

# THE FRONTIER FORTRESSES AND SANCTUARIES OF AL-ANDALUS: RECONQUEST, RESIGNIFICATION AND COLLECTIVE MEMORY IN THE IBERIAN PENINSULA (ELEVENTH TO FIFTEENTH CENTURIES)

JOSÉ SANTIAGO PALACIOS ONTALVA  
UNIVERSIDAD AUTÓNOMA DE MADRID  
SPAIN

Date of receipt: 15<sup>th</sup> of September, 2021

Date of acceptance: 19<sup>th</sup> of July, 2022

## ABSTRACT

The ideology of the reconquest pursued a clear objective: the recovery of a nation illegitimately occupied by Muslim invaders and the restoration of Christianity in Peninsular territory. This process necessarily entailed the submission, if not the expulsion, of al-Andalus's Muslim population, as well as the erasure of any sign of its presence, culture or religion. The Christians demonstrated great efficacy in this operation through a series of different actions leading, first of all, to the effective control over the territory and its fortresses, places of worship, and spiritual landmarks. Then by resignification through different symbolic and religious elements. And, finally, developing an alternative collective memory, one that would justify their actions, sustain the new and victorious Christian society and subdue the vanquished Muslims.

## KEYWORDS

Fortresses, Sanctuaries, Collective Memory, Conquest, Transformation.

## CAPITALIA VERBA

Fortalitia, Sanctuaria, Memoria communis, Conquestio, Transformatio.

## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Between 1085 and 1492 the essential objective pursued by the ideology of the reconquest was materialized: territorial dominion over al-Andalus and the transformation of its social structure, as well as the capture of those spaces for Christianity, with the consequent restitution to the Church of its patrimony and honour, said to have been wrested from it by the Muslim usurpers. Beyond how that justifying ideology was forged, and the stages in which its events unfolded, we are interested in emphasizing that for the definitive control of that space, its military conquest, repopulation and subsequent economic exploitation did not suffice. The reconquest, as it had been conceived, was only complete when a symbolic appropriation of al-Andalus was achieved through the repossession of places of special significance, a new religious and secular geography was generated, and, of course, the last remnants of the preceding Islamized landscape were erased.

In our view, this transformation took place by means of three processes, sometimes almost synchronous. The first involved the effective domination of the territory through military control of it, with this involving the material expropriation of its main landmarks, places and buildings, as well as the submission of that portion of the indigenous population that had not been forced to emigrate. The second involved the resignification of these spaces, altering their religious and cultural references for those residual inhabitants, and their replacement with new benchmarks for those who progressively supplanted emigrants from al-Andalus. A third process helped to elaborate the account justifying the transition from Islamic to Christian rule, based on the development of a version of events, or memory, employing two types of arguments. Some were related to the past prior to the Islamic invasion, and fully legitimized the reconquest of Hispania as an act of justice after what was an illegitimate invasion, while others constituted an account developed *ex novo* and were aimed at establishing new symbolic references that would sustain it over time.

## 2. Recovery

Within the vocabulary of the holy war, numerous terms feature evident territorial connotations, starting with the *dilatatio/restauratio christianitatis*, and continuing with frequent allusions to “expansion”, “dispossession” and the “oppression” of one’s enemies, as well as the “defence”, “expugnation”, “liberation” or “restoration” of

---

1. This article is part of a research project entitled “Violencia religiosa en la Edad Media peninsular: guerra, discurso apoloético y relato historiográfico (ss. x-xv)”. (Religious Violence in the Middle Ages on the Peninsula: War, Apologetic Discourse and Historiographic Narrative R&D (10<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> centuries)” (HAR2016-74968-P), financed by the Ministerio de Economía, Industria y Competitividad (Spain). This project is co-directed by Carlos de Ayala and José Santiago Palacios at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (Spain). Abbreviations used: AHN, Archivo Histórico Nacional.



an imprecise physical space, though well identified as lying on the other side of a “border”, understood as a conflictive space.<sup>2</sup>

Undoubtedly, a requirement for the materialization of the ideology of the reconquest was the effective control of the territory through its conquest and liberation from the hands of the enemy, efforts centred around key spaces such as fortresses, walled cities, and mosques, as buildings infused with great symbolism.

The ways these fortified places were handled upon passing into Christian hands reflect and record the different surrender and capitulation agreements reached. These agreements featured certain conditions and guarantees for the subjected populations, but they invariably stripped the Islamic authorities of control over the vast majority of these key sites.<sup>3</sup> Urban fortresses and rural castles (*ḥuṣūn*), if they had not been abandoned or taken by force previously, passed into the hands of the conquerors, who, in turn, proceeded to occupy or distribute them among the participants in their operations of conquest.<sup>4</sup>

On the Peninsula, many of those enclaves also ended up in the hands of the military orders, institutions that, significantly, took their names from those fortresses, turning them into fortified facilities or the headquarters of their seigneurial territories and, ultimately, sanctifying these positions through the presence of the friars. Moreover, these institutions developed their military charisma on the basis of maintaining a great set of fortresses on Christian-Muslim borderlands.<sup>5</sup>

The continued occupation of these places of territorial importance, also endowed with a special religious significance, as genuine *loca sancta*, special holy sites in a context of heightened military spirituality, took on greater importance when Christian castles were built on sites where we know that pious practices linked to *ḡihād* and *ribāṭ* were formerly carried out. This apparently occurred in several

2. On the concurrence of this vocabulary in the documentation, see: Sirantoine, H  l  ne. “La canceller  a regia en la   poca de Fernando III: ideolog  a, discurso y pr  ctica”, *Fernando III, tiempo de cruzada*, Carlos de Ayala, Mart  n F. R  os, eds. Madrid-Mexico: Silex - Instituto de Investigaciones Hist  ricas, 2012: 175-203; Ayala, Carlos; Henri  t, Patrick; Palacios, J. Santiago, eds. *Or  genes y desarrollo de la Guerra Santa en la Pen  nsula Ib  rica. Palabras e im  genes para una legitimaci  n (siglos X-XIV)*. Madrid: Casa de Vel  zquez, 2016; Miranda, Ferm  n. “‘Dilatatio christianitatis’. La evoluci  n de un concepto y su plasmaci  n hisp  nica”, *La Reconquista. Ideolog  a y justificaci  n de la guerra santa peninsular*, Carlos de Ayala, Isabel Cristina Fernandes, Jos   Santiago Palacios, coords. Madrid: La Erg  stula Ediciones, 2019: 325-341.

3. Only in the case of certain agreements of a feudo-vasallic character between Christian powers and Muslim leaders was some temporary cession of fortresses to the latter considered: Burns, Robert I.; Chevedden, Paul E. *Negotiating Cultures. Bilingual Surrender Treaties in Muslim-Crusader Spain under James the Conqueror*. Leiden: Brill, 1999: 25-36.

4. The examples of the conquest of Toledo by Alfonso VI, and of Valencia by El Cid are, in this sense, paradigmatic: *Primera Cr  nica General de Espa  a*, eds. Ram  n Men  ndez Pidal, Diego Catal  n. Madrid: Editorial Gredos, 1977: 538-540; 588-592; 867-869; 918-919.

5. The documentation related to the orders is full of calls for the defence and protection of their borderland fortresses, whether through the endorsement of crusades, the granting of indulgences to guarantee their custodianship, or solutions that ensured their maintenance through the supplying of provisions, or other assets to keep the structures intact: Ayala, Carlos. *Las   rdenes militares hisp  nicas en la Edad Media (siglos XII-XV)*. Madrid: Marcial Pons - Latorre Literaria, 2003: 575-590; Josserand, Philippe. *  glise et pouvoir dans la p  ninsule Ib  rique: Les ordres militaires dans le royaume de Castille (1252-1369)*. Madrid: Casa de Vel  zquez, 2004: 275-282.



