

QURTUBA'S MONUMENTALITY AND ARTISTIC SIGNIFICANCE

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*For me, Cordoba is Art.
Outside Art, Arab-Islamic presence
bears no significant meaning in Cordoba.
Adonis, 2007¹*

Notwithstanding the importance of Qurtuba, together with Baghdad, as the main source of Humanist learning in classic Arab Islam, the Umayyad capital can unquestionably lay claim to the distinction of being an exceptional and active centre of artistic creation. In fact its architecture and manufactures became an essential symbol of the splendor of Islamic art, capturing the attention, first of all, of its own Arabian erudition in Al-Andalus and then, later, the attention of the Hispanic and European scholars. This interest has expanded even more in modern times and today art historians, artists, authors, collectors, the media and the public from all walks of life continue to admire the wealth, monumentality and subtlety of its art forms. The complete volume that al-Maqqari devoted, within his great encyclopaedia of the history and literature of Al-Andalus (1629-1630), to the description of Qurtuba, gathering together an extensive anthology of texts by the most important chroniclers, poets and scholars from all the eras of Al-Andalus, or travelers who visited it,² comprises a striking and enlightening palimpsest that offers a detailed and on occasions hyperbolic image of the face of a splendid city, *maqarr al-mulk* ('Seat of the Sovereignty') and *qubbat al-islam* ('Dome of Islam'), with its doors, walls, abundant mosques, baths, gardens, country houses and palaces and, more specifically, the Great Mosque and the palatine cities of al-Zahra and al-Zahira. It does also not forget the civil war (*fitna*), which saw the end of the Caliphate and how Qurtuba became, thanks to the subsequent Andalusian and Arabian literature, a symbol of the decline and transient nature of all human construction. Fortunately, a significant example of that extraordinary conjunction of «manual and imaginative genius» as Adonis defines the «architectural-artistic miracle» that is Qurtuba's Great Mosque lives on, not only at monumental scale (very much concentrated around the city of Cordoba) and

¹ Adonis (2008). Gaymatun fawqa Qurtuba [Cloud over Cordoba] (21/04/2007), in *Laysa al-ma'u wahda-hu yawaban 'ani l-'atash* [Water does not only quench thirst]. Dubai, p. 42.

² Al-Maqqari (1988). *Nafh al-Tib*. Beirut: Ed. by I. 'Abbas, Vol. iv [of 8 vols.], with references and texts by al-Razi, Ibn Bashkwal, Ibn Sa'id, Ibn Hayyan, Ibn Jaqan, al-Hiyari, Ibn Hawqal, Ibn al-Jatib and others, including poets of all genres and walks of life.

in the refined miniaturist decoration of numerous sumptuary and popular objects (widely dispersed among museums in Spain and on other continents) but also in the high level of aesthetic self-awareness shown in the texts and in the exhibition of the names and signatures of the patrons responsible for and orchestrators of the works.

THE PRODIGIOUS GREAT MOSQUE OF QURTUBA

According to Arabian sources, when ‘Abd al-Rahman I, al-Dajil (‘the Immigrant’), reached Qurtuba he began an intense military, civil and religious building program³ designed to convert the former Roman and Visigoth city into the «capital of Al-Andalus» (*qa’idat Al-Andalus*) and «government seat» (*qa’idat al-mulk*) of the new and first Islamic state of the Iberian Peninsula. The most momentous project of all this was, obviously, the Great Mosque (Illustration I). Commenced in 165 H. (785/786 A.D.), the project required an investment of «eighty thousand dinars» and was rapidly completed on the remains of a modest Christian building, St Vincent’s Church, which, according to the same sources, the Emirate acquired following negotiations with the Christians «for one hundred dinars», thus re-enacting the story of the founding of Damascus’ Great Mosque on the site of the temple of John the Baptist. Both Christian edifices were located, in turn, on the sites of Roman temples, with which the new Great Mosques of both Umayyad capitals stand on «sacralized» sites as an expression of continuity and symbolic surmounting of the pre-Islamic past. Its anonymous master builder designed it with a square ground plan measuring 80 square cubits, both for the patio and for the prayer hall (with sides measuring around 76 m), following the models of the first oriental Umayyad mosques, with 11 naves perpendicular to the kiblah wall and 12 rows of recycled Roman, Early Christian and Visigoth-Byzantine columns. Showing great creativity and architectural skill, to compensate for the extremely weak foundations of the prayer hall, limited to a few stones under each column, and the way the top of the building linked together via the flat wooden roofs that connected the naves under the ashlar stone perimeter wall, which were what gave them consistency, he invented a new and daring system of overlapping arches, which would be perpetuated in the successive enlargements of the mosque and maintained in subsequent Christian interventions, agglutinating up to the present day the image par excellence of the monument. This system, so frequently described and admired, was calculated in proportion to the ground plan taken coherently as a whole, and it consists in the overlapping of two arches of a different order; the lower horseshoe arches (intrados of 55 cm), which act as braces between the pillars that support the upper arches, which are rounded and double

³ ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Dajil «began the aggrandisement of Qurtuba, renewing its buildings, constructing new ones, fortifying them with walls and building the Emirate palace-fortress and the Great Mosque, with a large patio; he also reconditioned the mosques in the *coras* [districts] and built the city of al-Rusafa for his own personal enjoyment, including a beautiful palace and extensive gardens, where he transplanted unusual plants and valuable trees from Syria and other regions». *Ibidem*, p. 546.

the width of the former (intrados of 107 cm) and support a 45 cm wide channel that drains water between the naves' pitched roofs to the patio. This is a progression from the lintel structure used to overlap the arches in the large oriental Umayyad religious constructions (Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa and Damascus mosques), increasing the sensation of weightlessness and the fantasy of architectural multiplicity and movement and emphasized by the two-color red/white painted decoration on the arch voussoirs.⁴ Furthermore, the placement of the pillars made it necessary to select them laterally in order to fit them elegantly on the capitals, creating the scroll modillions; the pillars, as in the case of the two horseshoe arches attached to each pillar, rest on a cross-shaped stone piece added to the capital and which, though imperceptible, is a key cohesive element.⁵



Illustration 1. View of the prayer hall, looking towards the patio, in the first Qurtuba Great Mosque built by 'Abd al-Rahman I in the 8th century.

Source: Photograph by Agustín Núñez.

Also remaining from the 8th century mosque is the *bab al-Wuzara'* (Viziers Door, subsequently San Esteban Door), the outer façade of which was reformed under the orders of Masrur, servant (*fata'*) of Emir Muhammad I, in 241 (855/856), according to the Kufic

⁴ Apart from any possible symbolic values that may be attributed to both colors (white was the color of the Umayyads, red was mentioned in the *hadiz* as the Prophet's favourite color), in Arab literature and philosophy, the combination of both colors, white due to its luminosity and purity, red due to its link to life, were considered signs of aesthetic superiority; this two-color pattern, which is one of the modalities of the *al-ablaq* technique (black and white or contrasts of other colors, habitually found in Syrian architecture), was one of the predominant characteristics of the Cordovan Umayyads and it singled out their works and many of their decorative designs.

⁵ Among the abundant bibliography on the monument, I remit at this point to the study by Antonio Fernández-Puertas (2009). *Excavaciones en la Mezquita de Córdoba*, in Antonio Fernández-Puertas and Purificación Marinetto Sánchez (2009). *Arte y cultura. Patrimonio Hispanomusulmán en al-Andalus*. Granada: Editorial Universidad de Granada, pp. 9-132, where he reviews significant aspects of the mosque's structure and decoration, based on documents, images and unpublished data obtained by Félix Hernández during his excavations. See also Manuel Nieto Cumplido (2005). *La Mezquita Catedral de Córdoba. Patrimonio de la Humanidad*. Granada: Edilux; Christian Ewert (1995). *La Mezquita de Córdoba: santuario modelo del Occidente islámico*, in Rafael López Guzmán (coord.). *La arquitectura del islam occidental*. Granada: El Legado Andalusi, pp. 53-68; Rafael Moneo (1985). «La vida de los edificios. Las ampliaciones de la Mezquita de Córdoba», *Arquitectura*, 256, pp. 26-36, a revealing analysis of the building and its Christian transformations from the perspective of a present-day architect; and the subtle synthesis with good bibliographic guidelines left by Juan A. Souto (2007). «La Mezquita Aljama de Córdoba», *Artigrama*, 22, pp. 37-72.

inscription over its lintel;⁶ it should not be forgotten that this Emir was, in turn, the constructor of the Mayrit fortress, from which, centuries later, Madrid would be born. This façade, the tripartite structure of which, flanked by tower-like buttresses, has late Roman and oriental Umayyad precedents, constitutes the very origins of the Andalusí monumental doors. In the center, the door with lintel is framed by «Cordovan» arches with alternate red voussoirs and embossed plant motifs; the horseshoe arch, with Visigoth and not oriental antecedents, but with wide extrados in a proportion of 2:3 in the arch, two-colored red/white painted decoration on the voussoirs and a thin protruding rectangular frame, would become, from this moment on, the classic Qurtuba arch, unmistakable due to the solemnity and delicateness of its shape. Above the three small blind horseshoe arches on the upper section of the façade, there are eaves supported by corbels with modillions, circled overhead by the stonework of stepped crenulations, imported from the Middle East and which, as from this moment, would become a habitual characteristic of Andalusí architecture. To the right and left, the upper decorative section contains two marble lattices and below these, flanking the entrance door, the remains of the oldest plant motifs carved in stone on the outside of the mosque. The initial project was completed by the son and successor of the Immigrant, Hisham I (788-796), who built the minaret, the ground plan of which was marked out on the floor of the *Patio de los Naranjos*, as well as the *mida'a*, a 20 × 16 m pavilion for ablutions, which contained latrines and was located on the outside of the east-facing façade of the prayer hall, though it was hidden with the extension carried out by Almanzor.

The progressive development of Qurtuba led 'Abd al-Rahman II (ca. 848 A.D.) to extend the mosque with eight new sections of columns, the foundation of which were now laid in a continuous line for each row of columns, and which incorporated 17 Cordoba-built capitals, which were still not as refined as those made during the Caliphate period; the *mihrab* of the first mosque, probably a niche crowned by a round arch with scallops,⁷ was replaced with a new *mihrab* located further south, with stepped footings and overhanging from the wall of the new kiblah, in front of which two white fluted Roman marble columns were placed to highlight it. The two pairs of red and black columns that supported the arch of this *mihrab* were conserved, according to Ibn 'Idari,⁸ by al-Hakam II in his construction and they can still

⁶ Manuel Ocaña Jiménez describes the pyramidal hierarchy of project management and completion, based on the inscriptions and other sources preserved: 1) Honorary project manager (Emir or Caliph); 2) Construction manager (*sahib al-bunyan*); 3) Construction inspector (*nazir al-bunyan*); and 4) Laborers: *'urafa'* or Master builders (*banna'ün*), Surveyors (*muhandissun*) and artisans (*summa*), as well as the artisan builders and sculptors (*naqqashun*). See Manuel Ocaña Jiménez (1986). «Arquitectos y mano de obra en la construcción de la gran mezquita de Occidente», *Cuadernos de la Alhambra*, 22, pp. 5-85. Recently, Juan A. Souto (2010) reviewed these data and extended them to all the Umayyad architecture of between 711 and 1013, in «Siervos y afines en Al-Andalus omeya a la luz de las inscripciones constructivas», *Espacio, Tiempo y Forma. Serie III, Historia Medieval*, 23, pp. 205-263, where he provides a list of over 80 people, principals, managers and artisans, based on their signatures and lapidary symbols.

⁷ See Antonio Fernández-Puertas (2009). *Excavaciones en la Mezquita de Córdoba. Op. Cit.*, pp. 46-49.

⁸ Ibn 'Idari [edited by Georges Seraphin Colin and Évariste Lévi-Provençal] (1998). *Al-Bayan al-Mugrib, II*. Beirut: Dar al-Taqafa, p. 238.

be seen today. Prior to that, his father, 'Abd al-Rahman III, al-Nasir li-Din Allah ('Defender of the Divine Religion'), following proclamation of the Caliphate in 929, had remodeled the mosque's patio, first of all building a new minaret in 340-341 (951-952), for which the previous one was demolished and the patio was extended, and later, in *du l-hiyya* in 346 (23 February-24 March 958, according to the commemorative plaque that attributes the project to the Vizier and Magistrate Sa'id ibn Ayyub), the oratory façade overlooking the patio was reinforced, given that it had been affected by the increased load of the eight new sections added during the extension carried out by 'Abd al-Rahman II. The access arch to the central nave, which is wider than the others, still conserves the 10th century red and white geometric bands, together with the more sober 8th century arch. Clearly, the new Caliph was in a hurry to build a new monumental minaret; however, this strange 47.14 m. high construction in the form of two parallel towers and with separate stairways, one on each side of a dividing wall, was to become a visual reference point in Qurtuba, as well as the focus of admiration and subsequent emulation in Al-Andalus and the Maghreb. According to the intervention by Félix Hernández Giménez⁹ and his restoration based on the remains embedded in the tower of the cathedral designed by Hernán Ruiz II in the 16th century, the minaret, built with ashlar stones on headers and stretchers, had two storeys of windows at the same height, with three small blind horseshoe arches on one wall with geometric decorations, supported by four columns (on the east and west sides), and two open windows with double arches and mullioned columns (on the north and south sides). These windows incorporated the first columns attached to jambs to be found in Caliphate art. Overhead there was a frieze with nine small arches, with intertwined extrados and frames like those of the windows, topped by the stepped crenulations that crowned this huge lower tower. Above this tower there was a second little tower with a chamber for the Muezzins, probably covered with a small dome topped with a *yamur* with four golden spheres and which, together with the stucco cladding imitating white ashlar bordered by layers of red ochre mortar, would have produced an impressive sensation of majesty and vigor, worthy of the Caliphate.

