

## Article

# The Experimentation of the Sacred in al-Ḥakam II's Maqṣūra: An Architecture Based on Emotions

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**Abstract:** The present work will try to delve into some emotional aspects expressed by the community of believers about a section of the Mosque of Córdoba: the maqṣūra of al-Ḥakam II. It is important to observe this maqṣūra from the point of view of the emotions that it generates during its use as an active sacred space. The maqṣūra of al-Ḥakam II is a space for communication between the political and religious powers within the religious community who attended the Prayer on Friday (Ṣalat al-Jumu'a). This article reviews and expands some hypotheses raised by Professor Ruiz Souza in 2001, where he pointed out the importance of the point of view of the community of worshippers to understand the main functions of the maqṣūra. The worshippers attended the ceremonial and could observe part of the maqṣūra from the shadows of the naves of the old mosque. What did they perceive from a space that was hidden from their gaze? What was this luminous place where the Prince of Believers was located, trying to make them feel? To answer these questions, new methodologies from the History of Art have been used, combined with Anthropology of Religion, the Archeology of Emotions, Color Symbolology, Neuroscience and Psychology.

**Keywords:** maqṣūra; sacred space; emotional experience; Córdoba Mosque; Islamic architecture; light; senses; caliphal art; ritual



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## 1. Introduction: Work of Art, Aesthetic Experience, and Sacred Space

The consideration of the work of art as an aesthetic experience constitutes one of the most interesting aspects from which to approach the full understanding of the artistic object (Arbeloa et al. 2023, p. 7). The work of art is conceived from continuity; therefore, it will be necessary to take into account what previous conditions have facilitated its conception (Guio 2015, p. 214) process. It is known that it is difficult to separate Art from aesthetic experience. However, most of the objects, spaces, and artifacts that make up the ancient heritage were decontextualized and transformed into museum pieces. The aesthetic experience intrinsic to the ordinariness or purpose of an object, now artistic and museum-based and fulfilled in its historical context, is consequently lost (Dewey 2005, p. 13; Guio 2015, p. 215).

The object of study in this article, the maqṣūra of al-Ḥakam II inside the Mosque of Córdoba, is part of this transformation into a museum object. Most of the monumental architectures of the past had been considered living and dynamic entities until the 19th century, when they became heritage elements to be preserved and were turned into static spaces. As a result, aesthetic experimentation, or how these buildings were lived and felt in the past, is difficult to define. However, in the case that concerns this study, we may consider ourselves lucky to have most of the structure of the caliphal maqṣūra of al-Ḥakam II preserved. This provides, at least partially, a recreation of the sacred space and the representation of power that might bring the contemporary observer closer to the sensorial experience that the community of believers used to have when contemplating the architectural space, which was conceived to trigger specific emotional expectations (see Arbeloa et al. 2023). In this sense, the religious community, considered here as a

spectator, does not constitute a passive entity in the face of the sensations caused by the aesthetic combination of the artistic elements of the maqṣūra, but rather they interact with it through the senses (Howes 2014, p. 20). According to the architect Juhanni Pallasmaa, the predominance of the sense of sight had almost annulled the use of the other senses in the perception of the work of art in contemporary times, which implies a transformation in the way of thinking and observing the architectures of the past (Pallasmaa 2006, p. 9) that this article will try to dilute.

We begin by considering that, in the past, this type of architecture linked to liturgical representation and ritual actions that implied the participation of the sovereign required the activation of magical thinking in the individual (Arbeloa et al. 2023, pp. 6–7; Alfayé 2016, p. 12). The participation of the body is also fundamental; the body is understood as the means to process emotions and their responses. These emotions and sensitivities are produced thanks to their active role as part of a ritual scenario that is shared with the community, with a group larger than the individual themselves (Pallasmaa 2006, p. 10). Fortunately, the development of sensitivity to the magnificence of architecture, religious in this case, has not been left behind, and contemporary humans still have the ability to be moved by the sensorial exchange with a work of art. These emotions can be intensified with the participation of the rest of your senses, not just sight. “In the experience of art, a peculiar exchange takes place: I lend my emotions and associations to the space and the space lends me its aura, which attracts and emancipates my perceptions and ideas”. (Pallasmaa 2006, pp. 10–11).

From this perspective, one can begin to imagine by contemplating the maqṣūra of al-Ḥakam II, which, in the words of Ruiz Souza, is “one of the most beautiful buildings in the West” (Ruiz 2001, p. 444).

The importance of this work, already discussed in my doctoral thesis (see Cuenca 2021), lies in the possibility of contextualizing Western Islamic art through the maqṣūra of al-Ḥakam II in a much broader environment. The maqṣūra of al-Ḥakam II, once analyzed from the perspective of its formal and emotional language, allows us to connect with a wide range of religious, philosophical, aesthetic, visual, and iconological traditions and sensorial experiences that cross the borders of Islamic orthodoxy and were present in the Mediterranean religious context of Late Antiquity. We are faced with a great compendium of shared sensorial experiences (Parada 2013, p. 122) throughout the Mediterranean basin through the use of certain aesthetic resources that aim to achieve similar ends, as will be observed throughout the following pages.

#### *The Emotional Contact with the Sacred in al-Ḥakam II's Expansion of the Mosque of Córdoba: Previous Considerations*

As noted, the object of analysis in this article is the maqṣūra of al-Ḥakam II. In the Islamic tradition, places known as maqṣūra refer to limited spaces that adopt different functions. Among its best-known functions is the protection of the sovereign during a public event, such as presiding over the community prayer on Friday. A maqṣūra is also the space reserved for women inside a building of Islamic worship, or palatine (Calvo 2014, p. 82). Maqṣūras can have simple elements, such as the placement of lattices, or adopt monumental characteristics that privatize a specific part of an area, as is the case with the maqṣūra of al-Ḥakam II. In this case, the maqṣūra is part of the expansion program of the Mosque of Córdoba, carried out by the second caliph of Al Andalus in the second half of the 10th century (Abad 2009, p. 10).

As it is a religious space linked to the representation of power, it was conceived as a monumental site, almost like an independent building within the naves of the old mosque.

Both the Mosque of Córdoba in general and the maqṣūra of al-Ḥakam II in particular are constructions that were designed, among many other things, to promote the connection between the divine and the earthly. Therefore, its analysis must start with an approach to its formal aspects, but it must also be considered that they are spaces that aim to show what cannot be perceived with strictly figurative forms. For this reason, they used

numerous resources, both physical and aesthetic, capable of making visible the concepts that characterize the transcendence of the sacred. During the celebration of the ceremonial Friday Prayer, the mosque and the maqṣūra become dynamic places that, when inhabited, are felt with all possible sensory mechanisms (Krautheimer 2005, p. 257).

The question we want to answer is how the maqṣūra of al-Ḥakam II was perceived and received by the participants in the communal prayer and what kind of emotions generated in its full ritual action. The main objective of this study will be to approach the maqṣūra of al-Ḥakam II from the perspective of those who contemplate it from the outside, that is, from the perception of the community of worshippers who attend communal prayer. Therefore, the maqṣūra becomes a performative space inside, but also towards the outside dynamic that serves specific ritual purposes and is capable of creating different emotional expectations through the activation and conjunction of the bodily senses in the agents participating in the communal liturgy. To fulfill the main objective and reach a series of final considerations, we start from the hypotheses raised by Ruiz Souza in 2001 in what he called the *luminous façade of al-Ḥakam II* (see Ruiz 2001) about the importance of paying attention to what the new maqṣūra meant as a beacon of extraordinarily intense brightness, containing the presence of the sovereign, and how it was perceived by the community of believers who were located inside a dark and mysterious space: the former naves of the Mosque of Córdoba.

“It must have been amazing to observe from the shadows of the naves built in the times of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān I and Abd al-Raḥmān II that luminous curtain that announced the beginning of the exuberant expansion, denouncing a successive hierarchy of volumes”. (Ruiz 2001, p. 441)

In this context, attention to sensory stimuli is essential. The research methodology of Art History generally concentrates on the visual aspects, on the iconography of the image. Considering that the worshippers were not allowed to see the maqṣūra of al-Ḥakam II, the visual codes that are located inside, as well as the interior architecture of the oratory, were somehow difficult to observe. However, there are texts about the maqṣūra dating from the caliphate, and some authors of the time and later writers made descriptions of this sumptuous space (see Abad 2009; Calvo 2008). It is worth noting the importance of the oral transmission by those lucky ones who were able to observe the interior of the maqṣūra. It is possible that these oral descriptions recreated in the imaginations of the subjects a fantastic image of this sacred space and therefore provoked a predisposition to perceive what the imagination dictates (Alfayé 2016, p. 12). The possibility of going deeper into this aspect is scarce, but interesting. Since the sense of sight cannot capture the entire maqṣūra, auditory stimuli are also important. In the Islamic religious ceremony on Friday, the recitation of the Quran in Arabic by the imām is the fundamental element. This recitation of the sacred text had to reach all the participants in the prayer. As has been recovered by the researcher Mikel de Epalza, the design of the Mosque of Córdoba as a sonorous temple (see de Epalza 1997) that speaks is essential. In addition to this, other sounds, such as the opening of doors, and other sensory elements, such as the use of perfumes (see Silva 2023), boost the changing and dynamic aspect of Grand Theater, which helps the maqṣūra provoke a sum of sensations experienced by the competitor during the ritual.

To carry out a more in-depth investigation that would give prominence to the role of the participants who observed the ritual and their emotional perceptions, it has been necessary to resort to other types of methodologies linked to the neurological and psychological study of what produces religious emotion. To do this, the research of Hobson et al. (2018) has been studied, and it focuses on an approach to the phenomenon of ritual and emotions from neuroscience, psychology, and cognitive processes. From these aspects, they have configured an organizational framework where they explain the relationship between the physical characteristics of the ritual and the processes that occur when giving psychological meaning to the rituals and their different actions. At this point, it was also important to work with the theories on *Archeology and the Senses* of Hamilakis (2014), who proposes an approach to the artistic and historical object considering the emotional complexity that it

causes but originates from the spaces where the objects were conceived. That is, how the space and the conjunction of elements shown in the ritual, given meaning by the participant, activate unique feelings and emotions, only experienceable in a specific time and place (Hamilakis 2014, p. 21).

