VILLA (MUNA) ARCHITECTURE IN UMAYYAD CÓRDOBA: PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

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Introduction

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

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

**MUNYA REMAINS IN CóRDOBA**

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

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munya architecture, and of the estates’ place in the urban scheme of greater Umayyad Córdoba.

Archaeologists working just beyond the city’s walled core have unearthed remains of extramural development which encircled the medieval urban centre and which suggest Córdoba’s greatest extent. Cemeteries have been found within a kilometre of the city’s western wall and on the bank of the Guadalquivir opposite the Great Mosque. The remains of streets, houses, mosques and baths comprising extramural quarters have been excavated to the north and west of the walled centre, to a distance of about four kilometres. By far the most evidence for the extramural expansion of the city is to be found west of the urban centre. Remains have been excavated in the territory beginning just outside the western wall, and extending in a rectangle westwards along the bank of the river for nearly thirteen kilometres, and northwards from the Guadalquivir for about five kilometres, as far as the Sierra Morena. It is in this western suburban zone that Madinat al-Zahrā’ is located, and in which archaeologists have uncovered the most material evidence for munya architecture (Fig. 1).

Since no definitive chronology exists for the remains which have so far been unearthed, it is perhaps best to study the munyas according to their location, beginning with the sites closest to the walled centre, then proceeding west along the bank of the Guadalquivir, and ending with remains located in the foothills of the Sierra Morena. At the site located closest to the urban centre, archaeologists excavating a tenth-century suburb about one kilometre south-west of the city wall (within the present-day municipal zoo) encountered the traces of an Umayyad munya which predated the suburb. The archaeologists posit that the caliphal suburb developed around the munya (dated broadly between 756 and 923), whose traces can be identified in walls, foundations, and

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5 María Teresa Casal García, “Los cementerios Islámicos de Qurṭūba”, Anuario Arqueológico Córdoba 12 (2001), pp. 283–313. For an overview of recent archaeological discoveries of extramural development, see Antonio Arjona Castro et al., Urbanismo de la Córdoba Califal: Tras las Huellas de la Córdoba Califal (Córdoba: Edición de la Posada, 1997), pp. 17–20, though note that the identification of the remains with specific Umayyad sites is unconvincing based on the evidence presented.

6 Dolores Ruiz Lara and Juan Francisco Murillo Redondo, “Resultados de la intervención arqueológica realizada en el zoológico municipal de Córdoba”, Anuario Arqueológico de Andalucía: Informes y Memorias (AAA) (1996), pp. 123–42, especially p. 142. Evidence of fire and numerous abandoned, but whole, glass and ceramic vessels indicates that occupation of the site ended suddenly and violently in the eleventh century, which they take to support textual descriptions of the turmoil which accompanied the fitna.
Fig. 1. Map of Córdoba’s western suburban zone with approximate locations of *muqṣa* remains marked with *, Courtesy of the Conjunto Arqueológico de Madīnat al-Zahrāʾ, and after Antonio Vallejo Triano, *Madīnat al-Zahrāʾ: Guía Oficial del Conjunto Arqueológico* (Junta de Andalucía: Consejería de la Cultura, 2004).
a series of ramps, stairs and terraces connecting the site to the river, as well as ceramic and other material remains. The munya itself was apparently constructed upon the remains of a second-century Roman suburban villa oriented towards the Guadalquivir. While the remains revealed little about the plans of either the Roman villa or the munya, they provide evidence for continuity between Roman and Umayyad sites which is largely absent in the textual sources, and lend material support to medieval texts which imply that early munyas served as foci for the development of the caliphal city’s extramural quarters.7

Moving westwards along the river, three sites—the Huerta de Valladares, the Cortijo del Alcaide, and Casillas—indicate that a series of residences, richly-ornamented and oriented towards the Guadalquivir, extended along the riverbank to a distance of approximately three kilometres from the city walls (Fig. 1). The Huerta de Valladares and Cortijo del Alcaide were identified as munyas in 1949 and 1956 respectively, on the basis of in situ remains and fragments of architectural ornament which had been unearthed on the sites. They have never been properly excavated, and there is no information available regarding the plans of these structures. However, the remains of architectural ornament found at the sites indicate that the structures were constructed and decorated with materials and a visual vocabulary familiar from court buildings at Madmat al-Zahrāʾ.8

In a 1949 article about the Huerta de Valladares, located about three kilometres from the south-west corner of Córdoba’s walled centre, Rafael Castejón described standing walls, extant pavements, and the remains of carved stone architectural ornament which were then still

