

Chapter 2

The Stratigraphy of Forgetting: The Great Mosque of Cordoba and Its Contested Legacy

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As with any major monument that figures prominently in architectural history, the Great Mosque of Cordoba has a classic architectural “story” that explains it. This story attracts little attention in the USA, where the medieval past is of little interest because our national narrative does not depend on it. But in Europe, where a recent exhibition catalogue on Islamic art concluded with the question, “Que representa hoy al-Andalus para nosotros?” (“What does al-Andalus represent for us today?”) (Cheddadi 2000:270), medieval history plays a powerful role in modern heritage politics. Especially in Spain, the interpretation of the medieval Iberian past, with its intertwining threads of Christian, Muslim, and Jewish culture, is a deeply political act.

It serves as a mirror for the present and provides the justification for either regarding Spain as a modern participant in a diverse global world or, conversely, maintaining a self-contained essential Spain, defined as a nation as well as a people.

The Great Mosque of Cordoba is one of the most visited and admired Spanish monuments. It is an impressive building that marks an important moment in the history of Islamic architecture and, more specifically, Iberian Islamic architecture. It was built beginning in 786 by the first Hispano-Umayyad emir, °Abd al-Rahman I, called al-Dakhil (“the émigré”), who came to Spain (called al-Andalus) from Damascus, from where he had fled following the massacre of the rest of the members of his family in a coup d’état. This upheaval resulted in the end of the Umayyad dynasty of Syria (661–750), replaced by a new dynasty, the Abbasids, who ruled from their capital, Baghdad, until 1258. After a long journey across northern Africa, where °Abd al-Rahman I had taken refuge with his mother’s people, the surviving young prince resettled in Cordoba, where he founded the new Hispano-Umayyad line (756–1031), a small elite group of Arab Muslims ruling over a majority Christian population (on the genealogy of this dynasty, see Ruggles 2004).

This oft-repeated political and dynastic narrative—largely factual, although with an admixture of conjecture and legend—has a parallel architectural narrative [Note 1]. According to that, under the Abbasids Islamic architecture shifted its focus

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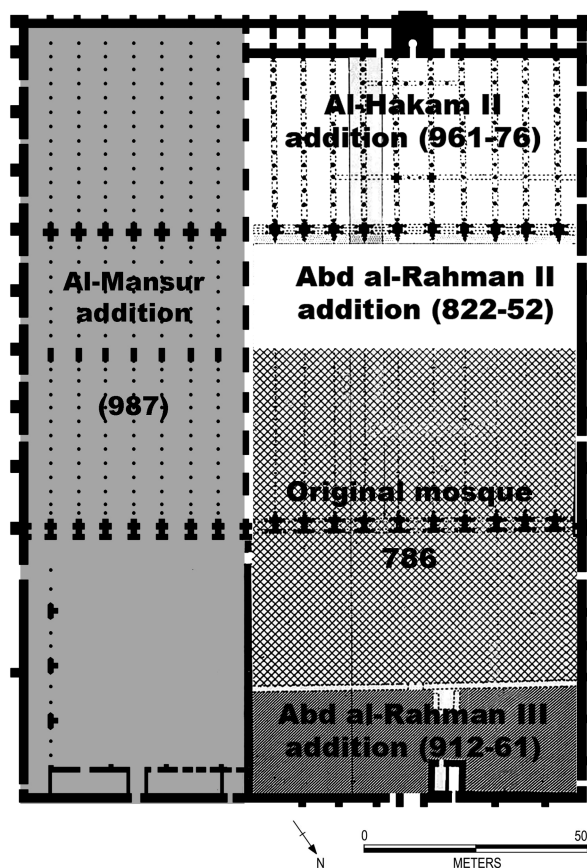
Fig. 2.1 Cathedral–Mosque of Cordoba, interior of original prayer hall. (Photo: D. Fairchild Ruggles)



from the Mediterranean to look eastward toward Mesopotamia, becoming more hierarchical and gaining an unprecedented grandeur of scale and luxury; meanwhile remote Spain carried forward the more Mediterranean Damascus style, with its clear debt to the Roman and Byzantine pasts.