At this point, it has been of great help to recover Durkheim's studies in *Elementary forms of the religious life* (1964). Specifically, the rereading and revision of the chapters dedicated to the definition of the rites and their relationship with belief; likewise, the present study on the maqsūra of al-Ḥakam II is articulated around an essential issue addressed by the author: commemorative rituals. As Durkheim pointed out and could be applied to the ritual action of the maqsūra of al-Ḥakam II, there are religious traditions that aim, through a repeated ceremony, to perpetuate the memory with the recreation of a moral system, a cosmology, and a history of their own (Durkheim and Ward 1954, p. 375). In this sense, the Andalusī Islamic ritual during the caliphate, reiterated every Friday in the aljama mosque, is what sustains and reinforces the transmission of belief among the community of believers as well as the legitimacy of the Umayyad dynasty. In this way, the loss of meaning is avoided, the essential elements that make up the collective identity are commemorated and revived, and the means for the achievement and experimentation of certain individuals and shared emotional states are.

For this article, previous studies of a more formal nature have also been reviewed. However, they already echoed the presence in the beginnings of Islamic art of stories, ideas, and iconological elements that were part of the cultural, visual, and symbolic heritage of the Roman and late Roman Mediterranean areas. The understanding of the space of worship in the 6th century in the Mediterranean area in philosophical terms, especially Neoplatonic, was also analyzed in the case of *Hagia Sophia* by Nadine Schibille. Her book on *the aesthetic experience in Hagia Sophia* (2014) was a very interesting source of inspiration to apply the same methods of analysis both to the Umayyad mosques and specifically to the maqsūra of al-Ḥakam II. Schibille approaches the iconographic and iconological analysis of *Hagia Sophia* through the materiality of the temple. For our purposes, it is important how the author defines the use of light in physical terms and, in turn, how the entirety of material concepts are transformed into spiritual terms perfectly understood by the believing believer who observes.

In addition to Schibille's contributions that are based on the importance of what the believer experiences when contemplating the temple itself, they have recovered, along the same lines, the studies of the Art historian André Grabar (1947) and Kathleen McVey (1983) about the microcosmic temple. The microcosmic temple structure expanded throughout the Mediterranean basin, both formally and symbolically. Both authors delve into the data offered by the hymnic literature of the 6th century about the meaning of this type of religious construction and the different parts that make up the temple. To feel the transcendent, it will be the architecture itself that generates the different places of experimentation with the sacred. The nuance, regulation, and use of light, combined with other material elements, are imposed on the old use of the figurative image, creating new emotional expectations in the believer. The cult space, according to the aforementioned authors, crowned by the dome that represents the center of the firmament, recovers the idea of the Sacred Abode, the place where the essence of divinity lives. This change in the conception of the worship space spreads throughout the Mediterranean basin in Christian religious buildings, reiterating complex structures very similar to each other to hide the *sancta sanctorum*. For this work, this change in the consideration of the liturgical site is essential, since it also helps to understand the physical, symbolic, and ceremonial structure of the ancient Umayyad mosques. And, especially, of the maqsūra of al-Ḥakam II, as will be observed in Section 2.

Finally, for this article, it has been essential to return to the analysis of Ruiz, Dodds, and Calvo Capilla on the Mosque of Córdoba and the political and religious role of al-Ḥakam II's maqsūra. However, although a lot of work was conducted on its formal language and iconography, it is considered that the emotional aspect that this oratorio produced was not sufficiently deepened. In these investigations, the inspiration in the architecture of the

past (Uscatescu and Ruiz 2014; see González-Gutiérrez 2023) stands out. Al-Ḥakam II used it as a means for his discourse of legitimacy and in an iconography closely linked to the ancient Mediterranean tradition, especially Byzantine and Hispanic (Abad 2009, p. 14–ff.). Especially striking is the presence of the Solomonic iconography pointed out by Calvo (2008) and Ewert (1995), as will be seen in the final pages.

Recovering this research has served to raise the idea that the symbolic messages extracted from the maqṣūra during the Friday prayer affect the creation of specific emotional expectations in the community of worshippers because there is a previous story. This predisposition to feel is possible due to knowing certain stories and ancient and abstract ideas about the transcendent that circulated through the Mediterranean and that allow the sacred space to be shown as an active place where to experience the scope of Paradise and the materialization of the idea of God.

## 2. Imagine the Image: The Microcosmic Temple and Its Influence on the Mediterranean Worship Space

### 2.1. *The Recovery of the Old Tabernacle and the Invisible Presence of the Sacred*

The comparative reflection between the microcosmic temple, associated with the Byzantine context, and the structure of the maqṣūra of al-Ḥakam II is important due to the fact that the architectural conception of the maqṣūra seems to have similar ritual spaces codified by the dome, as will be observed next.

The concept of microcosmic temple was used by the iconographer André Grabar in *Le témoignage d'une hymne syriaque sur l'architecture de la Cathédrale d'Édesse au 6e siècle et sur la symbolique de l'édifice chrétien* (Grabar 1947) with the aim of defining the meaning of the new Christian architecture linked to the *Renovatio Imperii* promulgated by Justinian and Theodora in the 6th century, whose best example will be Hagia Sophia in Constantinople. The microcosmic temple is characterized by being in the center of the city and representing the space where communication with the sacred can be experienced (Brown 1971, p. 216) as opposed to the old meeting space of the religious community. Physically, it manifests itself as a venue with solid spiritual foundations, among which the balance and harmony between the different parts of the temple stand out, creating a pure, clean, symmetrical, and tension-free structure that imitates the characteristics of God (Grabar 1967, pp. 59–60), whose place is in the very center of the dome.

The microcosmic temple, as has been indicated, recovers—as some fragments of Syriac hymnic literature point out—(McVey 1983) the metaphor of the Jewish Tabernacle as a container of the Sacred Abode (Roitman 2016, p. 40; Ousterhout 2010, p. 236). This Sacred Abode houses within it the pact of obedience between God and his followers. More colloquially, it is known as the Ark of the Covenant, a metaphor for the space occupied by the constant presence of the divinity that accompanies its people, materialized in the Tables of the Law and in the pact sealed with God. Both the essence of God and the witnesses of the covenant were housed inside the Tabernacle, later the temple, in a protected place. This story appears in Exodus 26 and the Book of Kings 1:1–39. In the Exodus, it is told that while the people of God wandered through the desert, carrying the Tabernacle, the place occupied by the holy of holies was always illuminated by a column of fire that rose towards heaven, symbolizing the constant presence of the essence of God that accompanies his people (Roitman 2016, p. 47). The texts state that the architects and protectors of the holy of holies, the guides of the community of believers, will be Moses, David, and Solomon. Moses and David had the mission of ascending to collect the message that God had for his people, as well as ensuring compliance with the covenant of obedience and loyalty. In their role as high priests, they also had to remind us of this pact through the corresponding rituals. The case of Solomon is, for the purpose of this study on the maqṣūra of al-Ḥakam II, more important since Solomon will be in charge of installing the definitive Sacred Abode with the construction of the great Temple of Jerusalem. Solomon will be the architect king of the House of God, a richly sumptuous space as narrated in the Book of Kings 1, as well as the paradigm of the righteous ruler (Ousterhout 2010, p. 224).



The reinforcement through literature that, through words, it designs a visual representation -*ekphrasis*-, is of great support for the assimilation of these theological ideas of the temple. Also, to stimulate the experience of the believer in these spaces as places of experimentation and generation of emotions with the activation of the imagination (Schibille 2014, pp. 29–30).

Therefore, this creation of ekphrastic literature that recreates the beauty of these temples and their symbolism helped the written and oral transmission, generating a mythical story where different traditions from various belief systems come together.

As indicated, the recovery of some sacred stories and mythical characters from the Old Testament around the 6th century is important for the exercise of power by the Byzantine emperors and empresses, who remain linked to the sacred through their presence in liturgical celebrations under the dome. In some texts of the time, linked to power, the emperor is associated with the Solomonic figure, a sovereign who promotes the correct social order thanks to contact with divinity. The dome, under which the imperial couple is placed (Cuenca 2022),<sup>1</sup> will represent the space of light that rises towards the sky and that visually marks where the temple sanctuary is located. The place of the *sancta sanctorum* will be protected in the apse, hidden behind the gates or the iconostasis. It is evident that this Templar structure will develop and expand progressively throughout the Mediterranean basin between the 6th and 8th centuries (Krautheimer 2005, p. 330-ff.). Therefore, it is a temporary space of two centuries where Islam will also have its development in the same cultural context.

Regarding the importance of the invisible presence of the sacred, it is essential to highlight that the genius of the microcosmic temple is to make figurative and physical elements disappear and to provide numinous materiality to the concept of light, nuanced or increased by other aesthetic resources that complete architecture (Cortés 1999, p. 46). However, as indicated previously, the predisposition to feel, in the case of the participating observer, is essential for the mission of the microcosmic temple to work. The biblical legends about the Tabernacle and the afore mentioned characters were known among the religious communities of the Mediterranean through oral tradition, religious writings, sacred poems that were recited in the temples, etc. They were part of popular culture. Even in pre-Islamic Arabic poetry, fragments are collected where the exploits of Suleyman, King Solomon, are narrated (Puerta 1997, p. 63).

The first Umayyad buildings in the East, such as al-Aqsa, Damascus, or the commemorative Dome of the Rock itself, resorted to using the dome to mark the most prominent places in the building. In the first two, al-Aqsa and Damascus, they adopted in the space preceding the mihrāb an articulation similar to that developed in the microcosmic temples of the Mediterranean. Therefore, the language of the microcosmic temple seems to be Islamic (Hodgson 1974, p. 46).<sup>2</sup> The caliph, to preside over the communal prayer, stood under the dome that marks the exact place where the niche is and where the prayer is directed. This space was closed to worshippers. In the next pages, we will see how the maqsūra of al-Ḥakam II reiterates, once again, this structure, which had previously been codified in the emiral phases of the Mosque of Córdoba (Fernández 2015; González-Gutiérrez 2023). The architecture of the maqsūra is accompanied by a whole display of visual codes linked to the unification of these religious and literary traditions, assimilated and understood from an Islamic perspective.

## 2.2. Neoplatonic Architecture: The Experience of Ascent to Paradise

In order to justify the transfer of forms and concepts more solidly between different religions that are part of the same Mediterranean cultural context, it is helpful to highlight that the ultimate goal of both Christianity and Islam is the possibility of the salvation of the soul (Wansbrough and Rippin 2004), which will remain in Paradise for the rest of eternity. The possibility of saving the soul that is constantly repeated in Islamic and Christian sacred texts implies that there is a reflection of the actions in earthly life in the heavenly plane your soul must access. But this will happen as long as they comply with a series of specific

regulations in their passage through the world, the most important ones being obedience to the sovereign and compliance with religious obligations (Calvo 2008, p. 92). This aspect is repeated in the ritual, in the Islamic case, every Friday. It will be seen below how the structure of the microcosmic temple reinforces this concept of obligation. During the liturgy, different lighting and aesthetic resources are activated. Therefore, the temple offers the believer a vision of what awaits him in Paradise as long as he submits to the divine and sovereign will.

