

CORDOBA, FROM THE MUSLIM CONQUEST TO THE CHRISTIAN CONQUEST

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Cordoba is, like Granada though for different reasons, one of the «mythical cities» whose name is usually mentioned on one side and the other of the Mediterranean within the context of the chaotic process of the Euro-Arab relationship. It is considered as the symbol of a golden age and coexistence between cultures and religions, which we would like to be a model for our era. Sometimes, though, it becomes a caricature: in a debate about the Andalusian civilization that took place in Algiers in 2007, I heard one of the lecturers stating, obviously without mentioning any source, that during the era of the Umayyad Emir 'Abd al-Rahman I (756-788), students from all over Europe visited Cordoba to become imbued with Arab sciences. It is known that the *Reconquista* of al-Andalus and Cordoba is one of the driving utopias of certain Islamic fundamentalist movements. It is easy to find in Europe references to «an outstanding [Andalusian] civilization in which the splendid cities, as a result of the boom of trade and arts, had magnificent monuments and delightful gardens, embracing poets and musicians, thinkers and wise men, jurists and mystics of the three religions» and, above all, an atmosphere of tolerance which allowed the mixture and acceptance between languages and beliefs.¹ This embellishment, somewhat paradisiacal, was what allowed the French journalist Jean Daniel, in an article published in the *Nouvel Observateur* in October 1994, to refer to the peninsular 10th century as the «sacrosanct al-Andalus» in which, for approximately seventy years, this marvelous and amazing phenomenon called «the spirit of Cordoba» had reigned.

Obviously, one can try to avoid the representations nearer to our era rather than the facts of the past. But the myths themselves are part of a contemporary history, which is not indifferent. However, it is not necessary to ridiculously condemn them, spreading more «untruths» than those they already contain. This is the case of some WebPages which try to contradict the myth of Andalusian «coexistence». If for instance we consult one of these, whose title is *History and Myth: the Muslim al-Andalus [Histoire et mythe: l'Andalousie musulmane]*, we will confirm, un-

¹ According to the preface of Michel Zink to the work of María Rosa Menocal (2003). *L'Andalousie arabe: une culture de la tolérance, VIIIe-XVe siècle*. Paris: Autrement, p. 5.

surprisingly but at the same time somewhat bewildered, that it is full of historical mistakes: in order to diminish the importance of the «geopolitical» break-up of the Umayyad architecture which overflowed to the Maghreb, it is asserted without any doubt that Morocco was part of Visigothic Spain and, talking more specifically about Cordoba, that the famous caliphal library was «inherited from the Visigoths». With reference to the tolerance attributed to the Andalusí civilization, it is stated, providing no sources at all, that the Christians of Cordoba were victims of a massacre in 796.² In this text we will try to maintain some balance between an often too idealized, almost hagiographic vision (in Jean Daniel's interpretation of Cordoba mentioned above he talks about the «sacrosanct al-Andalus») and a too dry, positivist and brusque act of demythologizing which only focuses on the «shadows» that are inevitably linked to the most famous golden ages of the history of humanity.

Focusing on history rather than on the myth, the first thing we have to do is recognize, as in fact Jean Daniel did in the passage quoted above, that the emblematic splendor of Cordoba's 10th century caliphs and of their immense and prestigious capital did not last more than a few decades and that the city never recovered the grandeur and prestige it had enjoyed in the second half of the 10th century. Undoubtedly, it is important to take into account what Cordoba represented when a Germanic poetess called it the «adornment of the world»,³ but we also have to understand how it reached this apex and what happened to the city afterwards.

The text taken from the Internet and quoted above, which tries to diminish the splendor of Muslim Cordoba, focuses on the fact that, before the arrival of Islam, the city that would be the see of the great Western Caliphate was an «Episcopal city of great vitality». It was indeed an Episcopal city, like many others during Visigothic Spain, but there is not much evidence of its «great vitality»! Previous to the century in which the city joined the *dar al-Islam*, there is probably more evidence of a certain cultural and architectural dynamism in Toledo, the capital of the kingdom, and Mérida and Seville, both of them also metropolitan sees. It is true that since 1990, archaeologists have found to the northwest of the historical centre of the city, at the location of Cercadilla, near the train and bus station, a great imperial palatine complex dating from the end of the 3rd century or the beginning of the 4th century, which was probably occupied subsequently by the bishops of Cordoba; however, this complex disappears as such in the 6th century, when the reduction of developed land takes the bishops to the Guadalquivir banks, next to the palace of the Visigothic governors.⁴

² Le Messie et son Prophète, http://www.lemessieetsonprophete.com/annexes/Al-Andalus_histoire_et_mythe.htm [consulted on the 2nd of February 2013].

³ Text frequently quoted of the Saxon religious author Hroswitha de Gandersheim, see Évariste Lévi-Provençal (1999). *Histoire de l'Espagne musulmane: le siècle du califat de Cordoue*. Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, volume III, p. 383.

⁴ Vicente Salvatierra Cuenca and Alberto Canto García (2008). *Al-Andalus: de la invasión al Califato de Córdoba*. Madrid: Síntesis, p. 132. Plenty of literature can be found concerning the digs of Cercadilla.

Cordoba was not the main objective of the first Muslim invasion in 711. The troops of the first conqueror, the Berber general Tariq b. Ziyad, headed mainly towards Toledo, the capital of the kingdom, and thus only sent a 700 knight detachment to take over Cordoba. The circumstances of the taking of the city have been narrated with uncommon details by Arab sources, probably because the traditions concerning the fall of the al-Andalus capital have been preserved better than those referring to other cities. The attackers took advantage of a gap in the wall near the bridge entrance, neutralizing the defenders, through which they entered the precinct and occupied the city. The Visigothic governor and 500 men of the city were forced to evacuate the city via the door of Seville and shelter in a church dedicated to San Acisclo outside the enclosure. One of the hypotheses formulated is that this building is located at the site of the previously mentioned Cercadilla. Indeed, the building had to be powerful enough and in a good state of preservation to resist the three-month siege imposed by the Muslims.⁵

The Arab texts agree on the fact that the Roman bridge over the Guadalquivir river was partly demolished, which implies the city and its surroundings were in a deteriorated state. In any case, it was not Cordoba but Seville the city chosen by Musa b. Nusayr, the governor of Kairuán who headed the conquest from 712, as the capital of the new province. After 714, the year when he was called to Damascus by the Caliph, it was still Seville where his son ‘Abd al-‘Aziz, who inherited the management of the new province, lived until he was murdered in 716 —with the complicity of the caliphal power, according to some sources— by the Arab chiefs surrounding him due to the «royal» manners he had dared to adopt or, more probably, due to political differences of a nature difficult to know at present.⁶

The temporary governor chosen by the ruling elements —seemingly not without difficulties— stayed in power only around six months. A centralized regime such as the Damascus Caliphate was undoubtedly trying to control the province as firmly as possible and, in a short period of time, the governor was replaced by a *wali* hierarchically appointed, al-Hurr b. ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Thaqafi. It was this third governor who decided to settle in Cordoba.⁷ The explanation offered by Pedro Chalmeta of this decision seems to be quite realistic: having arrived with a strong military force (maybe thousands of men), he intended to get rid of the influence of the *yund* (‘army’) already established in Spain and probably Seville and its immediate area of influence, as well of the Berber elements ‘Abd al-‘Aziz b. Musa had attracted to the Peninsula, seemingly to support his policy. In

⁵ Cyrille Aillet (2010). *Les mozarabes: christianisme, islamisation et arabisation en Péninsule Ibérique (IXe-XIIe siècle)*. Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, p. 79.