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8 I am grateful to María Dolores Baena Alcántara, Director of the Museo Arqueológico y Etnológico de Córdoba, and María Jesús Moreno for access to the materials excavated at these and other presumed munya sites. These rich materials, including epigraphic fragments, await systematic analysis and publication. To these fragments may be added approximately fifty fragments in the collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum, to which Mariam Rosser-Owen has recently drawn my attention. Preliminary examination of the V&A fragments suggests a close relationship in material and decoration to those in the Museo Arqueológico de Córdoba, but comparative analysis of the V&A fragments with those in Córdoba is necessary to establish whether they originated at Madmat al-Zahrāʾ or from one or more of the other Córdoban sites.
visible at the site. Castejón concluded that the dimensions of stone blocks found there could be compared to construction (presumably at the Great Mosque) carried out under al-Manṣūr, while he judged the incised vegetal ornament on the stone fragments to be comparable in quality and technique to those discovered at Madīnat al-Zahrā'. Although there is no documentation of excavations from this period, the numerous fragments from the site housed in the Córdoba Archaeological Museum invite comparison with Umayyad and Āmirid architecture and ornament (Fig. 2).

A series of carved stone panels—most in the form of discrete rectangular panels which would have served as pieces in larger compositions, but two of which feature carved panels framing open arches—was unearthed in 1956 at the nearby Cortijo del Alcaide, located just west of the Huerta de Valladares (Colour Plate 7A). Félix Hernández Giménez, the archaeologist who directed the first systematic excavations at Madīnat al-Zahrā', compared the quality and style of the Cortijo del Alcaide panels to al-Ḥakam II’s additions to the Great Mosque of Córdoba. More recently, Christian Ewert has dated the panels to the end of the Umayyad reign, possibly the Āmirid period, based on analysis of their decorative vocabulary. Based on the high quality of the carved stone panels, Hernández, Castejón and others have suggested that the remains at the Cortijo del Alcaide could be those of the Umayyad estate, Dar al-Nāʿūra (“Palace of the Waterwheel”).

While the distinctive Umayyad horseshoe arches with alternating red and white voussoirs, and the rectangular fields of carved vegetal orna-
ment, which characterize the Alcaide panels share obvious similarities with the decorative vocabulary of the reception hall of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān III, the residence of the caliph (Dār al-Mulk), and the House of the Small Pool (Casa de la Alberquilla) at Madīmat al-Zahrāʿ, such a precise identification of the site is at best premature. While analysis of the epigraphic fragments unearthed at the Alcaide site, and others in and around Córdoba, may provide information about dating and patronage, the remains need not be those of any particular Umayyad estate to be of interest. What is important about these sites is the material support they lend to medieval Arabic texts which allude to the location of numerous munyas near the Guadalquivir.

A handful of other sites immediately surrounding the present-day city have also yielded remains of decorated buildings, pottery and glassware, all of which await cataloguing and analysis of their decorative vocabulary and, in some cases, epigraphic fragments (Colour Plate 8). Without further investigation into these materials, however, it is difficult to say more about them beyond the fact that in materials and decorative technique they appear consistent with remains of architectural ornament.
unearthed at Madinat al-Zahrā’. Nevertheless, plotting the general find-spots for such materials on the map of present-day Córdoba gives a preliminary idea of how these complexes were distributed across the landscape of greater Umayyad Córdoba (Fig. 1).13

Casillas, located just over three kilometres from Córdoba’s south-western corner, is the most-recently identified of the munya sites. Excavated between 2001 and 2002, it also provides more information regarding the plan of these riverine sites than the Huerta de Valladares or Cortijo del Alcaide.14 Casillas had two Islamic phases, the earlier of which dates to the ninth or early tenth century, and whose remains consist of the residential portion of a larger complex which stretched northwards from the river. Walled on the east and south sides (perhaps for protection against possible flood periods), like the remains discovered at the municipal zoo site, the Casillas munya was connected to the river below by means of a structure whose precise character has yet to be clearly understood. However, traces of walls, foundations, mouldings, friezes and pavements, as well as common cooking and food storage vessels, indicate that this was a large courtyard residence. Rooms were arranged around an irrigated interior garden surrounded by porticos and decorated with carved marble ornament.

The courtyard arrangement conforms to the picture of Umayyad domestic architecture as revealed by excavations conducted in tenth-century suburbs located west of the walled centre.15 Ranging in area from 85 to 200 square metres, the excavated houses of Córdoba share

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13 Textual evidence suggests that munyas were divided across the Córdoban landscape roughly along ethnic/social lines, with estates of the Umayyads and their freedmen located west of the urban centre and those of the Arab and Berber aristocrats located east of the urban center (including al-Mansūr’s palace city al-Madīnat al-Zahrā). See Ruggles, Gardens, Landscape and Vision, p. 125, and Anderson, The Suburban Villa, pp. 119–48.

