

VILLA (*MUNYA*) ARCHITECTURE IN Umayyad Córdoba: PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

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INTRODUCTION

Little survives of the sprawling Umayyad metropolis of Córdoba described by medieval authors like Ibn Ḥayyān and Ibn Ḥawqal.¹ However, archaeological excavations conducted in the last few decades offer an increasingly important source of information about the Umayyad capital. Ongoing excavations at the palace-city of Madīnat al-Zahrā', for example—focusing recently on the city's residential sectors and infrastructure—offer the most dramatic illustration of the increasing importance of material evidence to the study of this medieval city.² At Madīnat al-Zahrā' today, visitors can examine the remains of houses, baths, roads, walls and waterworks.³

¹ Al-Maqqarī draws on texts by al-Bakrī, Ibn al-Farādī, Ibn Sa'īd, Ibn Ḥawqal, and Ibn Bashkuwāl, for example, in the description of Córdoba which makes up the fourth book of his *Nafh al-Ṭīb*. Al-Maqqarī, *Analectes sur l'histoire et la littérature des arabes d'Espagne (Nafh al-Ṭīb)*: ed. de la primera mitad del *Nafh al-tib de al-Maqqarī* (ed. completa, *Bulaq*, 1279 h) ed. R. Dozy, G. Dugat, L. Krehl, W. Wright (Leiden: Brill, 1855–1860), Vol. I, pp. 298–462.

² Recent research on the Umayyad palace city appears in *Actas de las IV Jornadas de Madīnat al-Zahrā': Nuevas investigaciones sobre el Califato de Córdoba: Córdoba, 10–12 noviembre 2003* (Sevilla: Junta de Andalucía, Consejería de Cultura, 2004), and is ongoing in the journal *Cuadernos de Madīnat al-Zahrā'*, 1987–. In general see Antonio Vallejo Triano, *Madīnat al-Zahrā': Guía Oficial del Conjunto Arqueológico* (Junta de Andalucía, Consejería de Cultura, 2004); D. F. Ruggles, “Madīnat al-Zahrā'”, in *Gardens, Landscape, and Vision in the Palaces of Islamic Spain* (University Park: Pennsylvania State Press, 2000), pp. 53–85. Antonio Vallejo Triano, “El Proyecto Urbanístico del Estado Califal: Madīnat al-Zahrā'”, in *La Arquitectura del Islam Occidental* (Lunwerg Editores S.A., 1995), pp. 69–81; Antonio Vallejo Triano, “Madīnat al-Zahrā': The Triumph of the Islamic State”, in *Al-Andalus: The Art of Islamic Spain*, ed. Jerrilyn Dodds (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992), pp. 27–41; Felix Hernández Giménez, *Madīnat al-Zahrā': Arquitectura y Decoración* (Granada: Patronato de la Alhambra, 1985).

³ See Manuel Acíen Almansa, “Madīnat al-Zahrā' en el urbanismo musulmán”, *Cuadernos de Madīnat al-Zahrā'* 1 (1987), pp. 11–26. On the water system, see Carlos Flores Sancristobal et al., *El Aprovechamiento del Sistema de Saneamiento en Madīnat al-Zahrā'*, Cuadernos de Intervención en el Patrimonio Histórico, no. 6 (Córdoba: Junta de Andalucía, Consejería de Cultura y Medio Ambiente, Delegación Provincial de Córdoba, 1991).

In contrast to the gradual process of excavation and reconstruction taking place at the palace-city, other Umayyad sites found in and around Córdoba, and revealed during emergency excavations, have already disappeared beneath new development. These now only survive in the pages of archaeological reports published in outlets such as the *Anuario Arqueológico de Andalucía* and local academic journals, and in bits and pieces of stone, brick and pottery stored away in the warehouse of the Museo Arqueológico y Etnológico de Córdoba. The prolific local scholarship based upon such material evidence is published mainly within Spanish specialist circles, and as a consequence has yet to be integrated into the broader field of Islamic architecture.

MUNYA REMAINS IN CÓRDOBA

Ibn Ḥayyān and other Andalusī authors tell us that the Umayyad villas were the settings for hunting excursions, drinking parties and court feasts, celebrating occasions such as circumcisions and weddings, but what can they tell us about the architecture of the *munya*?⁴ As is typical of medieval Arabic historiography in general, the Andalusī authors provide very little concrete information about the appearance of buildings to which they allude. Furthermore, in the centuries since the disintegration of Umayyad hegemony, the *munyas* have largely disappeared from the landscape: there is not a single villa still standing in Córdoba. It is this gap in our knowledge which the material evidence, fragmented as it is at present, can begin to address. The ruins of walls, water systems, architectural ornament, and pottery unearthed along the Guadalquivir river, in the new residential suburbs and fields which stretch west of the present-day city, provide a preliminary picture of

⁴ On the *munya* as the setting for court activities see Anderson, *The Suburban Villa (munya) and Court Culture in Umayyad Córdoba (756–976 C.E.)*, Ph.D. diss., Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2005, pp. 149–89. On the *munya* in general, see Ruggles, *Gardens, Landscape, and Vision*, pp. 35–52; Christine Mazzoli-Guintard, *Ciudades de al-Andalus: España y Portugal en la Época Musulmana* (Granada: Editorial al-Andalus y el Mediterráneo, 2000), pp. 220–21; Luis Ramón-Laca Menéndez de Luarda, *Simbiosis arquitectura-paisaje. Evolución de los contornos de cuatro ciudades (Córdoba, Toledo, Sevilla y Granada)*, Ph.D. diss., Politécnica de Madrid. Escuela de Arquitectura, 1998, p. 39; Leopoldo Torres Balbás, *Ciudades hispanomusulmanes. Vol. 1 Historia e Instituciones; Organización de las ciudades; las calles. Vol. 2 Las defensas urbanas*, with introduction and conclusion by Henri Terrasse (Madrid: Instituto General de Relaciones Culturales / Instituto Hispano-Árabe de Cultura, 1985 ed.), pp. 136–43; Christian Ewert, *Die Aljafería in Zaragoza* (Berlin/Madrid: Deutsches Archäologisches Institut/Walter de Gruyter and Co., 1978), I, p. 4, n. 19–22.