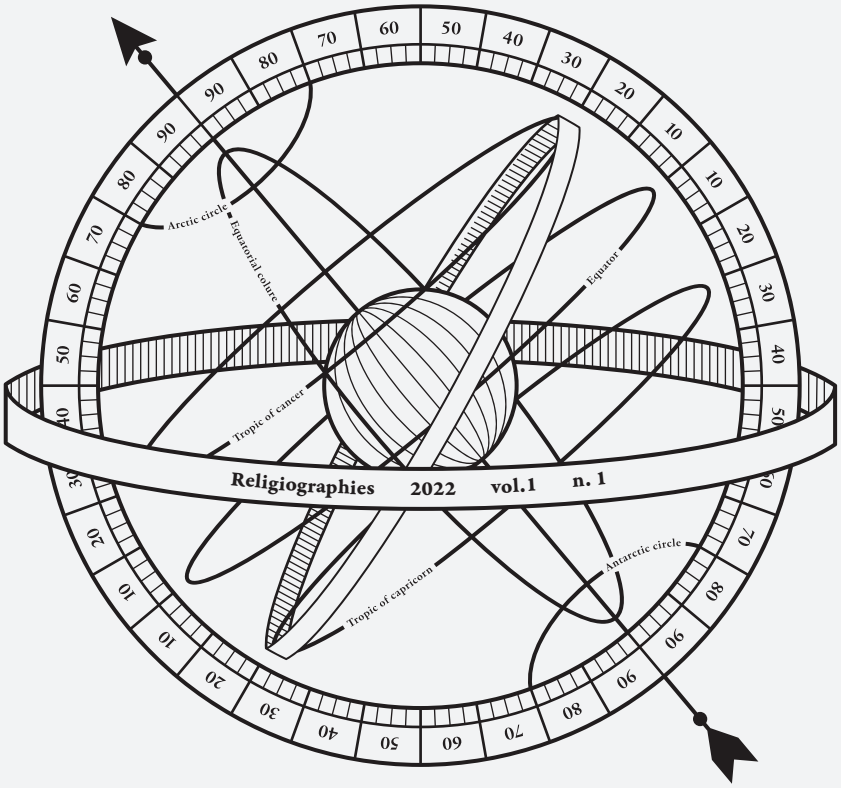
Religiographies



Special Issue
"Holy Sites in the Mediterranean, Sharing and Division"
edited by
Dionigi Albera, Sara Kuehn and Manoël Pénicaud

Fondazione Giorgio Cini 2022 - vol.1 n.1 ISSN 2974-6469

Early Religious Architecture in al-Andalus and its Islamic Context: some Reflections

Susana Calvo Capilla

Centro Studi di Civiltà e Spiritualità Comparate
fondazione Giorgio Cini onlus

Susana Calvo Capilla
Universidad complutense de Madrid
This article has been carried out within the framework of the I+D+i research project "Retos investigación" of the Spanish Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities, number RTI2018-093880-B-I00, called "Al-Andalus, art, science and contexts in an open Mediterranean. From the West to Egypt and Syria."
susana.calvo@ghis.ucm.es

Keywords:
Al-Andalus, Early Islam, mosques, places of worship, religious practices, religious texts

To cite this:
Susana Calvo Capilla, 2022, "Early religious architecture in al-Andalus and its Islamic context: some reflections," *Religiographies*, vol.1, n.1, pp. 34-47

Abstract

This article reflects on what we know today about religious spaces during "Early Islam." In the context of the latest studies about this period, and its cultural and religious reality, there are some basic questions worth asking, though still with no sure answer. Likewise, we must review the paradigms used so far to approach the subject, assuming what historians have defined as a long phase of transition. Faced with the scarcity and ambiguity of contemporary written sources, the remaining monuments and materials become the main and most reliable historical sources. The lack of references in the texts does not mean those works did not exist, nor that we could not make an approximation of the reasons behind their creation. Similarly, the absence of material support for certain information in the narratives is highly significant, especially if that absence is generalised, geographically speaking. Therefore, it is interesting to ask how and where did the first Islamised communities pray, both in the Mediterranean and in al-Andalus? And do we know what we are looking for when we speak of the first *masājid* or places of prostration?

It is interesting to return to the subject of the first *masājid* (literally, places of prostration) erected in al-Andalus, because, although new material finds are scarce, the study of the first period of Islam (known as Early Islam) has been enriched with publications about various places in the Islamic Mediterranean and about the onset of Islam. This provides a broader perspective and confirms that what happened in the Iberian Peninsula was not too far removed from what happened in other areas of the *Dār al-Islām*. We first tackled this study in 2007 and, four years later, the work was updated and published in French.[1] In the 2011 article, we insisted that the model of urban Islamisation in the Iberian Peninsula reproduced the patterns documented in the eastern Mediterranean area (*Mashriq*) and that the written traditions were also imitated. Quite often, the first mosques documented in the *Mashriq* were built in central urban spaces, but neither on the site of churches nor by reusing the Christian building itself. Churches usually remained open for Christian worship for some time after the arrival of a new doctrine: in Palmyra, Bosra, Tiberias, Jerash or Jerusalem, for example. "Believers" often improvised places of worship in areas or buildings adjacent to the commercial or political area of the city and, sometimes, to churches. Our tentative conclusions, then, that there was no material evidence to support the literary traditions concerning the mass destruction of "polytheistic temples," their transformation into mosques or their shared use with Christians, have been confirmed elsewhere in Syria, Palestine, and North Africa.

The Arab authors who construct the story of the conquest of the Iberian Peninsula, when they deal with the religiousness of the conquerors, compose a narrative seasoned with edifying and apologetic *topoi*, analogous to those of the East. The supposedly historical traditions are embellished with legends and anecdotes that allow them to create a series of

1
Susana Calvo Capilla, "Las primeras mezquitas de al-Andalus a través de las fuentes árabes (92/711–170/785)," *Al-Qanṭara,* 28 no. 1 (2007): 143-179.
Susana Calvo Capilla "Les premières mosquées et la transformation des sanctuaires wisigothiques (92H/711-170H/785)," *Mélanges de la Casa de Velázquez,* 41 no. 2 (2011): 131-163.

founding myths of great symbolic significance, such as the construction of the "Mosque of the Banners" in Algeciras or the first great mosques (*al-masjid al-jāmiʿ*) in Zaragoza and Cordoba. In general, they insist on two fundamental aspects: the first is that the churches were systematically destroyed and that, in urban centres of a certain importance, the mosques were built on their ruins.[2] However, the material remains and archaeological finds have not supported this account so far. Many churches remained in use until they were progressively abandoned; centuries later, Christians restored some of these buildings and consecrated them anew. In the Iberian Peninsula, the cases of Zaragoza and Seville are also examples of such processes, given that the excavations under the precincts of their early Friday mosques (all dating from the 9th century) have found the remains of Roman and Late Antiquity buildings, respectively.[3] The Muslims also broke, if necessary, with the orientation of the previous structures (and therefore of the ancient city's streets) to direct their *qiblas* approximately to the axis between the sunrise at the summer solstice and the sunset at the winter solstice.

The second recurring theme in the Arabic texts narrating the conquests (*futūḥāt*) was to attribute these foundations to characters of great religious prestige such as the *tābiʿūn*, the "Successors of the Companions of the Prophet," just as, in North Africa, the layout of the first *qiblas*, i.e. the orientation of the mosques, was attributed to the *ṣaḥāba* or "Companions of the Prophet" who were the first transmitters of his words (hadiths).[4] Their alleged existence and presence in the conquests allowed the traditionalists to establish a guarantee, ex post, of the religious purity of the conquerors, of their impeccable behaviour in the distribution of the booty and of the orthodoxy of the process of Islamisation of the territory. They thus created the founding myths that were necessary to consolidate, in the case of al-Andalus, Umayyad power and piety, a parallel phenomenon to what had happened in East and North Africa.[5] In the same way as Mūsā b. Nuṣayr in the Iberian Peninsula, according to literary tradition, the conqueror of Egypt, ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ, and the eighty *ṣaḥāba* who went with him, established, around 22H/643, the orientation of the great mosque of the capital, *al-Fusṭāṭ*, and supervised the distribution of the land plots.[6] In Ifriqiya, ʿUqba b. Nāfiʿ founded Qayrawān in 50H/670 and ordered the construction of its great mosque, in the layout of which, he himself and the *ṣaḥāba* and *tābiʿun* who accompanied him, who were also charged with spreading Islam in those lands, participated.