14 The second phase of occupation, dated to the eleventh and twelfth centuries, indicates that the residence became an industrial site for ceramic production after the Umayyad period, paralleling the subdivision and incorporation of industrial functions which occurred in Roman villas elsewhere in late antiquity. The excavation was conducted under the auspices of the Confederación Hidrográfica del Guadalquivir: see Gloria Galeano Cuencas, Informe-Memoria Intervención Arqueológica de Urgencia, Yacimiento “Casillas” (T. M. Córdoba) (Córdoba: Confederación Hidrográfica del Guadalquivir (Vías y Construcciones-OHL), 2002). The excavation report is filed in Córdoba’s municipal archives.

the arrangement of rooms around a central rectilinear courtyard (usually square, but sometimes rectangular or trapezoidal), accessible through an entrance passage, and containing a pool, basin or well in the courtyard space. All the houses were constructed along a north-south axis, and are characterized by a courtyard with a water feature, a rectangular room opening onto the courtyard and functioning as the main living and reception space, and an entrance hall. The houses vary in the combination of other rooms that might be present—for example, reception halls, bedrooms, latrines, kitchens, storage areas and stables appear in a number of combinations—but, in all of them, the central court is the organizing feature of the residence.16

The most significant munya remains uncovered to date are those at the site known as al-Rummāniyya.17 Unlike those discussed previously, it is not located along the riverbank, but in the foothills of the Sierra Morena, a short distance west of Madīnat al-Zahrā'. Al-Rummāniyya is the only munya for which a plan can be reconstructed, along with remains in situ, fragments of carved stone decoration and other material evidence, and a relatively firm identification based on epigraphic and textual evidence.18 Excavated in 1911 by the archaeologist Velázquez Bosco, shortly before he began the first systematic excavation of Madīnat al-Zahrā', al-Rummāniyya's remains consist of four rectangular terraces that ascend the slopes of the mountain range, and which measure approximately 160 by 150 metres overall (Fig. 3). Velázquez Bosco described the site as follows:

[The munya] occupies an area of about 4 hectares, at the foot of the Sierra, some nine kilometres from Córdoba... The terrain was levelled in order to construct the complex, which is divided into four horizontal terraced platforms, the whole of which is surrounded by a strong wall that is partly preserved. The perimeter wall is composed of a plinth of three or four rows of masonry, upon which alternating stone and concrete

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16 On the courtyard dwellings at Madīnat al-Zahrā’, see Almagro’s contribution in this volume.
Fig. 3. Plan of al-Rummāniyya, showing the terraces and extent of the grounds around the muṣaya; after Velázquez Bosco, Medina Azzahra y Almiriyya.
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courses were constructed. Thick stone retaining walls support the three upper terraces, and may also have supported defensive walls...19

The walls of the four terraces are still visible, as is a monumental pool located on the uppermost terrace (Fig. 4).20 Velázquez Bosco observed that al-Rummāniyya’s materials, construction techniques and decoration were comparable to those at Madinat al-Zahrāʾ (Fig. 5).21 The uppermost terrace of al-Rummāniyya featured a structure which Velázquez Bosco interpreted as the estate’s residence (Fig. 3), seeming to parallel the reception halls, houses and pools located on the upper two terraces of Madinat al-Zahrāʾ. He described the plan of the central portion of the structure as follows:

The palace is composed of one or more courts surrounded by narrow halls. The central body of the palace is very regular in distribution, and is composed of three parallel rectangular chambers of equal width. These are crossed by two walls, which divide them into square rooms at their extremes. These square rooms were probably barrel-vaulted, and connect to other rectangular chambers flanking the central composition.22

Arranged on an east-west axis, oriented towards the south, and measuring approximately fifty metres wide by fifteen metres deep, the front façade of al-Rummāniyya’s residence opened onto a paved patio from which stairs descended to the terrace below. The plan of the residence can be read as a tripartite arrangement in which a central double hall is flanked on either side by what appear to be residential suites. As at the so-called Residence of the Caliph (Dār al-Mulk) at Madinat al-Zahrāʾ, two wide rectangular halls, arranged one in front of the other, form the central portion of the plan (see Almagro’s Fig. 2 in this volume for a comparison of the two plans). These two halls (each measuring 15 metres by 5 metres, and 75 square metres, slightly smaller than those

19 Velázquez Bosco, Medina Azahahra, p. 23.
20 The German Archaeological Institute in Madrid commenced investigations at the site in January 2006 by documenting the visible remains. Excavations and soil analysis are planned, which it is hoped will yield more information about the site’s history, architecture and functions.
21 Based on the similarities in arrangement and siting between al-Rummāniyya and Madinat al-Zahrāʾ, Ruggles sees the estate as evidence of the palace-city’s profound influence on the architecture of contemporary palaces: see Ruggles, Gardens, Landscape and Vision, p. 118.
22 Velázquez Bosco, Medina Azahahra, p. 23. Ruggles describes the plan of al-Rummāniyya and provides the historiographical background for its attribution in Gardens, Landscape and Vision, p. 114.
Fig. 4. (A) al-Rummāniyya, lower terrace walls; (B) al-Rummāniyya, monumental pool, upper terrace.
of the Dār al-Mulk) were divided from one another by a wall pierced by three openings. This arrangement is mirrored in the front façade of the residence, which also opened to the exterior through three arched doorways (an arrangement found in houses excavated at the palace-city as well).23

