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A Prolegomena to a New Study of Ornament:
Architecture as Embodied Ornament in the Great Mosque of Córdoba

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Abstract

A Prolegomena to a New Study of Ornament: Architecture as Embodied Ornament in the Great Mosque of Córdoba

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This thesis argues for a new theory of ornament as embodied. The argument for a new theory of embodied ornament responds to and rejects canonical notions of ornament as an applied, decorative skin. Rather, it argues for an embodied ornament that is inextricable from the structure and subjectivity of an object. The thesis engages with the canon of literature around ornament, focusing largely on its interpretation and role in Islamic contexts. Further, it integrates new approaches to understanding Islamic art that emphasize perception, ambiguity, and allusion. The application of these new approaches to a reading of ornament opens new avenues of inquiry and interpretive potential. The case study for this new theory of ornament is the Great Mosque of Córdoba, which was founded in AD 786 in al-Andalus (modern day Spain) by the Umayyad amir ‘Abd al-Rahman I. The horseshoe arch, with its alternating red and white voussoirs, is the elemental form of the embodied architectural program. The combination of the potential for infinite repetition of the arch with the constraint of its own form combine to create an ornamental program that is embodied in the structure of the mosque itself. This theory of

a living, ever-evolving ornament tracks the development of the program across developments in the building as the embodied program morphs and mutates over time. The historical breadth of the thesis is extensive, tracking the evolution of the ornamental program from its founding in AD 786 to the insertion of a Gothic cathedral in the mosque by the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V in the beginning of the 16th century. It considers the continuity of the ornamental program through the Christian afterlife of the building. The discussion of afterlives concludes with a consideration of the continuation of the embodied ornamental program across temporal and geographic boundaries, using the kingdom of Zaragoza as an example. Finally, the thesis concludes with a consideration of the implications of a new theory of ornament for future scholarship.

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Introduction:

An Argument for a New Definition of Ornament

“To be able to claim that medieval culture is postmodern—and from this point on I will use that term consistently—at the outset involves rejecting that notion of History that places the highest value on narrativity, causality, evolution, and diachrony. Progress. And, in turn, accepting that these are not...the requirements of History itself.”

María Rosa Menocal, *Shards of Love: Exile and the Origins of the Lyric*, 1994, 37.

“If one wants to see the light of the sun, he must wipe his eyes.”

Saint Athanasius of Alexandria, 3rd c. Coptic Bishop qtd. by artist el-Seed in “Perception,” 2016, Cairo.

In the 2016 work, *Perception*, fifty buildings in the Manshiyat Naser neighborhood of Cairo were painstakingly painted by the French-Tunisian artist el-Seed and his team to form an anamorphic mural set against the Cairene cityscape (fig. 1). Taking the form of a monumental calligraphic boss featuring the words of the 3rd century Coptic Bishop Saint Athanasius quoted above, the mural was carefully mapped out so that the final work would be fully legible from above the city, from a specific vantage point. The resulting effect is that of an expansive ornamental motif—the calligraphic boss—sprawled across an entire cityscape.

The mural puts a multi-hued spotlight on the Manshiyat Naser neighborhood, a majority Coptic section of Cairo peopled largely by the city’s garbage collectors; its inhabitants are called *zabaleen* or “people of the garbage” by outsiders. However, the

people of Manshiyat Naser refer to themselves as the *zaraaab*, or “pig-breeders;” a subtle reference to the fact that they play a significant and unrecognized role in the city’s trash management system by keeping and breeding pigs who eat the organic garbage that they collect. *Perception* thus takes on a double meaning in el-Seed’s work; pushing for a shift in political and sociological perceptions of a marginalized group, while simultaneously playing with notions of vision and perceptual culture within the urban landscape writ large.

El Seed’s aptly named work thus plays twofold—both formally and conceptually—with the notion of perception. Just as *Perception* asks its viewer to alter their received perceptions of a specific sociological issue, so too does the work nudge its viewer towards expanding their own visual and perceptual fields to include a multi-planar artwork that does not fit neatly within a typical framing device. The work challenges standard binaries that are characteristically understood to be foundational to perceptual culture, such as calligraphy/graffiti, legibility/illegibility, and text/ornament.

Perception is both inherently modern and Islamic, in the sense that it fractures established European perceptual conventions. The visual plane of the picture frame operates on the scale of the urban landscape and takes for its canvas the façades of fifty buildings. The work can be made sense of as a cogent whole only from a specific angle above the city; obliging a dramatic expansion of the viewer’s visual field. Each individual facet of the work, however, as divorced from its whole, is a work of art in and of itself—creating in effect something like a more supple, monumental Mondrian consisting of fragments of Arabic script and characters. The calligraphic inscription is exploded to fit the canvas of the entire city and thus, reduces individual sections to abstraction: concentrated fragments of line, color, form. In one section of the work it might be

possible to glimpse the sweeping, downward stroke of an Arabic character, while the text at large remains indecipherable (fig. 2).

This formal rupture with conventional visual culture, perspectival norms, and straightforward signifiers is inherently modern. I suggest, however, that the perceptual ruptures apparent in this work must be contextualized within the rich perceptual traditions and aesthetic genealogy of the Islamic world. What we know as Western Modernism takes for granted several key concepts, such as the rejection of the mimetic image and the frame, which are groundbreaking within a tradition that valorizes the perspectival image. However, the same academy that ushered in modernism also cultivates a taxonomical hierarchy that broadly characterizes non-mimetic perceptual traditions such as ornament as meaningless, relegating them to the category of the decorative arts.

In a comprehensive historiographical inquiry into the study of ornament and its treatment in the European academies of the 19th and 20th centuries, Finbarr Barry Flood illustrates the ways the Islamic arabesque functions simultaneously as “an emblem of incapacity and sublimity.”¹ Flood tracks the characterization of Islamic and Jewish traditions of non-mimetic artistic production in terms of the sublime to the ascendance of modern, Euro-American abstraction. Comparisons between the arts of Islam and 20th century modern works by artists like Picasso and Pollock typically emphasize the shared use of undulating forms and emphatic lines, as well as the rejection of the mimetic image.² Too direct a comparison however, elides the different contexts of production and

¹ Finbarr Barry Flood, “Picasso the Muslim Or, how the *Bilderverbot* Became Modern, (Part 1),” *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics* (67/8, 2017), 52.

² Marshall G. S. Hodgson, “Islam and Image,” *History of Religions* 2, no. 2 (1964): 221. For a discussion of the complicated relationship of 20th century abstraction to Islamic ornament, Oleg Grabar, *The Mediation of Ornament, The A. W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1989, 21-24.

reception that characterize two very distinct periods. If we ought to avoid a conflation of modern and medieval contexts of reception and production, it is still important to note the relegation of premodern non-mimetic styles, like ornament, to the category of the decorative. Particularly in the context of a valorized canon of modernist abstraction, the rejection of ornament as insignificant stands out as a particularly biased and often racialized designation,³ wherein Islamic ornament is characterized as “lifeless,” and lacking in meaning and significance. This characterization is what makes it distinctly “not modern.”⁴ This deeply embedded polemic against ornament calls for an ongoing reconsideration of its role in the visual and material culture of the Islamic world.

In many ways, El-Seed’s work is a canny contemporary take on the melding and interwoven nature of artistic media in the arts of Islam. As discussed above, Islamic artistic traditions often align formally with certain key characteristics of modern art. *Perception* encapsulates the essence of the highly allusive, inherently self-referential perceptual traditions of the Islamic world. A calligraphic work sprawled across a cityscape, it seems to effortlessly forego any formal conventions or limitations in terms of medium, ground, or composition, all the while strictly adhering to an extremely precise and carefully developed design and compositional strategy. This composition gives the work structure and allows it to function as a cogent whole, much like a puzzling or

³ Flood, “Picasso the Muslim,” 54.

⁴ Hispanist María Rosa Menocal argues that the medievalist’s material is most literally ‘modern,’ her example being the medieval lyric. The vernacular lyric, in refusing the paternal tongue, “literally invents and creates the new languages of literature.” Maria Rosa Menocal, *Shards of Love: Exile and the Origins of the Lyric*, Duke University Press, Durham, 1993, 59.

enchanting work of medieval lusterware.⁵ Or, perhaps more aptly, the Great Mosque of Córdoba: a monumental mosque that creates the unique optical sensation of an overwhelming, infinite space through repeated variations on a single, iconic motif (figs. 3, 4).

So why begin a thesis on a medieval mosque with a discussion of a contemporary artwork? Both works of art are characterized by embodied ornament, which I define here as a phenomenon wherein ornamental forms converge with the structural integrity of an object, or make up the structure of the work itself. Embodied ornament is prone to evolution and mutation on a monumental scale, due to the metamorphosing qualities of ornament that will be explored later in the thesis. In addition, the themes that define this thesis are largely atemporal, and speak to a pivotal moment within the discipline of Islamic art history at large. A contemporary re-framing of the field of ornament studies requires a questioning of the validity of the established canon of Islamic art and architecture as it has been developed under the watchful eye of a conservative academy. At the crux of the re-conceptualization of an Islamic art history is ornament, an aesthetic mechanism that pervades Islamic visual culture and is present across a variety of media in an infinite number of formulations. In this thesis, the Great Mosque of Córdoba and the motif of the horseshoe arch will serve as models for a new theory of embodied ornament defined above as the convergence of structure and decoration. The thesis will also explore how the embodied ornamental program invests the structure with significant meaning. The implications of a new theory of ornament extend to contemporary works like El Seed's *Perception*, a calligraphic boss splashed across a constantly changing and

⁵ For more on medieval Islamic technologies of enchantment, Matthew Saba, "Abbasid Lusterware and the Aesthetics of 'ajab," *Muqarnas: An Annual on the Visual Cultures of the Islamic World* 29 (2012): 187-212.

evolving cityscape. El Seed's play on perspective within the ever-evolving cityscape that grounds his composition recalls the metamorphosing perceptual qualities, as well as the ongoing accretion, destruction, and restoration that characterize the program of the Great Mosque of Córdoba. Both works of art can be described in terms of an embodied ornament that evolves and mutates over time.

The formal similarities of these two works of art speaks to the powerful visual mechanism of ornament across media and temporalities. Despite this pervasiveness, ornament historically defies characterization, in large part due to this wide-ranging applicability. Questions about its function, significance, and meaning also make it difficult to define and understand. Any meaning derived from ornament may seem to be intentionally obfuscated, though recent scholarship suggests new possibilities for ornamental subjectivity and the accessibility of meaning through new channels of inquiry.⁶

THE INTERLOCUTORS

Often defined as abstract or decorative patterning, ornament as it is treated in Western scholarship is generally conceived of as surface application, and thus as an externality—never as intrinsic to, or even substantiating in and of itself, a work of art.⁷

⁶ On confusion and the intentional ambiguity, Grabar, *Mediation of Ornament*, 24 and Stephennie Mulder, "Seeing the Light: Enacting the Divine at Three Medieval Syrian Shrines," In *Envisioning Islamic Art and Architecture*, Boston: Brill, 2014, 90. An inquiry that offers new avenues of analysis around the production and reception of medieval Islamic objects, Margaret Graves, *The Arts of Allusion: Object, Ornament, and Architecture in Medieval Islam*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2018.

⁷ James Trilling, *The Language of Ornament*, London, Thames & Hudson, 2001.

Ornament can be conceived of as an externality as it functions within the perspectival traditions of the European canon; however, understanding ornament as artistic tradition intrinsic to Islamic visual culture allows for new conceptualizations of ornament beyond notions of surface application. In the chapters to follow, I will re-characterize ornament as an expansive, embodied phenomenon rather than as an externally-focused surface application.

This thesis will both invoke and attempt to resituate the established canon of ornamental scholarship, beginning with the late 19th century Austrian art historian and “high priest of European ornament studies,” Alois Riegl.⁸ In his 1893 *Stilfragen: Grundlegungen zu einer Geschichte der Ornamentik (Questions of Style: Foundations for a History of Ornament)*, Riegl proposes a continuous, teleological development of ornament as a decorative form beginning in ancient Egypt and through the Ottoman Empire. Grounded in his notion of *Kunstwollen*, or “the will to art,” Riegl argues that “the infinite tendril,” or vine-scroll motif of antiquity transformed over time into the Islamic “arabesque” (fig. 5, 6). This rapid move toward abstraction, in Riegl’s terms, was accelerated by the *Bilderverbot*, or what he and his contemporaries saw as the Islamic prohibition of images.⁹ While his discussion of the infinite ornamental tendril suggests the evolutionary possibilities of ornament’s role in visual culture as well as its continuous historical development, it also characterizes Islamic ornament as a regressive, lifeless abstraction couched in notions of “racial proclivity, religious proscription, [and] cultural

⁸ Flood, “Picasso the Muslim,” 49.

⁹ Alois Riegl., *Stilfragen: Grundlegungen zu einer Geschichte der Ornamentik (Problems of style: foundations for a history of ornament)* trans. Evelyn Kain, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1992.

aridity.”¹⁰ In a refutation of Riegl, this thesis will illustrate the rich potential of ornament for meaning-making.

Nearly a century later, art historian Ernst Gombrich proposed a new method for the interpretation of ornament. In his 1979 text on ornament, *The Sense of Order: A Study in the Psychology of Decorative Art*, Gombrich offers a broad, historical study of ornament and the decorative arts that frames the production and reception of decorative art in terms of the basic principles of human psychology.¹¹ Intended as a complementary volume to the widely-acclaimed *Art and Allusion*, Gombrich’s contribution to the study of ornament was based in the principles of perceptual psychology established by psychologist Karl Popper, and hinges on the idea that the processes of making and viewing ornament result directly from the human impulse to establish visual order. However, his theory never fully draws the line between ornamental subjectivity and pictorial representation. The ideas presented in the following chapters will present ornament within a matrix of production and reception that functions beyond an innate human impulse to establish order.

More recent scholarship proposes new approaches to understanding ornament beyond a desire for order: locating it, rather, in terms of desire itself. In his

¹⁰ Flood, “Picasso the Muslim,” 50.

¹¹ In this work, Gombrich asks more questions than he answers, a fact that he acknowledges in the introduction. However, the wide-ranging subjects of the text often make it difficult to follow the development and conclusions of his argument about ornament as they are initially stated—especially as his meditations on decorative art bleed into contemplations of representational art. Pictorial representation, Gombrich hints, may fulfill the same basic psychological function as ornament. For example, in a discussion of the Italian Master Raphael’s drawing of the *Madonna della Sedia*, he states that the artist’s own sense of rhythm and order is visible in the “free-flowing movement” of the draughtsman’s mark. Ernst Gombrich, *The Sense of Order: A study in the psychology of decorative art*, London, Phaidon, 197, 14.

1992 work, *The Mediation of Ornament*, Oleg Grabar proposes a new theory of ornament and a lexicon of new descriptive vocabulary to go along with it.¹² Grabar argues that ornament is a “daemonic,” Platonic intermediary force that links a viewer with an ornamental work of art, much as lover is linked to beloved. Though he endows it with daemonic force, ornament may, but does not necessarily have to, constitute the work itself in Grabar’s terms. In line with Grabar’s erotically-charged conception of ornament is art historian James Trilling’s 2001 work, *The Language of Ornament*.¹³ In this text, Trilling defines ornament as “the art of decorative patterning,” a surface-level visual device whose main function is to elicit pleasure from its viewer.¹⁴ Trilling calls for a contemporary rehabilitation of ornament, in response to the 20th century modernist polemic against ornament spurred on by theorists like the Austrian architect Adolf Loos, who condemned the evils of ornament in his 1910 lecture *Ornament and Crime*.¹⁵ Trilling’s response to this polemic is an emphasis on the important role ornament plays in global visual culture, as well as its temporal transcendence, from the Paleolithic period to the contemporary art of tattooing.

Recent contemporary investigations by historians of Islamic art suggest a shifting interpretative landscape that allows for more nuanced definitions of ornament beyond a decorative skin or pleasurable externality. In her 2018 work *The Arts of Allusion: Object, Ornament, and Architecture in Medieval Islam*, Islamic art historian Margaret Graves opens new avenues of inquiry into the history of the medieval Islamic portable object,

¹² Oleg Grabar, *The Mediation of Ornament*, xxiii-xxv.

¹³ Trilling, *The Language of Ornament*, 146.

¹⁴ Trilling, *ibid*, 228.

¹⁵ Adolf Loos, *Ornament and Crime: Selected Essays*, (trans. Adolf Opel), Riverside, Calif., Ariadne Press, 1998.

using primary source material to suggest the subtle, allusive meanings with which these objects are endowed. Graves characterizes the objects of her inquiry as “allusive objects,” that are—in both production and reception—part of an ongoing, open dialogue with a variety of other artistic and intellectual disciplines, from poetry and philosophy to architecture and the senses.¹⁶ Graves emphasizes the “intelligence” of these objects as they function in dialogue with craftsman and viewer, production and reception. Another recent, significant intervention is the 2019 book *What is Islamic Art? Between Religion and Perception*, in which art historian Wendy Shaw employs a range of textual sources to argue for a re-definition of Islamic art history based in Islamic aesthetic and perceptual theory.¹⁷ Emphasizing reception over production, Shaw rejects what she refers to as the artifice of the perspectival mode that characterizes Western Christian visual culture. Shaw argues that the perspectival paradigm has inflected the discipline of Islamic art history, such that it obfuscates ornamental and geometric subjectivity. Other recent reconsiderations of the significance of ornament cut across temporal and cultural lines, such as Gülru Necipoğlu and Alina Payne’s 2016 edited volume *Histories of Ornament: From Global to Local*, suggesting a new engagement with the subject outside of Islamic art history.¹⁸ In addition, there is renewed curatorial interest in the 1970s Pattern and Decoration movement, which was based on the ornamental work presented by artists based mostly in New York and California. These new exhibitions suggest a contemporary

¹⁶ Graves, *The Arts of Allusion*, 23.