Portuguese coastal locations, including Alcácer do Sal, Arrábida and Palmela.<sup>6</sup> Their transfer into the hands of the Order of Santiago also triggered a particular transformation of “doctrinal and ideological marks”, which invariably entailed the destruction of mosques to erect churches in their place, the construction of residential and religious spaces for brothers of the orders, and that of necropolises where their knights were buried.<sup>7</sup>

This could also have happened at the Castle of Cogolludo (Guadalajara), as recently suggested by Albarrán and Daza, who, although aware of the lack of documentation on the fortress before 1100, and of specific references to the practice of *ribāṭ* in it, speculate that the castle may have functioned as a fortified refuge for *murābiṭūn* in a strategic borderland enclave. When the Order of Calatrava received this possession, the minaret of the old mosque, topped with an interesting *qubba* (dome), would soon undergo a logical transformation, later mentioned in Christian sources as the Bell Tower.<sup>8</sup>

When speaking of authentic fortified frontier sanctuaries we cannot fail to mention the Castle of Salvatierra, also in the hands of the Calatrava Order. Between 1198 and 1211 it became an outlying Christian enclave that Arab chroniclers eloquently described as “a lookout in the desert and an eagle in the sky, a banner spread over the regions and a black point looming over the plains of Islam”. They also identified it as “the right hand of the king of Castile”, a “site of pilgrimage and a holy land” for Christians, as well as a “place of expiation for their sins”. In short, this was a fortress whose penitential symbolism made it, for a few years, a sanctuary of spiritual pilgrimage and a “castle of salvation”, in the words of Jiménez de Rada.<sup>9</sup>

Although this transfer of such a symbolic heritage element did not end up in the hands of the orders’ friars, many other fortified enclaves in al-Andalus that at some point featured pious practices compatible with *ribāṭ* continued to play a prominent role when they passed into Christian hands. Such would be the case, for example, at Tudela, which, according to Ibn Ḥayyān, was founded in 802 on the upper border (*al-ṭagr al-a’lā*), with the aim of protecting it, and “grew and blocked in the enemy’s

6. Fernandes, Isabel C. “Do ribāṭ à comenda: marcas ideológicas e doutrinárias na organização territorial e dos es pacos fortificados da península da Arrábida”, *Cristãos contra muçulmanos na Idade Média peninsular. Bases ideológicas e doutrinárias de um confronto (séculos X-XIV)*, Carlos de Ayala, Isabel C. F. Fernandes, eds. Lisboa: Edições Colibri-Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, 2015: 75-93; Carvalho, António R.; Wu, Chia-Chin. “O Despertar da Espiritualidade Islâmica no Sāḥil de al-Qaṣr / Alcácer [do Sal]. Entre o emirato andalusí e o califado almóada”. *Al-Madan online*, 21/3 (2017): 128-144.

7. Fernandes, Isabel C. “Do ribāṭ à comenda...”: 89-91; Fernandes, Isabel C. “Castelos e conventos das ordens militares em Portugal: a simbologia religioso-militar (séculos XII-XIV)”, *Hombres de religión y guerra. Cruzada y guerra santa en la Edad Media peninsular*, Carlos de Ayala, J. Santiago Palacios, eds. Madrid: Sílex, 2018: 173-176.

8. Albarrán Javier; Daza, Enrique. “Hacia la construcción de una geografía del *ribāṭ* en al- Andalus: práctica y materialidad”. *Cuadernos de Arquitectura y Fortificación*, 6 (2019): 57-105. I would like to thank the authors for consulting the original of this text, the result of reflections at the seminar “Las Geografías del Ribāṭ” (The Geographies of Ribāṭ), held at the Autonomous University of Madrid in 2019.

9. It deals extensively with the case of Salvatierra and contains quotes from the sources: Varela, Enrique. *La fortaleza medieval: simbolismo y poder en la Edad Media*. Valladolid: Junta de Castilla y León, 2002: 159-179.



throats",<sup>10</sup> being the place from whence some pious men, or ones who practiced *yihād* and *ribāṭ*, proceeded.<sup>11</sup> This fortress, located on the hill of Santa Bárbara and in an unbeatable strategic position in a pass of the Ebro, would end up constituting one of the Kingdom of Navarre's most representative fortresses, practically rebuilt by Carlos III de Navarra with palatial forms at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>12</sup>

In this context of the transfer of sites of particular strategic or symbolic relevance, we must make reference to the ritual observed when a mosque was converted into a Christian church.<sup>13</sup> These were very significant gestures and actions, always beginning with the allegorical purging of the "filth" of the Islamic creed through the sprinkling of holy water, salt or wine on its walls.<sup>14</sup> The construction of an altar and the modification of the building's orientation, the voidance of the *qibla* and the *mihṛāb* as topographic references, and the placement of bells in the minaret, replacing the *yāmūr*, were also part of the most evident and immediate architectural interventions. Likewise, it was essential for the site to house sacred relics and be redecorated with explicitly Christian objects evoking the religion's main dogmas (crosses, paintings and images, banners...). Also vital were the necessary interventions by senior members of the clergy, a solemn mass of thanksgiving, consecration (generally, to

10. Lorenzo, Jesús. *La dawla de los Banū Qasī*. Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2010: 156-163.

11. Albarrán, Javier. *Ejércitos benditos. Yihad y memoria en al-Andalus (siglos X-XIII)*. Granada: Universidad de Granada, 2020: 121-122.

12. It is paradoxical that, on the site of the old Islamic fortress built for the waging of the holy war, in the past century a 12-m monument was erected dedicated to the Corazón de Jesús (Heart of Jesus), the most prominent structure topping a hill, with a few visible remnants of the old fortress.

13. This is a subject covered by extensive previous literature: Harris, Julie A. "Mosque to church conversions in the Spanish reconquest". *Medieval Encounter*, 2/3 (1997): 158-172; Buresi, Pascal. "Les conversions d'églises et de mosques en Espagne au XI-XIII siècles", *Réligions et société urbaine au Moyen Age*. Études offertes à Jean-Louis Biget par ses anciens élèves, Patrick Boucheron, Jacques Chiffolleau, eds. Paris: Bibliothèque de l'école des chartes, 2000: 333-350; Echevarría, Ana. "La transformación del espacio islámico (siglos XI-XIII)". *Annexes des Cahiers de linguistique et de civilisation hispaniques médiévales*, 15 (2003): 53-77; Calvo, Susana. "'Et las mezquitas que habien deben seer del Rey'. La cristianización de las mezquitas de Murcia tras la conquista de Alfonso X", *Alfonso X El Sabio*, Isidro Bango, ed. Murcia: Comunidad Autónoma Región de Murcia - Ayuntamiento de Murcia - Caja de Ahorros del Mediterráneo, 2009: 688-694; Calvo, Susana. "De mezquita a iglesia: el proceso de cristianización de los lugares de culto de al-Ándalus", *Transformació, destrucció i restauració del espais medievals*, Pilar Giráldez, Màrius Vendrell, coords. Barcelona: Patrimoni 2.0 Edicions, 2016: 129-148; Well, Maria Luisa. "*Fuga demonium, angeli pacis ingresus*. El ritual litúrgico romano-galicano en el proceso de transformación de espacios sacros: de la mezquita a la iglesia (XI-XIII)", *International Symposium on the Cathedral of Seville in the Context of the Late Gothic. La piedra postrera*, Alfonso Jiménez, ed. Seville: Taller Dereçeo, 2007: 261-280; Remensnyder, Amy G. "The colonization of sacred architecture: The Virgin Mary, mosques and temples in medieval Spain and early sixteenth-century Mexico", *Monks and nuns, saints and outcasts. Religion in Medieval Society*, Sharon Farmer, Barbara H. Rosenwein, eds. Ithaca-London: Cornell University Press, 2000: 189-219; Remensnyder, Amy G. *La Conquistadora: The Virgin Mary at War and Peace in the Old and New Worlds*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014: 27-30.

14. "The Franks, then, entered into Medinaceli, capital of the middle frontier, and took possession of it. The first place in the city they entered was its main mosque. They doused its walls with wine, rang the bells, and transformed its alquibla (prayer niche)", Ibn 'Idārī. *La caída del califato de Córdoba y los reyes de Taifas (al-Bayan al-Mugrib)*, ed. Felipe Mañllo. Salamanca: Universidad de Salamanca, 1993: 88.



the Virgin Mary) and divine exhortation, which would definitively return the space to the fold of the Christian faith.<sup>15</sup>

The protocol was repeated with notable consistency and frequency in the conversion of the great *aljamas* (main mosques) after the conquest of the most important cities in al-Andalus, but we have much less data on other, less significant Muslim mosques located in intracity neighbourhoods, on city outskirts, or in the rural sphere. Some of them were able to survive as mosques serving residual populations displaced from the city centres.<sup>16</sup> In areas whose populations featured high percentages of Muslims, they continued to be used as before, and only the *aljamas* were transformed<sup>17</sup>. The ultimate trend, however, was for the dominant powers to exploit temples with total freedom, putting them to different uses.<sup>18</sup>

---

15. Alfonso X's historic *Partidas* (statutory code) specify the ritual for the consecration of a church (Partida I, X, XIV) but there is no reference to that for the conversion of a mosque.

16. Calvo, Susana. "Et las mezquitas...": 143-146.

17. This is documented in various places in the Levant, according to Burns, Robert I. *The Crusader Kingdom of Valencia. Reconstruction on a Thirteenth-century Frontier*. Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard University Press, 1967: I, 63. In Hornachos, for example, the Mudéjar community at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century still constituted a majority, and we know that in 1501 a score of *faqīhs* (jurists) practiced there (Molénat, Jean Pierre. "Hornachos fin XV<sup>e</sup>-début XVI<sup>e</sup> siècles". *En la España Medieval*, 31 (2008): 165-166). The visitors from the Order of Santiago, in 1494, *non hallaron que avia en la dicha villa nin en su termino yglesia nin hermita porque todos son moros salvo una capilleja pequeña que está en la fortaleza en que oyen misa el comendador e los suyos* ("they found no church or hermitage in the aforementioned town nor in the surrounding area, because they are all Moors, apart from a small chapel in the fortress in which the Commander and his companions hear mass"). Rebollo, Juan. "Reubicar la religión islámica: Aproximación a las mezquitas mudéjares en Extremadura". *Studia Historica, H<sup>a</sup> Medieval*, 38/1 (2020): 113-139, 126-127.

