Al-Andalus

THE ART OF ISLAMIC SPAIN

EDITED BY JERRILYNN D. DODDS

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The Great Mosque of Córdoba

JERRILYNN D. DODDS

The Great Mosque of Córdoba, like a massive anchor, draws the city to the banks of the Guadalquivir River. Except for its minaret, the mosque cannot be seen over the lowest and most ancient rooftops, and yet its presence is felt everywhere in the old city: austere walls that hug the ground and yet also seem to give form to the urban fabric.

Córdoba's main congregational mosque was one of the first monumental expressions of Muslim rule in Spain. It was not only a powerful presence in Córdoba but also arguably the building that most fully embodied an image of the Muslim hegemony in al-Andalus during the caliphal period. What is extraordinary is that the mosque became such an image for both the Christians and the Muslims of western Europe—as if its singular forms could be understood as the natural outgrowth of the Islamic culture of al-Andalus and also as abstract symbols of the Muslim presence on the Iberian Peninsula. So the history of the mosque simultaneously chronicles the development of a Muslim language of forms on the western frontier of Islam and the creation of a series of potent visual symbols of what that Muslim culture meant to those within and without it.

The Early Mosque and the Emirate

The earliest accounts of the Great Mosque of Córdoba are shrouded in myth, which suggests that this particular monument began very early to embody important meanings in the Islamic world. A tradition transmitted by al-Rāzī tells us that at the time of the conquest of Córdoba, the Muslims "agreed with the barbarians of Córdoba to take half of their largest church which was situated within the city; in this half they constructed the mosque, while leaving the other half to the Christians, but destroying the other churches."[1] While this account is probably apocryphal and is bound up with preoccupations of later times to which I shall return, it recalls for us later Islamic historians' fascination with the necessary intimacy between an indigenous Christian population and the Muslim rulers. There were other newly conquered cities in the early Islamic world—Damascus and Jerusalem in particular—where unconverted Christians were a force to be reckoned with; yet Córdoba came over time to represent in the minds of Muslim historians the locus of encounter with the other, the idea that Spain was the edge of the Muslim world, Islam's frontier with a remote Christian north.

These were, however, not the primary concerns of the man who built the earliest parts of the monument that stands today, for the young emir ʿAbd al-Raḥmān I brought a different drama with him on his historic journey to al-Andalus. In an act that would shape the character of Islamic rule in Spain for centuries, this grandson of the Umayyad caliph Hishām escaped the ʿAbbāsid forces that sought his life, along with the destruction of the entire Umayyad royal family. He was forced to leave his home in Syria, the site of the caliphate, which had for close to a century been governed by his line, and to flee across the face of North Africa with ʿAbbāsid troops hard on his heels. He found allies with his mother's people in Morocco and, by the age of twenty-six, unified al-Andalus under his own rule.

Tradition has it that ʿAbd al-Raḥmān I began considering the construction of the mosque nearly thirty years after establishing himself in Córdoba.[2] The same historians who suggest that the Christian

Great Mosque of Córdoba with Catedral de Santa María, aerial view and Muslim populations of Córdoba had been sharing the church of San Vicente on the site of the present mosque contend that he purchased from the Christians the half of the church they still shared with the Muslims, giving them permission to build additional churches outside the city walls. Ibn ʿIdhārī tells us that "Abd al-Rahman began the demolition of the church in 169H (785/6), and finished the new mosque in 170H (786/7)."[3]

ʿAbd al-Raḥmān I's original building (Fig. 1) survives in the southwestern portion of the prayer hall of the mosque in its final form (Fig. 2). A walled courtyard opened onto a wide hypostyle hall—together courtyard and hall originally measured about seventy-four meters square. The prayer hall roof is supported by columns sustaining ten arcades of twelve bays each, including a central aisle that is very slightly wider than the others and is also distinguished by red column shafts. Thus constructed, the building fits neatly into an established tradition of mosques with wide, dispersed spaces that depend on the repetition of a single support to create a hall for community prayer. The grouping of supports to the south drew the worshiper in what was thought to be the direction of Mecca, but little else in the building design points to the notion of a hierarchy involved in the act of worship. The hypostyle plan as it appears in the first campaign of the Great Mosque of Córdoba reflects the codification of an early Islamic space for prayer: It responds to the need for a communal gathering in which each individual prays without the intervention of clergy or liturgy and in which the mosque's users are comparatively unaffected by the kind of stridently hierarchical architectural forms that such intermediaries inevitably excite.[4]

This rather abstract account suggests a clarity in the mosque's typology that completely fails to convey the startling originality of its interior space (Fig. 3). For the columns that support the hypostyle hall explode into a labyrinthine elevation of superimposed horseshoe-shaped arches composed of voussoirs in which deep red brick and white stone alternate. This carnivalesque solution converts a basic building type that is repetitious and by nature somewhat monotonous into a

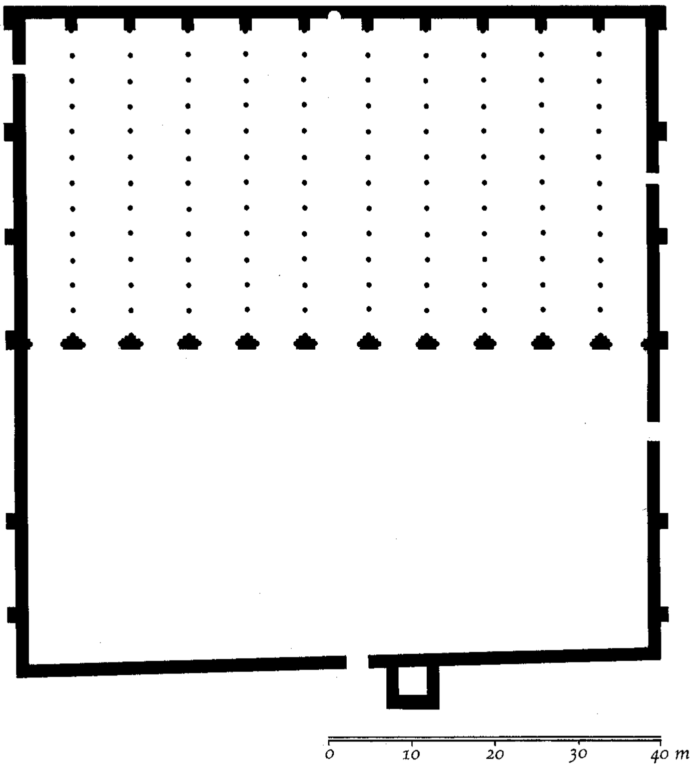

Fig. 1 Great Mosque of Cordoba, mosque of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān I, plan

