

(1501)

## CHAPTER 5

### ART & ARCHITECTURE

This chapter is guilty of the sins of inadequateness and gross incompleteness. In part this incompleteness is due to the fact that at present I lack the resources for the traveling necessary for a really adequate treatment of this particular aspect of Hispano-Iranian relations, in part because to adequately treat this theme would require a whole book rather than a chapter. I hope that the reader will enjoy what is only an introduction to a vast field.

In Chapter II we briefly discussed how the Goths during their stay in the steppes to the North of the Black Sea adopted the art of the Sarmatians and the Alans. The Visigoths did not, of course, abandon this art, at once vigorous and refined, when they entered the Iberian Peninsula. The Visigothic metalwork in Spain, continues the tradition of the Iranian nomads, though it soon becomes mixed with Celtic elements such as the "rope" or "corded" motif, the interlace, the spiral and the turning wheel, and such Byzantine motifs as the peacock. Perhaps in this field the Visigoths never equal the best Celtic and Iranian pieces, but nevertheless Visigothic metalwork has a vigor and virility

which give it merit and appeal (1). Why painting should be considered a "major" art and metalwork a "minor" art I really do not know, unless it be merely one of the infinite number of gross stupidities typical of the "Renaissance" and the "Enlightenment".

Being a semi-nomadic people, the Visigoths brought no architecture with them to Spain. Until the end of the 6th Century, there is virtually nothing which may be called "Visigothic architecture". The architecture in Spain at this period follows Paleochristian and Byzantine models, with specifically "Hispanic" or "Visigothic" characteristics few or none (2). Of course, one may argue that this impression is due to the paucity of surviving buildings, which may be true. Nevertheless, when all is said and done, all evidence available at this time indicates that the first 150 years of Visigothic rule in Spain were quite sterile in the artistic field, except for metalwork and manuscript illumination. The later Mozarabic illuminated manuscripts indicate a long tradition and also indicate close contacts with Ireland and Christian Egypt in pre-Muslim times.

Near the end of the 6th Century Visigothic Spain began to develop its own style in architecture and architectural

decoration. Unfortunately the great architectural works of the 7th Century in Toledo, Seville, Merida, Cordoba and Sarragossa have long since disappeared, except for fragments. The surviving architectural remains of this period are small and all (except, perhaps, Santa Maria de Melque) in remote, inaccessible places. These are the only Visigothic buildings able to survive the incurions of Almanzor (al-Mansur) and the depra-dations of the Almoravides (al-Murabitun) and the Almohades (al-Muwahidun). Nevertheless, the number of surviving Visigothic buildings is sufficient to draw a few general conclusions.

In the first place, one is struck by the solidity of construction and the general excellence of the stonemasonry. This last is no doubt a heritage of Roman times. If Roman buildings were very often of a poor rubble-and-mortar construction, the stonemasonry of the Roman bridges and aqueducts is impressive. Indeed, the excellence of the Hispano-Visigothic stoenmasons was proverbial (3).

As to ground plans, there were two general types, i.e., one of which follows the Paleochristian basilica plan, the other, more original and interesting from our point of view, is the cruciform or "Greek Cross" plan. As the name indicates, this is really a central plan with four wings of equal length and a dome

over the central crossing. The Byzantine antecedents of this plan have been noted, particularly the Church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople. Nevertheless, by far the nearest equivalent to this plan is that of a Sassanian fire temple (4).

The dome is mounted on squinches over the base in the Sassanian rather than the Byzantine manner, and the vaulting which covers the wings is very much in the style of a Sassanian "ivan"(5).

Another original feature of Visigothic architecture of this period is the "horseshoe" arch. This sort of arch was known to the Romans, but was used only for small windows. The Visigoths used it as a basic architectural element (6). This arch was passed on to Muslim Spain. However, the Hispano-Muslim "horseshoe arch" is more closed than the Visigothic.

Visigothic capitals are, in general, not of very much interest, being variations of the Corinthian capital.

Other Visigothic decoration is far more interesting. Celtic motifs such as the turning wheel and the "rope" motif are found, the first particularly in the Church of San Pedro de la Nave, the second in Quintanilla de las Vinas. San Pedro de la Nave also has some capitals of very Sassanian appearance. The motifs on said capitals of Daniel in the lions' den, peacocks (?) on either side of the tree of life and human heads "cut off

at the neck" all show unmistakable Sassanian inspiration (7).

More abundant than the Celtic motifs are the Byzantine. These include the "Byzantine peacocks", the Greek Cross with or without the Greek letters Alpha and Omega hanging from the arms; the CHI Rho, once again with or without the Alpha and Omega, and certain vegetal motifs of very Byzantine aspect. Of apparent Coptic inspiration are certain motifs, such as the "grapevine with bunches of grapes" and the manner in which the acanthus leaves of the capitals are chiseled (8).

In terms of frequency of appearance, by far the most abundant of the decorative motifs of the Visigothic buildings are those of clear Sassanian inspiration. The typical Sassanian motifs of compartments formed by four-petalled leaves appears in virtually all Visigothic buildings, in particular Quintanilla de las Vinas, San Juan de Banos and fragments found in Cordoba and Murcia (9). In Asturias at least, this motif survived in the decoration of the columns of Romanesque churches.

Nearly as abundant are the "rosettes" identical to Sassanian models. These appear everywhere, but especially in Merida (10).

The Sassanian palmette and a debased form of it which archaeologists now call "fleur de lis" for want of a better

name, is also abundant in Visigothic buildings, like the four-petalled leaf motif, often covering large spaces. The "fleur de lis" at times appears even on otherwise Corinthian capitals (11). The fleur-de-lis was frequently used as an artistic motif by the Scythians of the Altai region of Siberia, circa 400 BC (12), and is also frequent in Celtic art.

One Visigothic motif which is particularly abundant in Merida is the blind arch or vaulted niche whose interior is occupied by a series of grooves or veins which radiate from the centre and remind one of a fan or the interior of a scallop shell. The Sassanian inspiration of this motif is now perfectly clear (13).