After 961, the imposing minaret was joined by the most spectacular enlargement of the mosque, carried out by al-Hakam II, who had been in charge of his father's project in Madinat al-Zahra. Here, he added 12 new sections of columns and, although the kiblah of the Great Mosque in the aforementioned palatine city had been oriented years previously towards the southeast (with an error of 9°), for the one in Qurtuba it was decided to maintain the original traditional south orientation, for which the land that drops away towards the Guadalquivir was leveled. Not only does the Umayyad architecture reach its maximum splendor at this point, but also many historians consider that this work by al-Hakam II represents the greatest milestone in western Islamic architecture; its constituent components, so often dwelled upon, can be summarized as follows:

⁹ Félix Hernández Giménez (1975). *El alminar de 'Abd al-Rahman III en la mezquita mayor de Córdoba: génesis y repercusiones*. Granada: Patronato de la Alhambra.

a) Unified construction of all the columns with reddish and grayish alternating shafts that converge in diagonals of both colors in the small red and black double pillars of the *mihrab*.

b) New system with four domes, forming a T and with the footings laid out over Vilaviciosa Chapel, where this extension begins, three of which lighted and ennobled the *maqsurá* in front of the *mihrab*, which encompasses five naves and rises up over ten meters. It should be noted that these domes, built with eight intertwined arches on an octagonal base, were the first monumental ridged domes known and they would find continuity in the Andalusí constructions (Bab Mardum Mosque¹⁰ and Du l-Nun Palace in Toledo, Aljafería Oratory in Zaragoza), in North African buildings (al-Qubba al-Murabitiya or al-Barudiyin in Marrakech and the Tremecen Great Mosque, both Almoravid), in the Gothic, Mudejar, European Baroque styles (San Lorenzo in Turin, by Guarino Guarini, 17th C.) and in modern architecture (Islamic Centre in Rome, 1996).

c) In the magnificent aforementioned *maqsurá*, the area reserved for the Caliph in front of the *mihrab* (Illustration 2) is delimited by screens of overlapping arches, which include lobed arches imported from the Abbasid architecture, but which in Qurtuba reached unexpected splendor, becoming the protagonists of the façades in which intertwined and projected arches were also used in order to create a greater sense of opulence and architectural complexity than that offered by the original overlapping arches, which were still reproduced, nevertheless, in other areas of these extensions. These new elevations become large and unexpected «trellises» derived from the overlapping, projection and intertwining of poly-lobed, horseshoe and round arches that, furthermore, display greater density in the stucco decoration. The visual and plastic effectiveness of these arches does not, however, pose any obstacle for them to distribute the load and tensile strength of the domes.

¹⁰ Although many of the components of Qurtuba Great Mosque survived, today there are few examples of the Andalusian religious architecture linked to its aesthetics; the most significant of these is the small Bab Mardum Mosque (later the temple of Cristo de la Luz) in Toledo, financed by a Toledo nobleman in 999-1000, that is, a few years after the extension carried out by Almanzor. Almost square with a ground plan in T and structured in 3 × 3 compartments, its most outstanding aspect is the dome in front of the *mihrab*, which clearly emulates the Cordoban model, but at a much smaller scale.



Illustration 2. *Maqsura* and *mihrab* of Qurtuba Great Mosque; extension carried out by al-Hakam II (ca. 965-970 A.D.).

Source: Photograph by Agustín Núñez.

d) Returning to the traditions of the oriental Umayyad sanctuaries (Dome of the Rock, the al-Aqsa and Damascus mosques, the now disappeared Medina mosque), a magnificent mosaic design was added to the *mihrab* façade, in the central dome and the two lateral doors leading to the *bayt al-mal* ('treasury') and the *sabat* (two-storey passageway that connected, via an exterior enclosed bridge, with the Caliphate palace-fortress); the mosaics were laid in 360 (970/971) under the orders of Ya'far, and not only are they unique in Al-Andalus, but they can also be considered the culmination and epilogue of this art in classic Islam. In this respect, it is habitual to quote Ibn 'Idari, according to whom the Byzantine monarch ('*malik al-Rum*'), after receiving a message from al-Hakam II requesting an artisan «to emulate that done» by Caliph al-Walid in Damascus Mosque, sent him a gift of 320 quintals of mosaics ('*fusayfisa*') together with an artisan ('*sani*'), with whom al-Hakam put a group of slaves to work so that they could learn this art (*li-ta'allum al-sina'a*); the slaves became so proficient that the artisan was no longer required and was returned, together with valuable gifts. The work carried out, according to Ibn 'Idari, was such that it was visited by «all the expert artisans from all over the world».¹¹ The mosaics comprising approximately 1 cm square tessera, are made of glass paste, limestone, ceramic and marble, in 18 colors, apart from gold (mentioned very frequently in Arabian texts on the mosque) and white, among which

¹¹ Ibn 'Idari (1998). *Al-Bayan al-Mugrib. Op. Cit.*, pp. 237-239.

the most outstanding are the red, green and blue ones,¹² used in the Kufic calligraphy and the plant and the geometric motifs; the inscriptions are set out in gold on a blue background and vice versa, and on the doors that flank the *mihrab* there are also borders, straight ones forming frames and curved ones, with gold Kufic symbols on red and blue backgrounds.

e) The central dome is made up of eight braided groin vaults (which the tessera fit very well), at the base of which there is a border with gold Kufic script on a background of blue lapis lazuli with the *basmala* and a fragment of the Koran 22, 78, referring to the duty to pray, the endeavors required of Moslems (*yihad*) and the Abrahamic prophecies. The tessera on the vaulted surfaces comprise a network of astronomical lines with white stars leading to the vertex, where there is a larger, 10-point star in blue; together with this design, full of cosmic symbolism, there are representations of two crowns (central vaults to the north and south) of Byzantine tradition, designed to give weight to the appearance of the Caliph before the *mihrab* as a great sovereign, protected and enlightened by divinity.

f) The inside of the *mihrab* has a magnificent scalloped vault (which has lost its color), inserted within an octagon, six sides of which are decorated with three-lobed blind arches with small columns attached to small pillars.

g) In 355 (965/966), a parquetry *minbar* with nine steps was installed next to the *mihrab*, decorated with Arabic texts assuring that it was manufactured using noble woods (ebony, sandalwood, aloe, etc.) at a cost of 37,505 dinars. Destroyed in the 16th century, it was almost certainly a direct antecedent of the one made in the Qurtuba workshops in 1125-1130 for the Almoravid sovereign 'Ali ibn Yusuf (r. 1106-1142),¹³ an excellent example of the continuity of the great Caliphate art in the city. The *minbar* was used for taking oaths, as well as during the Friday sermon, for which it was taken out and put back. Other aspects of the Cordovan Great Mosque that also attract great interest are the doors, with their bronze cladding and magnificent decoration, its lamps, which

¹² Henri Stern highlighted the great skill shown in these mosaics, in which extreme care was taken in the color distribution, the most visible and best formed of which are to be found in the octagonal frieze with inscriptions from the Koran on the central dome, which offers the greatest contrast. See Henri Stern, Manuel Ocaña Jiménez and Dorothea Duda (1976). *Les mosaïques de la grande Mosquée de Cordoue*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

¹³ As regards this *minbar*, known as Kutubiya *minbar* (today in the al-Badi' Palace Museum in Marrakech), worthy of mention are some of its artistic elements, for which it is considered one of the most important Arabian and Islamic parquetry structures: the geometric sections with eight-point stars that adhere to a precise dynamism and perceptive ambiguity, the minute details and precision of the chequered lines and, in particular, the admirable plant motifs, extremely deep and with leaves that come alive, even escaping from the delimiting fields, which were achieved with great skill and the use of special blades that did not reach Europe until the Italian Renaissance. Furthermore, there are the Koran borders that refer to the divine throne in beautiful non-florid Kufic script, the polychromatic motifs, lost for the most part, with golden elements in the upper part and the meta-architectural decoration with horseshoe arches, footings and capitals on the fronts of the steps, all of which also links to the best mural decoration and Cordovan ivories, to which we will refer later on.

were brass on the outside and silver inside and included a large *zuraya* that hung from the main dome (*qubba kubra*), where the Korans were placed in front of the *maqsurā*.¹⁴

h) With this extension, the Great Mosque ended up with a double kiblah wall, only equaled by its antecedent in Madinat al-Zahra; this double wall encloses a succession of rooms divided, to the east, by the *bayt al-mal* and to the west by the *sabat*, which, as already mentioned, connected the *maqsurā* to the neighboring Caliphate palace-fortress.

i) The wooden roofs of the extension carried out by al-Hakam are the most profusely decorated and colorful, and the best conserved, although with notable modern restorations. Some of the wood is signed by Ibn Fatah; unfortunately, several of the beams were auctioned in London in 2004 and 2008, whilst others, as well as panels from the framework are museum pieces displayed in the galleries in the *Patio de los Naranjos*.

j) The façades built by al-Hakam II follow the tripartite model of the first Qurtuba Emir, but incorporating the artistic novelties of the overhanging and intertwined lobed arches supported by thin columns, together with a rich geometric decoration based on a red and white square pattern, stucco with wide stemmed Cordovan plant motifs, Kufic script bands and lateral latticed windows.

k) A profuse epigraphic program was deployed, which has been conserved to a great extent and includes: 1) Express mention of the constructor Caliph «al-Mustansir al-Hakam, Commander of the Faithful», on the right impost of the *mihrab* arch, which continues on the interior skirting and states that the *mihrab* and its marble cladding constitute a godly project carried out thanks to the «executive management» of Ya'far and the building inspectors and police chiefs (*sahib al-shurta*) Ahmad ibn Nasr, Muhammad ibn Tamlij, Jald ibn Hashim, as well as of the *katib* ('secretary or scribe') Mutarrif ibn 'Abd al-Rahman, and that it was completed in *du l-hiyya* in 354 (28 November-27 December 965); on the skirting inside the *mihrab* it says that «it was the work of» Fath, Nasr, Tarif and Badr, as servants (*abd*) of the Caliph, names that also appear as sculptors (*naqqash*) and creators of the capitals and works in Madinat al-Zahra and other places. 2) Systematic deployment of Koran inscriptions with content relating to justice on the exterior doors (those on the west and those conserved on the east), perhaps in relation to the *bab* al-Sudda of the neighboring Caliphate palace-fortress, where justice was administered and capital punishment carried out. In the *maqsurā* and on the kiblah wall there is a selection of landscapes that emphasize

¹⁴ Al-Maqqari (1988). *Nafh al-Tib. Op. Cit.*, vol. 1, p. 551. In the wall of the al-Hakam kiblah there were mural paintings, some of which were uncovered a few years ago when carrying out restoration work in 'San Bartolomé Chapel' (St. Bartholomew Chapel), specifically the wall on which a black-shafted column rests. Notably, together with the geometric decoration with floral motifs on the left-hand side of the column, to the right a succession of vertical cartouches appeared, forming vignettes with a square base and a three-lobed arch, made up of a cord of pearls that linked them with loops, and each of them including a stylized animal with artistic characteristics similar to the zoomorphic figures in the «green and manganese» ceramics and other Caliphate works of art. This part of the kiblah wall displayed paintings of a trotting gazelle (top), a bird with open wings (center) and a quadruped, perhaps a gazelle or a deer, almost erased (bottom). See Manuel Nieto Cumplido (2005). *La Mezquita Catedral de Córdoba. Patrimonio de la Humanidad. Op. Cit.*, pp. 104-105.

the Caliphate's Malik orthodoxy (in opposition to the free will defended by certain sects and in favor of predestination), as well as verses relating to mercy (obligation to give alms, etc.), on Christianity (for example, the Surah of *al-Iklas* or Pure Faith, in which it is affirmed that God does not beget) and Doomsday.¹⁵

The last of the extensions, that of the *Amiri* leader Almanzor (ca. 987-1000), was the largest in terms of area, comprising the addition of eight naves on the western side and extension of the patio in that direction, for which it was necessary to demolish the houses in the medina. The classic Arabian sources at the time praised the execution of the works, carried out applying the system of overlapping arches invented in the 8th century, although they noted the lack of decoration, especially compared to the project carried out by al-Hakam.¹⁶ This extension gave the complex, it has to be said, significant monumental and visual amplitude, transforming it into the largest mosque in the Western world with 112 doors, 1,103 internal columns (of which 856 remain) and a surface area of 175 × 128 m, that is, approximately 22,400 sq. m. Later, the Christians would carry out the first and discreet intervention following the city's conquest by Fernando III in 1236; another of greater importance was carried out by Alfonso X the Wise, in 1260, removing two naves between the extensions carried out by 'Abd al-Rahman II and al-Hakam. Finally, in 1523, at the height of the Granada wars, it was decided to build a cathedral —in the centre of the Umayyad temple— giving the monument its absolutely matchless appearance and creating what has been and still is a bone of contention between those who argue that the cathedral should be demolished and those who consider it an ingenious piece of architectural engineering, combining the delicate and horizontal reticular structure of the mosque with the elevation of a Gothic temple. To achieve this, following an in-depth study of the Islamic structure, Hernán Ruiz, took advantage of the strong walls of the eliminated kiblans whilst at the same time foregoing greater height for the Christian building. In the end, however, the mosque considered the «most grandiose, marvelous and best constructed of all mosques»¹⁷ retained its essential constituent and artistic components, which today continue to be seen as the most creative and subtle construction and the closest to the current aesthetics.

¹⁵ See Susana Calvo Capilla (2000). «El programa epigráfico de la Mezquita de Córdoba en el siglo x: un alegato a favor de la doctrina ortodoxa malikí», *Qurtuba*, 5, pp. 17-26; Susana Calvo Capilla (2010). «Justicia, misericordia y cristianismo: una relectura de las inscripciones coránicas de la Mezquita de Córdoba en el siglo x», *Al-Qantara*, 31 (1), pp. 149-187. The author includes the necessary references to the studies of the inscriptions in the mosque carried out by Amador de los Ríos, Manuel Ocaña, Martínez Núñez, Nuha N. Khoury and others.

¹⁶ Al-Maqqari (1988). *Nafh al-Tib. Op. Cit.*, vol. 1, p. 551. In the extension carried out by Almanzor appear the signatures of Aflah, Aflah al-Farra' and al-Farra' (they may have been one and the same), Durri, Faray, Fath, Hakam, Jalaf, Nasr, Sa'ada, some of which have been found in previous works and on capitals, column components and other objects not belonging to the Great Mosque.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 545.

QURTUBA'S TWO JEWELS: AL-ZAHRA AND AL-ZAHIRA

To give the new State the necessary representative and residential architecture, the Umayyads also transposed to Qurtuba the Syrian palatine constructions of Byzantine, Hellenistic and Middle East tradition, which they enhanced with their own notable contributions. Following the layout of the oriental Umayyad cities, 'Abd al-Rahman I built an Emirate or governmental palace (*Qasr al-Imara*) next to the main mosque, the connection to which would be maintained and renewed by his descendents; in fact, one of its towers was used to call to prayer before Hisham built the minaret of the Great Mosque, initiated by his father. Replaced by the Episcopal palace and other constructions in the area of the palace-fortress built by the Christian kings, there are only a few remains of this palace and the Caliphate palace-fortress that succeeded it, together with some of the walls and capitals and the baths of the Caliphate area, discovered in the Cemetery of the Martyrs and which were rescued in the last century.¹⁸ 'Abd al-Rahman I also constructed an idyllic country estate (a recreational and gardened palatine city, according to others), located on the slopes of Sierra Morena, with extensive gardens (*yinan wasi'a*) and planted with vines, pomegranates and other fruit trees imported from his country of origin, which he called al-Rusafa, in memory of the mansion of the same name built by his grandfather Hisham, next to Raqqa, in the north of Syria,¹⁹ of which only written references remain. This has also been the fate of other Umayyad palaces, of which we only know their beautiful names, evocative of these lovely places: al-Kamil ('Perfection'), al-Muyaddad ('Renovation'), al-Ha'ir ('the Reservoir'), al-Rawda ('the Garden'), al-Zahir ('the Radiant'), al-Ma'shuq ('the Loved'), al-Mubarak ('the Blessed' or 'the Fortunate'), al-Rashiq ('the Elegant'), al-Surur ('the Joy'), al-Tay ('the Crown'), al-Badi' ('the Marvelous'), al-Bustan ('the Orchard').²⁰ Qurtuba's palatine jewels would, indeed, be al-Zahra ('the Resplendent') and al-Zahira ('the Brilliant' or 'the Flourishing'). Of the latter, there are sufficient material remains, together with some isolated palaces, such as al-Rummaniya,²¹ as well as literary traces, to give us an approximate idea of its artistic and monumental splendor.