The Mosque of Cordoba itself shows clear debts to Roman and Byzantine architectural traditions. It is a great basilica whose roof is supported by large marble columns with bases and carved capitals that reflect and reinterpret a classical vocabulary (Fig. 2.1) [Note 2]. While some of these were wrought new for the sanctuary, many others were spolia taken from ruined Roman and Visigothic sites in Cordoba and its surrounding areas. The mosque's roof rises high due to its structure of tiered arches, each arch composed of alternating voussoirs of red brick and white stone, an elegant yet durable configuration for which there is a direct model in the Roman aqueduct built to serve Merida in the first century CE. It also echoes the tiered arcaded construction of the Great Mosque of Damascus (finished 714–715), the capital city of the Syrian Umayyads. After the Cordoba Mosque's foundation in the late eighth century, the mosque was expanded various times in the ninth and tenth centuries, receiving a tall minaret in one such expansion and arcades around the inner face of the courtyard in another (Fig. 2.2). Its original *qibla* wall (the wall marked as being nearest to Mecca and thus guiding the orientation of prayer) was

Fig. 2.2 Cathedral–Mosque of Cordoba, plan of stages from 786 to 1010. (Plan: D. Fairchild Ruggles)



pierced and the *qibla* moved twice toward the southern extension. In the last of those southern additions, the mosque received its most famous architectural element: the beautiful mosaic *mihrab* (niche indicating the direction of Mecca), made in 965 by a Byzantine master artist sent from the Byzantine court as a gesture of diplomatic goodwill (Fig. 2.3). He brought not only his artisanal knowledge to the court of Cordoba (where such mosaic was otherwise unknown) but also the blue and gold glass tesserae with which to make the images of leafy vegetation and inscriptions that enframe the niche and the “voussoirs” (fake because they are referential rather than structural).

In 1236 Cordoba was conquered by Ferdinand III of Castile and the mosque was converted into a church to serve the Christian population. Despite the change in worship, there were few changes to the actual fabric of the building at that time. Although it is rarely written about—lacking the drama of co-option and destruction—this is perhaps the most interesting chapter in the building’s history, revealing the degree to which people of different faiths in Cordoba (and elsewhere



Fig. 2.3 Cathedral–Mosque of Cordoba, mihrab. (Photo: D. Fairchild Ruggles)

in al-Andalus) felt comfortable in each other's religious spaces. The Mosque of Cordoba had enormous symbolic status not only as a mosque representing the Muslim faith but also as the historic progenitor of all other mosques in al-Andalus. Yet, despite the clear presence of Arabic inscriptions indicating Quranic verses and the dazzling mihrab that pointed to the conceptual presence of Mecca as clearly as any arrow, the Christians did not hasten to demolish it. Instead, they used it as a church, adding chapels and burial spaces, and in the thirteenth century, a mudejar-style pantheon for Castilian royalty. Jerrilynn Dodds (1992:24) comments, "The Christians who conquered Córdoba understood that there was much more power to be gained from appropriating this extraordinary metaphor of their conquest than from destroying it." In this way, most of its Islamic form and decoration was preserved for the next 300 years.

Despite the possibility for such insight into interfaith relations, the architectural story loses its thread here because for the next 250 years cities such as Seville and Granada far outshone Cordoba. In the years following 1492, Spain officially purged itself of its Muslims and Jews, although in actuality there were many people who stayed behind, converts to Christianity but still steeped in Andalusian Islamic culture. But in the sixteenth century, the building suffered a dramatic change. In 1523 the architects of Charles V—the first of the Hapsburg kings in Spain—scooped out the center of the venerable mosque and inserted a gothic cathedral choir so



Fig. 2.4 Cathedral–Mosque of Cordoba, exterior view. (Photo: D. Fairchild Ruggles)

that the mosque became the frame for the new cathedral (Fig. 2.4). Ironically, this act of destruction—which Charles himself purportedly perceived to be a terrible mistake—was probably the reason why this mosque still stands, while those of Toledo, Granada, Seville, and other cities were demolished and replaced entirely by huge churches (on the preservation and restoration of the Cordoba Mosque, see Edwards 2001).