As can be seen, there is a trilogy that cooperates: the believers, who must strive to fulfill the divine mandate and who are situated in the darkness of the side naves of the temple; the caliph, who promotes earthly order and can communicate with the sacred. From the center of the building, the position of the divine in a celestial plane that, to be reached and known, requires a mystical ascent was already present in the philosophical schools that followed Plato. However, in this transition period between Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, Neoplatonic philosophy had a great development, especially in the Alexandrian environment.

Neoplatonic philosophy has been present in the intellectual and religious context of Late Antiquity since the 4th century (see Brown 1971; see Teja 1988). Thanks to Plotinus's initial work during the Hellenistic context of the 3rd century BC and his followers Iamblichus (4th century BC) and Proclus (5th century BC), among others (Brown 1971, p. 65–ff.), this Platonic philosophical line exerted a very particular influence on the symbolic codification of the new oriental temples, whose ultimate goal would be to facilitate the reach of the physical and palpable manifestation of the greatness of the sacred from its invisibility. Since the 4th century, important exegetical work has been carried out on the Old Testament texts to help shape the new imperial order, whose public appearance took place during the ritual. The relationship between divinity and the power of the sovereign is significantly reinforced, as is the active and submissive role of the community of believers. Naturally, this relationship is forged by the need for control that imperial power seeks to exercise over religious issues, and that is justified in a discourse of legitimacy based on previous stories of mythical sovereigns who guarantee the fulfillment of God's plan. Therefore, the concept of the sacred and the history of Salvation will be described in Neoplatonic terms, where the ruler ensures each time the ritual is repeated inside the temple that order is maintained and that only he can observe the manifestation of God in all his splendor. The sovereign "ascends", hidden from the eyes of the religious community that attends the ceremony and can only imagine what is happening in that sacred center bathed in light. In this sense, the community of worshippers, relegated to the sides of the main nave, represents the impure human being (Teja 1988, p. 17), who must constantly strive to achieve knowledge, illumination, and the sacred.

In short, Neoplatonic terms are incorporated into the architecture of the temple and the achievement of a religious ceremony related to the insistence on obedience to God and the sovereign, whose contact guarantees the correct functioning of life. To make the understanding of the sacred more difficult and abstract, terms such as invisibility, mystery, and concealment are used (Roitman 2016, p. 17). These concepts are present in the literary language of hymns and sacred texts, as is the case with the Quran. In the case of temple architecture, it means that the corporeal is transformed into a graspable concept through the performative action that the temple exercises through materials that can generate certain transcendental effects (Cox 2009, p. 16–ff.). In sum, the representation of the divinity with human attributes loses importance and is replaced by other iconographic elements such as the light reflection, its symbolic attributes, or the meaning of colors, common characteristics of the microcosmic temple that also appear in the maqṣūra of Caliph al-Ḥakam II (Calvo 2008).

### 3. “The Jeweled Baldachin”: Aesthetic Resources of the Microcosmic Temple in the Maqsūra of al-Ḥakam II

Schibille (2014) delved into the question of how the microcosmic temple acts on the emotions of the participants in the case of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople. As indicated in the introduction, this research has been fundamental to establishing a link between the microcosmic temple in the Christian context and in the Islamic context of the Umayyad period. Specifically, how it crystallizes in a completely Islamized language in the Umayyad caliphal architecture of the Western Mediterranean in the Iberian Peninsula:

#### 3.1. The Architectural Design: A Revival of the Basilical Language of Late Antiquity<sup>3</sup>

“La obra de arquitectura trasciende al arquitecto, va más allá del instante en que la construcción se produce y puede, por tanto, ser contemplada a lo largo de las luces cambiantes de la historia sin que su identidad se pierda con el correr del tiempo”. (Moneo 2018, p. 105)

Firstly, the architectural design of the sacred space constitutes an aesthetic resource in itself. In the case of the microcosmic temple, it is important to attend to the complexity of the space that precedes the sanctuary and of the sanctuary itself.

In the case of the maqsūra of al-Ḥakam II, this constitutes almost a new building inside the Mosque of Córdoba and is closed to the gaze of the worshippers located in the side naves. The maqsūra is presented as a kind of independent and limited oratory, which acts in a similar way to the Byzantine iconostasis and the visigoth chancels (Momplet 2012, p. 249). The maqsūra plan floor is reminiscent of an ancient basilica hall with three naves that flow into the qibla wall (Dodds 1992, p. 51). This oriented wall is divided into three rooms: in the center is the miḥrāb, to the left is the treasury, and to the right is the sābāt gate, as well as the hole to extract the minbar. The entire structure is a private space that only the caliph had access to, accompanied by the court and the imām, in charge of reciting the Quranic text. The caliph, as Prince of the Believers, entered the maqsūra through the door of the sābāt and stood under the dome, in front of the miḥrāb (Calvo 2008, p. 83). Therefore, they were the only participants who had a complete view of what was happening inside the maqsūra, in front of the sacred niche of the miḥrāb.

From the point of view of the external participant, the community of worshippers who attend the *Ṣalat al-Jumu‘a*, this space has an important mysterious component (Moneo 2018, p. 110). The receiver, individually and collectively, will tend to imagine certain actions that are taking place inside the maqsūra, capturing and feeling them through the activation of the five senses. Its reception, naturally, is conditioned, since it will imagine what it is predisposed to imagine after a cultural construction codified centuries ago. Furthermore, these are sensorial perceptions shared by the group (Parada 2013, p. 116–ff.). Here is the theatrical magic of the microcosmic temple, which, when the liturgy began, made the light expand from the center to the rest of the place of worship. As Ruiz (2001) indicated, the maqsūra of al-Ḥakam II is a point of light and brilliance in the gloom of the old mosque (see Figure 1). So, the essence of God, understood as light in the three monotheistic religions, can be felt.

“Allāh is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The example of His light is like a niche within which is a lamp [...]” *Surat an-Nur* (The Light). The Noble Qur’an 24:35. (The Noble Qur’an n.d.)

This distribution of ritual space for the creation of these effects was widely developed in the Hagia Sophia from the 6th century on. With an elongated basilica architecture with three naves, the construction of Hagia Sophia visually represents a tendency towards centralization thanks to the design of the great dome (Cortés 1999), in the same way that happens in the dome under which the caliph is placed in the maqsūra in Cordoba. This dome, with its symbolic implications about eternity and representation of the universe (see Lehman 1945), brings together the rest of the architectural elements, that emerge from it in harmony. In the apse, protected by an iconostasis, a hierarchical space is created from the



dome, behind which the sanctuary containing the divine essence will be laid out. In the same way as in the *maqṣūra*, the imperial couple stood under the dome during the ritual, contemplating the iconostasis and the entry and exit of the Eucharistic species through a theatrical ceremony through its three doors, accompanied by the recitation of the hymns (Krautheimer 2005, p. 347). The central nave of the basilica was closed from the view of the worshippers who gathered there by using gates or curtains, which allowed the light to pass through, in a filtered way, the impure spaces where human beings are located—the Platonic cavern. Thus, a partial perception of what was happening in the center of the temple is created, and the only option left is to give full rein to the imagination and sensorial observation of the symbolic ascent.



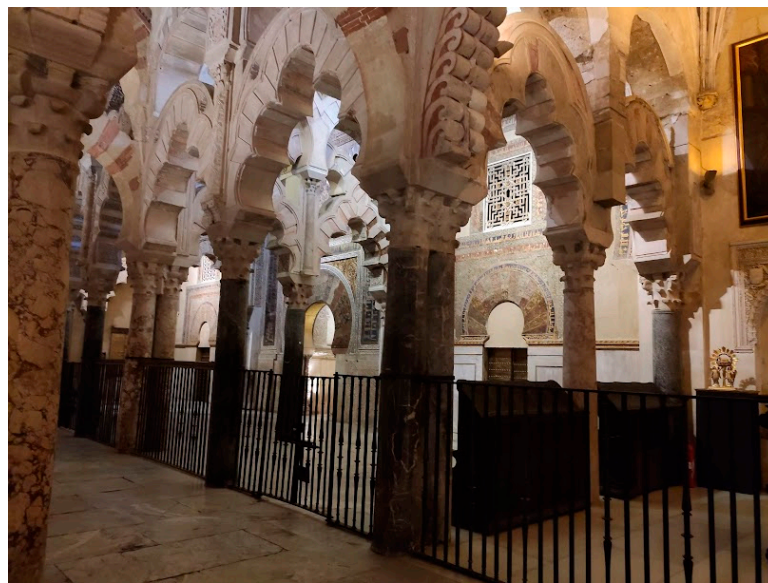
**Figure 1.** Main access. Maqṣūra of al-Ḥakam II (picture by author).

The darkness of the side naves is key to the sensorial and microcosmic perception of the organization of the world, closely linked to Neoplatonic philosophy. It symbolizes the worldly situation of a human being. In Platonic terms, the cave, the new distribution of the worship space, understood as the Sacred Abode, transforms it into a space for experimentation and attempts to understand the mystery of Salvation. The ultimate goal would be the contemplation of light and wisdom. In the spiritual terms of the religious contexts discussed here, enlightenment is understood as the contemplation of the Glory of God (Schibille 2014, p. 137) and the possibility of reaching eternal Paradise. It was indicated that literature reinforces these ideas.

This ascent had been possible in the story of Moses on his ascent to Sinai, but it was also experienced by the Prophet Muhammad, as narrated in surat 17 *al-Isra*, the Night Journey, of the Quranic text. Interestingly, in Quranic verses 9–10 of surat 17, the worshippers are urged to believe in Paradise because otherwise painful punishments will be inflicted.