Again as at the Dār al-Mulk, al-Rummāniyya’s residence features square chambers flanking the central double hall to the east and west, and measuring approximately 4 by 5 metres each. These flanking chambers can be read as two separate residential suites, as can the rectilinear chambers that extend around and behind the double hall to the north. The western suite appears to be the more private and extensive of the two.24 Moving northward, the second chamber of the

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23 On which see the contributions of Vallejo and Almagro in this volume.
24 Of the four chambers directly adjacent to the central double hall, only the first chamber opens onto the central portion of the residence. In contrast, both of the
western suite provides access to a group of four rooms arranged around a small courtyard, in what appears to be another residential unit. From this small courtyard a passage leads to two rooms on the extreme west end of the residence, which provides exits to the west and north. On the east side of the al-Rummāniyya plan, a series of five chambers forms what appears to be a second residential suite, but without access to the rooms that occupy the far eastern end of the al-Rummāniyya block. Instead, the five-chamber suite is completely separate from a long rectangular passage (probably a service corridor) that extends along the entire depth of the residence’s block. This passage in turn opens onto six interconnected chambers whose function is unclear.

The plan of al-Rummāniyya’s residence, so similar to the Dār al-Mulk at Madīnat al-Zahrā’, raises more questions about munya architecture than it answers. How are we to interpret the striking double-hall arrangement, which so far finds its only parallel in the Residence of the Caliph? Perhaps the plan arose to accommodate the convivial gatherings centred around the enjoyment of food, drink, music and poetry, to which the Arabic texts allude. Might al-Rummāniyya’s plan reflect the aspirations or high court status of its patron, the Falār Durrī al-Ṣaghīr, whom texts tell us was one of the highest-ranking freedmen in the court of al-Hakam II?26

Indeed, the richness of the decoration which survives from al-Rummāniyya and the other sites points to the court as the likely source of patronage for these residences. For instance, Velázquez noted that the interior surfaces of the residence at al-Rummāniyya were covered with stucco up to a height of half a metre, and painted red with white horizontal bands, with patterns or epigraphy apparent in some places.

flanking chambers that form the first two spaces of the eastern suite of rooms open onto the central halls.

25 See Anderson, The Suburban Villa, Chapter 6, pp. 149–189, and the contributions of Robinson and Rosser-Owen in this volume.

Unfortunately, he did not reproduce images of this decoration in his publication. However, painted wall decoration of this type is visible at Madīnat al-Zahrā‘ and at the Umayyad bath recently excavated west of the Great Mosque of Córdoba in the present-day Campo Santo de los Mártires (Fig. 6). Likewise, the floors of al-Rummāniyya’s residence were paved with red and white marble laid in parallel bands and rectangular tiles, again similar to the residences at Madīnat al-Zahrā‘ (see Colour Plate 2A).

Velázquez discovered only a few fragments of architectural decoration during his excavation of al-Rummāniyya, but what they lack in quantity they make up for in interest. Consisting of a volute, part of a column capital, an epigraphic fragment, and two rectangular portions originally from larger friezes or borders, these fragments indicate that the decorative programme at al-Rummāniyya was characterized not only by the ubiquitous fields of vegetal ornament common to Umayyad architectural decoration, but by the frequent presence of animals (Fig. 5). The birds, dogs, lions and rams which appear within the leafy vines and scrolls of the Rummāniyya fragments constitute a striking departure from the tiny number of figural motifs found among the innumerable fragments of ornament at the caliphal palace-city. Since figural imagery is so rare in the architectural ornament at Madīnat al-Zahrā‘, Castejón interpreted this peculiarity as evidence that al-Rummāniyya had been appropriated by an ʿAmirid patron after the death of al-Ḥakam II in 976, when al-Manṣūr ruled al-Andalus as regent to al-Ḥakam’s young son and successor Hishām.27

However, while it is the case that animal figures are more or less absent from the decoration found to date at Madīnat al-Zahrā‘, they certainly are present in other, more-familiar, Umayyad objects. The al-Rummāniyya fragments, with their combination of foliage and figural imagery, parallel the combination of animals and vegetation