⁶ Pedro Chalmeta (2003). *Invasión e islamización: la sumisión de Hispania y la formación de al-Andalus*. Jaén: Universidad de Jaén, pp. 246-247.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 254, according to the majority of sources: «the first action of the new governor was moving the capital from Seville to Cordoba».

Cordoba, thus, he would have more freedom to impose measures regulating the territorial and tax situation of the province.⁸

In this respect, al-Hurr was, during his three-year term of office, an energetic governor who also continued the religious war beyond the Pyrenees, in the ancient Visigothic Septimania and the south of the Frank Gaul. After him, the governors succeeded one another in a quite ephemeral way, without questioning Cordoba's status, definitively transformed into the capital of the new province of Islam. From this moment, urban developments were carried out in line with this role. It is thus known that the successor of al-Hurr, al-Samh ordered the repair of the bridge with ashlar from the wall, restoring the latter with simple bricks. On the other hand, he ordered the building of the cemetery of Arrabal⁹ on the left bank of the river, on land that belonged to the Public Treasury.

It could be supposed that this is the moment the elements which configure a «Muslim city» are coming into being, but these are only mentioned briefly in texts concerning political-military events. The second quarter of the 8th century finishes in al-Andalus with a decade of civil wars, in line with the general crisis context, which affects the Damascus Caliphate before its fall in 751. The sources concerning this period show, for example, that in the battle of Saqunda, which confronted in 747 two Arab factions (the Yemenis and the Qaysis or «Arabs from the North») in the vicinity of Cordoba, the leader of the latter, conscious of their critical situation, reversed the balance of power by appealing, by means of the *sahib al-suq* or manager of the capital's market, to the bazaar's craftsmen. Four hundred of them showed up carrying sticks and butcher knives, and gave the victory to the Qaysis over their adversaries, as exhausted as them due to the combat. However, the same narration, which suggests that the market of Cordoba was being organized on the basis of rules inspired by the new legal-religious ideology, also states that the Qaysis' leader, al-Sumayl, massacred the Yemenis' leaders captured, after rounding them up in a church inside the city.¹⁰ Arab sources insist on the fact that this church was located in the same place where the great mosque of Cordoba would be built years later.¹¹ If this version is accepted, which has often occurred, we would be facing a small problem; but according to a more recent source, the said church, dedicated to San Vicente, which was the cathedral church of the

⁸ We ignore if the rivalries between the «tribal factions» who would very soon stir up al-Andalus and the whole Caliphate really played a role in these events. It would be worth it to pick up again this issue within the context of the debates on the «parties» or «factions» opposed to the Damascus Caliphate (starting from the theses formulated by Muhammad Abdulhavy Shaban (1971). *Islamic History: a New Interpretation* (A. D. 600-750, A. H. 132). Cambridge: University Press; see particularly pp. 120 and following.

⁹ Évariste Lévi-Provençal (1999). *Histoire de l'Espagne musulmane: la conquête et l'émirat hispano-umayyade: 710-912*. Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, volume 1, p. 39 [first edition in 1950. Paris, Leiden: Maisonneuve, Brill].

¹⁰ Pedro Chalmeta (2003). *Invasión e islamización: la sumisión de Hispania y la formación de al-Andalus*. *Op. Cit.*, pp. 340-341.

¹¹ Emilio Lafuente y Alcántara (1867). *Ajbar Machmua (colección de tradiciones)* [collection of traditions]. Madrid: Imprenta y Estereotipia M. Rivadeneyra, p. 65: «in a church inside Cordoba, where the major mosque is at present located».

time of the Arab conquest, was then shared by Christians and Muslims, offering the latter a place for their Friday community prayer.¹² It is difficult to admit that the massacre of the Yemenis' leaders took place in the same building that was already being used as the main mosque of Cordoba —at least a part of it. It would be more credible if we accepted the theories deduced from the discoveries made in the digs of Cordoba's mosque during the last decade, by which in this site not only the great basilica destroyed by 'Abd al-Rahman I at the end of the 8th century in order to build the new mosque would have been located, but a whole complex of Episcopal buildings.¹³ If this is so, it is perfectly acceptable that the Christians preserved one of the buildings while the Muslims transformed the other one into a mosque.

It is interesting to point out this relative convergence between text and archaeological data, which allow us to discern the possibility of increasing the knowledge of this transition period between the end of the Visigothic kingdom and the beginning of the Umayyad Emirate of Cordoba. However, it was not until the reign of the Eastern «emigrant» 'Abd al-Rahman I, who arrived escaping from the massacre of his family in the East by the Abbasids, who had just overthrown the Damascus Caliphate (751) and were about to establish their own caliphate in Baghdad, when the new dimension of the political and —more and more— cultural capital was beginning to become patent. Having crossed from the Maghreb to Spain in 756, the aim of the young Umayyad prince was to take control of Cordoba resorting to the military power of the *mawali* ('clients') of his dynasty established in al-Andalus, who had just incorporated several thousands of Yemeni warriors unhappy with the power which the interests of the Qaysis represented; they had finally imposed their dominion after the tribal struggles which had characterized the first half of the century. The then governor, Yusuf al-Fihri, and his «right-hand man», the Qaysi leader al-Sumayl, were defeated at the gates of Cordoba and the Umayyad pretender took possession of the governmental palace and made the Cordoba citizens recognize him.

The long reign of 'Abd al-Rahman (756-788) allows the new sovereign to establish in Cordoba a dynasty, which bases its legitimacy on its caliphal background in the East (the Umayyads of Cordoba, even though they have no claim on the Caliphate, say they are «descendants of the Caliphs», 'banu jala'if'). Undoubtedly, the stability of the country is still far away, and the majority of his kingdom will be dedicated to hard internal wars against the

¹² Évariste Lévi-Provençal (1999). *Histoire de l'Espagne musulmane: le siècle du califat de Cordoue*. *Op. Cit.*, volume III, p. 386.

¹³ See the works of Pedro Marfil Ruiz (2001), for instance, his *Urbanismo Cordobés*, in *María Jesús Viguera Molins and Concepción Castillo Castillo (coordinators). El esplendor de los omeyas cordobeses: la civilización musulmana de Europa occidental. Exposición en Madinat al-Zahra, 3 de mayo a 30 de septiembre de 2001: estudios*. Granada: Consejería de Cultura, through the Fundación El Legado Andalusi, pp. 360-371; and (n. d.). «Arqueología en la mezquita de Córdoba», <http://www.ciberjob.org/suple/arqueologia/mezquita/mezqui.html> [consulted on 2 February 2013]; as well as the specifications of Susana Calvo Capilla (2007). «Primeras mezquitas de al-Andalus a través de las fuentes árabes (92/711-170/785)», *Al-Qantara*, 28 (1), pp. 166 and following.