Madinat al-Zahra, discovered at the beginning of the 20th century and which a short time after became the most important Medieval archaeological site in Europe, was founded by 'Abd al-Rahman III, according to some sources, on 1 *muhammad*, that is New Year's Day

¹⁸ Regarding this palace-fortress, Andalusi sources mention the doors of *al-Sudda* ('Throne'), *al-Adl* ('Justice'), *al-Yinan* ('Gardens'), *Ishbiliya* ('Seville'), *al-Hammam* ('Bath') and *al-Siba'* ('Lion'), as well as the *al-Sath* or Roof Terrace, from where the sovereign watched military parades and capital punishments carried out on the esplanade beside the river.

¹⁹ Al-Maqqari (1988). *Nafh al-Tib. Op. Cit.*, vol. 1, p. 467, following passages from *al-Mugrib* by Ibn Sa'id.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 464, taken from Ibn Bashkwal.

²¹ Country estate built next to al-Zahra by al-Durri al-Sagir, or al-Asgar, that is, Abu 'Utman al-Saqlabi al-Mustansiri, servant and treasurer of al-Hakam II, to whom it was gifted in 973 and of which there are still palatial remains with a large pool. Al-Durri al-Sagir directed the architectural works and the manufacture of some of the court ivories.

325 (19 November 936),²² although archaeologists have found that work began before this. Furthermore, although the recently self-proclaimed Caliph al-Nasir had his own palaces in the capital, as well as those of his forebears, he decided to embark on an ambitious, lengthy and risky architectural adventure, building a new palatine city, to where he would move his court, the state government and his throne, as well as coin money in a new mint. For his new representative universe that would compete with those built by the Abbasid and Fatimid Caliphs in the East, the first Al-Andalus Caliph chose a location «close to Qurtuba», at a «distance of four miles and a third of mile», that is, prudently distant and, at the same time, well connected with the metropolis. Very soon a mythologizing mechanism arose, presided over by the location's archetype of feminization and the aesthetics of its luminosity. The luminous dimension is intertwined, in its very name, with the feminine character of the project: al-Zahra is, simultaneously, the resplendent and/or flourishing city of the new Caliphate established by al-Nasir and the capricious and beautiful slave that demanded from the sovereign the construction of such an enormous monument. The celebrated founding legend transforms al-Zahra into a beauty reclining in the lap of Bride's Mount (*yabal al-arus*), which the Caliph himself covered with fig and almond trees in order to achieve the splendid environment requested by his love. Furthermore, he irrigated it with abundant water that filled the orchards and gardens, likewise synonymous with chromatic and luminous beauty, as well as evoking harmonious sounds, aromas and fertility. It was in this place, until then a wild hillock in the foothills of Sierra Morena, that al-Nasir concentrated his building activity and modeled the city in the mountain, laying it out on terraces and constructing a labyrinth-like collection of walls, palaces, places of worship, patios, pools, gardens, baths, pathways, homes for the army, the court, the service and artisans, as well as factories, military buildings, etc. until composing a complete regal city with a regular layout and which fulfilled the requirements at that time, even though the promoter of these works would not see them completed.²³

Madinat al-Zahra occupied, therefore, an extensive walled rectangular space of 1,518 × 745 (112 ha), which exceeded even the area of Qurtuba, with the buildings staggered over a 70 m slope, in order to always ensure splendid views of the landscape over the Guadalquivir valley and towards the metropolis in the distance, to which it was con-

²² Al-Maqqari (1988). *Nafh al-Tib. Op. Cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 524 and 526.

²³ From among the enormous amount of bibliography available on the city of al-Zahra, I remit here to the report on the excavations of Félix Hernández Giménez. See Félix Hernández Giménez, Purificación Marinetto Sánchez and Antonio Fernández Puertas (1985). *Madinat al-Zahra: arquitectura y decoración*. Granada: Patronato de la Alhambra; see also the synthesis by Antonio Vallejo Triano (2001). *Madinat al-Zahra, capital y sede del Califato omeya andalusí*, in María Jesús Viguera Molins and Concepción Castillo Castillo (coords.). *El esplendor de los omeyas cordobeses: la civilización musulmana de Europa occidental. Exposición en Madinat al-Zahra, 3 May to 30 September 2001: estudios*. Granada: Ministry of Culture, via the Fundación El Legado Andalusi, pp. 386-397; and Antonio Vallejo Triano (2007). «Madinat al-Zahra. Notas sobre la planificación y transformación del palacio», *Artigrama*, 22, pp. 73-101, with a precise critical analysis of the bibliography; and not forgetting the great comprehensive work: Antonio Vallejo Triano (2010). *La ciudad califal de Madinat al-Zahra. Arqueología de su arquitectura*. Córdoba: Almuzara.

nected via two main thoroughfares that originated at the north and south gates. The best known and extensively excavated area corresponds to the Caliphate palace-fortress, the construction of which is generally considered to have been carried out in three consecutive stages, which we will not consider in depth here: the first two include Dar al-Mulk or regal residence, as well as the main mosque, the Pool House and the two large protocol halls called Dar al-Yund or al-Wuzara' ('House of the Army or the Viziers') and Maylis al-Dahab ('Golden Hall') or al-Maylis al-Sharqi ('Oriental Hall'). These were joined, in the third stage during the Caliphate of al-Hakam II, by the House of Ya'far and the *bab* al-Sudda or the Grand Throne Room Door. Outside the Caliphate palace-fortress, there are the remains of two small mosques and homes and factories in the medina, as well as areas of land left free from building for crops and to allow for the city's growth. The buildings had a square layout, though juxtaposed one against the other, without any prior planning of the complex as a whole. Following are some of the most significant artistic components:

1. Great care was taken to preserve the landscape views when constructing the Caliphate palace-fortress buildings, in turn walled on the central axis and attached to the north wall, the only canvas that was somewhat sinuous in order to adapt it to the terrain. As already mentioned, the upper galleries of the residential buildings, above their patios and the rest of the buildings on the lower terraces, afforded views of al-Zahra itself and the surrounding hills, Guadalquivir valley and Qurtuba; its walls, towers and domes also provided an impressive presence, seen from the outside.

2. In the surrounding area, separated from the guard and stable areas, the monumental representative area was made up of the Dar al-Yund, practically in contact with the north wall, accessed from the *bab* al-Sudda or from the north door, in a bend, via a sinuous route of doors and guardrooms. In the Dar al-Yund there was a magnificent basilica hall, comprising five parallel naves and large transversal hall-portico that opened onto a spacious porticoed courtyard, probably designed for military parades or other solemn occasions. Reconstructed by the archaeologists up to the frames of the main arches and without a roof, the ruins show the solemnity of the space, with its wider central nave and a north wall that, despite not conserving the decoration, suggests it was probably used to accommodate an important figure. The exterior courtyard could be seen from there, via the triple horseshoe arch with red and white voussoirs at the entrance of this nave and the transversal hall-portico, as can the spaciousness of the hall itself, as this north-south axis was complemented by another imposing east-west axis, the most outstanding characteristic of which were the two large horseshoe arches located in the centre of the nave on wide pillars and flanked by two triple horseshoe arches supported by much smaller columns. The entire space of the Dar al-Yund could be viewed or walked via multiple straight or diagonal routes between separate naves/naves joined together by the aforementioned arches, offering different perspectives of what must have been a magnificent landscape for guests, ambassadors and visitors.

3. The ‘Abd al-Rahman III Hall, at a lower level than the above described one, was also built with a basilica layout and a transversal hall-portico, but with a central façade incorporating five horseshoe arches that opened up to the main pool in front of the hall and to three deep naves, which were divided by two galleries with five free-standing columns and two columns attached to the wall at the ends; on the north wall of the central nave, also wider, stood the Caliphate throne,²⁴ from where, through the spans in the hall-portico, the pool, the façade of the pavilion at the other end and its reflection in the pool could be contemplated. This pavilion, comprising three naves and a portico hall, was surrounded by three lesser pools and the High Garden, which, in four beds, formed an almost square spacious area in front of the Golden Hall and up to the palace-fortress wall; it also had its own lookout tower with views over the south part of the garden. On the east side of the al-Nasir Hall lie the remains of the rooms and the palatial baths.

4. To the east of the hall and outside the walled palace-fortress complex, but connected to it via its wall, the ruins of the Dar al-Zakat (‘House of Alms’) can also be seen, next to those of the main mosque of al-Zahra, which clearly diverges from the north-south axis of the palatine buildings, as it was built looking towards the southeast, seeking the Mecca with greater precision, as already mentioned; its location shows its connection to the Caliphate palace-fortress, from where al-Nasir could access the *maq̣sura* through the bridge to the *sabat*, in the double wall of the kiblāh, as well as to the city, so that the faithful could gather at that essential point of contact between the Caliphate and the other social classes, without entering the palace. It is still possible to discern its layout, with five hypostyle naves, the porticoed patio and the base of the minaret (5 m), which rose 20 m high, with two overlapping prisms and crowned with stepped crenulations. According to Arabian texts, a battalion of 300 masons, 200 carpenters and 500 other laborers, between artisans and salaried workers, worked there to complete a magnificent project in only 48 days, and that a sumptuous *minbar* was installed on 20 May 941 so that the mosque could be inaugurated the following day, Friday, by the Imam and Khadi Muhammad ibn ‘Abd Allah ibn Abi ‘Isà, who officiated, for this purpose, the prayers at sundown.²⁵

²⁴ Continuing with the Byzantine, Abbasid and Fatimid protocol, and in competition with these, diplomatic and commercial receptions were organized in the court halls in Qurtuba and al-Zahra, such as those organized by al-Nasir in 949 for Byzantine diplomats, or for the monk Juan de Gorze, ambassador of Oton I, in 956, in which the halls were decked with magnificent carpets, curtains and tapestries; the throne would have been placed under the painted arch on the north wall, like a *mīhrāb*, probably slightly elevated, as al-Maqqari mentions the fabric that covered the tiers of al-Hakam II’s throne when he received Ordoño IV of Leon, indicating that it was a kind of bed with cushion on which the Caliph reclined — See María Teresa Pérez Higuera (1994). *Objetos e imágenes de al-Andalus*. Madrid: Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional-Lunwerg, p. 38. On this protocol, see Emilio García Gómez in *Ibn Hayyan* (1967). *Anales palatinos del califa de Córdoba al-Hakam II, por Isa ibn Ahmad al-Razi* (360-364 H. = 971-975 J. C.) [translated by Emilio García Gómez]. Madrid: Sociedad de Estudios y Publicaciones; and Miquel Barceló (1991). El califa patente: el ceremonial omeya de Córdoba o la escenificación del poder, in *Reyna Pastor, Ian Kieniewicz and Eduardo García de Enterría* (1991). *Estructuras y formas de poder en la historia: ponencias*. Salamanca: Universidad de Salamanca, pp. 51-71.

²⁵ Al-Maqqari (1988). *Nafh al-Tib. Op. Cit.*, vol. I, pp. 563-564.

5. Of special interest are the lesser palatial constructions, specifically those called Pool House and House of Ya'far, particularly because this model, comprising two small porticos, one in front of the other overlooking a patio, the first with a small pool, gardened flower beds and perimeter pathway, as well as private rooms and baths; and the second, with a tiled patio and a central fountain, together with simple, shallow rectangular rooms off the porticos, would find continuity in the subsequent Andalusí architecture, whilst the deep basilica type rooms would disappear. Nevertheless, the house of Ya'far conserves three traditional basilica rooms, though small and slightly off-center in relation to the axis of the portico.

6. The decoration of al-Zahra, reserved for these noble areas of the palace-fortress and for the Great Mosque, continues to amaze due to its profusion, detail, creativity and the quality of the materials used; together with the ashlar stone, the panels of purple rock and mortar with limestone and compacted earth used for pathways, itineraries and floors, purple limestone and alabaster slabs and marble pieces were carved to cover the main areas; the skirting of many rooms, corridors and baths were painted with red ochre, plain or with white plant motifs, using techniques of Roman origin. For the Dar al-Yund and Maylis al-Dahab excellent columns of red and black marble were carved and placed alternatively to form naves and façades; here the bases and the capitals reach their purest Caliphate configuration, showing such formal variety and high quality in the carving of their mesh strips, calligraphic bands and tree structures (called «honeycomb» due to the painstaking and deep trepanation), that they constitute the culmination of the Andalusí and Islamic history of art. Some of these pieces have been conserved onsite, others were subsequently proudly re-used in Andalusí and Christian buildings and several are on display in museums. The horseshoe arches that supported these beautiful columns, on wide inverted pyramid shaped cornices, had a deep intrados that reinforces the sensation of weightlessness as it rises above the construction mass. In this era, oriental tendencies were introduced in al-Zahra, and then in Qurtuba Great Mosque, such as the plant motifs on alternate voussoirs on the arches and the Abbasid lobed arches (for the first time, perhaps, in the circular walkway next to al-Nasir Hall), and a rich mural decoration pattern was developed, considered the most important of the late Middle Ages in the Mediterranean and, furthermore, carved on stone plaques superimposed on the construction, while in the Dar al-Mulk, the Pool House and the Great Mosque, this was limited to the façades with plant motifs of Emirate tradition with acanthi and palm leaves. In the al-Nasir Hall, all the walls were covered with framed panels, resembling rectangular pictures, filled with vegetable compositions made up of a central stem and divided and intertwined branches, with a great many deliberate asymmetries and pairs of fruit (possibly references to the Koran), all of which, despite the schematic nature and the powerful unified control of their execution, exude vitality, exuberant variety and solemnity. These panels (over 65, all of them different, constituting a one of a kind ornamental design)

have been explained as a reflection of paradise. The gardens/paradise, denomination given in some of the Arabian texts to describe the aspect of these walls,²⁶ and subscribed by modern historians with greater precision, it is thought may possibly have been a recreation of the paradisiacal hierarchy expressed in the Koran and Islamic eschatology, with the purpose of exalting the Caliphate and the figure of the Caliph.²⁷ He would have been represented enthroned in stratified combination with the rationalized exterior garden of plants and pools and in a space given cosmic connotations provided by the geometric decoration and the possible *qubba* that would crown him, judging by the Arabian texts that mention and describe it as covered in gold and solid marble of the most varied and pure colors, with stalls also in gold and silver, with which its light irradiated, catching the eye from the surrounding fields and from the distance.²⁸ The Caliph would appear, therefore, in the upper part of an illuminated paradisiacal stairway and protected by divinity, located, as mentioned in the Andalusí literature that mythologized it, in the paved terrace (*al-sath al-mumarrad*) in clear reference to the «palace paved in glass» built by Solomon to reveal the dark mysteries of Bilqis, Queen of Sheba (Koran 27, 44); in the decoration, the Hom Tree or Tree of Life also flourishes profusely on the keystones of the arches (blind arch in the throne room and lateral doors), which would be reproduced later in the arch of the *mihrab* in al-Hakam II's Great Mosque.²⁹

²⁶ In an extremely useful text, Al-Maqqari says that Madinat al-Zahra «was the most marvelous thing that those who traveled through Al-Andalus at the time could hope to contemplate or talk about [...]. And this is so, even if they only found the paved terraces that looked out over the proud garden in the Golden Hall and the *qubba*, plus all the marvels it contained in terms of its perfect execution (*itqan al-san'a*), sumptuous grandeur, beautiful views, skilful rendering and carved marble cladding and worked gold, together with its columns that could have been cast from moulds, its ornamental carvings like gardens (*nuqush ka-l-riyad*), its enormous pools perfectly made, its fountains and its marvelous statues of human figures, for which not even the imagination can find the words to express». *Ibidem*, p. 566.