27 Rafael Castejón, “ʿAlamiría”, *B.R.A.C.* 25, no. 70 (1954), pp. 150–158. Like Velázquez Bosco, Castejón believed that al-Rummāniyya could be identified with al-ʿAmiriyā, a munya belonging to al-Manṣūr, and Castejón ascribed the decorative fragments to the ʿAmirid period based on the proliferation of animal themes. It is likely, if Castejón’s stylistic judgement stands, that the munya passed into the hands of al-Manṣūr, or a favoured member of his family or administration during his rule as hājī in the final years of the Umayyad caliphate, and that the pieces found there were additions to the estate from this period. Mariam Rosser-Owen has addressed the issue of ʿAmirid patronage in *Articulating the ʿHijāba: ʿAmirid Artistic and Cultural Patronage in Al-Andalus (c. 970–1010 A.D.)*, unpublished D.Phil. thesis, Faculty of Oriental Studies, University of Oxford, 2004. See chapter 3 for a discussion of architectural patronage.
Fig. 6. (A) Painted wall decoration, Madīnat al-Zahrā‘; (B) Painted dado, excavated bath, Córdoba (Campo Santo de los Mártires).
which distinguish the ivory caskets produced at al-Hakam’s court.28
Like the ivories, the munyas were luxuries associated with the highest
court circles. The unusual combination of animal and vegetal motifs
present in the al-Rummāniyya fragments may therefore indicate that
the figural, agricultural and court motifs so strikingly depicted on the
surface of the ivory caskets also appeared on the walls of the private
spaces of luxurious court villas.

THE ROLE OF WATER

Belying the relative silence of Arabic texts on the visible remnants of
Córdoba’s pre-Islamic past, recent archaeological excavation reveals
that Córdoba’s Roman water infrastructure was refurbished and
expanded by the Umayyads, and thus was an important factor in the
urban development of the capital.29 In 967, under al-Ḥakam II, the
city’s Fontis Aureae aqueduct was repaired and reused to fill ablutions
basins at the Great Mosque of Córdoba.30 Earlier, the Aqua Augusta,
which had fed more than 100 public fountains and more than 300
houses in the first century, had been refurbished by ‘Abd al-Raḥmān
III to supply Madinat al-Zahrā’. It is logical to suppose that Córdoba’s
Roman aqueduct system was also an important factor in the siting
and development of the Umayyad estates. Al-Maqqart, quoting Ibn Saʿīd,
provides a glimpse of this relationship in an anecdote about the
construction, during the reign of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān III, of an aqueduct
which provided water to Dār al-Nāʿūra.31 When Ibn Saʿīd notes that
the aqueduct, and the enormous pool into which its waters poured, via
a statue in the shape of a lion, was among the most significant ancient
monuments of the kings of the past (due partly to the magnificence of

28 For recent perspectives on the ivories see the Journal of the David Collection 2 (2005),
nos. 1 & 2, for the publication of The Ivories of Muslim Spain, papers from a symposium
held in Copenhagen from the 18th to the 20th of November 2003.
29 On the Roman aqueduct which was refurbished to bring water to Madinat al-
Zahrā’, see Vallejo’s contribution in this volume.
30 See Ángel Ventura Villanueva, El Abastecimiento de Agua a la Córdoba Romana. II:
Acueductos, Ciclo de Distribución y Urbanismo (Córdoba: Servicio de Publicaciones, Universi-
dad de Córdoba: 1996), pp. 185–86.
31 The Arabic term used is qanāt, which of course refers to a quite different type of
hydraulic system. I translate qanāt here as aqueduct, however, because Ibn Saʿīd goes
on to describe the Córdoban water system as “one engineered for water to flow along
its construction and height), he seems to offer a rare medieval reference to the city’s pre-Islamic past.32

Water used both pragmatically and decoratively is ubiquitous in the archaeology of the munya sites. The most striking evidence for the role of water in the overall conception of the munya appears at al-Rummāniyya, where a monumental pool (measuring 49.7 by 28 by 3 metres deep, with a capacity of 1372 cubic metres) is located northwest of the pavilion on the upper terrace. Miquel Barceló, who has studied Andalusi water systems, found that al-Rummāniyya’s pool was fed by a reservoir and aqueduct (both subterranean) located north of the residence.33 The drainage system in turn conducted water from the pool to the lower terraces. In addition to serving as a reservoir from which to irrigate the estate’s terraces, its unusual depth, considered with the textual references to great fishponds at Madīnat al-Zahrā’ during the reign of ‘Abd al-Rahmān III, suggests that al-Rummāniyya’s pool provided the estate’s patron with fresh fish for the table.34 Velázquez Bosco speculated that the pool’s massive perimeter buttresses might once have supported a suspended walkway above the surface of the water.35 Ruggles has commented on the recreational and aesthetic character that such a walkway would have lent the pool, and we can indeed imagine the pleasure which a tenth-century resident or visitor might have taken in traversing its perimeter, perhaps catching glimpses of the fishes in the water inches below.36