18. The *Partidas* are very clear in this regard: *E las mezquitas que debían haber antiguamente deben ser del rey e puédelas él dar a quien se quisiere* ("And the mosques that used to be there should belong to the king and he may give them to whomever he wishes"): *Las Siete Partidas del Rey don Alfonso el Sabio*, ed. Real Academia de la Historia. Madrid: Imprenta Real, 1807: Partida VII, XXV, I; as are different documents from the period of Alfonso X in which those mosques are granted to different individuals. Those in Seville were left in the hands of the king's brother, the infante Felipe, archbishop of the city, in 1252: *Et do demas ala iglesia de Seuilla por Ruego de don Phelipe mio hermano eleyto desse mismo lugar todas las mezquitas que son en Seuilla quantas fueron en tiempo de moros que las aya libres e quitas por siempre por iuro de heredit fueras tres mezquitas que son en la judería que son agora sinogas de los judíos* ("And I also give to the Church of Seville, by request of Don Felipe, my brother, elected of the same place, all the mosques of Seville and as many as there were in the time of the Moors, to possess them free forever, by oath of ownership, except three mosques in the Jewish quarter which are now synagogues of the Jews"): Ballesteros Beretta, Antonio. *Sevilla en el siglo XIII*. Madrid, 1913: X (doc. No. 8); see also: Ecker, Heather. "The Conversion of Mosques to Synagogues in Seville: The Case of the Mezquita de la Judería". *Gesta*, 36 (1997): 190-207. Those of Murcia, meanwhile, were handed over to the residents of the city by means of a *privilegio rodado*, an entitlement bearing the royal seal, dated 1266: *Otrossi, les damos todas las mezquitas de la cibdat de Murçia et de sus aldeas, aquellas que fueren pobladas de christianos que las ayan con sus corrales et con sus fossarios pora sus moradas, sacado ende aquellas mezquitas que serán dadas pora eglesias* ("Furthermore, we give them all the mosques within the city of Murcia and its hamlets, those that were populated by Christians, to possess them with their famyard and with their hosaria for their dwellings, excluding those mosques that will be converted into churches"): *Documents of Alfonso X el Sabio*, ed. Juan Torres Fontes. Murcia: Academia Alfonso X el Sabio, 1963: I, 18-19. Other examples of this free disposition and transfer of the old Murcian mosques can be found in: *Documentos del Siglo XIII*, ed. Juan Torres Fontes. Murcia: Academia Alfonso X el Sabio, 1969: II, 29-31. Years before, after the Catalanian-Aragonese conquest of Mallorca in 1230, Jaime I had handed over to the Templars the Almudayna Castle, with its orchard, houses, mosque and other





In any case, when they were transformed into Christian temples, numerous signs of their ancient Islamic appearance were, inevitably, still visible. These Christianized architectural elements underlined the Muslims' defeat, and we cannot rule out that they were maintained with the express purpose of highlighting the symbolic dominance of these emblematic architectural spaces.<sup>19</sup> Thus, despite the fact that during the 13<sup>th</sup> century there was a veritable boom in strictly Christian architectural models, which came to supplant the old Islamic ones, only Christianized in their formal exteriors after the conquest,<sup>20</sup> some Muslim cultural hallmarks continued to be present and visible. Such was the case, for example, with certain churches dubbed "Fernandinas", or "of reconquest" in Córdoba, which were built on the sites of smaller neighbourhood mosques distributed throughout the Islamic city.<sup>21</sup> At four of them - San Juan, Santa Clara, Santiago and San Lorenzo - the minaret was preserved with many of its distinctive features (twinned windows with horseshoe arches, for example), evoking a constructive vocabulary that was not exactly Christian.<sup>22</sup>

Toledo's case of the Bāb al-Mardūm mosque, later the hermitage of Cristo de la Luz (Christ of the Light), acquires special relevance if we also consider the fact that it, preserved intact after its consecration, save for an amputated *mihṛāb*, passed into the hands of the military order of San Juan a century after the city's conquest. The Knights Hospitaller thus converted the "house called Sancta Cruce, which was a mosque of the Moors", into "their chapel and oratory", preserving its significant dedication of the Holy Cross as an unequivocal sign of the Christian victory over Islam.<sup>23</sup>

But, speaking of this type of symbolic transfer, conveyed through architecture, a lesser known but very significant case is found at the hermitage/sanctuary of Nuestra Señora de la Encarnacion (Our Lady of the Incarnation), probably erected over the mosque in the eastern suburb of Calatrava la Vieja, where the remains of a door under a horseshoe arch of Islamic design are still visible, bricked up and

---

attached properties, *Diplomatari del Masdeu*, ed. Rodrigue Tretón. Barcelona: Fundació Noguera, 2010: V, 256-2568. On the Valencian case, see: Burns, Robert I. *The Crusader Kingdom...: I*, 62-66.

19. Remensnyder, Amy G. "The colonization...":

20. Buresi, Pascal. "Les conversions...": 348-349.

21. Calvo, Susana. *Las mezquitas de al-Andalus*. Almería: Fundación Ibn Tufayl, 2014: 411-424.

22. Valdivieso, Ana; López, Rosa María. "Las mezquitas de barrio en Córdoba: estado de la cuestión y nuevas líneas de investigación". *Anales de Arqueología Cordobesa*, 12 (2001): 215-239. With regard to others, such as San Nicolás de la Villa, San Miguel, and San Nicolás de la Axerquía, no remnants of their previous Islamic construction have been identified, but it is widely believed that these, and the vast majority of the churches built in the 13<sup>th</sup> century were raised on the sites of old mosques, although these claims are not always based on credible arguments: González, Carmen. "Las mezquitas de barrio de Madīnat Qurṭuba 15 años después: espacios religiosos urbanos en la capital andalusí". *Anales de Arqueología Cordobesa*, 27 (2016): 287.

23. Calvo, Susana. *Las mezquitas...: 424-434, 672-689*. Other Toledo churches feature vestiges and evidence of their former use as Muslim places of worship: San Andrés, San Bartolomé, San Lorenzo, San Salvador, San Sebastián, Santa Justa y Rufina, and Santiago del Arrabal, studied by Rütenik, Tobias. "Transformaciones de mezquitas en iglesias en Toledo, desde la perspectiva de la arqueología arquitectónica". *Anales de Arqueología Cordobesa*, 20 (2009): 428.



semi-hidden by one of the building's buttresses.<sup>24</sup> According to a very plausible interpretation of these vestiges as those of a mosque, not only was transformed into a shrine in this case, but the Order of Calatrava, as of 1212, began to use the space as an emblematic site for the burial of their knights who perished after the events at the battle of Alarcos (1195), dedicating the old mosque as Our Lady of the Martyrs.<sup>25</sup> From there arose the current sanctuary dedicated to the Virgin, one of whose annexes continues to be called the *Cuarto de los Mártires* (Room of the Martyrs)<sup>26</sup>, despite the fact that the brothers later proceeded to convey the remains of their comrades killed in combat to the order's new headquarters: the fortress of Calatrava la Nueva, in 1217.<sup>27</sup>

On another note, as different art historians have shown, it cannot be ruled out that some elements representative of Islamic architecture, both Eastern and Western, were replicated in European Christian churches from the early decades of the 12<sup>th</sup> century as visual reflections of the Crusades fought on both fronts and as a reminder of Islam's symbolic subordination to Christendom's expansive mission. We are referring, specifically, to the arches with alternate voussoirs that were used in the mosques of Damascus and Córdoba, as well as the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, replicated in the French churches of Vezelay, Le Puy and Notre Dame du Port in Clermont, buildings featuring significant reminders of the Crusades, as well as at San Pedro de Cardeña, in Castile.<sup>28</sup>

Regardless of the morphologies that the new churches took on and the transformations that the old mosques underwent, the truth is also that these mutations entailed and reflected more complex realities affecting their roles as organizational landmarks of a demographic, economic and jurisdictional nature. Dismantling the network of Islamic houses of worship entailed depriving Muslims of them, although many had already fled their former lands, such that their needs in this regard had been drastically reduced. But this amputation, in addition to

---

24. Hervás, Miguel Ángel; Retuerce, Manuel. "Calatrava la Vieja, primera sede de la Orden Militar de Calatrava", *El nacimiento de la orden de Calatrava. Primeros tiempos de expansión (siglos XII y XIII). Minutes of the 1st International Congress, on the occasion of the 850th anniversary of the foundation of the Order of Calatrava, 1158-2008 (Almagro, October 2008)*, Ángela Madrid y Medina, Luis Rafael Villegas, coords. Ciudad Real: Instituto de Estudios Manchegos, 2009: 132-136.

25. Hervás, Miguel Ángel. *Conservación y restauración en Calatrava La Vieja (1975 - 2010)*. Ciudad Real: Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha (PhD Dissertation), 2016: 195-197.

26. Rodríguez-Picavea, Enrique. "La villa y la encomienda de Calatrava la Vieja en la Baja Edad Media". *Espacio, tiempo y forma*, 12 (1999): 152.