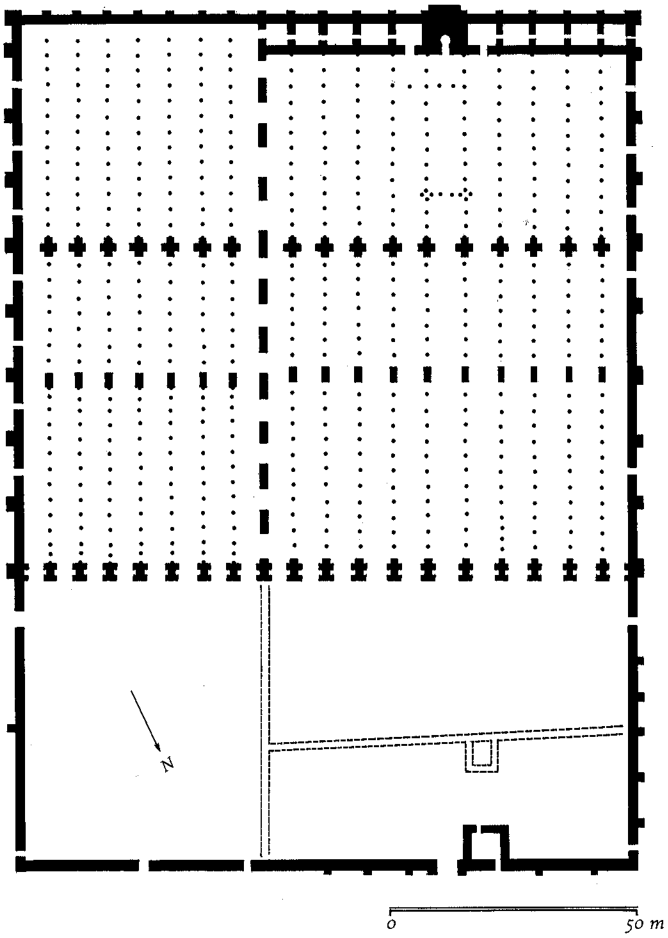

Fig. 2 Great Mosque of Cordoba as it appeared in 987 (A.H.377), plan

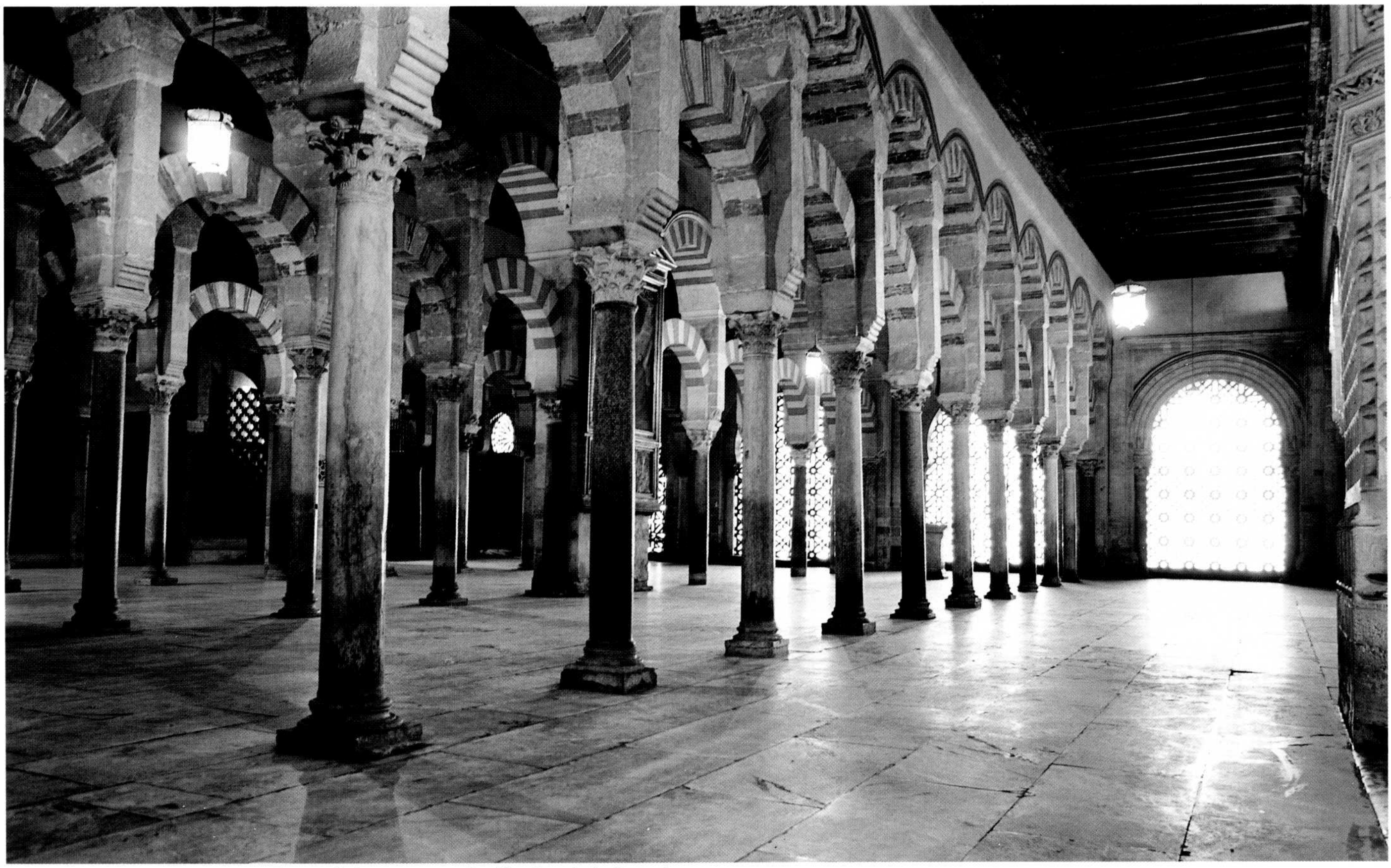

Fig. 3 Great Mosque of Córdoba, prayer hall of ᶜAbd al-Raḥmān I

wild three-dimensional maze, a hall of mirrors in which the constant echo of arches and the unruly staccato of colors confuse the viewer, presenting a challenge to unravel the complexities these refinements impose upon the mosque's space. Interest in the mosque's interior is created, then, not by the application of a skin of decoration to a separately conceived building but by the transformation of the morphemes of the architecture itself: the arches and voussoirs. Because we share the belief that architectural components must by definition behave logically, their conversion into agents of chaos fuels a basic subversion of our expectations concerning the nature of architecture. The tensions that grow from these subverted expectations create an intellectual dialogue between building and viewer that will characterize the evolving design of the Great Mosque of Córdoba for over two hundred years.

The complex dialogue excited by this system of decoration can be seen as part of a subconscious collective experience common to many early Islamic societies: a struggle to create a language of architectural forms for the mosque within an aniconic culture—a way of identifying a place of worship with Islam and of engaging an audience without resorting to storytelling. But there are also conscious meanings encased in the specific forms chosen, meanings that relate to the particular experience of ᶜAbd al-Raḥmān I and his earliest Muslim successors who ruled al-Andalus.

While the appearance and effect of the superposed horseshoe arches in the Great Mosque of Córdoba are startling, the practice of doubling arches in elevation had precedents, though in more prosaic contexts and in visually divergent forms. In Mérida, for example, a Roman aqueduct combines piggyback arches with alternating brick and stone masonry, calling to mind the alternating voussoirs of the mosque (Fig. 4).[5] Moreover, the Great Mosque of Córdoba consistently employed the horseshoe arch, an element of the indigenous church-building tradition of both pre-Muslim and Muslim dominated Spain.[6] And in proportion and construction, the arches of ᶜAbd al-Raḥmān I's prayer hall are comparable to those of the church of San Juan de Baños, built in the seventh century by the Visigothic king Recceswinth (Fig. 5). For a number of reasons, it should not be surprising to find that these