They also echoed the Eastern *topos* about the shared use of places of prayer by Christians and Muslims, which in the case of Damascus was the traditionalists' explanation for the contradictions in the narratives circulating about the conquest of the city. Archaeology has so far been unable to prove this either in the *Mashriq* or in the Maghreb.[7] However, it has found that in the cities of both the Levant and North Africa some of the oldest known mosques were built next to the main churches, and both buildings were used for worship by their respective communities at the same time for years. Initially, when the population was largely Christian, churches dominated the urban landscape. From the 8th century onwards, or later depending on the region, conversions to Islam and population growth meant that the Friday mosques were enlarged and became the visual and functional focus of urban life.

2
Calvo, "Les premières mosquées et la transformation des sanctuaires," 140-142.

3
Susana Calvo Capilla, *Las mezquitas de al-Andalus* (Almería: Fundación Ibn Tufayl de Estudios Árabes, 2014), 28-39.

4
Calvo, *Las mezquitas de al-Andalus*, 33-35. Manuela Marín, "Ṣaḥāba et tābiʿūn dans al-Andalus: histoire et légende," *Studia Islamic*a LIV (1981): 5-49. This author analyse their biographies and shows the dubious veracity of accounts of their ubiquity.

5
See the historical limits and the apologetic character of what is transmitted by the "tradition savante musulmane" about the formative stage of Islam: Cf. Christian Julien Robin, "L'Arabie à la veille de l'Islam dans l'ouvrage de Aziz al-Azmeh, The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity," *Topoi*, no. 21 (2017): 293-297; Albrecht Noth and Lawrence I. Conrad, *The Early Arabic Historical Tradition. A Source-Critical Study* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1994) and Calvo, "Les premières mosquées et la transformation des sanctuaires," 135-136.

6
The date of the Hegira will be indicated with an H. We will also use here, for ease of reading, the terms "Muslim" (more correct at this time would be *mu'minūn*, believers) and "mosque" (instead of the more generic *masjid*, place of prostration).

7
Mattia Guidetti, *In the Shadow of the Church: The Building of Mosques in Early Medieval Syria* (Leiden: Brill, Series Arts and Archaeology of the Islamic World, Vol. 8, 2016), 20-30; Thallein Antun, *The Architectural Form of the Mosque in the Central Arab Lands, from the Hijra to the End of the Umayyad Period, 1/622–133/750* (Oxford: Bar Publishing 2016). For Andalusi accounts of the conquest see, Nicola Clarke, *The Muslim Conquest of Iberia: Medieval Arabic Narratives* (London, New York: Routledge, 2012); Kenneth Baxter Wolf, *Conquerors and Chroniclers of Early Medieval Spain* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999).

What happened outside the Iberian Peninsula?

Bilād al-Shām. Palestine and Syria

Gideon Avni collected in 2014 in his book "The Byzantine-Islamic Transition in Palestine" the wealth of information available on the gradual process of Islamisation of the entire region of Palestine, both in the large urban centres and the rural and Bedouin areas. Numerous examples of the coexistence of places of worship (churches, synagogues, and mosques) have been documented during the early Islamic period. As previous work by Devreesse and Pentz had already pointed out,[8] Avni's conclusion from numerous archaeological finds is that the transformation of local societies in Palestine and Jordan between the 6th and 7th centuries shows a complex but accurate picture of slow and gradual transition, which contradicts with the previous paradigm of a hostile "smoke and fire" scenario of violent conquest followed by a rapid change.[9]

In the area studied by Avni, which includes Palestine and Jordan, the oldest mosques found in pre-Islamic cities, in *quṣūr* and *ribāṭ* types of settlements (Islamic-founded establishments), as well as in rural areas, have been dated to no earlier than the late 7th or early 8th century. The *quṣūr* had simple quadrangular mosques with a fairly deep semi-circular *miḥrāb*, often separated from the palatine structure. Well-known examples include the Jordanian complexes of Qasr Hallabat, Umm al-Walīd, al-Qastal (with the oldest known circular minaret) and Humayma. At the imposing *ribāṭ* of Qal'at al-Mina, dating from the same period, the mosque was within the enclosure. The transition from Christianity to Islam in the region is difficult to detect and, according to Avni, in many places actual Islamisation did not even occur until the Crusader period. The cases of re-use of a Jewish or Christian building for worship are exceptional and always occurred later and after the space had been abandoned, as in Khirbet Susiya and Eshtamo'a.[10]

In the Negev area several mosques of rural or Bedouin character have been found within a variety of Byzantine and early Islamic settlements. In places like Be'er Ora or Sede Boqer, the mosques are of small dimensions and in the open air, with walls no more than a metre high.[11] In large urban centres, such as Sbaïta-Shivta, a city that emerged in the 5th century, the mosque was built in a space adjacent to the baptistery of one of its three churches, which bears witness to the penetration of Islam into the mainly Christian local population and the simultaneous use of the church and mosque during the early Islamic period (inscriptions date it to between the 8th and 10th centuries).[12] All of them would date from the late 7th to the early 8th century and there is no reason to think that they were earlier. As far as large cities are concerned, Tiberias also shows the survival of churches, open for worship at least until the 10th century, and the construction of a great mosque next to the main temple, so that both buildings functioned simultaneously, a "multi-religious" centre according to Cytryn-Silverman.[13]

In Jerusalem, the testimony of Bishop Arculf, who supposedly visited Damascus and Jerusalem (conquered in 14/635 and 17/638, respectively) around 670, has served to explain the early presence of a place of prayer on the esplanade of the ancient Temple of Jerusalem, the *ḥaram al-sharīf*, in the area where the al-Aqṣā Mosque was later built in the early 8th century. However, archaeology has not found any clearly datable remains from the 7th century beneath the al-Aqṣā Mosque. Other sources concerning

8
Robert Devresse, "Le Christianisme dans le Sud palestinien," *Revue des Sciences Religieuses*, 20 no. 3-4 (1940): 250. Peter Pentz, *The Invisible Conquest: The Ontogenesis of Sixth and Seventh Century Syria* (Copenhagen: National Museum of Denmark, 1992). All of them insist on the idea of a transition within a Late Antiquity context.

9
Gideon Avni, *The Byzantine-Islamic Transition in Palestine. An Archaeological Approach* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 344-353 and p. VII.

10
Avni, *The Byzantine-Islamic Transition in Palestine*, 225-227, 238; 242-43; and 254-256, respectively.

11
Avni, *The Byzantine-Islamic Transition in Palestine,* 268, 284-285, 271, 458-59. The fact that many of the settlements studied date from pre-Islamic (and pagan) times and that their open-air mosques date from the 8th century would prove that the process of transformation of religion and worship took place very slowly in the region.

12
Bilha Moor, "Mosque and Church: Arabic inscriptions at Shivta in the Early Islamic Period," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, 40 (2013): 73-141. Avni, *The Byzantine-Islamic Transition in Palestine*, 264-266, 458-459. Devreesse, "Le Christianisme".

13
Katia Cytryn-Silverman, "Tiberias' Houses of Prayer in Context," in *Arise, walk through the land. Studies in the Archaeology and History of the Land of Israel,* ed. Joseph Patrich (Jerusalem: The Israel Exploration Society, 2016), 235-248, Katia Cytryn-Silverman, "The Umayyad mosque of Tiberias," *Muqarnas,* 26 (2009): 37–61; and Guidetti, *In the Shadow*, 63-64.

Jerusalem refer to an early oratory established by the Caliph ʻUmar (d. 23/644) at the time of the conquest of the city, or by the first Umayyad Caliph Muʻāwīya (41/661-60/680), who held his *bay'a* there. In many cases, historiography has hastily assumed that those early supposed oratories in Jerusalem and Damascus, the latter installed in the Roman temenos where the church of St. John the Baptist stood, were already in the form of a hypostyle hall, the canonical model documented in the early Kūfa, Wāsiṭ, Bosra, al-Aqṣā of Jerusalem or Fusṭāṭ.[14] Although these were flimsy constructions, with reused materials and a wooden roof, it is assumed that such a model had already emerged by the mid-7th century, at the time of ʻUmar and Muʻāwīya.