This is how the story is told: a straightforward narrative of architectural foundation, conversion, preservation, and destruction. However, as I wrote at the outset, the medieval past is never neutral in Spain, and so too with the Mosque of Cordoba. That building, as the single most powerful emblem of Islam in Iberia, has come to represent much more than a mere development in architectural history. As the first and only surviving Spanish congregational mosque, it “stands in” for a lost, or simply repressed, Hispano-Islamic identity. This identity is claimed both by Spanish citizens and by others whose claim, though distant, is nonetheless aggressively—sometimes violently—asserted. Indeed, in a publicly released video, Osama bin Laden’s second-in-command, Ayman al-Zawahri, called for a new reconquest of al-Andalus: “O our Muslim nation in the Maghreb . . . restoring al-Andalus [is impossible] without first cleansing the Muslim Maghreb of the children of France and Spain, who have come back again after your fathers and grandfathers sacrificed their blood cheaply in the path of God to expel them” (reported by Noueihed 2007).

In the modern West, where Islam is the new Soviet Union, and where al-Andalus figures prominently in the rhetoric and terrorist agenda of al-Qaeda, the mosque is a site of conflict between two world views. One sees the mosque as a

historic monument, a relic of a firmly demarcated past that belongs to Spain, now safely converted to Christian use. This group continues to enjoy the celebration of daily mass in the church and welcomes the visits of thousands of daily tourists to Cordoba's major attraction. The other group sees the mosque as a symbol with powerful political currency. For them it represents a lost period of Islamic ascendancy, and Islam itself provides a tool to resist the Catholic Church and to recover a suppressed Muslim identity. In Spain, despite increasing secularism, the Church remains powerful: Spain is nominally 94% Catholic (CIA 2009), and the government still pays the salaries of the church clergy (Simons 2004). However, after the death of Franco in 1975, a small number of Spaniards chose to convert to Islam for motivations that varied from an embrace of the faith, to a desire to reclaim a lost heritage, to a rejection of Catholicism's associations with the repressive Franco regime. Therefore, depending on one's perspective, the Cathedral–Mosque is emblematic of medieval Iberian history (a closed chapter) or a site for prayer and resurgent Muslim identity. A point of clarification: I do not equate these attitudes toward Islam with either al-Qaeda extremism or ultra-conservative Spanish nationalism; nonetheless, those extremes do form part of the *discourse* within which the current claims to the monument are made.

Archaeology has recently begun to play an important role in this argument because under the Cathedral–Mosque there are the remains of a much older building, the Visigothic church of San Vicente, dating to 590. Historical sources relate that in the eighth century, the burgeoning Muslim community in Cordoba initially rented space in the church and then purchased the site from the Christian community, ultimately demolishing the old structure in 786 to make way for a new mosque with its prayer hall of arcades on columns (al-Razi, transmitted by al-Maqqari 1967, I: 368, and II: 7–11; Gayangos 1840–1843, I: 217–218; also Ibn ʿIdhari 1948–1951, II: 244, 378; Ocaña Jiménez 1942). Because the story reveals the Muslims' fair treatment of the Christian community, and because the same kind of story was reported with regard to the acquisition of the Church of St. John in Damascus in the late seventh century and its reconstruction as a congregational mosque, a few modern scholars have asserted that there was no Visigothic church where the Cathedral–Mosque now stands (Terrasse 1932: 59, note 2) [Note 3]. They regard the story of a precedent church as a *topos* with no factual basis. However, archaeological excavations carried out in the 1920s by Ricardo Velázquez Bosco and in 1931–1936 by Félix Hernández Giménez (Hernández Giménez 1975) and expanded in recent years under the direction of Pedro Marfíl (Marfíl n.d.) unequivocally confirm the presence of a much older and smaller church under the present site of the Cathedral–Mosque.

Spanish scholars have known this for years. But as the Visigothic remains lay buried and out of sight, no one paid much attention to them until a few years ago when Muslims began asking for the right to pray in the Cathedral–Mosque. In 2004 the Islamic Council (*Junta Islámica*) formally petitioned Pope John Paul to allow Muslim prayer in the Great Mosque. Turned down, they petitioned again in 2006. In December of that year, Mansur Escudero, the Islamic Council's president, insisted publicly on the right to pray in the mosque and called upon Muslims to join him, but

the response from the Bishops was a categorical denial of the right to do so (reported in Nash 2007). On December 27, 2006, the Bishop of Cordoba reiterated that the Catholic Church had “authentic legal title” and “incontestable historic title” to the Cathedral (Asenjo 2006). Although the Islamic Council has repeatedly stated that its objective is neither repossession of the mosque nor the recovery of “a nostalgic Al Andalus” (reported by Fuchs 2006), the request was perceived in precisely those terms.