¹⁷ Wendy Shaw, *What is Islamic Art? Between Religion and Perception*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019.

¹⁸ Gülru Necipoğlu and Alina Payne, ed., *Histories of Ornament: From Global to Local*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2016.

revision of a modernist art world polemic that described the ornamental movement as “ridiculous and irrelevant.”¹⁹

Finally, the methodological approach of literary historian and Hispanist María Rosa Menocal will influence this thesis. In her 1993 work, *Shards of Love: Exile and the Origins of the Lyric*, Menocal proposes an alternative historical methodology, asking whether it is possible to “tell History in the lyrical mode” given that the “...postmodern construct of History is not only *not* our invention, but one that once shaped a world of difference and dialects as colorful as our own.”²⁰ Menocal proposes a new, philological approach to telling histories that revels in the “cacophonous,” vernacular artistic production of the medieval period.²¹ The offerings of Menocal, Shaw, and Graves propose new avenues of inquiry into vernacular matrices of artistic production that will be explored in the first chapter.

RESITUATING THEORIES OF ORNAMENT

The new notions of ornament explored in this thesis will be proposed in the context of a recent expansive scholarly re-conceptualization within the fields of medieval and Islamic art history, as mentioned above. Rooted in a matrix of vernacular and caliphal architectural production that combined Andalusian craftsmanship with the allusive images of a highly literate and interconnected medieval world, this thesis will

¹⁹ Glenn Adamson, “Reassessing Pattern & Decoration, The Last Art Movement of the Twentieth Century,” *ArtNews*, *Art in America*, 2019. <https://www.artnews.com/art-in-america/features/pattern-decoration-legacy-reassessed-la-moca-ica-boston-63654/>.

²⁰ Menocal, *Shards of Love*, 50.

²¹ Abigail Krasner Balbale, “Cacophony” *Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies*, 5.2 (2013): 123-128.

argue for the Great Mosque of Córdoba as an embodied ornamental program. The program is comprised of the repeated motif of the red-and-white horseshoe arch. This single, repeated motif characterizes the interior of the Great Mosque of Córdoba, synthesizing structure and decoration so successfully that that the structure itself is a living, embodied ornamental program. This argument diverges from most established definition of ornament in that it is not surface application. Ornament, in my terms, is metamorphosing; it treats everything from the holiest of scripture to the walls of a mosque to the most mundane pottery sherd; it gives an architectural feature the appearance of a textile; or reproduces a monumental archway on a small stucco panel.²² Ornament is playful; it bends the rules of perception and scale such that a building is no longer so distinct from a textile, the program of a prayer hall not so discrete conceptually from the vine scroll border of a Qur'an; an inscription barely individuated from the ornament surrounding it, each character seemingly on the verge of sprouting a tendril. As a perceptual, aesthetic mechanism, ornament is so highly mutable and multivalent that, conceptually, it may appear to be inseparable from medium.

Yet, significantly, ornament is constrained.²³ Much like a fractal, ornament must retain some degree of 'self-similarity;' in other words, an ornamental program relies on a single motif or group of motifs that is reproducible and mutable, but that stays true to the original form or motif. Thus, as with fractal geometry, any sense of the infinite evoked by the reproduction of a motif is in fact the result of the highly constrained (and often highly

²² Golombek argues that, among other objects, Al Hakam II's maqsura screen in the Great Mosque of Córdoba evidences a "love for interlace" rooted in the textile arts. Lisa Golombek, "The Draped Universe of Islam," *Content and Context of Visual Arts in the Islamic World*, ed. Priscilla Soucek, 1980, 35. On ornament that alludes to architecture, Margaret Graves, *Arts of Allusion*, 59.

²³ Gombrich, "The Challenge of Constraints," in *Sense of Order*, 63-94.

mathematical, especially in the case of geometric ornament) formulation of one motif that is repeated and developed and metamorphosed but never completely discarded. This is evident in the program of the Great Mosque of Córdoba, in which the single horseshoe arch is replicated and transfigured by successive interventions so that it creates an overwhelming, immersive optical experience. Nevertheless, the program is always constrained by the basic structure of the original motif, the horseshoe arch. Ornament, if it retains the integrity of the original motif, thus creates a sense of the infinite while simultaneously avoiding the kind of chaotic sensibility that arises from a lack of uniformity.

The historical breadth of this thesis is quite extensive, beginning with the foundation of the Great Mosque of Córdoba in 786. The founding and the initial developments of the structure track to the beginnings of the Islamic presence in the Iberian Peninsula after the fall of the Syrian Umayyads to the new Abbasid Empire. Subsequent interventions in the mosque occurred after the declaration of the Umayyad Caliphate in al-Andalus by the caliph ‘Abd al-Rahman III in 929. This period marks the golden age of the Islamic presence in Iberia, when al-Andalus was a cultural center considered far and wide to be the “ornament of world.”²⁴ The Great Mosque itself would outlive the caliphate, surviving through ongoing cycles of destruction and restoration through the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.²⁵ Cordoba was conquered by a Castilian army in 1236, marking a turn in the tide of mounting Christian sovereignty on the Peninsula. What was once a mosque remained in continuous use as a church during this

²⁴ Maria Rosa Menocal, *Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain*. New York: Little, Brown, and Company, 2002.

²⁵ Heather Ecker, “The Great Mosque of Córdoba in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries,” *Muqarnas* 20 (2003) 114.

period, with minimal additions made to it. Ongoing struggles between Christian and Islamic forces would ultimately leave to the capitulation of Granada in 1492, and the gradual expulsion (or conversion) of Muslims and Jews from the peninsula. The expulsion was shortly followed by the unification of the Spanish kingdoms Castile and Aragon, and the 1519 consolidation of imperial power by the newly declared Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V. These dramatic socio-political shifts would leave their mark in the most significant addition to the mosque, that of a soaring Gothic cathedral inserted into the fabric of the structure in 1526. The fractious situation and subsequent political paradigm shifts in medieval Spain are traceable catalysis for evolutions in the ornamental program of the Great Mosque.

The first chapter of the thesis will situate the Great Mosque of Córdoba and its ornamental program within its medieval context. It will then discuss the interweaving of vernacular, architectural craftsmanship with the building descriptions from literate, *ekphrastic* travelers' accounts in the creation of a distinctly vernacular architectural. The second chapter of the thesis will offer a re-conceptualization of the architectural program of the Great Mosque of Córdoba as an embodied ornamental program that adorns and constitutes the space of the building itself. This argument will reject notions of ornament as an applied, decorative skin and show ornament is embodied, and how the ornamental program continues to develop and mutate over time. This chapter will invoke Riegl's notion of the infinite tendril while rejecting his racialized characterizations of Islamic ornament as regressive. Finally, the third chapter will consider the afterlives of the ornamental program of the Great Mosque of Córdoba, exploring the diffusion of the interlacing arch motif across artistic media, through the period of the *taifa* kingdoms in the 11th century, as well as their emergence in Mudéjar artistic traditions after the

Christian conquest; and finally, taking on completely new meanings as a symbol of Spanish national identity and “Nacional-Catolicismo.”²⁶

²⁶ Peter Linehan, *History and the Historians of Medieval Spain*, Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 1993, 17.

Chapter 1: Building a Vernacular Architectural Imaginary in Córdoba

“...the image is a repetition that works through resemblance. However, the resemblance did not need to be mimetic, for it was not mimesis that made the image a valid functioning representation...”

-Zainab Bahrani, “Salmu,” *The Graven Image*, 129.

This chapter will discuss the role of architectural knowledge transmission combined with vernacular craftsmanship in the development of the architectural imaginary that is the Great Mosque of Córdoba. The original construction of the Great Mosque was a site of *ekphrastic* memory, built on nostalgic recollections and textual accounts of a distant homeland in Syria. Successive interventions made to the mosque by consecutive caliphs through the 11th century fall of the Umayyad Caliphate in al-Andalus, perpetuated the traditional convergence of vernacular styles with far-flung, imperial aspirations. By examining the original construction and later developments to the Great Mosque, this chapter will explore the development of a non-mimetic architectural tradition rooted in a cultural matrix that merged vernacular production with the imaginations of the literary elite. This mode of production relies upon the transmission of style through both caliphal patronage and the vernacular Andalusian imagination, and thus encourages the gradual elaboration and variation that characterizes an ornamental program. The horseshoe arch is the through-line of this ornamental architectural reproduction.

There is no substantial evidence that architectural knowledge transmission in the medieval period relied upon formal plans; while there are a few tantalizing references to early architectural plans from this period, but none are extant, and it is unclear what form

they might have taken.²⁷ The earliest architectural plans and diagrams from the Islamic world date to the sixteenth century, though it seems likely that they were used as early as the fourteenth; such plans were widely used in western Europe only after the 13th century.²⁸ Nonetheless, inimitable constructions can be found across the vast territorial and temporal expanses of the medieval period, particularly in the culturally rich lands under Islamic dominion. Owing, in large part, to local expertise and artisanal knowledge there is no shortage of stunning and technologically sound buildings that were constructed across the medieval Islamic world.²⁹

What's more, many of the major edifices, including mosques and palaces, often make clear reference to faraway buildings by referencing and repeating specific architectural features. Though a building might recall any number of imported styles, its production also relies upon vernacular craftsmen, materials, and visual idioms. This combination of memory and imagination with local, vernacular architectural traditions leads to the production of a distinct and original construction. The horseshoe arch motif established at The Great Mosque of Córdoba in the eighth century, for example, would become popular throughout the Iberian Peninsula and beyond for many centuries. The Great Mosque would prove to be a tastemaker, resulting in the perpetuation and repetition of the process of elite *ekphrastic* image transfer and vernacular reproduction that originally led to the mosque's own creation.

²⁷ Renata Holod, "Text, Plan, and Building: On the Transmission of Architectural Knowledge in *Theories and Principles of Design in the Architecture of Islamic Societies*, ed. Margaret Bentley Sevcenko (Cambridge: The Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture), 1998, 2-4.

²⁸ Grabar, *Mediation of Ornament*, 175.

²⁹ Renata Holod, "Text, Plan, and Building," 2.

This mode of architectural production was based on the highly-interconnected court culture of the medieval Islamic world, in which court poets and travelers were hired to document their visits to foreign courts and their major monuments, in highly figurative *ekphrastic* form: painting, as it were, word-images of faraway places. The regional dissemination of these personal accounts and descriptions of architecture was a mainstay of early architectural practice in the medieval Islamic world. While the Islamic world is often considered to be a transmission point for the science and technology of the classical past, the significance of local, vernacular knowledge transmission alongside the dissemination of classical theoretical architectural knowledge cannot be underestimated.³⁰

Architectural knowledge and language was regionally-specific, and buildings were designed based on written descriptions that patrons could have consulted and used as models in the place of seeing a structure in person.³¹ Margaret Graves corroborates this claim, writing that architecture in the medieval world was “a collaborative practice between artisans and mathematicians” that did not rely upon formal architectural plans.³² This is where the vernacular comes into play in the Great Mosque of Córdoba. Though the mosque is the product of caliphal patronage, the image desired by its patron would have to be translated into the vernacular architectural and ornamental language of al-Andalus. The idea of vernacular transmission is central to my argument going forward. Graves emphasizes a textual tradition of applied geometry in architectural practice from the tenth century onward, in the form of guidebooks that would have circulated among

³⁰ Holod, “Text, Plan, and Building,” 2.

³¹ Jonathan M. Bloom, “On the Transmission of Designs in Early Islamic Architecture,” *Muqarnas* 10, no. 1 (1993), 21.

³² Graves, *Arts of Allusion*, 30.

craftsmen. A later tradition of design scrolls beginning in the 15th century, which emphasize modular decoration, suggest the application of these designs that “imply a modular imagination at work.”³³

This emphasis on non-written channels of knowledge and craft production characterize Graves’ argument, which I will refer to as vernacular. Graves emphasizes the “intelligence” of objects as they function in an ongoing, allusive dialogue from their production to their reception. These intelligent objects take part in what art historian Sussan Babbaie similarly terms the “polyglot cultural matrix,” which she argues characterizes the contemporary arts of Islam.³⁴ The Great Mosque of Córdoba can be characterized as an allusive object in a similar cultural matrix, the conditions of its production in the hands of local craftsmen who were tasked with bringing to life the descriptive travelers’ accounts. Vernacular production both facilitates and alludes to an elite and worldly literary tradition in the construction of the Great Mosque, illuminating the imagination of the caliphal patron.

Islamic architectural historian Nasser Rabbatt argues that architecture in the medieval Islamic world was “essentially a craft.”³⁵ An architect had to learn to work from a kind of modular shorthand that would allow him to produce a completed structure without the use of a graphic intermediary.³⁶ This kind of work required intensive training in geometry, centered around the replication and adaptation of a geometric module in three dimensions. The architects who participated in this modular design practice

³³ Graves, *ibid.*

³⁴ Sussan Babbaie, “Voices of Authority: Locating the “Modern” in “Islamic” Arts,” *Getty Research Journal*, 3 (2001): 137.

³⁵ Nasser Rabbatt, “Design without Representation in Medieval Egypt,” *Muqarnas*, no. (2008) 147.

³⁶ Rabbatt, *ibid.*, 149.

historically occupied a low position in the social hierarchy, acquiring an education in their field through apprenticeships rather than formal education.³⁷ Though highly trained, these individuals lived and worked in a vernacular space where their work was valued but not recorded or discussed in intellectual circles. Nevertheless, those same intellectual, courtly circles relied upon the expertise of craftsmen to transform their florid written accounts of faraway places into local, built realities.

BUILDING THE GREAT MOSQUE OF CÓRDOBA

As noted above, early Islamic architects seem to have relied upon a close relationship between intellectual traditions, some of which may be traceable to the classical world, and artisanal knowledge. Textual accounts of buildings after which new plans could be modeled were readily available. Based on such accounts, medieval rulers could task local architects and artisans with re-creating an equally evocative space. If no written account was available, it seems likely that verbal accounts and memory played a similar function in the evocation of images of faraway places. This section will provide a history of the construction of the Great Mosque of Córdoba, showing how written accounts led to the origin of a new and distinctly Andalusian ornamental program at Córdoba. It will trace the origins of the ornamental program to its origins in a nostalgia for the Umayyad homeland in Syria combined with the new conventions of architectural style in al-Andalus. Scholarship on medieval architectural knowledge and the construction of the Great Mosque of Córdoba has focused on the non-mimetic transfer of

³⁷ Rabbatt, *ibid*, 147.

images in production.³⁸ Building on this scholarship, I will argue that this unique method of transfer allowed for and constituted the emergence and evolution of a distinct and embodied ornamental program.

The mythology around the initial construction of the Great Mosque of Córdoba reflects this notion of memory-based image-building: ‘Abd al-Rahman I, a ruler in a strange new land who supposedly felt an intense longing and sense of nostalgia for his native Syria, replicated certain aspects of his homeland, from the palm trees in the courtyard of his new mosque to the airy arcades that filled the prayer hall.³⁹ The somewhat humble initial construction of the mosque in AD 786-87 featured a simple hypostyle hall of only twelve bays and eleven aisles running perpendicular to the *qibla* wall (fig. 7), clear references the imperial religious architecture of Umayyad Syria.⁴⁰ The basic form of the mosque, with a large courtyard about the same size as the prayer hall itself, recalls the Damascus mosque (fig. 8); in addition, the monumental double arcades found in the courtyard and within the Great Mosque of Damascus (fig. 9, 10)—allowing for an airier, more monumental interior than a single arcade would permit. The double arcade also characterizes the prayer hall of the Córdoba mosque.⁴¹ Though the monumentality of the arcades is significantly scaled down in Córdoba (perhaps due to the limitations of local expertise or technical architectural knowledge in al-Andalus, still a

³⁸ Nuha Khoury, “The Great Mosque of Córdoba in the Tenth Century,” *Muqarnas* 13, no. 1 (1996), 90.

³⁹ Jerrilynn Dodds, *Architecture and Ideology in Early Medieval Spain* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1989), 95.

⁴⁰ Dodds, “The Great Mosque of Córdoba,” *Al-Andalus: The Art of Islamic Spain*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992 and K.A.C. Creswell, “The Great Mosque of Cordova,” *A short account of early Muslim architecture*, Revised edition by James W. Allan, Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1989.

⁴¹ Dodds, *Architecture and Ideology in Early Medieval Spain*, 96.

peripheral entity, at the time) the number of aisles was increased from the two that characterize the Damascus mosque to eleven. This amplification of the double arcade results in the unique optical and phenomenological effects that characterize the mosque in Córdoba.

The mosque in Córdoba is an ode to the Umayyad mosque in Damascus; its *mihrab* and *qibla* wall are oriented southward, facing Syria rather than Mecca.⁴² This brazen and debatably heretical choice in construction pays homage to the Umayyad lineage before it does the holiest shrine in Islam.⁴³ This orientation speaks to the potency of Umayyad identity as a legitimizing force for the new rulers of the Iberian emirate, and soon to be caliphate, in Córdoba. The Great Mosque retains a distinctly Iberian vernacular sensibility, however much the original construction is beholden to the form of the Damascus mosque. The repeating double arcades of red-and-white horseshoe arches recall the vernacular Hispano-Roman civil architecture found throughout the Iberian Peninsula. The remains of Roman aqueducts, nearby Córdoba in Merida and the more distant one in Tarragona (fig. 11, 12) are perhaps the most vivid vernacular touchstones for the vernacular Iberian style reproduced in the Great Mosque.⁴⁴ The double and triple arcades, as well as horseshoe-like arches directly recall the interior of the mosque. Here

⁴² Dodds, *ibid.*

⁴³ The growing consensus in the scholarship suggests that mosques in Iberia and North Africa tend to be more south-facing than the modern *qibla* orientation due to an astronomical mode known as *Suhayl al-Wazn*, Abby Stockstill, “A Tale of Two Mosques: Marrakesh’s Masjid al-Jami‘ al-Kutubiyya,” *Muqarnas* 35 (2018): 65-82, and David King, “The Sacred Direction in Islam: A Study of the Interaction of Religion and Science in the Middle Ages,” *Interdisciplinary Science Review* 10, no. 4 (1985): 315-28, and David King, “The Enigmatic Orientation of the Great Mosque of Córdoba,” *Suhayl* 16-17 (2018-19): 33-111.

