PART I

ARCHITECTURE AND URBANISM IN
UMAYYAD CÓRDOBA
The works undertaken at Madīnat al-Zahrāʾ since 1985 have significantly advanced our knowledge of the city founded by ʿAbd al-Raḥmān III in the second half of the tenth century, and come after a long journey of investigation, which was begun with the first excavations of the site in 1911.¹ This new contribution has not been motivated by an extension of the excavations of the palace, which covers basically the same area as established during the work of the 1980s. It is well-known that this zone corresponds to the central sector of the palace, and that its surface area reaches approximately 10 hectares, out of the total of 112 hectares which the city once covered. In this sector are found scores of dwellings of various types, including two caliphal residences with associated bath complexes, two aristocratic residences, and service quarters, where the staff worked who attended the occupants of the residences. Also in this zone are spaces associated with the palace guard; some large administrative buildings, where the bureaucratic work of the caliphal state took place; the extraordinary court complex presided over by the reception hall, the famous Hall of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān III; the great garden spaces; and, just outside this area, the congregational mosque.

New knowledge of Madīnat al-Zahrāʾ has come in the last few years from a variety of interrelating factors. Principal among them were, firstly, a change in the working hypotheses, with the introduction of historical hypotheses which explain the city as the full urban expression of the Umayyad caliphate, and which understand it within a context of the development of different Islamic states in both the

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