For Muslims, the struggle is not centered on the availability of places to pray, because, although Spain has an insufficient number of mosques to accommodate its growing Muslim population (Burdett 2008), Cordoba has had its own prayer hall and Islamic center for more than a decade. Handsome modern mosques have been built elsewhere in Spain (e.g., Granada and Marbella), although their construction has sometimes sparked resistance and hate acts (as occurred in Seville). Likewise for non-Muslims, the precise cause for alarm is not the occasional diversity of individual religious practice, since in the past high ranking, visiting Muslim dignitaries *have* been allowed to pray in the Mosque of Cordoba. It is not individual worship that provokes worry, so much as the public performance of *difference* realized by large congregations bowing and prostrating in prayer. At stake is the political power of the growing Muslim community that wishes recognition that they have a legitimate claim to this very historic monument. The justification for their request is implicitly grounded on the Cathedral’s *prior* identity as a mosque.

However, archaeologists and historians knew that the premise of priority or originality was flawed, because if the Christian cathedral’s identity could be challenged by the prior presence of a mosque, then the mosque’s identity could be challenged by the even earlier existence of the Church of San Vicente. To make this very point, in January 2005 a selection of the Visigothic and Roman materials found on the site were brought out of storage and placed on display. These include carved column capitals, figural sculpture, fragments of altars, a font with Visigothic geometrical ornament, and especially crosses (Fig. 2.5). The objects are supplemented by photographs showing the excavations of the 1930s and present a floor plan showing the traces of the Visigothic church’s aisles and apses revealed through archaeology (Fig. 2.6). Finally, an area of the mosque floor that had been excavated also has been left open, revealing pebble mosaic (believed to pertain to an outbuilding of the Visigothic cathedral) at a depth of approximately 3 m. In short, the curators of the Cathedral–Mosque created the Museo de San Vicente *inside* the Cathedral–Mosque.

It is very well done from a museological perspective with dramatic lighting and adequately explanatory labels. But the reason why this collection of Roman and Visigothic materials has been brought out now, instead of 75 years ago, is not a newly kindled interest in Visigothic archaeology (which—*pace* my early-medievalist colleagues—is no more popular in Spain than it is in the USA) but rather a deployment of that archaeology against growing Muslim claims on the building as a site of prayer and identity. Although the Cathedral–Mosque is protected by the Spanish government under the 1985 Spanish Historic Heritage Law No. 16 and



Fig. 2.5 Museo de San Vicente, display of Visigothic pieces. (Photo: D. Fairchild Ruggles)

by UNESCO, it is owned by the Catholic Church and is still an active Christian sanctuary. Its historical study is overseen by Manuel Nieto Cumplido, a canon-priest and the cathedral archivist, and its archaeologist is Pedro Marfil. Both are capable scholars, deeply interested in the complex history of the Cathedral–Mosque, who would be affronted by the suggestion that they may have used historical evidence to influence contemporary politics. Indeed, the display that complements the Museo de San Vicente is an indication of their thorough and even-handed scholarship: in another part of the prayer hall is an equally well-presented exhibition of recovered fragments from the Islamic period and a collection of the plaster impressions taken of the mason's signatures scratched on the columns and capitals of the former mosque (Fig. 2.7). These are a remarkable testament to the humanity of the laborer, a real human presence. Some of the names are written capably (and can be seen here in several of the impressions), while others—simple abstract symbols—reveal the writer's illiteracy. Moreover, although Muslim names predominate, there are a few ostensibly Christian names, reflecting the mixing of communities that we know characterized Cordoba in the period when the mosque was built.

Another museological project has been to inscribe in stone the location where the former minaret once stood in the present courtyard (Fig. 2.8). This minaret was demolished in the tenth century and replaced by a larger tower to the north when the mosque was enlarged during the reign of ^cAbd al-Rahman III. The indication of its original location is not intrusive and in fact is missed by most visitors. But for the