supporters of the former government, against the Yemeni tribal elements who were upset for having helped an «Arab from the North» to reach power and against a great Berber religious uprising in the centre of the Peninsula. In this period in which the Umayyad has to fight fiercely to remain in power, the peripheries are controlled with difficulty. There were riots in favor of the Abbasids in Beja (763) and Valencia (777). The latter is composed of the movements of dissent headed by the Arab chiefs who at that moment control the Ebro Valley and are responsible for the famous expedition of Charlemagne against Zaragoza in 778. This almost uninterrupted succession of local uprisings only emphasizes the contrast with the deep rooting of power in Cordoba, based on the settlement in the city of the last descendants of the Umayyad family, the members of the Quraysh tribe to which the former belonged, and many clients (*mawali*) of the dynasty, those who had composed the «first circle» of the establishment of their power in al-Andalus and those who will constitute during the whole Emirate the «hard core» of the State of Cordoba.¹⁴

This is the context which allows the reconfiguration of the capital whose details we do not know exactly but whose features, broadly speaking, are clear: the powerful «state aristocracy» acquires aristocratic properties in the city and mainly on its outskirts, and these wealthy estates are the «starting point» for the fast expansion of neighborhoods and suburbs. A good example of this is the «palace of Mughith» (*balat Mughith*), the Umayyad *mawla* who commanded the detachment that took possession of Cordoba and who received a large quantity of property outside the city which promoted the development of one of the main suburbs of the capital, located immediately to the East of the Emir's *qasr* ('palace').¹⁵ The *banu Mughith* are, at the end of the 8th century and beginning of the 9th century, one of the main castes, which provide the regime with the higher posts of the state. A passage of *Muqtabis* of Ibn Hayyan allows us to catch a glimpse of an episode of the growth that developed around his residence by explaining how, subsequently to the conquest, a member of the Umayyad lineage who was the «chief» of Mughith, also immigrated to al-Andalus and settled alongside the *mawali* residence.¹⁶ In this case it is clear how powerful families got together in a sort of «agglomeration» and how a whole population gathered around them based on certain social mechanisms of patronage and dependency. Obviously we do not have many data concerning this population.

¹⁴ See the theses of de Mohamed Meouak (1999). *Pouvoir souverain, administration centrale et élites politiques dans l'Espagne omayyade (Ile-IVe/VIIIe-Xe siècles)*. Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica.

¹⁵ Évariste Lévi-Provençal (1999). *Histoire de l'Espagne musulmane: le siècle du califat de Cordoue*. Op. Cit., volume III, pp. 375-376. A good location of the Cordoba neighbourhoods can be found in Juan Francisco Murillo Redondo, María Teresa Casal García and Elena Castro del Río (2004). «Madinat Qurtuba. Aproximación al proceso de formación de la ciudad emiral y califal a partir de la información arqueológica», *Cuadernos de Madinat al-Zahra'*, 5, pp. 257-290 (see the photograph and the map of the p. 285).

¹⁶ Ibn Hayyan al-Qurtubi (2001). *Crónica de los emires Alhakam I y Abdarrahman II entre los años 796 y 847 [Almuqtabis II-I]* [translation by Mahmud Ali Makki and Federico Corriente]. Zaragoza: Instituto de Estudios Islámicos y del Oriente Próximo, p. 96.

The symbol of the solid settlement in Cordoba of a dynasty —undoubtedly new in al-Andalus, but carrying all the prestige of its well-known bloodline— is obviously the building of a great mosque which from the start appears as a «lighthouse» monument of Muslim art, the first large emblematic religious construction built outside an Eastern capital and founder of Andalusí artistic tradition. The monument, ordered by the first Emir, was built in one year on the esplanade left by the destruction in 169/785 of the constructions existing in the location of the ancient Visigothic cathedral and undoubtedly the first Muslim prayer room. This proves the concentration of economic resources obtained in Cordoba by the state taxation system, the degree of planning of which unknown architects working for the Emir were capable and their surprising ability to innovate while they remained faithful to the tradition of Damascus' Umayyads.

This first great Umayyad mosque of Cordoba, though slightly hidden from view due to the successive extensions it would be subject to, has been analyzed hundreds of times, insofar as it constitutes the first milestone of an aesthetic and architectural tradition to which the following emirs and subsequently the caliphs successors of the first Umayyad sovereign would remain faithful, and even endow with splendor. It is presented as the starting point of what, seen at a later stage, seems a kind of «dynastic program» that still fascinates both art historians and tourists. Obviously, we will not relate here the umpteenth description, but we will endorse the opinion of Teresa Pérez Higuera, who describes the two levels of arches which sustain the roof as a «brilliant solution».¹⁷ The talent of the builder was maybe achieving to erect a mosque, which totally complied with the needs of the Muslim cult and, at the same time, was brand new in architectural terms. It is difficult to know to what extent it is inspired in local traditions (Roman aqueducts of Spain have been recalled in reference to the superposition of the above mentioned arches and the horseshoe arches of the lower level find their precedent in Visigothic churches) or it remains faithful to the patterns brought from the East (the Great Mosque of Damascus also had two levels of superimposed arches, and, on the other hand, the horseshoe arch was found in several monuments also built by the Umayyads in Syria).¹⁸

¹⁷ Teresa Pérez Higuera (2001). La mezquita de Córdoba, in *María Jesús Viguera Molins and Concepción Castillo Castillo (coordinators). El esplendor de los omeyas cordobeses: la civilización musulmana de Europa occidental. Exposición en Madinat al-Zahra, 3 de mayo a 30 de septiembre de 2001: estudios. Op. Cit.*, pp. 372-379.

¹⁸ Juan Carlos Ruiz Souza (2009) carries out an interesting analysis in *La Corona de Castilla y al-Andalus. Préstamos arquitectónicos y grados de asimilación. Espacios, funciones, y lenguajes técnico-formales*, in *Pierre Toubert and Pierre Moret. Remploi, citation, plagiat conduites et pratiques médiévales (Xe-XIIe siècle)*. Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, pp. 231-257; in the p. 236: «The Cordoba formula cannot be more “anti-classical”, since the section of the whole structure increases together with the height, just opposite to what happens in the aqueduct of Mérida. This is one of the main differences between Roman and Islamic architecture; while in the first one we could guess to a large extent the structures sustained by studying the foundations of the construction basing on its highly rationalist feature, this would be impossible in the Islamic case, in which we could hardly imagine the hanging walls or the domes of the mosque of Cordoba or the Alhambra of Granada if both buildings had only preserved its foundations».

The successors of the first sovereign of the dynasty, with regard to the capital, observed the former's design. The crown of estates or *mumyas* ('farms'), which surrounded the city, added to the splendor with new constructions. The most prestigious ones were those of the dynasty itself, beginning with the famous Rusafa, whose construction was ordered by 'Abd al-Rahman I¹⁹ and whose name came from a Syrian residence his ancestors were specially attached to. Even its background is interesting: The Emir bought it from a Berber chief who owned it probably since the conquest.²⁰ Together with his successors new properties appeared, such as the *mumyat* al-Na'ura, on the right bank of the Guadalquivir further down the city, which was built in the middle of a great orchard by the future Emir 'Abd Allah before his rise to power in 888. It owed its name to the wheel of a big water mill with which the estate was watered, and it was just one of the properties built by the members of the dynasty and, among them, by the wives of the Emirs, such as the famous *mumyat* 'Ayab, founded by one of the wives of al-Hakam I (796-822).