27. Daza, Enrique. "Espacios de memoria y reliquias de la guerra santa. Una relectura material del culto a los mártires de Calatrava", *Memoria y fuentes de la guerra santa peninsular (ss. X-XV)*, Carlos de Ayala, Francisco García Fitz, J. Santiago Palacios, eds. Gijón: Ediciones Trea, 2021: 413-432. The author seeks to reconstruct the histories of the relics of the Calatrava knights through the order's different sites, since the defeat in 1195, highlighting the spaces in Zorita de los Canes and Calatrava la Vieja, churches with crypts, that may have housed such revered objects. If so, he suggests, the authentic church of Los Mártires was the facility within Calatrava proper, and not the complex indicated on the outskirts.

28. Dodds, Jerrilynn. "Remembering the Crusades in the Fabric of Buildings. Preliminary Thoughts about Alternating Voussoirs", *Remembering the Crusades. Myth, image, and identity*, Nicholas Paul, Suzanne Yeager, eds. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012: 99-124.





its obvious consequences of a religious nature, included a social, political and economic dimension of enormous importance. Firstly, this was because their mosques, which functioned as teaching and socialization centres, disappeared, as did the *aljamas* where the community came together to strengthen their political ties and listen to sermons on Fridays (*juḡba*). Also passing into Christian hands was all the urban infrastructure (baths, cemeteries, houses, ovens, stores...) and the rural properties integrated into the *habices* (*awqāf* or *aḥbās*), donated mortmain properties dedicated to the support of said mosques, entailing the patrimonial dispossession and destructuring of these vital cornerstones underpinning Muslim life.<sup>29</sup> In parallel, there was the forced emigration of Islamic clergy and authorities linked to those places, as evidenced by numerous accounts of *ulama*, *faqih*s, and *qadi* displaced to different parts of the Islamic world as a result of these events.<sup>30</sup> In short, the dismantling of some basic pillars of al-Andalus society was taking place, which could no longer recover from the impact of the feudal conquest.

### 3. Resignification

Once control of the territory and its inhabitants had been firmly established, as well as the initial transformation, by right of conquest, of Islam's most emblematic architectures in the process of the domination of al-Andalus and the construction

---

29. Buresi, Pascal. "Les conversions...": 339-340; Burns, Robert I. *The Crusader Kingdom...: I*, 64-66. In relation to the mosques, the pious legacies associated with them, and the types of property attached thereto: García Sanjuán, Alejandro. *Hasta que Dios herede la Tierra. Los bienes habices en al-Andalus (siglos X-XV)*. Huelva: Universidad de Huelva, 2002: SVII; Carballeira, Ana M<sup>a</sup>. *Legados píos y fundaciones familiares en al-Andalus (siglos IV/X-VI/XII)*. Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2002: 71-72, 101-103.

30. Ibn Bassām refers to the expulsion of the last *faqih* to pray in Toledo's main mosque just before its conversion into a church, by order of Alfonso VI: Vlamincx, Kristine. "La reddition de Tolède (1085 AD) selon Ibn Bassām Šantarīnī". *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica*, 16 (1985): 195. Other works containing similar accounts include López de Coca, J. Enrique. "Granada y el Magreb: la emigración andalusí (1485-1516)", *Relaciones de la Península Ibérica con el Magreb (siglos XIII-XVI)*, Mercedes García-Arenal, María Jesús Viguera, eds. Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1988: 409-451; Vallvé, Joaquín. "La emigración andalusí al Magreb en el siglo XIII (despoblación y repoblación de al-Andalus)", *Relaciones de la Península Ibérica con el Magreb (siglos XIII-XVI)*, Mercedes García-Arenal, María Jesús Viguera, eds. Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1988: 87-129; Molina, Emilio. "Algunas consideraciones sobre los emigrados andalusíes", *Tribute to Prof. Darío Cabanelas Rodríguez, O.F.M., LXX anniversary*. Granada: Universidad de Granada, 1987: 419-432; Valencia, Rafael. "La emigración sevillana hacia el Magreb alrededor de 1248", *Minutes of the 2nd Hispanic-Moroccan Historical Sciences Colloquium. Historia, Ciencia y Sociedad (Granada, 6-10 noviembre 1989)*. Granada: Spanish International Cooperation Agency, 1992: 323-327. See also: García-Sanjuán, Alejandro. "Retoces territorial y declive musulmán en la obra de al-Qurtubī (m. 671/1273), un ulema andalusí del exilio", *Memoria y fuentes de la guerra santa peninsular (ss. X-XV)*, Carlos de Ayala, Francisco García Fitz, J. Santiago Palacios, eds. Gijón: Ediciones Trea, 2021: 263-282; Palacios, J. Santiago. "Tras la conquista de al-Andalus (1085-1266): Permanencia o emigración de los vencidos". *Hesperia. Culturas del Mediterráneo*, 23 (2021): 201-223.



of a new Christian identity, sanctuaries and frontier enclaves<sup>31</sup> underwent the resignification of their symbols; that is, the attribution of new cultural and religious meanings to them.

To begin with, over the recently conquered castles and mosques, in addition to the other functional and symbolic transformations already discussed, royal banners soon waved, as an obvious sign of Christian dominion over the most prominent architectural elements.<sup>32</sup> Just to cite one example of the special symbolism that the placement of banners had at newly conquered sites, let us recall what happened in Granada on January 2, 1492, when two banners were run up on the fortress's highest tower: that of the Holy Cross (Santa Cruz) and that of Santiago. The first was the symbol of the crusade campaign waged by the kings with the Pope's blessing. The second represented the old Hispanic effort at reconquest, which this saint was believed to particularly support.<sup>33</sup>

Essential in this resignification process at these fortified spaces was the construction of chapels within the castles and fortresses, sometimes after the transformation of the pre-existing mosques, although in the case of strongholds of the military orders, besides this symbolic transformation into churches, appropriate spaces were needed for the conventual life of the *freires*, and hence many churches were built *ex novo*.

It might be supposed that the most important Andalusí *alcazabas* and *alcazares* featured private spaces of worship for their occupants, but the truth is that we know little about the mosques within these fortresses, especially the smaller ones.<sup>34</sup> Apart from the cases cited in the previous note, let us look at, by way of illustration, two examples in a little more detail: the Alcazaba de Badajoz and the Aljafería de Zaragoza. In the first case, the primitive place of prayer was a modest building erected by 'Abd al-Rahmān ibn Marwān al-Ŷillīqī between 875 and 889, later slightly enlarged. After the Leonese conquest of 1230 it would immediately be transformed into the cathedral of the city and dedicated to Santa María de la Seé, or del Castillo. Its modest dimensions and its location in an inadequate space soon led to the construction of the new Cathedral of San Juan Bautista (St John the Baptist)

---

31. It is understood that sanctuaries and frontier enclaves caught the maximum interest of the new conquerors because of their symbolism and importance. This includes mosques, shrines, oratories, *zawiya-s*, and also all types of defensive structures, from small towers for territorial control to large fortresses, which underwent formal or conceptual changes after the Christian conquest.

32. This was the case, for example, with the mosques of Córdoba: Roderici Ximinius de Rada, *Historia de Rebus Hispanie sive Historia Gothica*, ed. Juan Fernández Valverde. Turnholt: Brepols, 1987: book IX, chapter 16, 298; and Seville: *Primera Crónica General...*: II, 767 (Chapter: 1123).

33. Goñi Gaztambide, José. *Historia de la bula de cruzada en España*. Vitoria: Editorial del Seminario, 1958: 392.

34. At the *alcazaba* (citadel) in Mérida, and the *alcázar* (fortress) in Jerez de la Frontera, for instance, two such places of worship are documented; also, at the *alcázares* of Toledo and Murcia (Calvo, Susana. *Las mezquitas...*: 445-450, 467-470, 543-551; Feijoo, Santiago; Alba, Miguel A. "El sentido de la Alcazaba emiral de Mérida: su aljibe, mezquita y torre de señales". *Mérida. Excavaciones Arqueológicas*, 8 (2002): 565-586). Gormaz Castle, meanwhile, may have housed an open-air prayer space, or *muşallā*, with three *mihribs*, or prayer niches, built into one of the walls of the enclosure, oriented to the southeast: Zozaya, Juan. "Evolución de un yacimiento: El castillo de Gormaz (Soria)", *Castrum 3: Guerre, fortification et habitat dans le monde méditerranéen au Moyen Age*, André Bazzana, ed. Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 1983: 173-178.



in another part of the city, although the church survived until the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when it was destroyed to build the Military Hospital in the *alcazaba* (citadel).<sup>35</sup>

In Zaragoza the fortress/palace of the Aljafería still conserves a private prayer space whose construction was ordered by the second of the kings of the Taifa (kingdom) of Zaragoza: al-Muqtadir b. Hūd, who reigned between 1049 and 1083. It is a compound of modest dimensions featuring an octagonal floor plan and a niche for the *mihṛāb*, “unparalleled in Islamic art”, located in the palace’s most emblematic area and profusely decorated with different interlocking arch designs inspired by the Cordoba mosque.<sup>36</sup>