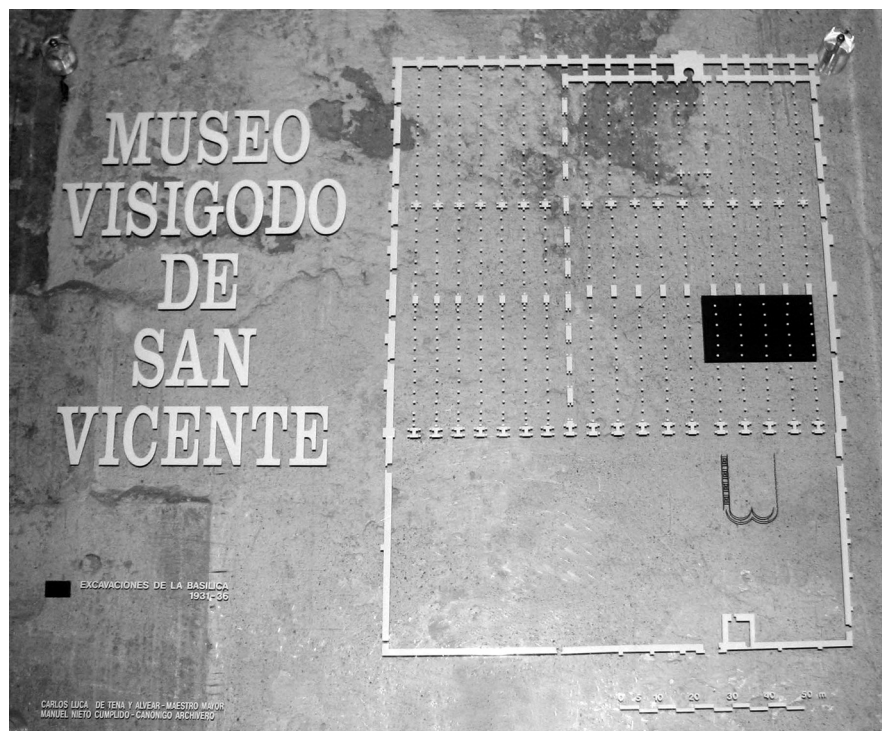


Fig. 2.6 Museo de San Vicente, plan of mosque indicating the excavated apses of the underlying Visigothic church. (Photo: D. Fairchild Ruggles)

historically aware, it gives tangible presence to the vanished older mosque without interrupting the space of the complex as it exists today.

If asked, the curators would surely insist that their goal is to study and display *all* aspects of the building's complex history. But despite their broadminded intentions, the *reception* to their work has focused more narrowly on the issue of identity. When the new Museo de San Vicente opened in January 2005, it was popularly regarded in a very political light. Reporting on the new exhibition, the newspaper *Córdoba* referred to the "true Christian historical origins of the Mosque-Cathedral" and crowed, "Henceforth, one cannot explain the Arab Mosque without mentioning its historical Christian origins" (Recio Mateo 2005). Even at official levels, archaeology has been used to justify claims. The aforementioned Bishop's directive of December 27, 2007 specifically mentions Hernández's 1930s excavations in justifying the legitimacy of the Church's possession of the building. Occupying a space somewhere between the popular and the official, a plaque at the entrance to the Cathedral–Mosque exaggerates the role of the Church as steward: "It is the Church, through its Cathedral Chapter, that has made it possible to keep the former mosque of the Western Caliphate, the oldest cathedral in Spain, and a World Heritage Site, from becoming a heap of ruins. In fact this has always been one of the missions of

