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Justin E.A. Kroesen

From Mosques to Cathedrals: Converting Sacred Space During the Spanish Reconquest

The Christian Reconquest of Moorish Spain is a thread that runs throughout the medieval history of the Iberian peninsula. This political and religious struggle stretched over a period of nearly eight centuries, with Christendom eventually being victorious. The victories were consolidated through the building of churches for the Christian cult in the newly conquered territiories. Monasteries were founded throughout the vast countryside, while cathedrals and parish churches appeared in towns and villages. In many instances, these urban churches supplanted Muslim prayer houses. This article focuses on those cathedrals which are known to have been built on the sites of demolished mosques. As we will see, the architectural solutions chosen vary widely from almost complete preservation of the existing structure, as at Córdoba, to full substitution, as at Toledo and Granada. In the final section, we shall analyse the consequences that the architectural characteristics of these cathedrals had for liturgical practice.

Conquest and Reconquest[1]

In the year 711, an army of Arab conquerors under the command of Lord Tariq crossed the Strait of Gibraltar and entered the Iberian peninsula from the south.[2] The newly founded Omayyad Caliphate of Al-Andalus chose the city of Córdoba as its capital. On their way northwards, the Muslims crushed the kingdom of the Visigoths and even pushed forward well into the Frankish Empire near Poitiers, where they were brought to a halt in 732 by Charles Martel. Some years earlier, in the Iberian peninsula itself, the first seeds of Christian resistance were sown in the northern mountains of Asturias. According to legend, in 718 the Asturian Prince Pelayo defeated a Muslim force in the valley of Covadonga after a cross had appeared to him promising victory. A second centre of Christian dominance was formed shortly after

1 Litt.: T. Glick, *Islamic and Christian Spain in the Early Middle Ages* (Princeton, 1979); J. O'Callaghan, *A History of Medieval Spain* (Ithaca, 1975); R. Collins, *Early Medieval Spain. Unity and Diversity* (New York, 1983); R. Barkai, *Cristianos y musulmanes en la España medieval. El enemigo en el espejo* (Madrid, 1984).

2 R. Collins, *The Arab Conquest of Spain, 710-797* (Oxford, 1989).

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800 in the east of Spain, where Charlemagne founded the so-called Spanish Marsh as a buffer state against Islam.

From bases in these two areas, territory was slowly regained from the Moors. At the end of the millennium, in Castile-León, the dividing line or 'extremadura' was situated around the river Duero. The slow but steady southward expansion of Christianity was largely due to the weakness of the Moors rather than the power of the Christians. In the tenth and eleventh centuries, the once mighty Caliphate of Córdoba fragmented into a number of minor kingdoms, the so-called Taifas.[3] Notwithstanding the strong support for the Muslims coming from the Almoravids and Almohades during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, Moorish Spain remained fundamentally Balkanised. In the eleventh century, some of the most important cities fell into Christian hands, such as Coimbra in 1064 and Toledo in 1085.[4]

In western Europe, towards the end of the eleventh century, the cry for the recovery of the Holy Land from Islam led to the proclamation of the first Crusade. In the Iberian penisula, where Christians fought the same enemy, the 'Reconquista' took the shape of a real Crusade on a second frontline.[5] In 1089, Pope Urban II directed the Catalan knights not to take part in the Crusade in Palestine, but to exert themselves in the conquest of the city of Tarragona. The heavenly recompense, in the form of remission of sins, was to be the same: "We encourage those who will set out for Jerusalem or other places in a spirit of penitence or devotion to expend all the labor of that journey on the restoration of the church of Tarragona, so that that city (...) may be celebrated as a barrier and a bulwark against the Saracens for the Christian people, to whom, out of mercy of God, we offer that indulgence which they would gain if they had fulfilled the journey [to Jerusalem]".[6] Although early efforts were unavailing, the city was eventually captured in 1118, the same year in which the Aragonese capital of Zaragoza was also taken from Islam.

In 1212, the united Christian forces won a decisive victory near Las Navas de Tolosa in the Sierra Morena.[7] Within the next decades, the Algarve and Andalusia were largely recovered, including important cities such as Córdoba, Jaén and Seville.

3 Cf. P.C. Scales, *The Fall of the Caliphate of Cordoba. Berbers and Andalusis in Conflict* (Leiden/New York/Köln, 1994).

4 D.W. Lomax, *The Reconquest of Spain* (London, 1978) and J.F. O'Callaghan, *Reconquest and Crusade in Medieval Spain* (Philadelphia, 2003).

5 Cf. J. Goñi Gaztambide, *Historia de la bula de cruzada en España* (Vitoria, 1958).

6 Translated passage taken from O'Callaghan, *Reconquest and Crusade*, 31. The Latin text reads: "Eis autem qui vel in Hierusalem vel in partes alias poenitentiae spiritu vel devotionis ituri sunt, suademus totam illam viae et sumptus operam restitutioni ecclesiae Tarraconensis impendere, quatenus auxiliante Domino et cathedra inibi tuto habeatur episcopalis, et civitas eadem sarracenorum opposita populis, in murum et antemurale christicolae populi celebretur, quibus eandem ex Dei misericordia indulgentiam pollicemur quam promererentur si in dictae viae prolixitatem explerent" (cit. taken from Goñi Gaztambide, *Historia de la bula de cruzada*, p. 57).

7 Lomax, *The Reconquest*, 129ff.

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Along the east coast, the Aragonese also made great progress, conquering cities such as Palma on the island of Majorca, as well as Valencia and Murcia. Around the middle of the thirteenth century, Islam was pushed back into the southeast corner of the Iberian peninsula, where the Nasrid Kingdom of Granada was to stand firm for another 250 years.[8]

The conversion of mosques in medieval Spain

In the lands that were conquered by the Christians, the majority of Muslims and Jews were usually allowed to continue their religious practice. In general, the three religions coexisted peacefully, as is illustrated by the fact that the Castilian Kings Fernando III (1217-1252) and Alfonso X (1252-1284) both described themselves as "King of the Three Religions". In spite of this relative tolerance, however, in almost every reconquered town the principal mosque was seized by the Christians and transformed into a church. The capture of the most emblematic religious building and the subsequent celebration of the first Mass in its interior was taken to be a public manifestation of Christian supremacy.[9] In the course of time, many mosques were demolished to create sites for new cathedrals built in the Gothic style. An explanation of the temporary preservation of many mosques could well be a lack of funds, as the Spanish church had been seriously reduced to poverty by the military campaign.

The custom of transforming mosques into cathedrals probably occurred from the very beginning of the Reconquest. Although details are virtually unknown, it is most likely that the lost Romanesque cathedrals of northern cities such as Burgos and León were built on the foundations of destroyed mosques. This was certainly the case in the Portuguese cities of Coimbra and Lisbon, which were reconquered in 1064 and 1147, respectively. After the city of Lisbon fell on All Saints Day of 1147 the mosque was solemnly 'cleansed' and consecrated by Archbishop João de Braga together with four other Portuguese bishops.[10] Here, as in Coimbra, the mosque was supplanted by a Romanesque church building whose fortress-shaped bell towers with barbicans seem to emanate a message of proud triumph. As the construction of these church buildings began somewhat later than the moment of the conquest of these cities, the existing mosques must have initially served as cathedrals. After being seized, mosques turned into cathedrals were usually consecrated to the Virgin Mary, patroness of the Reconquista. The buildings were provisionally equipped for the Christian cult by placing altars in front of the east walls and hanging bells in the former minarets.

8 L.P. Harvey, *Islamic Spain, 1250 to 1500* (Chicago, 1990). On Muslim Spain in general, see the rich collection of studies in S. Khadra Jayyusi (ed.), *The Legacy of Muslim Spain* (Leiden/New York/Köln, 1992).