²⁷ See Manuel Ación Almansa (1995). Materiales e hipótesis para una interpretación del Salón de 'Abd al-Rahman al-Nasir, in Antonio Vallejo Triano (coord.). *Madinat al-Zahra. El Salón de Abd al-Rahman III*. Córdoba: Junta de Andalucía, Ministerio de Cultura, pp. 177-195. Maribel Fierro proposes an interesting interpretation of the paradisiacal symbolism of the hall based on the Koran 55, 46-78 and eschatological works, such as the *Kitab wasf al-firdaws* by 'Abd al-Malik ibn Habib, and places al-Zahra's entire constructive and decorative program in the context of the political-religious conflict between the recently proclaimed Córdoba Caliphate and the Fatimid Caliphate. See María Isabel Fierro (2004). «Madinat al-Zahra, el paraíso y los fatimíes», *Al-Qantara*, xxv, 2, pp. 299-327.

²⁸ See José Miguel Puerta Vilchez (2004). Ensoñación y creación del lugar en Madinat al-Zahra, in Fátima Roldán Castro (coord.). *Paisaje y naturaleza en al-Andalus*. Granada: Junta de Andalucía, Ministerio de Cultura, Fundación El Legado Andalusí, pp. 313-338.

²⁹ The paradisiacal utopia that was al-Zahra had its dystopian counterpoint, and therefore its confirmation, in al-Duwayra, the famous prison at al-Zahra, which, as other prisons and dungeons, was located in the palace-fortress, very close to the Caliphate residence. We have already referred, in passing, to the punishments that were witnessed from the Caliphate palace-fortress next to the Qurtuba main mosque and we will see further references to violence and punishments in the aulic iconography of sumptuary art, where the multiple meanings linked to the exercising of power, the battle to achieve it and its imposition on enemies can be seen underlying the significance of the artistic beauty.

7. Together with the boards and the geometrical red and white frames and panels, there were a series of inscriptions, of which there are interesting examples in the mosque, the Dar al-Mulk, the south pavilion and, above all, in the 'Abd al-Rahman III Hall, where they can be seen in borders running around the frames of the arches on the façades and the interior naves, as well as on the throne's blind arch and some of the footings of the columns and capital. They were carved in an extremely elegant renovated florid Kufic script and their purpose was to glorify the sovereign as Imam and leader of the Caliphate and display the construction date (between 953 and 957) and the names of the project managers and some of the most important creators, some of whom also appear in the work carried out by al-Hakam II in Qurtuba's Great Mosque.

8. In respect of those responsible for or creators of the works at al-Zahra, the Arabian chronicles provide data of interest, such as those collected by Ibn Jaqan (12th C.) who describes how al-Nasir employed 10,000 men, including servants (*juddam*) and laborers (*fa'ala*), who were paid 1.5, 2 or 3 dirham a day to build the spacious complex of al-Zahra; there is even a mention of the master surveyor (*al-arif al-muhandis*) Maslama ibn 'Abd Allah, of Syrian origin to whom, therefore, it is possible to attribute the transposition of the Oriental forms to al-Zahra.³⁰ We also know the name of the master builder (*arif al-banma'in*), 'Abd Allah ibn Yunis, who, with the aid of the sons of Ya'far al-Iskandarani, Hasan and 'Ali, brought pink marble (*rujam*) from Ifriqiya, green marble from Isfaqus church (Tunisia), white marble from Almeria and striated marble from Raya (Malaga), for which, according to Ibn Hayyan (987/988-1076), al-Nasir gave them 10 dinars for each large or small piece of marble, apart from the cutting and transport costs.³¹ Furthermore, in the epigraphic remains of al-Zahra it is still possible to read the names of the project managers, sculptors and some of the marble workers (*rajjam*), mentioned frequently in pairs or groups, on the footings, capitals, arches, friezes and decorative panels; between 954 and 957, the workers in the al-Nasir Hall included: Sa'd, Aflah, Zarif, Badr, Tarif, Nasr, Galib ibn Sa'd, Sa'id ibn Fatah, Muhammad ibn Sa'd, Sa'id al-Ahmar, Rashiq (the three signed a beautiful capital) and Muzaffar, who were probably highly qualified sculptor servants posted to the Caliphate workshop (*dar al-*

³⁰ Rafael Manzano suggests that he could have brought the basilica structure. See Rafael Manzano Martos (1995). *Casa y palacios en la Sevilla almohade. Sus antecedentes hispánicos*, in *Rafael López Guzmán and Julio Navarro Palazón* (1995). *Casas y palacios de al-Andalus: siglos XII y XIII*. Granada, Barcelona: Fundación El Legado Andalusi, Lunwerg, p. 315; according to the master surveyor Maslama ibn 'Abd Allah, 6,000 slabs were leveled, smoothed and carved daily at al-Zahra, apart from those prepared for paving (*tablit*), and 1,400 or more mules were used, 400 of which belonged to Caliph al-Nasir and the rest were hired; each mule carried three loads a month and had to transport a total equivalent of 3,000 meticals per month, with which around 1,100 loads of bricks and gypsum came into al-Zahra every three days —see Al-Maqqari (1988). *Nafh al-Tib. Op. Cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 566-568. The Arabian chronicles emphasize especially the number of columns that, according to Ibn Jaqan, were as many as 4,300, that is, almost four times the amount in Cordoba's Great Mosque; other chroniclers assure that 1,013 columns came from Ifriqiya, 19 from the territory of the Franks, and 140 were a gift from the Byzantine king; the rest of the noble supports came from North Africa (for example, those from Sijilmasa cost 8 dinars) and from different areas of al-Andalus.

³¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 526-527.

sina'a).³² The project managers were Shunayf (in the entire interior of the hall and the baths; he was a Berber client who ascended to the Caliphate court), 'Abd Allah ibn Badr (in the entrance to the inside of the hall; he was the supreme chief of police and Vizier)³³ and Ya'far Ibn 'Abd al-Rahman, in the south pavilion built in 345 (956/957), and in the baths (Ya'far was promoted from servant and head of the stables and of the *tiraz* (royal weavers) with al-Nasir, to *hayib* ('chamberlain'), *sayf al-dawla* and *katib* with al-Hakam, for whom, as we have seen, he managed the work in Qurtuba's Great Mosque and palace-fortress.

9. The idealising rhetoric of al-Zahra was nurtured, not only by the paradisiacal references (Koranic, eschatological and literary) and the chronicled accountancy of the materials, workers and money invested (a third of the state budget), of which the veracity or level of exaggeration is not easy to determine, but also with more purely artistic descriptions on how marvelous the buildings and their components were. Any of today's tourist guides mention the pool full of quicksilver (for others, a mere basin) that, according to some Arabian texts, was placed in a palatine room surrounded on each side by eight doors with ivory and ebony arches encrusted with gold and pearls and supported by colored columns with diaphanous glass. When al-Nasir wished to impress a visitor, he made a sign to one of his slaves to shake the mercury and the flashes that irradiated on the hall façade (*maylis*), and inside, produced such displays of light that the audience was captivated and even had the impression that the building was taking flight together with those present as the quicksilver moved.³⁴ This artifice was presented as a scenic innovation invented by al-Nasir, although other Arabian historians assure that his Fatimid competitors had already caused a sensation with another similar mercury pool.

10. However, all this aesthetic-representative zeal on the part of al-Nasir to build architectural landmarks, at any cost and on any terrain, providing them with water brought long distances and in perpetuating his works (*tajlid atari-hi*) as a sign of monarchic strength (*quwwat al-mulk*), vigorous power (*izzat al-sultan*) and supreme aspiration (*uhw l-himma*), albeit in the words of the Andalusí chroniclers, meant that he devoted so much of his energies to achieving the perfect construction and decoration of the al-Zahra palaces that he was absent three consecutive Fridays from the Great Mosque and in the face of such a serious

³² See María Antonia Martínez Núñez (1995). La epigrafía del Salón de 'Abd al-Rahman III, in *Madinat al-Zahra. El Salón de Abd al-Rahman III*. Córdoba: Junta de Andalucía, Ministerio de Cultura, pp. 107-152. The fact that several of these same names appear in al-Hakam's expansion of Qurtuba's Great Mosque and palace-fortress, and even on some of the ivories and «green and manganese» ceramics, would seem to indicate, according to the author, that they were more the direct supervisors of the Caliphate workshop, rather than all-purpose artisans.

³³ María Antonia Martínez Núñez mentions the participation of Shunayd and, in particular, 'Abd Allah ibn Badr, in the persecutions carried out years previously by the Caliphate against the *Massariés* in the context of the confrontation with the Fatamids; according to Martínez Núñez, the titles taken by the Caliph in the inscriptions in the hall, in which most important parts contain the sole title of *Imam*, also correspond to the ideological dispute. *Ibidem*.

³⁴ Al-Maqqari (1988). *Nafh al-Tib. Op. Cit.*, vol. I, p. 527.

breach of his religious obligations, as remarked upon by the chroniclers, his faithful and watchful faqih, Mundir ibn Sa'īd al-Balluti, had no choice but to censure him in the Great Mosque of al-Zahra, exclaiming:

Do you construct on every elevation a sign, amusing yourselves, and take for yourselves palaces and fortresses that you might abide eternally? And when you strike, you strike as tyrants. So fear Allah and obey me. And fear He who provided you with that which you know, provided you with grazing livestock and children and gardens and springs [...]! [Koran, 26, 128-134].³⁵

In another of the many ups and downs in the strained relationship between aulic architecture and religious piety, probably the example most reported in Andalusī literature, and which renders the Caliphate legitimacy more believable and solid, as commented by Maribel Fierro, gave al-Nasir the opportunity of responding firmly to the renowned faqih who had managed to bring rain to Qurtuba in a public prayer; it is said that the Caliph recited: «When kings seek to have their grandeur remembered after they have gone they use the language of buildings (*alsun al-bunyan*). / Have you not seen how the pyramids live on whilst the kings are erased by time? / The construction (*bina'*), when it is grandiose / of great status it becomes a sign». Nevertheless, despite the fact that the Imam and Commander of the Faithful endeavored, with the aid of his collaborators and artists, to «sacralize» his projects, not only with the pious construction of the Great Mosque next to the palace-fortress, but also through the mural decorations and the always eloquent epigraphs, its final hours came prematurely, and al-Nasir's own enjoyment of al-Zahra was short-lived. In fact, its brilliance was eclipsed a short time after, following the accession to the throne of al-Hakam II's son, the weak Hisham II (976-1009 and 1010-1013) and Almanzor's entrenchment of the Caliphate administration in Madinat al-Zahira, in 370 (981). The final decline came in the era of the second son of the Amiri leader, 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Al-Mansur ibn Abi 'Amir, nicknamed Sanchuelo, upon the outbreak of the *fitna* and al-Zahra was repeatedly burned and destroyed by the people; finally, during the government of al-Mustakfi (1024-1026), the palace-fortress was sacked of all that was left.³⁶ A little after the dominion of Qurtuba by King al-Mu'tamid of Seville in 462/463 (1070), his minister Abu l-Hasan Ibn Siray visited the ruins with other Viziers and officials from the Abbasid court who, captivated by the fascination now exercised by al-Zahra, that of a decrepit woman in her twilight years, surrendered to premature romanticism — as Rubiera Mata called it —, which would become the topic of the Arabian poetry and literature, from the contemporary Ibn Zaydun, at least, up to our days. The illustrious visitors, at the service of Al-Andalus' most renowned king poet,

³⁵ Translation from *El Corán* by Julio Cortés (1991). Barcelona: Herder.

³⁶ «Con esta ruina se plegó la alfombra del mundo y se desfiguró aquella hermosura que había sido el paraíso terrenal», in the words of Ibn Hayyan set out in *al-Dajira* by Ibn Bassam —translated by Emilio García Gómez (1947) [“This ruin wrinkled the carpet of the world and defaced that beauty, which had been a paradise on earth”]. «Algunas precisiones sobre la ruina de la Córdoba omeya», *al-Andalus*, xii, fasc. 2, p. 281; for the fate of the ruins of al-Zahra throughout history, see Félix Hernández Giménez, Purificación Marinetto Sánchez and Antonio Fernández Puertas (1985). *Madinat al-Zahra: arquitectura y decoración*. *Op. Cit.*, pp. 182 and following.

al-Mu‘tamid, arrived at the desolated palaces of al-Zahra, they entered its high chambers, finished their drinks on the balconies and, and after visiting the ruins (*atar*), probed the effects of destructive time, seeing how plants and varmints had taken over the place, how the songbirds had been replaced by birds of ill omen and how the splendid and fertile al-Zahra had become an old lady, whose sons were long gone, a rose that has swiftly lost its bloom.³⁷

The place’s symbolic feminization, paradisiacal and nuptial, encompassed even Qurtuba, which al-Hiyari saw as a splendid bride adorned, for a short time, with two jeweled studs (*qurt*), al-Zahira and al-Zahra, which he classed as royal seats (*hadirata l-mulk*) superior to al-Jawarnaq, al-Sadir and Gumdan (*Nafh*, I, 153), the mythical oriental cities, prototypes of architectural marvels, and at the same time, of human arrogance defeated by time. Unfortunately, even less traces remain of al-Zahira than of al-Zahra, of which it was actually a rival, as the *de facto* usurper and creator of a usurping Amiri state, Muhammad ibn Abi ‘Amir, Almanzor, commenced its construction —also on the outskirts of Qurtuba— in 978, as a new aulic city. Whilst al-Zahra was located to the west of the metropolis, Arabian sources place al-Zahira to the east and alongside the River Guadalquivir, localization that would seem to be corroborated by the many and fragmented remains found in the area. Almanzor installed himself in al-Zahira in 980 for security purposes, emulating the Caliphs and as a show power. Extended over the plains next to the river and surrounded with walls, according to Ibn Jaqan, it took him only two years to build. There he placed the government offices, the Administration and the Treasury, he distributed plots amongst his secretaries, generals and ministers, he planted orchards and gardens, established markets and held receptions. One of the palaces at al-Zahira was «the Home of Joy», with double marble columns that were soon praised in poems, whose authors had no qualms in comparing them to Solomon’s topical and Koranic constructions in Bilqis.³⁸ Al-Saqundi and Ibn Sa’id, in the 13th C., and al-Maqqari in the 17th C. would insist, in a less literary manner but with similar eulogizing intention, on the luminosity that imbued the vast ribbon that both Cordovan jewels formed together with the mother city: «the construction joined the buildings of Qurtuba, al-Zahra and al-Zahira, and it was even possible to walk by the light of the lamps (*daw’ al-sunay*) placed over a distance of ten miles».³⁹ All of this has now been snuffed out, but many of the works of art created in the workshops of both ephemeral hubs of splendor, as well as those of the metropolis, still retain their brilliance; all of them were created for the enjoyment of the sovereign and the court, to adorn the gardens and the rooms or as gifts to show off, in other latitudes, the image of Cordovan opulence and refinement.

