomes, on the Persian mode, very stratified, while at the same time it needs to be kept in direct proximity to the ruler. A part of this bureaucracy is the financial system. It is significant that in *al-Andalus* the head of the finances in the court was often a non-muslim either, a *mozarab* or a Jew. Hasdai ibn Shaprut (915–970 CE) was at one point the Chief of Finance, and so was Rabi, son of Teodulf. It was indicative of the composition of the bureaucracy that caliph Muhammad I (852–886 CE) is said to have received complaints from the religious clerics regarding the ‘amount of *dhimmis* serving in court’.

As *emir*, Abd al Rahman III concentrated his efforts on the pacification of the peninsula, addressing *muwalladun* rebellions, such as that of Ibn Hafsun and stabilizing the internal politics, both by military prowess and also through diplomacy. After that, “the caliph became a grand and distant figure”. As an illustration we see an evolution in the protocol of caliphal

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125 Lévi-Provençal, 14.
126 Jean de Gorze (900–974 CE), abbot of Lorraine, diplomat of Emperor Otto I, visitor to Cordoba.
127 Lévi-Provençal, 489.
128 Lévi-Provençal, 31.
129 *Dhimmis* were non-Muslims who lived within Islamic lands under the protection of Muslim law. A covenant of protection was made with conquered “People of the Book”, which included Jews, and Christians. Sabaeans, Zoroastrians and Hindus were all *dhimmis*. They were allowed to practice their religion but were subject to a special tax.
130 Lévi-Provençal, 32.
131 Ibn Hafsun (850–917 CE) (original last name Hafs) was a Christian Iberian local who converted to Islam (*muwallad*) and modified his last name to Hafsun. He became an outlaw rebel against Umayyad power, rallying disaffected *muwallads* and *mozarab* and becoming a serious threat to the Cordoba authorities. Menendez Pidal, 199.
movements during this transition from emirate to caliphate. The departures and arrivals of the royal person were always formal events, announced to the public and displaying military companies and personal slave eunuchs. In the past, the subjects were able to see the caliph in person and acclaim him as he briefly crossed their streets. These open public ceremonies were to end with the construction of *Madinat al-Zahra*, as by the time of al-Hakam II, the caliph became more ‘static’, staying in ‘his’ new city, and expecting the subjects to travel to render honor to him. There is also an evolution in the celebrations related to a victorious return from military campaigns or a departure to a new campaign. During the emirate, and the first few years of the caliphate, it was traditional for the ruler to ride at the head of the troops around the city walls and enter the city at the *Bab al-Sura*, the gate of the old Alcazar. Heads of the vanquished were displayed atop the fortified walls. With the construction of *Madinat al-Zahra* all new propagandistic displays were now to take place along the *Camino de las Almuniñas*, the road leading from Cordoba towards the caliphal city, entering at the new gate of *Bab al-Sura*. Military parades and displays took place in the main courtyard immediate to this entrance or in the courtyard of the Upper Palace as described above. The caliph was now much less accessible to the general population.

All these changes in the staffing of government entities and new protocols of power had a distinct influence in the planning of *Madinat al-Zahra*, both in terms of the new conventions of ceremony, the use of a throne and the housing of a much larger bureaucratic body. Later on, with the rise of prestige and importance of the Cordoba caliphate, audience halls were constantly used to receive ‘clients’ arriving to pledge alliance and also foreign dignitaries traveling to establish new alliances. The accommodation of activities peripheral to these audiences, such as circulation spaces, serving of food, etc., become influential to the design of the buildings, as we will see in

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Press, 1979), 41.

133 Vallejo Triano, 124.
more detail in Chapter III.

The munyat and Madinat al-Zahra, acting together encompassed the ceremonial movements of the caliphal court, with the former acting as stations along the way between the old city and the new palatial complex. The following excerpt from al-Maqqari’s The History of the Mohammedan Dynasties in Spain reflects this relationship, describing the passage of King Ordoño from the munya al-Naura towards Madinat al-Zahra:

….Ordoño and his suite entered into a passage formed on each side by bodies of infantry placed in such admirable order that the eyes were dazzled at their uniformity, and so thickly set that the mind was bewildered at their numbers. Such was moreover, the brightness of their armour and weapons and the variety and richness of their uniforms, that the Christians were actually stupefied at what they saw, and repeatedly crossed themselves in amazement at the imposing scene; they looked on with their heads down, their eyelids contracted, and their eyes half-closed until they arrived at the outer gate of the palace of Az-zahra, ……where all those who had gone out to meet Ordoño dismounted. The Christian king continued to the Bab-al-Suddah…[proceeding towards the Upper Palace]…arrived in front of the eastern hall, Ordoño stopped, uncovered his head, took off his bornus, and remained for some time in an attitude of astonishment and respect, under the impression that he was now approaching the radiant throne of the Khalif.\textsuperscript{134}

\textsuperscript{134} Al-Maqqari, 162.
Chapter III- *Madinat al-Zahra* - Evolution of the Islamic polity in *al-Andalus*

**Building and Siting of the New City**

Abd al-Rahman al-Nasir proclaimed himself caliph in the year 929 CE (316 AH) during a service in the *aljama*\(^{135}\) Mosque, thus establishing the Caliphate of Cordoba (See map of the Cordoba Caliphate in fig. 27). This self-proclamation needed to be more than a mere self-declared title and it was duly accompanied by specific practical initiatives to consolidate the new polity and the legitimacy of its ruler such as the planning of a new city. The Abbasids, for example, had moved their new capital away from Damascus and al-Mansur had founded Baghdad (*Madinat as-Salam*, City of Peace) in 762 CE, symbolic of establishing a departure from the Syrian Umayyad influences and to reflect the new proximity to the Persian population that had been instrumental in the success of the new dynasty. Similarly, the Fatimids had declared a new caliphate in 909 and would eventually build a new city in Cairo in 969 CE (*Madinat al-Qahira* or the city of victory)\(^{136}\). The founding of a new city was always of emblematic of power and new beginnings.

Other initiatives of the new Qurtuba caliph would include new gold coinage and public works such as the construction of the *minaret* in the Cordoba Mosque, both emblematic in their own way. The emirate had only issued silver coins, known as *dinars*. Gold coins were a prerogative of caliphs. The first gold coins were minted by Abd-al-Rahman III in 929 CE as a symbol of legitimate authority\(^{137}\). *Minarets* evolved from the practical need for an elevated place for the *muezzin* to call the times for each of the five daily prayers. In time they became imposing architectural elements dominating the skyline of a given city, possibly derived from Christian Church towers, familiar to the Umayyads from Syrian churches and possibly also Northern

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\(^{135}\) *Aljama*, from the Arabic ‘*jami*’, refers to the type of Mosque (*a masjid jami*) that is central to a community and where Friday prayers are conducted. This is as opposed to smaller mosques that may exist in a city.

\(^{136}\) Arnold, 60.

Visigothic churches, which, by their presence (and the sound emitted from them, originally the sound of bells or the human voice) established the superiority of the new faith. In the case of the Caliphates (Cordoban, Fatimid or Baghdad versions), the rule of the caliph was both political and religious. The construction of the Cordoba mosque minaret, visible to the entire city, was a visible symbol of this dual role as well as of the dominance of Islam in the territory.