9 O'Callaghan, *Reconquest and Crusade*, 202-206.

10 O'Callaghan, *Reconquest and Crusade*, 205.

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On 25 May 1085, the city of Toledo was captured by Castilian knights after Muslim dominance for more than 370 years.[11] A year later, Pope Urban II raised the city, the former capital of Visigothic Spain and home of the saints Leocadia, Eugenio and Ildefonso, to the rank of an archbishopric with a French cluniac monk, Bernardo de Sédirac, as its first prelate. During the siege, in exchange for a peaceful surrender, King Alfonso VI (1065-1109) had come to an agreement with the Moors that they would hand over to him the citadel, the royal garden and other fortresses, and that the king would in return respect the Great Mosque as a Muslim place of worship. This building, which after major additions in the tenth and eleventh centuries had become an eleven-aisled complex of approximately sixty by fourty metres, more or less occupied the site where the nave of the cathedral is now situated. In relation to the present-day cathedral, the mosque reached from the west façade to the transept, the *mihrab* or prayer niche being situated in the centre of the southern wall, close to the actual Puerta Llana. The 'shan' or atrium, containing the basin in which believers could wash themselves before prayer, was probably situated on the north side, on the spot of the present-day cloister.[12]

In October 1087, little more than two years after the conquest of Toledo, King Alfonso's promise to respect the mosque was broken when it was seized by order of Archbishop Sédirac. Together with Queen Constanza of Burgundy, he thought it disgraceful that the Muslims should keep the Great Mosque when the Christians had only tiny old churches to celebrate their Masses in. Allegedly, the King was very upset by these events, but he did nothing to rectify the situation.[13] After being "cleansed of the filthiness of Mohammed" and consecrated to the Holy Virgin, the orientation of the building was rotated by ninety degrees, with the high altar placed in front of the eastern wall.[14] This state of affairs continued to exist for about 130 years with the structure of the old Great Mosque serving as a space for Christian worship until it was finally supplanted by a Gothic cathedral from 1222 onward [Fig. 1].

11 See Lomax, *The Reconquest*, 63-67 and J.F. Rivera Recio, *La iglesia de Toledo en el siglo XII (1086-1208)*, 2 vols. (Rome, 1966-1976).

12 P. Navascués Palacio, *La catedral en España. Arquitectura y liturgia* (Barcelona/Madrid, 2004) 134

13 O'Callaghan, *Reconquest and Crusade*, 205.

14 In Moorish Spain, unlike other parts of the Islamic world, mosques were usually built with the prayer wall or qibla towards the south rather than directed to Mecca (east).

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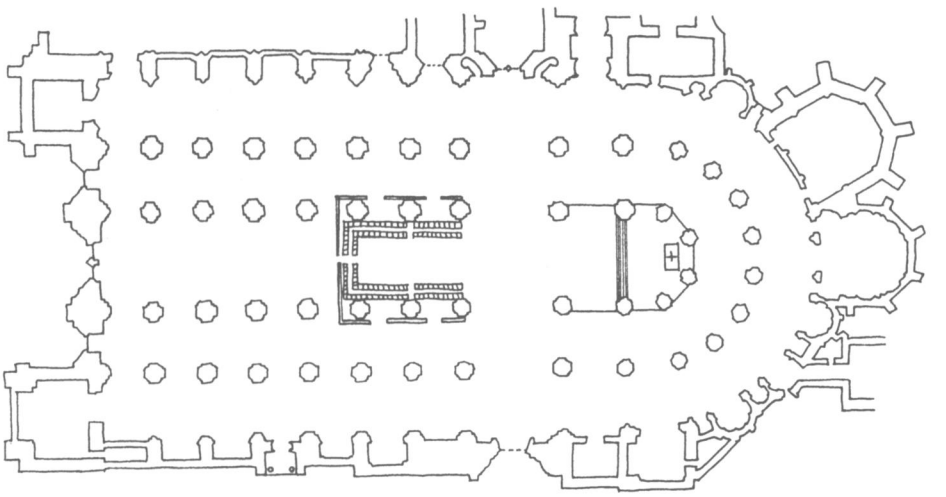

1) Toledo, cathedral, ground plan (drawing JK)

In that year, French masters were commissioned by Archbishop Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada to build a cathedral in the classical Gothic style. Apart from practical needs for a new building, this imported architectural style from the Île-de-France also served to emphasise the Christian identity of the city and its government. From the original structure of the mosque only a few columns and a capital remain, reused as *spolia* in the choir partition.[15]

Architecturally speaking, Toledo Cathedral shows close affinities with the French cathedrals of Paris and Bourges. They all consist of five aisles, a double ambulatory and a transept that does not exceed the width of the nave. Nevertheless, at the same time, it has been characterised as the most Spanish of all Spanish Gothic cathedrals.[16] Unusual by French standards, for example, is the great overall width of the church and the strikingly short chevet, which only encloses one chancel bay before the semi-circular apse. These aspects of the architectural design, partly due to the construction of the cathedral on the foundations of the mosque with its wide rectangular ground plan, must have puzzled its French builders and visitors.

15 F. Chueca, *La catedral de Toledo* (León, 1975), and J.F. Rivera, *La catedral de Toledo* (Toledo, 1950).

16 Navascués Palacio, *La catedral en España*, 49.

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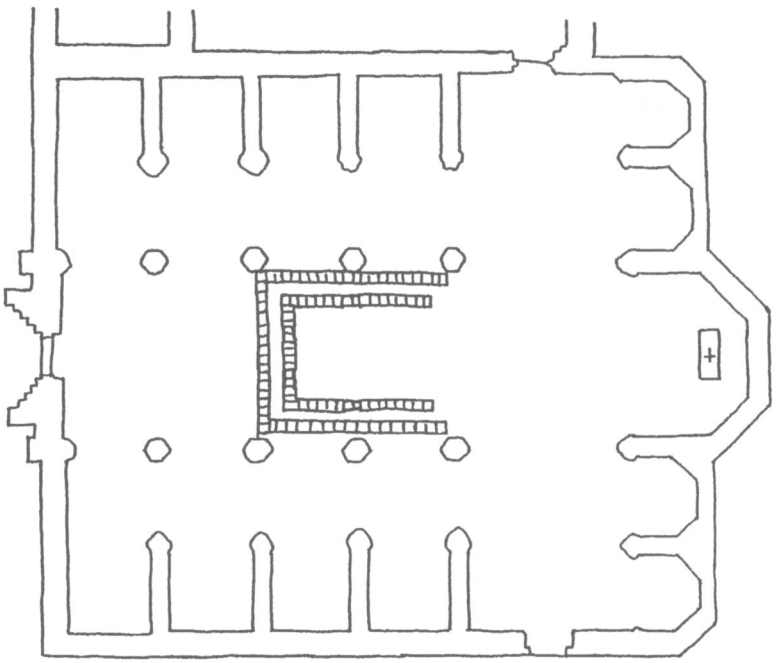
Around 1100, under the reign of Kings Pedro I (1094-1104) and Alfonso I (1104-1134) the Aragonese also expanded southwards, conquering the cities of Huesca, Tarragona and Zaragoza.[17] In Huesca, which had been captured in 1096, the mosque was transformed into a cathedral in 1097 and dedicated to Christ the Nazarene, the Virgin Mary, Saint Peter and both the St Johns.[18] Serious plans for replacing the mosque with a Gothic cathedral were not made until the third quarter of the thirteenth century. In 1273, the Aragonese King Jaime I (1213-1276) expressed his wish to replace what used to be 'the mosque of the Saracens' with a cathedral built in the Christian manner.[19] The Gothic building, which was largely erected in the fourteenth century, has survived to date [Fig. 2].



2) Huesca, cathedral, ground plan (drawing JK)

17 On the history of Medieval Aragon, see T.N. Bisson, *The Medieval Crown of Aragon. A Short History* (Oxford, 1986).

18 E. Carrero Santamaría, 'De mezquita a catedral. La seo de Huesca y sus alrededores entre los siglos XI y XV', in E. Carrero/D. Rico, *Catedral y ciudad medieval en la Península Ibérica* (Murcia, 2004) 35-75 (here 36).

19 "(...) et ecclesiam majorem eiusdem que mesquita saracenorum esse consuevit, vero quod ad edificium in eodem statu in quo erat tempore saracenorum, et sit cogitum et honestum ut in statum siue modum ecclesiarum more christiano constructarum ad honorem sumi domini immutetur", cit. from R. del Arco, 'La mezquita mayor y la catedral de Huesca', in *Argensola* 5 (1951) 35-42 (here 39).