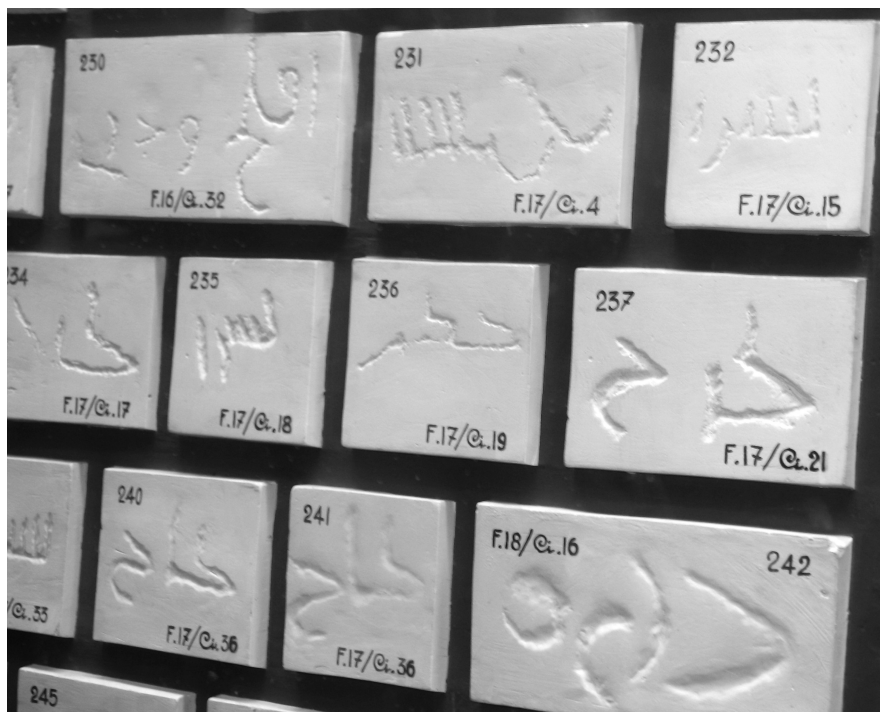


Fig. 2.7 Masons' signatures, on display in the Museo de San Vicente. (Photo credit: D. Fairchild Ruggles)

the Church; to safeguard and inspire culture and art. . ." This theme is carried further in the brochure, which is the only other historical information provided to visitors on site. Offered in multiple languages, it states,

THE ORIGINS

Beneath every cathedral is always a bed of hidden cathedrals. In the case of Córdoba, tradition traces back to its Visigoth origins. This fact is confirmed by archaeological excavations, whose remains can be found at the Museum of San Vicente (Saint Vincent) and in the pits where the remains of mosaics from the ancient Christian temple can be observed on site.

It is a historical fact that the basilica of San Vicente was expropriated and destroyed in order to build what would later be the Mosque, a reality that questions the theme of tolerance that was supposedly cultivated in the Córdoba of the moment. This was the main church of the city, a martyr [sic] basilica from the 6th Century, that would be remembered and venerated by Christians, centuries after its destruction.

There are myriad social and economic issues that make Islam and the prospect of Muslim repossession of the Cathedral–Mosque such a fraught issue. Suffice it to say that Spain is emerging from a period of phenomenal economic growth. As a result, since the death of Franco in 1975, and especially since Spain's entry into the European Union in 1986, it has received increasing numbers of immigrants and is becoming visibly diversified. Out of a population of 42 million, an estimated



Fig. 2.8 Cathedral–Mosque of Cordoba, courtyard with old (missing) minaret indicated in stone pavement. (Photo credit: D. Fairchild Ruggles)

4.8 million are immigrants—mostly from Romania, South America, and Morocco—clinging to the bottom of the economic ladder and hoping for upward mobility (Red Cross 2006). Of the latter, most arrive illegally, and the voyage by boat is dangerous and sometimes deadly. In modern Spain there are an estimated one million Muslims, mostly immigrants, but also a small number of natives who converted to Islam when the end of Franco’s regime allowed new opportunity for religious freedom.

The controversy over the Cathedral–Mosque occurs amidst these palpable changes. Indeed, I think the controversy there is not really about prayer at all, because in actual practice, anyone can utter a quiet prayer in the Cathedral, communing with whatever version of God their religion teaches them to worship. But Muslim prayer, which demands oriented standing, bowing, and prostration, announces its difference visibly and actively. It resists assimilation to any order other than Islam. Therefore, the struggle in the Cathedral–Mosque is a struggle to cope with the changing demographics of Spanish society, to cope with difference, and specifically, with Islam. That the contest is not really between Visigoths and medieval Muslims, but between modern nations and between modern worldviews, is revealed by a brief comparison with another medieval building in Spain.

The so-called Church of El Tránsito in Toledo was built as a Jewish synagogue in the fourteenth century (Fig. 2.9). The patron was Samuel Halevi Abulafia, the powerful treasurer to Pedro I (called “Pedro the Cruel”), who added the synagogue to his



Fig. 2.9 Church-Synagogue “El Tránsito.” (Photo credit: D. Fairchild Ruggles)

own residence in the Jewish quarter of Toledo in 1360. In 1492, with the expulsion of the Jews, the building was given by the Catholic Monarchs, Isabel and Ferdinand, to the Order of Calatrava, who converted it to use as a church, called the Church of San Benito. It later gained the popular name of El Tránsito (The Assumption of Mary). It remained as a church until the early nineteenth century when it served variously as army barracks and as a monastery, until in 1877 it was declared a national monument. It remained in private hands, however, until 1970 when it was acquired by the Spanish government and made into the National Museum of Judeo-Spanish Art.