⁴⁴ Dodds, *Architecture and Ideology in Early Medieval Spain*, 95 and Dodds, “The Great Mosque of Córdoba,” 14.

we see the convergence of the caliphal styles of Umayyad Damascus with local Iberian precedents, the double arcade of arches from two sources enforcing the potency of the motif. This double transmission marks the origins of the ornamental program at Córdoba and the first transformations of the program.

The successors of ‘Abd al-Rahman I, each making their own intervention in the mosque, preserved the language of the original construction while making their own unique mark on the structure. I argue that these interventions mark developments in the ornamental program. In the first half of the ninth century, ‘Abd al-Rahman II expanded the prayer hall by eight bays (fig. 13). Rather than using spoliated columns and capitals of a variety of shapes and widths in the style of ‘Abd al-Rahman I, he employed local masons to develop a more consistent, contemporary masonry style referenced but further developed the style of the Roman originals (fig. 14).⁴⁵ The tenth century caliph ‘Abd al-Rahman III was the next ruler to make significant additions to the mosque; and is significant as the caliph who would declare a new Islamic caliphate in Córdoba, in opposition to the caliphal seat of power in Abbasid Baghdad. ‘Abd al-Rahman III’s additions focused on the exterior of the structure. He reconstructed the main façade, and added distinctly Syrian porticos in the courtyard, a new entrance to the mosque. He also added a minaret that was Syrian in style, though it was later replaced with a Christian bell tower.⁴⁶ The caliphal expansion can be viewed as a reinforcement of the Umayyad identity of the Andalusian caliphate as well as a reflection of the needs an expanding devotional community.⁴⁷ Despite these additions, the focus of the new caliph’s architectural patronage was on his imperial palace-compound outside the city, Madinat

⁴⁵ Dodds, *Architecture and Ideology in Early Medieval Spain*, 96.

⁴⁶ Dodds, *ibid.*

⁴⁷ Dodds, “The Great Mosque of Córdoba,” 17.

al-Zahra. This project suggests the caliph's interest in developing an image of his imperial project, the newly declared caliphate, above all else.⁴⁸ This image of the caliphate was clearly the horseshoe arch, which was employed extensively in the caliph's complex of palaces outside the city.

The newly-titled caliph notably had his court poet, Ibn 'Abd Rabbih, compile an anthology, *al-Iqd*, part of which featured detailed descriptions of the three holy shrines of Islam (in Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem) and which were thought to influence Al-Hakam's II late 10th century intervention in the mosque as well.⁴⁹ The anthology featured descriptions of these major shrines alongside a panegyric for the caliph, enforcing the notion of imperial investment in and patronage of the creation of images of piety through textual architectural descriptions. While there are inconsistencies in Ibn 'Abd Rabbih's descriptions, they indicate the significance of this kind of account more so as participating in a collective architectural imaginary and process of image-making than in the direct iconographic transfer of images; the anthology suggests the referent was an overarching idiom more-so than a plan to be imitated.⁵⁰

Upon his ascension to the caliphate in 961, the caliph Al-Hakam II began to implement a major reworking of the mosque on a monumental scale, based in part on Ibn 'Abd Rabbih's anthology.⁵¹ Al-Hakam II's tenth century intervention in the mosque (the first of the many significant alterations to follow) included a dramatic twelve-row expansion of the prayer hall (fig. 15), marked by a gilded central aisle complete with elaborate interlacing, poly-lobed arches (fig. 16, 17), and topped by three large gilded

⁴⁸ Dodds, *ibid.*, 16.

⁴⁹ Khoury, "The Great Mosque of Córdoba in the Tenth Century," 89.

⁵⁰ Khoury, *ibid.*, 90.

⁵¹ Khoury, *ibid.*, 92.

domes (fig. 18). This new central aisle led toward the *mihrab* niche, framed by a gold, mosaic-encrusted horseshoe arch decorated with elaborate vegetal motifs and Kufic inscriptions, ostentatiously marking the direction of prayer (fig. 19). Like the original construction, this intervention relied upon the cultivation of the image of an Umayyad past, but broke new ground in the incorporation of other imperial styles, including Byzantine-style mosaics.⁵² Yet again, the combination of established Andalusian conventions would be combined with other imperial styles that would be incorporated into the growing ornamental program of the mosque. The mosaics that decorate the *mihrab* niche were sent to Córdoba by the Byzantine Emperor himself, along with a craftsman to apply them.⁵³ Here, we see a first example of direct transmission of knowledge via a foreign craftsman, rather than a vernacular translation by a local craftsman. The form of the new *mihrab* is also significant due to its unprecedented form. Built in the form of an octagonal room, the niche is the first of its kind and directly recalls the apse of a Christian church.⁵⁴ Al-Hakam II's turn to Christian sources of architectural inspiration—both the Byzantines and the vernacular Spanish Christian models—reflects a melding of sources in a structure that would now refer to the knowledge of a Christian architectural vernacular in al-Andalus as much as it did to the more distant, holy structures of Islam. Both Jerrilynn Dodds and Nuha Khoury have discussed the transfer of architectural knowledge in the Great Mosque as a transfer of memory at length.⁵⁵

⁵² Dodds, “The Great Mosque of Córdoba,” 18-21.

⁵³ Dodds, *Architecture and Ideology in Early Medieval Spain*, 97.

⁵⁴ Dodds, *ibid.*, 98-99.

⁵⁵ Khoury, “The Great Mosque of Córdoba in the Tenth Century” and Dodds, “The Great Mosque of Córdoba.”

In addition to his Christian sources, the Prophet's Mosque at the Medina served as a major prototype for Al-Hakam II's expansion, features of which are discernable in the ornamental program and spatial arrangement of the sanctuary area of the building.⁵⁶ Ibn 'Abd Rabbih's description of the mosque suggest a greater connection to his textual account than to accurate reconstructions of the mosque in Medina:

On the *qibla* side, the [mosque's] aisles run across from east to west. Each row of its aisle has seventeen columns, the space between the columns being large and wide. The columns of the southern [*qibla*] aisle are plastered white and very lofty. The remaining columns are of marble. The plastered columns have large square bases and golden capitals. Above these are [wood] beams that are painted and gilded as well. Opposite the *mihrab*, in the middle of the [transverse] aisles, is an aisle that is gilded all over. [This aisle] cuts through the [transverse] aisles [all the way] from the courtyard as far as the [niche] *mihrab*'s aisle, which it does not cross. And in the aisle adjacent to the [niche] *mihrab* is much gilding. In its center is a dome that is round like a large shield concave like a mother of pearl shell, and gilded.⁵⁷

The description does not align exactly with the established reconstructions of the Prophet's Mosque in Medina. Here we see again an example of the indirect transmission of architectural knowledge in the Islamic world, and its effectiveness in inspiring regional, virtuosic architectural idioms that retain the essence of the prototype(s). Notably, Rabbih's eye-witness account of the Prophet's mosque does not include specific dates or names, suggesting the evocation of an Umayyad idiom rather than a specific structure.⁵⁸ However, similarities between Rabbih's description and al-Hakam II's expansion, including the broadened, gilded central aisle that leads to the *mihrab* niche, the large central dome, and the "room-like" niche that features a mother-of-pearl shell

⁵⁶ Khoury, "The Great Mosque of Córdoba in the Tenth Century," 90.

⁵⁷ Ibn 'abd Rabbih, quoted in Khoury, "The Great Mosque of Córdoba in the Tenth Century," 90.

⁵⁸ Khoury, *ibid*, 89.

hood suggest the significance of the textual account as a reference work.⁵⁹ In emulating an *ekphrastic* description of the Prophet's Mosque—whether every detail of the description was accurately replicated or not—al-Hakam II charged his craftsmen with evoking the essence of one of the most holy structures in Islam. The reconstruction would also evoke a legitimizing, Umayyad idiom, while operating within a perceptual tradition of indirect image transfer. This mode of image transfer gave a patron the flexibility to incorporate new elements, such as the Byzantine-style mosaics or the apse-like *mihrab* niche, that mark an elaboration upon the ever-expanding ornamental program.

The plan of the Umayyad Mosque of Damascus (fig. 8) likewise served as a significant prototype for al-Hakam II's expansion, and is a structure widely cited and described by medieval writers. Jonathan Bloom suggests that al-Hakam's additions to the mosque, such as the four, monumental ribbed domes surrounding the *mihrab* and the mosaic revetment of the *mihrab* niche and main dome, had no local Iberian precedent.⁶⁰ Rather, they seem to refer to monumental Islamic mosques like the mosque in Damascus. It seems that Al-Hakam II's expansion of the mosque mirrored architectural developments and "an interest in spatial focus" seen in major urban mosques, such as the Great Mosque of Damascus, among the shrines described in Rabbih's and others' accounts.⁶¹ The most extensive description of the Damascus mosque in the medieval period comes from the Andalusian court poet and writer Ibn Jubayr, writing a few centuries later. In 1184 he writes:

The Lead Dome [is] in the centre of the building beside the *mihrab*. It rises high into the air with a vast circumference, and is supported by the huge erection

⁵⁹ Khoury, "The Great Mosque of Córdoba in the Tenth Century,"

⁶⁰ Bloom, "On the Transmission of Designs," 24.

⁶¹ Dodds, *Architecture and Ideology in Early Medieval Spain*, 97.

which is the nave and which extends from the *mihrab* to the court. Over this nave are three cupolas, one adjoining the wall against the court, one beside the *mihrab*, and the other beneath (and within) the Lead Dome and between the other two. The Lead Dome chokes the air around it, and when you come before it you look upon an overwhelming sight, an awe-inspiring spectacle which men have likened to an eagle in flight, the Dome being its head, the nave its breast, and the half of the wall of the right aisle together with the half of that on the left, its wings.⁶²

Ibn Jubayr's embodied description of the mosque is but one example of the kind of descriptions that regional patrons and architects would have used as models for their own building plans. In the absence of formal plans, memory, or personal viewership of the building, these phenomenological accounts substantiate a genre and tradition of literary-perceptual production in and of themselves. The accounts cross the threshold between the visual and the literary, all while providing material for architectural production across the courts of the Islamic world. Accounts such as that of the Andalusian thinker Ibn Jubayr were in circulation around the Iberian Peninsula and the greater Islamic world and likely informed architectural production quite broadly. The later interventions in the Great Mosque continued to build on as well as disrupt the newly established Andalusian-Umayyad idiom. These interventions would take place after the fall of the caliphate in 1031, and thus take their place in the afterlife of the structure, which will be discussed in the third chapter.

ORNAMENT AND ARCHITECTURAL KNOWLEDGE TRANSMISSION

The Great Mosque of Córdoba is a site of memory, alluding to and directly referencing certain aspects of the holiest Islamic sites, landmarks of local Iberian architecture, and even Byzantine Christian styles. Some of the essence of each of these structures is present in the Córdoba mosque, though it is a uniquely Andalusian

⁶² Ibn Jubayr quoted in Jonathan Bloom, "On the Transmission of Designs," 25.

vernacular creation whose translator certainly did not have the original text at hand.⁶³ Whether working from memory or a travelers' account, modes and methods of architectural planning and conceptualization in this period did not rely upon a formal attempt to replicate an exact image, thus operating outside of the mimetic visual paradigm that defines much of the art historical canon.⁶⁴ The Islamic paradigm was one in which the mimetic qualities of the image were inessential; manipulability and difference, allusion and illusion, play more significant roles in the production of perceptual culture than do the mimetic or semiotic modes.⁶⁵ If we take a work of architecture, then—a building, mosque, or palace—to be an image or object in and of itself, functioning within the rich perceptual culture of the Islamic world, then there would consequently be as little impetus for mimetic replication in architectural production.

The insertion of difference into a new construction like the Great Mosque of Córdoba allows for the emergence of the vernacular perceptual vocabulary, as it is found in the combination of elements of the structure. It allows for the incremental ornamental evolution that I argue characterizes the structure. From the Hispano-Roman vernacular, to the imported Syrian Umayyad architectural model, the visual and formal pastiche of the Córdoba mosque blends geographies and temporalities within one construction. This new image is the product of local circumstances and context, in combination with imported and re-imported images of faraway styles, like the double

⁶³ Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," *Selected Writings*, ed. Howard Eiland & Michael W. Jennings, (Cambridge: 1991–1999) 267-269.

⁶⁴ Zainab Bahrani, *The Graven Image: Representation in Babylonia and Assyria*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2003, 75.

⁶⁵ Wendy Shaw, *What is Islamic Art?*, 300.

arcade or Byzantine-style mosaics. Menocal's notion of the inherent postmodernism of the medieval period can be teased out here. In the absence of a formalized set of requirements for cultural production, medieval perceptual culture—including literary, architectural, and visual styles—functions in what Menocal terms the postmodern mode of the medieval period.⁶⁶ She conceptualizes the medieval period as a time where the insertion of difference, via the vernacular, allows for new forms of cultural production that are not beholden to a canon of style. For example, we see the combination of different visual dialects in the vernacular translation of the elemental, landmark feature of any Islamic society: the mosque.⁶⁷ The incorporation of the vernacular visual language of Iberia into the caliphal project of the Great Mosque fractures established norms and constitutes a new visual convention. In Menocal's terms, then, the Great Mosque is a postmodern creation. This character of the mosque is intensified over time as new additions from many different sources were made to the structure, each inserting some level of difference into the program at each expansion.

The written accounts of the medieval period that characterized the literature around architecture suggest the significance of local, vernacular production. These accounts have been described as “a plan meant for someone else to realize”⁶⁸ and as “an instrument of iconographic transfer...[re-creating] one as an image of the other.”⁶⁹ These arguments suggest that that no “plan” was conceived of in the medieval Islamic context as a mimetic signifier. The new construction of the Great Mosque of Cordoba was not meant to resemble anything other than itself, or the transformation of itself. As a

⁶⁶ Menocal, *Shards of Love*, 50.

⁶⁷ Menocal, *ibid.*, 44-45.

⁶⁸ Bloom, “Transmission of Designs,” 25.

⁶⁹ Khoury, “The Great Mosque of Córdoba in the Tenth Century,” 89.

vernacular creation, the structure cannot be conceived in terms of the language of an original image.⁷⁰ While it is certainly highly allusive, drawing on the elements and motifs of other spaces, the Córdoba mosque cannot have been meant to exactly replicate al-Walid's mosque in Jerusalem, nor the Umayyad mosque in Damascus. This indirect means of transmission, resulting in a new, distinctly Andalusian architectural paradigm, is neatly tied into meaning as related to architectural production here. Certainly, the Umayyad project in Iberia depended on an assertion of its own difference during the ongoing period of the construction of the Mosque—associating itself with the Umayyads in Syria, but eventually declaring a new Umayyad caliphate in al-Andalus in staunch opposition to the Abbasids installed in Baghdad. Much as the Great Mosque of Córdoba was not intended as an exact replica of any other structure, nor was al-Andalus as an imperial offshoot a true replica of the Umayyad caliphate, however much it may have longed to be so.

Just as the notion of ornament relies simultaneously on the notion of the infinite and the notion of constraint, so too does a mode of architectural planning that relies heavily on vernacular image-making result in a unique combination of infinite possibility and constraint in its construction. “The mosque” as an abstracted ideal can be understood as a set of forms based on now mythological originals, such as the Prophet's Mosque in Medina. Despite all attempts at reconstruction of this most holy of Islamic shrines, the original form of the structure is inaccessible, except in its transference across temporalities in new constructions that use the image or ideal of the Prophet's Mosque as a model for the mosque par excellence.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Walter Benjamin, “Task of the Translator,” 257.

⁷¹ Khoury, “The Great Mosque of Córdoba in the Tenth Century,” 93.

The original plan for the mosque exists as a basic framework—courtyard, prayer hall, *mihrab*—but not as a formal or fully realized plan. Grabar conceptualizes the architectural plan as a dream, wish, or idea; a kind of shorthand for an indirect guide to architectural production.⁷² This notion of the plan as an ideal or a collection of images, rather than a formal set of calculations, can be seen in the case of the construction of the Great Mosque of Córdoba and its reliance on and preservation of *ekphrasis* and memory. The practicalities of local mosque construction, anywhere, entail a certain set of materials, technology, expertise, memory, textual material, and motivations that are combined and translated in the vernacular space, with an external reference point that can only be imagined, be it the Great Mosque of Damascus, the Prophet’s Mosque at Medina, or the Mérida aqueduct. The result of this process points to the development of an architectural imaginary deeply rooted in the local context, but still participating in the perceptual culture of the Islamic world at large. This mode of non-mimetic transfer provides the backbone for a theory of ornamental production as a constantly evolving and developing program. The next chapter will discuss this theory of ornament in more depth.

⁷² Grabar, *Mediation of Ornament*, 177.