Unfortunately, we do not have enough numerical or topographical data concerning the growth of the city of Cordoba during the era of the Umayyad Emirate. It seems to have been important. A well-known and at the same time dramatic historical event reveals this: the famous revolt of the suburb (*rabad'*) of Cordoba which took place in 818. This episode, profusely related in written sources, shows the existence of one of Cordoba's neighborhoods whose growth Lévi-Provençal summarizes perfectly in his *Histoire de l'Espagne musulmane*:

The physiognomy of Cordoba [he writes] had changed a lot since the reign of 'Abd al-Rahman I. The city, already important and populous during the Visigothic era, had received inside its walls, since it became the capital of the Hispanic-Umayyad Emirate, many Arabs coming from the East or Ifriqiya, as well as a certain number of Berber Maghrebians. New neighborhoods had been built at the North and West of the city. On the other hand, since the restoration of the Roman bridge over the Guadalquivir river carried out by Hisham I, the water course that surrounded the city was no longer an obstacle for its extension along the left bank: a noisy and very populated suburb (*rabad'*) spread from the bank to the vicinity of a neighboring village, Saqunda, the ancient Secunda.

This suburb was inhabited not only by the common people from Cordoba, but also by craftsmen and *muwallads* or Christian small merchants. Thanks to its proximity to the great mosque and the emir's palace, both located near the

¹⁹ Rusafa was the favourite residence of the first emir and was located more than two kilometres away from Cordoba, to the northwest of the precinct, in the first hills which surrounded the plain.

²⁰ Évariste Lévi-Provençal (1999). *Histoire de l'Espagne musulmane: le siècle du califat de Cordoue*. *Op. Cit.*, volume III, p. 374, no. 2.

Guadalquivir and only separated from one another by a long street which ended on the bridge, the *Mahayya 'uzma*, many citizens whose duties or studies were related to the Government's headquarters or the main building of worship of the city found it comfortable to settle in the Southern suburb: it was here that the majority of the former Andalusí pupils of Malík Ibn Anas lived, now transformed into well-known and influential *faqíhs*.²¹

Nothing better, in my opinion, than quoting this passage of the great historian of Muslim Spain to confirm the speed of the changes carried out and their nature. The development of the Southern suburb of Cordoba is just an example of the growth that affected in the same way the rest of the peripheral areas of the capital, to the East, North and West. The only difference is that we are perfectly aware of its chronology, because its expansion was abruptly stopped by ruthless repression, total destruction and massacre or expulsion of its inhabitants ordered by the Emir al-Hakam I, after the great revolt which took place in 818. It is thus clear that from the beginning of the 9th century the ancient *madina* of Cordoba had been surrounded by populous suburbs, whose «Islamic» feature is not questioned, since, in fact, the mutual opposition between the religious factions and the urban «masses» composed of merchants and craftsmen concerning certain measures — mainly related to the tax issue — they considered abusive and ungodly according to Islam rules, was the cause of the revolt. This struggle reveals the boom of development that the city was going through at that moment, inasmuch as the elimination of several thousands of rebel inhabitants did not seem to affect more than temporarily the growth of the whole city.²²

At the peak of the Emirate, under the reign of 'Abd al-Rahman II (822-852), the son of al-Hakam I, the city reached considerable prosperity unknown until then. Ibn Hayyan associates the sovereign's foreign prestige with the ornaments with which he decorated the city:

He maintained correspondence with sovereigns of several countries, raised palaces, built bridges, brought drinking water from the top of the mountains to his palace, drilling for this purpose solid rock in order to provide his palace with water, according to a well designed plan. This way he obtained water to drink and for his park, and he took the surplus to the fountain he installed in front of the central Southern gate of his

²¹ Évariste Lévi-Provençal (1999). *Histoire de l'Espagne musulmane: la conquête et l'émirat hispano-umayyade: 710-912*. Op. Cit., volume 1, pp. 161-162.

²² We can add to the issue of the revolt that while the result was unfortunate for the rebels, it had positive consequences for archaeologists: considering that the suburb was destroyed and that an edict which banned new constructions on that location was issued, the preservation of remains at floor level were favoured, and the digs recently carried out have provided a great amount of data concerning the organisation of the neighborhood and the material culture that existed in it.

palace, the so-called Garden gate, where water flowed into a marble basin to which everyone who went to the fortress or passed by had access, with great benefit for everybody.²³

It was also in times of ‘Abd al-Rahman II when an important enlargement of the great mosque was carried out, nearly doubling the capacity of its prayer room, so it could take in an increasing number of the faithful population which was constantly growing in a heterogeneous city inhabited by Arabs, Berbers and natives and, from the religious point of view, Jews, Muslims descending from the conquerors, many converts and still a great number of Christians. The Umayyad capital was at that moment very lively, and there was an educated and well-off class (*amma*) large enough to give way to the emergence of a cultural center which attracted people from the East who imported the Iraqi trends the population was eager to acquire. This was the role played by the famous Ziryab, a musician and singer who came from Iraq and became the favorite of the high society.²⁴

Obviously, we have more information about the dominant Arabian-Berber class. We have mentioned above the aristocratic property of *balat* Mughith, located at the Northwest of the conurbation, pertaining to a powerful family of Umayyad clients whose members were part of the highest caste who held power: son of the Mughith who entered Cordoba in 711, ‘Abd al-Malik b. ‘Abd al-Wahid b. Mughith was the general of Hisham I (788-796) and commanded in 793 the army which attacked Narbona and achieved the great victory of Orbieu over the Franks; his brother ‘Abd al-Karim b. ‘Abd al-Wahid, who participated in the same expedition and lead some others, assumed the post of chamberlain or *hayib* of the Emir al-Hakam I (796-822).²⁵ According to Ibn Hayyan, when this powerful character returned to his own palace after having fulfilled the duties of his official position in the palace of Cordoba, he stopped to greet the «chief» of his lineage, the descendants of the Umayyad Habib b. ‘Abd al-Malik, who, as we have already seen, located near the *balat* Mughith. He tied his horse at enough distance to walk in and out on foot to honor the family, of which he was still a client (*mawla*) in spite of his high state status. There were also bonds between these high state ranks and other elements of the society of Cordoba, particularly with the increasing influential category of the *fuqaha*’ (jurists and religious men) or ulama. A famous jurist (*faqih*) related that, when he went with ‘Abd al-Karim in his expedition

²³ Ibn Hayyan al-Qurtubi (2001). *Crónica de los emires Alhakam I y Abdarrahan II entre los años 796 y 847 [Almuqtabis II-I]*. *Op. Cit.*, pp. 169-170.

²⁴ Évariste Lévi-Provençal (1999). *Histoire de l’Espagne musulmane: la conquête et l’émirat hispano-umayyade: 710-912*. *Op. Cit.*, volume 1, pp. 269-272. Ziryab is just the most evident fact of the process of «orientalization» of society and the State of Cordoba which is developing at that moment.

²⁵ Ibn Hayyan al-Qurtubi (2001). *Crónica de los emires Alhakam I y Abdarrahan II entre los años 796 y 847 [Almuqtabis II-I]*. *Op. Cit.*, pp. 95-99. ‘Abd al-Karim died in 824 or 825.

against Narbona to ensure the legal distribution of the loot, he once received a gift from him consisting of a hundred dinars (that is, in theory a hundred golden coins of about four grams, probably given in silver dirhams, since in al-Andalus they did not at that time mint gold); this gives us an idea of the financial comfort the high personalities of the Umayyad state enjoyed.