³⁷ See María Jesús Rubiera Mata (1988). *La arquitectura en la literatura árabe: datos para una estética del placer* [prologue by Antonio Fernández Alba]. Madrid: Hiperion, p. 131; and José Miguel Puerta Vilchez (2004). *Ensoñación y creación del lugar en Madinat al-Zahra*. *Op. Cit.*

³⁸ María Jesús Rubiera Mata (1988). *La arquitectura en la literatura árabe: datos para una estética del placer*. *Op. Cit.*, pp. 132-134. It should be noted that Almanzor also built himself a country estate of which only the name is known: al-‘Amiriya.

³⁹ Al-Maqqari (1988). *Nafh al-Tib*. *Op. Cit.*, vol. I, p. 456.

THE PLASTIC AND FIGURATIVE DOMINANCE OF THE OBJECTS

Some of the aulic objects were legendary in their time, such as the pool (*hawd*) installed in Madinat al-Zahra, which Andalusí literature dwells on due to its peculiar shape and its ornamentation and gilding carried out in the Orient, in Damascus or Constantinople, and transported by sea and land by Ahmad the Greek and the Bishop Rabi; it is thought to have been green and with carvings (*nuqush*) and images (*tamatil*) that included human figures (*alà suwar al-insan*) and that it was placed in the al-Mu'nis ('the Intimate') bedroom that al-Nasir had installed in the Golden Hall; 12 images were added, made of red gold and incrustated with valuable pearls, manufactured in the *dar al-sin'a* ('royal workshop') at Qurtuba, under the supervision of al-Hakam's son, the only person it was said that al-Nasir delegated to and trusted. The depictions in question made up a significant aulic zoo: a lion, together with a gazelle and a crocodile, on one side, on the other, a serpent, an eagle and an elephant; and on the two flanks, a dove, a falcon, a peacock, a hen (or cockerel), a kite and a vulture.⁴⁰ This sculptured fauna was thought to have been manufactured in gold with incrustations of rich pearls, with water gushing from their beaks and jaws forming a majestic fountain, as so many others that were installed and were later praised in poetry by the prolific Andalusí aulic literature.⁴¹

Although without gems and precious materials, different pools and fragments of marble fountains have survived to the present day, some of which were complemented with zoomorphic spouts cast in metal. Well-known Caliphate examples of these pools, with felines and birds of prey (lion and eagle) devouring herbivorous animals (gazelles, deer, bulls, etc.) — millenary illustrations of power that were incorporated in Islamic royal symbols via Sassanid art— include the Cordovan Caliphate pool, brought to Granada by King Badis (Alhambra Museum) and which displays a double scene of a feline attacking a herbivorous animal, divided on either side of a central tree of life, which is accompanied by hunting eagles on the sides. Other examples are the two Amiri pools, originating probably from Madinat al-Zahira; Almanzor's Pool, to whom it is dedicated in a Kufic inscription that dates it at 377 (987) (National Archaeological Museum, Madrid) and the one dedicated to his son 'Abd al-Malik (1002-1008), which is conserved in the Madrasa ibn Yusuf in Marrakech, which is similar, though it has lost some of its decoration. On this latter, the abundant decoration combines fields of vegetable and floral ornamentation, aquatic birds and fish around the edges, with classic aulic zoomorphic imagery (eagles with quadrupeds on their spread wings and gazelles in their claws, as well as gryphons facing each other on each side of a tree). In Almanzor's Pool, one of its frontals is a vigorous meta-architectural composition formed by small columns designed to look like they are supporting three three-lobed

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 526-527 and 568-569; and Al-Maqqari (1978). *Azhar al-riyad fi ajbar 'hyad*. Rabat: E.A.U., pp. 270-271; translation by María Jesús Rubiera Mata (1988). *La arquitectura en la literatura árabe: datos para una estética del placer*. *Op. Cit.*, pp. 91-92.

⁴¹ Ibn Jaldún attributed to al-Nasir the possession of other royal beasts (*wahshi*) and birds (*tuwur*) in al-Zahra. See Al-Maqqari (1988). *Nafh al-Tib*. *Op. Cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 578.

arches with typical Cordovan alternating voussoirs, each of which house an axial tree of life, with which, plainly, the architectural imagery is incorporated in the aulic iconography of status and sovereignty. From al-Zahra there are also traces, and some still remain in its ruins, of several circular pools with braided sections, without figurative elements and with sparse and attractive vegetable decoration, or simply with a Kufic calligraphic frieze, such as the 12 braided sections with inscriptions referring to al-Hakam II and his minister Ya'far, with date corresponding to 970 (Granada Archaeological Museum). It goes without saying that the construction of pools, fountains and animal spouts lasted in Al-Andalus until the Nasrid era, taking with it an abundance of poetic literature. However, the most celebrated of all of them were, without a doubt, the zoomorphic fountain spouts that, with pre-Islamic origin and subsequent exaltation in Arabian architectural mythology, enjoyed a golden era in Al-Andalus, and which are represented mainly by the fawns of Madinat al-Zahra (Illustration 3) of which the following have been conserved: one in Cordoba Museum (now Madinat al-Zahra Museum), one in Doha Museum in Qatar, and another, more deteriorated one, belonging to the National Archaeological Museum in Madrid. Manufactured in cast bronze using a lost wax casting technique, their exquisite profile, which emanates both grace and solemnity, and their stereotyped almond-shaped eyes and the fine scrolls of plant motifs that cover their bodies, distance them from copies of nature, giving them an eminently symbolic presence that evokes abundance, beauty and status. This is corroborated by the figure considered a quadruped in Bargello Museum (Florence) (10th - 11th C.), probably another fawn, although not as streamlined and with different vegetable decoration, which has a central band with a Kufic phrase *baraka kamila* ('complete rendition'). From the series of lion spouts that, with variants, reached the latter years of Al-Andalus, we will mention the lion with articulated tail and open jaws in Kassel Museum, and the one from Monzón, Palencia (Louvre Museum), attributable to 12th C., but with many similarities to the precedent Umayyad bronzes, among them, the border with a propitious Kufic inscription displayed on its flanks.⁴²

⁴² Its function was similar to that of an elephant carved in stone that poured water into a pool of a country estate close to Qurtuba (Cordoba Diocesan Museum), the image of which reappears in 11th C. poetry, specifically in a poem by Ibn Wahbun, which describes another elephant-fountain in the palace of al-Zaki de al-Mu'tamid in Seville — Ibn Bassam (2000). *Al-Dajira* [ed. by Ihsan 'Abbas]. Beirut: Dar al-Garb al-Islami, vol. iv, p. 519. Apart from the prolific poetic idealization of this type of fountain, we can also find some pictorial recreations, such as that in one of the *Hadit Bayad wa-Riyad* miniatures (13th C., Vatican Museum) in which two heads (perhaps of a deer) pour water into a pool in the Garden of Our Lady.



Illustration 3. Madinat al-Zahra fawn, 10th century. Cordoba Archaeological Museum.

Source: Photograph by Agustín Núñez.

Within these same aesthetics, although with a different function, fall the two peacock-shaped bronze pitchers, possibly for rituals, one of which (Louvre Museum) carries the Arabic inscription: «the work of ‘Abd al-Malik the Christian» and another in Latin: «*Opus Salomonis era TX*», that is, with the Andalusí date T X (1010), equivalent to the year 972. The symbolic link between birds and Solomon is well known in both the Islamic and Christian worlds and this peacock and another similar ones found in Mores (North Sardinia, Pinacoteca Nazionale di Cagliari) contain the same plant motifs on the wings and breast as those on Hisham II's wood and silver casket (Gerona Cathedral) and the semicircles are like those on the Pisa Gryphon. All of this indicates that they must be Andalusí and fall within a Christian context, given that they bear a cross, the inscription thus suggests and because, furthermore, for Christians the peacock was a «symbol of the Gentiles who come to Christ from distant lands», according to Raban Maur (s. IX).⁴³ As regards the famous Pisa gryphon, the figure of this fantastic being is elevated to the status of grand bronze, constituting a rounded mass with extraordinary presence. A hybrid with the head, beak and wings of an eagle and the legs of a lion, it is therefore a fusion of both solar animals and emblems of sovereignty, as well as being associated with the tree of life and traditionally considered as a vigilant and beneficial being.

⁴³ María Jesús Viguera Molins and Concepción Castillo Castillo (coords.) (2001). *El esplendor de los omeyas cordobeses: la civilización musulmana de Europa occidental. Exposición en Madinat al-Zahra, 3 de mayo a 30 de septiembre de 2001: estudios*. Op. Cit., p. 47. Worthy of mention within the refined metallurgy of Qurtuba and its area of influence are other pitchers and a large range of other pieces, such as pierced candle holders (especially the Algeciras candle holder with the Kufic inscription *Baraka* and the figure of a bird, dating from the Caliphate era), and others originating from Cordoba and Madinat Ilbira, or the bronze lamps and brazier feet adorned with lion heads, of a simpler manufacture, also found in Madinat Ilbira (9th - 10th C., Granada Archaeological Museum), as well as different objects for daily use, coins, and jewels (Garrucha, Loja, Ermina Nueva and Charilla Treasuries), or the beautiful Caliphate scenes from Cordoba and Lucena (Cordoba Provincial Archaeological Museum). *Ibidem*, pp. 190-246.

From the ancient Middle Eastern arts it migrated to Islamic art and can be found in fountains, ivories, textiles and other Umayyad and Andalusi objects. This gryphon, to which some attribute a decorative function while others give it a ceremonial use, was almost certainly cast in Al-Andalus in the 11th century and it bears propitious or desiderative borders with beautiful Kufic calligraphy («Absolute and constant blessings, benefits, bliss, health and happiness for its owner»). On the upper part of its legs there are carved lions (two front legs) and eagles (two hind legs), thus dividing the archetype image of the gryphon, whilst the wings and areas of the head are decorated with stylized feathers and the body with incised circles.

This imagery reappears, miniaturized, on the ivory caskets and jars manufactured in the workshops at Qurtuba and Madinat al-Zahra, and later on those in Cuenca, but enhanced, on the valuable ivory supports, with anthropomorphic figures to form small books illustrated with elegant calligraphic bands, delicate ornamentation, symbolic animals and subtle aulic scenes, which raised these objects to the summit of Medieval artistic luxury.⁴⁴ The ivory must have reached Qurtuba following ‘Abd al-Rahman III’s military campaigns in the Maghreb and it was a common material used for gifts by the African leaders, as is confirmed by al-Maqqari in his well stocked Andalusi library, which refers that 8,000 pounds of ivory reached Qurtuba, sent to Hisham II in 991 by Emir Zuhayr Ibn ‘Atiya. From the workshops in Madinat al-Zahra, the oldest documented, originate other works, such as the Zamora Cathedral jar (National Archaeological Museum, Madrid), the one in the New York Hispanic Society and the little box in Fitero (Navarre), the latter two signed by Jalaf. Specialists have detected another workshop in Qurtuba itself, active between 960 and 970, although their production was less refined than that of al-Zahra. The Zamora *pyxis* is made up of two pieces of ivory, body and lid, topped with a knop in the shape of an *amalak* fruit; carved with a hammer and chisel, it displays straight and deep cuts and a beautiful *chiaroscuro* effect. The Kufic inscription, well visible on the plain border placed around the base of the lid, asks for «divine blessings for Caliph al-Hakam al-Mustansir bi-Llah, Commander of the Faithful» and records that the jar was made «for the honorable mother of ‘Abd al-Rahman, under the orders of Durri al-Sagir, in the year 353 [964]»,⁴⁵ that is, for the legendary Subh, Basque slave who became the wife of al-Hakam II and mother, therefore, of heir to the Caliphate at this date. However, ‘Abd al-Rahman was to die prematurely and he would be succeeded on the throne by Hisham II, who was born the year after the manufacture of the piece in 965. The body is adorned with vegetable shapes punctuated by vertical symmetry

⁴⁴ See José Ferrandis Torres (1935-1940). *Los marfiles árabes de Occidente* [2 vols.]. Madrid: s. n.; John Beckwith (1960). *Caskets from Cordoba*. London: Victoria and Albert Museum; Ernst Kühnel (1971). *Die islamischen Elfenbeinskulpturen: VIII-XIII Jahrhundert*. Berlin: Deutscher Verlag für Kunstwissenschaft; and María Teresa Pérez Higuera (1994). *Objetos e imágenes de al-Andalus*. *Op. Cit.*, pp. 27-31 and bibliography.

⁴⁵ We have already indicated above the ascendance and high offices held by Durri al-Sagir. Another casket was made for another woman, «the lady and noble wife of ‘Abd al-Rahman, Commander of the Faithful» (Victoria and Albert Museum) with the sole decoration of a florid Kufic border with plant motifs, almost certainly made in Madinat al-Zahra after the death of ‘Abd al-Rahman III in 961. Likewise, the little boxes of Fitero ivory and the one in the Don Juan Valencia Institute, all dated in 966, as well as the one in the Hispanic Society (ca. 968), among others, also display decoration limited to a vegetable band and Kufic inscriptions.

axes, which suggest trees of life, and include double and single palms, single or multiple foliate leaves, as well as peppers, lettuce hearts, vegetable sprouts and flowers. Among the foliage, pacific looking animals are interspersed: eight pairs of birds facing each other on the lid and, on the jar, four pairs of peacocks, fawns and four pairs of birds.

This kind of idealized garden or paradise, the vegetable shapes, axial lines and floral motifs, which can also be found on some of the palatine mural panels, is filled with precise royal and masculine iconographic designs in other more complex ivories, such as the al-Mughira jar (Louvre Museum) (Illustration 4) and the Leyre casket (Navarre Museum). The al-Mughira jar has a cylindrical, almost architectural structure similar to the Zamora one and it is comprised of eight medallions with eight lobes, all joined together by a *continuum* of small leaves, like a braid, which flows dynamically over the entire piece and even extends over the perimeters of the body and the lid.



Illustration 4. al-Mughira Jar (968 d. C.). Louvre Museum (Islamic Section), Paris.

Source: Photograph by Agustín Núñez.