It is true that certain of these motifs (notably the "fleur de lis") found the ground prepared by their similarity to certain Celtic motifs (14), but this in no way alters the fact that the predominant influence in Visigothic architecture, in its ground plans, structure and decoration is Sassanian.

From 799 to 818 the bishop of Orleans in Central France was a Spanish Mozarab with the very Gothic name of Theodulf. It was he who built the oratory at Germigny-des-Prés. This church follows the plan of a Sassanian fire temple, and its mosaic and stucco decorations consist mainly of Sassanian palmettes,

(1507)

rosettes and Tree of Life motifs (15).

By the year 718 the Muslims had conquered virtually all the Peninsula, though the Balearic Islands remained in Byzantine hands, and were attacking the Franks to the North of the Pyrenees.

In that rugged and picturesque region of northern Spain known as "Asturias" from the Celtic "As Tor", which means "High Mountain" a member of the Visigothic Royal Family named Pelayo took refuge. Pelayo collected a force of local Celts and refugee Visigoths. At the battle of Covadonga, named for a grotto with a strong spring of water ("Cova" = Cave; "Donga" is derived from the name of the Celtic aquatic goddess "Danaan", "Don" in Welsh). Pelayo won a victory over the Muslim forces of Munuza, governor of the area, gaining a precarious independence for the Kingdom of Asturias.(16) Taking advantage of the Muslim civil wars and wars between Muslims and Franks, this tiny mountainous kingdom gradually expanded. Here in this isolated, picturesque corner of Spain was born a unique style of art and architecture. Some consider Asturian art and architecture to be a continuation of the Visigothic, while others consider it a branch of the Mozarabic. In any case, Sassanian influences are

very strong in Asturian art and architecture. Asturian art and architecture before the reign of Ramiro I (842-850 AD) is really a continuation of the Visigothic tradition, with some variations and a slight Muslim influence, particularly in the tendency to enclose the arches of the windows in a sort of rectangular "frame". It is during the reign of Ramiro I that Asturian art and architecture reach maturity.

The gem of Ramiran art is Santa Maria del Naranco, near Oviedo. This was originally a palace, not long afterwards converted into a church, whence the altar on the east end. In effect, this is a Sassanian building consisting of a single ivan. The ground plan is rectangular, with the North-South axis the shorter of the two. The entrances are on the North and South sides, while the East and West ends form a sort of open air porches. This was obviously a summer palace, since in Winter heating it would be practically impossible.

The structure of the vaulting of the main hall is purely Sassanian. Were it not for its early date, one would be tempted to call this vault "Romanesque". The arches are all semi-circular, not the Visigothic or Hispano-Muslim "horseshoe" arches. Between the arches are the decorative disks or medallions which are copies of Sassanian silver plates. Some of



the capitals combine the Sassanian motif of confronted animals with the Celtic "rope" or "corded" motif. Particularly Sassanian is the motif of confronted roosters with floating ribbons, and the quadruped looking backward whose tail ends in a sort of leaf, or that is locked in combat with a serpent.

The churches of San Miguel de Lillo and Santa Cristina de Lena are small churches of a central plan, though the centre is covered by a vault rather than a dome. The decoration is similar to that of Santa Maria de Naranco, but in general is simpler and more geometric. One interesting feature is a plaque from San Miguel de Lillo with the very Sassanian motif of the griffin.

Asturian metalwork generally follows the Visigothic tradition of heavy use of colored stones and glass and enamel inlay. The best example of this is the Cross of Victory (908 AD). The Celtic motif of the turning wheel is also very common in Asturian metalwork (17).

I hope that the reader will pardon the somewhat sketchy nature of this exposition, though it is to some extent supplemented by the illustrations.

The Kingdom of Asturias was really a fragment of the Visigothic Kingdom which survived in the rugged mountains of the

Northwest. Not until the capital was transferred from Oviedo to Leon, thus bringing it into close contact with the Caliphate of Cordoba on one hand and with the Franks on the other, would the Kingdom acquire a distinct and separate character.

The Visigothic Period in the history of Spain is often given short shrift. Before leaving this period behind, it might be wise to take a last look at it, so as not to fall into stereotypes.

Firstly, let us study the Visigoths themselves. The Goths, both Visigoths and Ostrogoths, were certainly the most cultured, most artistic and least barbaric of all the so-called "barbarian peoples" who invaded the Western Roman Empire. Compared with certain other Germanic peoples, such as the Angles, Saxons, Vandals, Suevi and Lombards, the goths were perfect models of culture and gentleness. Scandinavians by origin, they lived for two centuries on the shores of the Black Sea in what is now the Ukraine. During this time they became very Iranized by contact with the Sarmatians and the Alans, with whom they fused to a great extent. As I said in Chapter II, in everything except their language the Goths were almost totally Iranized. this fact alone was enough to give them an enormous superiority over other Germanic peoples in the fields of art and literature. Nor

is this all.

During this same period the Goths were in close contact with the Eastern Roman (later Byzantine) Empire in Thrace and Asia Minor. Thus the Goths were the first of the Germanic peoples to write their language, and, were, in fact, the inventors of *runes* (see Chapter 2). As Jordanes said: "The Goths have always known the use of letters" [*runes* to be exact](18). They were also Christianized at an early date, though most unfortunately to the heretical sect of Arius of Alexandria, the work of Ulfilas (or Wolflein) who translated the Bible to the Gothic language (19). The Goths during this period were also at least in indirect (more probably direct) contact with Sassanian Persia. The importance of this last fact is certainly considerable, though, as we shall see, very difficult to measure and evaluate.

One should therefore be careful in lumping the Goths with the so-called "barbarian" peoples. For two centuries before their invasion of the Roman Empire they formed a part, albeit marginal, of the Eastern Mediterranean cultural area, whose great centres were Constantinople and Ctesiphon. If they were "barbarians" it would only be in the Classic Greek sense of the term, since they were non-Hellenic by origin and Iranian rather

than Greek by culture, or in the Roman sense in that they were little inclined to urban living. Of course, the above-mentioned Classic Greek definition of "barbarian" represents a rather stupid and ignorant blend of xenophobia, ignorance and bigotry. The above-mentioned Roman definition of "barbarian" is also much too narrow. Archaeology has uncovered neolithic urban cultures which were really quite primitive in all respects, while so high a civilization as that of Early Christian Ireland was totally non-urban.