32 “This aqueduct, and the pool and lion fountain into which its waters flowed, were among the most significant ancient monuments of the kings of the past age, considering the distance the aqueduct traversed, the changes in direction that it had to make, the magnificence of the construction, and the height of its towers, which raise the water within them so that the water continues to flow correctly”: al-Maqqarī, Naḥḥ al-Tib, vol. I, p. 565, lines 5–7 (my translation).
34 The Arabic term birka, used to refer to munya pools, is also used to refer to fishponds. According to Manuela Marín, the inclusion of many fish recipes in the later cookbook of Ibn al-Razīn al-Tūfīhī seems particular to an Andalusi/Maghrebi culinary context; see Manuela Marín, “Beyond Taste: the complements of colour and smell in the medieval Arab culinary tradition”, in A Taste of Thyme: Culinary Cultures of the Middle East, ed. Sami Zubaida and Richard Tapper (London: Tauris Parke, 2000), pp. 205–214, especially p. 206.
35 Velázquez Bosco, Medina Azzahara, p. 23.
While al-Rummāniyya boasts the largest and best-preserved munya pool, evidence of water tanks has been found near the Cortijo del Alcaide, as well as at a number of other sites in the countryside surrounding Madīnat al-Zahrā’. The remains of one such pool at the Cortijo del Alcaide display a clear ornamentality, with the inner surfaces of the pool walls decorated with interlacing arches (Colour Plate 7B).37 Pools were sometimes incorporated into the courtyards of tenth-century Córdoban suburban houses, and also appear in the court residential zone at Madīnat al-Zahrā’. The pool in the courtyard of the House of the Small Pool (Casa de la Alberquilla), for instance, features two sets of steps descending to the water’s surface, paralleling a similar arrangement excavated in the courtyard of a large tenth-century Córdoban residence located west of the walled centre.38

Ibn Sa‘īd’s account, related by al-Maqqarī, of the aqueduct at Dār al-Nā‘īra also contains a description of a marvellous fountain and pool that marked the arrival of the water at the estate, revealing how munya water features were designed for dramatic effects:

...The water flowed into a great pool (birka aẓīma), which had a statue of a great lion (‘alayha asadun aẓīmyn al-ṣūr)...A more splendid creation did not exist among all the works of the kings of the past (fi-nā ṣawwara al-mulūk fī ḡabir al-dahr). The waters that spilled forth from this lion could water all the gardens of the palace, despite their great extent, before its surplus overflowed and ran down into the Guadalquivir.39

Small ornamental water basins, if not nearly so theatrical as that of al-Nā‘īra, are also associated with the Córdoban munyas.40 At al-Rummāniyya alone three basins were unearthed between 1920 and

37 I am grateful to Antonio Vallejo Triano for directing my attention to the tank and its decoration.
38 On the Casa de la Alberquilla, see Ruggles, Gardens, Landscape and Vision, p. 72, and Almagro’s contribution in this volume. Might the large suburban residence excavated west of Córdoba at the Cercadilla site have been a munya? Its size and level of elaboration distinguish it from the surrounding houses, which may have developed around it later. The majority of the houses excavated at Cercadilla were provisioned simply with a well, while others contained water basins approximately two metres in length and arranged along the dwelling’s north-south axis. This type of pool appears in one of the illuminations of the manuscript Bayād wa Riyād, on which see Cynthia Robinson, Medieval Andalusian Courtly Culture: the ‘Hadith Bayād wa Riyād’ (London: Routledge Curzon, 2006).
1950. The first was found by workmen in 1926; it measures 0.95 × 0.68 × 0.26 metres, and is decorated with acanthus leaves and lions’ and rams’ heads (Fig. 7). Its unusual appearance led Henri Terrasse to argue that the basin was a pre-Islamic piece, an opinion that Castejón contested in later articles. In 1945, twenty years after the discovery of the first basin, workmen discovered a second marble basin at the site, similar in some respects to the earlier find (Fig. 8). The new basin was smaller than the first, measuring 0.68 × 0.52 × 0.18 metres, and featured a similar, but more complex decorative scheme, depicting whole figures of lions or leopards, rather than just their heads, together with the same acanthus leaves as the earlier piece. Archaeologists did not record the exact locations at which these basins were unearthed, making it impossible to determine what the relationship of the basins to the architectural or garden spaces might once have been.

The notion of the display and visual celebration of water in Córdoban residences is reflected in another group of water basins excavated at Córdoba, or attributed to the city during the caliphal period. One of these is in the Museo de la Alhambra in Granada, a white marble basin (measuring 0.42 × 0.62 × 0.15 metres) whose rim is decorated with two scrolling, interlaced vines, while its long sides are decorated with a symmetrical arrangement of large vine scrolls flanking a central

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41 The marble basin was discovered when a group from the Córdoba Commission of Monuments visited al-Rummāniyya, citing concern for the site in the face of new construction which the proprietor of the estate was undertaking. The Commission’s report also mentions their desire to investigate rumours circulating around Córdoba in the wake of Velázquez Bosco’s early excavations at the site that al-Manṣūr’s muqarnās al-ʿĀmirīyya, known from textual evidence, had been discovered. Rafael Castejón, “Las ruinas de Alamiría”, Anales de la Comisión Provincial de Monumentos Históricos y Artísticos (Madrid, 1926), pp. 17–21.