Abd al-Rahman III used the munya al-Naura (see Chapter II) as a residence while the Alcazar in the walled city continued to serve as the political and military center. The existing location of this complex adjacent to the Mosque was connected to it via a special tunnel created by emir Abd Allah (844–912 CE) to facilitate safe passage and called a siibii. This proximity emphasized in practical terms the dual nature of the rulership. Yet, the presence of the ruler in the Cordoba Alcazar and Mosque would change soon after the proclamation of the Caliphate.

The construction of the new caliphal city was both a symbolic move and a necessary one, as the new construction would no longer be limited in its planning by the old city walls or any surrounding structures. The city needed to accommodate the growth of the caliph’s ‘private staff’. The saqaliba, described in the last chapter and existing as a significant class of courtiers since the first Andalusi emir, increased greatly in number during the rulership of the first caliph and extended through the roles of personal domestic staff, palace maintenance, personal guards, cooks, etc. They numbered, by the end of Abd al-Rahman’s reign, approximately three thousand five hundred. The facilities in the Alcazar were therefore rapidly outgrown.

Aside from the above mentioned comparisons to other ‘new caliphal’ cities such as

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139 Vallejo Triano, 121. He quotes Ibn Hayyan texts of the decade of 920-930CE describing both the activities and pernoctations of the caliph and the lack of any type of new improvements to the residential quarters in the Alcazar.
140 Vallejo Triano, 121.
141 Ruggles, 6.
142 Vallejo Triano, 123.
Baghdad or Cairo, there are questions about the founding of Madinat al-Zahra raised by the lack of textual evidence about its planning. There are well known accounts of the complex planning and astrological consultation process preceding the siting of Baghdad by al-Mansur and al-Qahira by Jawar al-Siqilli. The intellectual circles next to the caliphs were consulted, and there are lengthy accounts of the selections made, the auguries, and so on, etc. These accounts also extend to other planned cities such as Samarra\textsuperscript{143}. But the texts on Madinat al-Zahra are silent about these preparations and selections. Vallejo Triano projects his own views on the guiding principles for the planning of the Caliphal city based of the similarity of the philosophical views of al-Farabi’s\textsuperscript{144} The Perfect or Virtuous City (al-Madina al-Fadila) in his treatise on The Perfect State\textsuperscript{145}, with the built reality of Madinat al-Zahra\textsuperscript{146}. Given the site and the space, a perfect city could be planned totally anew. This is an interesting point of view and Vallejo Triano links his own arguments with those of Maribel Fierro, who documents the familiarity of the attributed planner of Madinat al-Zahra, Maslama ibn abd-Allah\textsuperscript{147}, with the philosophy of al-Farabi during his travels in the Levant\textsuperscript{148}. As a relatively new politico-religious entity, the Caliphate was constantly exploring models to symbolically express the perfection of the dual rulership. The round city of Baghdad for example, took what was considered a flawless, possibly God-given, circular shape for the plan of the city. Political philosophers like al-Farabi endeavored to list the qualities that were to be emulated by a (Islamic) ruler and the citizens of the polity he guided. Although al-Farabi did not provide specific instructions, his texts encompassing particular qualities in the ‘perfect city’ and the direct

\textsuperscript{143} Vallejo Triano, 128.
\textsuperscript{144} Al-Farabi (Abu Nasr al-Farabi, b.870 CE) was an Islamic philosopher who lived in Baghdad and Egypt and wrote extensively on political matters.
\textsuperscript{146} Vallejo Triano, 134.
\textsuperscript{147} Arnold, 61.
\textsuperscript{148} Vallejo Triano, 137.
leadership of the rightful caliph, were often used as inspiration. A significant aspect of al-Farabi’s treatise discussed specifically the cultivators (al-fallahin)\(^ {149} \) as important requirements of the rulers of the perfect city. Therefore, the connection between a fertile landscape and the legitimacy of the caliph had to be intrinsically connected.

**Madinat al-Zahra Within the Landscape**

The site of *Madinat al-Zahra* is not strategic or defensive, and although there is proximity to material resources such as water and stone quarries, most authors agree that the location was selected for its visual characteristics, of which the height and views were primordial (Figs. 28–29). Vallejo Triano writes “The city was conceived with both political and propaganda intentions as the best and most refined formal representation of the caliphal state.”\(^ {150} \) The commanding view from the highest point has visual amplitude of approximately 90 km over the valley and across to the walled city of Cordoba. The slope is as much as 15 to 20 percent and therefore considerable amounts of ‘cut and fill’ were necessary in order to manage reasonable circulation between the various levels. We can assume that these physically difficult transformations were part of the image of caliphal power being asserted over nature, as well as a display of wealth. The selected site used a part of the original Roman aqueduct from the Augustan era, rebuilding some portions in order to maintain the required water pressure between the source and the end points\(^ {151} \) (Fig. 30). Similarly, the original Augustan road network had to be extended northwards, as the Roman settlement had never reached the northern reaches of the new city\(^ {152} \). In describing the site, Vallejo Triano writes that “the mountain itself was incorporated as an integral element of the city….and within the walls, its topography was adapted so that the exact hierarchy and image for each individual building was

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\(^ {149} \) Anderson, 157.

\(^ {150} \) Vallejo Triano, 72.


\(^ {152} \) Vallejo Triano, 70.
accomplished, with the result that the entire city is fundamentally an exercise in iconography.\footnote{Vallejo Triano, 73.}

Instrumental in the planning of the complex was the need to house an expanded Caliphal court including its military forces, all of which Velazquez y Bosco numbers as 30,000\footnote{Velazquez y Bosco, 39.}. It is instructive to read the classification of the composition of the permanent and temporary members of this court: 6000 women (concubines and servants), 3700 eunuchs and slaves and 12,000 troops. In addition, there needed to be spaces for the “jurists, cadis, poets and scribes”\footnote{Velazquez y Bosco, 9.} who occupied specific areas within the complex. Aside from the permanent inhabitants, there also needed to be areas for the visiting dignitaries and their entourages, although some of them were at times housed in some of the neighboring \textit{munyat} as guests of royal court members as described in Chapter II.

There have been many theories about the name of the new city, of which the most romantically popular is the story that the first caliph named it after his favorite concubine. More believable is the hypothesis of Lévi-Provençal (and others) who look to the Arabic root ‘zhr’ translating it to al-Zahra with the meaning of ‘shining or sparkling’, thus the Shining City\footnote{Lévi-Provençal, 340.}.

\textbf{The Urban Structure}

\textit{Madinat al-Zahra} is built on three areas occupied west to east respectively by the military troops, the caliph and his royal court and the actual 'medina' including the market and the \textit{aljama} mosque\footnote{Arnold, 63.} (Fig. 31). There is a natural logic in this planning as the royal residences are protectively placed in the middle, with the military troops massed at the Western end, at the edges of the city, and with the townspeople placed closest to the old walled city. Antonio Menendez Pidal writes about how Abd al-Rahman III created incentives for representatives of the main occupations of the city to move to this new site. Reportedly, he contributed 400 \textit{dirhans} to all business owners who
agreed to relocate themselves. Menendez Pidal is quick to add that 'this did not affect Cordoba's economic development' and that the expansion of the business activity into Madinat al-Zahra was a natural result of the population growth of the old city.