Part of the reason for the low esteem in which the Visigothic period in Spain is generally held is the lack of sources. There are no chroniclers comparable to St. Martin of Tours, Boethius, Jordanes or Paul the Deacon. St. Isidore of Seville, for all his encyclopedic learning, is a singularly dull and uninformative chronicler. It is, of course, highly probable that there once existed Visigothic chronicles which are now lost, but this does not alter the fact that our written sources concerning Visigothic Spain are both scanty and dull.

Concerning Visigothic art and architecture, it must be noted that the great Visigothic buildings in Toledo, Merida, Seville, Cordoba and Sarragossa have all vanished, except for

defensive walls here and there and decorative fragments in museums or reused in later buildings. The Visigothic buildings which have survived are all small and in out-of-the-way places difficult to reach even today. Nothing survives remotely comparable to the Carolingian buildings which survive in Aachen, Corvey, Lorsch and Paderborn and many other places, nor to the Ostrogothic buildings which survive in Ravenna. The Visigothic buildings which do survive show great skill in the stonework and a great solidity in the construction. As we said before, in its ground plans and use of domes, squinches and vaults, Visigothic architecture shows a combination of Sassanian and Byzantine elements. In reference to architectonic decoration, of which a great deal survives, albeit in fragments, one finds a great mixture of elements: Celtic, Sassanian and Byzantine. In comparing the Visigoths to the Romans in the field of architecture, it is important to distinguish between architecture as engineering and architecture as art. The Romans were magnificent engineers, perhaps the greatest the world has ever seen, but they were a people very much lacking in both imagination and aesthetic sensibility; they were engineers rather than artists, lawyers and bureaucrats rather than poets, mystics and philosophers. Roman architecture is impressive for

its sheer size or monumentality, but not for its aesthetic appeal. I have seen Roman ruins from Rabat to Cologne, and can testify that, artistically speaking, Roman architecture is stereotyped, monotonous and frankly banal. Even as engineers the Romans showed a singular lack of imagination and creativity, they repeated the same architectural formulae, showing far less imagination and ingenuity in this field than Byzantium, Sassanian Persia, Islam and the Romanesque and Gothic architects of Medieval Western Europe.

Judging by the buildings, foundations and decorative fragments which survive, one may come to certain tentative conclusions. Visigothic architecture was certainly far less abundant than the Roman, and almost certainly inferior to it as a feat of engineering. However, from the artistic point of view, there would seem to be good reason to believe that here Visigothic architecture was superior to its Roman counterpart. Under the Visigoths there was a strong resurgence of Celtic artistic motifs which had been suppressed under the Romans, and very powerful currents from the Syro-Byzantine and Iranian (both Saka and Sassanian Persian) worlds entered. Visigothic architecture, while it may have lacked grandiosity, was very rich in variety and creative vitality. Even in the purely

structural field, the Visigoths showed far more initiative and creativity than the Romans. Besides the late -Roman "basilica" structure and ground-plan, the Visigoths also employed the "fire temple" plan of Sassanian inspiration and the Byzantine "Greek Cross" plan derived from it. At least in the buildings which have survived, it is apparent that the Visigoths used the Sassanian rather than the Byzantine solution to the problem of mounting a round dome over a square base, and this tendency continued in Hispano-Muslim, Spanish Romanesque and even Gothic architecture. The Romans endlessly and monotonously repeated the same decorative motifs over and over. Not so the Visigoths. Even among the few remains which have survived, one notes a rich and refreshing variety of decorative motifs derived from Celtic, Saka, Byzantine, Coptic and Sassanian sources. The capitals of the columns are a fine example of this. While the Romans monotonously repeated the Corinthian and "hybrid" (Corinthian acanthus leaves combined with Ionic "ram's horns") capitals, the Visigothic capitals are almost infinitely varied.

The field of literature was most certainly not a strong point of the Romans, as one might suppose. Latin is a language of lawyers rather than poets or philosophers. In general, Classic (in contrast to the richly varied Medieval) Latin

literature has been classified as "degenerate Greek", in other words as a rather poor imitation of Greek models. It is difficult to quarrel with this evaluation. While there are indeed a few Roman writers of great merit, it is undeniable that in the field of literature the Roman period is grossly inferior both to the Hellenic and Hellenistic periods which preceded it and to the Middle Ages which succeeded it.

Of the literature of the Visigothic period in Spain comparatively little has survived. However, from contemporary notices and later developments in Hispano-Arabic, Castilian and Gallego-Portuguese literature one may reach certain conclusions which have a high probability of being true.

The Romans, in contrast to the majority of Indo-European peoples, had no epic tradition. The Aeneid is based on Greek models and has no real traditional epic roots. It is interesting to note here that Virgil, author of the Aeneid and perhaps the greatest of Roman poets, was a Cisalpine Gaul, and therefore of Celtic rather than Roman origin. Some have noted Celtic characteristics in the works of Virgil (20).

We have mentioned before the many proofs that the Visigoths had an extensive and very Iranized epic tradition, and that this tradition was continued in Spain and became the basis of the



later Castilian epic.

As we have said before, in the field of lyric verse there is evidence that after the fall of the Roman Empire there was a strong Celtic resurgence in Gaul and Spain (in most of Great Britain this resurgence was stifled by the invasions of the savage Angles and Saxons) in the literary as well as in other fields. The evidence of this in Hispano-Arabic literature are unmistakable. For a long time it was thought that Gallego-Portuguese trobador verse was purely derived from Provencal models. However, the discoveries formerly alluded to lead one to the conclusion that said verse also contains elements derived from an indigencous tradition which, like the Provencal verse, has Celtic roots.

The conclusion of all this is that during the Visigothic period there must have existed a rich poetic literature, both epic and lyric. Said poetic literature must have been far more vital and creative, more varied in its themes and versification techniques than was Roman poetry.