Finally, we must return to Ruiz's research on the luminous façade of the *maqṣūra* of al-Ḥakam II, where he highlighted a very interesting and repeated presence of the structure of the tripartite Roman triumphal arch (Ruiz 2001, pp. 440–41). This language of triumph

and faith, through the afore-mentioned visual code, is used in the access to the maqṣūra, in the opening of the naves towards the qibla wall, and also in the internal articulation of the wall itself, divided into the three aforementioned spaces: the miḥrāb flanked by the treasure and sābāt rooms. In the case of Hagia Sophia and the Byzantine buildings derived from it, and also of the Christian Latin West, as in the case of the Visigoths and Mozarabics in the Iberian Peninsula,<sup>4</sup> the game of triple openings in the wall of the apse that houses, in its center, the *sancta sanctorum*, the placement of the iconostasis with its doors or the transepts that further compartmentalize the entrance to the sanctuary (see Figure 2). This compartmentalization in smaller spaces, added to the use of gates, curtains, or iconostasis, favored the concealment of the ritual species and the sovereign, whose actions must also be imagined by the community of believers, oblivious to what is actually happening. However, the culmination of the ritual in both cases occurred with the metaphor of the triumph of faith, that is, the achievement of Heavenly Paradise.



(A)



(B)

**Figure 2.** (A) Qibla wall. Al-Ḥakam II's maqṣūra. (B) Apse of San Miguel de Escalada Church. León, 9th century (both pictures by author).

This process of intentional concealment during the Islamic ceremonial act (Fierro 2009, p. 139) helped create certain emotional expectations in the participants that allowed experimentation and sensorial capture of the transcendent. It is a process, again, of emotional suggestion, brought about by the mystery in which the space is enveloped. All of this is complemented by sensory play thanks to the use of elements of visual concealment combined with the use of candles, whose smell is also important, as is the melody of the imām reciting the sacred text, whose sound penetrated the arches of the mosque, and perhaps the possible use of perfumes and incense. The totality of the resources that activate the senses at the same time helps to generate an active liturgical space and individual and, also, shared sensations, all of them of a neurocognitive nature (see Hobson et al. 2018).

### 3.2. The Paradisiacal Walls

The architectural symbology developed in the microcosmic temple was completed with other aesthetic resources that enhanced the spiritual messages uttered and echoed by hymnic literary sources (see McVey 1983; see Palmer and Rodley 1988). Among the most notable elements, we find the use of light, the shine achieved thanks to the glazed mosaic technique, which enhances reflection, and the representations of attributes that make up the architectural lines of the place of worship. The maqṣūra of al-Ḥakam II continues to fascinate any viewer due to the sumptuousness of its mosaics. For this reason, Abad (2009, p. 26) called it the jeweled baldachin.

The aesthetic canon and the form of iconographic representation used in this andalusí space are very similar to those that would appear in Hagia Sophia and other buildings sponsored by Justinian and Theodora—such as San Vitale in Ravenna or Sant’Apollinare Nuovo—and also in the aforementioned mosques of Damascus and the Dome of the Rock, where a good part of the parietal mosaics have been preserved. These mosaics are made with the glazed mosaic technique, known in the Roman Mediterranean context (Christys 2018, p. 387), whereby the light reflects and expands in a much more powerful way, penetrating through the gaps that the architecture is responsible for sifting. Thus, it is transformed into a mysterious space between lights and shadows, floating and ethereal. From the viewer’s point of view, the power of the light emanating from the entire maqṣūra had to be something that would, in fact, be linked to the manifestation of the concept of the sacred at a precise moment, at the culmination of the liturgy. Therefore, a manifestation is perceptible by sight and felt bodily in its entirety, as well as shared.

Another of the fundamental resources, which entails an enhancement of light, is the cutout of the figures on golden backgrounds, which indicate their position in a transcendental and timeless area (Grabar 1967, p. 19).

In the case of the maqṣūra of al-Ḥakam II, this is one of the main characteristics, as well as in Damascus and the Dome of the Rock. This parietal resource was frequent in previous buildings such as the mausoleum of Santa Costanza in Rome, the mausoleum of Julius in Rome, the monastery of Mor Gabriel in Mardin, Sant’Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna, or San Victor in Ciel d’Or, to name but a few of the many examples that survive between the 4th and 6th centuries. In the case of Hagia Sophia, the original mosaics of the dome are not preserved, but the literature of the time<sup>5</sup> offers well-known descriptions of the entire golden dome, made with glazed mosaics, and in the center of which was the symbol of the jeweled cross. As can be seen, the integration of common aesthetic resources between buildings of Christian worship and Islamic worship could make the spaces understood in a similar, even identical, way. The golden background that appears on both the façade of the miḥrāb and the dome of the maqṣūra of al-Ḥakam II leads one to think of the allusion to the celestial plane where the Throne of God is located (see Figure 3), from which the rays of light emanate (Calvo 2008, p. 65) in addition to granting dignity to the place (Janes 1998, pp. 94–95). The message that the spectator receives is the possibility of achieving the salvation of the soul in Paradise, in the same way that occurs in the Christianized context, precisely because the ritual allows them to contemplate what awaits them in the other life. As has been indicated, the importance of the use of glass and gilding lies in their mission



as enhancers of lighting effects, perfectly thought out and focused to create illusions in a supernatural setting (López 2011, p. 365), where the sacred has the capacity to manifest itself with its imposing halo of mystery.



**Figure 3.** Main dome of the maqṣūra of al-Ḥakam II (picture by author, with permission of Cabildo de Córdoba).

On the other hand, the enhancement of light is not only achieved with the manipulation of its own reflections and the architectural games of light and shadows. The viewer is also suggested by the representation of elements that are considered, due to their characteristics, as sources of brightness. In the decoration of the microcosmic temple, it is very common to find jeweled elements—jewelry style— gems; pearls; and precious stones—sumptuous pieces that accompany and define the characteristics of sacred and royal power (Janes 1998, p. 36).

The placement of sumptuous elements in certain points of the worship space, such as wreaths or pearls that clump the leaves of plant elements, helps the observer channel the experience of sacred life through sight, but it can also be felt through the other senses of the observer, including touch. The pearls and gems depicted are perfect; they are soft and offer freshness, a characteristic related to the metaphor of the flowering meadow (Schibille 2014, p. 97).

Finally, it becomes necessary to comment that the jeweled pieces have also acquired an eschatological meaning and represent the eternity of Paradise, as an ultimate goal that alludes to the reach of the Glory of God, of wisdom. A similar meaning is recorded in the Islamic context, where the jeweled trees, the sumptuous vases, and the tents of the blessed decorated with precious stones and pearls compose a vividly luminous and rich image of the Paradise described in the Quran (Silva 2011, p. 40).

### 3.3. The Colors of Neoplatonism

Studies on the materiality of color through physicochemical analysis are a very important methodology today to delve deeper into the Cultural History of Color and are extremely interesting (Vázquez de Ágredos et al. 2019; Expósito 2024). In this case, it is briefly commented that thanks to the comparison between the different examples treated, it can be stated that the maqṣūra of al-Ḥakam II, from its chromaticism and its materiality, responds to the same cultural context developed during Late Antiquity.

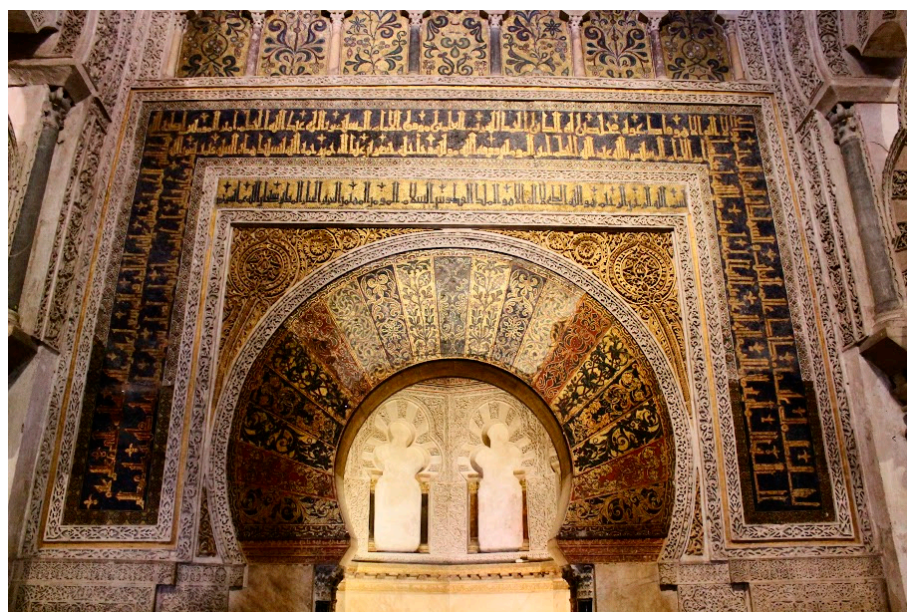
In addition to gold, the color palette used in most of the buildings that respond to the characteristics of the microcosmic temple is linked to Neoplatonic philosophy and was the

symphony of colors typical of Late Antiquity (Schibille 2014, pp. 118–19). These colors, important in terms of their rich materiality and chemical composition (Expósito 2024), contain a meaning related to wisdom, the paradisiacal context, and the characteristics that define divinity. Both in the maqṣūra of al-Ḥakam II and in the preceding Umayyad buildings, and towards the past, in Hagia Sophia, Saint Vital of Ravenna, and Saint Catherine of Sinai, are the blues and greens that, according to Pseudo Dionysius Areopagite, link the scene to the earthly realm or intermediate between God and his people (Schibille 2014, p. 156).

Red or purple is also very present. It is a color associated with royal power (Schibille 2014, p. 144) and related to the sacred, present in the Old Testament texts that allude to the wealth of the Tabernacle (Roitman 2016, p. 42). In the Islamic case, red was associated with the red tents or pavilions where the Prophet and the caliphs were located (Calvo 2008, p. 94) and was also frequently used to dye the background of the most sumptuous Qurans (Puerta 2009, p. 51).

Finally, white and silver, which make it easier for light to slide, reflect, and be projected with greater intensity through the spaces of the temple, are common colors related to the strength of the void.

As indicated, Concepción Abad (2009, p. 26) was very correct when she defined the space of al-Ḥakam II's maqṣūra as a "jeweled baldachin", intended for the caliph to preside over the Friday prayer, located under the rich dome filled with colored mosaics. Indeed, the iconography that is displayed on the façade of access to the miḥrāb (see Figure 4), as well as on the dome that precedes it, alludes to these paradisiacal and eschatological concepts, which guide the viewer to the monumental access door to the miḥrāb. In it we find, as is also preserved in the Mosque of Damascus and in the Dome of the Rock—and possibly this was the case in the Mosque of 'Uqba in Kairouan (see Albarrán 2023)—a golden space filled with jeweled plant elements that ascend towards the dome, where it places, remember, the Throne of God from which light emanates (Calvo 2008, p. 95). In the words of Susana Calvo (2008, p. 95), this "mineralization of nature", idealized, helps the viewer encode in their imagination the image of the heavenly Paradise where their soul will rest eternally if they comply with obedience to God and the sovereign. As is known, this type of chromatic visual code was present in the cult spaces of the Mediterranean basin during Late Antiquity, starting with the innovations of Hagia Sophia, so that the conceptual relationship that emerges from the visualization of these elements was in need of a progressive process of understanding (Cox 2009, p. 31).