Ninety percent of the site is still unexcavated including the bulk of the westernmost and easternmost areas. As a result, a visitor's experience of the extant remains reveal only the middle area of the royal residences, audience halls and gardens, while we await further excavations at the two outer extremities for the rest of the buildings and landscapes that are yet to be revealed. The present visitor’s entrance is located at the top of the site, which is misleading, as visitors of the tenth century would have approached from a lower level, where the main gate (the new Bab al-Sura) was located. When studying the site from only two-dimensional maps and plans it is easy to miss the very important relationships between the buildings, as the level differential between them can be considerable. Two areas may appear adjacent to one another in a plan view, but their floor levels may be separated by as much as twenty feet in height. It is crucial to understand that the city was purposely sited with these changes in level as part of the overall planning as the concept of “views and landscape” were integral to the concept of power in the Andalusi caliphal state. The actual ‘madina’ where the majority of the population lived and worked, was located at the eastern end of the site, by the road from the old city, known nowadays as the Avenida de las Almunias. There was also a mosque, now partially excavated, within easy access of this area of the new city. There are no main axes of sight uniting the overall composition. One reason could be the fact that the entire complex was not built at once and there was a lack of overall vision, but I tend to agree with Arnold's theory that a different concept of space is at play here: one that connects each built

158 Menendez Pidal, Historia de España-España Musulmana 711-103, (Espasa-Calpe, S.A., 1950), 343. This is also confirmed by Glaiire Anderson. Both authors cite the writings of historian al-Maqqari (1578–1632). Al-Maqqari compiled chronicles of the history of al-Andalus. His importance rests with his use of multiple sources that are no longer in existence.
159 Antonio Vallejo Triano, La Ciudad Califal de Madina al-Zahra, 22.
space with the surrounding landscape and endless views of the countryside.\(^{160}\)

**The Ceremonial Approach**

The entrance for incoming visitors was on the East Wall of the site, at the middle elevation of the site. The main gate on the city wall was the *Bab al-Sura* (the Gate of the Image) (Fig. 32). This gate was crowned by a female statue, most likely representing the zodiac constellation of Virgo or the planet Venus (*al-Zuhara*), who were the protectors of *Qurtuba* and *al-Andalus*, according to Arab authors al-Biruni and Ibn Ghalib.\(^{161}\) It is said\(^{162}\) that the statue was removed by al-Mansur during the *Almohad* regime that followed the caliphate\(^{163}\). The names and likenesses of pagan divinities survived in other cultures due to their association with astrological bodies. For Muslim astronomers, the name of “Venus” for example, would not have been seen as having a religious but rather a scientific and mythological connotation. All embassies and visitors came in through this entrance.

Entering at the lowest elevation immediately placed visitors in an inferior position as they began the slow climb up to the main parade grounds, passing through the monumental arches and then making their progress through ramps and stairs towards the Upper Palace where the audiences would take place, in established protocol patterns, after which the ceremonial procession turned downwards to the central Pavilion and the Salon Rico. This “artificial itinerary”, described in the Palace chronicles of Ibn Hayyān\(^{164}\), was understandable from the point of view of prolonging a processional activity reflective of the magnificence of caliphal power. There was a complex segregation of the residential and visitor traffic from the servants’ and guards’ circulation as

\(^{160}\) Arnold, 65.


\(^{162}\) Vallejo Triano, 178.

\(^{163}\) Calvo Capilla, 16.

\(^{164}\) Vallejo Triano, 291.
evidenced by the tunnels with low ceilings found in the area.

Arnold writes of the great influence of the protocols of Imperial audiences in the court of Byzantium. Reportedly, as evidenced in court annals, caliph Abd al-Rahman III sent an emissary, Hisam ibn Hudayl, to the court of Constantine VII (in approx. 950 CE)\textsuperscript{165} and versions of the imperial practices observed there were emulated in Cordoba, staging grandiose audiences. These ceremonial protocols were reflected in the planning of the two ‘public’ halls built at Madinat al-Zahra by the caliph: the Upper Palace (or Dar al-Jund) and the so-called, Salon Rico.

The Upper Palace was located at the western end of the open parade space mentioned above, at the end point of the path traveled by visitors arriving to the site entering through the Bab al-Sura. During the route, the direction bends three times in order to overcome the difference in elevation (4.5 m)\textsuperscript{166} between the plaza and the courtyard of the Upper Palace, where the palace itself is set atop a 1.2 m platform. The courtyard is built with proportions that utilize the principle of the equilateral triangle mentioned in Chapter II, and in this case, it allowed the caliph to stand at the edge of the platform and survey the entire space and review the assembled visitors, or a special deployment of royal troops, without turning his head. “The primary purpose was again control: control of the space and of the people occupying it”\textsuperscript{167}.

The Upper Palace hall is, according to Arnold, the largest palatial hall of the Western Islamic World, accommodating 3000 people (Figs. 33-34). He identifies it as the al-Maglis al Gharbi (Western Hall) described in the court annals\textsuperscript{168}. Aside from its impressive size, it is in the layout of the seven spaces that comprise the plan that this building reflects the complexity of the Caliphal ceremonial audiences. Having approached the courtyard and climbed to the platform, the

\textsuperscript{165}Arnold, 74 (From Franz Dölger, \textit{Regesten der Kaiserkurkunden des Oströmischen Reiches}. New ed. By Andreas E. Müller, Munich 2003).
\textsuperscript{166}Arnold, 77.
\textsuperscript{167}Arnold, 79.
\textsuperscript{168}Arnold, 79.
visitors did not enter through the central axis, but rather, they approached through the two outer square chambers and into the portico. This portico acted as a ‘buffer zone’, very much controlled by the action of climbing the platform stairs and passing through narrow doorways. Only then was the visitor allowed to proceed along the main axis of the central bay, and after kissing the threshold, and proceed towards the caliph, as described in court annals. The greeting of the Caliph, who would be sitting at the rear of the hall, would involve prostration and the kissing of the ring. Visitors would then leave the main hall through the secondary parallel bays, or proceed to the farther tertiary bays where food would be served, depending on their rank and prestige (Fig. 35).

“The architectural highlight of the palace was the Salon Rico, one of the most sumptuous audience halls ever built.” There are some extant remains of walls with decoration fragments attesting to its character. Its layout is similar to that of the Upper Palace, with a broad portico acting as a buffer zone preceding three perpendicular bays forming the audience hall. The lines of sight can be drawn from the back of the hall (the caliph’s throne) and across the lines of columns, encompassing the entire front, where the ceremonial approach would take place. This is an illustration Arnold’s argument of the use of the equilateral triangle in the design of interior spaces as described in Chapter II. Furthermore, and based on the documented measurements of Madinat al-Zahra, Arnold extends his argument to the fact that the design was utilized also in exterior spaces, and as such, it was the first use of it in the Western Islamic palaces. The evidence is in the Upper Garden, south of the Salon Rico. The masonry remains indicate that when this garden was built, its width was made to expand into the adjacent Lower Garden, so that it would have the

169 Arnold, 81.
170 Arnold, 81.
171 Arnold, 88.
172 Arnold, 74.
required proportions\textsuperscript{173} (Fig. 36–37).

**The Royal Residences**

*Madinat al-Zahra* has been now studied for almost a century by Ricardo Velazquez y Bosco, Felix Hernandez Gimenez, Rafael Manzano Marcos, Antonio Vallejo Triano and, more recently, Jose Escudero Arandal\textsuperscript{174}. The concentration of the work has been focused in the middle, residential area.