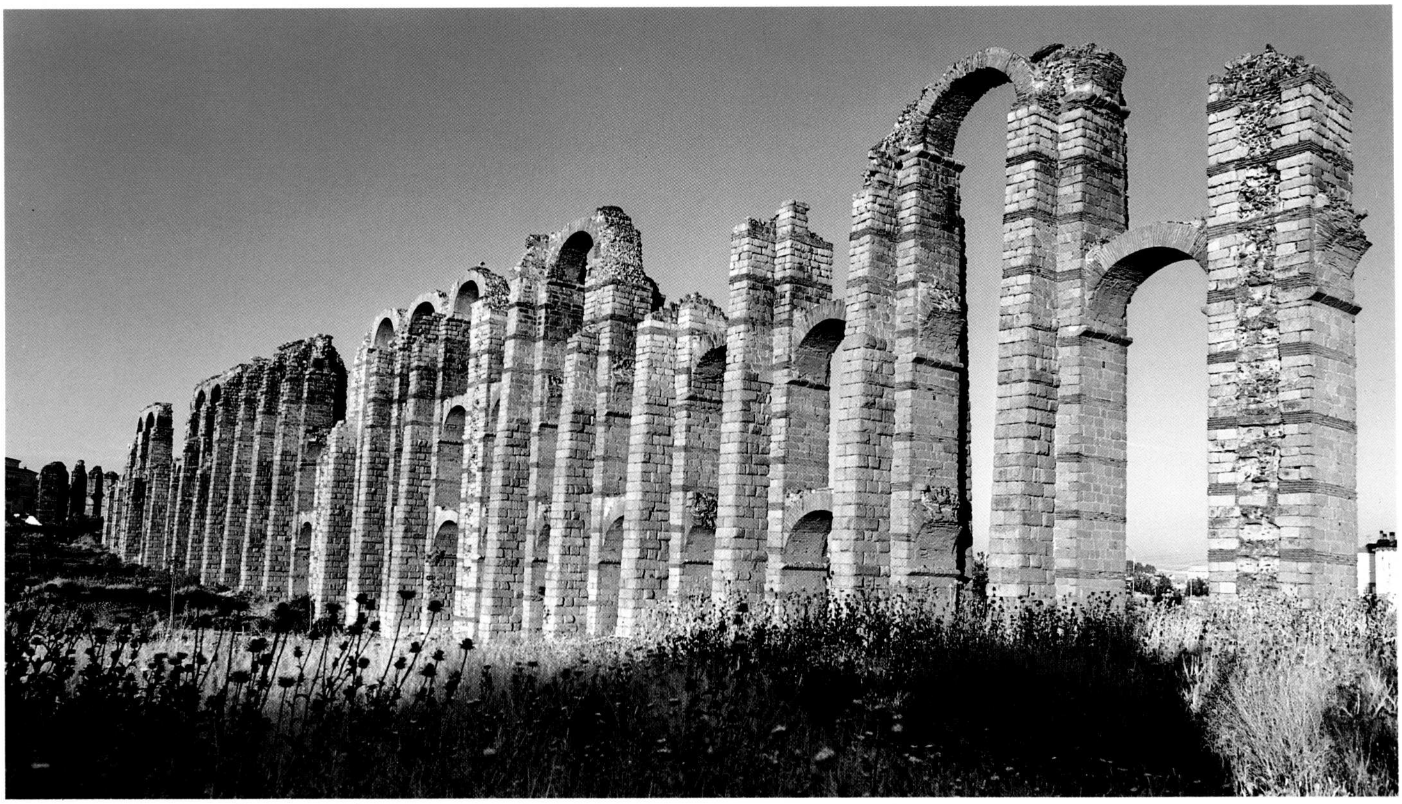
Fig. 4 Roman aqueduct, Mérida

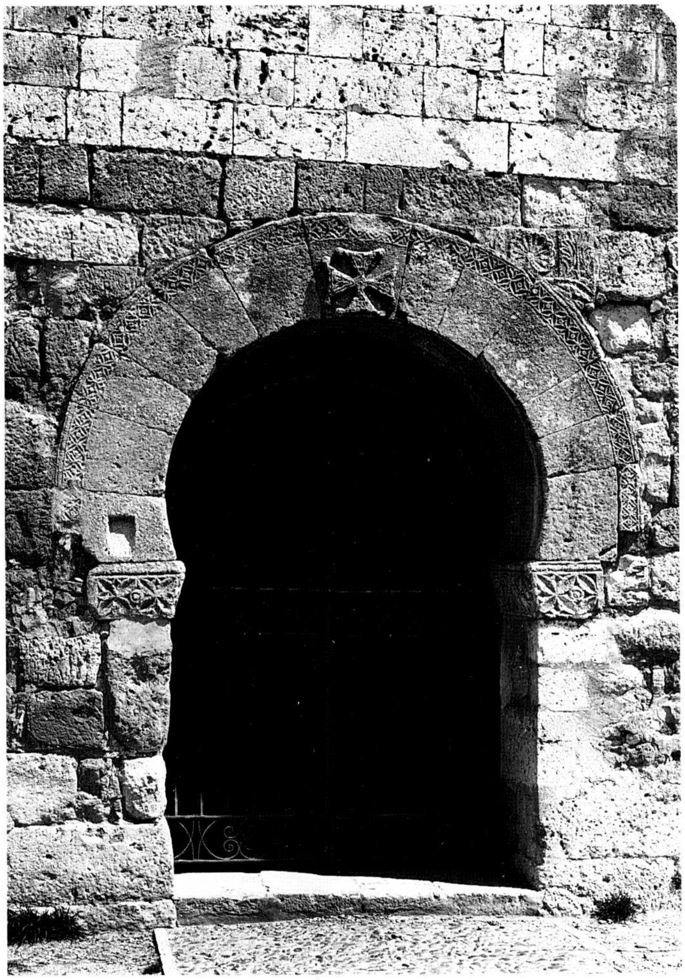
Fig. 5 San Juan de Baños, portal

features at Córdoba were taken over from earlier structures. All of the capitals in the initial campaign of the Great Mosque were *spolia*, and we know that no particular meaning that might inhibit their use in a Muslim context was attached to the appropriation of individual parts of ruined churches and Roman civic buildings. Indeed, early mosque architecture is part of the late antique building tradition in the Mediterranean. Thus, it would not be unexpected to see the appropriation of solutions such as those suggested by an aqueduct, for instance, which would help Cordobán architects heighten the ceiling of the Great Mosque, while employing reused columns of varying heights.

This said, however, we perhaps want to question whether the wild disposition of the mosque's elevation can be interpreted merely as a response to the practical need to elevate its roof or the passive adoption of an indigenous formal solution. I believe, rather, that the aqueduct of Mérida offered ʿAbd al-Raḥmān I a way to link his formidable act of patronage with his heritage and his aspirations. For it presented him with local techniques and materials that could evoke the important monuments built by his forbears, the Umayyad caliphs of Syria. The Great Mosque of Damascus tops its colossal arcade of reused columns with a second, diminutive series of arches, almost an interior clerestory, that raises the height of the roof and punctures the upper wall.[7] An effect even closer to that achieved at the Great Mosque of Córdoba can be found in the Umayyad city of ʿAnjar, where a double arcade of slender semicircular arches cuts a dizzying and monumental profile through the center of the urban fabric. Further, Córdoba's alternating voussoirs of brick and stone surely must be an interpretation, in an accessible and less expensive medium, of the opus sectile colored voussoirs typical of late antique revetment. Recently scholars have begun to question whether the original marble revetment of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem or the Great Mosque of Damascus might not have included voussoirs of alternating colors.[8] When we remember that the aisles of the Great Mosque of Córdoba run perpendicular to the qibla in the manner of the mosque of al-Walīd I in Jerusalem,[9] the Spanish mosque emerges as a web of associations that link it with three of the most transcendent acts of patronage of the Umayyad caliphate in the Fertile Crescent. It is these fragments of architectural allusion that bring us to the heart of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān I's personal concerns as a patron.

As the last surviving Umayyad ruler of a Muslim land, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān I was deeply concerned with the authority provided him by virtue of his lineage. He had never forgotten the fate of his family or his own persecution by the ʿAbbāsids, and he effected as complete a political separation from ʿAbbāsid authority in Baghdad as was possible without claiming the caliphate for himself. We know, however, that he felt enormous nostalgia for the homeland he had been forced to flee: He named at least one palace outside Córdoba for an Umayyad country estate in Syria and wrote the following extraordinary poem to a single palm tree encountered on the Andalusian plain:

> In the midst of Ruṣāfa has appeared to us a palm-tree in a Western land far from the home of palm-trees. So I said, this resembles me, for I also live in distant exile and separated by a great distance from my children and my family. Thou hast grown up in a foreign land and we are both exiled far from home.[10]

The poem reveals to us that memories of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān I's homeland had permeated the very heart of the emergent emirate as well as its political vocabulary. The lost Umayyad caliphate had quickly taken on both symbolic and emotional importance for the Umayyads of the emirate; it served not only as a political tool that demonstrated their heritage and right to rule but also as a source of identity in a frontier far from the familiar center of the Islamic world.

So we can see in the extraordinary prayer hall of the Great Mosque of Córdoba as it appeared at the time of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān I a vigorous and spirited architectural solution that on many levels reflects the creative tensions of a new culture. On one hand, the use of indigenous materials and models signals that the Umayyads had early come to terms with both the gifts and the limitations of an existing architectural tradition. They in fact employed this tradition with enormous freedom and applied it in innovative ways in their ongoing search for an aniconic vocabulary of form. On the other hand, the conscious symbolic meanings of the mosque design were based in an artistic dialogue with the centers of Islam: with Umayyad Syria of the past and with ʿAbbāsid Baghdad of the present. Poised on the frontier of the Islamic world, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān I used the design of his most transcendent architectural commission to create a visual symbol of his usurped authority as the last Umayyad and of the survival of his family in a faraway land.

If the immediacy of the first emir's experience of exile was not felt by succeeding Umayyad princes, they continued to share his sense of identity with an Umayyad past. In each of the subsequent additions to the mosque, we can at once read an unswerving reverence for the raucous but meaningful forms introduced under ʿAbd al-Raḥmān I. Under ʿAbd al-Raḥmān II in 836 (A.H. 222) the prayer hall was extended eight bays to the south: This elongates the plan, while it respects the elevation of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān I's mosque. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān II's reverence for his predecessor's plan was not compromised, even though many new columns and capitals were fashioned expressly for the mosque. The willingness to make new architectural parts to correspond in proportion to those of the older prayer hall, which was composed of *spolia*, reminds us of the strong appeal exerted by consistency with the older scheme. This addition was completed by ʿAbd al-Raḥmān II's son Muḥammad, who is said also to have constructed a

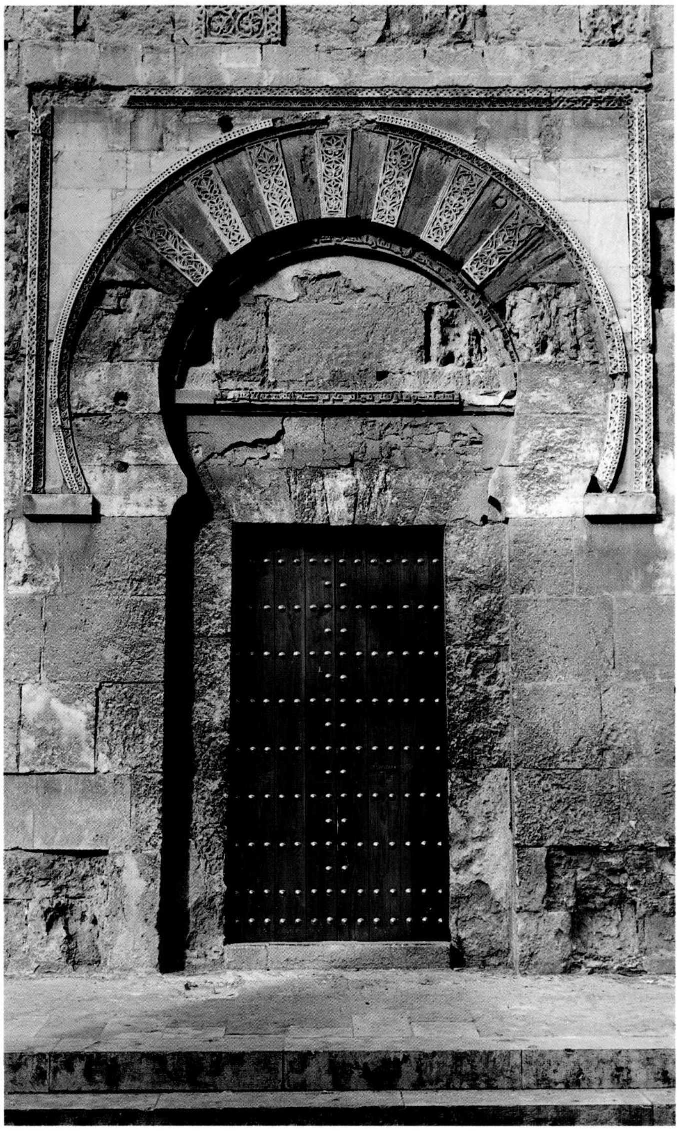

Fig. 6 Great Mosque of Córdoba, Puerta de San Esteban

maqṣūra, or reserved space in which the emir prayed, and to have restored the west door of the mosque, the Bāb al-Wuzarā'[11] popularly known as the Puerta de San Esteban, in 855/6 (A.H. 241) (Fig. 6).