Chapter 2: Re-Conceptualizing Ornament:

An Embodied Ornamental Program in the Great Mosque of Córdoba

A re-conceptualization of ornament is no minor feat, in part due to its fraught disciplinary positioning within the history of art. Ornament is both deeply entrenched within a modernist polemic and rejected from the canonical hierarchies of the visual arts established by the European academies. This fraught positioning stems from a lack of clarity surrounding the definition, role, and meaning of ornament in visual culture, as well as the ongoing negotiations and relational aesthetics of beauty, pleasure, and morality that characterize much of the history of Western ideas about visual culture. And yet, it is not only the unsure footing of ornament within the Western or European intellectual context that confounds the prospective theorizer; the inherent ambiguity of the visual forms that characterize ornament makes it an art form whose meaning is somewhat difficult to access, particularly for the uninitiated viewer.⁷³ The often-intentional ambiguities of ornament force us to ask where interpretation begins, and how this interpretation is limited. To answer these questions in terms of ornament requires a new art historical approach that provides for more flexible boundaries around vision, perception, and aesthetics.⁷⁴ In this section I will argue that ornament in the Great

⁷³ Stephennie Mulder, "Seeing the Light," 90.

⁷⁴ One such a new art history has been proposed and explored in detail by Wendy Shaw in the book *What is Islamic Art?* where she argues that a paradigm shift towards a discourse around "perceptual culture" over art history allows for a full-fledged study of the history of the arts and sensory experiences of the Islamic world that rejects the discursive limits set by the Christian European tradition. Among the limits of this tradition is the insistence on the perspectival and semiotic modes, which Shaw argues are not effective modes of investigation and interpretation of perceptual culture in the Islamic world. Shaw, *What is Islamic Art?*, 300.

Mosque of Córdoba is an illuminating, embodied force that develops and evolves over time and accrues new meanings in the context of political paradigm shifts.

ARCHITECTURE AS EMBODIED ORNAMENT

Entering the Great Mosque of Córdoba is like walking into a living arabesque—a multi-dimensional, multi-planar ornamental program of seemingly infinite rows of interlacing, intersecting multi-tiered arches. The program is characterized not by the application of a decorative skin but by “the transformation of the morphemes of the architecture itself; the arches and voussoirs.”⁷⁵ The iconic arches make up the supports of the building and function as ornament, adorning the space of the building and human activity of religious devotion.⁷⁶ This program upends notions about the separation between architectural function and ornamental frivolity. As discussed above, the form of the original mosque, founded in 784-86 by the emir ‘Abd al-Rahman I, featured in its original form a simple prayer hall of 10 rows by 12 columns of red and white horseshoe arches. The arches featured alternating voussoirs of red brick and white stone.

The architectural program of the structure depends on this single elemental form: the horseshoe arch. Much like the ornamental form of the arabesque, described by Riegl as the “infinite tendril,” the red and white horseshoe arch is an infinitely reproducible and mutable motif that originates from a simple and highly identifiable form. Replicated such that it creates the sensation of the infinite for its viewer, the motif is transfigured by

⁷⁵ Dodds, “The Great Mosque of Córdoba,” 13.

⁷⁶ Grabar argues that architecture is the ideal ornamental intermediary, in that its sole function is in the service of adorning human activity; however, he does not concede that architectural ornament can be a work of art in and of itself. Grabar. *Mediation of Ornament*, 193.

successive interventions in the building of the structure, but is always constrained by the form of the original motif—an infinitely reproducible and mutable motif of the horseshoe arch that originates from a simple and highly identifiable form recognizable from the Iberian Peninsula to Syria and back again. Constraint is integral to the efficacy of an ornamental program, for ornament “never celebrates a world without order.”⁷⁷ Based in this principle of order, Trilling proposes a slow evolution of ornament that leads to the creation of something entirely new. The gradual evolution of the ornamental program at Córdoba fits into this model, the constraints of the original construction influencing each subsequent development while simultaneously allowing for significant changes in the meaning of the program.

The architectural program of the Great Mosque of Córdoba embodies the conceptual tenets of ornament, substantiating an argument for a transformative living ornament: a substance that flows through the body of the work of art itself. An embodied ornament gives an architectural structure or an object form, pulse, and breath; it illuminates it from within. Ornament is life-giving; one example being the churning, seemingly-animate illustrations of an iconic manuscript like the 9th century Hiberno-Saxon Gospel the *Book of Kells* (fig. 20). The text of this manuscript cannot be extricated from the decorative flourishes of the work, their deep entanglement substantiating the work itself. This theory of ornament maintains the forceful, near daemonic, characterization of ornament, but departs from notions of exteriority in favor of a deeply embedded, illuminating ornament manifested in the structural bodies of the artwork.

⁷⁷ If Trilling’s primary association of ornament with the production of pleasure diminishes the theoretical potential of ornament as a more nuanced visual modality, his comments on the transformative power of ornament seem to subvert his own reduction, and speak directly to the ideas of the metamorphosing power of ornament explored in this thesis. Trilling, *Language of Ornament*, 156.

The horseshoe arch is an elemental structural feature that is both the main constraint and decorative force of the ornamental program in the Great Mosque. It is compounded by multiple additions and interventions. Later caliphs made significant additions to the building, expanding the prayer hall and renovating the walls and arcades of the courtyard. These subsequent interventions in and additions to the structure elaborated on the simple motif of the horseshoe arch, mutating into ever more intricate forms: poly-lobed, interlacing, multi-tiered arches that intersect with one another within the visual plane to overwhelming effect. The monumentality of the structure and its overwhelming optical effects makes these additions somewhat difficult to navigate and demarcate.

This thesis will categorize the embodied ornamental program in terms of the original program and its afterlives. The first category, or life, includes the original construction of the mosque and the interventions dating to the emirate (756-929) and the caliphal period (929-1031). The second category, afterlives, includes the expansion made to the mosque under the supervision of the vizier al-Mansur, marking the fall of the caliphate at the end of his rule in the early 11th century. Other afterlives include later additions made following the Castilian conquest of Córdoba in 1236 and the addition of a cathedral by the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V in the year 1526.⁷⁸ These later changes

⁷⁸ The chronology proposed by Creswell divides the history of the mosque into the five sections—the amiral period, the caliphal period, the rule of the vizier Al-Mansur, and the later history, K.A.C., "The Great Mosque of Cordova." Creswell's chronology has been criticized as "monolinear" by Heather Ecker, who proposes a more nuanced later history of the mosque that is characterized by continuous cycles of destruction and restoration, as well as the continual employment of Muslim artisans in these building projects. Heather Ecker, "The Great Mosque of Córdoba in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries," 114.

in the program of the structure reflect political paradigm shifts, leading to significant transformations in the meaning of the ornamental program. The later evolutions of the ornamental program diverge significantly from the structure and cohesion of the original program but still reference the original constraint of the program: the red-and-white horseshoe arch.

THE ORIGINAL CONSTRUCTION

The original program, as mentioned previously, was formally simple. A simple courtyard mosque, the eighth century prayer hall of ‘Abd al-Rahman I is characterized by the repetition of a single motif, the double horseshoe arch. In its earliest state, this repetitive ornamental program was both functional and decorative. Margaret Graves’ discussion of architectural ornament and its allusive capabilities is significant here. In particular, her discussion of ornament’s ability to blur the line between structure and decoration by representing architecture non-mimetically is relevant to this thesis. Graves argues that ornamental depictions of architecture on a variety of portable objects reflect the allusive capabilities of ornament and thus its significant potential for meaning-making.⁷⁹ She further presents the combination of function and ornament in architecture as a major challenge to the discursive tradition that defines ornament as inherently two-dimensional, as established by Riegl.⁸⁰ Rather than discuss depictions of architecture on objects, however, this thesis releases ornament from the object. In the Great Mosque of Córdoba, the double-tiered arcades of horseshoe arches allow for an opening of the space and higher elevation of the ceilings as they simultaneously adorn the space for prayer,

⁷⁹ Graves, *Arts of Allusion*, 64-94.

⁸⁰ Though Graves challenges the idea of a two-dimensional ornament, her study focuses on the architectural ornament of objects rather than architectural structures themselves, Graves, *Arts of Allusion*, 64-94.

creating a dazzling “hall of mirrors” that carves out the sacred space of the mosque while it simultaneously ornaments and intensifies the visual experience of devotion.⁸¹ The rhythm and repetition of columns, combined with the springing forms of the stacked horseshoe arches, and the reproduction of these forms time and time again creates a dazzling and immersive phenomenological experience of ornament.

Entering the building in the eighth century would have been a much more concentrated visual experience than it is today, its space confined to just eleven aisles by twelve bays of double-tiered horseshoe arches. Nevertheless, the visual experience must have been just as, if not more, visually intoxicating. The overpowering visual stimuli of the Great Mosque underscores Grabar’s theorization of ornament as a “daemonic,” Platonic intermediary force that links a viewer with an ornamental work of art. And indeed, the most potent of the four intermediaries that he proposes is architecture, as a framing device for human experience.⁸² In the original construction the Great Mosque of Córdoba—a structure that adorned human prayer—the axial logic of the building would have been far more legible than it is today (fig. 21). The entryway and enclosed courtyard at the northwest and the *mihrab* at the opposing, southwest end of the building. The concentrated, repeating arcades adorning the interior space would have demarcated a path for directional prayer: the central aisle leads the faithful directly to the *mihrab*, with five symmetrical aisles on either side of the central one. The program diverges from homogeneity only in the slightly larger (by one meter) central aisle with red column

⁸¹ Dodds, “The Great Mosque of Córdoba,” 13.

⁸² Grabar’s intervention is groundbreaking, in that he establishes the visual potency of ornament within Islamic visual culture. His new vision of ornament remains conservative, however: he states that ornament is necessary for the comprehension of a work of art, but not, “except in extreme cases, the work of art itself,” Grabar, *Mediation of Ornament*, 45.

shafts that leads to the *mihrab*, as well as the variety found in the spoliated columns and capitals sourced from various locations.⁸³ The condensed repetition of arches within a comparatively small rectangular space of only 74 square meters must have been visually overpowering.⁸⁴ The repetition of the horseshoe arch in this more contained, early environment may have reflected the repetitive, meditative nature of prayer. Coinciding with the actual experience of the rhythm of bodies engaging in prayer, the repetitious nature of the ornamental program would certainly reflect and intensify the function of the structure.

THE AMIRAL AND CALIPHAL INTERVENTIONS

However magical the original structure must have been, it is in the interventions in and additions to the ornamental program of the structure the realization of an embodied, architectural ornament emerges. Subsequent interventions also lead to a divergence from the conventions of mosque architecture and the creation of a constantly growing, monumental structure.⁸⁵ The temporal aspect of an architectural structure, with its subsequent interventions and mutations as they are realized over time, allows for the realization and embodiment of a slowly-evolving ornamental program that makes full use of ornament's dynamic potential energy. An ornamental program begun and completed at one moment in time by a single maker or workshop may similarly evolve and mutate in the process of production, but the temporal nature of an architectural program allows for a greater depth of transformation and development under the auspices of different makers

⁸³ Dodds, *Architecture and Ideology in Early Medieval Spain*, 95.

⁸⁴ Dodds, "The Great Mosque of Córdoba," 12.

⁸⁵ Early mosque architecture is characterized by the established scheme of a large hall supported by repeating architectural elements, creating a large space for community prayer. Dodds, "The Great Mosque of Córdoba," 12.

and patrons over time. The slow ornamental evolution of the Great Mosque of Córdoba ultimately led to the appearance of a completely new structure, though the original core remains intact.

The adherence to basic ornamental principles in successive interventions in the Great Mosque reflect the changing meanings of the space as it corresponded with political paradigm shifts in Córdoba. Two major additions to the mosque during the amiral period undertaken by the successors of ‘Abd al-Rahman adhere to the established program of the structure, as discussed in more depth above. ‘Abd al-Rahman II’s intervention in 836 include an extension of eight bays to the south of the *mihrab*, respecting the established parameters of the mosque and its ornamental program. His son Muhammad’s intervention included the restoration of the Bab al-Quzara, or west entrance to the mosque, as well as the addition of a *maqsura*, or private space for the emir to pray.⁸⁶ Subsequent amiral interventions reflect a reverence for the original program as well as an ever-increasing interest in the status of the emir.⁸⁷ This period, focusing less on expansion than on access, suggests a rather strict adherence to ‘Abd al-Rahman I’s construction, an incremental step toward the evolution of the ornamental program.

The establishment of the Umayyad caliphate in al-Andalus by the ruler ‘Abd al-Rahman III was an assertion of Andalusian Umayyad legitimacy in the Islamic world at large. The declaration of the imperial power of al-Andalus was reflected in significant alterations to the mosque. The courtyard was enlarged and renovated, and the mosque’s first true tower minaret was added, clearly marking the urban landscape as Islamic. These

⁸⁶ Dodds, “The Great Mosque of Córdoba,” 16 and Dodds, *Architecture and Ideology in Early Medieval Spain*, 98-99.

⁸⁷ Interventions during the amiral period focus less on expansion and are rather centered around ease of access to the mosque for the emir, via private passageways and entryways. Dodds, “The Great Mosque of Córdoba,” 16.

interventions suggest an emphasis on the grandeur of the entrance to the mosque and an interest in the outward-facing appearance of the structure as a signifier of caliphal eminence.

Of the caliphal interventions in the mosque, those of Al-Hakam II mark the first major push towards a significant evolution of the established ornamental program. Upon ascending to the throne in 962, al-Hakam II immediately began work on a significant expansion of the prayer hall from the southwestern, *qibla* end of the mosque.⁸⁸ Adding twelve new bays, an elaborate *maqsura*, and a room-like *mihrab* niche, the intervention retained the axial symmetry of the building, but transformed the proportionality of the mosque from a structure with roughly equal areas of courtyard and interior space to a structure of which two thirds made up the prayer hall, a veritable forest of columns.

As one approaches the new caliphal section, it becomes clear that the new space is intentionally imperial, access to the gilded *maqsura* and mosaic-encrusted *mihrab* signaling access reserved for the caliphal entourage. An extension that supersedes the ornamental program established by the amiral powers, al-Hakam II's addition is a lavish, embroidered elaboration on the established program: the inclusion of monumental *maqsura* screens, with three poly-lobed, red-and-white horseshoe arches crowned by interlacing, undulating poly-lobed forms—within which one can glimpse a remnant of the original, single-lobe arch (fig. 22). The rather literal elaboration on the original ornamental form here, with the insertion of lobes into the simple horseshoe arch, and the interlacing, untraceable re-imagination of the upper arcades, is a dramatic leap forward in the otherwise slow evolution of the ornamental program. Al-Hakam's elaborate, golden Byzantine-style, mosaic-encrusted *mihrab* similarly takes and elevates the original

⁸⁸ Dodds, *Architectural and Ideology in Early Medieval Spain*, 97.

horseshoe arch form, crowning it with golden Quranic inscriptions and insertion elaborate mosaic vegetal forms into each mosaic-lined, pseudo-voussoir of the archway. Thus, al-Hakam II's elaborate intervention establishes his caliphal authority while paying homage to and venerating the original ornamental motif as a symbol of the Umayyad Andalusian legacy.

In al-Hakam's addition we see a significant jump forward in the embodied ornamental program of the mosque. Though the archways are functional, their elaborate decoration is by no means essential to the structural integrity of the building. The interlacing poly-lobed arches of al-Hakam's *maqsura* screens and additional aisles represent the growth and transformation of the ornamental program. The immersive three-dimensionality of the new space extends directly from the original caliphal sections like a living thing, or the blossoming of an "infinite tendril." Here, Riegl's notion of the gradual stylistic development of the ornament is constituted within one structure.⁸⁹ The slow transformation of the structure is like a creeping vine that suddenly blossomed under Al-Hakam's patronage.

THE FALL OF THE CALIPHATE

Changes to the mosque leading up to and following the fall of the Umayyad caliphate in Córdoba reflect even greater divergences from the established program. These additions suggest the emergence of a new, post-imperial paradigm that is reflected in the ornamental elaboration of the structure. Up until the fall of the caliphate, axial symmetry was retained within the mosque, despite al-Hakam's significant expansion and emphasis on the interior space of the prayer hall over the symmetry of courtyard and interior. Additions before at the beginning of the 11th century by the insubordinate vizier

⁸⁹ Riegl, *Stilfragen*.

al-Mansur disregard the axial symmetry of the building (fig. 23).⁹⁰ Al-Mansur made additions of eight aisles along the east side of the mosque that expanded the assembly capacity of the structure but that did not honor the integrity and central symmetry of the caliphal *mihrab* niche.⁹¹ In terms of the ornamental program, such interventions might fall under the category of hypotactic ornament defined by Trilling, which denotes the agglomeration of forms that are similar to the original motif but of unequal mass or proportion.⁹²

This elaboration and evolution upon the existing program directly reflects the lead up to and eventual fall of the caliphate in Córdoba. The introduction of a new political paradigm in the capital and al-Andalus at large is reflected in the development of the mosque. These new interventions actively rejected conformity to the indulgent nature of the fallen caliphate.⁹³ These interventions, in my terms, reflect the beginnings of the afterlife of the mosque, as the death of the caliphate reflects the termination of the sense of “order” or integrity of the established ornamental program. Subsequent interventions do evolve the program, but do not necessarily maintain the constraint that is essential to ornament as theorized in this thesis.

Despite the loss of these constraints, even the 16th century intervention of Castilian monarch Charles V continued to play out the motif of the horseshoe arch. Charles V’s addition consisted of the addition of a monumental cathedral within the mosque itself. Arcades of horseshoe arches provided the structural support for the

⁹⁰ Dodds, “The Great Mosque of Córdoba,” 23-24.

⁹¹ Dodds, *ibid*, 24.

⁹² Trilling, *Language of Ornament*, 146.

⁹³ On the indulgence of Al-Hakam II’s interventions, Dodds, “The Great Mosque of Córdoba,” 24.

ornately decorated, plataresque walls of his cathedral. (figs. 24, 25).⁹⁴ Charles V's addition consisted of the addition of a monumental cathedral within the mosque itself. The later interventions disregard the symmetry and elevation of the original construction, though they maintain the reference point of the horseshoe arch. Interventions in the construction of the Great Mosque of Córdoba illustrate an incrementally evolving ornamental program of infinite repetition and elaboration. The Christian afterlife of the structure will be discussed in more depth in the third chapter. These initial thoughts on changes to the ornamental program after the fall of the caliphate illustrate that it is replete with changing meanings, each addition reflecting the shifting function of the structure. Inextricable from the structure itself, the ornament breathes life and meaning into this unique building, illuminating it from within. It is integral to and inextricable from the space and thus inherently challenges common conceptualizations of ornament as a potent, but exterior or intermediary force.