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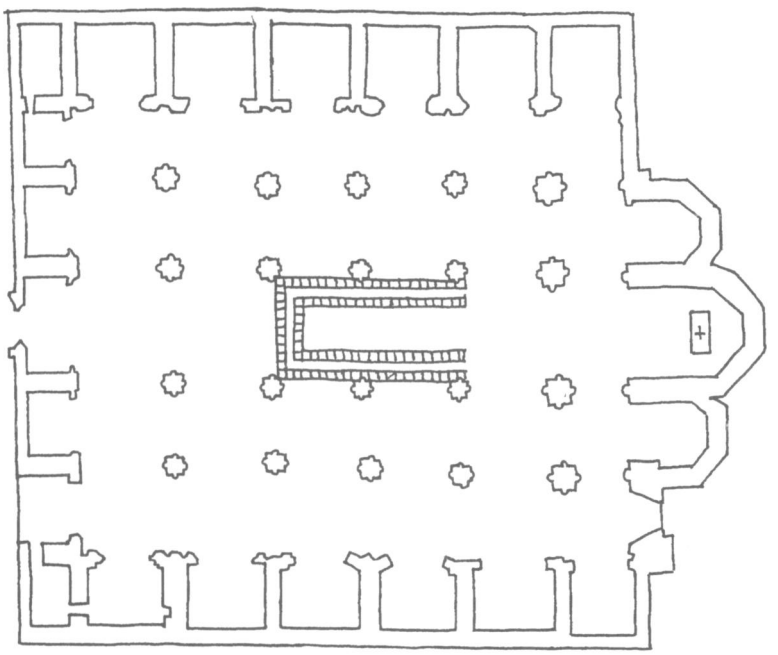
The wide rectangular plan still betrays the contours of the former mosque, while the striking chevet consisting of a row of almost square chapels seems to be inspired by Cistercian models.[20] The last mentioned aspect may reflect the deep involvement of this monastic order in the endeavour of the Spanish Reconquest. The minaret adjoining the building was probably transformed into a bell tower.[21]

In Zaragoza, conquered in 1118, the mosque – one of the oldest in the Iberian peninsula, begun in 713 – was consecrated by Bishop Pedro de Librana on 6 January 1119 (the day of Epiphany) and dedicated to Christ the Saviour.[22] Immediately after, Librana started a fundraising campaign in order to replace the old mosque with a new church, the building of which was not started until 1189 under Bishop Pedro de Torroja y Villabertrán. After several building campaigns and a number of enlargements over the next centuries, Zaragoza Cathedral was finished as a five-aisled building in Gothic style with an almost square ground plan which is strongly reminiscent of its Islamic predecessor [Fig. 3].[23]



3) Zaragoza, cathedral, ground plan (drawing JK)

20 J.M. de Azcárate, *Arte gótico en España* (Madrid, 1990) 48.
21 A. Durán Gudiol, *Historia de la catedral de Huesca* (Huesca, 1991) 37-38.
22 F. Abbad Rios, *La Seo y El Pilar de Zaragoza* (Madrid, s.a.) 14.
23 P. Araguas/A. Peropadre Muniesa, 'La 'Seo del Salvador', église cathédrale de Saragosse, étude architecturale, des origines à 1550', in *Bulletin Monumental* 147/4 (1989) 281-305.

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The Catalan city of Lleida, east of Zaragoza, was captured on 24 October 1149. Here, the main mosque was quickly transformed into a cathedral built in a transitional style between late Romanesque and early Gothic.[24]

In 1229, a joint Catalan-Aragonese fleet under the command of King Jaime I, known as 'the Conqueror', seized the island of Majorca. The Great Mosque in the capital Palma was consecrated as a cathedral and maintained as such until well into the fourteenth century. From 1386 onwards, this building, referred to by the Spanish pope Benedict XIII as "that damned mosque of the Saracens",[25] was subsequently supplanted by a church building in the slender Catalan Gothic style. According to a contemporary voice, the old mosque was no longer regarded as suitable for the canons' prayer: "(...) and the choir, parts of which have been splendidly carved already, can be situated in its proper spot in the church (...), so that when these works are finished and the church is cleaned of the rubble of the old edifice, this choir, that is now still situated under the mentioned construction, can be put in place in a more decent way".[26]

When Valencia fell in 1238 after a siege of eighteen months, it was not the first time that its Great Mosque had been transformed into a Christian church. The same had already happened in the late eleventh century, when El Cid and his knights captured the town and converted "the house of the Saracens which they call a mosque" into a church honouring the Holy Virgin.[27] After the definitive conquest of the city, the mosque was turned into a cathedral by the archbishop of Tarragona. Twenty-four years later, construction of a Gothic cathedral on top of the demolished mosque began, with the building work continuing well into the fourteenth century. Again, the ground plan of this cathedral shows the layout of its Islamic predecessor in its great width, combined with an extremely short eastern limb which only consists of a polygonal apse.[28]

In contrast to the cases mentioned above, some Andalusian cities preserved their Great Mosque to some or even a large extent. After their victory in the decisive Battle at Las Navas de Tolosa in the Sierra Morena in 1212, the Christians pushed through into the heart of Al-Andalus, where the old capital Córdoba was taken in 1236 and

24 On the conversion of Lleida Cathedral, see E. Carrero Santamaría, 'La mezquita mayor, Santa María l'Antiga y la canónica de la Seu Vella de Lleida: Historia de una confusión', in *Actas XIII Congreso CEHA. Ante el nuevo milenio. Raíces culturales, proyección y actualidad del arte español*, vol. 1 (Granada, 2001) 65-74.

25 'la maldita mezquita de los sarracenos', cited in E. Sagristà, *Gaudí en la catedral de Mallorca* (Castellón de la Plana, 1962) 29.

26 "(...) y el coro ya en parte primorosamente labrado pueda asentarse en el lugar debido de la misma iglesia (...) a fin de que terminadas estas obras, y limpiada dicha iglesia de los escombros del viejo edificio, pueda dicho coro que aun permanece bajo dicha antigua construcción, colocarse más decentemente", cit. from Sagristà, *Gaudí en la catedral de Mallorca*, 28 [translation JK].

27 O'Callaghan, *Reconquest and Crusade*, 205.

28 V. Castell, *La catedral de Valencia* (Valencia, 1978).

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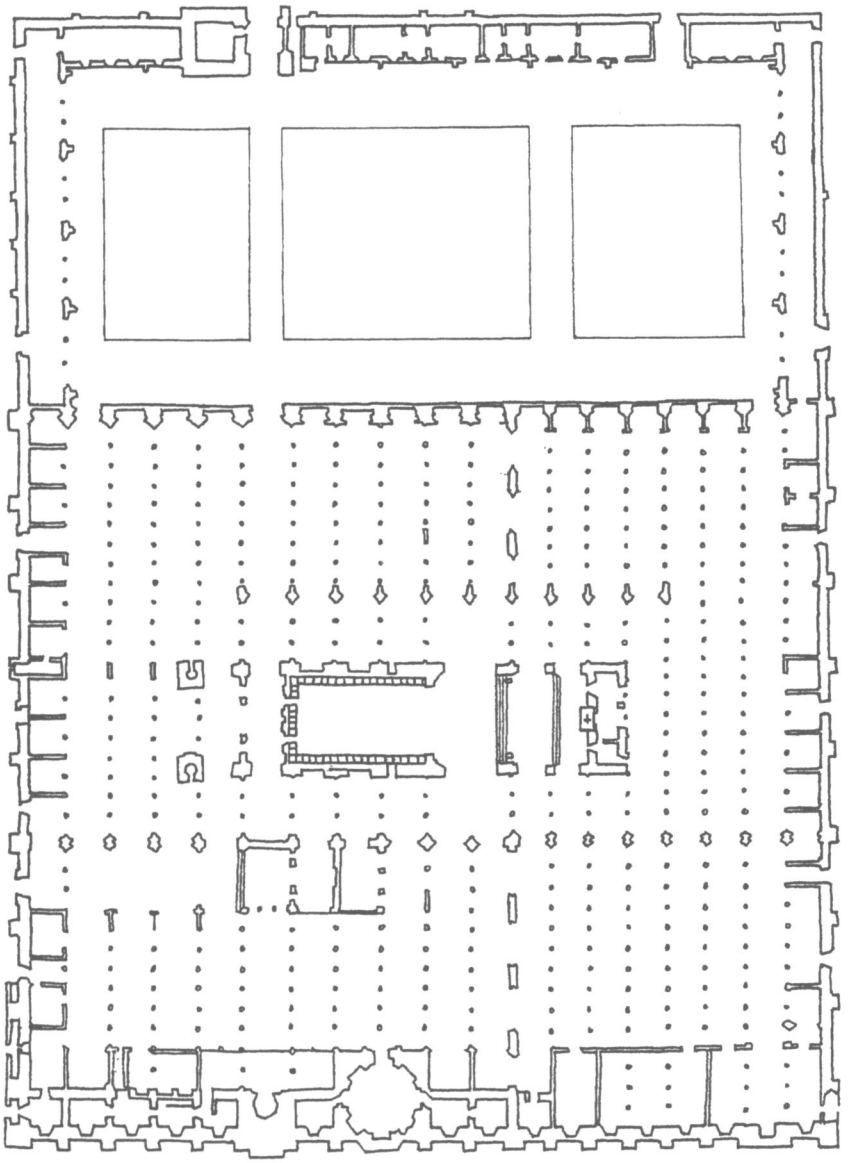
Seville in 1248. In Córdoba, as an exception, the 'Mezquita' and its fore-court have remained almost intact in their entirety [Fig. 4]. The original minaret, furthermore, still forms the core of the present bell tower.[29]