**Figure 4.** Miḥrāb façade in al-Ḥakam II's maqṣūra (picture by author, with permission of Cabildo de Córdoba).



#### 4. The Sensorial Exchange: A Ritual Space to Experiment

The codification of a ritual is a mechanism to offer security and ratify the order of the world (Hobson et al. 2018, p. 260). To do this, it is necessary to historically analyze how religions and the ways of understanding them have evolved over time (Durkheim and Ward 1954, p. 3-ff.). Specifically, for this case, the aspects of progressive formation and consolidation of ritual actions characterized by their invariability are of interest (Hobson et al. 2018, p. 261). Given that the liturgical act requires specific and invariable times once codified, there is another fear of performing the ritual incorrectly, which translates into a fear of chaos or the incorrect functioning of the organization of the world (Alfayé 2016, p. 12). In cases that have been mentioned previously, it has been insisted that the microcosmic temple has the characteristic of its architectural and harmonious perfection, which is made possible thanks to the political work of the imperial couple, who, in the process of pacifying the territories of the empire, has managed to achieve a certain institutional perfection (Cuenca 2022, p. 75). Obedience to the leader, whose power emanates directly from God, is necessary to maintain good order. Thus, the world is perfect when the citizen, also a believer, fulfills their duty of obedience, guaranteeing the stability of the kingdom, and must demonstrate this by actively participating in the temple each specific day for the celebration of the communal liturgy. In the case of Andalusia Islam, this happens on Friday, when the main prayer is celebrated. The sacred space acts to show, both visually and physically, during the liturgical act, which is always repeated at the same time, that the fulfillment of your obligations as a believer will lead to eternal life.

This section delves into an approach to the conjunction of emotions that the caliphal maqṣūra could have provoked in ritual action during the *Ṣalat al-Jumu'a*, following the theories of the Archeology of Emotions (Hamilakis 2014; Hamilakis and Corpas 2015). For this case, as has been shown with the aesthetic resources, it is important to return to the idea of an aesthetic community developed by Parada (2013), of prior predisposition or conceptual association. This preparation of the individual to feel, also collectively, is possible thanks to the maintenance of a shared, transversal cultural and religious context, as a liquid border, between the monotheistic religions in late ancient and early medieval times in the Mediterranean.

The maqṣūra of al-Ḥakam II, as a fundamental part of the sacred space of the Mosque of Córdoba, is designed to produce a sensorial exchange between the religious space and the believer. It is designed, as mentioned at the beginning, to produce emotions: fear, effort, persistence in faith, obedience, or perception of the invisible. Today, despite its relative nudity, it continues to provoke diverse sensations in visitors. These emotions, after all, are the perception of this space more as a work of art than as a place of religious experimentation (Arbeloa et al. 2023, p. 4). The maqṣūra, as a monumental space, also responds to certain political needs that consolidate the union, power, and pacification of the territories of the independent Caliphate proclaimed by 'Abd al-Raḥmān III, supported by his son al-Ḥakam II (Calvo 2008, p. 90).

The meaning given to each ritual action is important and has a specific symbolic charge. In the case of the maqṣūra, we proceed to observe what was happening inside, how the liturgical act developed during the community prayer, and how it could have been assimilated by the viewer. As will be explained in the following pages, the ritual that was repeated every Friday in the maqṣūra of al-Ḥakam II has very interesting connections with liturgical acts present in the cultural context of both the Iberian Peninsula and the Byzantine area. One of the hypotheses that will be raised is whether the ritual actions that took place with the caliph as the protagonist were only directed at the Muslim community. Or, perhaps, they are also sought to be understood by other Andalusí religious communities, such as Christians and even Jews, as Parada reveals in his idea of an aesthetic community (Parada 2013, p. 109; also in Uscatescu and Ruiz 2014).

It is known that in Islamic orthodoxy, the culmination of the liturgy is not produced by the manifestation of God in his corporeal aspect. However, in our opinion, for various reasons that will be explained below, the possibility of resignification is hypothesized

from certain previous ritual actions and sacred concepts, present in the Mediterranean and peninsular religious contexts, to a properly Islamized language. They would share liturgical uses in some of their parts, not in their entirety (see [Cuenca 2021](#)).<sup>6</sup> An answer to this hypothesis is found in the importance of the need to legitimize the Umayyad dynasty not only as the spiritual guide of the Muslim community of believers, in contrast to the disputes with the powers of Baghdad and the Fatimids of Cairo, but also as the sovereign of the Western Mediterranean ([Calvo 2008](#)). Therefore, he would be the spiritual guide of the entire Andalusī society, which included a considerable presence of Andalusī Christians and Jews. To connect emotionally with the three communities, it could be that al-Ḥakam II, continuing the work of peace and cultural flourishing started by his father ‘Abd al-Raḥmān III, resorted to visual, emotional, and liturgical mechanisms, including identity and memory, linked to ancient Byzantine practices—regarding the representation of power in the sacred space—replicated in the Spanish Visigoth and Mozarabic worlds—in order to create a strong feeling of belonging and a religious and social cohesion that recognizes the legitimacy of the ancient dynasty Umayyad in Al Andalus.

To create a feeling of identity, belonging, and an exercise of memory, it is required to possess prior knowledge of certain traditions that need to be appealed to, which must be activated in a functional way. This activation occurs through the sensorial perception that the sacred space offers in both its forms and uses. Next, some elements will be analyzed that, in our opinion, would allow the believer to connect emotionally, through certain metaphors ([Pinker 2007](#), p. 321), with his memory and that of his tradition and create a solid identity through the shared religious art of the maqsūra of al-Ḥakam II in its ritual use.

#### *4.1. Constituent Elements of the Umayyad Caliphal Ceremony: Memory and Feeling*

The development of a specific ceremony related to the pacifying work of the Umayyad dynasty is linked to the proclamation of the independent caliphate of Córdoba by ‘Abd al-Raḥmān III in 929. Most of the data known about their ritual actions, later consolidated by his son al-Ḥakam II, were compiled by Ibn al-Hayyan al-Qurtubi at the beginning of the 11th century ([Fierro 2009](#), p. 137). The cohesion and unity offered by the new caliphal state were materialized in the construction of monumental enterprises such as the city palace of Madinat al-Zahra or the expansion of Caliph al-Ḥakam II in the Mosque of Córdoba, among others. The decision to leave a permanent mark of their respective reigns in spaces that are connected with the past of their dynasty is a resource of legitimacy and memory that was practiced by all the sovereigns of the Mediterranean ([Ruiz 2009](#)). In the case of the Hispanic Umayyads, the guarantee of stabilization Politics is linked, visually, to the very past of the territory they govern and also to certain ceremonies. Ceremonies were reflected not only in the space of worship but also in public hearings, the administration of justice, and palace activities ([Fierro 2009](#), p. 138). However, the actions of the supreme leader, the caliph, were manifested through what his messengers and his servants transmitted about his decisions, but the caliph rarely allowed himself to be seen by his subjects. This fact is part of this sophisticated ceremony, which Fierro called “the mechanisms of concealment and separation”, ([Fierro 2009](#), p. 139), which provided that halo of mystery and superiority to the caliph, especially in the Baghdad context. The chronicler Ibn Idari also reported that this practice was common among the rulers of Al Andalus, as in the case of the emir ‘Abd al-Raḥmān II, who hid during public audiences and ceremonies ([Calvo 2009](#), p. 107).

In the present case, the invisible presence of the caliph is interesting as an essential part of the Friday prayer ceremony. The caliph, accompanied by his court, accessed the mosque through the sābāt gate, which connected his residence—the fortress—with the qibla wall ([Khoury 1996](#), p. 86). The sābāt gate can still be seen, to the right of the miḥrāb. Therefore, it is located within the caliphal maqsūra complex. Thus, the beginning of the community prayer was marked by the entrance of the caliph, who walked from the door of the sābāt to stand under the dome, in front of the miḥrāb. His image was guarded by latticework that hid him from the gaze of the worshippers. However, the entrance of the caliph was perceived through the sound of the doors of the sābāt opening, which indicates

the beginning of the religious ceremony, in addition to other sounds such as the extraction of the minbar—the pulpit—from its custody space so that the imām led the prayer.

It is emphasized that this type of ceremonial concealment of the sovereign is not new in the context of the sacred temple in the Mediterranean. A large number of rituals present in the different religious cultures of this vast territory had this type of mysterious scenery. Perhaps the most striking are the Orphic mysteries of the Greek tradition and some practices of the same nature in Roman culture, which are also nourished by mysterious liturgies linked to Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Zoroastrian, etc. practices (see [Bernabé 2020](#)). Of course, all of them, especially all those of the Greek and Alexandrian worlds, also had a notable influence on the complex development of the Abbasid ceremony, as [Gutas \(1998\)](#) thoroughly investigated. However, in the case that concerns this article, it is inevitable to return to the liturgy of the Eastern Roman Empire, where these types of mysterious questions related to the conception of the sacred and the role of the sovereign come together again to redefine themselves and to become more complex. According to [Krautheimer \(2005, p. 253\)](#), in reference to Hagia Sophia, the compositional principle of affirmation and negation is what articulates the entire building not only visually but also symbolically. In this way, only the agents gathered in the central nave of the building during the liturgy can understand the entire spatial composition. In short, the emperor and empress, together with the officiants; however, the *sancta sanctorum* remained closed, even to them, behind the iconostasis. As can be deduced, the position, as well as the sensations and expectations, of the community of worshippers gathered in different parts of the building around the liturgical center, is similar in the case of the Byzantine ritual and in the one celebrated during the Friday prayer in the Mosque of Córdoba during the caliphate. It is important to note that the sacred spaces where the Visigoth ritual was celebrated in the Iberian Peninsula, as well as the Mozarabic one, also had very similar compartmentalized spaces closed to the participating agents in the surroundings of the apse and the sanctuary.

The *Ṣalat al-Jumu‘a* in the Mosque of Córdoba, in the 10th century, presided over by the caliph, developed different ritual actions that would have a strong connection with sensory stimuli. Below, we briefly recall these ritual actions, which were collected in late works such as the texts of the geographer Al-Idrisi during the 12th century ([Calvo 2008, p. 98](#)).