Obviously, none of these cases can be considered places of worship typical of a border fortress, which must have been constructed observing more functional than aesthetic criteria, but we cannot rule out that in those more exposed and rudimentary military sites the interior of a simple tower or some modest annex may have functioned as a mosque for the garrison and/or volunteers of the holy war, linked to the practice of *ribāʿ*. One of these possible cases is that of the tower of San Andrés de Sepúlveda, possibly erected at the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> century when the area was reoccupied by Caliphate troops, where we find the niche of what appears to be a *mihṛāb* with a horseshoe arch at the back, properly oriented 120° southeast. Another possible case is that of the two contiguous places of worship with *mihṛāb-s* that were found, also perfectly oriented, at the site of El Molón, in Comporrobles, occupied by Andalusī Muslims between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries. Here we are dealing with a rural *ḥiṣn* (castle) whose small size renders puzzling the need for these two prayer rooms, unless the enclave functioned as a space for the exercise of militarized asceticism compatible with the practice of *ribāʿ*.<sup>37</sup>

These small mosques, and many others that were surely built inside fortresses in al-Andalus, as well as other representative Islamic spaces, such as cemeteries, were, at best, abandoned and written off, or, at worst, completely consciously resignified after the Christian conquest. If not, what sense would it make for the parish church of Nuestra Señora de la Estrella de Montiel (Our Lady of the Star of Montiel) to be built by destroying the previous Islamic *maqbara*, surely still visible when the foundations of it were opened up, damaging some tombs?<sup>38</sup> Or that these burial

35. Valdés, Fernando. “La mezquita privada de ‘Abd Al-Rahman Ibn Marwan Al-Yilliqi en la alcazaba de Badajoz”. *Cuadernos de Prehistoria y Arqueología de la Universidad Autónoma de Madrid*, 25/2 (1999): 267-290.

36. Ewert, Christian. “La mezquita de la Aljafería y sus pinturas”. *La Aljafería y el arte del islam occidental en el siglo XI. Minutes of the International Seminar held in Zaragoza from 1-3 December, 2004*, Gonzalo M. Borrás, Bernabé Cabañero, coords. Saragossa: Institución Fernando el Católico, 2012: 97-134.

37. Albarrán, Javier; Daza, Enrique. “Hacia la construcción...”.

38. It was begun just a few years after the Christian conquest of the region and its excavators, although cautious, point to this conscious destruction of a space full of symbolism for the still abundant *mudéjar* (Islamic) population: Molero, Jesús M.; Gallego, David. “Arqueología de las órdenes militares: la iglesia parroquial de Nuestra Señora de la Estrella en Montiel (Ciudad Real, España) (siglos XIII-XV)”, *Entre Deus e o Rei. O mundo das Ordens Militares*, Isabel Cristina Ferreira Fernandes, coord. Palmela: Município de Palmela-GESOS, 2018: 986-987.



spaces were frequently the objects of divestiture between individuals and Christian entities after the conquest, thus desecrating spaces with strong Islamic religious connotations?<sup>39</sup>

In similar terms, the Christian kings took possession of a significant set of Andalusí heritage elements (mosques, palaces and fortresses), where they performed notable symbolic gestures. Some were buried in old mosques converted into churches, such as that of Alfonso VII in Toledo, and Fernando III in Seville. Alfonso X, meanwhile, proposed several plans for his mausoleum in the mosque of Córdoba, in the new church of Santa Cruz, in Cádiz, or in the Alcázar of Murcia, where he ordered the demolition of the previous Muslim<sup>40</sup> holy space to erect a “conuento de monges de la Orden del Cistel que rueguen a Dios por nuestros pecados”.<sup>41</sup>

In the case of less valuable and little-coveted rural locations, this process of resignification sometimes meant simply their complete abandonment, decay, or their radical transformation. As an example of this situation we can cite several enclaves around the Tagus River that passed into the hands of the Order of Santiago. Among the Islamic fortifications that the Order inherited but abandoned or transformed in the succeeding years we can speak of Alharilla, Alboer, Biedma, and Santa María del Castellar.<sup>42</sup>

The first of them came into the Order's possession via a donation by Alfonso VIII in 1172,<sup>43</sup> but a few years later the successive Almohad waves of attacks, and the superior location of the new site at Fuentidueña, north of the Tagus, led to its

39. Evidence of this process for the disposal of Islamic *maqbaras* (cemeteries) is abundant and widespread. In the aforementioned donation of the Almudayna Castle, which Jaime I granted to the Templars in 1230, there is also mentioned a *fossatum ipsius castrí* (Tréton, Rodrigue. *Diplomatari...*: V, 2567). One of the cemeteries in Alicante belonged to the city of Cartagena in 1264, and was handed over to Pedro Savardu *pora fazer del et en el a todas vuestras voluntades* (“to do all your wills from him and in him”). In 1267 the Abez mosque, *cum suo fossario*, located in Murcia, was handed over by the dean of Cartagena to Raimundo Vicente, *ad faciendum, inde omnes uestras uoluntates*. In 1270, as a last example, the Infante Don Manuel gave the Mercedarians (Order of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mercy) some old baths and a cemetery in Elche to found a monastery and to replace the Islamic cemetery with a Christian one (*Documents of the 13<sup>th</sup> century...*: 19-20, 30 -31, 37). On the survival of burial places for *mudéjar* Muslims, and their late medieval transformations, see: Villanueva, Olatz. “De la Arqueología Mudéjar a la Arqueología Morisca: del islam permitido al islam prohibido”, *Treinta años de Arqueología Medieval en España*, J. Antonio Quirós, ed. Oxford: Archaeopress, 2018: 299-303.

40. Sánchez, J. Antonio; García, Luis A. “Fulgor en el alcázar musulmán de Murcia. El conjunto religioso-funerario de San Juan de Dios”, *Las artes y las ciencias en el occidente musulmán. Sabios mursíes en las cortes mediterráneas. Museo de la Ciencia y el Agua (Museum of Science and Water), from 21 June, 2007 to 6 January, 2008*. Murcia: Ayuntamiento de Murcia - Concejalía de Cultura, 2007: 242.

41. *Documentos de Alfonso X el Sabio*, ed. Juan Torres Fontes. Murcia: Academia Alfonso X el Sabio, 2008: 302.

42. Palacios, J. Santiago. “Algunas fortalezas santiaguistas desaparecidas en la ribera del Tajo”, *II Congreso de Castellología Ibérica: Alcalá de la Selva (Teruel). 8-11 noviembre 2001*. Madrid: Asociación Española de Amigos de los Castillos, 2005: 641-662.

43. 1172, February 7. Toledo: González, Julio. *El reino de Castilla en época de Alfonso VIII*. Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1960: II, 284-286.



progressive depopulation. Thus, in 1508<sup>44</sup> and 1515<sup>45</sup> the *Libros de Visita* (Visiting Books) exclusively mention a hermitage dedicated to Santa María de Alharilla, and shortly afterwards the chronicler Rades wrote: “En aquellos tiempos fue Castillo principal (...) Agora es una Hermita con vestigios de Castillo, y dizese Alharilla”.<sup>46</sup>

The *castrum* (fort) of Biedma or Santa María del Castellar, identified in the Middle Ages as *Medina*, *Methme*, *Miethma* or *Biethma*, appears for the first time in the hands of the Order of Santiago in 1187.<sup>47</sup> Very soon, however, the fortress was abandoned, the place name was applied to the river plain, and other valuable sites on the order's lands were favoured; in its place, on a hill with good visibility over the Tagus, devoid of any remnants of its initially defensive function, a hermitage was erected, mentioned in the *Libros de Visita* of 1511 and 1515.

Alboher, meanwhile, appears in the documentation for the first time in 1099, when Alfonso VI donated the fortress to Archbishop Bernardo de Toledo.<sup>48</sup> We do not know exactly when it passed to the Order of Santiago, but in 1253 it was cited in the *fuero* (charter) of Santa Cruz de la Zarza as the “Castillejo de Albuer”,<sup>49</sup> denoting a lesser edification, which suggests that it and the adjacent village had declined due to a process of abandonment that culminated between the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, when the *Libros de Visita* do not mention any fortress in the place, and focus their attention exclusively on the inspection of the hermitage of Santa María del Albuhera.

A similar process of abandonment of fortresses and their replacement by hermitages was repeated in other geographical contexts having similar features.<sup>50</sup> In some cases they were lost prematurely due to military pressure from the Almoravids, first, and later the Almohads.<sup>51</sup> For the recipients of the donations the maintenance of all these fortresses was onerous, so they tended to favour the most prominent sites, leaving less suitable ones to languish.<sup>52</sup> The pushing of the border to the south and the change in the social organization of the space towards models favouring fields on flatter and more fertile lands also led to a transformation in landscape

44. AHN, Órdenes Militares, Libro 1073c, 131.

45. AHN, Órdenes Militares, Libro 1079c, 1491.

46. Rades y Andrada, Francisco de. *Chronica de las tres Órdenes y Cauallerias de Santiago, Calatrava y Alcántara, Chronica de Santiago*. Toledo: en casa de Iuan de Ayala, 1572: *Chronica de Santiago*: 12r.