4) Córdoba, mosque-cathedral, ground plan (drawing JK)

29 L. Torres Balbás, *La mezquita de Córdoba y las ruinas de Madinat al-Zahara* (Madrid, 1952) 96-100.

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Immediately after the city was conquered, King Fernando III had a certain Master Lope de Fitero place a cross on top of the highest tower of the mosque, to which was added the royal banner beside it.[30] On the evening of that same day, the building was dedicated as a cathedral to the Virgin Mary and was inaugurated with a consecration ceremony celebrated by a deputee bishop named Juan. Then, as the chronicle reads: "After eradicating Muhammedan superstition and filthiness, they sanctified the place by sprinkling holy water with salt so that what had formerly been a cubicle of the devil was made a church of Jesus Christ under the invocation of his glorious mother".[31]

The next day King Fernando was solemnly received in the newly created cathedral by four bishops. With a sense of history, he ordered to send back to Santiago de Compostela the church bells which Al-Mansur had looted over two centuries earlier.[32] The high altar was erected in a chapel in the southwestern section of the mosque which came to be known as the Villaviciosa chapel, while the rest of the building was practically left intact.[33] According to local tradition, the fortunate conservation of the principal mosque of Moorish Spain resulted from the great impression that the building had made on its Christian conquerors. Archbishop Jiménez de Rada of Toledo is said to have considered it to be the most beautiful mosque in the world.[34] In the *Primera Crónica General*, written during the reign of King Alfonso X in the second half of the thirteenth century, the Mezquita is said to have "stood out and surpassed all other mosques among the Arabs in effect and grandeur".[35]

In 1489, Bishop Íñigo Manrique, supported by his chapter, wished to demolish the central part of the ancient mosque in order to create more space for liturgical celebrations. Queen Isabella (1474-1504), however, forbade the bishop to carry out his plans and a compromise was reached, consisting of the removal of five rows of columns between the old Villaviciosa chapel and the west wall of the structure. Two continuous walls were erected which were connected by transversal arches, thus creating a rectangular Gothic hall of limited proportions.[36]

30 Lomax, *The Reconquest*, 146.

31 Cit. taken from O'Callaghan, *Reconquest and Crusade*, 205.

32 Lomax, *The Reconquest*, 146.

33 M. Nieto Cumplido, *La Mezquita-Catedral de Córdoba* (Barcelona, 1995) 42.

34 R. Ximenez de Rada, *Roderici Toletani antistitis opera* (Valencia, 1968) 206, referred to by Nieto Cumplido, *La Mezquita-Catedral*, 263-269. Archbishop Jiménez de Rada does not seem to have similarly valued Islamic architecture in general since the same prelate had commissioned the replacement of the old mosque by a Gothic cathedral in his home city of Toledo only ten years earlier.

35 Cit. from R. Menéndez Pidal (ed.), *Primera cronica general de España que mandó componer Alfonso el Sabio y se continuaba bajo Sancho IV en 1289* (Madrid, 1955) 734: "sobraua et vençie de afeyto et de grandez a todas las otras mezquitas de los alauares".

36 Torres Balbás, *La mezquita de Córdoba*, 106.

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In April of 1523, new plans for the construction of a large-scale choir and high altar chapel were launched, which stirred up severe resistance among the city's citizens. The town council opposed vehemently to the plans, stressing that "what is taken down is of a quality that cannot be recreated in the goodness and perfection with which it is built".[37] The councillors even threatened to condemn to death any craftsman who contributed to the realisation of the plans as long as the proposal had not been approved by the monarchy.[38] However, all this could not prevent the bishop from carrying out the construction since Emperor Charles V (1516-1556), who had never visited the mezquita, decided in his favour. The central part of the mosque was taken down and the building of the new cathedral was begun on 7 September 1523. Upon a visit to Córdoba three years later, the Emperor, who was on his way to Granada, allegedly repented his earlier decision.[39] To the present day, the Renaissance choir stalls and high altar constitute a Christian island in the sea of Moorish columns that give the Mezquita of Córdoba its fascinating and puzzling effect. The contrast this building evokes provides a unique impression of the character of such churches which, for some time, existed as converted mosques elsewhere in Spain.

Further south, after the city of Seville was reconquered on 23 November 1248, King Fernando III made his solemn entry, with the rest of the army following in the next few weeks. The Great Mosque of the city was swiftly consecrated as a cathedral to the Virgin Mary. Possibly due to earthquakes in 1356 and 1395, in 1401 the decision was made by the chapter to erect a cathedral "of such a nature and that good that there will not be a peer". Local tradition has it that one of the canons had even shouted "that when our children shall see it finished, they will think that we must have been complete fools!".[40] The huge five-aisled church – the biggest Gothic church structure in the world – was erected directly upon the foundations of the mosque, which resulted in a striking rectangular ground plan of great width, but without an eastern limb (a chancel proper) [Fig. 5]. Intriguing in relation to this last feature is the journal of the German Hieronymus Münzer from 1494, which states that "the church was completed, but not the chancel".[41] The remarks of this traveller illustrate the extent to which the Spanish cathedrals differed from Gothic churches in his northern homeland. To the north of the cathedral, the *atrium* was kept largely intact, as was the Giralda, the Almohad minaret dating from 1197.

37 "que se desfaze es de calidad que no se podrá volver a fazer en la bondad e perfeçion questa fecha", cit. from S. Calvo Capilla, 'El entorno de la mezquita aljama de Córdoba antes y después de la conquista cristiana', in Carrero/Rico (eds.), *Catedral y ciudad medieval*, 9-33 (here 21).

38 Cf. M.A. Orti, 'Oposición del Cabildo Municipal de Córdoba a la construcción del crucero de la Mezquita', in *Boletín de la Real Academia de Córdoba* 71 (1954) 271-277 (here 273-274).

39 Torres Balbás, *La mezquita de Córdoba*, 106.

40 F. Gil Delgado, *Catedral de Sevilla* (Barcelona, ²1998) 4.

41 Cit from J. García Mercadal, *Viajes de extranjeros por España y Portugal desde los tiempos más remotos hasta fines del siglo XVI* (Madrid, 1952) 373 [translation JK].

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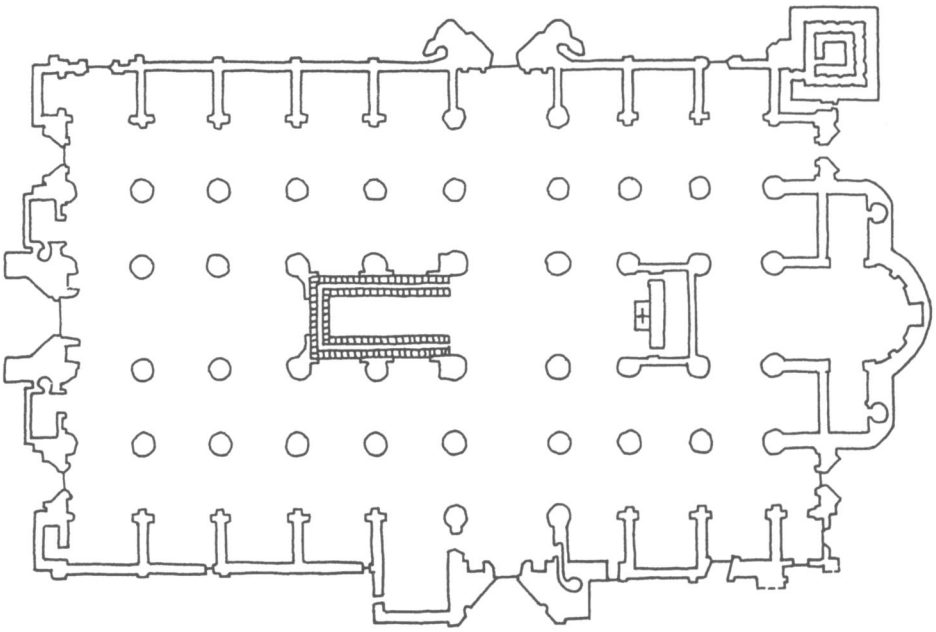

5) Seville, cathedral, ground plan (drawing JK)

A wide rectangular plan such as that at Seville is also encountered in Jaén Cathedral, which was erected from 1555 onwards, replacing a simple Gothic structure from the fourteenth century. This church has eloquently been characterised by the Spanish art historian Fernando Chueca Goitia as "possessing the features of a mosque without being one".[42]

42 F. Chueca Goitia, *Andrés de Vandelvira. Arquitecto* (Jaén, 1971) 164. On Jaén Cathedral, see G. Alamos, *Iglesia catedral de Jaén* (Jaén, 1971) and P.A. Galera, *La catedral de Jaén* (Jaén, 1983).