The slow growth and development of the program reinforces the idea of an embodied ornament in the Great Mosque of Córdoba. The structural component and motif of the horseshoe arch is both a structural necessity and constitutive of the decorative program. As changes and expansions are made to the mosque, this already embodied ornamental program grows like a living organism. This slow evolution of the ornamental program through the addition of novel but incremental interventions in established motifs is couched in the craft-like production of a vernacular architectural imaginary discussed in the first chapter. This imaginary is unique in its ability to refer to any number of distant places and re-create them in a vernacular space. Rather than insisting on precision, the nature of the *ekphrastic* architectural plan implicitly allows for

⁹⁴ Dodds, "The Great Mosque of Córdoba," 24-25.

the insertion and follies of human interpretation in the documentation of a space, and thereby creates space for novelty in translation. It is within this slippage, or the attempt at translation, that ornament comes to the fore. Ornament is a fluid perceptual modality that hints at and even encourages mutability and development rather than replication: the transformation of the sign rather than the sign itself, as proposed by Grabar.⁹⁵

The Great Mosque of Córdoba, with its multitude of double-tiered, interlacing arches, offers one the distinct feeling of entering a vast, incomprehensible, and divine forest of columns. The arches adorn the space of the structure, creating a multitude of portals through which one might gaze, only to encounter and enter a new window into space. The architectural details of the Great Mosque are embodied ornament, effectively adorning the space around which they are structured, and thereby establishing a perceptual ornamental program that exists at the crux of the interaction of the human gaze with the spatial intervention of architectural elements. The space of the mosque itself seems to encapsulate everything that Islamic ornament attempts to achieve: a transformation of the viewer's perceptual experience of space.

An embodied ornamental program is defined by the coalescence of perceptual modifications that challenge conventional notions of vision and reception. It combines playful and metamorphosing and repeating forms with the technical constraints of an established program. That is, while ornament may appear to be entrancing, chaotic, and visually overwhelming, it is characterized by the coherence and order of its programmatic whole.⁹⁶ This analysis of the Great Mosque of Córdoba suggests that ornament is anything but marginalia; nor is it containable by the conventional Western

⁹⁵ Grabar, *Mediation of Ornament*, 191.

⁹⁶ Gombrich, *Sense of Order*, 4.

categorizations and hierarchies of artistic and visual culture. Despite the insistence on the powerful, transformative nature of ornament across much of the scholarship on the subject, there is a strict resistance to understanding ornament as a work of art in and of itself. It is consistently theorized as a skin or an intermediary, though this chapter attempts to illustrate the constitutive, life-giving properties of ornament.⁹⁷

The architectural structure of the Great Mosque of Córdoba is virtuosic and irreproducible. It is an amalgamation of different generations and styles, vernaculars and high-flying literary imaginings, and visually astounding in a way that is distinctive of Islamic ornament. It takes the essence of Islamic ornament and realizes it as an experience of space; each architectural unit is infinitely reproducible but also infinitely novel. The structure is increasingly elaborate and charged with new meaning as it is developed slowly over time—and across temporal and geographic distances, as will be discussed in the third and final chapter.

⁹⁷ Trilling, *Language of Ornament*; and Grabar, *Mediation of Ornament*, 155.

Chapter 3: Ornamental Afterlives: Córdoba Across Temporalities and Geographies

“In them [good translations] the life of the original attains its latest, continually renewed, and most complete unfolding.”

-Walter Benjamin, “The Task of the Translator,” *Selected Writings*, Vol. 1, 255.

In 1526, the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, grandchild of the Christian conquest, bemoaned the massive insertion of a cathedral in the Great Mosque of Córdoba—one that he himself had approved: speaking to his architect, he said “If I had known your intentions, you would not have done this. You desired what could have been constructed anywhere, but here you had that which was unique in the world” (fig. 24, 25).⁹⁸

This sentiment appears to have been shared by the citizens of Córdoba of a few centuries earlier, for whom the mosque became a landmark and place of Christian worship. Though Córdoba was conquered by Castilian armies in 1236, the Christian inhabitants of the city used its mosque as a place of worship for fully three hundred years before any significant addition was made to the structure.⁹⁹ The initial additions made by the Christian community were minor, consisting mostly of small devotional chapels around the periphery of the structure, and did not interfere with the integrity of the existing program of the mosque. In fact, the structure was so valued by the Castilian community in Córdoba that when the proposal to construct a new church on the site was

⁹⁸ Glaire D. Anderson, “The Cathedral in the Mosque and the Two Palaces: Additions to the Great Mosque of Córdoba and the Alhambra During the Reign of Charles V,” *Thresholds* 25 (2002): 51.

⁹⁹ Anderson, *ibid.*, 49.

made in the middle of the 13th century, a city council determined that the appropriate penalty for altering the structure in any way before the issue was resolved was capital punishment.¹⁰⁰

This civic investment in the site—notably, a medieval model for cultural heritage preservation that values continuous development over restoration of an “original”—cannot be viewed myopically as an interest in the preservation of the Islamic past, especially given the deeply embedded Spanish historiographical interest in establishing the original site of the Great Mosque of Córdoba as the Visigothic Church of San Vicente.¹⁰¹ At the same time, a historiographical interest in establishing an origin story does not necessarily speak to the interests of the 13th century citizen of Córdoba, especially since this particular past is veiled by generations of nationalist ideation and the resulting Francoist-tinged scholarship.¹⁰²

Though it may be impossible to access the nuances of life and identity in medieval Spanish communities and to identify the motivations that led to the preservation of the site, some scholars argue that marking, altering, and thus preserving sacred sites is

¹⁰⁰ Glaire D. Anderson, “The Cathedral in the Mosque and the Two Palaces: Additions to the Great Mosque of Córdoba and the Alhambra During the Reign of Charles V,” 50.

¹⁰¹ Claims that the Great Mosque of Córdoba was built on the site of an early Visigothic church are so deeply intertwined with the history of the site that they have designated exhibition space within the mosque today, and are recorded as canon throughout much of the scholarship, though no substantive archaeological evidence supports them. From notes on Heather Ecker, “The Great Mosque of Córdoba: Foundation, Extensions, Interpretation.” Guest Lecture, Columbia University Faculty of Arts and Sciences for Prof. Avinoam Shalem, *Arts of Islam: The First Formative Centuries* (ca. 700-1000), November 20, 2017.

¹⁰² Alejandro García-Sanjuán, “Rejecting al-Andalus, exalting the Reconquista: historical memory in contemporary Spain,” *Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies* 10.1 (2018): 127-145.

an activity intrinsic to the human experience of place. Anthropologist Christopher Tilley theorizes that a sacred site can “...never be exactly the same place twice, although there may be ideological attempts to provide ‘stability’ or perceptual and cognitive fixity to a place to reproduce sets of dominant meanings, understandings, representation and images.”¹⁰³ Tilley emphasizes the significant role of the language of memory in places inhabited and changed by humans, continually modified in order to make the human experience of a new place comprehensible to an ever-changing population.¹⁰⁴ Tilley’s theory of place recalls Gombrich’s writing on ornament. His argument that the designation of “spaces” as sacred “places” allows humans to demarcate a chaotic existence is mirrored by Gombrich’s theory that the production of ornament allows humans to establish a sense of order in that same chaos.¹⁰⁵

The alignment of Gombrich and Tilley regarding ornament and afterlives, respectively, brings us back to a central question of this thesis: is the desire for order enough to explain human behaviors like the preservation of a sacred site, or ornamental production? Though Tilley’s notion of the non-fixity of places across time supports the idea of Córdoba’s multiple and ever-changing afterlives, this does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that intervention and afterlife can only be explained by an instinct towards stability and order. Spanish literary historian Maria Rosa Menocal rejects the rationalist gloss imposed on historical knowledge production by scholars like Gombrich and Trilling, arguing for an alternative path that discards the deep-seated scholarly fear of

¹⁰³ Christopher Tilley, *A Phenomenology of Landscape: Places, Paths, and Monuments*, Oxford: Berg, 1994, 27.

¹⁰⁴ Tilley’s theory is grounded in work by Merleau-Ponty on the role of the human body in understanding the function of space along with Heidegger’s theory of dwelling. Tilley, *Phenomenology of Landscape*, 15.

¹⁰⁵ Gombrich, *Sense of Order*, 1-16.

historical anachronism in an attempt to access vernacular histories. Her vernacular of choice is the Mozarabic lyric, composed by a poet whom she helps us to imagine living in an entangled, medieval world where “seeing minarets in the skyline, [is not] odd just because you are a Christian.”¹⁰⁶ Can we trace a desire to preserve the minarets of Córdoba’s skyline in that thirteenth-century city council’s order for preservation of the mosque-cum-church on pain of death? Such a mapping of desire requires us to trust in the “intellect of the hand,” a concept established by Margaret Graves that re-inserts the body as a humanist tool within the rich traditions of craft production. This bodily intellect can certainly not be defined as instinctual, and rather suggests a deep investment in cultural and artistic production that exists outside of the canon of style, much like Menocal’s emphasis on the vernacular as access point for historical knowledge.¹⁰⁷

Whatever the reason for conservation of the Great Mosque, the structure was preserved somewhat intact through the beginning of the 16th century. The significant Christian addition was only made following the final expulsion of all Muslims and Jews from the peninsula in 1492, coinciding with the incorporation of Spain as a united entity into the Holy Roman Empire under Charles V. This would be the first and only other time that Spain would be united under expansive imperial rule since the fall of the Umayyad caliphate in Córdoba and the disintegration of al- Andalus. It follows that the change to the Spanish imperial monument par excellence would have to be made on the scale of empire. Though considered by some to be a defacement of the original structure (as mentioned above, even by its patron) the Great Mosque was never a site that reveled

¹⁰⁶ Maria Rosa Menocal, *Shards of Love*, 50. For more on the use of “entanglement” instead of “hybridity,” Philip Stockhammer, “From Hybridity to Entanglement, From Essentialism to Practice,” *Archaeology and Cultural Mixture*, 28.1 (2013): 11-29.

¹⁰⁷ Graves, *Arts of Allusion*, 26.

in the maintenance of the original or the illusion of the original. Though the core of the first construction is preserved, successive additions and expansions—as discussed at length in earlier chapters—was the status quo.¹⁰⁸ Charles V's addition was just one in a succession of additions made by the (heretofore Muslim) rulers of Córdoba over the centuries. By the time that the Flanders-born, Austrian-bred Charles V saw the completed addition to the structure in 1526, the monumental edifice would have looked nothing like 'Abd al-Rahman I's original structure, even without the addition of a monumental cathedral. Perhaps his distaste for his own addition was misplaced.

The afterlife of an artwork requires its death, but also suggests its survival.¹⁰⁹ With its many incarnations and multiple afterlives, the Great Mosque of Córdoba and its embodied ornamental program survives in multiple translations. These translations retain the essence of 'Abd al-Rahman I's original construction while also suggesting new meanings through various alterations of the established visual idiom. The mosque-cum-cathedral in Córdoba is peculiar, in that it contains its own death(s) and many of its own afterlives within an ever-expanding body, an ever-mutating ornamental organism. While it is certainly not unusual, historically, for buildings to be re-purposed or expanded, it is more common to see them as palimpsests than as a comprehensive record of past lives. The preserved interventions and alterations in Córdoba give the mosque a particular improvisational quality, its architectural composition more comparable to a live riff on a jazz standard than to a carefully-rehearsed classical music recital.¹¹⁰ In other

¹⁰⁸ Heather Ecker, "The Great Mosque of Córdoba in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries," 113.

¹⁰⁹ Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," 254.

¹¹⁰ Grabar argues that plans are "far less" than musical scores, only identifying the components and instruments of a building. He suggests that plans are in the

words, each visible afterlife deviates from the original while simultaneously paying homage to it—perhaps adoringly, perhaps insolently, depending on the patron. It is in such deviation that an afterlife can be considered a “good translation,” rather than in rigorous fidelity to the original program.¹¹¹

Like a living organism, the expansion of the ornamental program of the mosque following its birth was exponential. The continuous growth of the structure over time makes it unwieldy, theoretically speaking. It is difficult to contain an object that is continually expanding within a theory of afterlife that is necessarily founded upon a paradigm of birth, death, and resurrection.¹¹² The afterlife of the Great Mosque of Córdoba, continuously unfolding over the centuries, suggests a continuous and ever-evolving reception of the original program that is inextricable from the ways in which the building functions in the present. This passage invokes Benjamin’s theory of production and reception: *Vorleben* and *Nachleben*, or the “fore-life” and “after-life” of a work of art, as they constitute and are inextricable from the ways in which an object functions in the present. His writing on production and reception is less beholden to a Christian paradigm of resurrection than are his discussions of afterlife in “The Task of the Translator,” and allow for a consideration of Córdoba’s afterlives as a continuous process of reception.¹¹³ This final chapter will go on to discuss the 16th century afterlife of the structure, as the most significant Christian intervention, and will conclude with a

service of the imagination: an intermediary between a dream and a range of possible constructions, Grabar, *Mediation of Ornament*, 177.

¹¹¹ Benjamin, “The Task of the Translator,” 257.

¹¹² Wendy Shaw discusses the myth of secularism in the academy and its reliance upon Christian paradigms at length in Shaw, *What is Islamic Art?*, 300.

¹¹³. Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, 267-269.

discussion of one of the many afterlives of The Great Mosque outside of Córdoba—in Zaragoza, a city in the kingdom of Aragon.

THE CHRISTIAN AFTERLIFE

The Christian rulers of Spain were certainly not known for their sweet tempers. The repurposed mosques wherever they encountered them and raised churches in their place. And yet the Great Mosque did not meet this fate, instead becoming a symbol of Spanish national identity. The 1526 addition of a monumental Gothic cathedral to the heart of the mosque was the most significant alteration made to the space. Out of all its afterlives, the addition of the Cathedral not only confirmed the appropriation of the space for Christian devotional purposes but, in doing so, horizontally bisected the main axis of the original construction.

The body of the Cathedral is situated in the very center of the mosque as it stands today. Besides this somewhat obvious symbolic insertion into the Islamic building, the Cathedral's placement is significant in that it separates the oldest, eight-century section of columns, or 'Abd al-Rahman's mosque, from the direction of prayer and *mihrab*, as well as al-Hakam II's additions of the tenth century.¹¹⁴ Most of the new Cathedral was built over the caliphal section, with the exception of the apse. The apse spills outwards into the newer, eastern portion of the building, breaking the boundary between the older, caliphal section and the later expansion of al-Mansur (fig. 23). The significant portion of the nave extends westward from the apse at the east into the caliphal section, just south of the oldest, eighth century section of the mosque. Only the northern section of the crossing

¹¹⁴ Glaire D. Anderson, "The Cathedral in the Mosque and the Two Palaces," 51.

permeated the earliest portion of the mosque, built just over the northeast corner of ‘Abd al-Rahman I’s prayer hall. Most of the cathedral was built over the 9th century additions of ‘Abd al-Rahman II, while an additional aisle to the southwest that formed a pathway from an entrance on the west toward the main body of the cathedral was built over a portion of al-Hakam II’s mosque.

The porch of the Cathedral was built directly over the central row of the mosque that leads toward the *mihrab*. Taking up the exact width of one aisle, the porch was engineered such that it effectively severs the central axis of Islamic devotion in the structure. In addition to this cincture, the insertion of the Cathedral itself, along with the aisle to the southwest mentioned above, completely obstructs the continuity of the caliphal program. In addition to the bisection of the caliphal section of the mosque, the addition of Gothic towers to the Cathedral was the first significant change to the elevation of the structure in its nearly eight-hundred-year history, disrupting the continuity of the archways with soaring, Gothic spaces (fig. 24).

Despite these significant changes to the function and program of the structure, the Cathedral is surprisingly inconspicuous; walking into the Mosque-Cathedral from the courtyard entrance at the northwest corner today, the awe-inspiring forest of columns obscures the monumental cathedral, a distant monolith in the center of the space. Only after overcoming the disorienting optical experience of the massive, arch-filled space might one chance upon the newer, Christian structure at its heart. Approaching and entering the Cathedral seems like an optical trip in and of itself, for the simple fact that one can walk through a portal—one of the endless horseshoe arches—and suddenly emerge into a soaring Gothic space. This re-purposing of the Islamic ornamental program allows for the integration of the Cathedral into a space that might otherwise reject it outright. Perhaps this gives the building too much agency, but the illusory Cathedral, like

a portal into another world, seems to be tuned into the optical games played by the original structure. It appears suddenly and is subsumed again just as quickly upon exiting. Would a Christian citizen of Córdoba not have found it odd to walk through the doors of a mosque—solemnly passing through an Islamic prayer hall to attend mass in a cathedral that bursts outward from the side-body of the structure, exploding the logic and axially of the caliphal program? Our Christian visitor's path cuts horizontally across the vertical axis of the caliphate and rejects the distant, glimmering *mihrab* of al-Hakam II in favor of a plataresque Christ framed by the omnipresent red-and-white horseshoe arches.¹¹⁵

The most outlandish afterlife of the Great Mosque, the Cathedral inserts itself into the existing program, disrupts and disfigures said program, but then effectively uses the style of the structure it supersedes to create and disseminate new meanings. The manipulation of the space itself, along with the appropriation of the ornamental program, intensifies the changed meanings of the space as established by its new rulers. It is an afterlife, as such, that has taken the source material but put it to new ends; namely, to serve a Christian imperial body.