47. Martín, José Luis. *Orígenes de la Orden Militar de Santiago (1170-1195)*. Barcelona: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1974: 403-404.

48. Martín, José Luis. *Orígenes...*: 169-170.

49. Chaves, Bernabé de. *Apuntamiento legal sobre el dominio solar de la Orden de Santiago*. Barcelona: El Albir, 1975: 40v.

50. Ruibal, Amador. “Algunas fortalezas desaparecidas del Campo de Montiel”. *Castillos de España*, 112 (1998): 61-64.

51. The case of Alharilla is very clear, as it was attacked in 1176, and later in 1195, when *assolaron los Moros el castillo de Alharilla, que era cerca de Fuentidueña* (“The Moors devastated the castle of Alharilla, which was close to Fuentidueña”); Rades y Andrada, Francisco de. *Chronica de Santiago...*: 15v, 21r.

52. Among other things, the transfer of some places to the northern bank of the Tagus turned the river itself into a natural moat defending against possible incursions by al-Andalus from the south: González, Julio. *Repoblación de Castilla la Nueva*. Madrid: Universidad Complutense, 1975: II, 199-200.



and settlement patterns entailing the abandonment of castles perched on steep and inaccessible hilltop locations. Thus, a significant percentage of the fortresses that disappeared ended up being replaced by small hermitages, most of them dedicated to the Virgin Mary, even today.<sup>53</sup> We are certainly dealing with, the first parishes established after the military conquests of the late 12<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>54</sup> Though not always successful colonizing efforts, they survived through the centuries as the only vestiges of what once were fortified positions and frontier settlements.

In a way similar to this process documented with regard to the fortifications, some of the rural sanctuaries in al-Andalus that functioned as *zāwiya-s* (sometimes also referred to in the sources as *ribāt-s* or *rābitas*) were abandoned or underwent interesting transformations after the Christian conquest. We know some cases on the Peninsula very well,<sup>55</sup> particularly some Portuguese ones, which serve to support the idea of historical continuity as “*zones chargées de sacralité*”; that is, places where Islamic sanctuaries were built, sometimes over others from earlier times that, in turn, were the sites of subsequent Christian monasteries and churches.<sup>56</sup>

In the Arrábida region (a Portuguese toponym alluding to the Arabic *ribāt*), for instance, this sacred legacy was sustained by the construction in the 16<sup>th</sup> century of a Franciscan monastery in the place where the Islamic sanctuary may have stood.<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, the Portuguese term *azoia* evolved from *zāwiya*, which in late sources is usually associated with sanctuaries built by different brotherhoods of Sufis on graves or places of worship dedicated to Islamic holy men. Different Arab sources as of the 12<sup>th</sup> century confirm the presence of these *zāwiya-s* in several coastal regions and cities: Lagos, Silves, the Leiria region, and the mouths of the Tagus and Sado rivers, where the “*toponymic footprint*” is significant, which seems to confirm that in those areas where the practice of *ribāt* has been verified, there was a certain concentration of these places of prayer.<sup>58</sup>

---

53. As of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, a great number of churches all across Europe were dedicated to the Virgin, but in the Peninsular context the Marian dedication of the converted mosques and new churches underscored the symbolic occupation and Christianization of the reconquered territory: Remensnyder, Amy G. “The colonization...”: 195-196.

54. On the implementation of these territorialized ecclesiastical structures in La Mancha, see: Villegas, Luis R. “Religiosidad popular y fenómeno repoblador en La Mancha”, *Devoción mariana y sociedad medieval*. Ciudad Real: Instituto de Estudios Manchegos, 1990: 23-72; Ayala, Carlos. “Las órdenes militares y la ocupación del territorio manchego (siglos XII-XIII)”, *Alarcos 1195. Minutes of the International Congress Commemorating the 8th Centennial of the Battle of Alarcos (Ciudad Real, 1995)*, Ricardo Izquierdo, Francisco Ruiz, eds. Cuenca: Ediciones de la Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha, 1996: 69-72.

55. Echevarría, Ana. “La transformación...”: 73.

56. Picard, Christophe. “Les ribats au Portugal à l’époque musulmane: sources et definitions”, *Mil anos de fortificações na Península Ibérica e no Magreb (500-1500)*. Minutes of the International Congress on Castles, Isabel C. F. Fernández, coord. Lisboa: Edições Colibri-Câmara Municipal de Palmela, 2001: 204. The Hispanic case, among others, is covered extensively by: Franco-Sánchez, Francisco. “El ġihād y su sustituto el ribāt en el Islam tradicional: Evolución desde un espíritu militarista y colectivo hacia una espiritualidad interior e individual”. *Mirabilia*, 10 (2010): 21-44.

57. Fernandes, Isabel C. “Do *ribāt* à comenda...”: 80.

58. Picard, Christophe. “Les ribats au Portugal...”: 205-206.





However, it is still difficult to establish any type of architectural relationship or analogy between the places where this Islamic religious and military practice has been documented, and impossible to associate *ribāṭ-s*, *rābīṭas* or *rapitas* with necessarily fortified buildings. The vagueness of the sources, as well as the lack of a standard building type adopted to fulfil the function of housing the practitioners of *ribāṭ*, or one that could be linked to the archetypal Tunisian *ribāṭ-s*, as can be deduced from the excavation sites at Arrifana and Guardamar, are problems that affect the entire Iberian Peninsula and Maghreb.<sup>59</sup>

In line with the focus of this work, however, what catches our attention is another striking reality: the association established between *ribāṭ-s* or *rābīṭa-s* and another etymon of clearly Greek origin, *al-munastīr-es*, traces of which are significant in Iberian toponymy, dating back until at least the 10<sup>th</sup> century. Almonacid, Almonecer and Almonester<sup>60</sup> evidence the continuity and resignification of possible Islamic sites dedicated to a specific type of *ḡihād* receiving a name with an undeniably Christian tone and continuing to exist after the feudal conquest.

#### 4. Memory and oblivion

Reconquest, restoration, recovery and even repopulation are concepts that refer, as we have had the opportunity to analyse, to a territorial, material and tangible dimension in spatial terms, and also concerns processes of resignification of that landscape through the creation of a new topography, both sacred and secular. From a semantic point of view, in addition, the prefix shared by these terms denotes the idea of a return to a previous state. Those carrying out the Christian advance to the south harboured shared accounts of the Muslims' previous desecration of their ancestors' lands, cities and sanctuaries,<sup>61</sup> and believed that their mission was, among other things, to restore a state of affairs abruptly interrupted by the Islamic invasion. They also generated a narrative of the events that would be projected into

59. Cressier, Patrice. "Lecturas arqueológicas del *ribāṭ* en Ifriqiya y Magreb occidental". *Cuadernos de Arquitectura y Fortificación*, 6 (2019): 107-125.

60. Epalza, Mikel de. "Al-Munastīr d'Ifrīqiya et Al-Munastīr de Xarc Al-Andalus", *Actes du VII Colloque Universitaire Tuniso-Espagnol sur "Le Patrimoine andalous dans la Culture arabe et Espagnole"*. Tunisia: Université de Tunis, 1991: 95-106; Franco-Sánchez, Francisco. "Rabitas y al-Monastīres en el norte y levante de la Península de al-Andalus", *La rābīṭa en el islam. Estudios interdisciplinarios. Congressos Internacionals de Sant Carles de la Rapita (1989, 1997)*, Francisco Franco-Sánchez, Mikel de Epalza, eds. Sant Carles de La Rapita: Ajuntament de Sant Carles de la Rapita-Universitat d'Alacant, 2004: 95-109.

61. Through the Christian chronicles, the Islamic conquest was blamed also in Asia Minor for the decline of urban life and for extensive migrations in the region: Ahrweiler, Hélène. "L'Asie Mineure et les invasions arabes (VII<sup>e</sup> -IX<sup>e</sup> siècles)". *Revue Historique*, 227/1 (1962): 1-32, a hypothesis that, however, is not confirmed by the archeology. In fact, the opposite seems to have been the case, as a certain revitalization of the urban sphere can be attributed to the Muslims, with signs of decay being evident before their arrival: Avni, Gideon. *The Byzantine-Islamic Transition in Palestine. An Archaeological Approach*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.



the future through new places, objects and events the memory of which would sustain the glory of the conquest.