Another example of a family, which occupied high positions in the Umayyad state and played a significant role in the development of Cordoba, was the important Berber family of the *banu Zayyali*. At the moment of the conquest they settled in the *kura* or Takurunna province (at present the region of Málaga). The first to be mentioned in the texts is Muhammad b. Sa'ïd b. Musa b. 'Isa al-Zayyali, noticed by the Emir 'Abd al-Rahman due to his poetic and literary skills who named him «private secretary» (*katib al-sirr*) of the sovereign, a position that did not exist until then. The residence in which he settled with his relatives, to the north of the historical *madina* of Cordoba, seems to have contributed to the structuring of the area to the extent of giving its name to the neighborhood (the suburb or *rabid* of the *Zayyayila*); the family would be since then one of the main families of the capital, since we know of at least 11 members who carried out governmental duties in the high Administration of the Umayyad state, at the end of the Emirate and during the Caliphate.²⁶ Their dynasty also gave name to a park (*ha'ir*) and a cemetery, and their social preponderance is proved by the fact that, in so far as they hovered around power, they had their own dependents or clients (*mawali*).²⁷

We do not have as much information about the establishment in Cordoba of other families of the powerful «state aristocracy» which, during the Emirate, formed a kind of «hard core» of power and the main pillar of the Umayyad state. Its most influential elements belonged to the large group of the Eastern *mawali* (the *banu Abi 'Abda*, the *banu Hundayr*, the *banu Shuhayd* and some other powerful castes) who were the main contributors to the accession to the Emirate of the first sovereign of the dynasty.²⁸ In the 80s of the 9th century a very serious political crisis began which carried on for several decades and during which a *fitna* or era of discord and division took place; meanwhile, the country broke up in political terms and the authorities of the central power weakened up to a point at which, for twenty years, no money was minted and no *yihad* expeditions were carried out at the frontiers. Historians are astonished by the fact that the Umayyad dynasty, under pressure from the opposition throughout the whole al-Andalus territory and almost confined to

²⁶ Mohamed Meouak (1999). *Pouvoir souverain, administration centrale et élites politiques dans l'Espagne Umayyade (IIe-IVe/VIIIe-Xe siècles)*. Op. Cit., pp. 174-175; and Helena de Felipe (1997). *Identidad y onomástica de los beréberes de al-Andalus*. Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas (CSIC), pp. 255-258.

²⁷ Mohamed Meouak (1999). *Pouvoir souverain, administration centrale et élites politiques dans l'Espagne Umayyade (IIe-IVe/VIIIe-Xe siècles)*. Op. Cit., p. 175.

²⁸ The same work of Mohamed Meouak gives many information on lineage and its power. *Ibid.*

Cordoba during the Emir ‘Abd Allah’s reign (888-912), could manage to maintain power in such conditions. The hypothesis could be posed that one of the elements that allowed the reign’s survival was, together with the local nature of the majority of the dissidences, the importance — demographic, economic and cultural— of a capital that did not question the Umayyad’s power. On this account, the succession was carried out peacefully and without impediment and the weak and passive Emir ‘Abd Allah was substituted by his grandson, the eighth Emir, ‘Abd al-Rahman III (912-961) who, on the contrary, would take Cordoba’s power to its peak by restoring the tenacity of the authority of the central power and recovering the title of caliph that his ancestors had inherited from Damascus (in 929). While in order to refer to the Umayyad’s capital in the 9th century we often have to resort to the historians’ reconstructions and hypotheses based on the brief indications disseminated in Arab sources, as well as on those recently provided by archaeological digs, in the case of the Caliphate, on the contrary, we can at least refer to a contemporary description, fairly detailed and apparently reliable: that of the Eastern geographer Ibn Hawqal, a great traveler who visited al-Andalus in the 10th century.²⁹ His text reads as follows:

The largest city of al-Andalus is Cordoba, with no other equivalent in the Maghreb, except for Upper Mesopotamia, Syria or Egypt, with reference to its population, the area it occupies, the space dedicated to the markets, cleanliness, the architecture of the mosques and the great number of baths and grain storage cooperatives. Several travelers coming from this city who have visited Baghdad say that it equals one of the neighborhoods of the Mesopotamian city. [...] Cordoba is perhaps like one of the two halves of Baghdad, but it is not far away from reaching its size. The *medina* has a stonewall which is located on a beautiful site with spacious esplanades; [...] [the sovereign] has his residence and fortress inside the fortified enclosure which surrounds it. The majority of the gates of the fortress connect with the core of the city on several sides. Two gates of the city are open in the wall itself of the *medina* on the road that leads from Rusafa to the river. The houses of Rusafa are the tallest of the suburbs and its constructions reach the lowest suburb of the city. It is a conurbation which surrounds the city to the East, North and West; when the

²⁹ We know that Ibn Hawqal was in al-Andalus in the summer of 948. He probably stayed there for some time to become familiar with what was happening there, since he provides accurate information on facts that happened later on. His *Kitab surat al-ard* [*Description of the Earth*] apparently suffered successive draftings until the end of the 10th century. In this regard, see the review included in the book of Jorge Lirola Delgado and José Miguel Puerta Vilchez (2004). *Biblioteca de al-Andalus: de Ibn al-Dabbag a Ibn Kurz*. Almería: Fundación Ibn Tufayl de Estudios Árabes, volume 3, pp. 320-321.

midday sun reflects on the river, along which there is a path called «the reef» (*al-Rasif*) and over which you can find the bazaars, taverns, caravansaries, baths and the lower-class houses. The mosque temple, beautiful and large, is inside the *medina*; the prison is located in the vicinity. Cordoba is separate from the houses of its suburbs, except for one that is attached to it. The *medina* is located in the centre surrounded by a wall; more than once I have walked the length of the wall within an hour; it is a circular, very solid, stonewall. [...] Cordoba has seven iron gates. It is a considerable and large city with an elegant plan. There are large fortunes and luxury spreads out in many ways: in the beautiful fabrics and dresses made of smooth linen, wild or refined silk, as well as in its agile horsemen and the different kinds of food and beverages.³⁰

It is not our intention here to describe in detail the Cordoba of the 10th century, but to transmit the impression the city provoked on an experienced and curious traveler who had already visited nearly all the Muslim world and, thus, could compare what he saw in the capital of al-Andalus with many other cities he had visited, especially the largest of all of them: Baghdad. We can add that he had sympathy for the Fatimid regime of Kairuán and that he was very critical of some other facts he witnessed in the Iberian Peninsula, for instance, the state of the military forces, which he considered insignificant. This makes even more interesting the admiration he feels for the grandeur, the good organization, the pleasant appearance and the wealth of the city. Apparently, he thinks that this is the only city of *Dar al-Islam* which can be compared to Baghdad.