The debate over the first "mosque" in Jerusalem is still relevant today, due to several publications questioning the meaning of the texts and the few remains found from the 7th century, as well as the Dome of the Rock (dated by an inscription to 72H/691-692).[15] Lawrence Nees has performed a new analysis of the known sources, both Arabic and non-Arabic, and concludes that there is a lack of evidence to confirm the 7th-century construction of a mosque (understood as a building with several naves, precise orientation and identifying features) or its exact location within the *ḥaram al-sharīf*.[16] Nees suggests that the first Islamic oratory in Jerusalem may have been the entire open-air enclosure of the *ḥaram al-sharīf*. Furthermore, after studying the monument itself, a document as valid as the written sources, he sets out the hypothesis that the so-called *qubbat al-silsila* or Dome of the Chain may have been built in the time of Mu'āwīya ibn Abī Sufyān (661-680) as his *minbar* or maqsūra in that kind of *musalla*.

Other authors such as Beatrice St. Laurent and Isam Awwad put forward a less convincing theory in 2014, which consists of identifying a part of some ancient structures in the southeast corner of the Ḥaram, known as *Istablat Suleiman*, Solomon's stables, as the remains of the first mosque in Jerusalem seen by Arculf (built by ʿUmar or Muʿāwīya), the southern wall of the enclosure being the one used as the *qibla*.[17] Di Cesare, for his part, proposes to reinterpret the earliest archaeological remains found by Hamilton under the mosque of al-Aqṣā (Aqṣā I) as an early oratory built by Muʿāwīya, but facing east and not south, with naves that are parallel and not perpendicular to the *qibla* and lacking a *miḥrāb*.[18]

14
Antun, *The Architectural Form,* 6-49.

15
Marcus Milwright, *The Dome of the Rock and Its Umayyad Mosaic Inscriptions* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016).

16
Lawrence Nees, *Perspectives on Early Islamic Art in Jerusalem* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 5-57 and 58-99.

17
Beatrice St. Laurent and Isam Awwad, "Archaeology & Preservation of Early Islamic Jerusalem: Revealing the 7th Century Mosque on the Haram Al-Sharif," in *Proceedings of the 9th International Congress of the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East, Islamic Session*, ed. Denis Genequand (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag 2016), 469-478. Clearing and renovation works in the southeast corner of the enclosure began around 1996. For more information, see Jon Seligman, "Solomon's Stables, the Temple Mount, Jerusalem: The Events Concerning the Destruction of Antiquities 1999–2001," *Atigot*, 56 (2007): 33-53.

18
Di Cesare, M. "A qibla mušarriqa for the First al-Aqṣā Mosque? A New Stratigraphic, Planimetric, and Chronological Reading of Hamilton's Excavation, and Some Considerations on the Introduction of the Concave miḥrāb," *Annali dell'Università degli Studi di Napoli "L'Orientale". Sezione Orientale*, 77(1-2), 2017, 66-96.

Syria

In a book published in 2016, Mattia Guidetti acknowledges the difficulty of identifying the oratories of the earliest stage of Islam. Very few written sources (some non-Arabic and rarely contemporary) describe the building activities of the conquerors. In general, the historical account of many of the buildings that eventually became part of the sacred monumental landscape of Islam, replacing the Christian one, was written after the fact, at a time when it was necessary to construct foundational myths of these buildings, in order to anchor the Islamic tradition to the territory.[19] Guidetti noted the same phenomenon that we had documented in al-Andalus, namely that the traditionalists invented a completely different scenario from the one revealed by archaeology, a partisan version where the churches were replaced by mosques, destroyed, or Islamised.[20]

Several of those early Islamic prayer spaces were built next to or "in dialogue" with the churches, so that both buildings were used simultaneously for a long time, something that may have been interpreted by later

19
Guidetti, *In the Shadow*, 20-30, 68 and 174; Suliman Bashear, "Qibla musharriqa and Early Muslim Prayer in Churches," *The Muslim World,* LXXXI no. 2-3 (1991): 267-282.

20
Guidetti, *In the Shadow*, 13-35; Calvo, "Las primeras mezquitas de al-Andalus" and "Les premières mosquées et la transformation des sanctuaires."

sources as shared spaces. The authors who write about the conquests refer contradictorily to the sharing of property and the shared use of the churches by both religious communities, a formula that has not been demonstrated in Damascus, Diyarbakir, Homs or Aleppo.[21] Bashear gathered the news' pieces where the traditionalists attributed to the early Caliphs and to the Companions, Successors, or religious men of prestige the custom of directing their prayers to the East in sanctuaries of special significance for the Christian community in the newly conquered Holy Land. These were not cases of shared churches or converted mosques, but occasional events and exceptional characters who were accorded special significance.[22] It does not seem wrong to consider that the accounts about the attraction that some churches had for early believers (*mu'minūn*) were a literary and historiographical elaboration, taking place several centuries after the conquest, the purpose of which would be to extol their triumph over Christianity.[23] In any case, such actions were soon included by the exegetes among the reprehensible practices because they implied the imitation of the idolaters and prayer towards a wrong orientation. In fact, orientation was a recurrent issue in the polemical literature of both Christians and Muslims, as we shall see later on.[24] Guidetti, for his part, concludes that such actions, if they existed, must have been ephemeral and limited to the early days of the conquest since they have left no recognisable material trace.[25]

The cathedral and the mosque were adjacent or contiguous buildings in cities such as Aleppo, Homs, Mosul, Mardin, or Diyarbakir. In some cases, a part of the enclosure or area surrounding the church was confiscated, as was the case in al-Ruṣāfa, where the Umayyad mosque was attached to the northern atrium of the St. Sergius Byzantine basilica complex.[26] In al-Bakhraʾ, also in present-day Syria, a Byzantine fortress reoccupied in Umayyad times, Genequand identified as a mosque a hypostyle hall attached to the north wall of the church;[27] and finally, in Amman, the Great Mosque was built in Umayyad times next to the cathedral, both of which have now disappeared but were still visible at the end of the 19th century.[28] These examples may also serve to suggest the model applied in Cordoba, where perhaps the Great Mosque was also built in a space adjacent to or close to the basilica, something suggested by the written traditions.[29]

There does not seem to have been a single model, and in several cities, a different part of the city from the Christian (Byzantine) religious centre was chosen to erect the oratory, as in Bosra, Jerash or Palmyra, with phases of occupation from the end of the 7th century. In all three sites, the mosque was built in Umayyad times, reusing abandoned Late Antiquity buildings located in the city centre (Roman *tetrakionion* in Jerash, Fig. 1 next page, and Palmyra, a main road in Bosra) and in the commercial area, revitalised by the Marwānids.[30] In these cities the churches were kept open for worship.[31] That location, next to the markets, was repeated in ʿAnjar (Lebanon), Amman and Ayla-Aqaba (Jordan), new Umayyad cities that followed the classical urban model.

To quote Walmsley and Damgaard, control (and tax collection) in the urban areas of this region was exercised by the Church from the end of the 6th century until it was progressively replaced by a new Muslim administration after the reforms of ʿAbd al-Malik (r. 65-86H/685-705). From that time, and until 750, there is evidence of intense building activity that provided the provincial centres with mosques, while at the same time the

21
Calvo, "Analogies" and "Les premières mosquées et la transformation des sanctuaires," 152-54; Guidetti, *In the Shadow*, 37-41.

22
On the meaning of the *masājid* in passages of the Qurʾān, as in 72:18-19, it could be understood as places of prayer in general, including polytheistic ones, see Guillaume Dye and Gabriel Said Reynolds, "Sourate 72. al-Jinn (les djinns)," in *Le Coran des historiens: Volume 2b,* ed. Guillaume Dye and Mohammed Amir-Moezzi (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 2019), 1853-1867.

23
Fred Donner, *Muhammad and the believers. At the origins of Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010),115. This author discusses about "believers" in the origins of Islam, a religious reform movement within monotheism initiated by Prophet Muhammad. In its early years the believers' movement included righteous Christians and Jews, who agreed to live righteously in obedience to the law revealed to Muhammad. The realisation that they constituted a separate religious community, distinct from Christians and Jews, emerged a century later, when they assumed that the Qurʾān was the final revelation of the One God, superseding the Gospel and the Torah, and that Muhammad was the prophet. Also, Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

24
Bashear, "Qibla," 268; Susana Calvo Capilla, "Justicia, misericordia y cristianismo: una relectura de las inscripciones coránicas de la Mezquita de Córdoba en el siglo X," *Al-Qanṭara* 31 no. 1 (2010): 149-187. Calvo, *Las mezquitas de al-Andalus*, 49-50.