At the apex of the city we have the *Dar al-Mulk* (or Royal abode) one of the first buildings to be constructed and located at the highest point, closest to the Northern wall, with the best possible views over the landscape (Fig. 38). From its placement, there is a pyramidal effect towards the south and east (the western zone not having been excavated). Adjacent to the *Dar al-Mulk*, yet approximately twenty meters below in altitude, are located other residences, namely the ones attributed to the crown prince (to be al-Hakam II) and the so-called ‘House of Ja'far’. There are also service areas adjacent to the three residences and connected to them via a narrow hallway\textsuperscript{175}.

The plan of the *Dar al-Mulk* consists of three broad halls with square side chambers at the ends, with the actual caliphal departments located at the end. Arnold writes that the layout of the *Dar al-Mulk* is particular to *al-Andalus*. Although there are certain similarities in room plan with other examples of Western palace architecture such as the Fatimid palace of Asir in present day Algiers\textsuperscript{176}, he emphasizes the main difference: the Cordoba palace is oriented towards the landscape and the views, whereas the lines of sight from the hall in Asir are completely contained within its courtyard\textsuperscript{177}. As illustrated (Figs. 39–40), there is a great height differential from the sills of the doorways to the floor below. As Arnold emphasizes, the views framed by the arches were

\textsuperscript{173} Arnold, 86.
\textsuperscript{174} Arnold , 63.
\textsuperscript{175} Vallejo Triano, 134.
\textsuperscript{176} Arnold, 53.
\textsuperscript{177} Arnold, 68.
not to be of the terraces below, but rather of the far distance and landscape. These arches would have also been visible from far away, as a visitor approached the palace, and they would have been symbolic of the power of the caliph overseeing his surrounding terrain.

**Intellectual Spaces**

Having briefly analyzed the ceremonial and residential areas in Madinat al-Zahra we begin to see how the political concept of the new caliphal power in Cordoba was expressed architecturally, through innovative layouts to accommodate ceremonial flow, by utilizing height differentials to maximize views and by the selection of materials and architectural forms used for particular spaces. We will now analyze an additional aspect of royal power: the development and prestige of culture and knowledge through the caliph’s involvement in intellectual matters.

An example was the “cubit of al-Rassas”, a new unit of measurement developed in al-Andalus. Uthman Sa’id ibn al-Farag al-Rassas was a scholar in the Ummayyad court who travelled widely in the East. His ruler may have wanted to emulate the Abbasid caliph al-Ma’mun (813–833 CE), who had also introduced a new type of cubit. Arnold writes: “establishing new units of measurement had always been considered the prerogative of sovereigns, a sign of their ability to bring order and harmony”. The new cubit measured approximately 47 cm.

The Abbasids were also instrumental in systematically recovering Greek and Latin works and promoting the sciences in order to consolidate their legitimacy through the creation of an Arab-Islamic corpus of knowledge, in other words, a new Islamic culture of their own. The education of princes included a new intellectual dimension, much as Philip of Macedon had hired Aristotle to educate the young Alexander. (Alexander III, called ‘the Great’ is well known and important in

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178 Arnold, 68.
179 Arnold, 16.
180 Arnold, 16.
Islamic tradition, he appears in the Quran as Dhu-l-Qarnayn\(^\text{181}\). The Eastern custom of having scholars and philosophers in the court entourage to legitimize and consolidate sovereignty was paralleled in *al-Andalus*. The many years of military campaigns had culminated in a period, that would turn out to be brief, in which Abd al-Rahman III had been able to achieve peace. At this time of stability, and aided by economic prosperity, the court was able to focus on the arts and sciences. The caliph’s son, the future al-Hakam II, was brought up by tutors in the milieu of *Madinat al-Zahra*\(^\text{182}\). Later on, the court annals record a renovation of an area of the *Dar al-Mulk* as a place of education for the crown prince Hisham in 972 CE\(^\text{183}\). As in the case of the young Alexander, Iberian princes were brought up learning with their friends, some living in the palace and others, as children of the elite, in the surrounding *munyat*. The knowledge imparted at the time consisted not only of the Greek translations initiated in the Abbasid court, but also of the translations of local academics such as Isidore of Seville, who had written his *Etymologies* in Northern Spain during the fifth century, at the time of the Visigoths. And we cannot discard the original scientific work that took place in *al-Andalus*, in the various fields of astronomy, mathematics and agronomy.

Susana Calvo Capilla provides an interpretation of the use of third-century Roman sculptures and reliefs of which remains have been found in *Madinat al-Zahra* (Fig. 41). Specifically, these consist of fragments of various *sarcophagi* as well as a *herm* (a bust) assumed to be *Heracles*. These *sarcophagi*, documented by al-Maqqari\(^\text{184}\), were found in some of the courtyards and they show evidence of having been modified in order to serve as water fountains (Figs. 42, 43a–43b). Some of these remains were found in the so-called Court of the Pillars, a

\[^{182}\text{Susana Calvo Capilla, 13.}\]
\[^{183}\text{Arnold, 69.}\]
\[^{184}\text{Calvo Capilla, 2.}\]
building that predates the Salon Rico\textsuperscript{185}. The findings suggest that the building might have been used as a site for intellectual pursuits, in the classical tradition of the Greek \textit{gymnasium}\textsuperscript{186}. Calvo Capilla accurately describes \textit{Madinat al-Zahra} as a focus of culture and not just a seat of political power. She explains: “Numerous accounts referring to the cultural environment of the Cordoban court in the tenth century suggest that in intellectual circles there was a certain familiarity with the heroes, philosophers and Muses of Antiquity”. The author adds that, in her opinion, “the presence of sarcophagi and classical statues depicting philosophers, Muses and heroes in the palace of \textit{Madinat al-Zahra} should be related to the intellectual environment of the courts of Abd-al Rahman III and al-Hakam II\textsuperscript{187}. In addition to the classical remains mentioned above, we should mention the use, documented in texts\textsuperscript{188} of the sculpted female figure at the city wall gates such as \textit{Bab al-sura} discussed above. But how then were these 'pagan' representations reconciled with the very strict religious \textit{Maliki} orthodoxy\textsuperscript{189} that controlled the caliphate?