In the previous quote we have omitted some indications about the princely city of Madinat al-Zahra, which the caliph ‘Abd al-Rahman III had been building since the year 936, some kilometers to the West of the *madina* of Cordoba, and to which the governor and his court were progressively moving. For example, when Ibn Hawqal arrives at the Iberian Peninsula, the minting of money, which until then was done in Cordoba, is taken to Madinat al-Zahra.³¹ Both the first caliph and his son, al-Hakam II (961-976), will live almost permanently in the new princely city, which on its own was as large as a provincial capital (a hundred of hectares, which at that time corresponded to the area of a city like Toledo). It was built at great expense — a third of the incomes of the state would have been invested for years —, with the most beautiful buildings constructed with ashlars, imported marbles,

³⁰ Ibn Hawqal (1964). *Configuration de la Terre (Kitab surat al-ard). Introduction et traduction, avec index, par Johannes Hendrik Kramers et Gaston Wiet*. Beirut and Paris: Commission internationale pour la traduction des chefs-d’oeuvre, Maisonneuve et Larose, volume 1, pp. 110-112.

³¹ Rafael Frochoso Sánchez (1996). *Las monedas califales: de ceca al-Andalus y Madinat al-Zahra’ (316-403 H., 928-1013 J. C.)*. Cordoba: Publicaciones de la Consejería de Cultura de la Junta de Andalucía, Obra Social y Cultural Cajasur, p. 15.

columns and artistic objects brought from different Mediterranean regions.³² Archaeologists have brought to light this immense location, showing its structure and revealed its wealth and restyling. A few kilometers away from Cordoba, this is another element that shows the splendor of the Caliphate.

The Cordoba-Madinat al-Zahra ensemble is completed and enlarged during the 80s of the same century by means of a second palatine city, built this time to the West of Cordoba by the great Amirid *hayib* al-Mansur during the period in which he rose to power and ruled the Cordoba Caliphate in an almost dictatorial way, a power he extended to the present Morocco; at the end of the 10th century, the said ensemble was an immense conurbation which extended along the right bank of the Guadalquivir river for nearly 15 kilometers. Thanks to the digs that have been carried out in the areas located between the ancient city and the palatine city of Madinat al-Zahra, remains of constructions have been found that support the idea that the urban fabric was also dense in the gap between the main cores that structured this ensemble. All this invites us to consider that the Umayyad capital was at that time comparable to the other two large caliphal conurbations: the Fatimid Cairo and the Abbasid Baghdad. It was during this last stage of growth of the caliphal Cordoba, undoubtedly to meet the increasing demographic needs, when two new enlargements of the great mosque were built: that of al-Hakam II, spattered with notable ornamentation (domes in front of the *mihrab*, tiles inspired by Byzantine art, new kinds of arches), and that of al-Mansur, more sober and consistent with the first phases of the mosque. All in all, the dimensions of the prayer hall were more than duplicated. It could be said that the enlargement carried out by al-Mansur, which adds eight lateral naves along the whole prayer hall to the eleven that already existed, responded particularly to the increase of the army's permanent forces due to the recruitment of *saqaliba* (European slaves, «Slavs» at first) and Berbers, mainly concentrated in the capital and its vicinity; but also that it was necessary to take into account the size of a metropolis which had become the political, economic and cultural centre of an empire that around the year 1000 extended from the Ebro Valley to the limit of the Sahara.³³

³² Manuel Gómez-Moreno (1951). *Ars Hispaniae: historia universal del arte hispánico. El arte árabe español hasta los almohades. Arte mozárabe*. Madrid: Plus Ultra, volume 3; or, more briefly, Évariste Lévi-Provençal (1999). *Histoire de l'Espagne musulmane: le califat umayyade de Cordoue (912-1031)*. Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, volume II, pp. 138-139, already allowed to catch a glimpse of the luxury displayed in Madinat al-Zahra. Many full color publications have spread in the last twenty years images concerning the architecture and objects which show this princely luxury, such as the two works published by *El Legado Andalusi* on the occasion of the exhibition of Madinat al-Zahra, from the 3rd of May to the 30th of September 2001, in María Jesús Viguera Molins and Concepción Castillo Castillo (coordinators). *El esplendor de los omeyas cordobeses: la civilización musulmana de Europa occidental. Exposición en Madinat al-Zahra, 3 de mayo a 30 de septiembre de 2001: estudios. Op. Cit.*

³³ The best synthesis on the Umayyad metropolis, focused on its peak moment, is that of Manuel Acíen Almansa and Antonio Vallejo Triano (2000). Cordoue, in Jean Claude Garcin (dir). *Grandes villes méditerranéennes du monde musulman médiéval*. Roma: École Française de Rome, pp. 117-134. The idea of an Umayyad «empire» which extended from the Sahara to the Pyrenees can undoubtedly be questioned, but it can anyhow be supported by certain «tangible» facts such as the minting of golden coins in the name of the Cordoba caliphs in the presaharan city of Sidjilmassa.

It is almost impossible to determine how many inhabitants Cordoba could have at that moment. Various figures have been suggested which range from a thousand to a million, and we should not depart from these two extremes.³⁴ We do not know if the immensity of the Umayyad capital, maybe excessive for the supply possibilities of that moment, contributed to the weakening that would occur later on, in comparison to Baghdad at the time of the decline of the Abbasid Caliphate. We can only confirm that its peak was suddenly interrupted as a result of the deep crisis which affected the Caliphate since the «Cordoba revolution» of the year 1009, apparently provoked by the incapacity to govern of the second son of al-Mansur, 'Abd al-Rahman «Sanchuelo»; he ascended to power in 1007, undoubtedly due to the various internal tensions which affected the regime. The following two decades will be characterized by the rivalry between the different political-military factions which aspired to take control of Cordoba, a correlative weakening of central power and the appearance of multiple local powers which progressively shaped the new political geography of al-Andalus: the fifteen years of the «Taifa kingdoms» already created when the Cordoba Caliphate disappears completely in 1031. The power established in Cordoba itself corresponds exactly with the socio-historical reality of a down-at-heel capital, as the urban oligarchy decided to entrust power to one of the families of the «state aristocracy» constituted by the group of the *mawali* Umayyads: the *banu* Yahwar; power does not extend anymore beyond the city and its immediate vicinity, as other local powers independent from Cordoba appear everywhere, in Seville, Granada and other secondary cities of Andalucía such as Morón or Carmona.

In contrast to the splendor the city had acquired in the 10th century, the political history of Cordoba during the Taifa Kingdoms of the 11th century is particularly dull. The short dynasty of the *banu* Yahwar (1031-1070) is formed by three rulers who illustrate very well the thesis of Ibn Jaldún about the decline of the princely powers. The first of them, Abu l-Hazm Yahwar, was recognized by the oligarchs from Cordoba when the Caliphate disappeared as a sort of *primus inter pares* responsible for taking care of the city issues. He is presented solely as the most eminent member of the vizier's council and he avoids adopting any nickname for his kingdom (*laqab*), trying not to confer a monarchical aspect to his power. His son, Abu l-Walid Muhammad, who succeeded him in 1043, imitated his caution. He merely adopted the modest *laqab* of al-Rashidm («the one who shows the good

³⁴ We could establish as a reasonable number the figure of 270,000 inhabitants suggested by Jesús Zanón (1989) in his small book *Topografía de Córdoba almohade a través de las fuentes árabes*. Madrid: CSIC, Instituto de Filología, p. 18, taking into account that the only reason for this choice is its «moderate» feature. Manuel Acíen Almansa and Antonio Vallejo Triano, in the work quoted in the previous footnote, recall that in a census ordered by al-Mansur the total figure would have been established between 200,000 and 300,000 houses (there are differences between the sources) belonging to the *khassa* ('common people') and the 'amma ('aristocracy'), and they would be inclined towards the higher hypothesis, in the light of the said figures and certain archaeological evidences which indicate a quite dense urban fabric (pp. 121-122).

path»). But after him, his son ‘Abd al-Malik, who succeeded him in 1063, after having destabilized with his maneuvers the state of Cordoba when his father was still alive, breaks up with this tradition of governmental modesty by accumulating ostentatious caliphal-style *laqabs* (such as that of *al-Mansur bi-Llah*, «the one to whom God gives victory»), in the same way that other *taifa* sovereigns did although with more logic, since they had more power and less unpopularity. The power of the third Yahwaride lacks strength. He is unpopular, hardly any money is minted in Cordoba and the weakness of his military forces encouraged his neighbors, the Toledo and Cordoba Emirs, of a different rank, to pursue the annexation to his states of such a historically prestigious city. In 1070, the situation finally comes to an end in favor of the Abbaid Kingdom of Seville, which was unifying under its aegis the majority of the Southern al-Andalus, from the Algarve to Murcia.