25
Guidetti, *In the Shadow*, 68. Avner's theory of the shared use by Christians and Muslims of the Kathisma church near Jerusalem is neither confirmed nor accepted by all researchers; the author argues that a miḥrāb was built around 700, although it is not attested that the sanctuary continued to be used by Christians after that. Cf. Oleg Grabar, *The Dome of the Rock* (Cambridge: Belknap, 2006), 89-119; Guidetti, *In the Shadow*, 68-69; Rina Avner, "The Dome of the Rock in light of the development of concentric Martyria in Jerusalem: Architecture and Architectural Iconography," *Muqarnas*, 27 (2010): 31-50.

26
Dorothy Sack, *Resafa IV, Die Grosse Moschee von Resafa-Rusafat Hisam* (Mainz: Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, 1996).

27
Denis Genequand, "Al-Bakhra' (Avatha), from the Tetrarchic fort to the Umayyad castle," *Levant*, 36 (2004): 225-242. However, no evidence of the *miḥrāb* was found.

28
Guidetti, *In the Shadow*, 36-70.

29
Studied by M. Ocaña Jiménez, cfr Calvo, "Les premières mosquées et la transformation des

Fig. 1. Jerash Mosque, general view, plan and miḥrāb, 8th century. Photograph © Juan Carlos Ruiz Souza.

activity and number of churches in use decreased, with the consequent weakening of the power of the ecclesiastical authorities.[32]

North of Africa: Maghreb and Ifriqiya

In the research about the transition from Late Antiquity to Islam in North Africa, mainly in Ifriqiya (present-day Tunisia), Pentz' s work in 2002 was an important milestone in beginning to question the traditional paradigm of the traumatic and radical change of ancient and Byzantine cities after the arrival of Islam.[33] Recently, a number of archaeological contributions have furthered the thesis of continuity (Baratte, Bockmann, Fenwick, Leone, or Mahfoudh, among others). Although much remains to be known about the places of prayer (especially in the westernmost area), a similar scenario to Levant can be discerned. According to Fenwick (2018), the mosques continued to be the dominant element of the urban landscape during the 8th century. Some churches continued in use until the 10th-11th centuries, as at Sbeïtla; others were converted to secular functions or were dismantled to make use of the materials. New churches were also built in Qayrawan in the 8th century.

As for the churches transformed into mosques, the historical-religious traditions mention some examples where either the change has not been confirmed by material evidence, as is the case with the al-Zaytuna mosque in Tunis, or it took place centuries later, as with the mosque of Le Kef,

sanctuaires," 152. See a summary of the readings done to this date of the archaeological remains in the cities by Isabel Toral-Niehoff and Alberto León Muñoz. "Ornament of the World: Urban Change in Early Islamic Qurṭuba," in *The Power of Cities,* ed. Sabine Panzram (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 107-60 and 114-15.

30
Guidetti, *In the Shadow*, 63-64, 103; Calvo, "Les premières mosquées et la transformation des sanctuaires," 138-139; Denis Genequand. "An Early Islamic Mosque in Palmyra. Une mosquée du début de l'époque islamique à Palmyre," *Levant*, 40 (2008): 3-15.

31
Rune Rattenborg and Louise Blanke, "Jarash in the Islamic Ages (c. 700–1200 CE): a critical review," *Levant*, 49 no. 3 (2017): 312-332.

32
Allan Walmsley and Kristoffer Damgaard, "The Umayyad congregational mosque of Jarash in Jordan and its relationship to early mosques," *Antiquity*, 79 (2005): 362–378.

33
Pter Pentz, *From Roman Proconsularis to Islamic Ifriqiyah* (Goteborg: Göteborgs universitet, 2002).

ancient Sicca Veneria.[34] Nor has it been possible to document any oratory erected in the early Islamic period, only later in Byzantine citadels.[35] Most of these mosques date from the Aghlabid period (11th century), including those of the capitals, and, for the moment, there are no earlier archaeological records.[36]

In Jebel Nefūsa (Libya), Virginie Prevost has studied some interesting cases of late conversions or replacements of Byzantine churches. Until the disappearance of the Christian communities with the gradual progress of Islamisation in the region (which started in 643-644), the churches remained open. Once they were abandoned, the Muslims (*Ibadis* in the region) reoccupied the sites, sometimes reusing the Christian building, and in other cases building the mosque on its site. Here too, the conversions did not take place in the transitional period but much later.[37]

Al-Andalus

In the last decade there has been no evidence found of Islamic places of prayer built during the first century of Muslim presence in the Iberian Peninsula, although progress has been made in the study of the process of Islamisation and Arabisation thanks to excavations such as those at Tolmo de Minateda (Albacete), Cordoba and Pamplona, among others.[38] In southern Portugal, several Andalusi enclaves have also been excavated, although the oratories found cannot be clearly dated to the early 8th or early 9th century.[39]

At Reccopolis (Guadalajara), the city founded by Leovigild in 578, recent geomagnetic studies have shown the great extent of the Hispano-Gothic royal city and have made it possible to identify a large building with a different orientation to the rest of the city's structures, including the palatine hall and the church. The rectangular building (ca. 20×40m) has one of its long sides facing southeast, an orientation that has led archaeologists to consider the possibility of it being an early mosque,[40] which shall be investigated by the excavation.

At the site of Tolmo de Minateda (Hellín, Albacete) the only documented transformations reveal the progressive Islamisation and Arabisation of the population from the end of the 8th century onwards. Although the Friday Mosque of the site has not yet been found, in 2014 a "bottle" from the Visigothic period was found with an inscription in Arabic that reads "*Ibn Nabdak went to the mosque,*" which would confirm that the conquerors erected an oratory in a different area from where the episcopal complex is located, together with the church and the palace.[41]

The doubts that were raised about the Roman mausoleum of Las Vegas de La Pueblanueva (Toledo) and its subsequent conversion into a mosque, according to the study published by Hauschild in 1978, are now even more irresolvable because the small apse identified as a possible *miḥrāb* was destroyed, shortly after that publication, when the site was abandoned. A recent archaeological study of the building maintains the doubts about the chronology of the surroundings of that element and, therefore, about its identification as a *miḥrāb*.[42]

Another case that has been identified as a possible conversion is at Los Hitos, Arisgotas (Toledo). The complex, built from the 6th century onwards, was a fortified *villa* for the high Hispano-Visigothic aristocracy of Toledo.[43] In addition to the imposing aulic pavilion, a church and a tripartite building with a courtyard have been excavated. The complex, dated between the end of the 6th and the 7th centuries, was abandoned

34
Faouzi Mahfoudh, "Commerce de Marbre et Remploi dans les Monuments de L'Ifriqiya Médiévale," in *Perspektiven der Spolienforschung 2. Zentren und Konjunkturen der Spoliierung,* ed. Stefan Altekamp, Carmen Marcks-Jacobs and Peter Seiler (Berlin: Topoi, 2017), 15-42; Anis Mkacher, "Construire, récupérer et inventer. Les mosquées en Afrique du Nord au VII^{e} siècle d'après les sources arabes," in *AFRICA - IFRĪQIYA. Continuity and Change in North Africa from the Byzantine to the Early Islamic Age,* ed. Ralf Bockmann, Anna Leone, and Philipp von Rummel, (Wiesbaden: Palilia 34, 2019),157-168 and 162-165.

35
Like Belalis Maior, Bagaï or Tobna. About Haïdra: François Baratte, "Recherches franco-tunisiennes sur la citadelle byzantine d'Ammaedara (Haïdra)," *Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, 140, no. 1 (1996): 153; Taher Ghalia and Faouzi Mahfoudh, "Aïn Tebournouk-Tubernuc et sa région de l'Antiquité tardive au Moyen Âge," *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome. Antiquité*, 115, no. 2 (2003): 794-795; François Baratte, "Les villes du nord de l'Afrique entre Antiquité tardive et conquête arabe. Historiographie récente et nouvelles perspectives," in *Entre civitas y madina el mundo de las ciudades en la Península Ibérica y en el norte de África (siglos IV-IX),* ed. Sabine Panzram and Laurant Callegarin (Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 2018), 198-199.

36
Corisande Fenwick, "Early Medieval Urbanism in Ifriqiya and the Emergence of the Islamic City," in *Entre civitas y madina el mundo de las ciudades en la Península Ibérica y en el norte de África (siglos IV-IX),* ed. Sabine Panzram and Laurant Callegarin (Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 2018), 218-219.