In passing, it should be noted that the first Muslim invaders did not consider Visigothic Spain to be a primitive and poverty-stricken place; rather they found it a wealthy and highly civilized area. This is evident to anyone who has read

Legends of the Conquest of Spain by Washington Irving, to name only one easily accessible source.

In summary, at least in the fields of art, architecture and literature the Visigothic period was one of great richness and creativity. As has been noted, virtually all the scholars of the Carolingian court were either Irish or were Spanish Mozarabs, whose scholarship continued the tradition of Visigothic Spain. Iranian influences, both Saka and Sassanian, were very intense during this period. The Visigothic period stands greatly in need of further study and merits a re-evaluation.

Up to this point we have mainly not dealt with Muslim Spain. From this point on, we will deal principally - though far from exclusively - with Spain in the Muslim Period. Many Persian influences reached Spain during the Muslim Period, many of which cannot be neatly classified into broad fields such as "art" or "literature". Not wishing to forget the above-mentioned influences, but at the same time not wishing to have a chapter titled "Miscellaneous", I will mention said influences in passing, and I hope the reader will forgive the digressions. However, art does not exist in a vacuum, and anything that helps

to bring Muslim Spain to life will help the reader gain a greater appreciation for and understanding of Hispano-Muslim art, architecture and literature.

Little is known concerning the beginnings of Hispano-Muslim art. Almost certainly the first Muslim conquerors simply made use of Roman and Visigothic buildings already in existence. If initially the Muslim Conquest was not very destructive, it was even less constructive. There is nothing identifiable as Hispano-Muslim art and architecture before the reign of Emir Abd ar-Rahman I, who established the Umayyad Dynasty in al-Andalus. As is well known, Abd ar-Rahman I was the only survivor of the Umayyad Dynasty after its fall. He is often called "the Eagle of Beni Umayya", and some who in general do not like the Umayyas of Damascus call him "the White Sheep of Beni Umayya". With Abd ar-Rahman I came a number of fugitives from Syria, and these gave Hispano-Muslim civilization a Syro-Byzantine cast which it never completely lost. For obvious historical reasons the Umayyas were at first fiercely hostile to anything Baghdadi or Persian. Thus at first Umayyad Spain was neither open nor receptive to Persian influences. This does not mean that Persian influences were absent. It is too often forgotten that there is a great deal of continuity between Visigothic Spain and

(1520)

Muslim Spain. Between 95% and 99% of the Hispano-Muslims were Mawalis or Muladis. i.e., Spaniards converted to Islam, and therefore of Iberian, Celtic and Gothic rather than Arab or Berber origin. This was true even of much of the governing class. Many Visigothic feudal lords submitted to the Muslims on condition that they would be vassals of the Emir in Cordoba as they had been vassals of the King in Toledo. The most notorious cases of this are that of Theodomir in the area of Murcia, which afterward was known as "the Kora of Tadmira" and of Casimir in the Valley of the Ebro, whose descendants, some of whom converted to Islam and some of whom remained Christians, were the famous "banu Qasi" family. A great many of the leading families of al-Andalus had names which revealed a Visigothic or at least pre-Islamic Spanish origin, such names as the above-mentioned "banu Qasi", "ibn Quzman" (from the Gothic "Guttmann", in Castilian "Guzman"), "ibn al-Gutia" ("Gutia" = "Goth"), "ibn al-Jellikan" ("Jellikan" = "Gallego") and a long et cetera. Iranian influences, both Saka and Sassanian, were so strong in Visigothic Spain that it is evident that Hispano-Muslim civilization must have been impregnated with Persian influences from its very beginning. Also, Byzantine art and architecture was shot through with

Sassanian elements.

The first known work of Hispano-Muslim architecture is the oldest part of the Mosque of Cordoba. This part dates from the time of Emir Abd ar-Rahman I. Though much of this mosque, including the mihrab, the minaret and the fountain of ablutions was destroyed in later amplifications, yet enough remains to form at least a good idea concerning this work.

In the first years of the Muslim Conquest, the number of Muslims in Cordoba, as in all Spain, was relatively small. For some years half of the Visigothic Church of San Vicente served as the Mosque of Cordoba, a tower of the nearby Alcazar or castle serving as minaret. By the time of Abd ar-Rahman I the number of Muslims in Cordoba had greatly increased. Abd ar-Rahman I purchased the other half of the Church of San Vicente from the Mozarabic community. But this church was awkwardly designed and oriented for use as a mosque. So Abd ar-Rahman I decided to build a new mosque on the site. The pedestal of the baptismal font of San Vicente is visible today in the Mosque of Cordoba. No doubt some of the columns and capitals of the Mosque of Abd ar-Rahman I proceed from the same source.

The Mosque of Abd ar-Rahman I follows the basilica plan, with 11 naves. The roof is supported by columns connected by

(1522)

superimposed arches of alternating red brick and white limestone. The columns and capitals are all taken from earlier Roman and Visigothic buildings.

The surviving portals continue the Visigothic tradition of the "horseshoe" arch, while the model of the rather ingenious arcades is evidently the Roman aqueduct of Merida called "los Milagros", with its superimposed arches and alternating courses of red brick and white stone, though the arches of the arcades of the Mosque of Abd ar-Rahman I, with their "horseshoe" shape, follow Visigothic rather than Roman traditions. Said arch may be of Sassanian origin, though the point is debatable. It is not really believable that the Visigoths derived the use of the "horseshoe" arch from the Romans. The Romans used said arch very little. The few known example of Roman "horseshoe" are arches are all very small and are purely decorative, supporting no weight. The Visigoths used the horseshoe arch very extensively, and Visigothic horseshoe arches are often very large. Most probably the Visigoths derived the horseshoe arch from other sources. Said arch was well known in all the Asiatic provinces of the Byzantine Empire, and was also known in Sassanian Persia. At present it is not easy to determine whether it was the Byzantines or the Persians who first used

said arch on a large scale. One is inclined to favor the Persians for two reasons:

1.) said arch was particularly used in Armenia and Cappadocia, provinces near the Persian frontier and very largely Persian in culture (as we said before, Armenia was ruled for some centuries by a dynasty of Arsacid or Parthian origin); &

2.) while there are many examples of Sassanian influence on the Byzantines, the reverse is quite rare. In other words, Sassanian Persia had more creative vitality than Byzantium (which is saying a great deal indeed), and its culture had greater power of diffusion. In summary, the Visigoths derived the horseshoe arch from the Byzantines or from the Sassanians (or from the Sassanians by way of the Byzantines) and later passed it on to the Hispano-Muslims (21).