The synagogue served its intended Jewish community for less than 150 years, whereas it was used as a church for more than 300 years. But in this monument, the prior claim of Jews (exiled and suppressed in 1492 along with the Muslims) and of Jewish heritage has been celebrated by peeling away the later Christian phases of the building and restoring it to its original state as a temple. The stucco ornament of the upper walls has been lovingly restored, and inscriptions written in both Hebrew and Arabic are visible as well as the shield of Castile, in deference to Peter, Samuel’s protector (Dodds 1992b). So as not to interrupt the majestic space of the main hall, the former women’s gallery, occupying a balcony on the north wall overlooking the hall below, has been turned into a museum with wall cases explaining aspects of Iberian Jewish life and religious practice. The issue of priority is firmly handled by locating the building’s original moment in the era of Samuel Halevi Abulafia. There

is no mention of Roman or Visigothic remains, which lie under nearly everything in Toledo, the former Visigothic capital.

What is it that permits one church to be materially restored to its earlier state as a synagogue, but prevents another (converted from a mosque) from being similarly treated? The archaeological display in the Mosque–Cathedral of Cordoba wishes to answer that question by its insistence on an “original” Christian building. But the concept of originality is a convenient invention because, whether we think of this synagogue in Toledo as original, or in Cordoba whether we regard as original the mosque or the Visigothic church, it is always a matter of selecting a layer in the history of the built environment that we wish to remember. But the material presence of the objects on display in the Cordoba Cathedral–Mosque distracts us from this act of human selection and instead attempts to persuade us of a fundamental “underlying” archaeological and historical truth. The stratigraphy of Visigothic, Islamic, and Christian traces in the building provide a material record of the rich layering of society, layers that rest on ostensibly Western foundations.

Of course the very concept of “Western” is a construction motivated by cultural and political investments. While Spain celebrates its 800 years of Islamic history as a unique feature that enriches its culture, it also sees itself as a Western country, which requires a rejection of Muslim identity. It claims the Western rubric not simply as a post-reconquest phenomenon but in the sense of *originally* Western, which demands the operation of peeling back the layers of Muslim and mosque to reveal that pure, “original” layer of Christian and church. The display of gleaming, white Visigothic fragments in the Cathedral–Mosque of Cordoba accomplishes this (although it conveniently forgets that the sect of early Christianity practiced by the Visigoths was later suppressed by the Catholic Church of Rome). The museum display of tangible archaeological artifacts is essential for this purpose because it offers a factual underpinning to something that is really a political assertion [Note 4].

With this, let us turn from facts and artifacts back to narratives and storytelling, which is where we began. There is currently a fad for retelling the story of Islamic Spain. For example, the video *Cities of Light: The Rise and Fall of Islamic Spain* (Unity Productions Foundation and Gardner Films 2007) was recently aired in the USA and several European countries (I was interviewed on camera for this). The best known books in English are probably Maria Menocal’s vivid *The Ornament of the World* (2002) and David Levering Lewis’s less scholarly *God’s Crucible* (2008), and the bookstores in Spain are likewise full of books and historical novels on these subjects. Moreover, the taste for “Moorish” themes extends even beyond popular imagery to cuisine and other forms of exotic experience: a recent phenomenon is the emergence of Moroccan-style tea houses and “Moorish baths,” such as in Cordoba and Granada. These are basically spas that offer a steam soak and massage, but in an evocative Andalusian setting of colored *zellij* tile and cusped arches, in the style of the Alhambra. In our taste for these, we look wistfully back to Islamic Spain as a time when everyone lived together happily: there was no Israel/Palestine struggle for cleavage or co-existence, no bombs strapped to the chests of young Muslim martyrs, no Guantánamo demonstrating the lie of American civil liberties, no Halliburton fattening the bank accounts of elected politicians. It is deeply satisfying, instead, to

imagine a time when a young Arab prince would found Spain's famous *convivencia*. But although the vision appeals to us on many levels, it doesn't quite stand up to scholarly examination.