Undoubtedly, the caliphal metropolis of the 10th century suffered from many serious political-military conflicts during the second decade of the 11th century. The two princely cities of Madinat al-Zahra and Madinat al-Zahira were looted and devastated. We know the name of several personalities who lost their lives in those lootings carried out by rival factions, briefly victorious: this was the case of the famous author of the first great bi-bibliographic dictionary of Andalusí wise men, Ibn al-Faradi, who was killed by the Berbers in favor of the caliphal power when the capital was plundered in April 1013. There are many references concerning political-administrative and intellectual elites who became dispersed throughout the provinces due to these riots. This was the case of many civil servants *saqaliba* or of the family of the «dictator» al-Mansur himself, who we find again later on in power in the Sharq (eastern region) of Valencia, as well as many other influential personalities of cultural Andalusí life. The author of *El collar de la paloma* [*The Ring of the Dove*], the great Ibn Hazm, of whom it is always said he is «from Cordoba» because it was where he was born and where he began his studies, left the city when he was eighteen, after the looting of the Berbers and he would only come back occasionally between his long stays in the Eastern and Western regions. His case is quite interesting from the point of view of the disappearance of a part of the old caliphal conurbation: we know for sure that, having spent his childhood as the son of the vizier in a *munya* called *de al-Mughira*, located in the neighborhood created around the Amirid residence of Madinat al-Zahira, and subsequently in another aristocratic residence situated in *balat* Mughith, both houses were destroyed by the riots, and when later on he lived for a while in the city, he had to stay in the house of one of his family’s relatives, maybe inside the old part of the city.³⁵

We can only suggest hypotheses regarding the reduction of probably two thirds of the urban space of Cordoba between the 10th and 11th century. Antonio Almagro, who has tried to make such hypotheses, suggests for the second period a surface of 185 hectares

³⁵ See the article of José Miguel Puerta Vilchez (2004) dedicated to Ibn Hazm in *Biblioteca de al-Andalus: de Ibn al-Dabbag a Ibn Kurz*, published by Jorge Lirola and José Miguel Puerta Vilchez himself. *Op.Cit.*, volume 3, pp. 392-443 (pp. 392-395).

and a population of 65,000 inhabitants, undoubtedly more concentrated than that of the previous century, when a four or five times larger population had spread throughout an immense area of 2,500 hectares.³⁶ This figure of some tens of thousands of inhabitants, which will still be acceptable during the following century, refers however to a still important urban reality, although it did not place the city in the very first rank of Andalusí capitals. Seville, for instance, inside its 12th century precincts, is undoubtedly much more vast and populated, with almost 300 hectares and around 100,000 inhabitants. In this same area, a great Western city would not have more than 50,000 inhabitants. The prestige of Cordoba had such an influence that in the 11th and 12th century it still maintains its predominant cultural role. The famous phrase of Averroes, *cadi* of the city from 1180 to 1190,³⁷ said that if a musician died in Cordoba, his instruments would be taken to Seville, while if a wise man died in the latter city, his books would be taken to Cordoba. However, we state that since the 11th century a great poet such as Ibn Zaydun began his life in 1003 in Cordoba, where he lived his first forty years, but his last twenty years were spent in Seville, where he dies in 1071.³⁸

At the end of the 11th century the dispossession of the *taifas*' sovereigns takes place by Yusuf b. Tashfin, the powerful leader of the Almoravid movement that had just imposed in Morocco, from its new capital Marrakech, the authority of a regime aimed at reforming Islam. The advance of the «Reconquista» of al-Andalus begun by the Christian kings (the taking of Toledo in 1085) is interrupted. The destiny of Valencia, temporarily occupied by el Cid (1087-1099) finally falls to the Almoravids, who reconquer it in 1102. From the end of the 11th century to the beginning of the 13th century, al-Andalus is successively linked to two large «African» empires: that of the Almoravids and, in the middle of the 12th century, that of the Almohads, who overthrew the first. All this provokes vicissitudes in Cordoba, such as a revolt in the city in 1121, under the Almoravid power, as well as the creation of an autonomous power headed by the *cadi* of the city coinciding with the crisis of the Almoravid regime (in the years 1145-1146, when the so called *second Kingdoms of Taifas* were established). Obviously, it is not our intention here to narrate history in detail when the Christian *Reconquista* reached Cordoba in 1236. This happened after the fall of the Almohad regime in al-Andalus (1228), during a new period of political fragmentation logically called *third Kingdoms of Taifas*. However, it is interesting to point out that, on the contrary to what happened in other cities (mainly Murcia, Valencia, Granada and Seville), Cordoba did not play a prominent political role and no independent political power was established in the city.

³⁶ Antonio Almagro (1987). «Planimetría de las ciudades hispanomusulmanas», *Al-Qantara*, VIII, p. 427.

³⁷ See the article about Ibn Rushd written by several authors in the volume 4 of the book of Jorge Lirola Delgado (2006). *Biblioteca de al-Andalus: de Ibn al-Labbana a Ibn al-Rayuli*. Almería: Fundación Ibn Tufayl de Estudios Árabes, p. 524.

³⁸ See the review of Jaime Sánchez Ratia focused on Ibn Zaydun in the volume 6 of Jorge Lirola Delgado (2009). *Biblioteca de al-Andalus: de Ibn al-Yabbab a Nubdat al-Asr*. Op. Cit., pp. 287-304.