Another element of undoubted Persian origin which appears in the Mosque of Cordoba of Abd ar-Rahman I is the "stepped battlement". This decorative motif, apparently of Achaemenian origin, was very extensively used in Sassanian Persia, from whence it passed to Armenia and Syria. There is no evidence of its use in Visigothic Spain, though considering how few are the Visigothic buildings which survive and the abundance of Sassanian elements which appear in Visigothic art and

architecture, one cannot deny the possibility that it was used by the Visigoths. However, the most plausible theory is that Abd ar-Rahman I and his followers brought the "stepped battlement" with them from Syria. These two elements, the horseshoe arch and the "stepped battlement" are constants in Hispano-Muslim, Mozarabic and Mudejar art and architecture and continue to be widely used in Spain to this day. Particularly the "stepped battlement" motif continues to be extremely common in Spanish ceramic tilework, which is little changed from Muslim times.

In summary, though the period of Abd ar-Rahman I was frankly hostile to Persian influences, yet said influences were present, in part a heritage from the Visigothic period, in part imported by way of Syria. Thus in its very birth Hispano-Muslim art and architecture was impregnated with Persian influences, and these early influences continued to be present in Hispano-Muslim art and architecture until the end of Muslim rule in Spain, and even then continued to be used by the victorious Christians.

From the end of the reign of Abd ar-Rahman I to that of Abd ar-Rahman II (822-852 AD) virtually nothing survives in the field of art and architecture. As we said before, the reign of



Abd ar-Rahman II is very important for the theme of the present work. The first Umayyads who ruled in al-Andalus were, for obvious reasons, frankly hostile to Persian influences as they were to anything related to the Abbassids of the Shi'ites. In the time of Abd ar-Rahman II this state of affairs changed somewhat. On the political and religious level the Andalusian Umayyads continued to be fiercely hostile to the Abbassids and the Shi'ites (hence their implacable hostility toward the Fatimids) from the time of Abd ar-Rahman II on al-Andalus was open to Persian and Iraqi influences in nearly all fields. Indeed, as we said before, Persian and Iraqi elements came to be fashionable in art, music, clothing, even cuisine. Nevertheless, in the fields of art and architecture the reign of Abd ar-Rahman II has little of interest from our point of view.

Abd ar-Rahman II enlarged the main Mosque of Cordoba begun by his ancestor and namesake, but at least in the parts which survive (once again the mihrab was destroyed by later enlargements) continues the style and manner of construction used by Abd ar-Rahman I. The other buildings which survive from the time of Abd ar-Rahman II also have nothing new to offer from our point of view.

One feature of the architecture of the Umayyad period in al-Andalus and later of the 1st taifa period is the construction of walls using alternate broad and narrow stone blocks. This method of construction was common in late Roman and Byzantine architecture. However, it first appears among the Parthians, particularly in the shrine of Shiz or Takht-i-Sulaiman (22).

Little survives from the period between the death of Abd ar-Rahman II and the accession of Abd ar-Rahman III. Abd ar-Rahman renounced his vassalage to the Abbassid caliphs of Baghdad and proclaimed himself caliph in his own right. In spite of the hostility between the Umayyads of Cordoba and the Abbassids of Baghdad, there exists a certain ironic parallel between these two great dynasties. Cordoba, on the banks of the lazy and sluggish Guadalquivir, pleasant enough in Spring and Autumn but unbearably hot in Summer, resembles far more the Baghdad of the Abbassids than it does the Damascus of the Umayyad ancestors of the Caliphs of Cordoba. From the time in which Abd ar-Rahman III proclaimed himself caliph in his own right to the final fall of the Caliphate one has the impression of a play with a script written in Baghdad, with Abd ar-Rahman III playing the role of Harun al-Rashid, al-Hakam II that of Mamun and the Berbers playing the role of the Turks. As al-

(1527)

Mansur built the new city of Samarra far from Baghdad, so Abd ar-Rahman III desired to build a palace outside of hot, teeming Cordoba. he chose a spot not very far from Cordoba, but in the foothills of the Sierra Morena, away from the crowds and noise of the city, with a climate less hot and humid in Summer.

The proposed palace became a city in its own right, and was named "Medina az-Zahara", the "City of Flowers". Firstly, I wish to give thanks to the fine and noble city of Cordoba for the hospitality with which I was received and for the help and cooperation which I was given in order to help me in the preparation of this work.

The city founded by Abd ar-Rahman III measured about 1,300 metres in length by about 800 metres in width. Baghdad and Samarra were "round cities", following the plan of a wheel, with the great plaza and its principal buildings forming the hub, the principal streets forming the spokes and the walls and the "loop street" or "beltway" forming the rim. This follows a Parthian and Sassanian tradition, and was later followed in the planning and construction of Washington, DC. Very much in contrast to this, the new city of Abd ar-Rahman III apparently follows no particular plan. Hispano-Muslim sources mention no such plan, and the excavations at this writing (admittedly only a small

part of Medina az-Zahara has been excavated) reveal no evidence of any such planning.

Less than a century after its construction Medina az-Zahara was burned and sacked by Berber troops, and not a single building was left standing. Later the ruins were looted, and many columns, capitals and other architectural elements found their way to other cities, particularly Seville and Granada, and even as far as Toledo. The excavation and restoration of Medina az-Zahara continues, though hampered by lack of funds.

Fabulous are the tales of Medina az-Zahara which one finds in Hispano-Muslim sources. For many years these tales were considered to be pure exaggeration. However, the excavations have given pause to the archaeologists and historians. Two examples will suffice. Various sources state that in the Mosque of Medina az-Zahara was a carpet with a rather strange (and clashing) color combination.