#### 4.1.1. The Muṣḥaf of ‘Uthman and the Use of Blood as an Element of Truthfulness

The qibla wall of the maqṣūra of al-Ḥakam II contains three openings, showing a distribution similar to that of the ancient Hispanic churches ([Dodds 1992, pp. 99–100](#)) and to that of the iconostasis of the microcosmic temples of the Eastern Roman Empire ([Momplet 2012, p. 249](#)). It has already been mentioned what the function of the sābāt gate was, which gave access to the caliph. In the center is the sumptuous Miḥrāb.

The room on the left corresponds to the custody of the Treasure, and other ritual elements take prominence when a copy of the Quran is extracted from it to be displayed during the religious ceremony. This Qurān was carried in a solemn procession by two chamberlains with veiled hands until it was placed on a lectern in front of the miḥrāb between two large candles ([Calvo 2008, p. 98](#)). A parallel can be established here with the Byzantine and pre-Islamic rituals in the Iberian Peninsula when the Gospels were taken from the diaconicon room and shown to the audience in procession in front of the iconostasis. This event marked the beginning of the Eucharist, known as the Minor Entry ([Krautheimer 2005, p. 345](#)).

The legendary copy of the Qurān displayed during the religious ceremony in the maqṣūra of al-Ḥakam II contains a fundamental element in order to establish a link between the Western Umayyad dynasty and the preservation of the memory of the founders of the dynasty in the East. According to tradition, this copy of the Quran, or muṣḥaf, was taken from Damascus to Córdoba by the first emir of Al Andalus, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān I, as narrated by al-Marrakusi in the 13th century ([Calvo 2007, p. 152](#)). The particularity of this precious relic lies in the fact that it belonged to ‘Uthmān, the third orthodox caliph, murdered in 656

and whose blood stained the pages of this Quran (Calvo 2008, p. 98). The Umayyad caliphs of Damascus guarded the sacred book until the massacre of the family by the Abbasids and the flight of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān I to Western lands. Therefore, every Friday during the communal prayer, a memory exercise is carried out that allows for the anchoring of the legitimacy of the Umayyad sovereigns as the true guarantors of the faith.

The physical presence of the muṣḥaf reminds us that the death of Caliph Utham was not in vain but in defense of religion, as the blood confirms (Hodgson 1974, pp. 354–58; Khoury 1996, p. 86). At the same time, the custody of the bloody muṣḥaf on the property of the Cordoba caliphate takes the believer to the memory of the first emir, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān I, who, striving in obedience to God, traveled the world to found a new kingdom at the service of the Islamic faith in the West. The Umayyad caliphs considered themselves the true successors of the work of the Prophet, managing to unify the Islamic community in the territory of Al Andalus and combating different heresies (Calvo 2008, pp. 90–92). They also managed to unite the Andalusian Christian and Jewish communities as part of the caliphate, both religious communities that surely understood this development of Islamic ritual acts. Perhaps they were even able to assimilate them as their own, as part of Al Andalus society.

Therefore, the idea of shared aesthetics could be expanded by adding a liturgy with common aspects, and different levels of meaning could be added. It is highlighted that, in the liturgy of Islamic community prayer in this Hispanic context, God is neither physically present nor corporeal through material elements. However, similar iconographic and transcendental resources are used in order to bring the community of worshippers closer to the spiritual, abstract, and grandiose concept that represents the sacred as well as the reach of Paradise. The use of physical resources, such as the muṣḥaf, therefore a tangible element, helps to initiate the neurological process of understanding or approaching the divine to transform itself, progressively during the liturgical act, into a transcendental, dematerialized, and abstract fact, reinforced through the recitation of the sacred text (Cox 2009, p. 109).

#### 4.1.2. The Elevation of the Sacred Word: The Minbar

This takes us to the second important element during the *Ṣalat al-Jumu‘a*: the use of the minbar or pulpit intended for the recitation of the Quranic text by the imām. The minbar ordered by Caliph al-Ḥakam II once the maqṣūra was finished was a very sophisticated piece of liturgical furniture that also had different functions. Among them are proclaiming the heir, swearing obedience to the caliph, or reporting on some decrees to combat certain heresies within official caliphal Islam. It seems that the first minbar was located to the right of the mihrāb and was fixed (Calvo 2008, p. 99). A new minbar monumental, portable, and using the inlay technique was built on the occasion of the proclamation as the successor of Hishām, son of al-Ḥakam II (Fierro 2009).

In the same way as for many elements of the mosque, from the 9th century on, Islamic orthodoxy gave exclusively Islamic meanings linked to Arabic traditions to most of them, including the minbar. According to the chroniclers, almost everyone in the service of the Abbasid caliphs—the Prophet Muhammad and the orthodox caliphs—used minbars for their sermons in the Medina Mosque, so it is an element closely linked to the oldest Islamic practices.<sup>7</sup> In the Andalusian case, the use of the minbar has been documented since the 9th century, according to Arab sources (Calvo 2009, p. 90).

The placement of a raised platform, or dais, from which to lead prayer, exhort the worshippers, and recite sacred texts inside the temple is a common practice present in both Mediterranean Christianity and Judaism (McVey 1983, p. 103).<sup>8</sup> The presence of this liturgical furniture that allows elevation is fundamental to the constitution of the microcosmic temple, as some hymnic texts of the Syriac and Greek traditions point out regarding Hagia Sofia and other similar buildings, referring to the memory of divine revelation (McVey 1983, p. 95). Let us remember that in the metaphor of the Mosaic ascent, Moses received the Tables of the Law and the revelation of the Abode thanks to his mystical ascension to Mount Sinai, where he accessed the Glory of God (Ousterhout 2010, pp. 231–34). In the

Islamic case, the Prophet Muhammad also ascended to the Heavens on his night journey and led a prayer with the other prophets, according to the Quranic surah al-Isra. Thus, a translation and resignification are observed once again of the liturgical furniture. The minbar is an element that helps enormously to enhance the voice of the imām and to expand it through the corners of the temple, reverberating through the arches of the mosque (see [de Epalza 1997](#)).

As can be assumed, the use of these ritual objects achieves great importance during the liturgy of communal prayer that is repeated every Friday inside the maqṣūra. These objects, with their own histories, acquire a specific symbolic charge and are thus perceived since their display or extraction marks the different parts in which the ritual action is articulated. This phenomenon of feeling through the symbolic charge of ritual objects was explained by Brown through Thing Theory: “The story of objects asserting themselves as things, then, is the story of a changed relationship to the human subject and thus the story of how the thing really names less an object than a particular subject-object relation” ([Brown 2001](#), p. 4). Following this theory, the afore-mentioned legitimacy objects reinforce the sensorial perception of the metaphysical presence of what they represent. They are artifacts that carry a meaning beyond what they physically show. With the presence of these legitimacy objects, during the *Ṣalat al-Jumu‘a* both the memory of the Prophet Muhammad and the sacrifice of the Caliph ‘Uthmān are perpetuated, who, in turn, are two of the characters on which the Umayyad dynasty in Al Andalus is legitimized, guarantors of his memory and the protection of the true faith. With the triad entrance of the caliph, exposition of the muṣḥaf, and extraction of the minbar, the spiritual act of experiencing the ascent to Paradise began.

## 5. Feel the Ascent to Paradise

“This Paradise have been given to you as an inheritance for what you did in earthly life”. Inscription located on the right fascia of the access arch to the miḥrāb of al-Ḥakam II. (see [Calvo 2008](#), p. 92)<sup>9</sup>

It has been observed that the aesthetic resources used in a large part of the maqṣūra of al-Ḥakam II point to a desire to get closer to the Heavenly Paradise in order to create an emotional expectation in the believer. The question that should be asked is: if the maqṣūra was delimited by latticework, could believers observe the façade of the qibla wall in some way? It could be the case that what this space was like was known through oral transmission and different types of exchange, as mentioned in the previous pages, and, therefore, the participant in the communal prayer could partially observe the mosaics of the brilliant façade, but your own imagination will play an important role, which raises expectations substantially (see [Hamilakis 2014](#)).

The detailed descriptions of Paradise were accessible to the community of believers because they were included in the Quranic text ([Moreno 2005](#), p. 58; [Silva 2011](#), pp. 39–40). Thus, it was an idea previously composed in the imagination and in the collective imagination (see [Rubiera 1988](#)) of the believer that would be reinforced with allusions to these images when the imām recited the surahs and verses of the Qurān. According to the Quranic text, Paradise is located above the earthly plane, and during the prayer, thanks to the illumination provided by the lamp hanging from the center of the dome in front of the miḥrāb ([Calvo 2008](#), p. 98), these sacred spaces transformed into something ethereal, almost floating ([Schibille 2014](#), p. 156). This physical, but also transcendental, fact would force the believer to look up and perceive, feel, that the metaphor of ascent materialized inside the maqṣūra, in the presence of the caliph, also invisible. The play of light and the increase in brightness are capable of establishing a relationship between the physical and spiritual planes ([Kapstein 2004](#)).

This ascending visualization of Paradise and the confirmation of the possible Salvation of the soul do not constitute an exclusive characteristic of the Islamic religion. It has been mentioned previously that the influence of Neoplatonic philosophy, both in late ancient Islam and Christianity, is fundamental to understanding the functioning of the new place of



worship. The metaphors linked to the perception of the paradisiacal world were channeled through the recovery of certain aspects of Old Testament literature and its Neoplatonic reading, as happens, for example, with those stories linked to Moses and the ascent to Sinai. In this text, Moses represents the intermediary between God and his people, who ascends and can contemplate the Glory of God, that is, Wisdom, the contemplation of the Sacred Abode on the top of the mountain. The text of Exodus 24 also implies that the community of believers, at the foot of Sinai, could contemplate a mountain covered by a cloud from which a “scorching fire” came out.<sup>10</sup> This story is referred to in surah *al-Ar'af* of the Qur'an (Quran 7: 42–145), therefore extrapolated to the Islamic religious context.