Viewing the medallions from right to left, as the attractive Kufic inscription on the base of the lid is read, we see an initial scene with dynastic content: over a throne supported by lions, inveterate image of sovereignty, there is a representation of the possible stereotypes of al-Hakam II's two brothers: 'Abd al-Rahman, with rod and chalice, both symbols of renewal of life and the new year in Antiquity, which indicate that he is the heir to the throne, and al-Mughira, holding a fan, which can be linked to the Byzantine liturgical fans. Both are seated «Turkish style» on each side of a standing laud player, one of the most commonly found musical depictions on these ivories and on many other Andalusí and Islamic works of art (textiles, capitals, ceramics, etc.) allusive to the importance, solemnity and festive ambience provided by aulic music. One foot of each of the two prince figures protrudes in front of the throne, subtly breaking the stateliness of the image. With all the figures beardless and, therefore, lacking Caliphate dignity, the

scene seems to allude to the future stability of the line of succession. This is confirmed in the parallel medallion, on the other side of the *pyxis*, which shows two lions devouring two bulls on each side of a vegetable axis, a classic representation of the sovereignty and the violence that sustain power and which has been carried out here with foreshortened figures that fill with life and plastic vigor a scene that, on its own merit, appears in all the manuals on Islamic Art. The simple Kufic inscription on the lid: «God's blessings, wellbeing, happiness and joy for al-Mughira, son of the Commander of the Faithful; May God have mercy on him. Made in 357 [968]», unusually omits the name of the reigning Caliph, al-Hakam II, whilst it does refer to 'Abd al-Rahman III al-Nasir, father of al-Mughira. 'Abd al-Rahman III al-Nasir was 18 years old when he received this *pyxis* and, given that al-Hakam II still had no descendents, both brothers were seen as heirs, although when 'Abd al-Rahman died around 970 al-Mughira became the most likely candidate. However, the aforementioned Subh quickly gave him the two children referred to above, 'Abd al-Rahman and Hisham, whilst al-Mughira was murdered by order of Almanzor on the same day that al-Hakam II died (1 October 976), and hours after Hisham II, still a child and malleable by the Amiri leader, was proclaimed sovereign. These historical circumstances led Renata Holod to perceive an ironic meaning in this ivory, which Prado-Vilar later specifies, suggesting that its iconography could have taken shape in the circle of Princess Subh and the *hayib* al-Mustafi who, in 967, had just supported Almanzor, a cruel, erudite person who favored luxury objects and gifts, according to al-Maqqari, with which the *pyxis* would have been given to al-Mughira as part of a veiled threat or, more likely, in my opinion, as a pedagogical reminder of his place.⁴⁶ The other medallions show, in this respect, images depicting the interruption of life cycles, probably allegorical of the danger of rupture in the Caliphate line of succession, as one of them contains the curious scene of a tangle of vines with three eagle's nests (the central one with four eaglets and the lateral ones with eagles incubating eggs) whilst the two young men, bitten by dogs (punishment for traitors of Al-Andalus) are trying to steal the eggs. In the parallel medallion, two horse riders carrying eagles are collecting dates on each side of a large palm tree, whilst being attacked by quadrupeds. Other secondary scenes are inserted amongst the vegetable decoration on the *pyxis* depicting violence and confrontation: below there are two dogs biting the tails of two gryphons, two wrestlers, two rams and two deer, all of them confronting one another; in the top part there are two eagles, a peacock flanked by two peahens, two animals, perhaps wolves, attacking an onager and two falconers. On the lid, four medallions surround the disappeared fruit-shaped knob, with opposing gazelles,

⁴⁶ See Renata Holod (1992). Bote de al-Mughira, in *Jerrilynn D. Dodds (coord.). Al-Andalus: las artes islámicas en España [exposición La Alhambra, 18 marzo-19 junio 1992]*. New York, Madrid: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, El Viso, 192-200; and particularly, Francisco Prado-Vilar (1997). «Circular Visions of Fertility and Punishment: Caliphal Ivory Caskets from Al-Andalus», *Muqamas*, 14, pp. 19-41; and (2005). «Enclosed in Ivory. The Miseducation of al-Mughira», *Journal of the David Collection*, 2.1, pp. 138-163, with a detailed and suggestive analysis and historical, poetic, literary and iconographic references.

two lions and two peacocks, a falconer on horseback, partridges or peahens, two doves, two birds, two lions and two jackals or dogs, all facing each other. The narrative structure of the *pyxis* and its design, established based on axial lines, symmetries and circularity, as well as on independent but complementary units, correspond to a compositional system similar to that of Arabian poetry. Let us not forget that some poetic pyxides were made, such as the one in the Hispanic Society, which has a carved Kufic poem that feminizes and idealizes it aesthetically, whilst at the same giving it its identification as a container for perfumes and precious stones.⁴⁷

Other well-known ivories express mainly messages praising and exalting the sovereign or a member of the court, such as the Ziyad jar (Victoria and Albert Museum), made in 359 (969/970) for Ziyad ibn Aflah, police chief with al-Hakam II, who was an ambitious figure involved in a number of Caliphate succession intrigues. The surface of this *pyxis*, which is also decorated with medallions linked together in a continuous band, shows the carved stereotype of a figure administering justice whilst seated on a throne (for some the Caliph, for others Ziyad himself who, after changing sides, in fact requested severe punishment for the responsible of a plot against al-Hakam II), following this the figure appears traveling on an elephant, and finally, hunting;⁴⁸ whilst in the first medallion, the throne's crossbars end in lion's feet paws, of Byzantine and Roman origin, the two confronting birds with their heads turned that appear below link them to Sassanid models, in the medallion above the elephant, the chair-throne is different and the two courtesans with sword and flask in the previous medallion are now two servants driving the elephant; inserted in the undergrowth there are also confronted gryphons, pairs of birds, heraldic eagles, deer, bulls, hunting animals, etc. as a symbol of elevation and power. Another of the more elaborate and valuable jewels of Cordovan ivories, the aforementioned Leyre casket (Navarre Museum, Pamplona) also displays a laudatory and victorious significance, in honor on this occasion of Almanzor's son, perhaps commemorating his victory in Leon, which gained him

⁴⁷ «Mi aspecto es de gran belleza / seno de joven que conserva toda su turgencia. // Mi traje de gala es la belleza. / Tengo vestido adornado de brillantes piedras. // Y soy así envase / para almizcle, alcanfor y ámbar», say the verses — translated by Juan Zozaya (1999) ['My look is of great beauty / a young breast still firm. // My gala robe is my beauty / I have a dress adorned with brilliant stones. // And I am thus a container / for musk, camphor and amber']. Los marfiles de Cuenca, in *Mil años de arte en Cuenca*. Cuenca: Asociación de Amigos del Archivo Histórico Provincial de Cuenca. This feminizing and complacent language applied to the artistic object reappears in later Andalusian objects and architectures, such as some vases and mural qasidas in the Alhambra. In this context, Prado-Vilar has compared the messages of the Cordovan ivories with the Arabian poetic genres, linking some of them, such as the one on Subh to the descriptive and naturalistic idealising poetry, others, such as the ones on the Ziyad jar and the Leyre casket to the panegyric and finally, the one on al-Mughira to satirical poetry, although perhaps it would be better to link it to the pedagogical and poetry. Let us not forget that the same author detected notable similarities between its scenes and the images and content of *Kalila wa-Dimna*.

⁴⁸ There are other ivories with this kind of enthroned representations, such as the Davillier jar (Louvre Museum), which has aulic scenes similar to those on the Leyre casket, or the casket dating from the beginning of the 11th century in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London (Inv. No.: 10-1866), on which the dais of the throne is shown raised above vegetable motifs.

the nickname of *Sayf al-Dawla* ('State Saber'). Its main inscription, in magnificent florid Kufic script with pearled letters, decorates the front of the lid, beseeching good wishes and long life for the *hayib* Sayf al-Dawla 'Abd al-Malik ibn al-Mansur, adding that it was made under the orders of the great server Zuhayr ibn Muhammad al-'Amiri, and that it was «the work of Faray and his disciples», who names are, in fact, displayed on different parts of the piece (Misbah, Faray, Jayr, Sa'ada, Rashid), as well as that it was made in 395 (1004/1005); this could indicate that it was made in Madinat al-Zahira, although its shapes are closer to those of the workshop at al-Zahra.⁴⁹ The decorative area comprises 23 eight-lobed medallions (13 on the lid and 10 on the box), linked by a braided band that, as on the al-Mughira jar, forms a dynamic *continuum* between the borders and the fields of the main scenes; of these, the most outstanding are the three aulic scenes, the visual narration of which begins parallel to the start of the inscription, with a larger bearded figure, with the Caliphate attributes (ring, branch and chalice). This figure, thought be that of Hisham II (976-1009 and 1010-1013) is sitting on a throne supported by lions and flanked by two lesser sized standing servants, who are looking at him; in his honor, the one on the left is holding a staff of office with a curved apex and the one on the right, a standard and a flask.⁵⁰ These attributes of sovereignty were incorporated in the Islamic rituals and iconography, attributing to the Prophet the use of the ring-seal with his name, on one hand and, on the other, the staff of office (on other occasions the Prophet's famous *burda* or mantle). Some Arabian texts also mentioned «the Chalice of the Worlds», clearly alluding to the expression of the Caliph's power, symbolism inherited from the ancient Iranian traditions («Chalice of Immortality» or «Chalice of Salvation»). During his proclamation in 961, al-Hakam II blandished a long bamboo cane with a curved end, and during his renewal of oath, the former's successor, Hisham II, proceeded to Qurtuba's Great Mosque with «the Caliph's Scepter» accompanied by Almanzor and, following the prayers, he retired to Madinat al-Zahra, handing over the actual government to the Almarí leader. On some ivories and textiles, the chalice is replaced by a flask, with the same meaning, which one can imagine full of wine, as it is also found in bacchanalian court scenes.⁵¹ The central medallion of the Leyre casket con-

⁴⁹ The fact that the names of Faray and Sa'ada also appear on capitals and carvings in Almanzor's extension of the Grand Mosque begs the question, difficult to answer, of whether they were general purpose artists or different specialist who applied similar aesthetic parameters.

⁵⁰ María Teresa Pérez Higuera appropriately cites this panegyric dedicated to 'Abd al-Rahman III to mark the birth of his son al-Hakam II: «Y por cuya generosidad hay lluvia cuando falta la lluvia, / tú en cuya mano apenas aparece la caña de bambú / cuando ya brotan en sus puntas las hojas verdes», and this other in the 'Abd al-Rahman III Hall in al-Zahra during the Sacrifice Festivities in 971: «Nuestros días admiran el esplendor del imperio, y son como bodas y festines, / pues la justicia reina, la religión islámica brilla y el ramo del imperio verdea y da sus frutos», translated by García Gómez ['And for whose generosity there is rain when there is no rain, / you, whose hands have barely touched the bamboo cane / when already from its top spring green leaves' and 'Our days admire the splendour of the empire, and they are like weddings and feasts, / as justice reigns, the Islamic religion shines and the empire's staff turns green and gives fruit']. Cited by María Teresa Pérez Higuera (1994). *Objetos e imágenes de al-Andalus*. Op. Cit., p. 54.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, p. 55.

tains three musicians (two with flutes and the one in the middle playing a laud) and to the left there are two beardless figures sitting, Turkish style, one on each side of a central tree and looking at each other, on a throne supported by lions. Given the political situation, the content of the inscription and the aforementioned attributes of sovereignty, it is likely that one of the figures is 'Abd al-Malik himself, true holder of the power since the death of his father, Almanzor, in 1002, as he appears with the chalice and staff of office; the figure carrying a branch and chalice to his right could represent his progenitor, from whom he would have received the command, although this is quite conjectural. On the symmetrical medallions on the other side, a hero stands out in the centre, perhaps 'Abd al-Malik, fighting with two lions, and in the accompanying medallions, there are pairs of horse riders with spears and swords, separated by an axial tree; they are static in the right-hand medallion and fighting each other in the left-hand one. These medallions are, in short, heroic scenes of fighting, triumph and power, which have been diversified in the other bas-relief ivory decorations, with confronting gryphons and unicorns, deer, lions attacking gazelles and a person climbing a tree, eagles hunting quadrupeds, images of hunting with falcons, lions and an elephant, as well as some peacocks and other animals and people mixed in with the undergrowth. On the other hand, the different quality of the composition and manufacture can be seen, particularly in the figures on the lid, due to their energetic naturalism and the precision with which they were carved.

Another later piece, the Braga Cathedral flask, the inscription of which pleads for «*al-hayib Sayf al-Dawla*» —once again Almanzor's son, 'Abd al-Malik— prosperity, happiness and increased glory from God, recording that it was made under the orders of Zuhayr ibn Muhammad al-'Amiri, though without giving a date, notwithstanding which it can be situated in 1004, year in which 'Abd al-Malik took on the title of Sayf al-Dawla, and before 1007, when he adopted the title of al-Muzaffar ('the Victorious') following his victory against Sancho García. The flask displays the most architectural shape of these ivories, as it is decorated with six horseshoe arches, supported by small columns with capitals, over which, above a loop derived from the projection of each arch, the lid forms a dome topped with a knob in the shape of an *amalak* fruit. The arches are filled with pairs of animals and birds and two people who are collecting and eating fruit; the loops, making up medallions, contain two deer, two peacocks and two quails, whilst the lid is covered with five eight-lobed medallions, each containing an animal (two lions, a peacock and two deer). Due to the pacific nature of its decoration it is thought that it was created to mark some nuptials or seasonal festivity, although it can also be interpreted in a diplomatic, or even Eucharistic light, due to which it has been suggested, on the other hand, that it could have been a gift from Asbab ibn 'Abd Allah ibn Nabil, Kadhi of the Qurtuba Mozarabs, to Mendo Gonçalves of Portugal when he visited Portugal in representation of 'Abd al-Malik to support Don Mendo in his disputes with Sancho García for the guardianship of the young Alfonso V, which would also explain the fact that its iconography shares characteristics with that

of the Visigoth images in the Gothic chalice conserved together with this *pyxis* in the Portuguese cathedral.⁵²

The royal workshops also produced pieces with an official stamp, although with more general semantics such as the renowned «green and manganese» ceramics, which were made in the cities of al-Zahra and Ilbira during the Caliphate. Vegetable, geometric, calligraphic, zoomorphic and anthropomorphic decoration was applied on a white glazed background (slip glaze) using copper (green) and manganese (black) oxides, whilst honey glaze was applied to the outside. Glazed ceramics, a contribution of Islam, attained a high level of refinement in Qurtuba, where oriental and Andalusí techniques and motifs were combined in an unmistakable synthesis. Such pieces include the *ataifors* with the words *al-Mulk* ('the Sovereign, Regal and Divine') repeated a simple Kufic band (National Archaeological Museum, Madrid) and again in a single central word painted in a more elaborate florid Kufic script (Cordoba Archaeological Museum). In the first case, the Kufic border is surrounded by a perimeter of plant motifs with palm leaves, whilst in the second the vegetable component forms a five-point star with curved lines, in the manner of an encasing cosmos. One of the Madinat al-Zahra jars also carries a border with *al-Mulk* in simple Kufic script, whilst another only has geometric borders and vegetable decoration with palm leaves and petals with evident creativity. Also belonging to the genre of «green and manganese» ceramics is a glazed jar with rear handles and vegetable bands without any calligraphy (Cordoba Archaeological Museum) and other works with figures of people and animals, such as the beautiful musicians' bottle (in the same Cordoba museum), the theme of which matches the «Musicians' Capital» (laud players), the only capital with human figures in Caliphate art (Cordoba Archaeological Museum),⁵³ as well as the fragment of a dish with a warrior wearing a helmet and coat of mail and carrying a spear and shield, the bowl with gazelle in the Valencia National Ceramics Museum and several fragments of dishes with peacocks and doves painted with a plant in their beaks (theme well-known in Byzantine art), all of these found in Madinat al-Zahra, plus the flask with hares from Madinat Ilbira (Granada Archaeological Museum). Other examples include certain singular pieces, such as the vessel in the shape of

⁵² Hypothesis offered by Serafin Moralejo contained in Francisco Prado-Vilar (1997). «Circular Visions of Fertility and Punishment: Caliphal Ivory Caskets from Al-Andalus», *Op. Cit.*, p. 34. A little after the fall of the Caliphate, ivories continued to be made at the Cuenca workshop, where Muhammad ibn Zayyan, author of the Silos casket in 1026, worked together with 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Zayyan, perhaps the brother of the former, who signed the Palencia casket in 1049, which is dedicated to Isma'il, son of the King of Toledo, al-Ma'mun. However, these pieces are carved on ivory plaques that were subsequently attached to the wooden box and their decoration is less refined.