In line with the memory of the past, thus does the *First General Chronicle* refer to the traumatic event of the Islamic invasion and its particular impact on the churches:

*los santuarios fueron destroydos, las iglesias crebantadas; los logares que loauan a Dios con alegría, essora le denostauan yl maltrayen; las cruces et los altares echaron de las iglesias (...) las iglesias et las torres o solien loar a Dios, essora confessauan en ellas et llamauan a Mahomat (...) Toda la tierra desgastaron los enemigos, las casas hermaron, los omnes mataron, las cibdades quemaron (...) Los moros por este enganno prisieron toda la tierra; et pues que la ouieron en su poder, crebantaron toda la pleytesia et robaron las iglesias (...) que non finco y nada sinon los obispos que fuxieron con las reliquias et se acogieron a las Asturias<sup>62</sup>*

Lucas de Tuy stressed idea of the transformation of Christian churches into places for the worship of Muḥammad: *Tenian los moros los mejores lugares, ganados por cuchillo vengante, y en las yglesias que se loaua el nombre de Ihesu Christo, el nonbre non santo de Mahomad con voz pública llamauan.*<sup>63</sup>

Similar memories of the desolation wrought by the Islamic invasion and, in particular, the dramatic fate of Christian places of worship, also fill the documentation at the royal chancellery of Castile-León, which documents the prevailing perceptions of the phenomenon in Christian settings.<sup>64</sup> Therefore, it should not be surprising that a well-articulated narrative was generated revolving around the recovery of those ancient places of worship, invariably evoking the past and reminding them that their churches had been converted into mosques, and that it was necessary to restore their *pristinum statum*, as was argued in the case of Barbastro.<sup>65</sup> A clear link was also established between the reconquering monarchs and their Visigoth “progenitors”, as reflected, among other documents, in the Cathedral of Toledo’s letter of donation, issued shortly after its conquest by Alfonso VI, and noting the Christians’ subjugation for 366 years to the Moors’ ignominy and

62. “The sanctuaries were destroyed, the churches were demolished; the places that praised God with joy, were debased and battered; the crosses and altars were torn from the churches (...) the churches and the towers that had been used to praise God, were now used to exalt and worship Muhammad (...) Our enemies razed the whole land, they laid waste to the houses, killed the men, burned the cities (...) The Moors, through this deception, conquered the whole land; with it in their power, they showed not respect, and robbed the churches (...) such that nothing was left, not even the bishops, who fled with the relics and sought sanctuary in Asturias”: *Primera Crónica General...*: 313 (Chapter: 559).

63. “The Moors had the best places, seized with their vengeful blades, and in the churches where the name of Jesus Christ was once pronounced, the unholy name of Muhammad was publicly uttered”: Lucas de Tuy. *Crónica de España*, ed. Julio Puyol. Madrid: Real Academia de la Historia, 1926: LXVII, 271.

64. Sirantoine, Hélène. “La guerra contra los musulmanes en los diplomas castellanoleonese (siglo XI-1126)”, *Orígenes y desarrollo de la Guerra Santa en la Península Ibérica. Palabras e imágenes para una legitimación (siglos X-XIV)*, Carlos de Ayala, Patrick Henriët, J. Santiago Palacios, eds. Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 2016: 55-60.

65. Harris, Julie A. “Mosque to church...”: 168-169.



blasphemy.<sup>66</sup> In short, we find a language conveying the notions of just war, holy war and reconquest, with similar terms being found in the extensive preambles of other documents dedicated to the restoration and endowment of old ecclesiastical sees. We are talking about the cases of Palencia, Huesca and Valencia, which David Porrinas recently studied, and where a certain *antiquarum dessolatio ecclesiarum* committed by the Muslim invaders is evoked.<sup>67</sup>

Along these lines, in this regard some recent historiography still embraces the ideas of Simonet, who observed that the Islamic invasion entailed the widespread occupation of Visigoth churches and episcopal sees, to convert them into mosques, when not the massive destruction of Christian places of worship. The scholar highlighting the Muslims' violent and intolerant nature, as well as their inability to develop their own set of monuments for posterity.<sup>68</sup>

The truth, however, is that there is no archaeological evidence of the conversion of churches into mosques at the time of the Islamic conquest, and the texts in this regard are not conclusive.<sup>69</sup> In literary traditions we have the supposed cases of Barcelona<sup>70</sup> and, above all, that of San Vicente de Córdoba, in regard to which work is currently ongoing, but not yet certified by the archaeological information.<sup>71</sup>

The first credible account of the conversion of a church into a mosque dates from the 12<sup>th</sup> century, occurring in a very specific context: when a portion of the Mozarabic communities of Granada, Seville and Córdoba were banished, accused of breaking the *dhimmi* pact by providing support to Alfonso de Aragón during his incursions in 1125 and 1126.<sup>72</sup> At this time at least one of its churches was converted into a mosque, as documented in subsequent litigation over the former mortmain properties attached to the Christian church.<sup>73</sup>

66. Gamba, Andrés. *Alfonso VI. Cancillería, Curia e Imperio. Colección diplomática*. León: Centro de Estudios e Investigación San Isidoro, 1998: 226-228.

67. Porrinas, David. "Rodrigo Díaz, el Cid Campeador, y la noción de Reconquista", *La Reconquista. Ideología y justificación de la guerra santa peninsular*, Carlos de Ayala, Isabel C. Fernandes, J. Santiago Palacios, coords. Madrid: Ediciones La Ergástula Ediciones, 2019: 370-377.

68. Simonet, Francisco Javier. *Historia de los mozárabes de España*. Madrid: Real Academia de la Historia-Establecimiento Tipográfico de la Viuda e Hijos de M. Tello, 1897-1903: 49, 83-85, 165, 248, 284-286. The same author, however, cannot avoid providing accounts of the construction of mosques near the Christian temples, but without any evidence of a penchant for destruction on the Muslims' part; quite to the contrary, there seems to have been a willingness to respect these religious spaces: Simonet, Francisco Javier. *Historia de los mozárabes...*: 150-151, 256).

69. Calvo, Susana. *Las mezquitas...*: 45-50. The work contains numerous references to the abandonment or destruction of churches, but also questions those conversions lacking textual or archaeological evidence.

70. Arce, Fernando. *La sociedad cristiana en al-Andalus a través de la gestión de su arquitectura religiosa (siglos VIII al X): continuidades, amortizaciones y renovaciones*. Madrid: Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (PhD Dissertation), 2021: 37-38, 270-274.

71. Arce, Fernando. "La supuesta basílica de San Vicente en Córdoba: de mito histórico a obstinación historiográfica". *Al-Qantara*, 36/1 (2015): 11-44.

72. Miranda, Fermín. "Traxi cum Dei auxilio de potestate sarracenorum. La gran cabalgada de Alfonso el Batallador (1125-1126)", *Fechos de armas. 15 hitos bélicos del medievo ibérico (siglos XI-XVI)*, Martín Alvira, Miguel G. Martins, eds. Madrid: La Ergástula Ediciones, 2021: 45-56.

73. Arce, Fernando. *La sociedad cristiana...*: 122-124; Carballeira, Ana M<sup>a</sup>, *Legados píos...*: 110-113.



F. Arce points out that archaeological investigations of churches used during Islamic times (whether constructed before 711 or later) have uncovered no evidence of their conversion into mosques after the cessation of their original Christian activity. He refers, among others, to Casa Herrera, Santa Eulalia de Mérida, El Gatillo, Melque, San Pedro de la Mata, Tolmo de Minateda and Algezares; nor is there documentation or material evidence of the supplanting of Christian religious buildings by other Muslim ones.

And yet, the insistent transmission of this ancestral “memory” constituted a key argument justifying reciprocal actions by the Christians when they took possession of the Islamic territory and its most sacred sites. In this way transforming mosques into churches was deemed appropriate within the parameters of just war, as this was considered a retaliation to a previous aggression. In addition, these conversions or constructions of new churches were considered restorative actions forming part of a holy war that returned to the Church its former rights, properties and dignity, in an effort to rebuild the Visigoths’ diocesan structure, taken as a geographical and moral model. The reconstruction of the episcopal map existing prior to the Islamic invasion was designed, in this way, around two main arguments: one aspiring to the *restauratio* of the old Hispano-Visigoth sees, and one referring to the *remodelatio* of that initial scheme in response to the new circumstances and organizational needs of the Church or lay powers, which frequently sparked jurisdictional conflicts.<sup>74</sup> In any case, that past was present in the minds of the Christian conquerors, who were concerned with furnishing the new ecclesiastical geography emerging from the expansion of the border with historical roots.

Similarly, narratives of the Christian conquest of al-Andalus were enriched with a recurring theme that would serve as a pretext for the foundation of many Marian sanctuaries: the *inventio* of the previous concealment of an image of the Virgin, ones which the Christian conquerors would “rescue” from the oblivion to which the Muslims had sought to condemn them, with the evident intention of embellishing the Christian legacy prior to the Islamic invasion. In this effort the Christians showed no qualms about enhancing these narratives with all manner of fictional elements.<sup>75</sup> The well-known case of Madrid’s Virgen de la Almudena is an example. The legend of the image of the Virgin’s alleged concealment and miraculous appearance was disseminated shortly after the Christian reconquest of Madrid, following the collapse of a wall where it was said to have been hidden for centuries, and where two candles, miraculously, continued to burn. The veneration of this virgin was linked to a previous church built in the early days of Christianity, in an effort to demonstrate that Spain had been one of the first Roman provinces to be evangelized, based on the existence of a Marian church erected when Santiago

74. Palacios, Bonifacio. “Alfonso VIII y su política de frontera en Extremadura”. *En la España medieval*, 15 (1992): 92.