God's revelation to Moses responds to a model of ordering the world, hence the importance of Moses as an intermediary and transmitter of the structure of the Sacred Dwelling in what is known as the Tabernacle. This Tabernacle represents the constant presence of God among his people, thanks to the ray of light that always accompanies the *sancta sanctorum* and marks the place where the essence of divinity is found (Roitman 2016, p. 43–ff.). The Tabernacle materializes and makes possible the experimentation of what awaits the worshippers. After death, that is, the ascent to the heavenly plane, as happened to Moses, David, Solomon, Jesus-Isa, or the Prophet Muhammad. As has been noted, during Late Antiquity, we returned to these stories and witnessed a process of assimilation of this literature, understanding the sacred as something much more abstract. The place of contact with divinity is materialized following a structure that reproduces the Tabernacle, a symbol of the Sacred Abode. The main question that arises is whether this fact, which historiography has accepted for the Christian context, is also occurring in the cult buildings of Umayyad Islam—specifically, in the maqṣūra of al-Ḥakam II.

Both in the Damascus Mosque, in the maqṣūra of al-Ḥakam II, and the al-Aqsa Mosque or the 'Uqba Mosque in Kairouan (Tunisia), even in some Fatimid and Abbasid mosques, the hierarchy of spaces inside the mosque is manifested by a central nave higher and wider than the lateral ones, crossed by the nave that precedes the qibla wall—the so-called T- (Ewert 1995, p. 53) with a dome that marks the exact point where the closest place to the sacred is located: the mihrāb. This space, as has been indicated, used to be closed during the prayer- maqṣūra-, to protect the caliph during communal prayer. The connotation of intermediary is even proposed as prince of the Believers, adopting the same role that Moses had played in the past.

The caliph acts as a guarantor of peace and prosperity and ensures that the community of worshippers obeys God. During the Friday prayer, the caliph can observe what happens before the mihrāb in its entirety—that completely empty space bathed in blinding light. In phenomenological terms, this emptiness of the mihrāb “could take your breathe away” (Otto and Abellá 2009, p. 123). Therefore, it could be thought that the mihrāb represented, at least in the Islamic Umayyad period, a role similar to the *sancta sanctorum* of the microcosmic temple, the metaphor of the incorporeal presence of the sacred, abstract, grandiose, and invisible (see Cox 2009) that constantly accompanies the community of believers. Thus, the caliph is the only one who, like Moses, can approach the contemplation of the Glory of God.

In the Quranic texts, there are numerous allusions to the materialization of the idea of God through the light, as indicated previously. Most of the mihrāb of the afore-mentioned mosques are presented with the aesthetic canon of the veneration niche, topped with a shell or scallop, typical of Greco-Latin architecture (Parada 2013, p. 109). In the Islamic tradition and in Arabic poetic sources, the shell is the symbol of light since it is inside where the pearls are produced (Calvo 2014, p. 90). As previously explained, this is used as an aesthetic resource associated with eschatological and paradisiacal ideas linked to the sacred, in addition to being a royal attribute (Parada 2013, p. 110). In the descriptions of the *sancta sanctorum* of 1 Kings 6, an entire descriptive text is displayed that alludes to the ornamental richness of the space where the divine essence is found, studded with pearls, gold, precious stones, carved date palms, etc.<sup>11</sup> So, the use of shells and pearls to mark the mihrāb maintains the visual tradition of highlighting a place that is intended to

draw attention and that is usually closely linked to the concept of the divine, a sumptuous space full of light. In the case of the mihrāb room of the maqṣūra of al-Ḥakam II, the entire octagonal space was covered with a concave dome in the shape of a scallop, topped at its base by a necklace of precious stones and pearls. The Paradise that is described in the Quranic text and that makes up the imagination of the community of believers is also a garden whose architecture is full of pearls, also embedded in the plant elements of the composition (Silva 2011, p. 39).

Another important element is the alteration of the sense of smell thanks to the use of perfumes during the ceremony and also to the activation of this sense through the visualization of the aromatic orchard that develops in the mosaic decoration. The perfumes were preserved in luxurious containers that were manufactured within the caliphal palace complex, as Silva has recently pointed out (see Silva 2023). The same author stated that the Islamic Paradise is an enormous, perfumed garden described in numerous Quranic verses that describe it (Silva 2011, p. 41). The use of particular incenses allows the olfactory memory to relate that smell to a specific moment of the *Ṣalat al-Jumu'a*. According to Hamilakis, the aromas released during the ritual “invade human bodies at will, being the most difficult to stop and control, occupying at the same space between the material and the immaterial” (Hamilakis 2014, p. 97). The author quotes Gell when he indicates that “the manifestation of a smell is the closest thing that an objective reality can do to become a concept without leaving the realm of the sensitive completely” (Hamilakis 2014, p. 29). Therefore, according to Hamilakis’ criteria with respect to the Byzantine temple, which can be thought of in the same way as the space of the maqṣūra of al-Ḥakam II, “all sensory modalities are activated in unison and play a fundamental role in religious ceremonies”. (Hamilakis and Corpas 2015, p. 95).

To recreate in its entirety the theatrical drama linked to the metaphor of ascent, the more ritual stimuli there are, the greater the corporal and sensory-mystical experience.

In conclusion, following the parameters of the Archeology of the Senses, the feelings and emotions that occur in the maqṣūra of al-Ḥakam II when it is transformed into a space of sacredness are linked to its particular cultural context. Emotions are conditioned by concepts acquired and preconceived long ago (Hamilakis 2014, pp. 92–93) that produce an emotional relationship between the space and those who inhabit it. This element, according to the afore-mentioned author, is essential for the sensory experience to occur (Hamilakis 2014, p. 35). From its architecture to the symbolic messages that have been analyzed, the maqṣūra of al-Ḥakam II and the entire Mosque of Cordoba, as spaces of representation, are buildings with which the participating society is familiar from long ago, in connection with the past of the Iberian Peninsula (see Dodds 1992; Uscatescu and Ruiz 2014), which have wrapped new levels of meaning.

## 6. Final Interpretations: The Space of the King of Justice

“The tabernacle remained the qiblah of (the Israelites). David wanted to build a temple upon the rock in its place, but he was not able to complete it. He charged his son Solomon to take care of (the building of the temple). Solomon built it in the fourth year of his reign, five hundred years after the death of Moses”. (Ibn Khaldūn and Rosenthal 1989, p. 447)

In these final interpretations, after having delved into the iconological messages displayed from the maqṣūra and how the physical forms of the space could affect the feelings of the participants, there is a possibility that the maqṣūra of al-Ḥakam II is recreating the literary structure in an Islamized language, known from the Mediterranean religious tradition, from the Temple of Solomon inside the Mosque of Córdoba. This is a hypothesis up for debate that is currently being worked on, and it is expected to be able to offer more consistent results in future research.

The *masjid* that refers to the sacred space in Islam—identified by some authors as the mosque—at least in its principles and in the Umayyad tradition seems to give continuity to the places of manifestation of the transcendent linked to figures such as Moses; David; and

Solomon; present in Arabic and Islamic literature (see [Puerta 1997](#)); through his physical presence and his function as a collective place. The figure of King David is important for his connection with the place where the Dome of the Rock was built, since he was the first monarch to build the so-called Tent of Meeting that contained within it the Ark of the Covenant, that is, the metaphor of the inviolable Covenant between God and his people.

On the other hand, Solomon will be the wise king who will beautify and materialize the definitive Abode ([Ousterhout 2010](#), p. 237) through the monumental construction of the Temple, inside which the Tent would be guarded, that is, the *sancta sanctorum*. Only the priests and the sovereign could access this space, full of material wealth.

The maqṣūra of al-Ḥakam II in the Mosque of Córdoba is a space intended to honor the presence of the caliph during the communal prayer, where he is presented as Prince of the Believers, surrounded by sumptuousness, and protector of the sacred Pact between God and obedience from his people. In this sense, the connection between the caliph and the role played by characters such as David or Solomon, even Moses, seems clear, these being the first mythical sovereigns who guaranteed the physical presence of the Sacred Abode through divine revelation. To confirm this connection and show that it would not be a fact foreign to Islamic culture, at least Umayyad, we refer to the Quranic text where there is a reference to the *Dawwud mihrāb*, translated as the sanctuary of David ([Grabar 1973](#), p. 54), recognized as the place where justice is dispensed following the story of surah 38.<sup>12</sup> It seems to refer to the space of the temple, where the Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa Mosque are today, built by the eastern Umayyads, perhaps recalling the presence of the Temple in an Islamic sense ([Shoemaker 2010](#), p. 205–ff.).

Due to the influence of Islamic orthodoxy and the exegesis produced over time, it is difficult to understand the mosque as a Sacred Abode, which implies the admission of the presence of divinity within the sacred Islamic precinct. It is not in our spirit to confirm this at the moment, but, in phenomenological terms, the presence of the sacred and the capture of its essence is an important part of the connection for the believer with his own faith, as has been argued throughout this article.

The allusions to Solomonic iconography—Salomonic topos—in the maqṣūra of al-Ḥakam II were already noted by [Ewert \(1995, p. 55\)](#) and [Calvo \(2008, p. 95–ff.\)](#) as well as very present in pre-Islamic or *Yahili* Arabic poetry referring to “Arab architectural mythology”. (see [Rubiera 1988](#); [Puerta 1997](#)) This allows the Andalusī Umayyad dynasty to be connected with its ancestors in an exercise of memory and legitimacy to prevail over Abbasid and Fatimid politics. It is remembered that the Umayyads had a great attachment to the city of Jerusalem ([Shoemaker 2010](#), p. 211–ff.). In this sense, the mihrāb erected by al-Ḥakam II is considered one of the key elements to confirm that this place was identified as the space of the King of Justice, who in tradition was linked to the figure of Solomon.

The mihrāb of al-Ḥakam II is one of the most sumptuous and monumental niches of this typology built in ancient mosques. It is presented as an octagonal space, like the Dome of the Rock, which forms a room covered by a dome in the shape of a concave scallop. In addition to the powerful sound effect that is achieved inside the space, it is important to attend to aesthetic solutions that allow us to establish a parallel between this caliphal mihrāb, the tradition of the *sancta sanctorum*, the Temple, and the memory of the eastern Umayyad ancestors who built it on the site of the ancient Temple of Jerusalem, the Dome of the Rock. The Dome of the Rock has been associated in Quranic exegesis as *al-Haram as-Sharif*, the noble, inviolable space ([Grabar 1973](#), p. 49), connotations that in monotheistic religious traditions were related to the metaphor of the Covenant between God and his people. Therefore, with the Sacred Abode.