⁵³ Also unusual are the capitals with zoomorphic themes, of which we can mention the one conserved in the Alhambra Museum, from the times of Almanzor, which shows two confronted aquatic birds with worms in their beaks.

a giraffe (Louvre Museum),⁵⁴ deemed to have belonged to a palace in Madinat al-Zahra and which is also made with a white glaze and decoration in green and manganese, and the dish known as the Madinat Ilbira horse bowl, in which a bird is riding a splendidly harnessed oriental-looking horse and holding the reins in its beak, unusual and enigmatic symbolism, though ancestral, given that it was known by the ancient Indo-Europeans and perhaps it should be linked to the idea of a spiritual guide (bird) showing the way to Paradise (one of the many meanings attributed to the horse in Arabian mythology and culture). Following the rupture of the Caliphate, local ceramic workshops sprang up throughout the 11th century in Toledo, Balaguer, Valencia and Mallorca, and prosperous new techniques, such as the lost wax technique of which there are examples from Madinat al-Zahra where, additionally, fragments of golden earthenware were found, although it is thought that they were oriental importations as all the signs indicate that these sophisticated ceramics were not developed in Al-Andalus until the middle of the 11th century and, in a regular manner, as from the 12th century in Qurtuba.⁵⁵

Obviously, a very special place of importance in the dissemination of the symbols of Cordovan Umayyad sovereignty is reserved for the *tiraz* or state weaving; the *dar al-tiraz* or weaving workshop was located next to the Caliphate palace-fortress and was run by a *sahib al-tiraz* or weaving workshop manager, who was a high vizier or chamberlain. Its first manager, in the 9th century, was Harith ibn Bazi, followed by Rayhan (910-911), Jalaf the Elder (925) and the famous Ya'far, who was given the post in 961 when al-Hakam II succeeded to the Caliphate. Regarding this Caliph we know, specifically, that he visited the *dar al-tiraz* in 972, where he was received by the workshop supervisors, and where he asked about the work and gave them guidelines. This official artistic-formal institution had direct Sassanid and Byzantine precedents, and it was adapted to the Islam to manufacture luxury textiles, on which the royal *marsam* ('hallmark') was placed, quite often together with the name of the sovereign. They were made for the use of the monarch and his family, for civil servants and members of the court, to be worn in celebrations, to adorn aulic and private buildings, or to be given as gifts and even to be stored as valuable treasures. Although it seems that silk was only beginning to be produced in Al-Andalus in the 9th century in Jaen, it is possible that with 'Abd al-Rahman I production of this material had already begun in Qurtuba. Ibn 'Idari does record, however, that it was 'Abd al-Rahman II (821-852) who was «the first person to establish the *tiraz* factories and extend their production in Qurtuba». It should be noted that this Emir was particularly interested in emulat-

⁵⁴ It is well-known that in festivities celebrating Nayruz (Spring) were held Al-Andalus, in which clay toys, especially in the shape of a giraffe, were given as presents.

⁵⁵ For all this, apart from the aforementioned *Al-Andalus. Las artes islámicas en España* and *El esplendor de los omeyas de al-Andalus*, see the studies by Basilio Pavón Maldonado (1972). «La loza doméstica de Madinat al-Zahra», *Al-Andalus*, xxxvii, pp. 191-227; and the books by Balvina Martínez Caviro (1991). *Cerámica hispanomusulmana*. Madrid: El Viso; and by Carlos Cano Piedra (1996). *La cerámica verde-manganeso de Madinat Al-Zahra'*. Granada: Fundación El Legado Andalusi.

ing the Abbasid court and that, under his government, Ziryab (ca. 788/789-ca. 857/858) arrived in Qurtuba. It was this factotum or cultural hero, almost mythical, poet, singer, musician and artist in general who, fleeing from the court of Harun al-Rashid, brought to Al-Andalus not only musical novelties (laud melodies and improvements for laud and its playing with a new plectrum), but also new gastronomic customs and table etiquette, such as the use of leather table cloths and crystal glasses, for which he is linked to the growth of Cordovan glass art.⁵⁶ It is also said that textiles with his name on the borders were secretly woven for Emir Muhammad I in Baghdad, and that in times of Emir ‘Abd Allah, the governor of Seville, Ibrahim ibn Hayyay, manufactured them with his name on «copying the Qurtuba custom».⁵⁷ During his trip to Qurtuba in 948, Ibn Hawqal would mention the quality of the Andalusí brocades, wools and silks, their magnificent colors and the weightlessness and beauty of the garments, which were exported and competed with those of Orient. From the Cordovan *tiraz*, in any case, there are some examples of calligraphies and decorations in tapestry stitch with silk threads in different colors with and abundant gold from Cyprus or gilt, such as the considerable *almaizar* (turban-like veil) belonging to Hisham II, which, originating from the reliquary of San Esteban de Gormaz (St. Stephen of Gormaz, Soria) and conserved in the Royal Academy of History (Madrid), is decorated with a large border on the ends worn over the shoulder, with the inscription, repeated in two lines and in reverse: «In the name of God the indulgent, the merciful, prosperity and long reign to the Caliph, Imam and God’s servant, Hisham, the object of God’s benevolence and Commander of the Faithful» in a florid Kufic script similar to that of Madinat al-Zahra. Between both lines of calligraphy there is a succession of octagons (like in the Coptic textiles) with birds, lions and gazelles, whilst the two octagons at one end contain two human figures, one masculine, probably the Caliph mentioned in the inscription, Hisham II, who is sitting Turkish style and holds a flask in one hand and is pointing deferentially with the other to his right, where there is a female figure, presumably his mother, Subh, with which the iconography influences the political and aulic nature of the piece. The vegetable elements interspersed between the «vignettes», joined in turn by eight-point stars, coincide with some of the Caliphate ivories and mural decorations commented on previously. Possibly with a similar composition, the 10th century embroidered textile, called *Yuba de Oña* and which was found in San Salvador Monastery

⁵⁶ The Arabian source that records with the greatest details the artistic-cultural adventure of Ziryab, based on previous texts, is Ibn Hayyan al-Qurtubi (2003). *Al-Muqtabis II-I* [ed. by Mahmud ‘Ali Makki]. Riad: Markaz al-Malik Faysal li-l-Buhut wa-l-Dirasat al-Islamiya, pp. 307-335; and Ibn Hayyan al-Qurtubi (2001). *Crónica de los emires Alhakam I y Abdarrahman II entre los años 796 y 847 [Almuqtabis II-I]* [translated by Mahmud Ali Makki and Federico Corriente]. Zaragoza: Instituto de Estudios Islámicos y del Oriente Próximo, pp. 193-215. It is known that in Al-Andalus several Iraqi glass objects were imported, but that with Emir Muhammad I they were also manufactured here, for which the factories of Murcia and Almería became renowned during the Caliphate; later they were produced in Seville under al-Mu’tamid (11th C.), in Malaga, Murcia and Almería (13th C.), together with golden earthenware, as well as in other cities.

⁵⁷ María Teresa Pérez Higuera (1994). *Objetos e imágenes de al-Andalus. Op. Cit.*, pp. 86-88.

at Oña (Burgos), shows a figure sitting on a dais, supported by branches that sprout from a vessel, in profile and pointing with the right hand, probably towards a main figure situated on the lost part of the textile. Also from the Cordovan *tiraz* are the fragment of embroidery dedicated to 'Abd al-Rahman III and carried out under the orders of Durri in 941-942 (Cleveland Museum) and the piece of the famous *Pyrenees tapestry* (Instituto Valencia de Don Juan, Madrid), on which a series of linked circles are embroidered with aulic animals inside (similar to the al-Mughira jar and the Garrucha treasury), of which only one of the circles with a peacock has been conserved, all accompanied by Caliphate vegetable and floral motifs. Likewise, there is the San Lázaro Shroud (St. Lazarus Shroud), from Autun Cathedral (France), which shows a turbaned horse rider and a falconer with a belt, with a mention, in simple Kufic script, of 'Abd al-Malik al-Muzaffar, for which the textile appears to be an exaltation of the aforementioned triumph of Almanzor's son in 1007.⁵⁸ In the era of the Taifas, other workshops came to the fore, such as the one in Almeria, place that 'Abd al-Rahman III had turned into a city in 955 after crushing a Mozarab uprising and fending off a Fatimid attack against Pechina. Almeria replaced Qurtuba in the manufacture of textiles, which reached the Orient and, according to al-Idrisi, the port city had as many as 800 silk looms, weaving dresses, cloth and brocades with beautiful designs, flowers and eye-shaped motifs. It was there, in «al-Mariya», where the Cape of Fermo (Italy) was made, as is recorded in its inscription dated 510 (1116/1117), with a rich figurative aulic pattern organized within linked circles: elephant with rider, falcon hunting, galloping horse rider, sovereign sitting Turkish style on a throne and flanked by a musician and a servant with a fan, as well as aulic animals, such as eagles with their wings spread hunting a gazelle, a panther, a gryphon, a winged lion, a sphinx, also with wings and a branch in its mouth, together with fawns, gazelles, parrots, peacocks and even aquatic birds; all of this is interspersed with vegetable motifs, trees of life and lotus flowers, and geometric elements (circles, spirals and eight-point stars). This textile, probably made for an Almoravid leader, perhaps 'Ali ibn Yusuf, who reigned at the time and favored the arts in Almeria, constitutes the survival of the visual language of Umayyad Qurtuba and, at the same time, in the golden Kufic inscription on a background of blue, it tells us of its disappearance.⁵⁹

SCRIBES AND BOOK ARTS IN QURTUBA

Throughout this synthesis of the artistic production in Qurtuba, calligraphy has occupied a central place in providing significance, from the hard marbles, mosaics and monumental spaces of the architecture to the more malleable materials of ivory, ceramics, textiles

⁵⁸ Cristina Partearroyo Lacaba (2007). «Tejidos andalusíes», *Artigrama*, 22, pp. 371-419.

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 383-386; and Laura Ciampini (2009). La capa de Fermo: un bordado de al-Andalus, in Antonio Fernández-Puertas and Purificación Marinetto Sánchez (eds.). *Arte y cultura. Patrimonio Hispanomusulmán en al-Andalus*. Op. Cit., pp. 141-177.

and, naturally and to conclude, parchments. If, with Islam, book arts obtained remarkable development, Qurtuba was one of its main hubs, thanks to state and private patronage, as well as the devotional, scientific and literary activity of the Andalusí Umayyads and their followers, who created a flourishing book industry in contact, always, with the Arabian Orient. We have examples of Arabian texts in Al-Andalus, from the first Andalusí coins known, the bilingual dinar of 94 (716), bilingual, the one from the year 102 (720), now with two faces with Kufic script following Caliph 'Abd al-Malik's numismatic reform, or the dirham coined by 'Abd al-Rahman I in 146 (763). Soon the calligraphy was put to monumental and artistic use, which would have a magnificent evolution from simple incised texts to the extremely refined simple and florid Kufic Caliphate scripts, the fame of which reached the Orient, where, in the 10th and 11th centuries «Andalusí Kufic» was celebrated as one of the most important Arabian calligraphies.⁶⁰ From 'Abd al-Rahman I (r. 788-796), considered a man of letters and a poet, the Andalusí Umayyad family also encouraged the importation, copying and production of books, and the creation of libraries. Emir Muhammad I (r. 852-886) gathered together a large royal library that exceeded all others in existence in Qurtuba; likewise, 'Abd al-Rahman III was also renowned for his passion for books, which led the Byzantine Emperor to present him with a copy of Dioscorides' medical works, written in Greek on parchment with letters of gold and silver and marvelously bound and illustrated with drawings of medicinal plants;⁶¹ a freed slave (*mawlā*) of this first Caliph, the Cordovan traditionalist Sa'id ibn Nasr Abi l-Fath (927/928-1004/1005), also worked as proof reader. Nevertheless, the book activity would reach its maximum heights with al-Hakam II (r. 961-976), based on which Andalusí sources cite tens and even hundreds of people dedicated to this art. In the Umayyad capital there was even a district called 'of the *al-raqqaqin*', that is «parchment makers» and book makers. According to Julian Ribera's calculations, in Qurtuba's age of maximum splendor as many as sixty to eighty thousand books could have been produced annually, taking into account the number of master technicians with hundreds of students who copied the lessons in the Great Mosque and other mosques, the teams of women scribes mentioned in the texts and the many librarians, bibliophiles, sovereigns

⁶⁰ For example, the foundation stone of Ibn 'Adabbas's mosque in Seville, built during the Emirate of 'Abd al-Rahman II, contained a still a roughly incised Kufic inscription, mentioning the Emir, the project manager, the Moslem scholar Ibn 'Adabbas, the calligraphic carver, 'Abd al-Barr ibn Harun, and the construction date, 214 (829/830). Another example is the inscription on the main door of Merida Alcazabar, with the names of two project managers, the governor 'Abd Allah ibn Kullayb ibn Ta'laba and the freed slave Hayqar ibn Mukabbis, also from the era of 'Abd al-Rahman II, and with the date *rabi* 11 220 (4 April-2 May 835); the epigraphy here is much more regular and calligraphic, whilst in the following decades, with the foundation stone of Tolosa arsenal, with calligraphy by Ibn Kulayb in 333 (944/945) and, in particular, the epigraphs mentioned from al-Zahra, al-Hakam's Great Mosque and the two Caliphate sumptuary objects, as already mentioned, the Cordovan Kufic script reached its zenith. See Manuel Ocaña Jiménez (1970). *El cufico hispano y su evolución*. Madrid: Instituto Hispano-Árabe de Cultura.