In the Bāb al-Wuzarā' we can also discern tensions between the creation of forms that gesture to the central Islamic lands and Muslim identity in particular and the use of indigenous materials and techniques and the new solutions they spawn. This door is dominated by a large blind horseshoe arch inscribed in an *alfiz*, a molding in a rectangular format. The arch itself is covered with false voussoirs that are alternately stucco reliefs and brick—a more elaborate version of those in the arcades within. Above the entranceway is a design of three horseshoe arches, the whole crowned by a projecting cornice of crenellations supported by a row of roll corbels. The horseshoe arch here becomes the center of a theme that exploits both the traditional disposition of the mosque's interior and carved stucco decoration in a style identifiable with the Umayyad world.

Al-Mundhir, Muḥammad's son, added a treasury to the mosque, and ʿAbdallah, his successor, constructed a *sabat*, or covered passage, leading directly from the palace to a door of the mosque.[12] Ibn Ḥayyān's story of this addition is fascinating for the picture it offers of the delicate balance among ruler, populace, and mosque construction. He relates that the construction of the arched passage was necessary only because ʿAbdallah wanted to "go unseen by the people when he wished to pray [so that] no one was obliged to stand up or watch his going out."[13] The account carefully crafts a narrative that sees ʿAbdallah commissioning the passageway in response to the pious reproach of a doctor of law, who, upon seeing that the people rose when the prince entered the prayer hall, admonishes him to show more humility. ʿAbdallah constructs the passage only after he is unable to keep his subjects from standing upon his arrival. Of course, the theme of the text is humility, but I wonder if it does not subconsciously voice a displacement of the controversy concerning humility as it relates to such constructions and the person of the prince. ʿAbdallah's *sabat* not only would prove extraordinarily convenient for the ruler but would also allow him to pass privately with his entourage "screened from the eyes of the people until he reached the maqsura," according to another account,[14] thereby separating him from the populace and releasing him from the pressure of direct contact with his subjects. I think there is a good possibility that the elaborate justification offered by the text masks nascent tensions concerning the growing isolation and insistence upon the dignity of the prince, as well as his license to make costly additions to the mosque.

The Caliphate

It is with the next patron of the mosque, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān III, that the fullest exploitation of princely dignity is put into play, as the emir declares himself caliph. This is an act accompanied most importantly by an impressive wave of patronage centered upon the palatine city of Madīnat al-Zahrā' but also marked by significant additions to the mosque by ʿAbd al-Raḥmān III. In 951 (A.H. 340) this ruler refurbished the mosque's courtyard, alternating piers and columns in a sequence that recalled the Great Mosque of Damascus, now two centuries old, and affirming for us the constant renewal of links with the Umayyad world as a source of Islamic identity and now of caliphal authority as well.

Possibly more significant, however, is his construction of the mosque's first true minaret, of which the lower portion survives in the present cathedral bell tower (Fig. 7). Hishām I had already built a minaret in 793/4 (A.H. 177), but Jonathan Bloom has recently demonstrated that this was most likely a *ṣawmaᶜa*, or staircase, minaret, which projected very little from the mass of the mosque itself.[15] ᶜAbd al-Raḥmān III's minaret of 951–52 (A.H. 340) was a true tower, a fact later chroniclers celebrate in elaborate descriptions. Of particular interest are its height —some claim it reached one hundred cubits—and its two independent internal staircases. The minaret was topped with a "domed pavilion" and "golden and silver apples."[16] Perhaps most important, as Bloom has shown, it was one of the first such structures to establish the tower minaret as a symbol of the presence of Islam.[17] Initially developed under the ᶜAbbāsids, in their own search for monumental forms to enhance the authority of their newly proclaimed caliphate, the tower became a potent symbol of the presence of Sunni Islam when the Spanish Umayyads appropriated it. In particular, Bloom sees this minaret as the physical manifestation of a defiant stance against the Fāṭimids, for whom such towers were unacceptable. Indeed, when the Umayyads took Fez from the Fāṭimids, ᶜAbd al-Raḥmān III himself commissioned the replacement of short *ṣawmaᶜa* minarets with tower minarets in the Spanish style in the city's two principal mosques.[18]

By the death of ᶜAbd al-Raḥmān III, then, strong symbolic meanings that interwove the Spanish Umayyads with both the past and the present of the Islamic world had been associated with acts of patronage in the main congregational mosque of Córdoba. By the ninth century, however, another cultural group had begun to have an effect on Spanish Muslims and the way they constructed a visual identity for themselves, and this dialogue seems to have had an impact, albeit subconscious and indirect, on the use of tower minarets.

During a moment of extreme social and political stress in Córdoba in the ninth century, a number of churchmen embarked on a dramatic movement of voluntary martyrdom, aimed at consolidating Christian resistance to the cultural juggernaut of Islam. In response, Muslim authorities took measures to suppress the aspects of Christian worship that had a rhetorical power over the Islamic cityscape.[19] Christian polemic writers complained that they were obliged to shield their ears from the cries of the muezzin from his minaret and lamented in particular that, in violation of earlier practice, the towers of their churches were torn down. The power of the minaret was seen as comparable to that of a church tower. Albar of Córdoba describes Muslims who hear the sound of Christian bells from bell towers: "They wail out repeatedly unspeakable things" and, as Eulogius of Córdoba says, "begin to exercise their tongues in all kinds of swearing and foulness."[20] Perhaps the tower minaret was adopted in the tenth century as a reaction to the perceived power of the bell tower in the Christian communities of al-Andalus. Three generations after

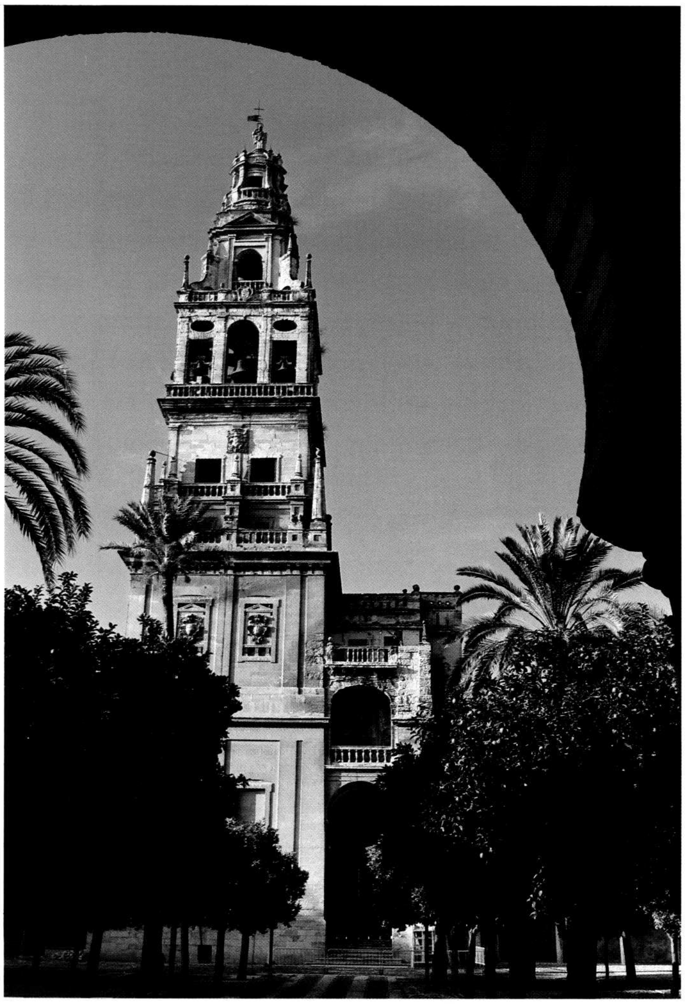

Fig. 7 Great Mosque of Córdoba, cathedral bell tower (minaret with additions)