In the excavations of the Mosque was found a charred piece of carpet of these very colors. The sources also state that in the great audience hall the walls were studded with precious and semi-precious stones set in silver. This was for a long time considered to be an "Arabian Nights" exaggeration. But I myself have seen the silver settings in the elaborately carved marble

and alabaster wall panels of the great hall. The gems have of course long since been plundered, but it is evident that that indeed the walls were once studded with precious and semi-precious stones. The same source also states that in the middle of the great hall was a fountain of mercury which reflected the brilliant colors of the ceiling. As yet no evidence has been found of this fountain, but no one is now willing to dismiss it as a mere "oriental fable" or "Andalusian exaggeration" (Andalusians, like Texans, are famous for exaggerating). The age of Abd ar-Rahman III was indeed the age of "Andalusian Glory".

The justifiably famous Alhambra has given a great deal of fame to the art and architecture of the Nazirid Kingdom of Granada. But there can be no doubt that the Caliphate was the finest period of Hispano-Muslim art. It is very sad indeed that Medina az-Zahara has not survived as has the Alhambra. Of course, our knowledge of the construction of the buildings of Medina az-Zahara is somewhat limited; the domes and vaults are lost beyond recovery. However, a great deal of architectural elements have survived, and more will no doubt be uncovered, so that any conclusions in this field must be considered tentative.

In contrast to the later periods of Hispano-Muslim art, in

the Caliphal Period all decoration of at least the major buildings is of elaborately carved stone; marble, alabaster or limestone. This is very much in contrast to the brick tracery and scrollwork of the Almohade period and to the "plaster lacework" so typical of the Kingdom of Granada. The capitals in general are of the Corinthian or "hybrid" type, but in the incredible fineness and delicacy of design and execution far excel any Greek, Roman or Visigothic model. For sheer, literally dazzling beauty they must be certainly be considered as being among the finest capitals in history. The bases of the columns were also elaborately carved.

From our point of view these bases are very interesting. Among the decorative elements used in said bases are Sassanian style "rosettes" and the "fleur-de-lis". This last may, of course, be of Celtic as well as Sassanian inspiration. Here one also finds such typically Celtic motifs as interlacing bands and the "rope" or "corded" motif. This is certainly not surprising.

As we have seen. the Muslim invasion did not produce so complete a rupture as some think. The Celtic, Roman, Byzantine and Visigothic heritage of Spain continued to be very much alive and vital at least until the time of the Almoravid invasion, and even later in some fields, such as music and versification

forms. Romance (Lisan al-Ajjam) continued to be more widely spoken than Arabic, even the Caliphs speaking it in private. An anecdote is told in various sources. An Arab from the East came to Medina az-Zahara with an important message for the Caliph. The first person he encountered was a maternal uncle of the Caliph, who spoke only Romance. The visitor finally located the Caliph, who at that moment was conversing with some of his relatives... in Romance. Incidentally, Abd ar-Rahman III, like most of the Umayyads of al-Andalus, had reddish-blond hair and blue eyes.

A brief digression. During the time of the Caliphate, two distinct but parallel processes were at work in al-Andalus, I refer to Islamization and Arabization. Islamization refers to conversion to Islam, while "Arabization" refers to the use of the Arabic language. The two processes did not by any means always coincide. There were a great many devout Muslims who spoke only romance, while at least at certain periods there were Mozarabs in certain cities of al-Andalus who spoke only Arabic. In other words, there were many people who were Islamized but not Arabized, while at certain periods there was at least a small number who were Arabized but not Islamized. Apparently

Arabic was never much spoken in Toledo. There are many references to devout Muslims in Toledo who spoke only Romance, including cadis and alfaquis. One may suppose that these last read Arabic but did not speak it.

In the time of the Caliphate almost everyone in al-Andalus either spoke only Romance, or was bilingual, as were the Caliphs themselves. If al-Andalus had been left to itself, i.e., if the Almoravid and Almohad invasions and the Christian Reconquest had never taken place, what might have been the result? One may speculate that, as in some Near-Eastern countries, Muslims would have become a large majority, but that the Mozarabic minority would never have completely disappeared. What is not at all clear is this: would the principal language of al-Andalus eventually have been Romance with an admixture of Arabic words, or Arabic with an admixture of Romance words? Al-Andalus was certainly going to be mostly, though perhaps never entirely Islamized. What is not at all clear is whether or not al-Andalus would have become linguistically Arabized, or would have followed the Persian model and preserved its pre-Islamic language, though with an admixture of Arabic words. There is no answer to this last question, because, as we shall see, al-Andalus was not to be permitted to go its own way, but, in



effect, was ground to bits between the Berbers of North Africa and the Christians Kingdoms of Northern Spain, rather like the grain in a flour mill. Certainly this was tragic. I hope that nor North African who may read this will be offended, but considering the role of the North African Berbers in the destruction of al-Andalus, it always sounds a bit ironic to me to hear a North African identify with Muslim Spain.

The walls of at least the main buildings of Medina az-Zahara were covered with elaborately carved panels of marble and alabaster, in some cases studded with precious and semi-precious stones set in silver. Perhaps the commonest motif of said panels is one of Persian inspiration: the tree of life. Of course, the very idea of covering the walls with panels of carved marble, alabaster, limestone or stucco is itself of Sassanian origin (23).

Lost is the art of stone carving as practiced in al-Andalus during the Caliphate. One looks at some stone carvings of this period and cannot believe one's eyes. It does not seem humanly possible to cut hard stone, such as marble or alabaster, so fine without breaking it. Today it is impossible, for this type of stone carving is a lost art, a tradition of craftsmanship which no longer exists. Today the marble and alabaster carvings of

the Caliphal period in al-Andalus cannot be duplicated.

As the excavations at Medina az-Zahara continue, there may yet be surprises in store. In Granada was found a large stone basin, apparently from Medina az-Zahara. The relief sculpture on

the two long sides is of thoroughly Iranian inspiration, showing four lions attacking four deer or gazelles. This motif is very common in Scythian and Sarmatian as well as Persian art in all periods; it may be classified as a "pan-Iranian" motif. In the middle of the scene, two pairs of animals on the right, two on

the left, is a representation of the Persian "tree of life".