The classical objects as the \textit{sarcophagi} and \textit{herms} can be interpreted as indicative of the intellectual and cultural activities taking place in specifically designated areas of the palace. There

\textsuperscript{185} Vallejo Triano, 19-25, Arnold, 97.
\textsuperscript{186} Calvo Capilla, 24.
\textsuperscript{187} Calvo Capilla, 6.
\textsuperscript{188} Calvo Capilla, 15.
\textsuperscript{189} Menendez Pidal writes that the official adoption of the \textit{Maliki} doctrine was established by Hisham I (788–796 CE), the second \textit{emir} of Cordoba. Relations had been re-established between \textit{al-Andalus} and the Baghdad Caliphate, resulting in the constant exchange of visitors and news of the latest developments. One of these travelers was Malik ben Anas (d.796 CE), who, visiting Medina, wrote extensively on matters of juridical religious law that eventually became established in \textit{al-Andalus}. With Hisham I, who was known to be very pious, the "religious aristocracy" began to grow, acquiring a new involvement in affairs of state. This development provided a very strict set of rules for the general population. On the other hand, it also preserved the Cordoba caliphate from the religious disputes that were arising in other areas of the Dar al-Islam. It is in view of this religious background in al-Andalus in the tenth century that we now turn back to analyze the use of Classical elements and their acceptance in the court.
are sources confirming the existence of extensive libraries during the caliphates of Abd al-Rahman III and Hakam II. “Unfortunately, we do not yet have enough formal or typological examples to identify the buildings described as scientific or intellectual spaces in Eastern [or Western] Islamic institutions.” The classical remains, which through archaeological analysis show evidence of having been purposely destroyed, were found in the drainage systems of specific areas in Madinat al-Zahra as shown on Figure 41. It can then be argued that the spaces adjacent to where the remains were found were used as rooms related to scientific and intellectual activities. These classical objects could be construed as being used as 'allegories for the 'science of the Ancients' and a visual reference to a past that Muslims had already claimed as their own in the eighth and ninth centuries, and which the Andalusi Umayyads now used as a means to legitimize their accession to the caliphate.' Only under this interpretation would the use of the classical figures have been acceptable to the Maliki scholars presiding over the religious customs of the Cordoba Caliphate. The destruction of the classical remains and of the manuscripts from al-Hakam’s library can be dated to the early eleventh century. Al-Maqqari writes: “This immense collection of books remained in the palace until, during the siege of that capital by the Berbers, the Hajib Wadhed, who was a freedman of Al-Mansur Ibn Abi’A’mir, ordered them to be sold, the remainder being shortly after plundered and destroyed on the taking of that city by the Berbers.”

In contrast to the fundamentalist Maliki orthodoxy established in the tenth century, Lévi-Provençal points out that the east-west exchanges also brought currents of different philosophical

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190 Al-Maqqari’s History of the Mohammedan Dynasties in Spain, V. 2, cites several sources on this subject, including the note that the mere catalog of the ‘books’ consisted of forty-four volumes containing nothing else by the titles and descriptions of the ‘books’. (NB: they would not have been ‘books’ per se, but rather, rolled manuscripts), 169.
191 Calvo Capilla, 21.
192 Calvo Capilla, 24.
193 Calvo Capilla, 25.
194 Al-Maqqari, 169.
ideologies, such as *mu'tazilism*\(^{195}\), and he writes about a native of *Qurtuba*, Khalil al-Ghafla, who is documented as speaking publicly about "human determination and free will"\(^{196}\), as well as other examples. This is not to say that any of these 'heretical' philosophical movements succeeded in having significant majority of followers, (or architectural manifestations), but it is reflective of the diverse intellectual life of Andalusian tenth century.

More influential than any individual philosophical currents were the official cultural exchanges between *al-Andalus* and the formerly adversarial caliphate of Baghdad. Although it is Abd al-Rahman III who is well known for the construction of *Madinat al-Zahra* and the consolidation of the Caliphate, it was his son, al-Hakam II who, according to Lévi-Provençal, was well known in the East for his cultural initiatives. Not only was there a great exchange of manuscripts across the Mediterranean during his reign, but he also invited and attracted men of science and letters, some of whom make *Qurtuba* their home. Al-Hakam II became caliph when he was over forty years old and therefore he had a long preparation during which he was able to dedicate himself to intellectual endeavors before becoming fully occupied by caliphal duties. Before his access to the throne, and probably due to the education he received as a prince, he began compiling the well-known royal library said to contain 400,000 volumes\(^{197}\). This library was housed in *Madinat al-Zahra*, and although we don't know exactly 'where', we may be instructed by the article of Calvo Capilla as to its whereabouts, by the suggestion of the existence of spaces devoted to intellectual studies within the palatial complex. In addition, Lévi-Provençal writes of the 'private' libraries of the tenth century, such as that of Muhammad Yahya al-Ghafiki and of Abd al-

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195 *Mu'tazilism*: The Mu'tazilites were philosophical rationalists. They believed that the arbiter of whatever is revealed has to be theoretical reason. They were influenced by Neoplatonism. D'Ancona, Cristina, "Greek Sources in Arabic and Islamic Philosophy", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2017 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2017/entries/arabic-islamic-greek/>.

196 Lévi-Provençal, 482.

197 Lévi-Provençal, 498.
Rahman ibn Futais\textsuperscript{198}. Both of these collections were housed in their \textit{munyat} in the western suburbs, of which there are no extant remains, but which may have been similar to the models described in Chapter II.

The point of these examples is that intellectual pursuits were a significant part of the ruler and his court and that, as Calvo Capilla and Lévi-Provençal write, there may well have been architectural spaces dedicated to these activities, both in \textit{Madinat al-Zahra} and in the surrounding \textit{munyat} owned by members of the court. The Andalusi caliphs thought of part of their legacy in scholarly terms, alongside with traditional territorial or military gains, and this induced the ‘seduction’ of men of letters away from Baghdad, such as Ibrahim ibn-Sulaiman al-Shami, a well known poet\textsuperscript{199} and Ziryad (also a \textit{munya} owner), who was revolutionized the mores, music and cuisine of the Cordoba court, not to speak of the developments in personal hygiene and fashion. Alongside social events and hunting, there were also \textit{majlis} (gatherings)\textsuperscript{200} during which the guests would discuss science or other academic subjects, while listening to music and poetry. Chronicles illustrate that popular works of \textit{adab}\textsuperscript{201} such as Ibn Abd Rabbihi’s \textit{Al-Iqd al farid} (Unique Necklace) were often read and discussed. Glaire D. Anderson writes about the court activities, taking place in Cordoba “in which the articulation of political relationships through display of political and cultural capital was celebrated as spectacle.”\textsuperscript{202}

**Building Materials**

We now turn briefly to the buildings and their materials and decoration and consider how these related to the representation of royal power. The main construction material used at \textit{Madinat

\textsuperscript{198} Lévi-Provençal, 499.  
\textsuperscript{199} Ibid, 489.  
\textsuperscript{200} Anderson, 3.  
\textsuperscript{201} \textit{Adab} was originally a Persian word describing a medieval form of prose designed to be both edifying and entertaining. (\textit{The Oxford Dictionary of Islam}, edited by John L. Esposito, Oxford Islamic Studies on Line. \url{www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/oprit/t125/e44}.  
\textsuperscript{202} Anderson, 4.}
al-Zahra was limestone, which occurs naturally in the area. There are buff and grey colored limestones. Limestone is a soft porous material, easy to work with but also not as durable as marble or granite. The local violet limestone mentioned in Chapter II was utilized for flooring slabs in many areas\textsuperscript{203}. The quarries for all these stones were present, though unused, since Roman times and the new caliph reopened them.