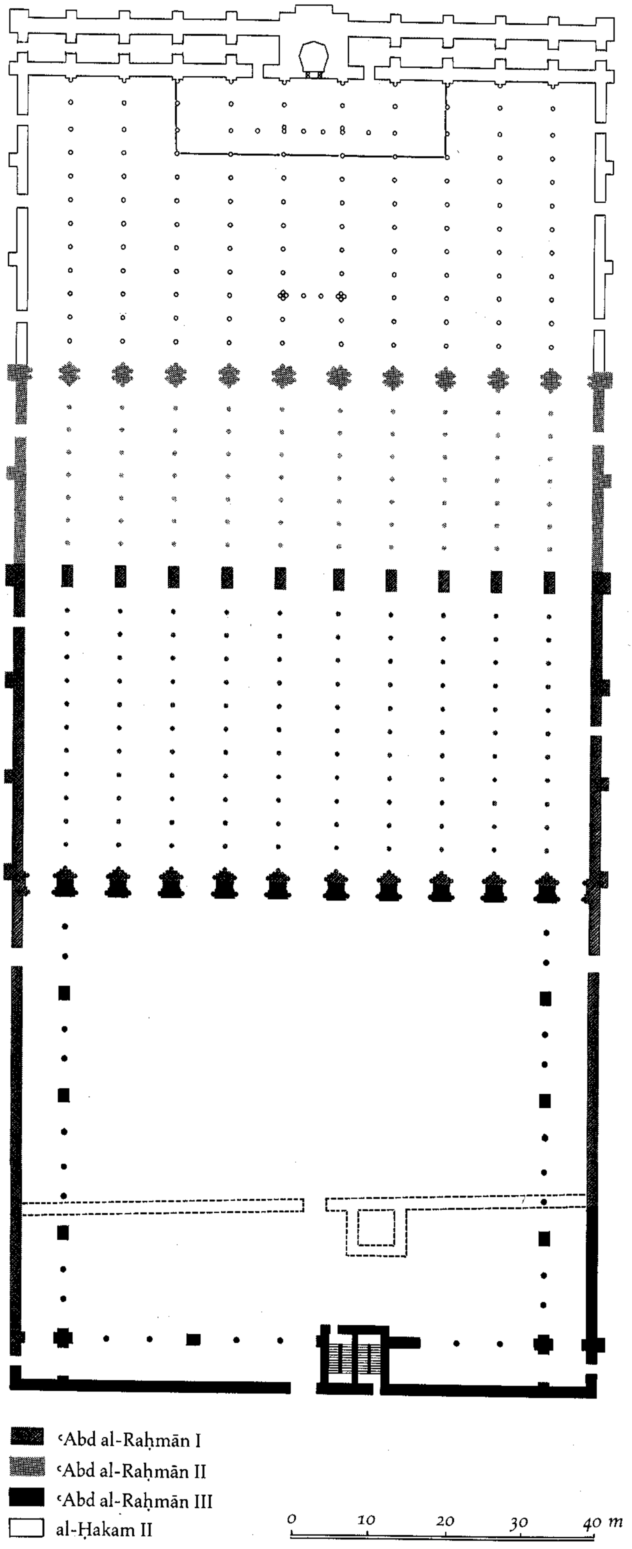

Fig. 8 Great Mosque of Córdoba, plan after additions of al-Ḥakam II

Christian church towers were destroyed because they appeared to threaten Muslim religious predominance, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān III appropriated the tower minaret from the architectural vocabulary of ʿAbbāsid Iraq to serve as a universal Sunni Muslim form: a symbol of the new caliph's transcendence within the Muslim world, on one hand, and a subconscious competitive reinvention of the church tower, on the other.

The dialogue between Christians and Muslims was to have a long history in al-Andalus: In 997 (A.H. 387) al-Manṣūr sacked and burned the Christian shrine at Santiago de Compostela, bringing the bells to Córdoba, where they served as lamps in the mosque. When Ferdinand III conquered Córdoba for the Christians in 1236 (A.H. 634), he returned the bells to Santiago on the backs of Muslim prisoners. Many of the extraordinary lamps that are today in the Qarawiyyīn mosque in Fez are made from the silent bells of Christian churches, captured in battle by the Almohads and Marīnids and carried to the mosque as trophies of a victorious religion (see Nos. 55, 58). These incidents remind us that the forms that had the most impact or rhetorical force were those that became the most powerful symbols of triumph and sovereignty as appropriated booty, even if they were not exploited for their original purposes.

The Additions of al-Ḥakam II

During the reign of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān III's son al-Ḥakam II, the Great Mosque of Córdoba received the mark of caliphal dignity that had distinguished the palace of Madīnat al-Zahrāʾ under the first caliph—it became the primary focus of royal patronage. Indeed, chroniclers recount that a mandate for additions to the mosque was the first order given by the new caliph upon taking the throne in 962 (A.H. 351). These additions were enormous in scope: He lengthened the existing arcades twelve bays in the direction of the qibla, converting a short, wide prayer hall into an extended longitudinal one (Fig. 8) and adding a number of doors that followed the earliest portal design (Fig. 9). The prayer hall now culminated in an elaborate new *maqṣūra* surmounted by ornate ribbed domes and forming a grid of three bays in front of the mihrab. The aisles extending from these three bays are distinguished at the entrance to the *maqṣūra* and the beginning of al-Ḥakam II's addition itself by two screens of wild meandering polylobed interlacing arches (Fig. 10).[21] This mihrab is the first to take the shape of a room, and to either side of it, doors open onto a treasury and a new *sabat*, which originally led to the caliphal palace. The three doors on the qibla wall, as well as the mihrab dome, are covered with mosaics in which inscriptions and abstract and vegetal

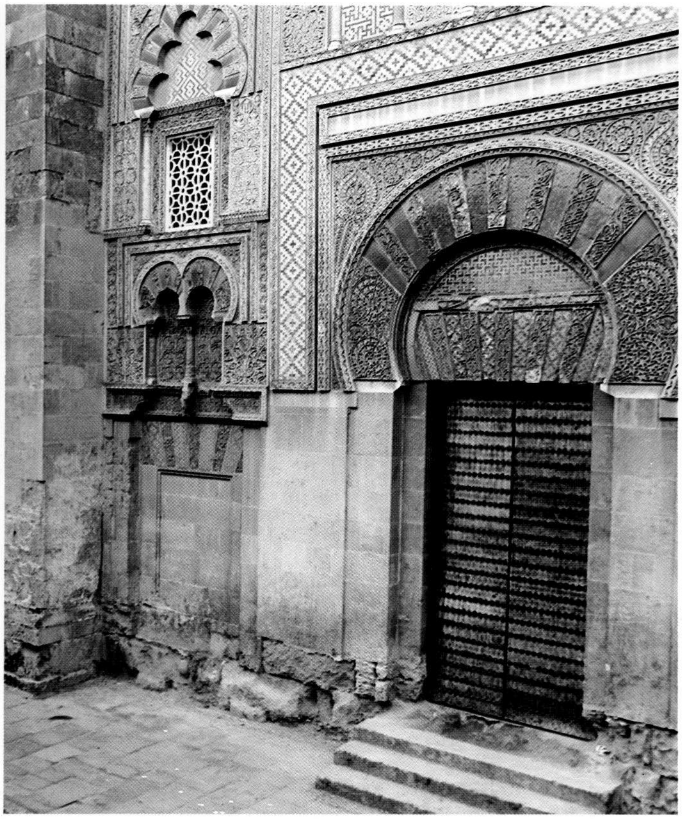

Fig. 9 Great Mosque of Córdoba, portal, addition of al-Ḥakam II

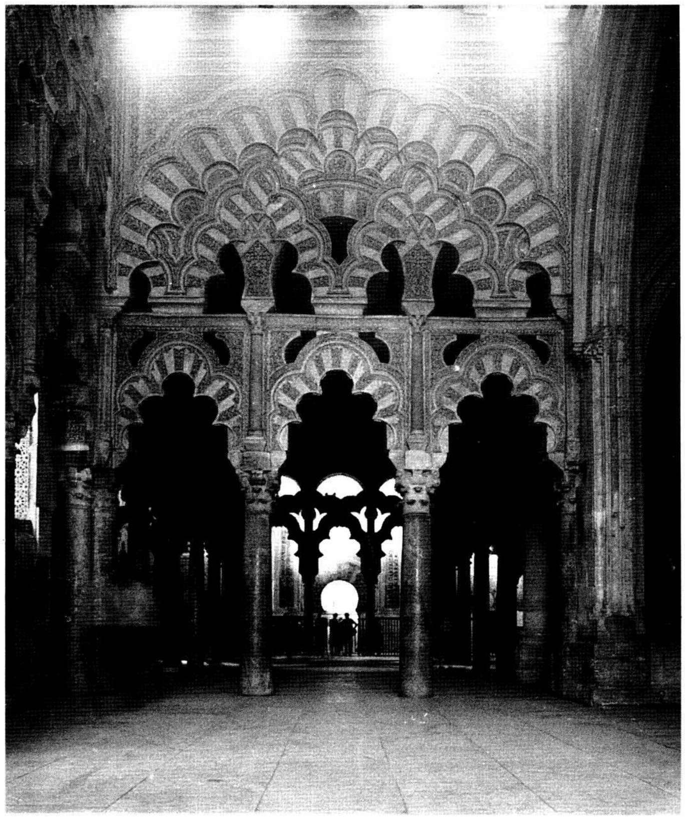

Fig. 10 Great Mosque of Córdoba, *maqṣūra* screens added by al-Ḥakam II

motifs that recall the mosque's history are picked out in luminous green and gold glass cubes (Fig. 11).

Al-Ḥakam II's addition is a costly and luxurious version of the original, traditional plan for the Great Mosque: The prayer hall repeats in all but the smallest details the sections built since the time of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān I. However, the elaborate interlacing stage-set arches of the three mihrab aisles, the exquisite mosaics of the mihrab, its adjacent doors, and its dome create a privileged space laden with the tensions and concerns developed in a more restrained way in earlier moments of the mosque's history.

