

Evie Odden  
Site Summary  
Great Mosque of Cordoba

Background:

Although evidence is scarce, it is believed that the original structure, which is now the Great Mosque of Cordoba, was a Christian church dedicated to Saint Vincent the Third. It is said that the land was shared between Christians and Muslims until 784, when the entirety of the site was purchased by the Emir Abd al-Rahman I, and the original structure was demolished and rebuilt as the Great Mosque of Cordoba, influenced by Roman and Byzantine architectural traditions. Abd al-Rahman had fled from Damascus, where a political upheaval had ended the Umayyad dynasty in Syria. In Córdoba, he founded the small Hispano-Umayyad line, which lasted between 756 and 1031, in which an elite, minority Muslim group ruled over the Christian population. After the foundation of the Great Mosque of Córdoba, it was expanded several times during the 9th and 10th centuries. In 1236, Córdoba was conquered by Ferdinand III of Castile, and the mosque was converted into a Christian Church. The architecture remained relatively untouched until 1523, when the architects of Charles V built a gothic cathedral inside the mosque. Currently, the Mosque of Córdoba is owned by the Catholic Church, and there are ongoing debates about whether or not Muslims should be able to pray in the Mosque of Córdoba.

Article 1: The Stratigraphy of Forgetting: The Great Mosque of Córdoba and Its Contested Legacy

- 1) When the Mosque was conquered by Ferdinand III of Castile, there were almost no artistic changes made when he converted it into a church, despite the clear Islamic references to be found around the building.
  - a) At first glance, this reveals the level of comfort people of different faiths felt in each other's spaces in this century in Córdoba.
  - b) However, the fact that this is the accepted interpretation reveals a normalization of oppressive coexistence that stems from past and current struggles in Spain with religious representation.
    - i) Revising history, it can be found that Jewish and Christian residents of conquered cities were awarded protection in exchange for minimizing public religious displays. This systemically allowed for a minority ruler, since peaceful suppression was more favorable than ongoing war.
- 2) In 2004, the Islamic Council lobbied with Pope John Paul to be able to pray in the Mosque of Córdoba. They were denied this right.
  - a) Muslims have been fighting for the right to pray at this location not because they need more spaces to pray, but because of the symbolic value of praying in Spain after repression.

- b) A major justification for not allowing Muslims to pray in the Mosque of Córdoba is the fact that the site was originally home to a church. This is used to delegitimize the Muslim argument that their prior ownership of the Mosque gives them the right to hold prayer there, since it was technically first a church.
  - i) This is simply a convenient argument that fails to recognize the rich and complex layers of Spanish history and society.
- c) Because individual, elite Muslims have been allowed to pray in the Mosque of Córdoba, the fact that the Vatican still denies the right of Muslims to pray, making their argument by using historical chronology, is reflective of several political tensions in modern Spain that lie in the shadow of false religious tolerance.
  - i) It reveals how much weight the differences in Islamic and Christian prayer (kneeling, chanting, etc.) have. Allowing mass Islamic worship would be symbolic of growing Islamic political power in Spain during a time of Western Islamophobia.
  - ii) It also reflects issues with growing numbers of immigrants in Spain. The performative aspect of Muslim prayer is symbolic, to the Vatican, of a resistance to assimilation.

#### Article 2: The Meaning of the Great Mosque of Córdoba in the Tenth Century

- 1) The 10th century expansion of the Great Mosque of Córdoba under al-Hakam II al-Mustansir synthesizes the Mosque's complex identity that remains caught between histories, cultures, and mythologies, but is inherently tied to the Umayyad dynasty as the expansion had a direct intent of enhancing the iconic power of past and present caliphs.
  - a) Al-Hakam's decision to place a "mosque within a mosque" places visual attention on Islamic symbolism.
  - b) Al-Hakam's choice to not correct the direction in which the qibla faces reveals his commitment to connecting the expansion to the original conquest and the choices of the Muslims who came before him.
    - i) Shows that communal and historical connections transcend geographical location.
  - c) Al-Hakam's inscriptions in the expansion are intended to connect the past with the future in an effort to renew Islamic society.
    - i) Inscriptions in the expansion call for unity in issues that threatened the Umayyad dynasty in the original conquest.
    - ii) Al-Hakam's choices with inscriptions follow the language of shrines, always expressing gratitude for God's predestination that allowed him to expand the Mosque as a continuity of the past.

### Works Cited

- Khoury, Nuha N. "The Meaning of the Great Mosque of Cordoba in the Tenth Century." *Muqarnas* , vol. 13, 1996, pp. 80–98.
- Ruggles, Fairchild. "The Stratigraphy of Forgetting: The Great Mosque of Cordoba and Its Contested Legacy." *Antipoda*, no. 12, Jan. 2011, pp. 19–37.