Not only could the plan of the mihrāb be related to the Dome of the Rock and to the memory of the space occupied by the Alliance, recovered by the Umayyad caliphs, but also the chromatic range used allows us to relate it to the Temple. From a chromatic display on the façade of the qibla wall, the mihrāb room uses three specific colors: red, white, and gold. The chronicler Ibn al-Hayyan referred to the *qubbat* of the mihrāb of al-Ḥakam II as *qubbat al-hamra* or red pavilion, related in Islamic tradition to the legend of the Red Tent

where the Prophet Muhammad received the revelations from God (Calvo 2008, p. 94–ff.). This Islamic legend seems to have been resignified, or also inspired, by the legend of the Exodus, where God tells Moses not only what the structure of the Tabernacle should be but also the materials that will decorate it. The skins dyed crimson red and purple constitute sumptuous and delicate materials that provide dignity, in addition to the constant mention of the use of gold. In the Book of Kings 1, the same thing happens with the revelation of the materials that must cover the holy of holies. Inside the caliphal mihrāb room, the shapes and covering materials are put at the service of the reflection and expansion of light, which slides down the walls and illuminates the calligraphy arranged in gold on red backgrounds. It was mentioned that the base of the scallop-shaped dome was formed by the reproduction of a sumptuous bead necklace topped with an eight-pointed star (Parada 2013, p. 118). A visual code that has been identified with the seal of the King of Justice (see Figure 5) and that would be located in front of the caliph when he presided over the prayer (Parada 2013, p. 118).



**Figure 5.** Detail of eight-pointed star. Inside the mihrāb of al-Ḥakam II's maqṣūra (picture by author, with permission of Cabildo de Córdoba).

To conclude, it must be remembered that the sensorial experience produced by the maqṣūra of al-Ḥakam II is a fundamental factor in understanding this space as a whole. In this article, a comparative methodological line has been proposed that starts from the visual connections that develop in the microcosmic temple and that seem to be revealed, again, in the composition of this Islamic space.

It is important to insist that the community of believers was relegated to the darkness of the temple naves with a clear intention: the real experimentation of the possibility of achieving eternal life. One of the purposes of communal prayer in the presence of the caliph, due to the development of the ceremony, is the contemplation of light. The vision of the intensity of light connects this physical fact with the concept of God and allows a series of neurological mechanisms to be activated. Stimuli, in short, are linked to sensations and expressed through emotion (Durkheim and Ward 1954; Ruiz 2001; Hamilakis 2014; Schibille 2014; Hobson et al. 2018). Therefore, the capture of the invisible is experienced through the bodily presence and the cooperation of all the sensory organs. This is channeled in the assimilation of the real, graspable possibility of the Salvation of the soul in Heavenly Paradise because space is not static but dynamic, thanks to the play of light, sound, and the use of olfactory resources and collective emotion. Previously, in other close religious contexts, such as Christianity, this lighting event inside the temple connected with the real



presence of God at the climax of the Eucharist. However, we share that, in Islam, what matters during the ritual is the memory of the past and the consideration of obedience to God and the caliph as Prince of the Believers, which legitimizes the Umayyad dynasty in power in the West. Although in the Islamic context, God is not present, it could at least be stated that during the prayer his grandeur is captured through the explosion of light, in a much more abstract amalgam of ideas, which brings the participant closer to a slight visualization of what awaits you in the afterlife if you try hard in the fulfillment of your religious obligations. From the conjunction of all these elements, which are activated during the liturgy, this can be felt.

The idea of predisposition and imagination to be able to feel, in addition to the sought-after sensation of experiencing the fear of God, are fundamental steps to consolidate the Islamic dogma of submission to both God and the caliph. This is what one of the inscriptions of the maqṣūra, inside the miḥrāb, orders: “Believers! Fear God with the fear due to Him and do not die except as Muslims./Hold on to God’s covenant all together, without dividing yourselves [...] Perhaps, then, you will be well directed”<sup>13</sup>. From the phenomenological perspective, this mysterious characteristic and constant paradoxes between the visible and the invisible present in this new space reinforce the binomial fear and religious experience present in Islam (Díez de Velasco 2016, p. 26). In this case, the believer’s greatest fear would be the punishment for disobedience, which implies the condemnation of the soul and, in turn, is very useful for politics and its control over the population.

The sensation of fear towards the sacred is one of the emotions sought through the aesthetic experience in the maqṣūra of al-Ḥakam II.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> One of the elements most criticized by Procopius of Caesarea in the *Secret History* (565), linked to the changes in Justinian’s *Renovatio Imperii*, was the consideration of the empress as sovereign. This fact implied that the emperor’s wife, in addition to being a consort, could take part in and execute certain decisions related to imperial policy. During the religious and public ceremonies, the imperial couple symbolized the duality and perfection of the world, contrary to the sole appearance of the emperor in previous times (see Cuenca 2022, p. 65–ff.).

<sup>2</sup> Marshall Hodgson developed the “islamicate culture concept” (see Hodgson 1974, p. 3–ff.). Islamicated culture refers to broader contexts related to Islamic influence at levels that exceed the limits of religious orthodoxy.

<sup>3</sup> Both Jerrilynn Dodds (1992) and other authors—including Grabar (1973), Calvo (2008), Abad (2009), Momplet (2012), or Uscatescu and Ruiz (2014)—drew attention to this fact in their research. The common point is the argument of the discourse of legitimacy through visual forms previously known in the Mediterranean and peninsular architectural contexts. Caliph ‘Abd al-Raḥmān III also used this planimetry in the Rich Hall of the Madinat al-Zahra Palace in the early 10th century.

<sup>4</sup> Dodds (1992) compares the maqṣūra qibla wall plan with the apse of San Miguel de Escalada church (9th century). This Christian Spanish building responds to the Mozarabic period. However, the three parallel apses were present in numerous



compendiums of Late Antiquity and Early Medieval buildings from the 6th century to the 10th century, both in Iberian Peninsula and Mediterranean settings (see Cuenca 2021, pp. 154–91).

- 5 The most famous descriptions of the symbolic elements in the microcosmic temple were collected by Paulus the Silentiary in *Ekphrasis of Hagia Sophia*, 6th century. Available online: <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/paulsilent-hagsoph1.asp> (accessed on 13 December 2023) and in *Description of Hagia Sophia*, 6th century, by Procopius of Caesarea. Available online: [https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/procop-deaed1.asp#:~:text=\[The%20Church\]%20is%20distinguished%20by,of%20so%20just%20a%20proportion](https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/procop-deaed1.asp#:~:text=[The%20Church]%20is%20distinguished%20by,of%20so%20just%20a%20proportion) (accessed on 13 December 2023). There are very numerous Christian authors who described the space of worship, the temple, in Neoplatonic philosophical terms linked to the contemplation of light, such as Narsai, Gregory of Nysa, Maximus the Confessor, Ephrem the Syriac, or Theodore of Mopsuestia (see Grabar 1967; McVey 1983, p. 103–ff.). It is important to highlight that both in the hymns dedicated to these sacred places and in the writings of the aforementioned authors, the temple is compared to a great palace (McVey 1983, p. 96). The relationship between sacredness and the palatine space—the relationship between the sovereign and the throne of God—is expressly exposed. In the case of Islam, this relationship appears both in the Quranic text (see Grabar 1973) and in the stories of Arab chroniclers, especially those that refer to figures such as David or Solomon. An example of this is Ibn Khaldūn (see Ibn Khaldūn and Rosenthal 1989, p. 341).
- 6 The aforementioned research work that was part of the development of the PhD dissertation began with a comparison between the maqsūra of al-Ḥakam II and the visual language of the microcosmic temple. However, the deepening of the ritual acts and the development of the liturgy made us think that not only the visual language or certain icons were shared in the same cultural context, but also the development of the ritual. In the Wisigothic Christian case, even Byzantine, there are metaphorical and symbolic elements that were taken by the Friday prayer in the caliphal period (see Krautheimer 2005; Khoury 1996). It is even worth asking what the culmination of the liturgical act is. In the Islamic context, divinity is not present during the ritual, as happens in the Eucharist. However, the light inside the mihrāb and the force of the void seem to progressively intensify, creating a sensation very similar to what in the Christian environment is identified with the presence of God at the moment of consecration. We continue working along these lines; therefore, it would be advisable not to draw conclusions.
- 7 According to a hadith written by historian al-Bukhari (9th century), the first minbar was used by the Prophet Muhammad to deliver a sermon in the Mosque of Medina. It was also used by his successors (see Calvo 2008, p. 99). However, other authors linked the first use of minbar to ‘Amr ibn al-‘As, the conqueror of Egypt (see Ibn Khaldūn and Rosenthal 1989, p. 342). The important aspect of the minbar is that it constitutes an essential liturgical element for the development of community prayer in the Friday Mosque since the beginning of Islam (Grabar 1973, p. 125).
- 8 Islamic tradition links the presence of the minbar to the preaching of the Prophet Muhammad in his first sermons in Medina. However, the ritual use of the pulpit is also present in the composition of the microcosmic temple. It is an element that serves to elevate the word and allows the officiant to recite the corresponding texts during the religious ceremony. In fact, in Greek, it is called ambo, a term Arabicized as minbar in Egypt and Syria. In the Eastern Arab Christian context, ambo is also called al-minbar, as mentioned by the monophysite Christian Yahiar ibn Jarir in the 11th century (see McVey 1983, p. 103–ff.).
- 9 Author’s translation from Spanish to English. Original translation from Arabic to Spanish in Calvo (2008, p. 92).
- 10 See Exodus 24: 17–19. Available online: <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Exodus+13&version=NIV> (accessed on 25 October 2023).
- 11 See the complete description in 1 Kings 6: 1–37. Available online: <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Kings%206&version=NIV> (accessed on 25 October 2023).
- 12 *Quran* 38: 20–21. “We strengthened his kingship and gave him wisdom and sound judgment. Has the story of the two plaintiffs, who scaled the wall of David’s sanctuary—mihrāb Dawwud -, reached you, ¡O Prophet!?” Available online: <https://quran.com/38> (accessed on 3 September 2023). The presence in the Quranic text of the *sancta sanctorum* as a mihrāb could be very significant to support the hypotheses about the first meaning that the mihrāb, empty, has inside mosques. It could be an element that maintains the tradition of the *sancta sanctorum*, that is, the space where the invisible presence of the sacred lives. It would be from the development of Baghdad orthodoxy in the 9th century when it was assimilated as a memory of the Prophet (see Shoemaker 2010). This was another of the symbolic interpretations mentioned by Grabar (1973, p. 125) regarding the mihrāb in the first Umayyad mosques and which was developed in the aforementioned Ph. D Dissertation (Cuenca 2021, pp. 374–85).
- 13 Author’s translation from Spanish to English. Original translation from Arabic to Spanish in Calvo (2008, p. 93).

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