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The Reconquest of Granada and its Great Mosque

Towards the end of the fifteenth century, the Nasrid Kingdom of Granada, the last stronghold of Muslim Spain, was severely weakened by internal conflicts. King Ferdinand of Aragon and Queen Isabella of Castile, the monarchs of a reunited Christian Spain, seized the opportunity by launching a large-scale military campaign against the Nasrid kingdom. After Málaga, Almería and Guadix, Granada itself finally surrendered on 2 January 1492, and four days later Ferdinand and Isabella solemnly entered the city in triumph.[43] The fall of Granada was strongly symbolic: it was perceived as the definitive victory of Christendom over Islam, implying the complete eradication of Muslim dominance from the Iberian peninsula. The special role that the Christian Spaniards saw for themselves was reinforced by the fact that in the eastern Mediterranean and the Balkans the Islamic Turks made important progress.[44]

The conquest of Granada was the crowning point of the political and religious aspirations of Ferdinand and Isabella, who were called the 'Catholic Monarchs' by reason of their piety and great dedication to the church.[45] During their reign, many buildings throughout Spain were decorated with bullet-shaped motifs depicting the pomegranate ('Granada' in Spanish) in a reference to the fall of this city. In Granada itself, the Alhambra castle was seized, as was the Great Mosque in the city centre, which was subsequently dedicated to the Virgin Mary and the Incarnation. Immediately adjacent to the latter, the building of a burial chapel for the Catholic Monarchs was begun in 1506 by the Flemish architect Enrique Egas. No more than fifteen years later, the construction of a vast new cathedral began on the foundations of the mosque. Egas, who was famous for several prestigious projects in Toledo, designed a large-scale basilica in late Gothic style. In 1528, Diego de Siloé, also of Flemish descent, took over leadership of the project. An enormous five-aisled basilica was erected in the style of the early Renaissance, mingled with late Gothic elements. The plan of the church consists of a nave of great width and a striking chevet, stretching beyond a semicircle, surrounded by a narrow passage and a wide ambulatory [fig. 6].

43 Lomax, *The Reconquest*, 170.

44 During the first decades of the sixteenth century, the Spanish even made attempts to push the Muslims far back into North Africa. However, apart from a short-lived occupation of the town of Oran, this endeavour amounted to nothing. For the key role of Archbishop Cisneros in the capture of Oran, see J. García Oro, *El Cardenal Cisneros. Vida y empresas*, 2 vols. (Madrid, 1992-1993).

45 The history of Spain in this pivotal moment is described by J. Edwards, *The Spain of the Catholic Monarchs, 1474-1520* (Oxford, 2000).

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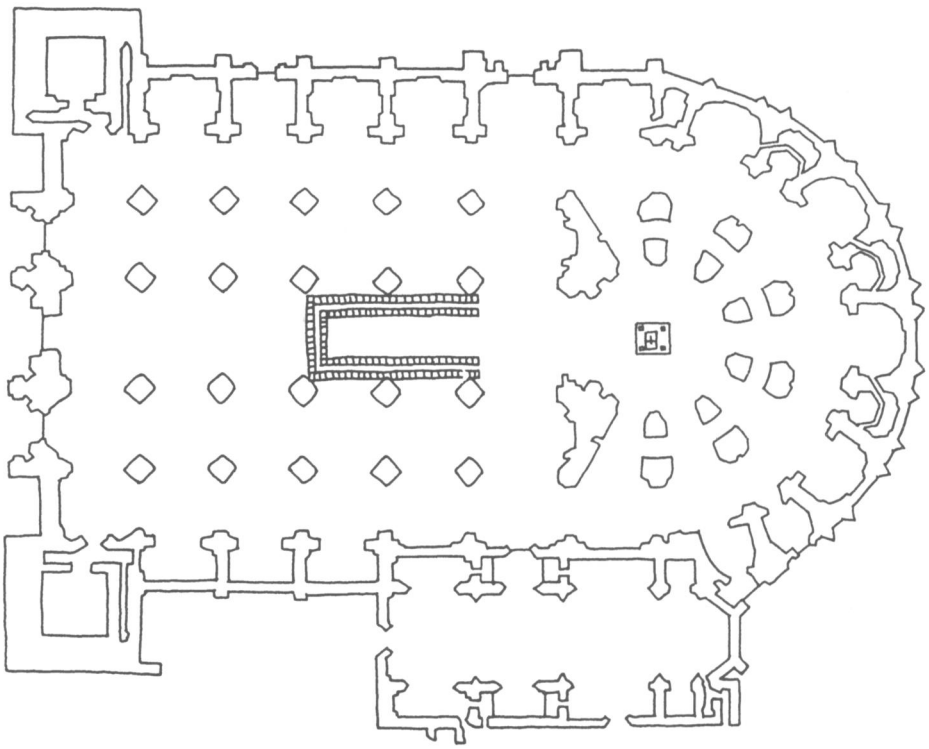

6) Granada, cathedral, ground plan (drawing JK)

The American art historian Earl E. Rosenthal published a study of this church building and its symbolism in 1961 which is still widely considered as the standard work on the subject.[46] In the third and last chapter, Rosenthal analyses the iconographic programme of the cathedral, referring not only to the imagery proper, but also to the statement emanating from the building as a whole.[47] According to his symbolic interpretation, several facets and details of the building are to be understood as expressions of political and religious triumph. Firstly, Rosenthal stresses the Renaissance style of the architecture, which he describes as a landscape of triumphal arches. Secondly, he points out to the iconographical references to the church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem that occur within the cathedral of Granada. Affinities between both sanctuaries are described, basically amounting to the combination of a rectangular and a circular component. According to Rosenthal, the circular chevet was inspired by the Anastasis Rotunda, reminding the Christian Spaniards of their duty to liberate that city too: "The iconographical references to the Holy Sepulcher in the cathedral of Granada suggest that those who planned its program were preoccupied with

46 E.E. Rosenthal, *The Cathedral of Granada. A Study in the Spanish Renaissance* (Princeton NJ, 1961).

47 Rosenthal, *The Cathedral of Granada*, 107-168.

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another city still in the hands of Islam – the holy city of Jerusalem. Prolonged pagan occupation of the Holy Land brought bitter shame to all Christian Europe, but the Spanish Crown, the titular ruler of Jerusalem by way of Aragon's acquisition of the title in the conquest of Naples and Sardinia, felt particularly responsible for the protection and recovery of the Holy Land".[48] Thirdly, Rosenthal highlights the fact that the church itself was erected on the site formerly occupied by the main mosque of the city. The Christian cathedral had thus effectively supplanted the Islamic place of worship.[49]

The conquest of Granada, the coping-stone of the Reconquista, was undoubtedly felt to be culmination of the political and religious campaign of Christian Spain. However, Rosenthal's highly symbolic approach runs the risk of overstating the uniqueness of Granada Cathedral. Thus, the observations mentioned above should be carefully examined in turn. Firstly, the architecture characterised by Rosenthal as "a declaration of triumph" reflects the early Renaissance, an architectural style which had been introduced in Rome during the second half of the fifteenth century. Pope Julius II (1503-1513) had the now cathedral church of Saint Peter rebuilt by Bramante in this new style, following the ground plan of a Greek cross with a circular dome. Characteristic of the introduction of the Renaissance in Spain was the slow acceptance of the new phenomenon, with the building of Gothic churches continuing well into the sixteenth century.[50]

The new style was initially only adopted in the ornamentation, which often seems to have been applied to the surface of the architecture. This resulted in the so-called 'plateresco'-style, a term which stresses the silversmith-like, superficial character of the decoration. It is intriguing that in Granada the building was commenced in what is referred to as the 'Spanish-Flemish style', a Spanish version of late Gothic architecture and sculpture which was heavily inspired by examples from northern Europe. If this design had been carried out, the building could also have been interpreted as a declaration of triumph, since in medieval Spain, Gothic architecture was considered to be the epitome of Christian culture. In contrast to Granada, almost simultaneously, a surprisingly pure Gothic cathedral was erected in the heart of the depopulated Jewish quarter in Segovia.[51] Interestingly enough, this church took over the cathedral function from an earlier church elsewhere in Segovia which had been built on the foundations of a former mosque too.