37
Virginie Prevost, "Des églises byzantines converties à l'islam? Quelques mosquées ibadites du djebel Nafûsa (Libye)," *Revue de l'histoire des religions*, 3 (2012): 325-347. Certain mosques bear a name reminiscent of Christianity or are qualified as "apostolic" (in 16th century sources) such as *masjid al-ḥawāriyyin*.

38
On the debates surrounding the survival of Late Antiquity, see also Juan Carlos Ruiz Souza and Alexandra Uscatescu, "El 'occidentalismo' de Hispania y la koiné artística mediterránea (siglos VII-VIII)," *Goya: Revista de arte*, 347 (2014): 95-115. A review of the state of archaeological knowledge in Julián Ortega Ortega, *La conquista islámica de la península ibérica: una perspectiva arqueológica* (Madrid: La Ergástula, 2018).

39
Santiago Macias, Maria da Conceiçao Lopes, "O território de Beja entre a Antigüedade Tardia e a islamizaçao," in *Visigodos y omeyas: el territorio,* ed. Luis Caballero Zoreda, Pedro Mateos Cruz, Tomás Cordero Ruiz (Merida: Instituto de Arqueología de Mérida, 2012), 305-328.

40
Joachim Henning et al. "Reccopolis revealed: the first geomagnetic mapping of the early medieval Visigothic royal town," *Antiquity*, 93, nº 369 (2019): 735-751 (742).

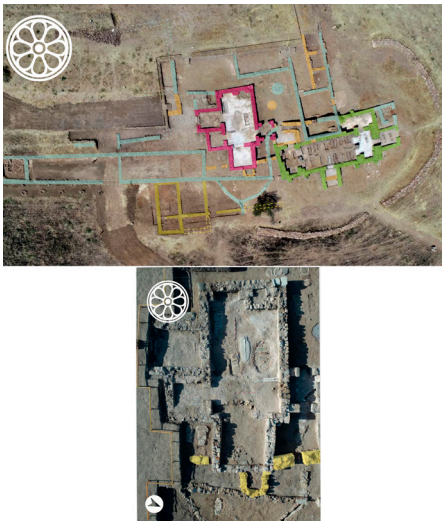


Fig. 2. Los Hitos, general aerial photography and detail of the church, 6th to 10th centuries, Arisgotas, Toledo. Photograph © Jorge Morín.

Fig. 3. Great Mosque of Cordoba, access to the Western nave of the prayer hall corresponding to the 8th mosque. Photograph © Susana Calvo.

in the 8th century, and reoccupied during the 10th and 11th centuries, according to Jorge Morín. The church, excavated in the 2017 campaign,[44] was a building with a single vaulted nave, richly decorated with marble slabs on the plinths, the doorways and on the floor. The discovery of a rectangular niche added to the east wall of the chancel suggests that the church was converted into a mosque, although its northeast orientation and the fact that it is off-centre raises some doubts about its identification as a *miḥrāb* (Fig. 2).

The structures on which the great mosque of Cordoba was built are still not well known.[45] The 1930s' excavations uncovered remains of Late Antique and Hispano-Visigothic buildings that indicate a major occupation. In the excavations that Marfil directed between 1996 and 1997 in its courtyard, next to the doors of the westernmost naves of the prayer hall (the area corresponding to the first mosque) (Fig. 3), an exterior pavement was found and, in it, a numismatic collection of *fulus* dating from before 143/760, and hence preceding the construction of the mosque. Structures dating to the 6th and 7th centuries were also found.[46] In 2017, another eighteen *fulus* of the same date were found in the access area to the third nave from the western façade. The building horizon and earlier structures could not be clearly documented; what could be documented was the gravel and river pebble pavement in the courtyard of the foundational mosque, as well as the clay pavement inside the prayer hall.[47] These findings report an urban area with buildings of some importance and their detailed analysis may provide interesting information about the site on which the great mosque, attributed to ʿAbd al-Rahman I, was built.

Having visited all these places, a question arises, paradoxically: how and where did the first Islamised communities pray, both in the Mediterranean and in al-Andalus? What did the first *masājid* or places of prostration consist of? Given that, as we have seen, the material remains of the first oratories are scarce, it seems necessary to address the question of "how did they pray?", or even "what did they pray?"

41
Blanca Gamo Parras and Sonia Gutiérrez Lloret, "El Tolmo de Minateda entre la Tardía Antigüedad y la Alta Edad Media: nuevos retos en nuevos tiempos," in *La Meseta Sur entre la Tardía Antigüedad y la Alta Edad Media*, ed. María Perlines Benito and Patricia Hevia Gómez (Castilla: Junta de Comunidades de Castilla-La Mancha, 2017), 47-74 (63). Maria Antonia Martínez Núñez, Sonia Gutiérrez Lloret, and Victoria Amorós Ruiz, "Un mensaje en la botella: escritura árabe en contexto. Un ejemplo de El Tolmo de Minateda," *Debates de Arqueología Medieval*, 6 (2016): 11-39.

42
Sergio de la Llave Muñoz and Ana Escobar Requena, "Redescubriendo el mausoleo tardorromano de Las Vegas (La Pueblanueva, Toledo)," *Urbs Regia*, nº 2 (2017): 26-45 (40).

43
Rafael Barroso Cabrera, Jesús Carrobles Santos, Jorge Morín de Pablos, Isabel Sánchez Ramos, "Toletum. Configuración y evolución urbana de la capital visigoda y su territorio," in *Territorio, topografía y arquitectura de poder durante la Antigüedad Tardía.* ed. Isabel Sánchez Ramos and Pedro Mateos Cruz (Merdia: Instituto Archeologia Merida, 2018), 195-236 (220-25). I thank J. Morín for all the data he provided me with.

44
Jorge Morín, "Excepcional hallazgo arqueológico en Toledo: descubren una iglesia 'privada'," *El Digital CLM*- EFE, 11/12/2017. Jorge Morín, "Las excavaciones en Los Hitos revelan una villa fortificada única," *La Tribuna*, Domingo 18/08/2019.

45
Calvo, *Las mezquitas de al-Andalus*, 55-56.

46
Rafael Frochoso Sánchez, "Las monedas encontradas en las Excavaciones de la Catedral de Córdoba," *Arte, arqueología e historia*, 16 (2009): 195-204. Pedro Marfil, "Intervención arqueológica en el Patio de los Naranjos de la Catedral de Córdoba, antigua Mezquita Aljama," *Qurtuba*, 2 (1997): 333-335.

47
Daniel Fernández Cabrera, Enrique León Pastor, and Raimundo Ortiz Urbano, *Actividad Arqueológica Preventiva. Control Arqueológico. Puerta-Celosía Nave 17 Conjunto Monumental Mezquita-Catedral de Córdoba. Memoria preliminar*, Córdoba, September 2017, available at: https://mezquita-catedraldecordoba.es/investigacion/otros-proyectos/ [Accessed on 28/09/2019] p. 74-76.

Definition of the Canonical Text, the Religious Ritual and the Space of Prayer

Studies of the oldest Qurʾānic manuscripts, as well as of the inscriptions and other pre-Islamic or early Islamic texts found in the Near East and the Arabian Peninsula, written in different Semitic languages, have enabled the scholars, in recent years, to assess both the date and the process by which the canonical version of the Qurʾān was established. Exegetes and traditionalists also provide evidence that suggests a long and slow transition from oral transmission to the written text. De Prémare summarised this transition well by indicating that in the first half of the 8th century (2nd century of the Hegira), the canonical version we know today had not yet been established.[48] Déroche, following the religious tradition, places at the time of caliph ʿUthmān (23-35 AH/644-656) the first attempt at compilation, in order to put an end to the divergent versions circulating among the community of believers. This caliph would send copies to the major cities, as was done in the time of ʿAbd al-Malik and al-Walīd, when there was a new impetus to fix the written Qurʾān. At the same time, there was also an attempt to fix the canonical way of reading or reciting it (*qirāʾa*).[49] But the questions of the chronology of the Qurʾān and of the "authors" of the Qurʾānic corpus are far from being resolved and need to go beyond the traditional approaches, as Dye has recently pointed out.[50]