Vallejo Triano compares the attitudes of Romans builders with their Islamic counterparts regarding the symbolic use of certain materials. In the first case, provincial local elites would utilize marbles and classical details in order to show unity with the central power of Rome. In the case of the tenth century caliphate, munyat built after Madinat al-Zahra, would copy the ‘construction catalog’ of the caliphal palace in order to show the direct relationship with the power of the caliph by selecting the same noble materials and methods\textsuperscript{204}. The author dismisses texts by al-Maqqari, who insists that the builders of the tenth century caliphal city sought the ‘most exotic and foreign materials’ for their construction, the historian even claimed that some of the columns were brought from as far away as ‘Ifriqiyya and Byzantium’\textsuperscript{205}, a claim disproved by the archaeological findings at the site. These findings support the theory that all materials (including spolia) were strictly of local provenance, assuming the word ‘local’ to include various areas of the Iberian Peninsula including what is now Portugal. Yet, the rhetoric is meaningful in that building materials, then and now, symbolize power.

As in the munyat, the main components of the walls at Madinat al-Zahra were units of limestone masonry installed in stretchers combined with headers (soga y tizon) (see Figs. 21–22). Vallejo Triano notes the amazing homogeneity of this system throughout the site, in spite of

\textsuperscript{203} Observations on materials: from visit to the site and sampling assisted by local site experts and guides.
\textsuperscript{204} Vallejo Triano, 116.
\textsuperscript{205} Vallejo Triano, 116.
chronological differences between the different phases of construction. In the Upper Palace, pavements were made of white marble and violet limestone, which had been in limited use in the first constructions, with the floors being built of the same buff limestone as the walls. Public audience halls were built with more expensive materials signifying the importance of these new spaces that would be visible to visitors. Marble was therefore used in column capitals, bases, wall panels and fountains\textsuperscript{206}, whereas plain limestone and brick were used in the service or lower hierarchy residential areas. The main hall in the \textit{Dar al-Mulk} was lavishly decorated with geometric inlays in the brick flooring and with \textit{atauriques}\textsuperscript{207} of vegetal and geometric themes on the walls. There were marble columns flanking the doorway and the brick floors had stone inlays with geometric patterns.

Based on the remains found at \textit{Madinat al-Zahra}, Vallejo Triano argues that horseshoe arches were exclusively used to demarcate important spaces. In general, every doorway or passage from one space to another in architecture is an opportunity for either an arch or a flat lintel. Since in \textit{Madinat al-Zahra} the majority are flat lintels, either plain or decorated, the horseshoe arches appear to be limited to special spaces, whether interior or exterior. Vallejo Triano concludes: "the horseshoe arch constitutes, throughout the emirate and caliphate, a symbolic and emblematic element that becomes associated with the visual lexicon of the State"\textsuperscript{208}. Its use in the Cordoba Mosque being an integral part of this concept due to the dual nature of the Islamic Caliphate: political and religious. The author also comments that the use of these arches was later copied by members of the court in their own residences, as an emulation of the power of the ruler.

It is also important to note, mainly for those who visit the site, that the limestone blocks

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\textsuperscript{206} Vallejo Triano, 157.  \\
\textsuperscript{207} An \textit{ataurique} is a sculpted tablet of plaster, usually with vegetal motifs, sometimes with epigraphic inscriptions.  \\
\textsuperscript{208} Vallejo Triano, 396.  
\end{flushleft}
mentioned above would not have been visible at all, as all wall surfaces were covered by either decorative panels or plaster. Due to time and natural deterioration and exposure to the elements, there are very few remnants of these facing elements, and this is unfortunate, as it is precisely this layer of the decoration and finished appearance of the buildings that illustrates the message and symbolism.

**Significance of Decorative Motifs**

The thickness of the plaster facings ranged between 1.25 cm and 10 cm\(^{209}\). At their simplest, these facings were painted, a horizontal band of dark red at the bottom (almagro) and white on the top, all the way to the ceiling. This was typical throughout the buildings. There were also horizontal bands of geometric designs running around the upper parts of the walls, of which few remains have been found (Fig. 44).

Vallejo Triano writes about a progressive evolution in the decoration of the palatial city. Originally decoration was limited to only a few areas of architectural elements, such as the alfices\(^{210}\) and arches and doorways. From there, in the construction of the Upper Palace, there is a change in that the decorations extend to all the surfaces\(^{211}\). The themes are mainly vegetal and extend into some of the walls of the adjacent gardens.

The main studies of decoration made at Madinat al-Zahra relate to the wall panels, carved in soft stone called atauriques (al-tawriq)\(^{212}\). In Islamic art these wall panels need to be considered for their propagandistic potential and ideological message. In the particular case of Cordoba for example, we find a concerted endeavor to legitimize the figure of the caliph and his polity. As a

\(^{209}\) Vallejo Triano, 322.

\(^{210}\) An alfiz is an architectural detail is a flat rectangular label that surrounds an arch. Plural: Alfices (Bevan, 28).

\(^{211}\) Vallejo Triano, 157.

\(^{212}\) The Arabic term (al-tawriq) refers only to "decoration in the shape of vegetal forms" but in most studies, the word is used to refer to all applied wall decoration, including geometric and epigraphic.
sign of their importance, there are stone *atauries* in only a few buildings at *Madinat al-Zahra*²¹³ located in the following buildings: the *Dar al Mulk*, the *House of the Alberca*, the Mosque, the Upper Palace, the Salon Rico and the Central Pavillion. The scant remains of these panels, found dispersed throughout the site, have been assembled like puzzles, but an overall interpretive view has only been successful in the case of the Upper Palace, and the *House of the Alberca*. In terms of placement, these carved panels were placed in areas where the caliph would sit or be seen, or along the routes of the ceremonial processions described above. There were different types of carvings, some epigraphic and some merely decorative, with vegetal motifs that showed entire plants, from root to leaves²¹⁴ (Fig. 45). There were innovations found in the increase of full size design and non-repeating asymmetrical compositions that we can link to the carvings in the ivory *pyxides* we will discuss below. In juxtaposition with the organic vegetal motifs, the complex geometric designs served a different role, that of showing order and perfection (Fig. 46).

Regarding epigraphic *atauries*, we find these in the reception halls where inscriptions above the arches announce the name of the caliph, Abd al-Rahman III, with all his honorific titles. All visitors would significantly need to pass through these arches. (Fig. 47)²¹⁵ At the *Dar al-Mulk*, some inscriptions also include the title of 'imam' for the caliph. In the Central Pavilion, located between the Upper Palace and the Salon Rico, the inscriptions, with a date of 956 CE²¹⁶, identify Abd al-Rahman III as developer of the works and Ja'far, a freed slave and *mawla* of the caliph, as director of the works. Thus, the decoration served a clear partisan function, controlling the message conveyed by the form. There is a centralized political direction combined with a certain degree of artistic latitude, as the artisans had freedom on the 'forms' and this is the reason

²¹³ Vallejo Triano, 423.
²¹⁴ Vallejo Triano, 436.
²¹⁵ Vallejo Triano, 441.
²¹⁶ Vallejo Triano, 455.
we can see evolving artistic developments. The idea of the caliph as governing nature is part of the political propaganda expressed by the court poets who ‘sing’, through the epigraphic inscriptions that “this One has brought back to the earth the gardens, the flowers and the fertility that has covered the earth” (Palatine Chronicles by Ibn Hayyan)\textsuperscript{217}.

The decoration in the Upper Palace is rather plain, simple stucco plaster covering the stone, with a red dado at the base. The floor was brick and not stone. In such an impressive hall, we need to remember that the floors would have been covered with carpets and the walls with tapestries and there would be textile hangings around the doorways. As will be discussed below, the luxury in many of these palatial spaces depended not only on the architectural detailing but also on the beauty of the manufactured objects such as the ceramics, textiles and ivory caskets carefully placed within the rooms.