43 Castejón, “Nueva pila”, pp. 235–240. He related these two basins to a third located in the courtyard of a house in the eastern zone of the walled urban centre. This third basin was larger (1.05 × 0.67 × 0.30 metres) than the al-Rummāniyya basins, but Castejón wrote that it was similar in ornament to the other two, with acanthus leaves and other vegetal motifs, as well as a sculpted lion’s head serving as an outlet for water.

44 In 2003, the staff of the Museo Arqueológico were not aware of the existence of any records or archival materials relating to Velázquez Bosco’s or Castejón’s excavations.
Fig. 7. (A) Large basin excavated at al-Rummāniyya, in the Museo Arqueológico Provincial, Córdoba; (B) Detail of design on the al-Rummāniyya basin's exterior.
Fig. 8. (A) Small basin excavated at al-Rummāniyya, in the Museo Arqueológico Provincial, Córdoba; (B) Detail of design on the small basin’s exterior.
pinecone. Not all surviving Córdoban basins are rectangular or feature decoration on exterior faces. For example, in the collection of the Museo Arqueológico y Etnológico in Granada is a round, lobed basin of white marble (0.65 × 0.25 m) devoid of ornament, apart from an epigraphic band around the rim which states that it was made for the caliph al-Hakam in 970–71, under the direction of the elite freedman Ja far. Might this basin once have decorated a Córdoban munya?

Clearly, water was central to the munya as an architectural type in Umayyad Córdoba. The incorporation of water into domestic/palatial architecture, as well as the emphasis on water infrastructure in the broader landscape, finds some parallels with the archaeological evidence for water systems in or around Umayyad qasr and the pools and infrastructure in and around the palaces of Abbasid Samarra. The Roman architecture of the Iberian Peninsula and North Africa may also provide parallels. In any case, the success of water elements as part of a larger architectural ensemble in Umayyad Córdoba is certain. We see the echoes of the munyas, with their great pools and carved fountains, in the later palaces of al-Andalus (most famously the Alhambra and Generalife) and the agdal of North Africa.

Conclusion

In contrast to the remains at Madinat al-Zahra’, becoming increasingly visible thanks to ongoing excavation and reconstruction, we can only imagine the appearance and architecture of the munyas based on the meagre evidence available, which tends to suggest more questions than answers about these sites. What is clear is that the munyas, unsurprisingly, share close affinities with Umayyad court and residential

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46 See El Esplendor de los Omeyas Cordobeses, p. 152, for description and bibliography.
47 Arte islámico en Granada: propuesta para un Museo de la Alhambra: 1 de abril–30 de septiembre de 1995, Palacio de Carlos V, La Alhambra (Granada: Junta de Andalucía, Consejería de Cultura: Patronato de La Alhambra y Generalife: Comares Editorial, 1995), pp. 269 (cat. no. 66); Dario Cabanelas Rodríguez, “La pila árabe del Museo Arqueológico de Granada y la Casa del Chapiz”, Miscelánea de Estudios Árabes y Hebreos 29–30 (1980–81), pp. 21–34. To these Córdoban pieces we can perhaps add two more basins which Mariam Rosser-Owen believes are ‘Amirid objects: a sandstone basin in the Museo de la Alhambra which is shallow and square, measuring 0.086 × 0.30 m; and a rectangular limestone basin in the Museo Arqueológico de Sevilla, measuring 0.19 × 0.55 × 0.32 m: for illustrations of both (and bibliography), see El Esplendor de los Omeyas Cordobeses, pp. 149–150, and Rosser-Owen, Articulating the Hijab, vol. II, cat. nos. 24 and 25.
architecture of the tenth century. The archaeology allows us to detect walled estates whose residences were oriented towards the south, which were connected, via actual structures or through panoramic views, to the Guadalquivir or to the fertile landscape of the river valley. Rooms, decorated with painted dadoes and carved stone panels, and capitals featuring motifs of lush vegetation and animal figures, along with pavements decorated with geometric patterns, opened onto interior courtyards or outward-looking terraces enhanced with pools and fountains.