The idea of *convivencia* (literally cohabitation, but more broadly referring to social tolerance) comes from the fact that, historically, the Christian and Jewish residents of conquered cities were accorded protection as *dhimmis*, in exchange for moderation with respect to public displays, especially of religion. These obligations are outlined in the Pact of ʿUmar, supposedly drawn up in ca. 637 upon the conquest of Damascus and rewritten and copied multiple times thereafter. The version of the treaty given by Ibn ʿAsākir (1105–1176) states, in the voice of the Christians themselves, that they would promise “to beat the *nākūs* [resonant board or bell] only gently in [the churches] and not to raise our voices in them chanting; not to shelter there, nor in any of our houses, a spy of your enemies; not to build a church, convent, hermitage, or cell, nor to repair those that are dilapidated, nor assemble in any that is in a Muslim quarter, nor in their presence; not to display idolatry, nor invite to it, nor show a cross on our churches, nor in any of the roads or markets of the Muslims” (Tritton 1970:5–6).

Islamic Spain had its own version of a submission treaty. The treaty of Tudmir, written in 713, similarly stated that the Muslim leader would grant the Visigothic ruler Theodoric (Tudmir) freedoms and even a degree of autonomy as long as the latter fulfilled certain conditions: “His followers will not be killed or taken prisoner, nor will they be separated from their women and children. They will not be coerced in matters of religion, their churches will not be burned, nor will sacred objects be taken from the realm, [so long as] he [Tudmir] remains sincere and fulfills the [following] conditions. . .” (Constable 1997; reproduced in Dodds, Menocal and Balbale 2008:16).

These treaties were the strategy of conquerors who sought to impose minority rule over a majority of a different faith, knowing that peaceful submission was far preferable to a state of continual war. From the perspective of the Christians and Jews, subordination was a small price to pay for the benefits of a well-ordered and reasonably just government, even if it was run by infidels (Dodds, Menocal and Balbale 2008:17). However, at the time, the emir ʿAbd al-Rahman I had no idea that he was crafting a policy of interfaith tolerance. His actions were simply those of an astute administrator, careful not to destabilize his minority government's rule by threatening its base, a Christian majority. It is only in the modern era that we look back and identify this as *convivencia*, imbuing it with the values of mutual respect and tolerance for difference, and the fact that we do so says much more about the twentieth and twenty-first centuries' conflicts and yearnings than about the contestations and ethnic polyvalence of the eighth century. The modern perspective on Spain's medieval history is an interpretation that emerges from our own political needs. *All* history is an interpretation—a reinterpretation—of the past. It is, after all, a tale told by a human narrator who cares about the storyline.

So, from history we have the satisfying story of al-Andalus, land of interfaith *convivencia*, and from archaeology we have the insistence on material evidence to justify claims to heritage. Both are produced within a political frame. The political frame, however, is not only Spanish heritage and the nation's struggle to

assert itself as either pluralistic and liberal or essentialist and Christian. I think the drama of history and the particularity of archaeology distract our attention from the most politically relevant realm of all, which is the powerful realm of *representation*. Spain is a relatively small player in modern Middle Eastern politics but because of its 800 years of Islamic-Christian negotiations, conquest, exile, and diaspora, it provides an important analogue for East–West relations. In this light, medieval Spain serves as a metaphor for the global politics of the modern world, and the Cathedral–Mosque functions as a metaphor for medieval Spain—and hence the intensity of the disputes over its origins and who can and cannot pray there.

Notes

1. The history of the mosque is given in the primary sources, most prominently in al-Maqqari (1855–1861, I: 368 and II: 7–11), Gayangos (1840–1843, I: 217–218); also in Ibn ‘Idhari (1948–1951, II: 244, 378). In secondary literature, these sources have been summarized and analyzed in Creswell (1932–1940 and 1989). An excellent current analysis is to be found in Dodds (1992a). See also Khoury (1996), although see Note 3 below.
2. All photographs used herein are the property of the author.
3. H. Terasse made the observation (1932), and K.A.C. Creswell pinpointed Ibn Jubayr as the conveyor of the story (Creswell 1989:291). Noha Khoury (1996) and other American scholars repeated the assertion, despite conclusive evidence for the prior presence of a church that had by then been brought forward by Spanish archaeologists.
4. This point seems obvious, and yet the outrage provoked by Dr. Nadia Abou El-Haj’s (2002) book—asking some of the same questions about the framing of archaeology in Israel—indicates the deeply sensitive nature of these issues.

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