To return to the original question of afterlives and their demarcations within the Great Mosque, it is clear that Charles V's Cathedral is the most flamboyant afterlife of the Great Mosque. The caliphal expansions make up the "life" of the building, each addition made during this period honoring the constraints of the ornamental program established at its founding. Only upon the rejection of the sense of order, of the constraints of the original program, can the death of the original program be observed, and the afterlife begin. Though Charles V's Cathedral is the most obvious example of this

¹¹⁵ Dodds, "The Great Mosque of Córdoba" 24-25.

intervention, the first afterlife can be traced to the addition of al-Mansur, which expanded the prayer hall by four rows to the east, thus fracturing the symmetry of the program.

In its afterlives, a rejection of the axial logic of the caliphal structure and the symmetry of the original program allowed for the addition of new and divergent programmatic interventions. These interventions are afforded more liberty for improvisation and extravagant stylistic developments, no longer constrained by the restrictive precepts of the original ornamental program. These translations repurpose the original project for new rulers, new devotions, and new ornamental possibilities. Each of the interventions that make up the afterlife of the structure were thus necessarily accompanied by new developments in meaning, such as a conservative al-Andalus that rejected the caliphal decadence of al-Hakam II in favor of a more democratic space; a Castile that would preserve the original structure on pain of death; and a newly unified, Christian Spain that was ruled by a Holy Roman Emperor and asserted its imperial omnipotence with the addition of a Cathedral within the mosque itself.

AN AFTERLIFE IN ZARAGOZA

The ornamental program of the Great Mosque cannot be confined to the original structure at Córdoba. Beyond the geographical and temporal bounds of Córdoba, the creeping vine of the established ornamental program continued to flower in more configurations. From Zaragoza, Seville, Granada, and North Africa to Pisa and even Aachen, the spread and persistence of the arch motif canonized at Córdoba is well-documented. Though the initial meanings of the ornamental program established at Córdoba were multi-valent and ambiguous, the fall of the caliphate cemented the iconographic significance of the horseshoe arch as a symbol of a great imperial past. The

motif was utilized as a legitimizing symbol throughout the many fractured Islamic states, or *taifa* kingdoms, of the 12th through 15th centuries. Their elaborations on the motif established at Córdoba represent a development and continuation of the ornamental program across geographic and temporal distances. Though the afterlives of the Great Mosque are widespread, the constraints of this paper limit me to a discussion of one particularly compelling example: the afterlife of the ornamental program of the Great Mosque as seen in Zaragoza, in the political architecture of the *taifa* kingdom of Zaragoza during the 11th century. I will also briefly discuss its subsequent use in the political and religious architecture of the Christian, Aragonese kings of the 14th century.

The last vestige of Islamic rule in Zaragoza is the Aljaferia palace, which was patronized by the Banu Hud *taifa* king al-Muqtadir of Zaragoza in the second half of the 11th century (fig. 26).¹¹⁶ The renovation of the Aljaferia was undertaken by subsequent rulers following the Christian conquest of Zaragoza by Alfonso of Aragon in 1118, following a trajectory of intervention much like that seen in the Great Mosque.¹¹⁷ Nevertheless, the main elements of the palatial structure were preserved. Remnants of the original include the footprint of the courtyard and the small private mosque, or oratory, both of which recall the structures of the Great Mosque at Córdoba. The central courtyard, now known as the Patio de Santa Isabel, is divided from north to south by a narrow irrigation canal leading from a fountain at the north end of the courtyard. The courtyard is surrounded on four sides by porticos, with arcades of interwoven, polylobed, stucco arches decorated with abstracted geometrical and vegetal motifs (fig. 27).

¹¹⁶ Cynthia Robinson, "Seeing Paradise: Metaphor and Vision in *taifa* Palace Architecture," *Gesta* 36 no. 2 (1997): 145.

¹¹⁷ Elena Paulino Montero, *La Aljafería: 1118-1583, el palacio de los reyes de Aragón*, Zaragoza: Instituto de Estudios Islámicos y del Próximo Oriente de la Alfajería, 2010.

The interlaced archway of the *maqsura* canonized at Córdoba is still the core element of the decorative program; however, interlacing poly-lobed elements that perch atop and connect each portal constitute a dramatic departure from the arch motif established in the Great Mosque.

The elaborations and interwoven arches of the upper register of the arcade do not masquerade as structural necessities; rather, they overwhelm with the logical impossibility of their multiple intersections in a single plane (fig. 28). This overwhelming ornamental scheme alludes to the overwhelming visual experience of a space like the Great Mosque of Córdoba, where the visual plane is full to bursting with repeated architectonic elements.¹¹⁸ The allusion to the ornamental program of the Great Mosque in the Aljaferia suggests a continuous development of the ornamental program that both collapses and elaborates upon the original motif. It further suggests the changing meaning of the program as it is elaborated across time and space; an allusion to the imperial splendor of the Umayyad caliphate suggests the legitimizing force of its iconographic presence in the palace of the *taifa* kings of Zaragoza.

In addition to the allusive qualities of the courtyard arcade, the surviving oratory in the Aljaferia (fig. 29, 30) recalls the innovative *mihrab* niche of al-Hakam II in the Great Mosque.¹¹⁹ The oratory-mosque of the Aljaferia is the most significant remnant of the original *taifa* structure. The opulence of the small room, characterized by an octagonal chamber with a *mihrab* niche that is accessible through an elaborate horseshoe arch, directly references the *mihrab* of the Great Mosque. Unlike Córdoba, however, the *mihrab* niche of the Aljaferia was made more economically out of stucco and then

¹¹⁸ Graves, *Arts of Allusion*, 80-81.

¹¹⁹ Christian Ewert, *Die Malereien in der Moschee der Aljaferia in Zaragoza*, Mainz: Von Zabern, 1999, 97-111.

painted.¹²⁰ The use of stucco would also allow artisans more creative freedom in developing elaborate ornamental forms. Blind, interwoven arches decorate all other sides of the oratory, with a second level of open, interwoven lobed arches stacked upon the first level. The rather poor quality of the materials used for the *mihrab* reflects the vernacular function of the space as a reference and allusion to the original in Córdoba. The re-creation of the *mihrab* in Zaragoza suggests a vernacular attempt to construct an allusive, sacred space in a new time and space. The oratory in the Aljaferia conjures up the image of an Islamic imperial legacy, which, as we will recall, was modeled after the apse of a Christian church.

The motifs found within the Aljaferia would ultimately find new expression in Mudejar ornament throughout Zaragoza, as symbols of Christian Spanish sovereignty. In the renovations undertaken by Aragonese monarchs from the 12th century onwards, and in the building projects throughout the city of Zaragoza, the aesthetics of the Islamic visual tradition would be incorporated into a symbolic repertory that simultaneously pointed to the conquered past and became the symbol of the emergent religio-political order in Aragon and Spain at large. The motif of the interwoven arch, as articulated in the courtyard of the Aljaferia (fig. 32), would become a staple of Mudejar art and architecture in Zaragoza. This visual incorporation of a conquered culture into a nascent Aragonese visual culture is a testament to what Jerrilynn Dodds refers to as the “peculiar interchanges and tensions between Islamic and Christian visual cultures” and the ever-changing meaning of a motif that originated as a distinctly Islamic style.¹²¹

¹²⁰ Ewert, *ibid*, 97.

¹²¹ Dodds, “The Great Mosque of Córdoba,” 25.

The iconographic force of the ornamental program established at Córdoba and then elaborated in the design of the Aljaferia is traceable to the façade of the metropolitan cathedral of Zaragoza, the Cathedral of San Salvador (hence, the Seo) (fig. 33).¹²² Established following the 1118 conquest of the city by Aragonese king Alfonso the Battler, the new rulers of the city installed themselves in the Aljaferia palace, and the Seo was established as the new metropolitan Cathedral on the site of the city's mosque.¹²³

The mosque sat empty for a little over a year after the conquest of the city, and was consecrated in the name of San Salvador en su Epifanía in October of 1121.¹²⁴ Modifications to the mosque were then made to give it the appearance of a Romanesque cathedral. The interior arcades in the prayer space of the mosque were demolished to make room for a wide, central nave leading to the new location of the altar at the north side of the Cathedral. The space of the *mihrab* was rededicated as a chapel of the Virgin in an attempt to discourage continued Muslim reverence of the site.¹²⁵ In 1318, the papacy granted Zaragoza ecclesiastical independence from the archbishopric of Tarragona, effectively making the Cathedral of San Salvador the See—la Seo—of Zaragoza, and thereby a relatively independent center of political and ecclesiastical

¹²² Parts of this section of the thesis are based on research undertaken on the Seo for my undergraduate thesis, "Power & Magic: On the Performative and Talismanic Properties of Monumental Mudejar in Medieval Zaragoza." The ideas are largely reformulated here.

¹²³ Some sources suggest that the mosque in Zaragoza was the first mosque established in the Iberian Peninsula, Susana Calvo Capilla, "Las primeras mezquitas de al-Andalus a través de las fuentes árabes (92/711-170/785)," *Al-Qantara: Revista de Estudios Árabes*, 28.1 (2007): 14.

¹²⁴ Domingo J. Buesa Conde, "La Catedral Románica de Zaragoza," *La Seo de Zaragoza*. Zaragoza: Diputacion General de Aragon, 1998, 107-123.

¹²⁵ This attempt seems to have been unsuccessful, for the site of the *mihrab* remained a place of reverence through the 15th century, until the expulsion of Muslims from the Iberian Peninsula, Buesa Conde, "La Catedral Románica de Zaragoza," 110.

power for the Aragonese monarchy. The cathedral was then remodeled in the Gothic-Mudejar style and dedicated as the site of the ritual coronation of Aragonese monarchs.¹²⁶ Spanish monarchs today continue to undergo coronation rites in the Seo. This legitimizing center of Aragonese political sovereignty and ecclesiastical power marked a significant paradigm shift in Zaragoza. This shift was marked by the symbol of the interlacing arch, which decorated the northwest exterior façade of the new cathedral.

The Gothic-Mudejar facade of the cathedral features a dazzling ornamental program featuring a combination blue, green, and white *alicatado* and tin-glazed ceramic tilework that combined Aragonese and Sevillian workshop styles.¹²⁷ The program is compartmentalized into multiple registers, suggesting an abstracted architectural space. The bottom-most register of the façade features repeating, interlacing brickwork arches that stand out in low relief. Each arch contains two white seven-pointed starbursts outlined in green, surrounded by small circular green tiles that are flush with the facade. Three points at the top of each brickwork arch perhaps allude to a poly-lobed archway, similar to those at the nearby Aljafería. The register just above features repeating brickwork, quatrefoil shapes that mimic the liminal geometric shape created by the intersection of the arches in the bottommost register. The repetition of this single geometric shape gives the overall impression of an architectural space characterized by continuous interlacing archways.

The upper register takes up the majority of the facade, and is bisected vertically into two uneven parts. The two parts feature repeating, six-pointed pinwheel forms and

¹²⁶ Elena Paulino Montero, *La Aljafería: 1118-1583, el palacio de los reyes de Aragón*, Zaragoza: Instituto de Estudios Islámicos y del Próximo Oriente de la Alfajería, 2010.

¹²⁷ Isabel Alvaro Zamora, "Cerámica Decorativa y Azulejería en las Seo de Zaragoza," *La Seo de Zaragoza*, Zaragoza: Diputación General de Aragón, 1998.

other variations on this same geometric form. The larger unit of decoration on the left features a geometric pattern that creates a sort of optical illusion—an abstracted architectural space or upper reaches of a building. Within this intermediate space, long hexagonal and pyramidal tiles form continuous six-pointed pinwheels that can also be interpreted as repeating triangular or hexagonal forms. The tilework in the second section on the right is made up of repeating bands of diagonal tiles, alternating between a line of single tiles and a repeating square element. Two large pointed gothic windows framed by bands of multicolored and multi-patterned tiles sit within this compartment, interjecting slightly into the upper border of the rectangular frame. Two irregularly placed, pointed windows within the decorative scheme are a somewhat jarring intervention, though they align stylistically with the other Gothic elements of the cathedral. Triangular tiles along the uppermost edge of the compartment are reminiscent of crenellations that one might see on a mosque or palace wall, the imperial reference implicit.

Triangular tiles along the uppermost edge of the compartment are reminiscent of crenellations that one might see on a mosque or palace wall, confirming the allusion to an architectural space. This two-dimensional façade of the Seo alludes to an architectural space, though the indirect nature of the allusion leaves room for the cultivation of new meaning. It functions similarly to the interlacing archways of the Aljaferia, which creates the new and distinct image of itself, while alluding to the visual experience of a complex architectural space like the Great Mosque of Córdoba. The façade of the Seo, in its allusion to the Aljaferia, represents a complete elaboration upon the ornamental program established in Córdoba in the eighth century.

Now at multiple removes from the Islamic meaning of the original ornamental program, the use of the interlacing arch motif in the Mudejar art of Christian Zaragoza suggests an evolution of the program across geographies and temporalities. Unlike the

intervention of Charles V, the allusive ornamental program of the Seo speaks to the vast distances between Córdoba and Zaragoza. Now endowed with a set of new and distinct meanings, the repeating arches that are visible on the façade of the Cathedral in Zaragoza are a record of interaction and ornamental elaboration. They also hint at the future—the new stylistic elaborations that would come to characterize the Spanish Mudéjar style. These Spanish elaborations on the set of motifs established centuries earlier in an Islamic al-Andalus reflect a continuous history of ornament that is replete with evolving and interlacing meanings.

Conclusion: Implications of a New Theory of Ornament

This thesis resituates established theories of ornaments by closely examining what I refer to as the embodied ornamental program of the Great Mosque of Córdoba and its subsequent elaboration in a variety of iterations. These elaborations take place gradually: first, within the structure itself, and eventually, across greater distances and expanses of time. This investigation argues for the power of a single motif to develop complex and ever-evolving meanings that are often more allusive than they are iconographic. In this case, the horseshoe arch motif established at the Great Mosque of Córdoba in the eighth century is a potent reminder of the significance of ornament beyond decorative folly.

The implications of this project are many: above all in terms of exploring the applicability of a new theory of living, embodied ornament in different contexts. Can this new theorization of ornament be applied to other structures, objects, and traditions? To what extent? Further investigations of the ornamental program of the Great Mosque of Córdoba might consider the elaboration of the motif established in the Great Mosque in more depth. For example, additional scholarship could track the dissemination of the ornamental program across the Islamic world, follow the trajectory of the program throughout the history of Christian Spain and its inculcation in the service of Spanish nationalism, and even investigate modern and contemporary uses and developments of the motif.¹²⁸

¹²⁸ For example, Ruggles explores the contested role of the image of the Great Mosque of Córdoba in the modern heritage politics of today, D. Fairchild Ruggles, “The stratigraphy of forgetting: The Great Mosque of Córdoba and its contested legacy,” *Contested Cultural Heritage: Religion, Nationalism, Erasure, and Exclusion in a Global World*, ed. H. Silverman, 51-67, New York: Springer, 2011.

This thesis proposes a new working definition of ornament that is open to further refinement and development. It offers an alternative to studies of ornament that diminish the potential for ornamental meaning-making, suggesting rather that the life-like potency of ornament allows it to morph and develop; expanding to swallow up a whole cathedral and retracting again to fit into a two-dimensional plane, only just alluding to its expansive potential.