⁶¹ See Al-Maqqari (1988). *Nafh al-Tib. Op. Cit.*, vol. 1, p. 367; and Julián Ribera Tarragó (1928). *Bibliófilos y bibliotecas en la España musulmana, in Disertaciones y opúsculos, I*. Madrid: Imprenta de Estanislao Maestre, p. 191.

and courtesans who had salaried copyists.⁶² Furthermore, al-Hakam II compiled the largest library known in Al-Andalus, starting with the collections inherited from his ancestors, to which he added that of his brother Muhammad and the volumes he himself ordered and which were manufactured in his scribe workshops. His proverbial Library of Knowledge (*jiznatu-hu al-'ilmiya*) had 400,000 volumes, registered in 44 volumes of indexes each with 20 folios, according to the author of *The Dove's Necklace*, Ibn Hazm of Qurtuba (994-1063).⁶³ The best binders in Al-Andalus worked in the palace-fortresses of the Cordovan Umayyads, together with illustrators, decorators and expert copyists, grammar supervisors and scholars,⁶⁴ from Sicily and even from Baghdad. Among the scribes and calligraphers who worked for al-Hakam II we will mention the Cordoban man of letters and lexicologist Muhammad ibn al-Husayn al-Fihri who was copyist (*warraq*), corrector and finisher of the works of Abu 'Ali al-Qali al-Bagdadi (893-967), and an important eastern lexicologist who, after spending some time training in Baghdad, went to Qurtuba, where he would die after training a number of Andalusis. The aforementioned and erudite Ibn al-Husayn al-Fihri, together with Muhammad ibn Mu'ammār from Jaen, took charge of copying (*nasf*) and refining the works of Abu 'Ali al-Qali called the *al-Bari' fi l-luga* ('Language Expert'), as well as another two of his lexicons, the *Kitab al-hamza* and the *Kitab al-'ayn*. When he finished the book and al-Fihri presented it to al-Hakam II, who —according to the sources— wanted to know what had been added to the copy (*'nusja*) of Jalil's *Kitab al-'ayn*, the first Arabic dictionary, the copyist informed him that no less than 5,683 words. From this lexicon-scribe cooperation between al-Qali of Baghdad and the aforementioned Andalusis, of note is the extremely high esteem that al-Qali had of the wholly oriental work *Adab al-kuttāb* ('Educating Scribes') by Ibn Qutayba (828-889), who cited his Andalusī students as models. Later

⁶² *Ibidem*, p. 204.

⁶³ Ibn Hazm (1962). *Yamharat ansab al-'arab*. Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, p. 100; according to Ibn Hazm in the same work frequently cited and which would be mentioned by Al-Maqqari (1988) (*Nafh al-Tib. Op. Cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 385-386) al-Hakam II's interest for knowledge and passion for books was such that, according to the eunuch Talid, head of the Umayyads' library, al-Hakam acquired works from all over, as well as ordering scholars to come from Baghdad and sending traders everywhere and sending them funds to buy books (it is said that he sent 10,000 dinars of pure gold to buy the *Kitab al-agani* from Abu l-Faray al-Isfahani, who sent him a copy of this magna literary encyclopaedia even before it saw the light in his native Iraq); al-Hakam, in short, «gathered in his house [according to the eunuch] the most skilful artisans in the art of copying (*fi sina'at al-nasi*) and the most dextrous in vocalisation (*fi l-dabt*) and in good binding (*iyadat al-taylid*)», until compiling in Al-Andalus the best library ever seen, and which could only be matched, in the opinion of al-Maqqari, by the one gathered together by the last generation of Abbasid Caliphs, specifically Caliph al-Mustadi' (d. 1170). Al-Hakam's library was sacked during the Berber uprising and part of the collection was sold; finally, a client of Almanzor cleared the rest. *Ibidem*.

⁶⁴ As regards the art of binding, the famous Cordovan leather, called 'cordobán', was used for this purpose, tanned goat's skin, used for gloves, cushions, saddles or sword sheaths or *guadameci*, a variety of more flexible embossed leather made from ram's hide, decorated with gold and colored designs, manufactured in a factory in Axerquia in Qurtuba. The treatise on binding drawn up by Ibn Ibrahim from Seville (d. ca. 1230-1232) *Kitab al-taysir fi sina'at al-tasfir* ('Simplification of the Art of Binding') has been conserved; its detailed content describing the manufacture, decoration and restoration of books can be consulted in the work by Hossam Mujtar al-Abbady (2005). *Las artes del libro en el Magreb y al-Andalus (siglos IV H./X d. C.-VIII H./XV d. C.)*. Madrid: El Viso.

this same work by Ibn Qutayba, in which specific attention is paid to the calligraphy, would be commented on by the lexicologist and philosopher Ibn al-Sid of Badajoz (1052-1127), resulting in one of the scarce theoretical reflections on the art of oriental-style calligraphy produced in Al-Andalus. Additionally, the Malik Faqui Abu 'Amr al-Dani, who was born in Qurtuba, studied in Cairauan, Cairo, Medina and Mecca, returned to Qurtuba and then resided in Denia, where he died in 1053, compared, in one of his multiple treatises on the reading of the Koran, entitled *al-Muhkam fi naqt al-masahif* ('Perfection Regarding the Koran Punctuation'), the letter *alif* to the human body, as a canon of beauty and harmony.

Another of the figures that contributed to the introduction of calligraphic knowledge and forms in Al-Andalus, this time from Cairauan, was Abu l-Fadl ibn Harun (907/908-989) of Sicily, who, after a stay in the aforementioned Tunisian city, an important hub of calligraphic dissemination, joined the group of copyists (*waraqin*) working for the crown prince at the time al-Hakam II, attaining a prestigious reputation in this activity.⁶⁵ Ibn Harun, the Sicilian, also worked under the orders of Ya'far al-Bagdadi, who «set up in Qurtuba and was one of the head copyists renowned for his exact vocalization and excellent calligraphy, as was 'Abbas ibn 'Amru, also from Sicily, Yusuf al-Balluti, Andalusí, and others».⁶⁶ All of these were employed by al-Hakam II in *al-wiraqa* ('book factory'), joining his famous teams of scribes, which also included women, such as Lubna al-Katiba, Fatima bint al-Sabullari and others. Indeed, we know that many of the «Al-Andalus female scholars» held the status of *katibas* ('scribes and calligraphers'); they were generally slaves who worked for their lords or ladies and were in charge of writing the correspondence and other official documents; some were copyists, with the actual office of court scribes due to their good calligraphy, although no works signed by them have been found. Calligraphy is, in any case, one of the arts, together with poetry and singing, on which there are the most reports of women artists found in classic Arabian Islam, given that copying the Koran and books of erudition was considered a devotional activity suited to them. In the Emirate and Caliphate Qurtuba, at least as from 'Abd al-Rahman II, female slaves and literary freed slaves and scribes were incorporated to work directly for the sovereign and the royal house, as their ancestors in Damascus and the Abbasids in Baghdad had done. The slave called precisely Qalam ('Flute') served Abd al-Rahman II as a singing, literary and scribe slave; she was of Basque origin and after training and learning to sing in Medina, she was acquired by this Emir and shone in Qurtuba thanks to her literary knowledge, her compositions and poetic reviews and beautiful calligraphy. Even 'Abd al-Rahman II's daughter, called Baha'

⁶⁵ The following data on Qurtuba calligraphers and calligraphies have been extracted, in the main, from the repertoires and works of Ibn al-Abbar, Ibn Bashkwal, Ibn al-Faradi, Ibn 'Abd al-Malik and al-Maqqari; many have already been cited by Julián Ribera and María Luisa Ávila, and I have also provided details on them in «Caligrafía y calígrafos andalusíes» and «Calígrafas del islam árabe clásico»; See José Miguel Puerta Vilchez (2007). *La aventura del cálamo: historia, formas y artistas de la caligrafía árabe*. Granada: Edilux, pp. 139-202.

⁶⁶ Al-Maqqari (1988). *Nafh al-Tib. Op. Cit.*, vol. I, p. 111.

('Splendor'), lived an ascetic life dedicated to making copies of the Koran, which she donated as devotional objects, as the Tunisian Fadl had done, from whom signed copies of the Koran have been found. An example of the piousness of this royal family scribe is the fact that the mosque in the suburb of al-Rusafa, to the north of the Qurtuba medina, carries her name: «al-Baha' Mosque». Baha' died in the month of *rayab* 304 (December 917), at the beginning of the reign of 'Abd al-Rahman III, for whom several slaves with calligraphic skills worked, such as the freed slave Radiya, copyist in the official installations; Kitman, from Cordoba, who was also Caliph's *katib* in the palace-fortress of Qurtuba, and Muzna (d. 358 [986]), another excellent female scribe and person of letters (*'adiba*). Also of this period is Zumurrud, female slave *katiba* who died in 336 (947). Apart from people of letters, bibliophiles and calligraphers, Abbasid Baghdad also exported some female scribes, such as Sitt Nasim al-Bagdadiya, who Abd al-Rahman III employed due to her skill, to imitate his writing and draw up official documents when, in his old age, he had lost his sight.

His son and successor, al-Hakam II, also had a number of female slaves at his service who were trained in music, letters and calligraphy: Lubna (d. 984-986), successor of her father al-Nasir, was expert in grammar, metrics and accounting, as well as a poet and magnificent calligrapher (*'katiba*, *'jattata*); the Cordovan Fatima bint Zakariya ibn 'Abd Allah al-Katib (d. 1036), daughter of a client and scribe at the service of al-Hakam II and of his *hayib* Ya'far, was scribe (*'katiba*) with excellent calligraphy as well as a polygraph expert; she died at the age of 94 and was buried, ceremoniously and multitudinously, in the cemetery of Umm Salama in Qurtuba. Al-Hakam's successor, Hisham II, was served by another of these slave calligraphers, called Nizam al-Katiba, who worked in the Cordovan palace-fortress (*qasr al-jilafa bi-Qurtuba*); extremely eloquent, she specialized in copying and drafting epistles (*'rasa'il*) and was the author of the letter (*'jitat*) offering condolences to 'Abd al-Malik al-Muzaffar for the death of his father Almanzor and naming him the latter's successor in *shawwal* 392 (August-September 1002). However, the calligraphic activity of women in Qurtuba was not limited only to the court environment, but its intensity was such that it is frequently observed that in the eastern suburb, during the Caliphate, 127 women worked making copies of the Koran with Kufic calligraphy, reason for which Julián Ribera opines that the massive use of female labor in the production of copies of the Koran was due to the fact that they were paid less than the men, apart from their abilities and the probity of their skill.

Following the decline of the Caliphate, the Andalusi sources continue to mention Qurtuba calligraphies. The series of biographies incorporated by al-Maqqari in *Nafh al-tib* taken from Ibn Hayyan, who, it should be noted, said that no slave in Al-Andalus could be matched in wisdom, education and poetic skills, mention literary freed female slaves and poets, such as 'A'isha bint Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Qadim of Qurtuba (d. 400 [1009/1010]), perhaps the daughter of Muhammad ibn Qadim ibn Ziyad, who was subsequently a freed slave. 'A'isha composed panegyrics for several Andalusi sovereigns and she

is remembered for her excellent calligraphy, with which she made copies of the Koran, wrote journals and compiled books; she amassed a great fortune and a good library and, although she remained single, she attained a position of influence in government circles. From the same city there are also references of Tuna bint ‘Abd al-‘Aziz ibn Musà ibn Tahir ibn Saba’ (11th C., beginning of the 12th C.), married to the Koran reader Abu l-Qasim Ibn Mudir, preacher in Qurtuba Great Mosque; mother of Abu Bakr and nicknamed Habiba, she trained under Abu ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-Barr, taking down his works in writing, as well as under Abu l-‘Abbas al-‘Udri. Later, she taught her husband the skills acquired from these two great masters and was appreciated for her excellent calligraphy and the precision with which she made the copies.

Though, unfortunately, few examples of this book art have reached the present day, there are some with significant artistic and historical value, such as a square (18 × 18.8 cm) copy of the Koran, made in vellum during the Almoravid domination, which is conserved in Istanbul University Library (A6755);⁶⁷ its flyleaf (3rd page) comprises a refined pattern with a weave of curved and straight lines in a wide pale band the same color as the parchment, which immediately evokes the Umayyad trellises and geometric designs. This band expands to form an exterior square, by way of eight intermediate interlinked circles, initiated at a central eight-point star, which contains an octagon with a golden band containing a braid, stylized as a pale eight-point star on a dark blue background, which gives the impression of rotation and immediately reminds one of the mosaic dome located in front of al-Hakam II’s *mihrab*, even including the contrast of the gold and blue aulic colors. The rest of the surface, of course, is a garden filled with «Cordovan» golden plant motifs on a dark blue background and with green and red shades in certain areas. In the colophon (pages 145b and 146a), written in blue oriental Kufic script, outlined in gold, and inserted within a wide square latticed frame, also full of golden vegetable scrolls and with an eight-point star in each corner, one can read, before the *tasliya* (formula in honor of the Prophet) and the date of completion, that is, 548 (1143/1144), the text: «The entire Koran was completed with divine aid and providence in the city of Qurtuba; may God protect it».

⁶⁷ Sabiha Khemir (1992). Hand-written Koran in *Jerrilynn D. Dodds (coord.). Al-Andalus: las artes islámicas en España [exposición La Alhambra, 18 marzo-19 junio, 1992]. Op. Cit., pp. 304-305.*

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José Miguel Puerta Vilchez (Durcal, Granada, 1959), holds a degree in History of Art and a doctorate in Arab Philology; he is a lecturer at Granada University and author of the books: *Los códigos de utopía de la Alhambra de Granada* (Granada, 1990), *Historia del pensamiento estético árabe. Al-Andalus y la estética árabe clásica* (Madrid, 1997), *La aventura del cálamo. Historia, formas y artistas de la caligrafía árabe* (Granada, 2007), *Leer la Alhambra. Guía visual del Monumento a través de sus inscripciones* (Granada, 2010) and *La poética del agua en el islam / The Poetics of Water in Islam* (Gijon, 2011). He has been commissioner of exhibitions such as *Doce candiles para Granada*, by the Palestinian artist Kamal Bullata and the Syrian poet Adonis (Granada, Alhambra Board of Trustees, 1998), and *Libertad e innovación. Caligrafía árabe contemporánea* (Casa Árabe, Madrid-Cordoba, 2010-2011). He also directed, together with Jorge Lirola Delgado, the edition and publication of *Biblioteca de Al-Andalus* (7 vols.) (Almeria, Ibn Tufayl Foundation, 2003-2012).

ABSTRACT

This article offers a new appraisal of the historical, artistic and significant values of Qurtuba's architecture and arts from the perspective of the recent contributions of research and taking into account the Andalusí Arab sources. To do this the essential aesthetic and constituent components of Cordoba Mosque and Madinat al-Zahra have been reviewed, as well as those of the most important Qurtuba bronzes, ivories, ceramics, textiles and book arts, placing special emphasis on the formal and semantic links between them all and on those responsible for the works and the artisans and calligraphers who produced them.

KEYWORDS

Qurtuba, Cordoba, constituent and artistic components.