48 Cit. from Rosenthal, *The Cathedral of Granada*, 164.

49 Rosenthal, *The Cathedral of Granada*, 116-118.

50 The Spaniards even exported the Gothic style to the New World, as churches in Mexico, such as Acolman, Tecamachalco, Teposcolula and Yanhuitlán, illustrate.

51 V. Nieto Alcaide, 'La versatilidad del sistema gótico: Construcción y reforma de las catedrales castellano-leonesas en el Renacimiento', in M.A. Castillo Oreja et al. (eds.), *Las catedrales españolas en la edad moderna. Aproximación a un nuevo concepto del espacio sagrado* (Madrid, 2001) 129-147.

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Secondly, the supposed reference to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem relies on interpreting the plan highly symbolically. Rosenthal assumes that the characteristic features of medieval copies of the Holy Sepulchre which are also to be found in the circular chevet of the cathedral in Granada, such as certain dimensions and the central location of the high altar, point to the symbolic reconstruction of the tomb itself. In fact, many centrally-planned churches taking the form of a Greek cross or a rotunda were combined with a rectangular component, the latter being in most cases the nave of the church. A more direct parallel to the arrangement of the cathedral of Granada is to be found in the earlier described cathedral of Toledo. In this city, a five-aisled church was also built, showing a three-quarter circle chevet to the east, surrounded by a double ambulatory.[52] In the Spanish context, a reference to Toledo – 'the Primate of all Spains' – would seem to be more natural.

As can be concluded from the first section of this article, Granada Cathedral was by no means exceptional in being erected on the foundations of a demolished mosque. This procedure was followed time and again across the Iberian peninsula from the very beginning of the Reconquest. In fact, events in Granada closely (and deliberately, referring to earlier conquests[53]) followed the usual procedure, raising doubts about the great triumphal significance to which Rosenthal refers. Two years before the fall of Granada the building had already been targeted as a war-booty by the royal chronicler Hernando de Pulgar during a surprise raid on the city. As was stated before, the 'cleansed' mosque was dedicated to the Virgin Mary and the Incarnation, the latter being a mystery of faith that pre-eminently stressed the inception of Christianity. For over 25 years, between 1492 and 1521, the old mosque served as the bishop's church. The new cathedral which was subsequently built followed the wide, short ground plan of most mosque-cathedrals, with the canon's choir in the eastern part of the nave, as was common in Spain.

We may conclude that Granada Cathedral was not at all unique, but rather continued the traditional pattern of converting sacred space in the Spanish Middle Ages. It constituted the last in a series of examples where the old mosque served as a cathedral for some time after the Christian conquest, and was subsequently supplanted by a church building of European design. Although in most cases the consecration of a mosque was probably seen as a sign of the victory of Christianity over Islam, this triumphalism was not necessarily expressed in its architecture. When a church was erected over a former mosque, its style was generally borrowed from other European countries such as France, Italy and Flanders. In the first half of the sixteenth century, just as in other countries, the style of the Italian Renaissance had become dominant in southern Spain. Although Granada Cathedral should be regarded as one of the earliest Spanish examples of full-fledged Renaissance architecture, this style does not cover

52 G.C. von Konradsheim, 'El ábside de la catedral de Toledo', in *Archivo español de arte* 48 (1975) 217-224.

53 Lomax, *The Reconquest*, 170.

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other features, such as the rectangular form of the nave, the almost circular chevet, and the placement of the canon's choir in the eastern part of the nave.

Consequences for the interior arrangements

In most Spanish cathedrals, the arrangement of the liturgical furnishings differs essentially from the pattern in other European countries such as France, England or Germany.[54] Indeed, upon entering, one is immediately surprised by the lack of an uninterrupted vista through the building. From the west this is impeded almost immediately by a closed choir partition ('trascoro'). The bays at the west end of the nave are therefore no more than a vestibule, a transition from the street to the hallowed area.[55] The avenue of columns characteristic of Gothic naves in other countries is absent. The transept, reached via the side aisles, stretches uninterruptedly across the nave, lending the north-south axis, rather than that from east to west, the visual effect of a nave.[56] At the intersection of the two is the crossing, squeezed between two closed domains both surrounded by a system of partitions and railings [Fig. 7]. The choir ('coro') stretches to the west, its stalls in the shape of a horseshoe with the open side to the east. East of the transept is the sanctuary, where the high altar and retable stand resplendent.

54 See P. Navascués Palacio, *Teoría del coro en las catedrales españolas* (Madrid, 1998) and, more recently, id., *La catedral en España.* A section on the location of the choir in Spanish cathedrals in relation to the development of the altarpiece is to be published in J.E.A. Kroesen, *Staging the Liturgy. The Medieval Altarpiece in the Iberian Peninsula* (Louvain/Paris/Walpole MA, 2009), 165-278.

55 Cf. J. Rivas Carmona, *Los trascoros de las catedrales españolas: Estudio de una tipología arquitectónica* (Murcia, 1994) 17.

56 G.E. Street, *Some Account of Gothic Architecture in Spain*, I (New York/London, 1914) [reprint 1969, Ed. G. Goddard King] 17: "(...) in most great churches the Crucero, or crossing, and the transept really do the work of the nave, in the way of accommodating the people".

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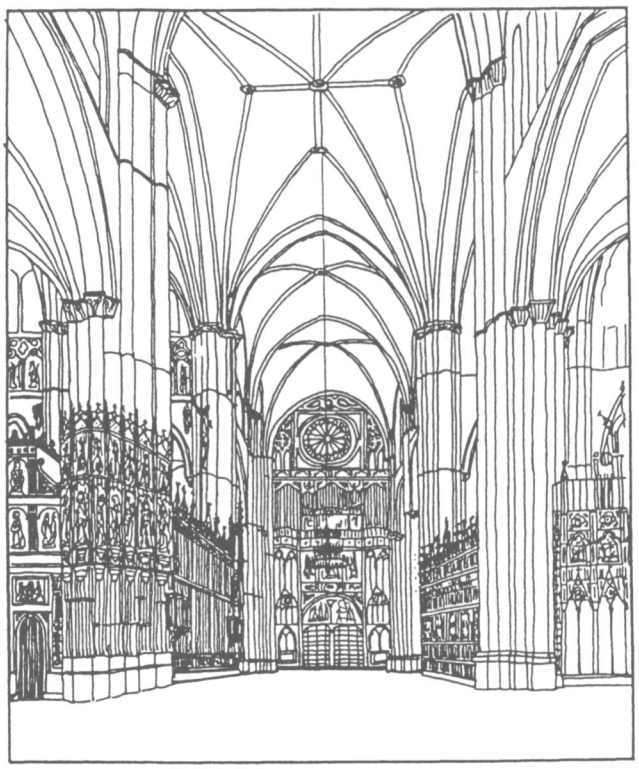

7) Toledo, cathedral, view of the transept looking south (drawing JK)

In most cathedrals in other European countries, the articulation of the interior from west to east along the length of the church follows a scheme of 1. room for the people, 2. canon's choir and 3. presbytery. In contrast, the interior of the Spanish cathedrals is composed of 1. room for the people, 2. canon's choir, 3. room for the people, and 4. presbytery.[57] This interior arrangement is somewhat reminiscent of monastic churches, but the one essential difference is that the area between the sanctuary and choir is freely accessible to the laity.[58] It is intriguing that this arrangement of medieval cathedrals was almost exclusive to the Iberian peninsula, with only very few examples outside of Spain.[59] The nave choir was a feature of Spanish cathedrals from Santiago de Compostela in the extreme northwest to Murcia in the far southeast, and

57 Exceptions were the cathedrals of Vic, Ávila, Cuenca, Palencia, Burgos and León. Towards the middle of the sixteenth century in all these churches, except León, the choir stalls were moved from the eastern limb to the eastern bays of the nave.

58 Rivas Carmona, *Los trascoros de las catedrales españolas*, 16 and 56-57.

59 In the cathedral of Reims (F) the choir was also in the nave but here, this resulted from the Coronation ceremony of the Capetian Kings which took place in the crossing bay with the vassals sitting in the transepts.