The demographic situation of Cordoba during the whole period of the Berber-Andalusi empires is not easier to determine than in previous eras. The old capital of the Umayyad caliphs is still, undeniably, a great city of provinces. It still maintains an important intellectual activity. To confirm the latter it is sufficient to mention the name of the greatest Islam philosopher already quoted, Averroes, who was born and lived the most part of his life in Cordoba. However, the city still had to suffer more political-military riots that would stir up that era, particularly the wars between the Almohads and the independent Emir of Murcia, Ibn Mardanish, which took place in the region at the end of the 50s of the 12th century. We ignore what an Almohad secretary and chronicler, Ibn Sahib al-Sala, actually means when he states that in September 1162, being in Cordoba at the time of the entrance into the city of two princes of the Almohad dynasty returning from an expedition precisely against the said Emir of Murcia, Ibn Mardanish, the city did not have more than 82 men, since the rest «had left during the rebellion to retire to the countryside. This depopulation and emigration revealed its misery and disgrace; their country was immersed in desolation and they were dressed in rags».³⁹ Undoubtedly, he refers to the *'amma*, the urban aristocracy, but his testimony deserves to be taken into account. What has been said above concerning the lack of «reaction» of the city after the disappearance of the Almohad regime is more in the sense of a really reduced dynamism, which observes events in a passive way. Without being able to provide real statistics, it is confirmed that, while the illustrated and wise people from Cordoba quoted in biographical dictionaries were more numerous in Cordoba than in Seville until the middle of the 11th century, in the Almohad era it was the second city that took the lead.⁴⁰

This lack of dynamism in Cordoba is also revealed in its archaeological remains. While the constructions carried out by the Almohads in Seville are famous (beginning with the Giralda, an ancient minaret of the great mosque built at that time) and in Murcia important remains from the 12th and 13th centuries have been discovered, there are no testimonies of such building activity in Cordoba, which lives off, so to

³⁹ Ibn Sahib al-Sala (1969). *Al-Mam bil-imama: estudio preliminar* [translated by Ambrosio Huici Miranda]. Valencia: Anúbar, p. 49. The figure may seem quite unbelievable, but it is also exactly reproduced by a later author (Ibn al-Abbar). Moreover, in the context of the text, it is quite clear that Ibn Sahib al-Sala refers to the «noble families» who remained in Cordoba, whose chiefs, as it can be imagined, left the city together with their civil servants from Seville — including the author — to welcome the two Almohad princes.

⁴⁰ This is perfectly summarised by an Eastern author such as Yaqt (1179-1229), who says that in his era the splendor of Seville still remains while «Cordoba is in a decline stage, nothing more than a city of the central region [of al-Andalus]», Gamal 'Abd al-Karim (1974). *La España musulmana en la obra de Yaqt (s. XII-XIII): repertorio enciclopédico de ciudades, castillos y lugares de al-Andalus: extracted from the Mu'jam al-buldan (dictionary of the countries)*. Granada: Publicaciones del Seminario de Historia del Islam, Universidad de Granada. This weakening, also cultural, of the city is deduced from the calculation of the number of wise men who lived in the different Andalusi cities in each period; see the tables proposed by Christine Mazzoli-Guintard (1996). *Villes d'al-Andalus. L'Espagne et le Portugal à l'époque musulmane (VIIIe-XVe siècles)*. Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes II, pp. 332-334.

speak, the architectural heritage left since the Umayyad era. It is true that the *qasr* ('palace') or the governor's palace inherited from the Umayyads was enough for the political mediocrity of the city, and that the great mosque, which was still the biggest mosque in use of the Muslim world at the time, was also more than enough for the needs of the congregation. Nonetheless, the city still maintained its symbolic prestige: in 1109 the work of Ghazali, *Revivificación de las ciencias religiosas* [*The Revival of Religious Sciences*] was burnt in front of its western gate because the Andalusí *fuqaha'* did not like it.⁴¹ The Arabian authors who describe Cordoba later on dedicate enthusiastic pages to its splendor. What follows is an example of 'Abd al-Mun'im al-Himyari, a Maghrebian author of the end of the 13th century and beginning of the 14th century, for whom the mosque of Cordoba is:

[...] one of the most beautiful monuments of the world, for its large area and the perfection of its plan, the richness of its adornment and the strength of its construction... There is no comparison in the Muslim world, neither of its ornamentation nor its width and length.⁴²

We can conclude this contribution comparing these favorable lines, not very surprising since they come from an Arab-Muslim author, from which we know of the admiration the Christians professed to the mosque of Cordoba. Juan Carlos Ruiz Souza highlights suggestively this point, which could be perceived from the perspective of history of art and through texts: «The impact that the mosque of Cordoba had during the Middle Ages among the Christian Kingdoms was tremendous», he writes.⁴³ In fact, it is not just a matter of admiration; according to the same author:

The mosque of Cordoba became [...] thus a source of patterns for the *visual culture of the sacred* from the 9th century onwards, although the conquest of the city in 1236 by the troops of Fernando III undoubtedly deepened knowledge and opinion, as it has been made clear by the laudatory texts written by important and crucial personalities of the 13th and 14th

⁴¹ Jacinto Bosch Vilá (1990). *Los almorávides*. Granada: Universidad de Granada, p. 248.

⁴² Évariste Lévi-Provençal (publisher and translator) (1938). *La péninsule Ibérique au Moyen Age d'après le Kitab ar-Rawd al-mi'tar fi habar al-aktar d'Ibn Abd al-Mun'im al-Himyari: texte arabe des notices relatives à l'Espagne, au Portugal et au Sud-Ouest de la France*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, p. 183. In reference to al-Himyari, whose exact identity has been discussed, see the article of Vicente Carlos Navarro Oltra (2012), in *Jorge Lirola Delgado and José Miguel Puerta Vilchez (eds.). Biblioteca de al-Andalus: de al-Abbadiya a Ibn Abyad*. Almería: Fundación Ibn Tufayl de Estudios Árabes, volume 1, pp. 444-451.

⁴³ Juan Carlos Ruiz Souza (2009). La Corona de Castilla y al-Andalus. Préstamos arquitectónicos y grados de asimilación. Espacios, funciones y lenguajes técnico-formales, in *Pierre Toubert and Pierre Moret. Remploi, citation, plagiat. Conduites et pratiques médiévales (Xe-XIIIe siècle)*. Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, p. 240.

centuries of the prestige of Pedro Jiménez de Rada, Alfonso X, don Juan Manuel or the chancellor Pedro López de Ayala.⁴⁴

From this point on there is a process of assimilation of such Muslim models in the development of Mudejar art. The dynamism of the art of Castilla has such magnitude, continues Ruiz Sousa, that occasionally it integrates and adapts these models with even more creativity than the Muslim art from Granada itself, imbued with a higher conservatism.⁴⁵ But this is another stage of the history of the Iberian-Arab culture that is not the responsibility of the mediaeval scholar.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p. 253.

⁴⁵ Ruiz Souza refers in this regard to Almagro Gorbea and Ladero Quesada («This is the reason why we would come back to the approach of Miguel Ángel Ladero Quesada, exposed above, about the assimilation of the Andalusí material heritage and its subsequent development under the creativity of the whole new society which appeared after the conquests of the Christian troops»). *Idem*, pp. 244-245.

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ABSTRACT

Cordoba is one of the «legendary cities» of the area of contact between the Arab-Muslim world and the Christian world. In this article we have tried to show the splendor of the ancient capital of the Umayyads of al-Andalus since they chose it, instead of Seville, as the capital of one of the provinces of the Damascus Caliphate after the Arab conquest of the 8th century until its occupation by the Christians in 1236. In the 9th century, the city, under the Emirate, undergoes a very fast process of growth and orientalization and, in the 10th century, a tremendously brilliant peak during the Caliphate. Together with the two princely cities built in the vicinity, around the year 1000 it is one of the largest conurbations of the Mediterranean world. The fall of the Caliphate at the beginning of the 11th century puts an end to its political predominance. Living on its previous glory and in spite of its demographic decrease, it still maintains a certain cultural splendor during the 11th and 12th centuries, until it is finally substituted by Seville. However, its incomparable great mosque and the remains of the nearby caliphal city of Madinat al-Zahra still witness this glorious legacy.

KEYWORDS

Qurtuba, Cordoba, al-Andalus, history.