A first level of meaning of this most ostentatious addition to the mosque involves its costliness, which did not escape the scrutiny of the public, as well as the uses to which this cost was put. ʿAbd al-Wāḥid al-Marrakeshī tells us that Cordobáns refused to pray in this enlargement until they were told how it had been financed.[22] In light of this account, Ibn ʿIdhārī's justification for the addition tends to ring with the same concern for rationalization and legitimization that informed Ibn Ḥayyān's explanation of ʿAbdallah's passage: "The press of the crowd in the mosque, because of the large number of faithful, was so great that many fainted and perished, and this is what determined al-Ḥakam II to order enlargements and additions. The qāḍi al-Mundhir ibn Saʿīd, accompanied by the superintendent of the pious foundations, the jurists and witnesses, came to the mosque to study the work of enlargement to be executed with the help of existing funds as well as from pious foundations."[23] The insistence on the welfare of the public as well as the consultation of so many representatives (including the superintendent of pious foundations) hint that the opulent—and not altogether practical—building programs that had come to link patronage to the aspirations of individual rulers had caused unease in the *umma*, the community of the faithful. These tensions clearly grew from the disjuncture between the opulence and cost of the program and the extent to which the cost actually served the *umma*, as opposed to the consolidation of the power of the ruler.

The second level of meaning of al-Ḥakam II's addition is a subconscious one.[24] It also grows from social unrest and concerns the impact of the Mozarabic turmoil of the century before. The reigns of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān III and al-Ḥakam II saw a closing of the rift between Muslims and subjected Christians in

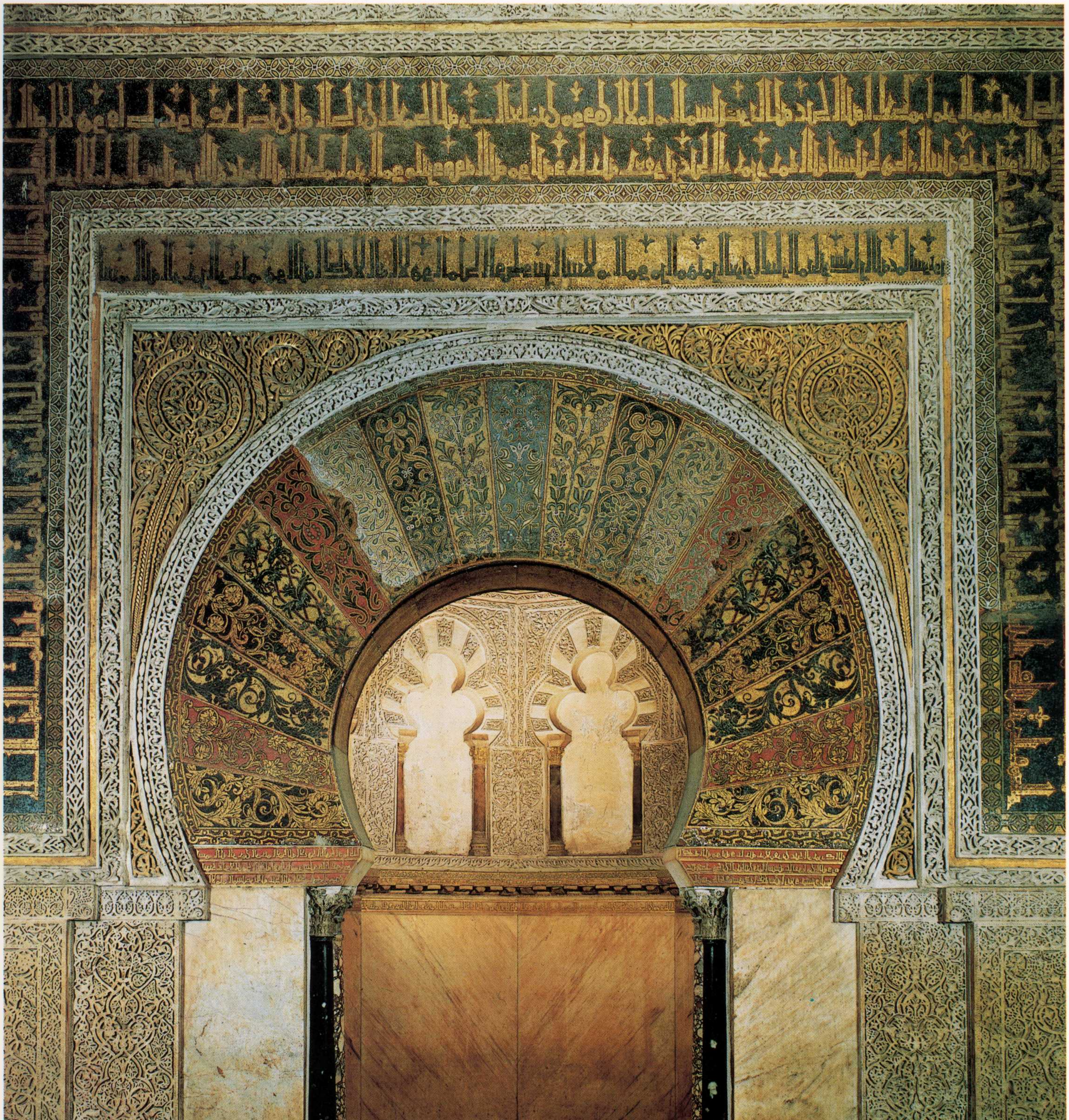

Fig. 11 Great Mosque of Córdoba, mihrab mosaics

al-Andalus, and in fact witnessed a landslide of conversions to Islam.[25] How did a large population of recent converts and a relatively recent experience of the power of the Christian community's religious fervor affect the secure and consolidated reigns of the Spanish Umayyad caliphs? I believe they inspired an unconscious reactive adaptation of a Christian architectural form in al-Ḥakam II's addition, just as in the case of the tower minaret. Here this adaptation involved the space of a contemporary Mozarabic church, in particular in the three principal aisles that align with the mihrab and its ancillary doors and in the creation of the first mihrab in the history of Islam to take the form of a room.[26] This kind of space was conceived centuries earlier to serve an ancient indigenous Christian liturgy: three longitudinal aisles and a transverse space culminating in three rooms, the central one of which can be horseshoe shaped. The church of San Miguel de Escalada, completed in 913 (A.H. 301), provides the best parallel for this plan type (Fig. 12).

The dependence of the mosque plan design on a Christian prototype is betrayed in a curious detail: There is no practical reason for the entrances to the *sabat* and the treasury to be decorated in a way similar to the mihrab; this is totally unprecedented and even functionally misleading, explicable only in the context of a formal parallel with three-apsed Christian churches. It has even been suggested that a procession that reflected the Mozarabic liturgy might have taken place in this space.[27]

Clearly, however, no conscious allusion to Christianity was intended here. As a matter of fact, the elevation is transformed with an artistic vocabulary unique to the Islamic architecture of al-Andalus. The impossible intertwining of the screens of polylobed arches is a complex mannerist interpretation of ideas we traced in the original mosque, whereby a visual puzzle is created and architectural form fashions a design that seems logically inconceivable. Further, the strongest visual associations here are not with Christian churches but with the palace of Madīnat al-Zahrāʾ; indeed, some of the elaborate decorative vocabulary and variations on the basilical axial space that appear in al-Ḥakam II's additions to the mosque were devised at Madīnat al-Zahrāʾ. And it is no wonder that the parallels with this palace are so close: The additions of al-Ḥakam II represent but one development in a movement throughout the Mediterranean that saw palatial forms imposed upon hypostyle mosque plans as a means of sanctifying the authority of rulers. The important issue to grasp is that, in the search for forms with rhetorical and authoritative force, Spanish Muslims not only mined the basilical spaces of secular palaces but also elaborated the effects and the ritual that inhabited those spaces through an understanding of the rhetorical force of a Christian liturgical building.[28] This was a language of forms the Muslims of al-Andalus learned from the Christians, with whom they were constantly in contact, but it was a language they emptied of any Christian meaning. To what end this extraordinary appropriation was used, I will return presently.

The third and final level of meaning to be drawn from the additions of al-Ḥakam II is both conscious and symbolic: It concerns the renewal of historical and visual links with the Umayyad caliphate, connections pursued with particular energy by the Spanish Umayyads in support of their own caliphate, which they had established only a generation before. Though this interpretation is the most obvious and well known of those discussed, it takes on a new texture against the backdrop of the more subconscious social tensions outlined above. The legends concerning the founding

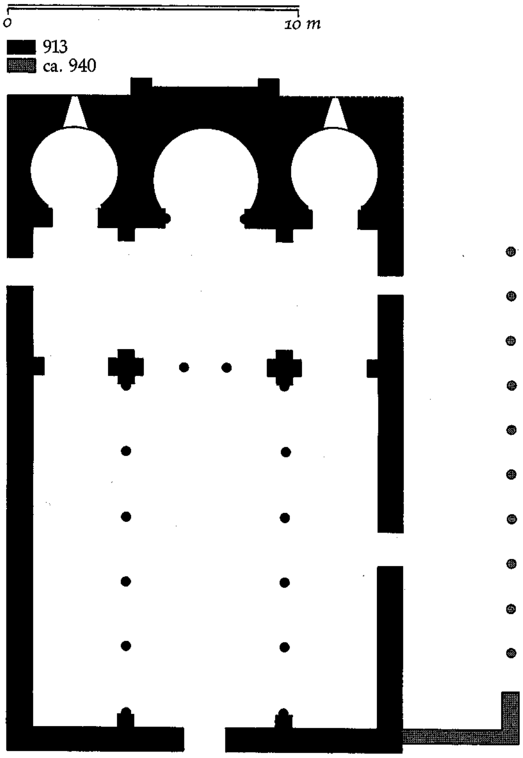

Fig. 12 San Miguel de Escalada, Spain, plan

of the mosque might well have developed at this moment, for the notion that the earliest Muslim inhabitants of al-Andalus might have shared a church with Córdoba's Christian inhabitants presents a striking literary parallel to the early histories of the Great Mosque of Damascus, the centerpiece of early Umayyad patronage in the first years of the eighth century.[29]