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from Seville in the southwest to Girona in the northeast.[60] In fact, it was even exported to the New World, where cathedrals from Mexico City to Lima all correspond to the pattern sketched above. Therefore, we may rightly speak of the "Spanish model".[61]

The central arrangement of the choir differs in two important aspects from the 'classical' model sketched before. Firstly, the choir stalls are not situated in the eastern limb of the church, but in the eastern part of the nave. The resulting public nature of the crossing implies a second deviation from the classical model, that is, the severing of the spatial unity of choir and presbytery. Elsewhere in Europe these two areas often formed an enclosed *Sancta Sanctorum*, accessible only to the clergy. It was not only prohibited for non-clerics to enter this domain, but it also remained even invisible behind high-rising stone walls and screens. As the lay people attended Mass at their own altar, which was usually placed in front of a rood screen, and side chapels were accommodated along the nave and around the presbytery, late Medieval churches virtually consisted of a number of churches within the main structure, ranging from highly clerical to popular.[62] In Spanish cathedrals, on the other hand, sanctuary and choir formed two individual, isolated domains, separated from each other by the crossing, which afforded the lay people a view of the high altar.

To a large extent the origin of the location of the altar and choir which is typical in Spain can be traced back to the Romanesque pilgrim's cathedral of Santiago de Compostela. Here, towards the middle of the twelfh century, a sculptor named Maestro Mateo carved a set of stone benches with surrounding partitions to be placed in the three easternmost bays of the nave, leaving the crossing freely accessible for the faithful [Fig. 8].[63]

60 The situation in neighbouring Portugal is more complex, as lack of information hardly allows general observations to be made.

61 Cf. Navascués Palacio, *Teoría del coro*, 68: "Aquella encarna una realidad forjada en el yunque del tiempo (...)" and Rivas Carmona, *Los trascoros de las catedrales españolas*, 15: "Realmente, se trata de algo sumamente peculiar de nuestras iglesias, contribuyendo a una configuración especial de las mismas".

62 This observation was made earlier by A. Erlande-Brandenburg in chapter 6 of his book on *The Cathedral. The Social and Architectural Dynamics of Construction* (Cambridge, 1994).

63 A partial reconstruction of this choir is exhibited in the chapter house at Santiago Cathedral. See also R. Otero Túñez/R. Yzquierdo Perrín, *El coro del Maestro Mateo* (A Coruña, 1990).

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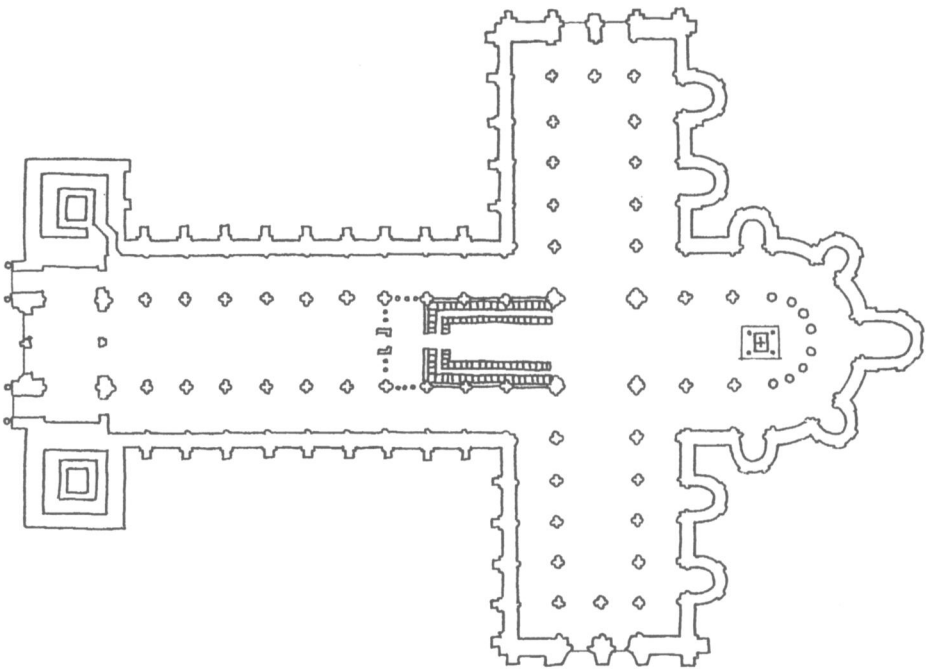

8) Santiago de Compostela, cathedral, ground plan (drawing JK)

The fact that the stalls were placed here and not immediately in front of the high altar is likely to be a consequence of the pilgrims' habit of saying their prayers *in front of* the sepulchre of the apostle St James. Most pilgrims entered the church through the north transept – the so-called Puerta de la Azabachería – and visited the chapel of St Nicholas in the north transept to thank the patron saint of travellers for their safe arrival. Subsequently, they went on through the transept toward the crossing in order to pay homage to the relics of the apostle under the high altar, which were the main object of their devotion. After sunset, the pilgrims would come back to the cathedral in order to hold the night watch again *ante corpus apostolicum* – in front of the apostle's grave.[64] As well as these practical aspects, the location of the choir in the nave could also be influenced by examples drawn from monastic churches. The role of monks, especially Cluniacs, in the Spanish church hierarchy and the organisation of the pilgrimage to the apostle's tomb was indeed very prominent.[65] From 1088 onward the seat of Compostela was governed by Bishop Dalmacio, himself a Cluniac monk.

Although Mateo's choir in Compostela is the oldest known example of a canons' choir in the nave of a Spanish cathedral, it was eventually the conversion of mosques

64 M. Chamoso Lamas, 'El coro de la catedral de Santiago', in *Cuadernos de estudios gallegos* 5 (1950) 191.

65 These aspects are discussed by V. Cantarino, 'The Spanish Reconquest: A Cluniac Holy War against Islam?', in K.I. Semaan (ed.), *Islam and the West* (Albany, 1980) 82-109.

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into cathedrals that resulted in the great spread of this arrangement, making it into the Spanish model. As far as is known from both written and material evidence, in every converted mosque the choir stalls were inserted in the centre of the building, separate from the high altar in a walled domain. In Toledo, as was stated earlier, after the Great Mosque was consecrated as a cathedral, the high altar was erected in front of the eastern wall of the building. Although the exact arrangement of the liturgical furnishings is unknown, it is likely that in this wide rectangular building the choir stalls were situated somewhere in the centre. This arrangement was adapted, or more probably maintained, in the newly built Gothic cathedral on the same site. The following of the model of Compostela by the builders and prelates of Toledo can possibly be interpreted as a deliberate allusion to that holy city of the apostle St James. The location of the choir in the nave even influenced the architecture of the church, as can be deduced from the unusual ground plan with its short eastern limb. As the building closely follows French examples such as Paris and Bourges in almost all other aspects, the deliberate insertion of the choir stalls in the nave must have been part of the original design.[66]

The same procedure was followed in converted mosques in the Kingdom of Aragon. In the almost square Gothic cathedral of Zaragoza, the location of the choir in the second and third bays of the nave is most probably a continuation of the arrangement in the converted mosque which it supplanted [Fig. 3]. A reconstruction of the apse has shown that space in this area simply ran short to accommodate a set of stalls.[67] In Huesca also, the shallow Gothic apse was clearly only designed to house the high altar [Fig. 2]. The eastern part of this church, with a row of five square chapels, seems strongly influenced by Cistercian models, which further strengthens the supposition that the choir had been within the middle of the nave – like in a monastic church – since earliest times.[68] In Palma de Majorca, which was conquered in 1229, the choir was certainly in the central aisle of the converted Great Mosque as early as 1330. After the construction of the Gothic cathedral from 1386 onwards, the choir was installed 'in the suitable place' from the second to the fourth bay from the east side [Fig. 9].[69] Also in the cathedral of Valencia, with its strikingly shallow eastern limb, the choir had probably been within the nave from the construction of the church up until its removal in 1943.[70]

66 Navascués Palacio, *La catedral en España*, 49.

67 Araguas/Peropadre Muniesa, 'La 'Seo del Salvador", 281-305.

68 Cf. L. Torres Balbás, *Arquitectura gótica* (Ars Hispaniae, VII) (Madrid, 1952) 218.

69 Recalling the earlier cited Sagristà, *Gaudí en la catedral de Mallorca*, 28: "(...) y el coro ya en parte primorosamente labrado pueda asentarse *en el lugar debido* de la misma iglesia (...)" [italics JK].

70 The fourteenth-century trascoro was already moved to the chapter house in 1777, cf. Navascués Palacio, *La catedral en España*, 263-269.