Analyzing the architecture of the palaces and the designs of the complementary artistic objects that together reflected the newly proclaimed caliphate, it is natural to look at the influences on their creation. We find both secular and pre Islamic influences. The public buildings of Madinat al-Zahra, for example, were shaped by borrowed ceremonial protocols of Persian and Byzantine courts. The Islamic conquests, due to their vast geographical expansion, were able to draw from many sources and through those ‘borrowings’, various motifs and patterns were incorporated for their association with a style of wealth and luxury. Whereas religious art was far more restricted in terms of adopting shapes of non-Muslim cultural connotation, secular art in the Caliphate was open to exotic, non-Islamic influences. Oleg Grabar writes “…an Iranian or Central Asian decorative design or animal could appear in Spain…because it was structurally a sign of luxury and not necessarily [because it was] an Iranian motif.”\textsuperscript{218} As Anderson notes, citing \textsuperscript{217}Vallejo Triano, 456. \textsuperscript{218}Grabar, 169.
historian ibn Khaldun (1332–1406) “in addition to the monuments a dynasty constructed, it was through the display of wealth that a dynasty’s power was manifested”\textsuperscript{219}. As such, it was the ownership and presence of luxury objects within the palatial buildings that represented power and sovereignty in \textit{al-Andalus}, and their display worked in conjunction with the architectural settings in impressing visitors and creating an impressive visual composition.

\textbf{Luxury Objects Complementing the Buildings}

Much as the epigraphy in \textit{atauriques} described above, the inscriptions in ceramic wares found both in \textit{Madinat al-Zahra} and the \textit{munyas} of the \textit{Yanib al-Gharbi} is most revealing. “Al-Mulk”, meaning sovereignty, kingship or royal power\textsuperscript{220} is painted on ceramic jars, vases and dishes (Fig. 48). Anderson writes that instead of the full Quranic inscription attributing ‘al-Mulk’ only to God\textsuperscript{221}, the shortened versions of the inscription found in \textit{al-Andalus} could be construed to focus more on an Umayyad concept of an earthly rather than a divine kingship\textsuperscript{222}. This, associated with the names of the rulers and designers of monuments found in secular Umayyad buildings, even in the Cordoba mosque, are reflective of the emphasis placed on the prominence of the humans shaping the built environment, and of the confidence in their own future and everlasting survival.

During the caliphate, the production of locally produced luxury objects was controlled and took place in royal workshops led by talented and distinguished members of the court elite, such as for example Durri al-Saghir mentioned in Chapter II. The royal workshops included metalwork, textiles (\textit{tiraz}) and more importantly, carved ivory containers called \textit{pyxides}. The designs for all these objects were a combination of traditional motifs combined with local methods that evolved

\textsuperscript{219} Anderson, 140.
\textsuperscript{220} Anderson, 140.
\textsuperscript{221} The Study Quran, Sura 67:1, 139.
\textsuperscript{222} Anderson, 147.
during the late Antique period as discussed in Chapter I, when the retreat of Roman influence allowed local artisans in Cordoba to develop independent techniques.

The ivory pyxides produced during the tenth century in al-Andalus were objects of great prestige distributed among members of the court and also given as presents to foreign dignitaries\textsuperscript{223}. Although the tradition and technology originated in the East, Andalusi pyxides reached a high level of artistic development and the main workshop was located at Madinat al-Zahra. There are fundamental similarities in the artistic composition of some of these objects and the architectural detailing of some of the buildings of the same period regarding the use of nature in art. These ivory pyxides have complex subjects and designs that are not limited to repeating geometrical shapes. The pyxide of Al-Mughira (Fig. 49), for example, has human figures and is identified by the Arabic inscription on the lid as being al-Mughira, the youngest son of the first caliph. The figures are ‘framed’ within curvilinear cameos resembling decorated arches and surrounded by realistic relief sculptures of trees and animals. The ivories we can see today allow us to see a “….visual layering of nature and artifice, carved marble ornament and natural landscape view.”\textsuperscript{224} Oleg Grabar considers these ivories as surpassing in originality all other artistic objects produced in the Cordoba area\textsuperscript{225}.

In my view, there is a direct relationship between the medallions in the al-Mughira pyxis and the ‘framed views’ carefully created in the caliphal palace buildings described above, as well as the multi-lobed arches found in the contemporary Cordoba mosque (Fig. 50). It is significant to look at these ‘princely objects’ as Grabar calls them\textsuperscript{226}, in terms of enhancements to the architectural monuments in which they were displayed and circulated as prestigious gifts to

\textsuperscript{223} Anderson, 87.
\textsuperscript{224} Anderson, 97.
\textsuperscript{225} Grabar, 181.
\textsuperscript{226} Anderson, 166.
visitors. Ultimately, it is the combination of the controlled landscape, and the buildings and artistic objects created in Cordoba that acts in unison in a strong and defined statement of the power and harmonious control of the caliph over the land and its subjects.
Chapter IV- Transformations and Conclusion

In the early eleventh century the politics of the caliphate were to be drastically modified by the death of Al-Hakam II in 976 CE and the youth and inexperience of his heir al-Hisham (976–1009 CE). Al-Mansur (978–1002 CE), the vizir/regent at the time, took over the government with the help of the Almohads, a religious fundamentalist Berber tribe from North Africa. The composition of the court changed and the ‘unfree’ aristocrats, so prominent during Abd al-Rahman III and al-Hakam II, disappeared from the stage, with ownership of the munyat passing to the traditional pre-caliphal aristocracy with its shifting loyalties. Divisions began appearing within the Umayyad regime and ended in the taifa period (muluk al-tawif\textsuperscript{227}) with the fragmentation of al-Andalus into as many as thirty recorded separate small kingdoms\textsuperscript{228}. Within this new structure, the ruler/regent met only with a limited circle of loyal friends, creating a void easily filled by opposing factions. It was a change from the centralized polity of the ninth and tenth centuries and a reversal to the original tribal allegiances of the pre-emirate period. Glaire Anderson finds an architectural parallel to this political change in the later villa architecture of the taifas, where the houses, such as the Aljaferia in Zaragoza, began to turn inwards towards private enclosed courtyards\textsuperscript{229} instead of outwards towards landscapes using miradores. The previous confident unity of a single sovereign acting as steward of the land and its people became fragmented into separate territories held by petty rulers with policies driven by individual interest.

During its zenith in the brief seventy-three years of its existence, we see Madinat al-Zahra and its firmament of munyat as “the preeminent stage upon which Andalusi Umayyad court culture

\textsuperscript{227} Meaning "kings of factions or groups". Coincidentally, the same name given to the successors of Alexander the Great. Kennedy, 130.

\textsuperscript{228} Kennedy, 145.

\textsuperscript{229} Anderson, 171.
was presented and performed"\textsuperscript{230}. The buildings of the yanib al-Gharbi were not mere ‘pleasure palaces’ but rather, they were used as settings for political and diplomatic events, directly and indirectly tied to the central government and its functions. “In the bid for caliphal legitimacy the Umayyad rulers used architecture, landscape, material culture, ritual, and court literature to fashion a powerful statement of political authority and good governance within the sphere of international politics and court culture\textsuperscript{231}.