Animals facing one another on either side of the tree of life is a motif of Persian art in all periods. Carved in relief on the short sides are heraldic eagles sinking their talons into the backs of deer. This motif is not specifically Persian, since it was known in the Near East long before the coming of the Iranians to the plateau which today bears their name.

Nevertheless, it is a common motif in Persian art of all periods. Under the scenes of the eagles and the deer is an archtypical Sassanian motif: two griffins of very Sassanian aspect facing one another with a stylized tree of life between them. Two other very similar basins exist, one in Marrakesh and

one in Madrid, though they are of later date, being of the time of Almanzor (al-Mansur). One suspects that these three basins are copies of a Sassanian original which somehow found its way to Cordoba. There exist fragments of two very similar basins, one in Granada and one in Cordoba (24). In Cordoba is preserved a much smaller basin in which each of the four corners is decorated with very Sassanian-looking leopards, carved in high relief.

We now leave Medina az-Zahara, at once tragic in its ruin and evocative of past grandeur. One wishes luck to the archaeologists who, hampered by lack of funds, patiently continue the excavation and partial restoration of Medina az-Zahara, the enchanted city of the Caliphs.

Of the minaret of the Mosque of Cordoba little remains, and from all evidence it really is not very relevant from our particular point of view. However, there is another building dating from the time of Abd ar-Rahman III which interests us very much. This is the mosque of Cristo de la Luz (Christ of the Light) in Toledo. How it came to have this name is interesting.

According to some of the many legends of Toledo, when Tarik the Berber took Toledo, a Christian priest hid an image of Jesus in a nook and placed a lamp in front of it, then walling up the

(1536)

nook. When Alfonso VI of Castile took Toledo, his horse unaccountably went down on his knees and refused to move. A search revealed the hidden image, and the lamp was still burning, hence the name "Christ of the Light". The Byzantine-style sculpture of Jesus may still be seen in Toledo. When the mosque was converted into a church, it was named after this image, hence the name.

The mosque in its general plan is that of a Byzantine oratory. The building is small, about 7 metres square, not including the 12th Century Mudejar apse. The interior is covered by 9 small domes, the central being much higher than the others. We will return to this point later. The domes are mounted on horseshoe arches supported by stout columns. The domes, being very small, support very little weight and their construction, different in each, is inspired more by aesthetic than structural reasons. In fact, since their shape is square rather than round they should be classified as "vaults" rather than domes. Nevertheless, as we shall see, in some ways they prefigure things to come. Cristo de la Luz is interesting for other reasons.

Here for the first time in Hispano-Muslim art one encounters the lobed arch (*lobulado*), i.e., a large arch composed of various

small ones. There is no doubt concerning the Sassanian origin of the lobed arch (25). Also for the first time in Hispano-Muslim art one finds arches which cross and interlace with one another. This point may be debatable, since said arches are in this case purely decorative and support no weight. Unlike the great structure of the Mosque of Cordoba and Medina az-Zahara, the humble but enchanting little mosque of Cristo de la Luz is built of brick rather than stone. The front is very interesting from our point of view. Above the lobed and horseshoe arches which form the doorway is a band of decorative interlaced arches. Above these arches is a sort of "jealousy" window formed by intercrossing bricks which form diamond-shaped openings. Around this "jealousy" is a frame of rhomboid shapes formed by bricks set in a diagonal manner, with the corners protruding. Above this band is the foundational inscription in Kufic letters formed by cut brick. The technique of setting bricks diagonally to form deep rhomboid shapes and that used to form the foundational inscription are of Persian origin, particularly of the Sassanian and Samanid periods; here they appear for the first time West of the Euphrates(26).

The expertise of the Persians in brickwork is proverbial;

says Edward Luytens:

"One must not speak of Persian brickwork, but rather of Persian brick magic."(27)

We now continue on to the reign of al-Hakam II, son of Abd ar-Rahman III. If Abd ar-Rahman III is comparable to Harun al-Rashid, then al-Hakam II may be compared to Mamun. From our viewpoint al-Hakam II is very notable for one reason: his enlargement of the great Mosque of Cordoba, particularly the new mihrab. It is thanks to this mihrab that the great Mosque of Cordoba is among the most beautiful mosques in the world.

The enlargement of al-Hakam II in general continues the type of construction used by Abd ar-Rahman I and Abd ar-Rahman II: superimposed horseshoe arches composed of alternate bands of limestone and brick supported by stout columns. However, there is a difference. Abd ar-Rahman I and Abd ar-Rahman II tended to use columns and capitals taken from earlier Roman and Visigothic buildings. Not so al-Hakam II. The columns are perfectly matched relative to length and diameter and are alternately of black marble and rose jasper. The capitals are also matched though except for those of the mihrab itself they are not of any great merit. But it is the mihrab which is the glory of the mosque. Basically, it is composed of three domes and a sort of

sounding chamber which may be considered as the mihrab properly speaking.

Perhaps the first thing which strikes the visitor are the mosaics. These cover most of the wall of the mihrab from the level of the curve of the three large horseshoe arches upwards as well as the interior of the great central dome. These mosaics are the work of Byzantine artesans. They are not of stone or ceramic, but rather of small cubes of colored glass in which are embedded flecks of gold and silver. The effect is dazzling, and quite impossible to capture on film, at least if one is using a still camera. The motifs, except for the Kufic inscriptions are, of course, Byzantine. However, one motif repeatedly used in these mosaics most certainly gives a Sassanian touch to them. I refer to the "fleur-de-lis". Since the artesans were Byzantine rather than Spanish, in this case it is very difficult to attribute a Celtic origin to the "fleur-de-lis" motif rather it is one of the many examples of Sassanian influence on Byzantine art.

Between the curve of the central horseshoe arch and the corners of the rectangular frame are panels of elaborately carved and gilded stone. These panels are nearly exact copies of Sassanian stucco work, the dominant motif, the pomegranate,

being Sassanian (28).