In terms of the mosque design, Christian Ewert has outlined for us a number of ways in which the axiality of the additions of al-Ḥakam II forms a dialogue with the Umayyad past.[30] It is, however, in the qibla wall constructed by al-Ḥakam II that we find the strongest support for the political idea that the Spanish caliphs sought to forge such connections.[31] One of the striking and curious aspects of the qibla of al-Ḥakam II is the presence in it of mosaic decoration. Mosaics had been unknown on the Iberian Peninsula for centuries and were little used in the contemporary Islamic world. Once again Ibn ʿIdhārī supplies a justification for a feature of the mosque, now providing the official explanation for the mosaics, as well as their official meaning: "Al-Ḥakam had written to the king of the Christians on the subject [of the mosaic incrustations] and had ordered him to send a capable worker, in imitation of that which [the Umayyad caliph] al-Walīd had done at the time of the construction of the Great Mosque of Damascus."[32]

The use of mosaic decoration was intended, then, to create a strong visual evocation of the Great Mosque of Damascus. It was not only another in the continuing series of links created between this mosque and the memory of the early Umayyads but also a fascinating gesture in which the caliph reminds the viewer of his presence as patron: Al-Ḥakam II negotiates with a Christian king (in this case, the Byzantine king) in an almost ceremonial repetition of what his ancestor, the Umayyad caliph in Damascus, had done over two hundred years earlier.

The qibla wall combines other, more familiar forms, such as quartered marble and carved stucco inspired by both the early history of the Córdoba mosque and the early centers of the Islamic world. The qibla's associations are with the mosque's own past as well as with the Great Mosque of Damascus: We are told that al-Ḥakam II himself supervised the conservation and transferal of the columns that support the mihrab arch from the mihrab of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān II, which had to be destroyed to accommodate this addition. The principal innovation in the qibla, however, was the introduction of Qurʾanic inscriptions as the carrier of meaning for this opulent focal point. The inscriptions weave a path through the densely composed jungle of vegetal and geometric forms of the mosaic, adding to their cacophony and horror vacui; at times their status as writing is obscured by their integration into the overall abstract schema. In this way the writing becomes part of the visual dialogue present everywhere in the mosque: If we read it, it carries one kind of meaning; but as an abstract form, it also plays a role as part of the complex and meditative design of the mosque as a whole. Once again the viewer is engaged by an ambiguity in the relationship among parts. This time, however, what the puzzle reveals to the meditative viewer is something more profound: the word of God, written in the language in which it was spoken. So the elusive script of al-Ḥakam II's qibla wall is sanctified both in its content and as part of a vast schematized puzzle of form.

In the Qurʾanic citations that embrace the three openings of the qibla, Oleg Grabar has seen evidence of a thematic development around the practice of prayer.[33] For those who were able to read the inscriptions, this first use of Qurʾanic writing to embellish a qibla linked an aniconic formal resolution with religious meaning literally to create a kind of Muslim iconography: an engaging visual drama that carries a message without dependence on narrative. It is an iconography that communicates through intellect rather than empathy. Once again I think it is possible to interpret a new development in religious art as the result of contact with an active and vibrant Christian community, and perhaps now also stimulated by the recent absorption of large numbers of former Christians into the Muslim community. The idea of creating an aniconic iconography—a nonfigurative art that carries a specific religious message to its public—can be seen as a concept learned from generations of living side by side with Christians, for whom religious art was a message conveyed through figural iconography. It is, however, borrowed across a cultural barrier, without any memory of or association with the figural religious iconography that was the catalyst for its development. What we find, then, is that the presence of a strong Christian community stimulated the development of a number of new forms in the Great

Mosque of Córdoba — forms that lie at the heart of the uniqueness and creativity of the mosque without once betraying any association with Christian practice or identity. Part of the strength and originality of the Great Mosque of Córdoba as a monument grew from the presence of an other — the challenge presented by confrontation with another culture.

In the case of the qibla inscriptions, the taking over of such forms served not only the subconscious goal of appropriating certain powerful rhetorical features from Christian arts; it also buttressed the conscious program of the creation of a new caliphate, which sought to underline the hierarchy and legitimacy of the new caliph. For the immediate model for the inscriptions, the model that transformed the Christian idea into a Muslim one for the builders of the mosque, was to be found in an Umayyad public monument—the Dome of the Rock. Here seventh-century inscriptions conveyed lessons about the Muslim religion and an image of Muslim victory to another lively non-Muslim community.[34]

The introduction of inscriptions and their integration into the most lavish part of these additions to the mosque can be seen as an attempt to galvanize a measure of public investment in a program designed primarily to consolidate the authority of the new caliphate. Their use can on one level be seen as a redirection of the opulent qibla program to prayer, the primary activity of the community in the mosque, an appropriate gesture in view of the earliest public reaction to the additions of al-Ḥakam II. This hypothesis is supported by one of the non-Qur'anic texts that wraps around the mihrab: "Praise be to God, master of the worlds who favored al-Ḥakam II, the servant of God, the prince of the faithful . . . for this venerable construction and helped him in the building of this eternal place, with the goal of making this mosque more spacious for his subjects, something which both he and they greatly wanted."[35]

Though the additions of al-Ḥakam II are teeming with conscious references to the political agenda of the caliphate—an agenda recognized and celebrated by later chroniclers—in the mosque inscriptions he states his purpose to be service to his subjects, a goal that might have been accomplished with significantly greater economy. Clearly the tensions between the needs of the *umma* and the license and exclusivity of the caliphate were great and not yet resolved when al-Ḥakam II's subjects refused to pray in the new mosque.

Despite a disjuncture between the political and public programs of the additions of al-Ḥakam II, even this new religious iconography of prayer, as well as the other inscriptions on the qibla, takes inspiration from a model that buttresses the links between the old Umayyad caliphate of Syria and the new one of Córdoba. The catalysts for the development of this first Qur'anic calligraphic program in a mosque may have been experience of the power of Christian didactic arts and the need for a way to justify the expensive arts of authority to a skeptical general public. As we have seen, the immediate model that provided an acceptable heritage for these goals was the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem.

The additions of al-Ḥakam II to the Great Mosque of Córdoba bear witness to the peculiar set of circumstances that created the Islamic society of al-Andalus. They demonstrate the need in a frontier peninsula to create a Muslim identity with links to the center of the Muslim world and also evidence the rich creativity that results from the challenge provided by the dialogue with a divergent religion and culture. Finally, the hierarchical architectural vision nurtured in this atmosphere exasperated the growing tensions between the caliph and the community, between the use of patronage as a means of asserting the power and exclusivity of a caliph and the community's dawning awareness that those pretenses diminish both the pluralistic nature of their worship and their community coffers. The mosque becomes our document of the social tensions that are created by, and hover about, opulent hegemonic display.

The Additions of al-Manṣūr

In the reign of Hishām II, under the administration of his despotic and powerful minister al-Manṣūr, the entire character of the mosque was transformed. In 987/8 (A.H. 377/8) al-Manṣūr added eight aisles to the east along the entire length of the mosque to provide room for the large number of Berber tribes that had settled in the capital. This addition, which repeats both the prayer hall elevation and portal type consistently used in the mosque, widens the prayer hall once more, disrupting the symmetry of the mihrab of al-Ḥakam II and dislocating the axis and hierarchy of the caliph's long directional plan (Fig. 2).