The "Qurʾānic" inscriptions in the ambulatory of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem (that give the date of 72H/691-692) are often mentioned in studies dedicated to the chronology of the sacred text to document the process of its canonisation. Nor should it be forgotten that this is the oldest known building where Arabic epigraphy is used with this monumental decorative character. For Whelan, although the verses in the Dome of the Rock do not match the "Vulgate," the complex political and religious discourse fabricated by quoting excerpts from the Qurʾānic context suggests, in her opinion, "*a broad familiarity with them and with the implications that they had for the early Islamic community*" of ʿAbd al-Malik's time. Grabar adds something important: the selection must have been conditioned by the oral tradition of the environment, given its rhetorical and prayer-like character. For al-Azmeh, "*we would be dealing with the circulation of material of a canonical character, and, therefore, completely Qurʾānic, before the establishment of a formally sealed literary canon, which required a long process of elaboration.*"[51]

Next to the Qurʾān, the second religious and legal source of Islam is the *sunna* or tradition of the Prophet. The hadith (*ḥadīth*), transmitted orally, seem to have begun to be systematised at the time of Caliph ʿUmar (II) b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz (99-101H/717-719), in an attempt to compile the traditions that had a guaranteed chain of transmission and thus put an end to the great discordances that existed. The process of textualization of tradition took place throughout the 3rd century of the Hegira (9th century) in the form of hadith collections, such as that of al-Bukhārī (d. 256H/870), or of biographies of Muhammad (*Sīra*). Hadiths' literature, or sayings of the Prophet, began to reach al-Andalus at the end of the 2nd century of the Hegira (early 9th century), partly due to the dissemination of the *Muwaṭṭaʾ* written by Mālik b. Anas (d. 179/795), founder of the Mālikī law school, which would become dominant in al-Andalus. This book was not only a legal work, but, above all, a manual of ritual and religious practice (in accordance with the consensus of the Medina community) and a compilation of hadiths. One of the canonical forms of reading the Qurʾān (*qirāʾa*), that of the al-muqriʾ Nāfiʿ of Medina, also came to al-Andalus through tradition. The 9th century also saw the

48
Alfred-Louis de Prémare, *Aux origines du Coran, questions d'hier, approches d'aujourd'hui* (Paris: Téraèdre, 2004), 97.

49
François Déroche, *Le Coran, une histoire plurielle. Essai sur la formation du texte coranique* (Paris: Seuil, 2019), chap. 2 and 3. More controversial interpretations of the formation of Islam and the Qurʾānic text have been published in recent decades, such as the work of Patricia Crone and Christoph Luxenberg. It is also interesting to recall C. J. Robin's studies on the context in which it arose, a Late Antiquity that also permeated the Arabian Peninsula, Christian J. Robin, "La péninsule Arabique à la veille de la prédication muhammadienne," in *Les débuts du monde musulman (VIIe–Xe siècle). De Muhammad aux dynasties autonomes,* ed. Thierry Bianquis, Pierre Guichard, Mathieu Tillier (Paris: PUF, 2012), 5-33; and Christian J. Robin, "L'Arabie préislamique," in *Le Coran des historiens : Volume 1. Etudes sur le contexte et la genèse du texte coranique,* ed. Guillaume Dye and Mohammed Amir-Moezzi (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 2019), 51-154 (137).

50
Guillaume Dye, "Le corpus coranique : contexte et composition," in *Le Coran des historiens : Volume 1. Etudes sur le contexte et la genèse du texte coranique,* ed. Guillaume Dye and Mohammed Amir-Moezzi (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 2019), 733-918 (822-23).

51
Estelle Whelan, "Forgotten witness: Evidence for the early codification of the Qurʾān," *The Journal of the American Oriental Society. American Oriental Society,* 118 (1998): 1-14 (10-13); Oleg Grabar, *The shape of the Holy: Early Islamic Jerusalem* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 63-68; Aziz Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity: Allah and His People* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 460. Christoph Luxenberg, "A New Interpretation of the Arabic Inscription in Jerusalem's Dome of the Rock," in *The Hidden Origins of Islam,* ed. Karl-Heinz Ohlig and Gerd-R. Puin (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2010), 125-151. Other contributions on the Dome of the Rock inscriptions: George Alain, *The Rise of Islamic Calligraphy* (London: Saqi Books, 2010), 60-68; and Milwright, *The Dome of the Rock*, 160-171, where he analyses the form and chronology of the two inscriptions in the ambulatory. On the use of the Arabic language at this early stage and its non-religious motivations, see Nees, *Perspectives on Early Islamic Art in Jerusalem*, 153. This author argued for two processes converging in the formation of Islam as a religious movement: the Islamisation of the Arab political (movement) and the Arabisation of the new religion. Cf. Suliman Bashear, *Arabs and Others in Early Islam* (Princeton: Gerlach Press, 1997), 53 and 116.

development of Andalusi hadiths' studies, with ʿAbd al-Malik b. Ḥabīb (c. 174-238H/790-853) as a leading figure.[52]

As we have shown, the writing in Arabic and the formation of the corpus of canonical texts[53] were basically initiated and directed by the Umayyads, to whom can be attributed two other aspects related to our subject: the establishment of liturgical practices (*ʿibādāt*), starting with the number of daily prayers and the ritual of Friday prayer (*ṣalāt al-jumuʿa*),[54] as well as the definition of a basic typology of oratory (*masjid*), with its most identifying elements (the courtyard, the minaret, the qibla and the *miḥrāb*). We will focus on three of these elements: the *ṣalāt* or ritual prayer, the orientation of the prayer, i.e. the qibla, and the niche opened in that wall, the *miḥrāb*.

The Qurʾān mentions the Friday prayer, the five daily prayers, fasting and pilgrimage, but does not give precise details or characteristics as established later, which would indicate that the liturgy was developed over an extended period. Invocation, prayer and prostration, performed in precise forms and cycles (*rakʾa*) and preceded by a ritual of calling (*adhān*) and purification (*wuḍūʾ*), evolved from Arabic, Jewish and Christian practices.[55] It is significant that the terms *ṣalāt* and *miḥrāb* are not of Arabic origin.[56] Several Arab authors indicate that, in the beginning, believers only had to pray twice a day, at dawn and at sunset.[57] Although the action of prayer often appears in the Qurʾān, it was the later Islamic tradition which, going back to the life of the Prophet through the hadiths,[58] elaborated a whole liturgical corpus.[59] The development of its own ritual gave the new monotheism an identity factor with respect to other doctrines.[60] However, in that turning back, as Robin points out, the Muslim traditionalists of the eighth century showed a very precarious knowledge of the pre-Islamic and early Islamic periods, also as far as ritual was concerned.[61]

Thus, Islamic tradition places the consolidation of the liturgical practice of prayer just after the change of the qibla or the direction of prayer. The first believers did not pray towards Mecca, according to the Qurʾān itself (2:142-145), but towards a place identified as Jerusalem by the prophetic tradition.[62] The change of direction, to the south, took place, according to exegetes, while Muhammad was still alive; but it possibly dates from the same time as the Qurʾān was being written down.[63] In any case, as King warns, the important point is not whether an orientation is correct today, but to define which direction or directions were considered appropriate for the qiblas in the period when the first monumental mosques began to be built. Generally, these did not face towards Mecca, but reproduced the astronomical axes of the Kaʿba, an astronomically aligned rectangular structure.[64] Later, for the Islamic society, the Kaʿba was at the centre of the sacred geography and the qiblas of the different regions around it.

In reference to the earliest places of prayer, the sources indicate that there was a first qibla, called *qibla musharriqa*, facing east, which Bashear identified with the orientation of the churches. In his opinion, that one was abandoned for the "true qibla of Islam" before the great Umayyad constructions that defined the spaces for prayer.[65]

For Di Cesare, the *qibla musharriqa* would have another meaning, which is explained in her recent reinterpretation of the first phase of the al-Aqṣā mosque in Jerusalem, which construction she places in the years 40-60H/660-680. The author analyses older mosques, such as the one founded by ʿAmr in Fusṭāṭ, which, according to the sources, had an

52
Joseph Schacht, "Mālik b. Anas," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, ed. Peri Bearman et al. (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 262-65; Isabel Fierro, "The introduction of hadith in al-Andalus (2nd/8th-3rd/9th centuries)," *Der Islam*, LXVI (1989): 68-93. The *khutba* or sermon, one of the most prominent elements of the Muslim ritual, along with the Friday prayer, is derived from the prophetic traditions and the Qurʾān: see Linda G. Jones, *The Power of Oratory in the Medieval Muslim World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 21-23.