75. Velasco, Honorio M. “Las leyendas de hallazgo y de singularización de imágenes marianas en España. Una aproximación a la categoría de imagen-persona”, *Religiosidad y costumbres populares en Iberoamérica, [Minutes of the First International Congress, held in Almonte-El Rocío (Spain) from 19-21 Feb. 1999]*, David González, coord. Huelva: Universidad de Huelva, 2000: 89-102.



the Apostle himself had preached in Madrid, thereby refuting the capital's founding under al-Andalus.<sup>76</sup>

In any case, the collective memory of the conquest consisted not only of legends from the past; it was also developed *ex novo* through contemporary elements, with sanctuaries and fortresses being used as transmitting agents of significant eloquence.

The development of these shared accounts was based on, for example, the histories of battles against the Muslims, sacred clashes that the Christians would strive to remember and sanctify through the erection of sanctuaries near the corresponding battlefields and other places of symbolic relevance. Such was the case of the site where Pedro I (Peter of Aragon and Pamplona) defeated the Muslims at the Battle of Alcoraz (Huesca, 1096), where a sanctuary dedicated to San Jorge (Saint George) was erected, who was said to have provided Divine assistance to the Aragonese on that day. After the conquest of Santarem in 1147 Alfonso I of Portugal had Cistercian monks brought in and sponsored the foundation of the Alcobaca Monastery as an offering of thanksgiving. We have already alluded to the dedication of the hermitage of the Martyrs in Calatrava la Vieja, where the Calatravan knights fallen at Alarcos were buried. In relation to that event, we should mention the hypothesis that Alfonso VIII built the cloister of Las Claustrillas at the Monasterio de Las Huelgas (Burgos) as an act of atonement for the sins that led to his defeat.<sup>77</sup>

In the same way, we can refer to the constructive elements intended to evoke the Christian victory at Las Navas de Tolosa. Firstly, there is the hermitage of Santa Elena (St Helen), which tradition situates on the very battlefield of Las Navas, although these references are somewhat dubious and late.<sup>78</sup> But, above all, we are referring to a great work directly associated with the Christian victory of 1212: the new and imposing castle of Calatrava la Nueva, across from Salvatierra. Erected on the site of the previous fortress of Dueñas, the construction of the new castle must have begun just after the battle, and in 1217 the official move of the conventual institution from Calatrava la Vieja to la Nueva took place<sup>79</sup>. Perhaps it would be excessive to consider the fortress, on its own, as a commemorative monument, but the fact is that the date of its construction and the better strategic position of the new castle, its proximity to the frontier and other reasons, explain the overall change that occurred. And we cannot forget that the spiritual core of the fortress was the so called Campo de los

---

76. Vera Tassi y Villarroel, Juan de. *Historia del origen, invención y milagros de la sagrada imagen de Nuestra Señora de la Almudena*. Madrid: Francisco San, imp., 1693: 74.

77. On Las Claustrillas, a strange commemoration of a defeat, and its functioning "more as an instrument for forgetting than for remembering", see: Walker, Rose. "Memoriales de guerra. Recuerdo y olvido. Más allá de Las Huelgas". *Quintana*, 11 (2012): 18-22.

78. Only an inscription on the facade of the current church of Santa Elena, from 1793, recalls the existence of the previous foundation of Alfonso VIII.

79. Zapata, Juan. *El sacro Convento de Calatrava la Nueva*. Ciudad Real: Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha (PhD Dissertation), 2012; Segovia, Ana María. "Primeras construcciones de la Orden en Calatrava la Nueva, s. XIII", *El nacimiento de la orden de Calatrava. Primeros tiempos de expansión (siglos XII y XIII)*. Minutes of the 1st International Congress, on the occasion of the 850th anniversary of the foundation of the Order of Calatrava, 1158-2008 (Almagro, October 2008), Ángela Madrid Medina, Luis Rafael Villegas, coords. Ciudad Real: Instituto de Estudios Manchegos, 2009: 435-444.



Mártires (Field of the Martyrs), where the bodies of the Calatravan friars who fell at Alarcos and Las Navas were moved, thereby creating a space charged with great symbolic and spiritual meaning in that martial/religious context.<sup>80</sup>

Another of these memorials of the holy war with the capacity to project shared versions of the reconquest into the future is the case of Tentudía, where a confrontation took place between the Order of Santiago, led by Pelayo Pérez Correa, and the Muslims, from which the former emerged victorious due to a miracle, a “stopped sun”, which allowed the Christians to defeat the Muslims in what was a drawn-out battle. On the site of that clash, scarcely inhabited and remote, a convent/priory of the order was built, and three masters of the institution were buried there, emphasizing the area’s sacred and symbolic nature.<sup>81</sup>

In any case, there was no battle between Christians and Muslims in the context of the Reconquest more celebrated than that of Salado, an event that gave rise to sanctuaries all across the Peninsula. In Spain, Alfonso XI moved to commemorate it by erecting the royal collegiate church of San Hipólito, in Cordoba, where he was also buried.<sup>82</sup> In Portugal an extensive royal construction program was undertaken by the military orders, which resulted in the building of, among others, monuments such as the Padraõ de Nossa Senhora da Vitória de Guimarães, the expansion of the Hospital Monastery of Flor da Rosa, and the refurbishment of the Order of Santiago’s church/pantheon of Santa Maria dos Mártires in Alcácer do Sal, demonstrating the powerful stimulus that a military victory viewed as part of a crusade could have as a propaganda element, as well as its ability to transform the religious and cultural landscape.<sup>83</sup>

Some elements conserving that disappearing Andalusí legacy survived long after the Christian conquest, revealing that, at certain levels, perhaps ones more attached to popular religiosity, it was difficult to erase the memories and heritage of ancestral traditions and the places associated with them. Such was the case of Ibn Hilāl al-Qaysī, a Muslim ascetic buried in Gormaz in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, whose tomb was venerated by both Muslims and Christians.<sup>84</sup> Another example is that of the *zāwiya* of the Sīdī Būna people in the Guadalest Valley, and of a pilgrimage associated with the Atzeneta Sanctuary, still maintained during the times of Peter I of Aragon. There the tomb of a Saracen considered a prophet was venerated, and in 1336 the

---

80. Zapata, Juan. “El culto a los mártires. Visión y símbolo del medievo a la Contrarreforma”, *Alarcos 1195. Minutes of the International Congress Commemorating the 8th Centennial of the Battle of Alarcos (Ciudad Real, 1995)*, Ricardo Izquierdo, Francisco Ruiz, eds. Cuenca: Ediciones de la Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha, 1996: 615-623.

81. López Fernández, Manuel. “La iglesia de Santa María de Tudía y los enterramientos de tres maestros santiaguistas”. *Revista de Órdenes Militares*, 9 (2017): 35-76.

82. Years later, the same monarch would have built the church of San Pedro el Viejo in Madrid after the taking of Algeciras, in one of the city’s districts with the largest *mudéjar* populations.

83. Fernandes, Isabel C. “O recrudescimento da Guerra Santa e a arquitectura de iniciativa régia e das ordens militares em Portugal (primeira metade do século XIV)”, *Guerra santa y cruzada en el Estrecho. El occidente peninsular en la primera mitad del siglo XIV*, Carlos de Ayala, J. Santiago Palacios, Martín Ríos, eds. Madrid: Sílex, 2016: 297-317.

84. Marín, Manuela. “Zuhhād de al-Andalus (912-1029)”. *Al-Qantara*, 12/2 (1991): 439-470.





Aragonese monarch authorized its celebration, contingent upon the payment of a fee of 5 dinars per pilgrim.<sup>85</sup>

## 5. Conclusions

The process of the conquest and political-military domination of Islamic al-Andalus as a space, carried out by the Christian forces, was accompanied by a necessary Christianization of the territory on the religious plane and, above all, the resignification of its most emblematic or symbolic places (castles, mosques, venerated sanctuaries, battlefields, etc.). This was an essential operation designed to erase the Islamic legacy from the land and construct an alternative narrative with which the new Christian settlers could identify, while also serving as a way to subjugate the residual Andalusí population that remained in the areas conquered by the feudal powers.

First came war and the conquest of the Andalusí political space by force. Then came expulsion of most of the Islamic population from those lands, forced migration, or their relocation in subjugated and segregated communities. Later came a wave of new Christian settlers from the north to fill the vacuum left by the Muslims. These political and demographic processes accompanied by symbolic measures, definitively changed the cultural landscape of al-Andalus between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. Somehow the ideology of the reconquest signified the recovery of the Hispanic homeland, the expulsion of its occupying invaders, and its expulsion from history and memory itself, as an undesirable time that came to an end in 1492.

---

85. The site corresponds to the current Adzaneta de Albaida, near Ontinyent: Fierro, María Isabel. "Holy places in Umayyad al-Andalus". *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 78/1 (2015): 124-125. The venerated tomb was that of a Sufi, Yá'far b. 'Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad b. Sīdī Būna al-Juzā'ī (d. 624/1227). On the specific identification of the sanctuary, see: Franco-Sánchez, Francisco. "Identificación de la tumba de los Sīd Bono en Benifato (Alicante)". *Sharq Al-Andalus*, 5 (1988): 181-186.

