PART V

MYTH AND MODERNITY:
CONSTRUCTIONS OF AL-ANDALUS
In 1851 a huge iron and glass structure rose in London’s Hyde Park to house the ‘Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations’. Although it was designed to be temporary, Joseph Paxton’s building, known as the Crystal Palace, became one of the most iconic buildings of the nineteenth century. After the Great Exhibition closed, a public company was formed to dismantle and re-erect it at Sydenham on the city’s southern fringe. Far less scholarship has been dedicated to this second incarnation, partly because, by the time the Crystal Palace was destroyed by fire in 1936, it was considered a deeply unfashionable survival of the Victorian period. Expensive to maintain and emblematic of a generation from which Modernists sought to distance themselves, this “crinolined bird-cage”, as one journalist called it, has long been considered less worthy of academic research than its predecessor. The two enterprises were, however, very different. The Crystal Palace at Sydenham, with its unabashedly didactic mission, developed from the 1851 precedent of global showroom into a space offering educational recreation. Opened by Queen Victoria on 10 June 1854, the new building welcomed members of the public for eighty-two years, compared to the Great Exhibition’s temporary existence of just six months. It is important to recognize this fact, because it means that many more people were exposed to Owen Jones’s Alhambra Court, over a longer period of time, than would have been the case if, as some historians have mistakenly stated, it had formed part of the original Great Exhibition displays.