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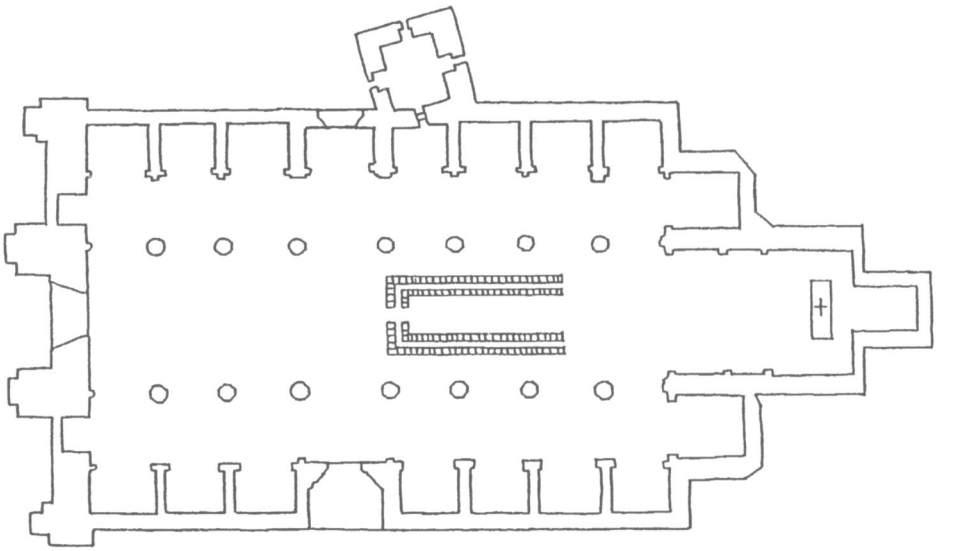

9) Palma de Majorca, cathedral, ground plan (drawing JK)

The famous Mezquita at Córdoba offers the best impression of how these Christian furnishings were located in a converted mosque. As mentioned in the previous section, after 1523 a monumental ensemble of choir and high altar chapel was erected in the very centre of the rectangular mosque. Today, this domain appears as an island of Christian worship in a sea of Moorish columns [Fig. 4]. The closest parallel is the vast Gothic cathedral of Seville, where the choir stalls were also probably located in the centre of the building from the moment the Great Mosque was consecrated as a place of Christian worship. When a vast Gothic structure was built on the foundations of the old mosque, the high altar and choir stalls were in all probability just maintained in the central aisle. In his mentioned journal, Hieronymus Münzer stated that while the nave had already been finished, the chancel was yet to be built. Münzer, who saw the structure through the eyes of a non-Spaniard, probably assumed that the arrangement of the high altar and the choir stalls in the central aisle was only a temporary solution which had grown out of mere necessity.

The Spanish model had far-reaching consequences for the way in which Mass was celebrated and experienced. As the crossing was freely accessible to both clerics and lay people, this area became a real crossroads of activities. As a result of this layout, priests walked back and forth from the sanctuary to the choir along a small corridor cutting across the transept which was created by low fences designed to clear a path through the congregation. The space 'between the two choirs' ('entre los dos coros') was used as a place for preaching, as can be determined from a few situations in which the medieval pulpits are preserved, for example in Barcelona, El Burgo de

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Osma, Murcia, Sigüenza and Tarazona cathedrals.[71] According to Blas Ortiz, a canon of the cathedral of Toledo, of 59 sermons that annually took place in the church, 37 were spoken "(...) from a public and very famous place constructed especially for the purpose; it is the eminent place which is already said to be puple coloured and situated to the left of the presbytery".[72] Apart from sermons, the crossing was also the scene of liturgical processions, a place for the showing of relics, performing mystery plays, for the temporary Easter Sepulchre, and for semi-religious ceremonies such as coronations. According to H.D. Smith, who studied Spanish preaching in the sixteenth century, the crossing also provided space for social interaction, as it was "noted as a place of rendezvous for damas and galanes".[73] A further consequence of the physical separation of high altar and choir stalls was the visibility of the altar for both clerics and lay people. In this respect, the Spanish cathedrals differed radically from those in countries such as France, Germany and England. In Spain the canons in the choir and the lay people in the transept celebrated Mass at the same high altar, and listened to the same preacher from a pulpit in the crossing.

Despite the far-reaching liturgical implications of the Spanish model, these aspects have hardly received any attention in literature. On the contrary, in his famous book *Die Entstehung der Kathedrale*, Hans Sedlmayr described the Spanish arrangement of the interior as "a liturgically absurd, but from the viewpoint of religious history a symptomatic, even symbolic form", because it not only deprived "the lay people from a view of the high altar, but also impeded the panorama of the nave as a whole".[74] In Spain itself, recent publications by P. Navascués Palacio have begun to positively change the way in which the choir is regarded by art historians and liturgists. As a result, a joint effort by art historians and liturgists to study the origins and consequences

71 See also P. Navascués Palacio, 'El coro y la arquitectura de la catedral: el caso de León', in P. Navascués Palacio/J.L. Gutiérrez Robledo (eds.), *Medievalismo y neomedievalismo en la arquitectura española - Las catedrales de Castilla y León*, I (Ávila, 1994) 78.

72 Cit. from R. Gonzálvez/F. Pereda (eds.), *La catedral de Toledo en 1549 según el Doctor Blas Ortiz. Descripción Graphica y elegantíssima de la S. Iglesia de Toledo* (Toledo, 1999) 224-225: "Quae praefinitae et statae hebentur, omnes numero quinquaginta novem sunt, ex quibus triginta septem loco publico et celeberrimo, ad eos usus nimirum structo, recitantur, is est eminens illud et porphiriticum suggestum, quod a parte sinistra maioris sacelli collocatum esse diximus".

73 Cit. from H.D. Smith, *Preaching in the Spanish Golden Age. A Study of Some Preachers of the Reign of Philip III* (Oxford, 1978) 14, note 5.

74 Cit. from H. Sedlmayr, *Die Entstehung der Kathedrale* (Zürich, 1950) 438: "Die Störung der Idee der Kathedrale durch Einbauten ist in Spanien stärker als anderswo. Zerschneiden in England die großen "screens" noch schroffer als in Frankreich die Kathedrale in aneinandergeschobene Kirchen, so sperrt in Spanien die *Verlegung des Chors der Geistlichen* – den mit dem Altarraum ein Gang (eine "solea") verbindet – *in das Langhaus* durch hohe Umhegung den Laien nicht nur die Sicht auf den Hauptaltar, sondern auch in das Hauptschiff selbst. Den an die Peripherie abgedrängten laien bleibt nur ein "Umgang", während der Klerus eine Kirche in der Kirche bildet: eine liturgisch absurde, aber religionsgeschichtlich symptomatische, ja symbolische Form." [italics by Sedlmayr].

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of the Spanish choir model is desirable in order to further deepen insights into the special character of Spanish church furnishings and their implications for the celebration of liturgy.

Conclusions

During the Christian Reconquest of Moorish Spain, the capture of towns and villages was usually followed by the transformation of mosques into churches. In most cases, after a bell had been hung in the minaret and the building was solemnly consecrated by the reading of a Mass, the old mosque served as a place of Christian worship for some time until finally being supplanted by a church building of European design. In fact, most Spanish cathedrals effectively supplanted a mosque, symbolising the supremacy that Christianity had finally gained over Islam. In only a few cases, for example in Córdoba and Seville, were parts of the Islamic mosque left intact. In places where mosques were completely demolished and subsequently superseded by new cathedrals, such as Lisbon, Huesca, Valencia, Zaragoza, Toledo, Jaén and Granada, the outline of their predecessors is still betrayed by ground plans that differ essentially from standard European models. Many Gothic cathedrals in the Iberian peninsula are rectangular, of great width and little length, with the extreme shallowness of the eastern limb being particularly striking. In the church interior, these architectural circumstances had a strong influence on the spatial arrangement of the liturgical furnishings. As space was short in the chancel proper, the choir stalls were erected in the easternmost bays of the nave, leaving a freely accessible area in the crossing between choir and presbytery. This meant that in Spain both the clergy and the lay people attended Mass at the high altar, whereas in other European countries presbytery and choir were strictly concealed behind closed walls and partitions. Spanish cathedrals thus seem to be conditioned by their predecessors not only in their form, but also in their use. These observations raise questions concerning the highly symbolic interpretation that is sometimes ascribed to Spanish cathedrals. In fact, both maintaining the mosque for some time and then reusing its foundations suggest that the triumphant symbolism was rather balanced by practical, economic issues.

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