Figures



Figure 1: El Seed, *Perception*, 2016. Anamorphic mural, Cairo, Egypt. Image: El Seed Art



Figure 2: Detail, El Seed, *Perception*, 2016. Image: El Seed Art



Figure 3: The Great Mosque of Córdoba, founded c. 786. Córdoba, Spain



Figure 4: The Great Mosque of Córdoba, founded c. 786. Córdoba, Spain

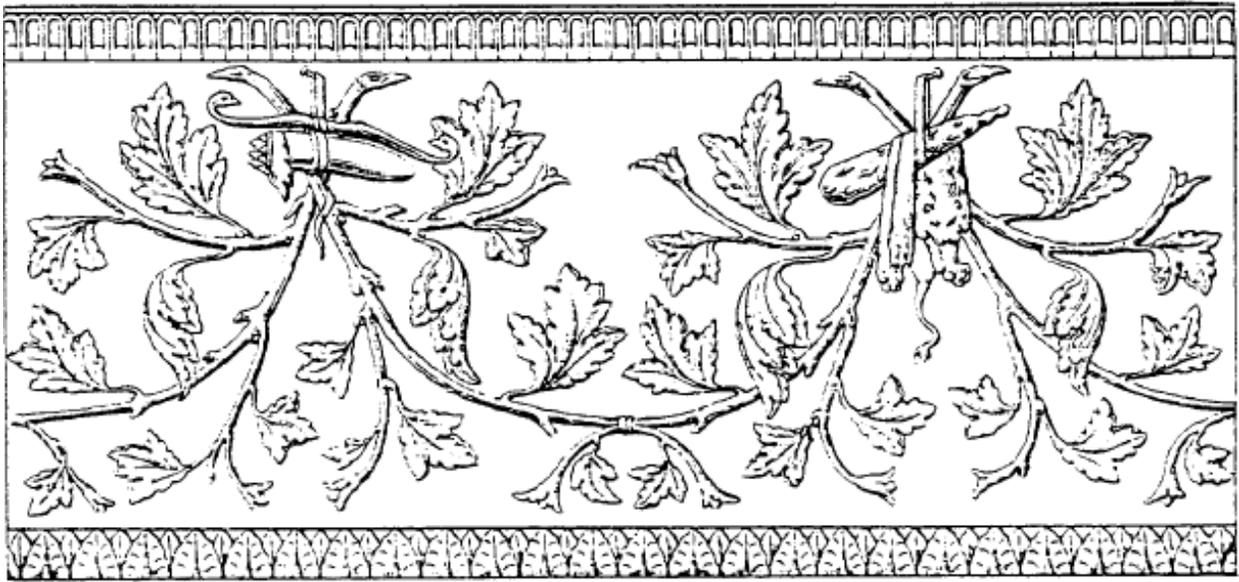


Figure 5: Riegl's example of Hellenistic vegetal ornament. Image: Fig. 177. "Marble puteal or wall head from Pompeii." *Problems of Style: Foundations for a History of Ornament (Stilfragen)*. Trans. Evelyn Kain. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992, 284



Figure 6: Riegl's example of an Islamic arabesque. Image: Fig. 192. "Arabesque filler ornament from a circular wall inset in the house of the fourteenth-century Emir Bardak in Cairo." *Problems of Style: Foundations for a History of Ornament (Stilfragen)*. Trans. Evelyn Kain. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992, 296

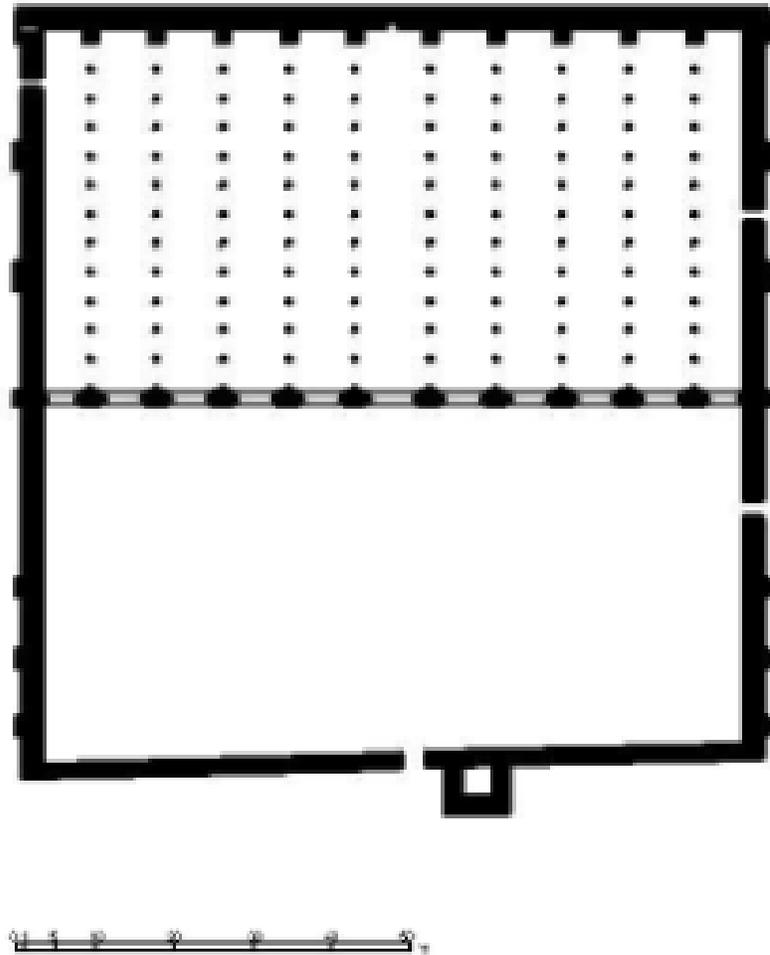


Figure 7: Plan of 'Abd al-Rahman I's mosque. The Great Mosque of Córdoba, c. 786, Córdoba, Spain. Plan by Saeed Arida, 2003. ArchNet

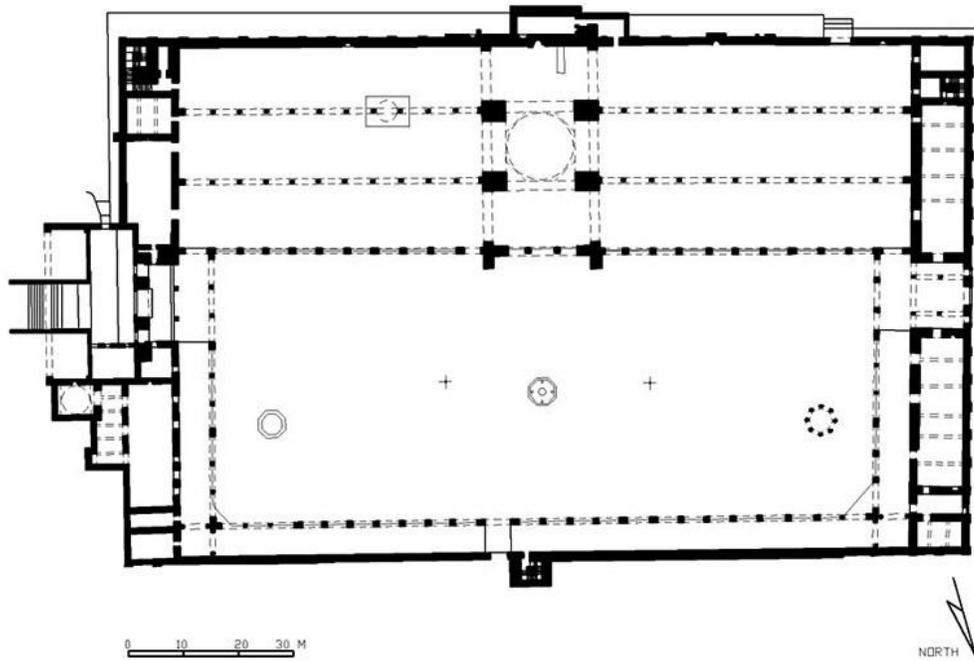


Figure 8: Floor plan, The Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, founded 706-15. Damascus, Syria. ArchNet



Figure 9: View of courtyard, Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, founded 706-15, Damascus, Syria. Image: DASE, The University of Texas at Austin

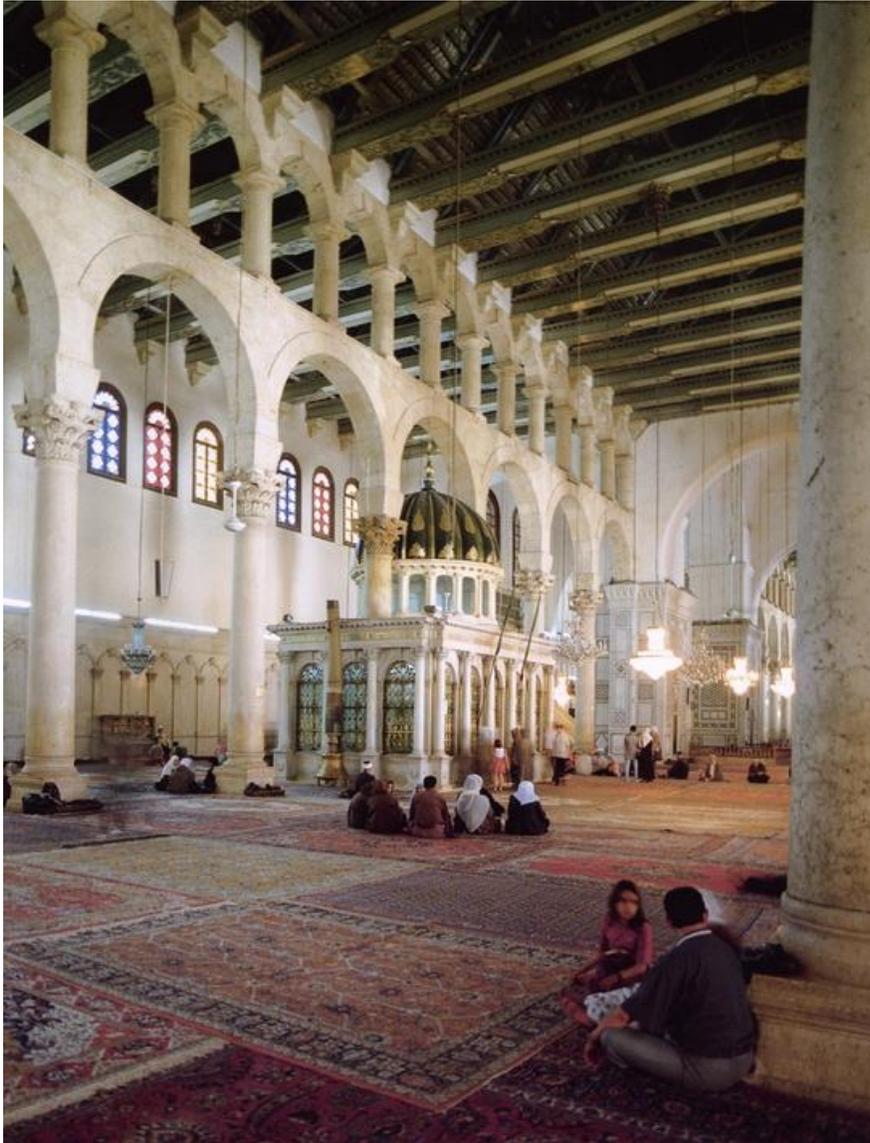


Figure 10: View of courtyard, Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, founded 706-15, Damascus, Syria. Image: DASE, The University of Texas at Austin



Figure 11: Roman Aqueduct at Merida (Acueducto de los Milagros), 1st century AD, Merida, Spain. Granite and red brick. 25 m high x 830 m long. Image: WikiCommons



Figure 12: Roman Aqueduct at Merida (Acueducto de los Milagros), 1st century AD, Merida, Spain. Granite and red brick. 25 m high x 830 m long. Image: WikiCommons

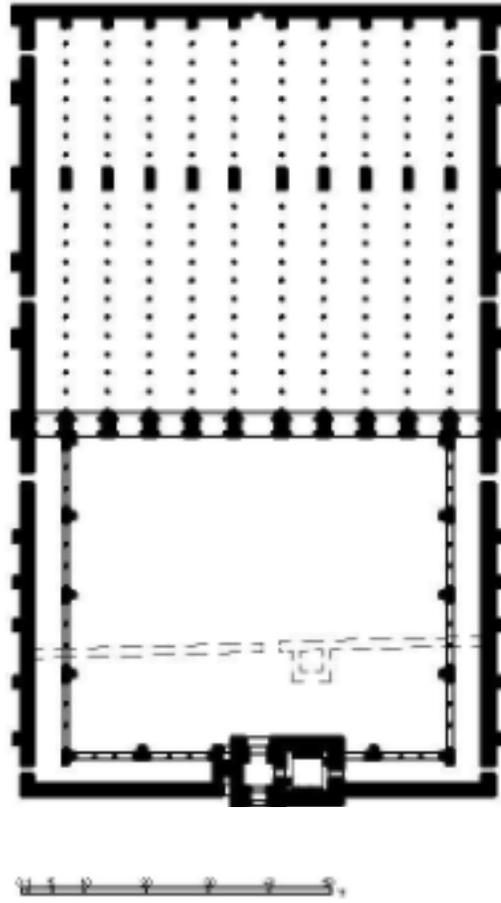


Figure 13: Plan of the Great Mosque of Córdoba after ‘Abd al-Rahman II’s additions, ca. 822-852, Córdoba, Spain. Plan by Saeed Arida, 2003. ArchNet



Figure 14: Capital, probably from Madinat al-Zahra, 10th century. Córdoba, Spain. Marble, carved. 36.8 cm x 34.3 cm x 34.3 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art

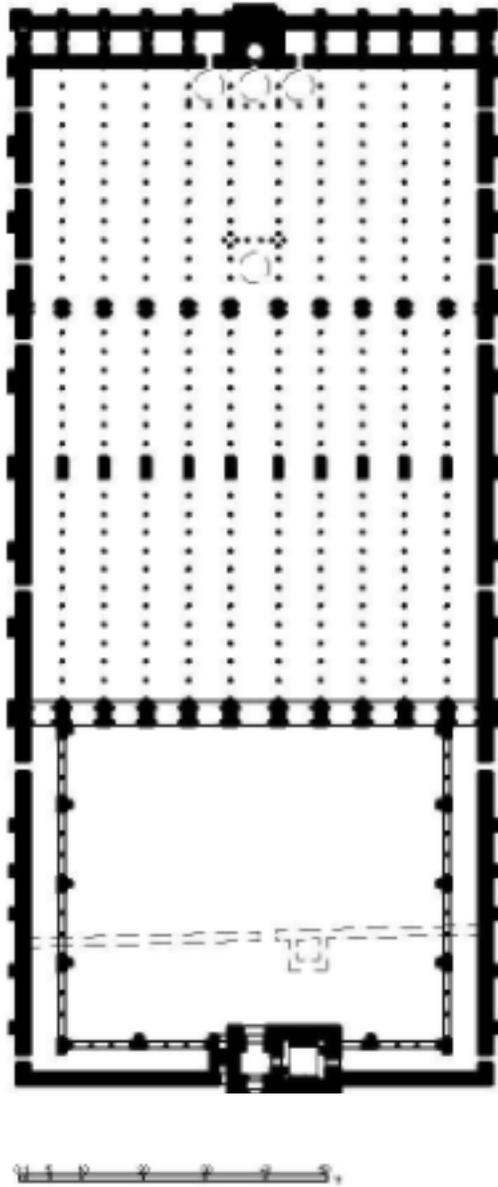


Figure 15: Plan, The Great Mosque of Córdoba after al-Hakam II's expansion, 961. Córdoba, Spain. Plan by Saeed Arida, 2003. ArchNet



Figure 16: Interior view, central aisle with poly-lobed *maqsura* screen, facing al-Hakam II's mihrab niche, The Great Mosque of Córdoba, 961. Córdoba, Spain. Image: Diana Luber

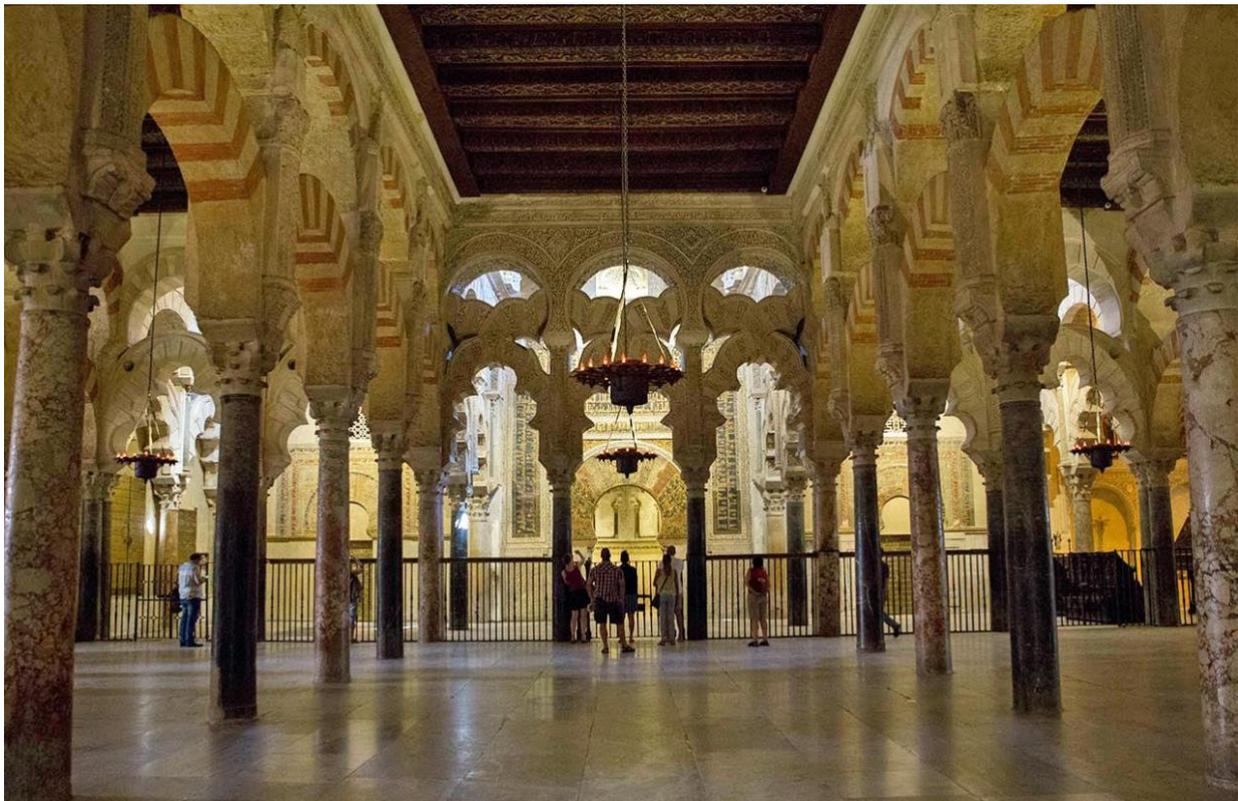


Figure 17: Interior view, central aisle with poly-lobed *maqsura* screen, facing al-Hakam II's mihrab niche, The Great Mosque of Córdoba, 961. Córdoba, Spain. Image: Diana Luber



Figure 18: Interior view, central aisle with poly-lobed *maqsura* screen, facing al-Hakam II's mihrab niche, The Great Mosque of Córdoba, 961. Córdoba, Spain. Image: Diana Luber