Munya plans conform to two types: the first is in keeping with residential architecture found throughout the Mediterranean, with rooms organized around a central courtyard. The second, consisting of the unusual double hall arrangement found at al-Rūmmānīyya and the Residence of the Caliph at Madīnat al-Zahra, finds no close parallels in the architecture of contemporary Islamic palaces. Neither the bayt system of the Umayyad qasuūr in Syria, the conglomerations of chambers and courts of Abbasid court architecture at Samarra, Persian palaces, nor the reception halls of the North African courts, suggest fruitful parallels. How then do we interpret the munyas’ divergence from expected models and contexts amongst their Islamic contemporaries? Not unexpectedly, the Roman villas of Iberia and North Africa offer the closest parallels. Al-Rūmmānīyya’s plan may find its predecessors in the rectangular hall plans of Roman villas such as the Villa de Murias de Beloño (Oviedo) and Villa de Centroña (La Coruña) in present-day Spain, and in the villas depicted in the Tabarka and Lord Julius mosaics of North Africa.48 The similarity between the North African villas depicted in the mosaics and the Generalife of Nasrid Granada is striking: are the munyas of Córdoba the mediating link between the antique and later Islamic villa traditions?

Generally speaking, the munya might best be understood as the hybrid offspring of late antique Mediterranean villa architecture—particularly that of Iberia and North Africa—on the one hand, and the tastes (in culinary and convivial practices, fashions, etc.) characteristic of interna-

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tional Islamic court culture in the tenth century, particularly that of the Abbasid court. Only further excavation and sustained studies of the material and textual (including epigraphic) sources can begin to answer the many questions which the munya of Córdoba raise. Certainly, the picture of Umayyad villa architecture sketched here is a preliminary one. Nevertheless, this discussion shows the necessity of revising and expanding the long-standing notion of the Córdoban munya as mere pleasure garden. Scholars have long characterized the munya thus, based on allusions to them in the Andalusi poetry produced after the disintegration of Umayyad hegemony in the early eleventh century. However, perspectives from other disciplines—economic, agricultural and landscape, and architectural and urban history, for instance—suggest a more nuanced interpretation is necessary. As historians of Andalusi agriculture have emphasized, cultivation was a central function of the Umayyad suburban estates. I have argued elsewhere that agriculture was keyed to the needs of the Umayyad court, with estates serving as sites of intense cultivation for the production of a whole variety of fruits, vegetables, fragrant flowers, herbs and shrubs. These were consumed and displayed in the form of elaborately-prepared dishes and

49 Anderson, The Suburban Villa, pp. 149–89.
50 For example, munya are characterized as “lieux de plaisance” in the classic work by Henri Pérès, La Poésie Andalouse en Arabe Classique au XIème siècle: ses Aspects Généraux et sa Valeur Documentaire (Paris: Librairie d’Amérique et d’Orient, Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1937), pp. 121–57, especially p. 119.
perfumes during court activities held at the estates, so that the choice of munya crops was dictated by their culinary, pharmaceutical and cosmetic utility, and rooted in international Islamic notions of refinement.54

As was true of the villas of late imperial Rome, the emphasis on the agricultural functions of the munya was closely linked to the social life of court elites.55 Medieval authors who wrote for the Umayyad administration make it clear that in addition to their agricultural roles, munyas were valued as places of leisure and recreation (nuzah). For example, speaking of the estate known as Dār al-Nā‘ūra, founded in the ninth century by the amīr ‘Abd Allah, Ibn Ḥayyān reports that the ruler founded a marvellous estate on a vast plot of land (ansha‘a‘a munya ‘ajiba wās‘i‘a al-khitta), and that while he intended it to serve as a place of delight (arädubā li‘l-furja), he nevertheless enlarged the villa’s lands (aus‘a‘a khitta) and increased its cultivation (akthara ghirās).56 Likewise, in a brief passage which nevertheless provides the most detail about an estate, the same author tells us that the munya of a powerful Umayyad freedman in the tenth century encompassed a residence, irrigated gardens (al-basāttīn al-masqīa) and other cultivated lands (al-qadrīn al-mazr‘a‘a), as well as riding animals and/or cattle (thawr), which would have been used for hunting, and may imply some level of animal husbandry as well.57

In addition to its relevance to the history of Andalusi agriculture and social history, the Córdoban munya also represents an important facet of Umayyad secular architecture.58 Despite the difficulties inherent in

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54 On this topic, and the functions of luxury objects as containers for such substances, see Renata Holod, “Luxury Arts of the Caliphal Period”, in Al-Andalus: The Art of Islamic Spain, ed. Jerrilyn Dodds (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992), pp. 41–47. On medieval Islamic notions of refinement, see Anderson, The Suburban Villa, Chapter VI.

55 On villa production as linked to the concerns of Roman elites, see Nicholas Purcell, “The Roman villa and the landscape of production”, in Urban Society in Roman Italy, ed. Tim J. Cornell and Kathryn Lomas (New York, 1995), pp. 151–179.


attempting to reconstruct long-vanished buildings from fragmentary material evidence, the Córdoban munya as revealed through archaeology and texts offers rich possibilities for investigating relationships between Córdoban architecture and urbanism, landscape, and Umayyad court society.