53
Arabic calligraphy and the Arabic language itself were also in "training", see Prémare, *Aux origines du Coran,* and Rizwi Faizer, "The Dome of the Rock and the Qurʾān," in *Coming to terms with the Qurʾān*, ed. Khaleel Mohammed and Andrew Rippin (Riyadh: Islamic Publications International, 2008).

54
Gerald Hawting, "Introduction. The Development of Islamic Ritual," in *The Development of Islamic Ritual*, ed. Gerald Hawting (London: Routledge, 2006), xiii-xxxix. Guy Monnot, "Ṣalāt," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, ed. Peri Bearman et al. (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 925-34 (927-28); Josef W. Meri, "Ritual and the Qurʾān," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 488-90.

55
Donner, *Muhammad and the believers*, 214-216. Carl Heinrich Becker, "On the History of early Muslim Worship," in *The Development of Islamic Ritual,* ed. Gerald Hawting (London: Routledge, 2006), 72-73. Patrick D Gaffney, "Friday Prayer," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 271-72. Robert G. Hoyland, *In God's Path: The Arab Conquests and the Creation of an Islamic Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 228-29. Guillaume Dye, "Jewish Christianity, the Qurʾān, and Early Islam: Some methodological caveats," in *Jewish Christianity and the Origins of Islam,* ed. Francisco Río Sánchez (Turnhot: Brepols Publishers, 2018), 11-29.

56
Marion Holmes Katz, *Prayer in Islamic Thought and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 11-14. In Yemeni poetry, *miḥrāb* meant building, palace, place of the prince or audience hall, Robin, "L'Arabie préislamique," 90.

57
Uri Rubin, "Morning and Evening Prayers in Early Islam," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, 10 (1987): 40-64.

58
Monnot, "Ṣalāt," 926.

59
Katz, *Prayer in Islamic Thought and Practice,* 18-19.

60
Hawting, "Introduction. The Development of Islamic Ritual," xxxi-xxxiv.

Fig. 4. Umayyad Mosque, current miḥrāb, Damascus. Photograph © Susana Calvo.

61
Robin, "L'Arabie," 295-96.

62
Calvo, "Justicia, misericordia y cristianismo," 176-77.

63
Donner, *Muhammad and the believers,* 214-24.

64
David King, "The enigmatic orientation of the Great Mosque of Córdoba," *Suhayl. International Journal for the History of the Exact and Natural Sciences in Islamic Civilisation*, 16-17 (2018-2019): 33-111 (35 and 44).

65
Bashear, "Qibla musharriqa," 281-82.

66
Di Cesare, "A qibla mušarriqa," 89-91.

67
Michael E. Bonine "Romans, astronomy and the qibla: urban form and orientation of Islamic cities of Tunisia," in *African Cultural Astronomy – Current Archaeoastronomy and Ethnoastronomy Research in Africa,* ed. Jarita C. Holbrook, R. Thebe Medupe, Johnson O. Urama, (Berlin: Springer Nature, 2008), 145-178; King, "The enigmatic," 35-48; and Alfonso Jiménez Martín, "La qibla extraviada," *Cuadernos de Madinat al-Zahra* 3 (1991): 189-209.

68
King, "The enigmatic," 35-37; 81. Calvo, "Las primeras mezquitas de al-Andalus," 166-170.

69
Faouzi Mahfoudh, "La Grande Mosquée de Kairouan: textes et contexte archéologique," in *The Aghlabids and Their Neighbours*, ed. Glaire D. Anderson, Corisande Fenwick, and Mariam Rosser-Owen (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 166-68.

70
Monica Rius, *La alqibla en al-Andalus y al-Magrib al-Aqṣā* (Barcelona: Institut "Millás Vallicrosa" d'Història de la Ciència Àrab, 2000), 174-188. It is also interesting to note at this point that the east façade of the Alcázar had a different orientation to this supposed Roman urban layout: Murillo Redondo, Juan Francisco et al. "Investigaciones arqueológicas en la Muralla de la Huerta del Alcázar (Córdoba)," *Anejos de anales de arqueología cordobesa*, 2 (2009-2010): 183-230 (218-19).

orientation "too far east" (*musharriqa jiddan*), and concludes that these orientations (90° to the direction of the ortho of Canopus) also coincided with the astronomical alignment of the Kaʿba, which is why they were considered valid, and this is consistent with King's explanation. Her second conclusion, however, is more debatable: that these mosques of al-Aqṣā and Fusṭāṭ, being built in a "more complex" and solid manner, preserved "the previous orientation" (towards the east) of the "earliest mosques" which they replaced, assuming, without material evidence, that there were earlier mosques and that they were also oriented towards the east.[66]

In his latest publication, King picks up the hypothesis, already put forward by other researchers, that the qibla of the Mosque of Cordoba, like others in North Africa, faces south because the building was aligned with the main streets of the Colonia Patricia of the Roman city, aligned, in turn, with the solstitial axes, i.e. the same as the Kaʿba.[67] Although the orientation of the axis of the Kaʿba was very important, King suggests that the mosque was adapted to the Roman urban layout and that only later was it realised that it coincided with the alignment of the Kaʿba, giving the qibla a "sacred cover" or religious justification.[68] All this was reinforced by the alleged presence of the *tābiʿūn* alongside the conquerors who laid out the first *qibla*, something very similar to what happened with the qibla of Qayrawān, attributed to ʿUqba.[69]

Although the coincidence seems evident in Cordoba (and in Damascus), I do not agree that the alignment of the streets of the Roman city was decisive in establishing the orientation of the *qibla*. When this urban layout did not suit the needs of the believers, the walls of the mosque were turned to orient it in the way they thought was correct, as happened in Zaragoza, which mosque's orientation is almost identical to that of Cordoba and Qayrawān, that is, perpendicular to the solstitial axis that joins the sunrise in summer and sunset in winter.[70] It does not seem that the orientation of the qibla was left to chance, neither in Zaragoza, nor in other places such as Jerash or Palmyra, where the mosques were also rotated with respect to the previous urban layout.[71]

Ultimately, from what has been said, we cannot conclude with absolute certainty in which direction the first Muslims on the Peninsula prayed before the construction of these mosques in Cordoba and Zaragoza at the end of the 8th century.

Di Cesare has recently linked the appearance of the *miḥrāb mujawwaf*, in the form of a deep niche, to the establishment of the south-facing qibla, which occurred at the beginning of the 8th century, with the construction of large mosques by order of the Umayyad caliph al-Walīd b. ʿAbd al-Malik. It is generally accepted that the earliest examples of *miḥrāb* were precisely those erected in the mosques of Medina and Damascus by order of al-Walīd between 87/706 and 96/714-15 (Fig. 4).[72] In this sense, we must consider the allusions to the concave *miḥrāb* of the mosques founded by the conquerors to be an anachronism of the Arab authors.[73] Although some researchers have proposed the earlier existence of painted *miḥrāb* or arches carved in monolithic blocks of stone, there are no architectural remains. This is the reason why both the Qurʾān from Sana'a (Yemen), with two illustrations of mosque-like architecture, and the "*miḥrāb*" type coinage with a spear (*ʿanaza*) inside it, from the time of ʿAbd al-Malik, both of which date to around the time of al-Walīd's religious constructions, are so important.[74] We can also add the monolithic scallop niche

found in the subsoil of the first mosque of Cordoba (Fig. 5) and the mural paintings of the *miḥrāb* in the mosque of Qayrawān, dated to the reign of Ziyadat Allāh, around 221-836.[75]

Fig. 5. Great Mosque of Cordoba, monolithic scallop niche, 8th-9th century. Photograph © Susana Calvo.

Conclusions

The absence of information about the first oratories in al-Andalus forced the Umayyad chroniclers to invent founding myths, to imagine some facts and give them an explanation that would allow them to lay a solid and true foundation for Islam and the orthodoxy of Andalusi religious practice.[76]

Why is there no trace of the first mosques in the lands conquered by Islam? Are we looking for places of worship of an anachronistic model and orientation? Ultimately, do we know what we are looking for when we speak of "early mosques?"