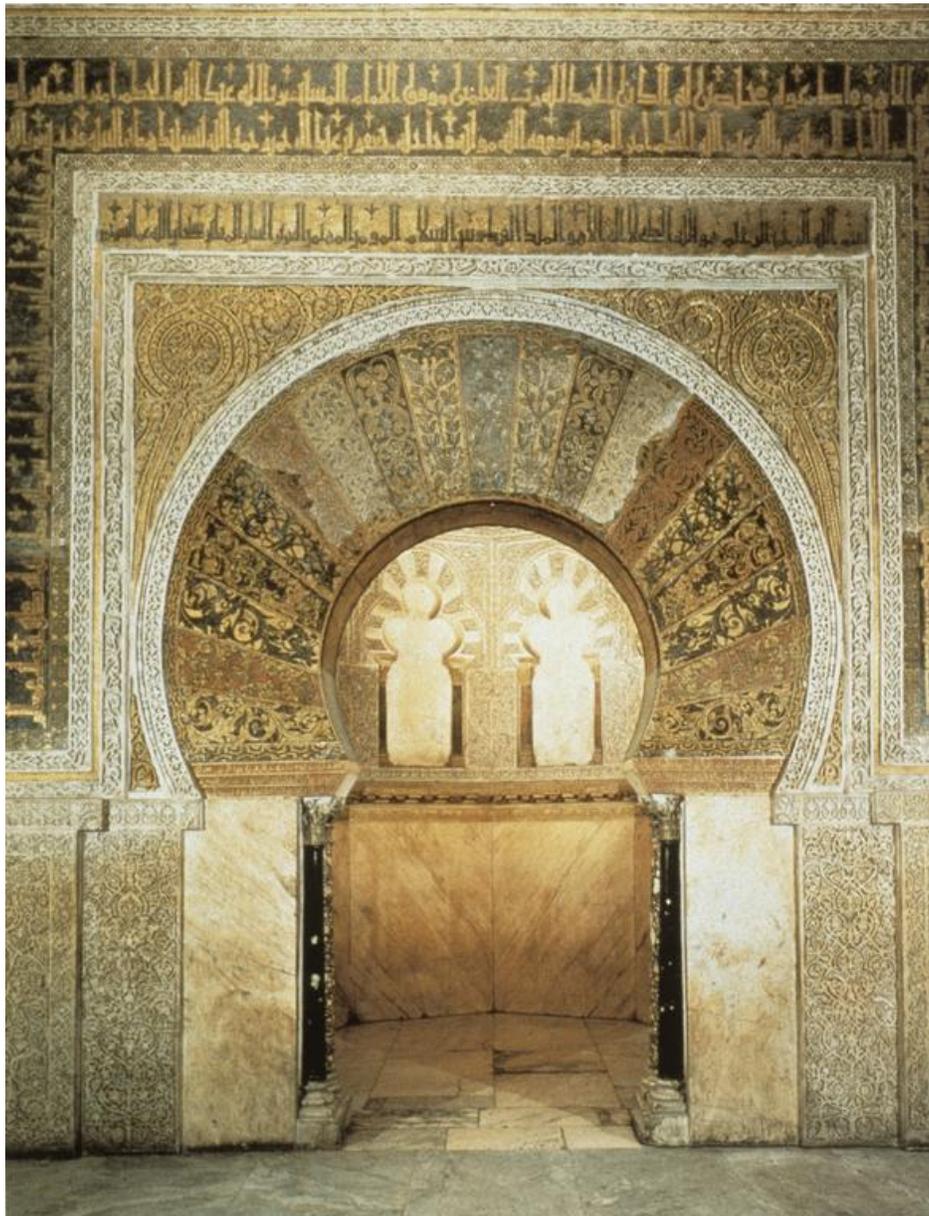


Figure 19: Al-Hakam II's Mihrab, Great Mosque of Córdoba, 961. Mosaics, gold. Córdoba, Spain. Image: DASE, The University of Texas at Austin



Figure 20: Opening of the *Gospel of Luke* [Quo/n/iam], folio 188r, *Book of Kells*, early 8th c-late 9th c. Hiberno-Saxon. Illuminated vellum. Trinity College Library, Dublin. Image: DASE, The University of Texas

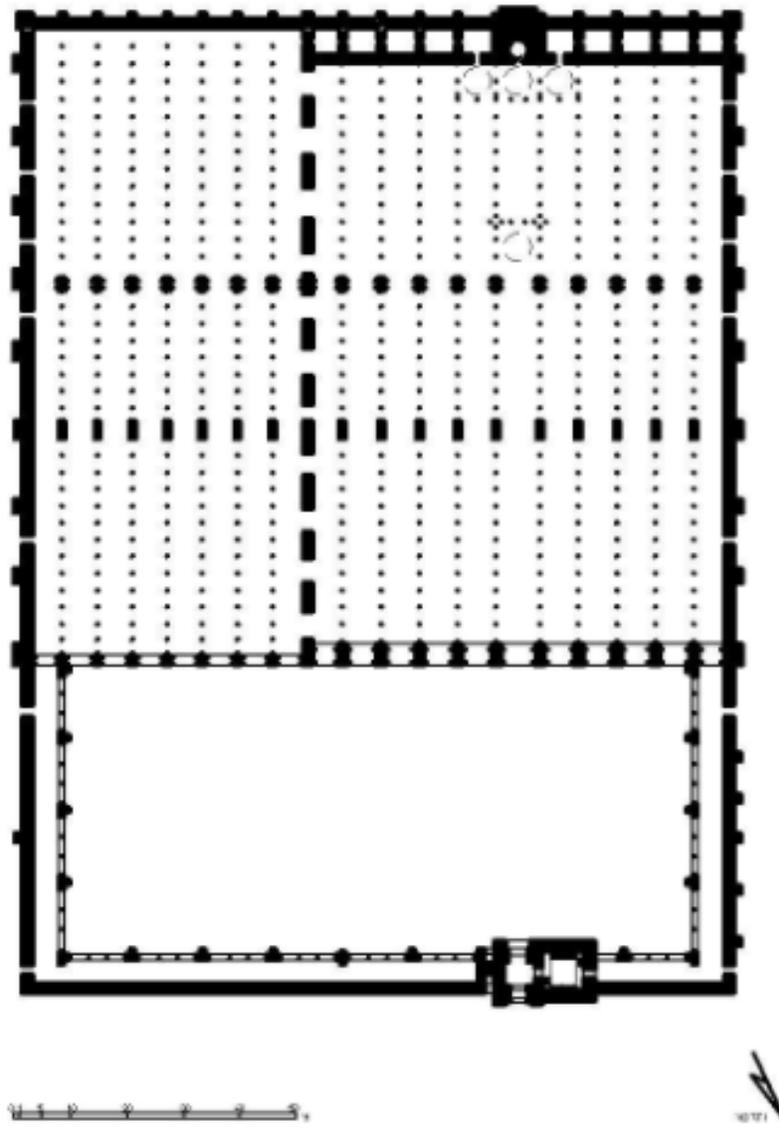


Figure 21: Plan, the Great Mosque of Córdoba after al-Mansur's expansion, end of the 10th c. Córdoba, Spain. Plan by Saeed Arida, 2003. ArchNet



Figure 22: Interior view, al-Mansur's addition to the Great Mosque of Córdoba, end of the 10th c. Image: Glaire D. Anderson, ArchNet

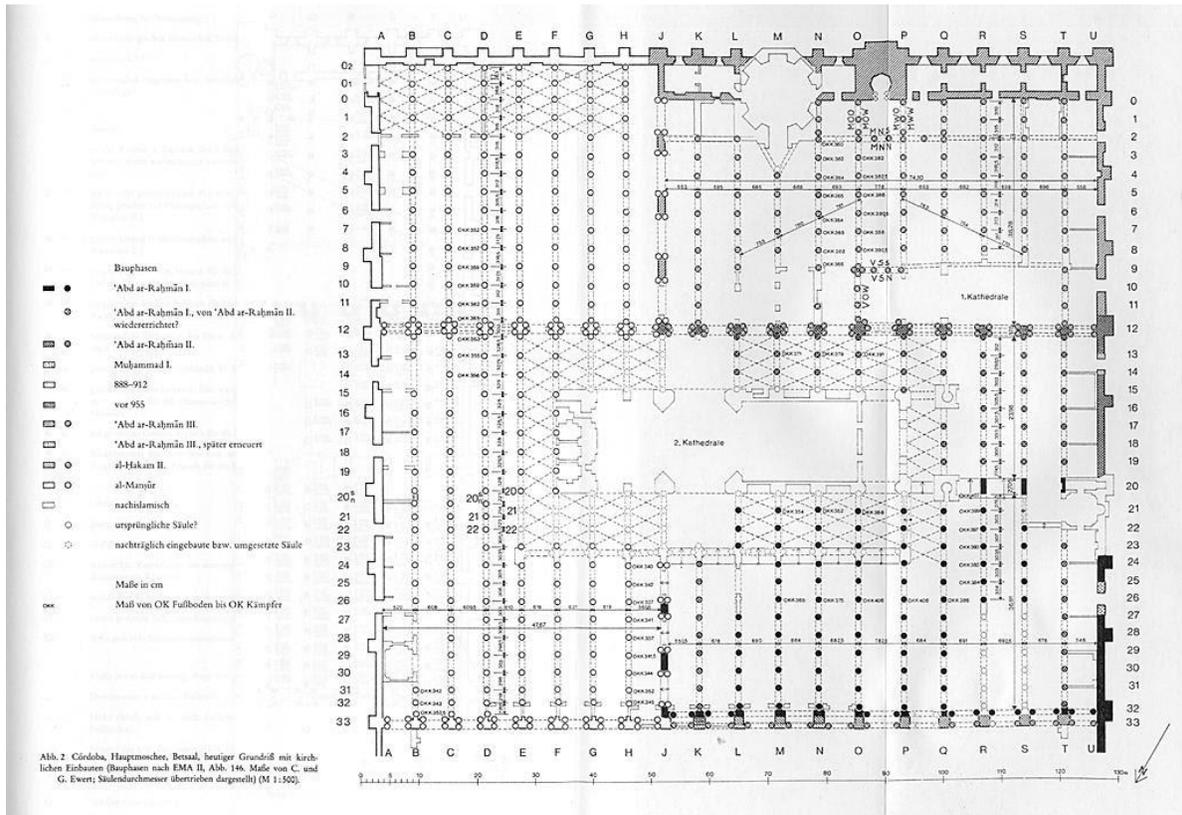


Abb. 2 Córdoba, Hauptmoschee, Betsaal, heutiger Grundriß mit kirchlichen Einbauten (Bauphasen nach EMA II, Abb. 146. Maße von C. und G. Ewert; Säulendurchmesser übertritten dargestellt) (M 1:500).

Figure 23: Plan with addition of Charles V' Cathedral, Cathedral-Mosque of Córdoba, Córdoba, Spain. Image: Christian Ewert



Figure 24: Interior view, Charles V's Cathedral, Great Mosque of Córdoba. 1526. Córdoba, Spain. Image: Diana Luber

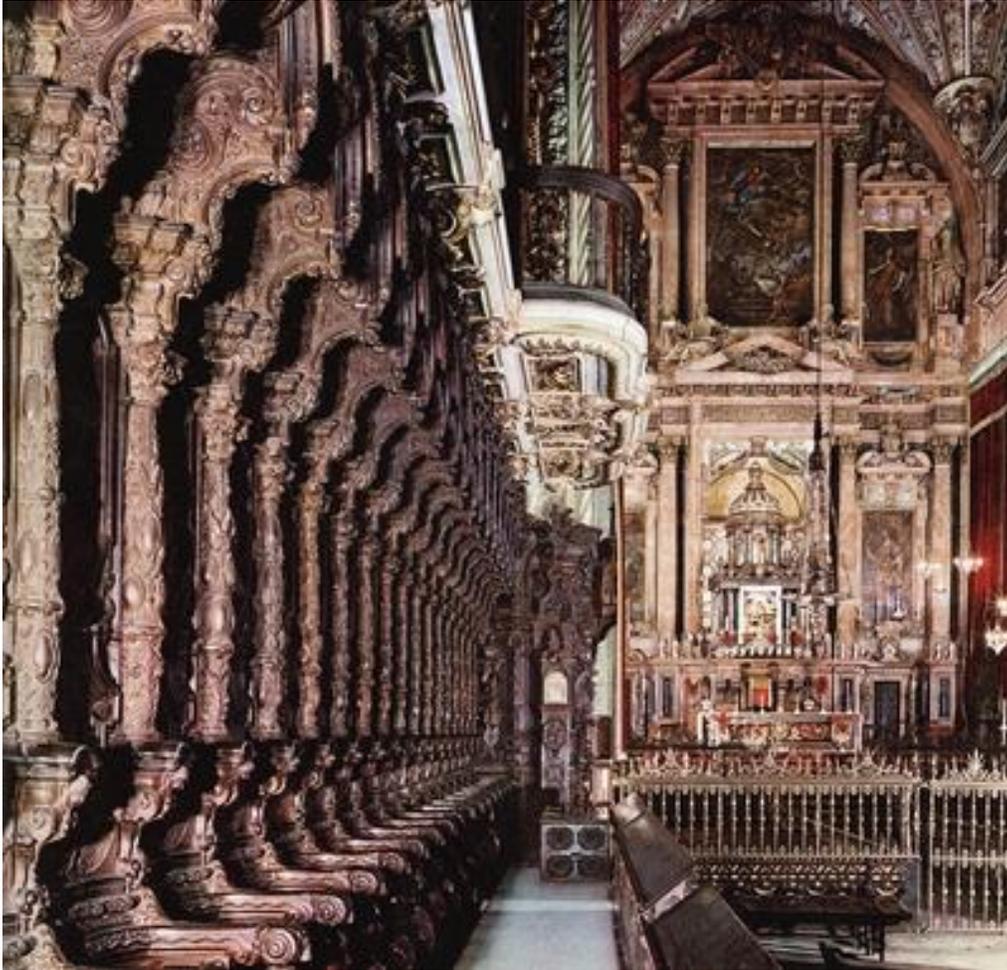


Figure 25: Interior view of choir stalls and altar, Charles V's Cathedral, Great Mosque of Córdoba. 16th-17th c. Córdoba, Spain. Image: DASE, The University of Texas at Austin



Figure 26: Exterior, Aljaferia palace, early 11th century, Zaragoza Spain. Image: Diana Luber



Figure 27: Patio de Santa Isabel, Aljaferia, early 11th c. Zaragoza, Spain. Image: Diana Lubert



Figure 28: Patio de Santa Isabel, Aljaferia, early 11th c. Zaragoza, Spain. Image: Diana Luber



Figure 29: Patio de Santa Isabel, Aljaferia, early 11th c. Zaragoza, Spain. Image: Diana Lubber

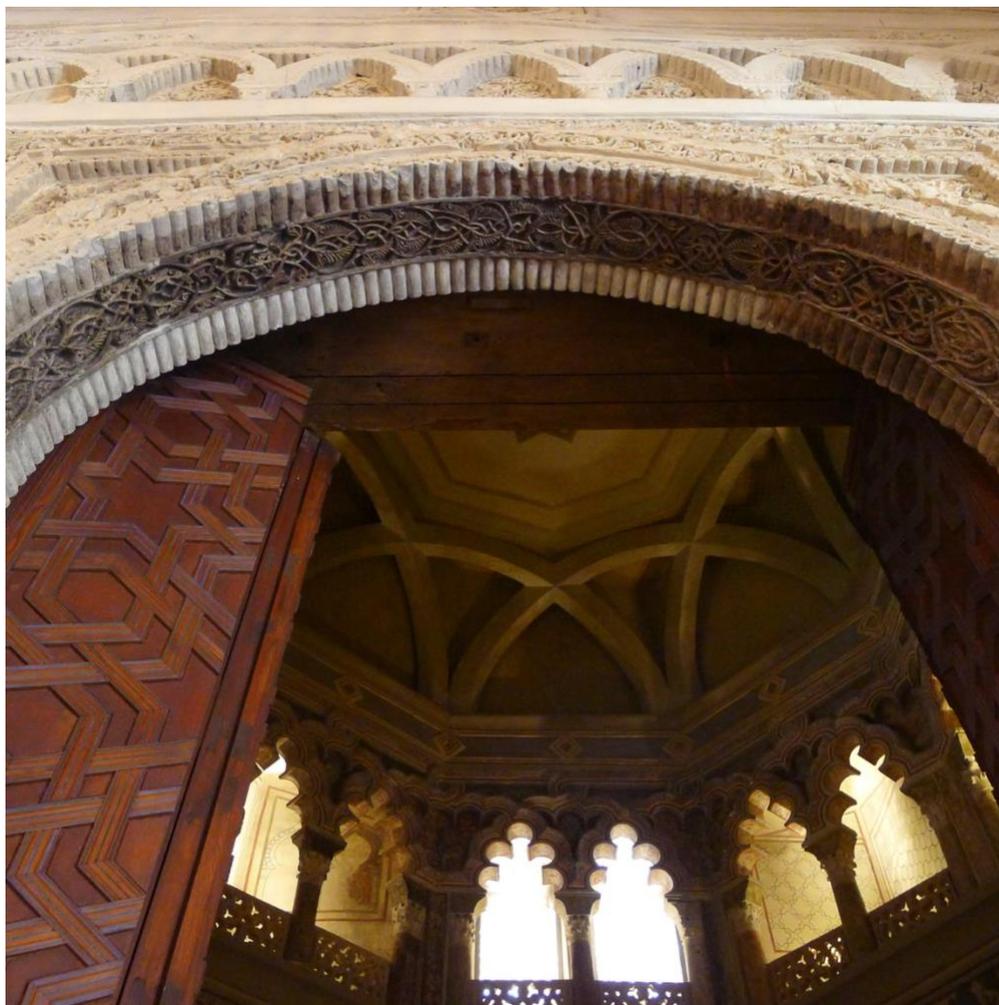


Figure 30: View of portal and interior, mosque-oratory, Aljaferia, early 11th c. Zaragoza, Spain. Image: Diana Luber



Figure 31: Interior, mosque-oratory, Aljaferia, early 11th c. Zaragoza, Spain. Image: ArchNet



Figure 32: Interior, mosque-oratory, Aljaferia, early 11th c. Zaragoza, Spain. Image: ArchNet



Figure 33: Gothic-Mudejar Façade, La Seo de Zaragoza (Catedral del Salvador), first half of the 14th century. Zaragoza, Spain. Applied brick and *alicatado* ceramic tiles. Image: Diana Lubert

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