Between the beginning of the curve of the central horseshoe arch and the floor are elaborately carved marble panels. As we said before, the use of carved panels to decorate the wall is of Sassanian origin: here also the principal motif, that of the "Tree of Life" is also of Persian inspiration, though the Celtic "rope" or "corded" motif is also present.

After the mosaics, perhaps the next thing the visitor notes is the nearly incredible profusion of arches. Basically, these arches are of three types: horseshoe, lobed and pointed. We have spoken of the first two types. The third type is also of Persian origin, first appearing in the Persian bridges of the 8th Century (29). Decorative niches are a Sassanian feature. Three-lobed arches exactly like those of the mihrab of the Mosque of Cordoba are found in Raqqa, a city built by the first Abbassid Caliph (30). In the Mosque of Cordoba these three-lobed arches also appear in decorative niches.

From the viewpoint of art and architecture, the profuse use of crossing and interlacing arches is very striking, indeed, at times they form veritable labyrinths. Precedents for this are lacking. To some extent this is prefigured in Cristo de la Luz. But the crossed arches of the Toledano mosque are blind arches,



merely decorative and support no weight. This striking originality is proof of the creative vitality of Hispano-Muslim art of the Caliphal period.

Save the three main horseshoe arches of the mihrab, whose curves are covered with Byzantine mosaics, all of the arches are of stone, with red-painted panels alternating with carved stone panels. The motifs of these carved panels are nearly all vegetal. Many bear a very strong resemblance to Sassanian stucco, though Visigothic, Coptic and Celtic precedents should not be forgotten. Indeed, one must not forget that it is this very mixing of so many different traditions and influences which gives Hispano-Muslim civilization its particular fascination and creative vitality.

The visitor is also struck by the beauty and sophisticated elegance of the domes of the Mosque of Cordoba. There are four of these domes, three directly in front of the mihrab, one several metres away. Though the four are far from identical, all are ribbed, i.e., they are partly supported by eight visible "ribs", which, however, do not cross in the centre. Also, in a rather Byzantine manner all have a fairly low, cylindrical drum between the squinches and the cupola, or spherical part of the dome. This drum in all four cases is pierced in order to admit

light. Also in the Byzantine manner, the four have external buttresses to aid in absorbing the weight of the cupola. Considering that Byzantine artesans worked on the mihrab, these Byzantine elements are certainly not surprising. Yet it would be an error to classify these four domes as Byzantine. Except for the dome over what is now called the Capilla de Villaviciosa, various metres in front of the mihrab, said domes have squinches which are most definitely not of Byzantine type. Also, the very idea of a ribbed dome in which the ribs do not cross in the centre, and in which this central space is higher than the rest of the dome is most certainly not Byzantine.

To some extent the domes of the Mosque of Cordoba are prefigured in those of Cristo de la Luz. But the ribs of the domes of the Toledan mosque are more decorative than functional; they bear very little weight, and their placements are really quite capricious. Also, the domes of al-Hakam II are only a few years older than those of Cristo de la Luz. The domes of the Mosque of Cordoba, with their ribs which do not cross in the center, their buttresses and their central part higher than the rest of the dome are really quite impressive feats of engineering, and have therefore sparked a lively debate, since it is not really believeable that they sprang full-blown as it

were from the imagination of the architect with no precedents to serve as guide and inspiration.

The Romans built domes which had a "skeleton" of arches, which was later "fleshed" with masonry or rubble. However, this is not really acceptable as the origin of the Cordoban domes. In the first place, the Romans never mastered the art of mounting a round dome over a square base. Hence, the Roman domes really have little in common with the Cordoban domes from the structural viewpoint. In the second place, the "skeleton" of the Roman domes is invisible, hidden in the "flesh" of the dome, and would therefore be unlikely to inspire later imitation. In the third place, there are no surviving examples of this sort of Roman dome on Spanish soil, and it is at least very doubtful that there were any in the time of al-Hakam II.

The domes which most nearly resemble those of the Mosque of Cordoba are found in Persia, Iraq and, most particularly, Armenia; indeed, it is the portico of the Armenian church at Ahpat which most closely resembles said domes from the structural point of view. However, all these models are later than the time of al-Hakam II. We may note that the precedents of these Eastern ribbed domes are as unknown as are those of the

Cordoban domes, but it is equally certain that they also must be the product of an architectural tradition (31).

Let us note a few facts. Save for a few "stray" specimens in Palestine, all of the "brothers" of the Cordoban domes are found either in Persia or in Iraq and Armenia, countries very strongly influenced by Persian civilization. It should also be noted that it was the Parthians who first successfully mounted a round dome over a square base. The oldest example of this is a Parthian atashgade (fire temple) at Rabat-i-Safid, not far from Meshed. This dome is low and somewhat flattened, and the rudimentary masonry squinches are supported by wooden beams (32).

Effectively, the first use of a ribbed dome is in an atashgade at Neisar which dates from the time of Ardashir I, founder of the Sassanian Dynasty. Here the ribs part from the centre of one side of the square base and pass to the other; in other words, there are two long ribs which cross in the centre of the dome (33). A. Godard noted that this sort of ribbed dome is still widely used in rural parts of Iran (34). Georges Marcais, following the opinion of Godard, affirms that the ribbed dome is of Sassanian origin (35). A close look at the atashgade of Neisar seems to support the idea of a Sassanian

origin for the Cordoban domes. The squinches of Neisar are conical vaults over the corners of the square base, "harsh but confident", in the words of A.U. Pope. The squinches of the three domes of the mihrab of Cordoba are also conical vaults thrown over the corners of the square base (the dome over the Capilla de Villaviciosa has squinches which are more of a Byzantine type), though the harshness is somewhat ameliorated. The squinches of the great central dome are masked by beautiful little lobed arches, while the squinches of the two lateral domes are pleasingly sculptured and partly masked by horseshoe arches.

Effectively, the Cordoban domes are much more elegant and sophisticated than the dome of Neisar. Nevertheless it is perfectly clear and evident how the one could have been derived from the other. Unfortunately, it would seem that the later Sassanian, Armenian and Early Islamic links between Neisar and Cordoba have not survived.

Behind the central arch of the mihrab is a sort of sounding chamber. The roof is formed by a low dome carved in the form of