Looking back to our study, we can say that a first transformation took place as the Cordoba Caliphate was consolidated in the early tenth century. This was a time when descendants of an exiled Syrian dynasty, already ethnically Iberian after three centuries of intermarriage, created a new and successful and centralized religious-secular polity based on eastern traditions yet adopting existing local customs and building methods. With architecture and economy working hand in hand, the benefits of the agricultural surplus in the Cordoba Valley, associated with a period of military peace, created an affluent middle class that was able to sponsor the creation of the munyat and participate in the social and cultural activities of the court.

Simultaneously, and as a result of the evident prosperity of al-Andalus, a corresponding transformation also came about in the rest of Iberia: the Christian Kingdoms in the North and the mozarabs within Muslim controlled territories acknowledged this Islamic polity as inevitable and proceeded to coexist alongside it. This was reflected in the many embassies that arrived in Cordoba during the reign of al-Hakam II to pledge baʿyaa or to request military assistance. These included Sancho, king of Navarre (901–925 CE), who recovered his throne helped by caliphal troops. There are also court annals recording embassies from Castille, Galicia and Barcelona coming to negotiate alliances with the caliph. And it was the need to accommodate these embassies and the new role of

\textsuperscript{230} Anderson, 137.
\textsuperscript{231} Anderson, 138.
the Caliphate in Iberian and International affairs that helped shape *Madinat al-Zahra*, where a long line of foreign dignitaries crossed under the *Bab al-Sura*, to be received in the royal presence in the Salon Rico or Upper Palace as described above, prostrated under lintels decorated with inscriptions exulting the Muslim ruler.

During its brief existence the Cordoba caliphate owed its power and stability to a policy that pragmatically and successfully managed local resources towards the glory of the central sovereign. These resources included not only water and stones and cultivated fields, but it also incorporated the majority of the population, originally non-Muslim, in myriad capacities ranging from artisans and masons to the *sagaliba*, to concubines and mothers of future caliphs, to distinguished active members of the court. There are many examples of these plural interactions, such as when Abd al-Rahman III sent the bishop of Elvira, Recemund, to the court of Emperor Otto I in 955 CE to negotiate some standing territorial disputes\(^{232}\). And we can also mention that prominent member of the Jewish community, Hasdai Ibn Shaprut (915–970 CE) who acted as royal doctor and part time *vizir*, active in court while also successfully lobbying for the welfare of his own Jewish community. More importantly, he translated the botany treatise of Dioscorides in 951 CE, from Greek, to Latin and to Arabic, a manuscript having been sent by Byzantine Emperor Constantin VIII (960–1028 CE) as a present, along with a Greek monk to assist in the translation\(^ {233}\). Scholarly work such as this, contributed by non-Muslims at the initiative of the caliphal court, contributed to the intellectual prestige of Umayyad power and to its claims to legitimacy, well beyond military or territorial standpoints.

We therefore see that the power of the Cordoba caliphate depended on this complex arrangement of managing a pluralistic population and its local resources. And reciprocally, we see

\(^{232}\) Lévi-Provençal, 222.  
\(^{233}\) Lévi-Provençal, 489.
an Iberia having developed a cultural dependence on Islam. The popularity of Islamic fashions and artistic artifacts in the general population, as well as the extreme action of wrapping Christian religious items in Islamic textiles, can only be explained by the fact that the beauty of art was, during the tenth century, able to be seen as totally dissociated in many cases from any religious significance. The Andalusi Islamic polity was based on “a very unique society that was run by Muslim Arabs, Arabized Berbers, Jews and Hispanic converts, but which also included a vital Christian component.” By the tenth century, this was very far from the situation of the original troops who landed across Jibral al-Tariq (Gibraltar) in 711 and who barely managed to maintain control through frail inter-tribal Arab-Berber alliances.

The caliphate thus achieved stability and prosperity by reaching a fine point of equilibrium between the various elements. “In blurring the political, religious, social and gendered boundaries between citizen and subject, *convivencia* essentially turned the Umayyads into Iberians. Abd al-Rahman I, the founder of the dynasty, was the son of a Berber woman, and his heirs had no qualms about having sex with Iberians to father their successors. Abd al-Rahman III's caliphate dominated the peninsula, but it was very much a hybrid Iberian institution that probably would have seemed quite alien and upsetting to the original Arab settlers...”

In conclusion, we look back at the elements in the Cordoba valley, buildings, gardens and land, as a reflection of that brief moment of stable power: *Madinat al-Zahra* with its audience halls and framed views over the gardens, the *munyat* with their terraces and magical water pools and the fertile lands surrounding them all. This earthly landscape, partly natural, partly man-made, was for locals and visitors, whether eager associates or reluctant participants, the visible representation of the sovereignty of the caliph in his confident role as steward of the land and providing prosperous

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stability for his people, all of them, and overseeing it all from the height of his miradores (Fig. 51).

Ten centuries later we still find ourselves assembling the fragments of the buildings and the landscape of the Yanib al-Gharbi and connecting the ideas of the complex society that built them, during that brief moment of splendor (Fig. 52).
### APPENDIX

**LIST OF MUNYAT IN THE CORDOBA VALLEY (800–1002 CE)**

Based on: Felix Arnold, *Islamic Palace Architecture in the Western Mediterranean*, Oxford University Press, Table 1.1, 24-26.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>PATRON</th>
<th>VISITS/EVENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ajab</td>
<td>Concubine of al-Hakam I (796–822)</td>
<td>Al-Bahrani (804)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abd-Allah</td>
<td>Abd-Allah (888–912) Uncle of Abd al-Rahman III</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-Amiriya</td>
<td>Al-Mansur (978–1002)</td>
<td>Marriage of al-Mansur's daughter (986)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arha-Naish</td>
<td>Al-Hakam II (961–976)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-Bunti</td>
<td>Abd al-Rahman II (822–852)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-Rummaniyya</td>
<td>Durri al-Saghur, head of the Caliphal Textile Workshop</td>
<td>Feast for caliph (973 CE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-Ganna Rabanalis</td>
<td>Gift to Abd al-Malik (1009 CE)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ibn Abd al-Aziz</td>
<td>Vizir of Muhammad I (823–886)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ibn al-Qurasiya</td>
<td>Al-Mundir, brother or al-Hakam II (961–976)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-Kantis</td>
<td>Muhammad I (852–886)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-Mughira</td>
<td>Son or Hakam I (796–976)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-Muntali</td>
<td>An-Qasim (973)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-Mushafi</td>
<td>Hagib of al-Hakam II (961–976)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nagda</td>
<td>Son in law of Abd al-Rahman III (912–961)</td>
<td>973 Destroyed by Berber troops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nasr</td>
<td>Eunuch of crown prince Abd al-Rahman III</td>
<td>Ziryab visited (822-857)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-Naura</td>
<td>Crown prince Abd-Allah, Abd al-Rahman III (912–961)</td>
<td>Emissary from Seville (913)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-Ramla</td>
<td>Abd al-Rahman III</td>
<td>King Ordoño IV (961),</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-Rusafa</td>
<td>Abd al-Rahman I (777), Muhammad I (852–886)</td>
<td>Emissary from Kairouan (961)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-Surur</td>
<td>Al-Mansur (978–1002)</td>
<td></td>
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