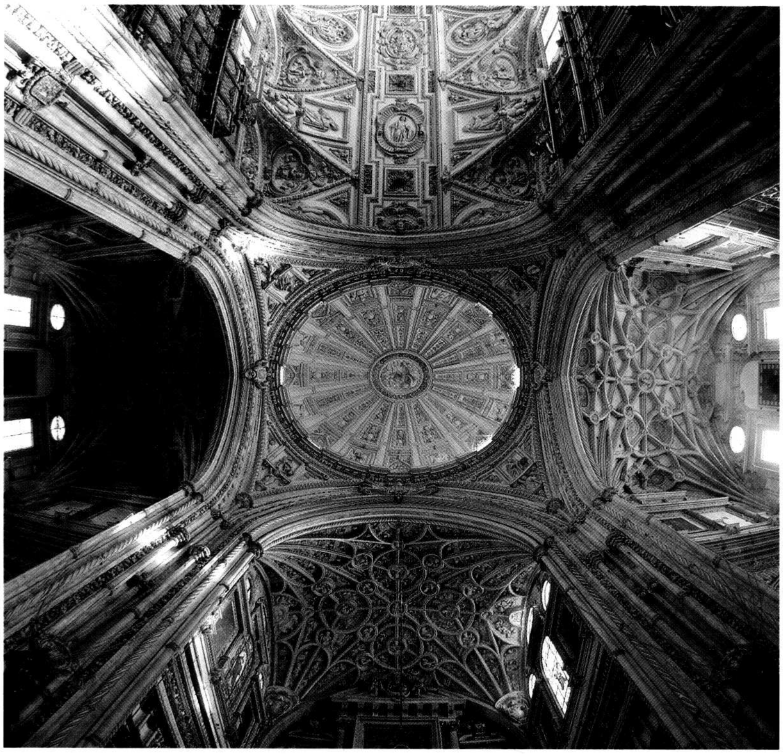

Fig. 13 Great Mosque of Córdoba, Catedral de Santa María, dome

Texts that speak of this last addition, executed on the eve of the fall of the caliphate, describe a more restrained insular attitude toward patronage than had existed earlier: Ibn ᶜIdhārī, for example, says curtly that what al-Manṣūr sought in his work was above all solidity and finish, but not ornamentation, though his enlargement is not inferior to the other enlargements in the edifice, except the work of al-Ḥakam II.[36] Historians also chronicle with evident approbation both al-Manṣūr's more conservative polarized attitude toward the Christian kingdoms of the peninsula and the way in which this position becomes part of his myth as a patron of the Great Mosque. For it was at this moment that al-Manṣūr "ordered the bells of the church [of Santiago] be removed to Cordoba on the shoulders of Christian captives, to be suspended [as lamps] from the ceiling of the Great Mosque."[37] Al-Maqqarī, who transmitted this remark of Ibn Ḥayyān's, goes on to say that al-Manṣūr's addition was "rendered still more meretorious by the circumstance of Christian slaves from Castile and other infidel countries working in chains at the building instead of the Moslems, thus exalting the true religion and trampling down polytheism."[38] This severe approach to both patronage and Christians as a group suggests that a reaction was in force against the perceived excesses of a new caliphate under al-Ḥakam II.

From Mosque to Cathedral

On June 29, 1236 (A.H. 634), Córdoba fell to the hands of Ferdinand III, king of Castile. In that same year Ferdinand and a number of bishops purified the Great Mosque of Córdoba for Christian worship, consecrating it as the Catedral de Santa María. At first alterations to the building constructed for Muslim worship were few and insignificant: The incorporation of occasional chapels and burials subtly transformed corners of the Muslim space. Later in the thirteenth century the Capilla Real, a pantheon for the kings of Castile, was constructed in the Mudejar style. The building of this chapel, which was decorated with Arabic inscriptions and carved stucco ornament, must have constituted an attempt to appropriate the potency of the vanquished Muslim caliphate by inserting Castilian royal burials within its most formidable monument. The Great Mosque of Córdoba was part of the myth of Córdoba as a world capital, as the center of a powerful, apparently invincible culture; its visual forms had come to embody the Islamic presence on the peninsula in all of its intriguing and threatening implications. The Christians who conquered Córdoba understood that there was much more power to be gained from appropriating this extraordinary metaphor of their conquest than from destroying it.

By the end of the fifteenth century, a Gothic nave and choir, the Capilla Mayor, subtly defined a Christian space for worship. However, no act more clearly illustrates the need of the Cordobán ecclesiastical hegemony to harness and transform the meaning of the former mosque than the construction of a vast cathedral at its center starting in 1523 (Fig. 13). Despite the opposition of the city council, which vociferously promoted the preservation of the mosque in its original form, the canons won their suit to build a church within it and began a construction campaign that would not be complete until the end of the eighteenth century. Designed primarily by three generations of the Hernán Ruiz family, the cathedral sprouts impertinently from the mosque's flat prayer hall and uses a dome and a clearly defined nave to proclaim its Christian identity to all who view the mosque from without, visually appropriating the minaret as a bell tower. Its interior reveals a vast, radiantly lit space, featuring Gothic tracery, classical orders, and an enormous array of Renaissance sculpture. These figures are at times inscribed in the earlier horseshoe arches with polychrome masonry, as if to give the Islamic architectural decoration the focal points and narrative subjects the Christian viewer misses. On the other hand, many of the vaults and walls are executed in the Plateresque style, in which abstract patterning of Gothic tracery reminds us that even architectural styles appropriate to Spanish churches contain digested Muslim forms, the mark of over seven hundred years of cohabitation with Islamic culture.

The emperor Charles V, who had originally supported the canons in their petition to build within the mosque, is recorded to have remarked upon seeing the new cathedral: "You have taken something unique and turned it into something mundane."[39] And yet we must not forget that this was the same man who carved a massive Renaissance palace into the site of the Alhambra. The ambiguous meanings that clung to the Muslim and Christian visual languages did not disappear with the Christian conquest; instead they provided fertile ground for the definition, this time, of a new Christian artistic identity. The Great Mosque of Córdoba was a strong statement of Muslim identity, one conceived to link the Muslims of al-Andalus to Syria and the ancient center of the Islamic world. But on some level it was also understood by Christians and Muslims alike as an intrinsically Spanish monument, one that reflected the peculiar interchanges and tensions between Islamic and Christian visual cultures. Appropriation of such a building meant that sixteenth-century Christians had begun to incorporate a part of the Muslim visual world into their own, making it a sign of all that was powerful and elegant for a new Christian hegemony.

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1. Cited by Ibn ʿIdhārī 1901–4, vol. 2, p. 378.
2. Creswell 1940a, p. 139.
3. Ibid.
4. For a discussion of the development of early mosques, see Grabar 1987, pp. 99–131. An absence of hierarchical organization characterizes the earliest mosques, though in a number of important prayer halls, pronounced central axes appear. Grabar discusses the particular way in which early mosque design uses the components of church architecture but subverts the natural hierarchy of its axial form, so that elements like aisles can appear without the culminatory effect they have in a Christian basilica (pp. 118–19).
5. On the issue of the relationship between the Great Mosque of Córdoba and the aqueduct of Mérida, see Marçais 1926, p. 231; Gómez-Moreno 1951, p. 36. For an excellent technical analysis, see Ewert 1966, pp. 12–14.
6. The history and meaning of the horseshoe arch have been widely discussed since Gómez-Moreno set the tone for its careful historical study (1906). Camps Cazorla examined proportion and technique (1953). More recently, Caballero Zoreda has rewritten the history of the form in light of discoveries of the last forty years (1977–78). Finally, I attempt to understand the meaning of the form on the Iberian Peninsula through the year 1000 (Dodds 1990).
7. The idea that the inspiration for the Great Mosque of Córdoba might derive from the elevation at Damascus was developed by Franz (1958).
8. For a review of the literature concerning this problem, see Dodds 1990, p. 164, n. 50.
9. For bibliography on this issue, see ibid., p. 163, n. 47.
10. Cited in Ibn ʿIdhārī 1901–4, vol. 2, pp. 95–96, trans. in Creswell 1940a, p. 139.
11. Brisch 1965.
12. Ibn ʿIdhārī 1901–4, vol. 2, pp. 380–81, cited in Creswell 1940a, p. 140.
13. Ibn Ḥayyān, "al-Muqtabis fī Ta'rīkh Andalus," Oxford MS, fol. 27a, b, cited in Creswell 1940a, pp. 140–41.
14. Ibid., fol. 28a, cited in Creswell 1940a, p. 141.
15. Bloom 1989, chap. 7.
16. Al-Maqqarī 1840–43, vol. 1, pp. 224–25, cited in Creswell 1940a, p. 141.
17. Bloom 1989, p. 106.
18. Ibid., chap. 7.
19. This argument is developed in Dodds 1990, pp. 102–4.
20. Albar of Córdoba, *Indiculus luminosus*, 6, trans. in Colbert 1962, p. 276; Eulogius of Córdoba, *Memorialis*, Lib. I, 21, this author's trans.
21. For a discussion of the interlacing arches, see Ewert 1966.
22. Al-Maqqarī 1840–43, vol. 1, p. 219, cited in Creswell 1940a, p. 143.
23. Ibn ʿIdhārī 1901–4, vol. 2, p. 390.
24. Dodds 1990, pp. 94–106.
25. See Glick 1979, p. 187; Bulliet 1979, pp. 117–26.
26. Kroeber describes "the idea of the complex or system which is accepted, but it remains for the receiving culture to develop a new content" (1940, p. 1). A text that is important for the application of such methods to the study of Spain is Glick and Pi-Sunyer 1969.
27. Grabar 1988; Dodds 1990, pp. 94–106.
28. Dodds 1990, pp. 94–106.
29. For analysis of the possible relationship between the establishment of the Great Mosque of Damascus and that of the Great Mosque of Córdoba, see Terrasse 1932, p. 59, n. 2; Creswell 1969, pp. 187–96; Creswell 1940a, pp. 138–39; Gómez-Moreno 1951, pp. 24–29; Ocaña Jiménez 1942.
30. Ewert and Wisshak 1981.
31. This has been recognized by a series of scholars, not least among them Stern (1976).
32. Ibn ʿIdhārī 1901–4, vol. 2, p. 392, this author's trans. from the French; see also Stern 1976, pp. 1, 28.
33. Grabar 1988, pp. 116–17.
34. Grabar 1987, pp. 46–70; Grabar 1959, pp. 33–62, reprinted in Grabar 1976, II.
35. Lévi-Provençal 1931, no. 12, pp. 15–16.
36. Creswell 1940a, p. 144, citing Ibn ʿIdhārī 1901–4, vol. 2, p. 392.
37. Al-Maqqarī 1840–43, vol. 2, p. 196.
38. Ibid., vol. 1, p. 228.
39. Ramírez de las Casas-Deza 1837, p. 197.