It seems necessary, as we said, to address the issue of the degree of Islamisation of the conquerors.[77] It is significant that the coins minted by the new rulers in 93H/711-12, at the time of the conquest of the Hispano-Visigothic kingdom, as was the case in Carthage and Qayrawān, were in Latin and introduced a monotheistic formula such as "*In the name of God, there is no god but God,*" without allusions to any prophet but with the date of the Hegira.[78] These coins were legible to the local population with a message that proclaimed the existence of one God. When the conquerors began to mint bilingual *solidus* (in Latin and Arabic), in 98H/716, they kept the monotheistic formula in Latin and introduced, in Arabic, the names of the prophet and the territory: Muḥammad and al-Andalus,[79] translation of *Spania*. This was a message that only the Arab conquerors could read, and that would constitute proof of their political and military action towards Damascus, just like the lead seals were proofs of their control over fiscal and commercial activity, as well as the administrative organisation in the new territory. It is not until 101H/720 that the dinar appears entirely epigraphic in Arabic, and the star disappears from the front,[80] and until 145H/763 we do not have the first known monetary issue of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān I.[81] It is worth remembering that what mattered about the coins in circulation at the time was not the language in which they were written, but their value, which is why Umayyad or Abbasid dinars were used, and even imitated, as far away as the far north of Europe.[82] Both the Arabisation and the Islamisation would begin to take their first steps in the 8th century, but at a slow pace and with varying results.

One possible conclusion in light of all that has been exposed is that everything seems provisional and changeable for almost sixty years in the Iberian Peninsula. The mints of the new Umayyad emir in 763 could be evidence of effective administrative and fiscal control of the territory and the establishment of an Umayyad state. It is only from that moment onwards that it seems possible that the foundations of the Islamisation of the territory began to be laid, by bringing together the necessary instruments: texts, rites and spaces. As we have seen, all of these were in the process of formation in the Islamic heartlands in 711. In the '80s, the construction of the great mosque in the capital, Cordoba, and in other cities would begin as a way of consolidating power and encouraging the sedentarisation and unity of the community of believers.[83] Until then, one would have to think of places of prayer of an equally provisional and improvised nature, while the churches remained open to the majority Christian population. Only at the end of the 8th century did a certain

71
The direction of qibla was still a concern in Almohad times: Susana Calvo Capilla, "Peregrination and ceremonial in the Almohad mosque of Tinmal," in *Encompassing the sacred in Islamic Art,* ed. Lorenz Korn and Cigdem Ivren, (Wiesbaden: Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 2020), 81-106.

72
Keppel Archibald Cameron Creswell, *A Short Account of Early Muslim Architecture*, Revised and Supplemented by James W. Allan (Aldershot: Scholar Press, 1989), 43-46. Finbarr Barry Flood, *The Great Mosque of Damascus* (Leiden-Boston-Köln: Brill, 2001), 47-56. Calvo, *Las mezquitas de al-Andalus*, 57-59.

73
Whelan, "Forgotten witness," 205-223.

74
For the Quran: George, *The Rise,* 79-86. Luke Treadwell "Miḥrāb and ʿAnaza or 'Sacrum and Spear'? A Reconsideration of an Early Marwanid Silver Drachm," *Muqarnas*, 22 (2005): 1-28 (19-22).

75
Mahfoudh, "La Grande Mosquée," 180.

76
The analysis of burials in the Iberian Peninsula, during the 8th and 9th centuries, also allows us to observe the lack of definition and the slow homogenisation of rituals, only evident in terms of orientation, at the beginning of the 9th century (Ortega Ortega, *La conquista,* 300-328).

77
Similar conclusions about the weak Islamisation of the Berber population are reached in Ifrīqiya: Chris Wickham, "Synthesis: Africa – Ifrīqiya Conclusions," in *AFRICA - IFRĪQIYA. Continuity and Change in North Africa from the Byzantine to the Early Islamic Age,* ed. Ralf Bockmann, Anna Leone, and Philipp von Rummel, (Wiesbaden: Palilia 34, 2019), 317-322 (319).

78
IN Nomine Dei Non Deus NiSi Deus SoLuS Non Similis. On the reverse side, the mint of *Spania* is mentioned: Novus SoLiDus FeRiTus In SPaNia ANNo XCIII – INDiCción XI ("New solid made in Hispania year 93 – Indiction XI" = year 93 H = 711-12). Mohamed Ghodhbane, "L'Africa à l'époque transitoire (Ier siècle H./VIIe siècle) Contribution à l'étude du toponyme, son évolution et de ses significations à la lumière des

balance between the two communities become evident, with Muslims becoming more and more numerous and Christians less and less, and the churches beginning to be abandoned and reused.

Ultimately, minting coins with the name of the prophet in 716 does not mean that, at that time, both the dogma (Qurʾān and *Sunna*) and the liturgy were fully defined, much less consolidated, as mentioned above. We must wonder about the degree of Islamisation of the Arab and Berber troops who settled in the Iberian Peninsula at the beginning of the 8th century. The need for later chroniclers, from the late 9th and 10th centuries, to insist on the presence of mythical *tābiʿūn* embedded in the troops that arrived in 711, and to attribute to them the layout of the first qiblas in al-Andalus, would explain, in our opinion, the limited religious burden of the conquest and the scarce witnesses it left behind. The lack of material remains, mainly of places of worship in the first phases of development of Islam in all regions (in the 7th century in the Levant, in the 8th century in the Maghreb), would confirm this conclusion: it must be that neither the doctrine nor the liturgy had been fully defined, and thus neither had the need for specific spaces with specific components which would make them recognisable today.[84] It was with the construction (according to Arab sources, the reconstruction[85]) of the mosques in the capital cities of Damascus, Jerusalem, Medina or Cairo, at the time of al-Walīd, in the first two decades of the 8th century, that a lasting model of a place for worship was established, a model that was to spread massively thereafter.[86]

données in *AFRICA - IFRIQIYA,"* in *Continuity and Change in North Africa from the Byzantine to the Early Islamic Age,* ed. Ralf Bockmann, Anna Leone, and Philipp von Rummel, (Wiesbaden: Palilia 34, 2019), 35-53 (41-42).

79
Muḥammad rasūl allāh (Muḥammad is God's envoy).

80
Alberto Canto, "Precintos," *711, Arqueología e historia entre dos mundos,* ed. García Moreno Luis (Madrid: Museo Arqueológico Regional de Madrid, 2011), 159-165. In the period of transition (711-720) from Latin to Arabic, the coins bear a star that could allude to al-Andalus, synonymous with *Spania* (Hispania) and *Hesperis*, according to Ramírez del Río, "Acerca del origen del topónimo al-Andalus," *eHumanista/IVITRA*, 12 (2017): 124-161 (138-9); a theory not shared by Ortega Ortega (*La conquista*, 121), because stars appear on coins from other parts of the Mediterranean at similar dates.

81
Alberto Canto, "Las monedas y la conquista," in *711, Arqueología e historia entre dos mundos. Zona Arqueológica,* ed. Luis A García Moreno and Alfonso Vigil-Escalera (Madrid: Museo Arqueológico Regional de Madrid, 2012), 133-144. Jere L. Bacharach, "Signs of Sovereignty: The *Shahāda*, Qurʾānic Verses, and the Coinage of ʿAbd al-Malik," *Muqarnas* 27 (2010): 1-30. Regarding the *nafaqa fi sabil Allāh* legend on the fils minted in Ifrīqiya and al-Andalus, there are not enough reasons to affirm that the concept of *jihād* was already present among the conquerors at that time (Ortega Ortega, *La conquista,* 56-57, 333).

82
A gold coin of 774, minted by King Offa of Mercia (England), in imitation of the contemporary Abbasid dinar. James Allan, "Offa's imitation of an Arab dinar," *The Numismatic Chronicle and Journal of the Royal Numismatic Society*, 14 (1914): 77–89. See also Alfonso VIII's Arabic coinage.

83
Calvo, *Las mezquitas de al-Andalus*, 62-74.

84
Robin, "L'Arabie," Donner, *Muhammad and the believers*; Ahmez, *The Emergence*. In contrast, other researchers believe in the fully Islamic and Qurʾānic roots of the Arabic epigraphs (especially the mention of Muhammad) on both coins and commercial lead seals from the time of the Arab governors, and consider these materials to indicate that the conquerors were "true" Muslims. Cf. Alejandro García, *La Conquista islámica de la península ibérica y la tergiversación del pasado* (Madrid: Marcial Pons Ediciones de Historia, 2013), 310.

85
Antun, *The Architectural Form,* 96-98. With the exception of the very poorly known mosques of Basra and Kufa, whose construction is supposed to date from the 7th century.

86
I dedicate this article to two great art historians who recently left us: Javier Docampo Capilla and Juan Carlos Ruiz Souza.