

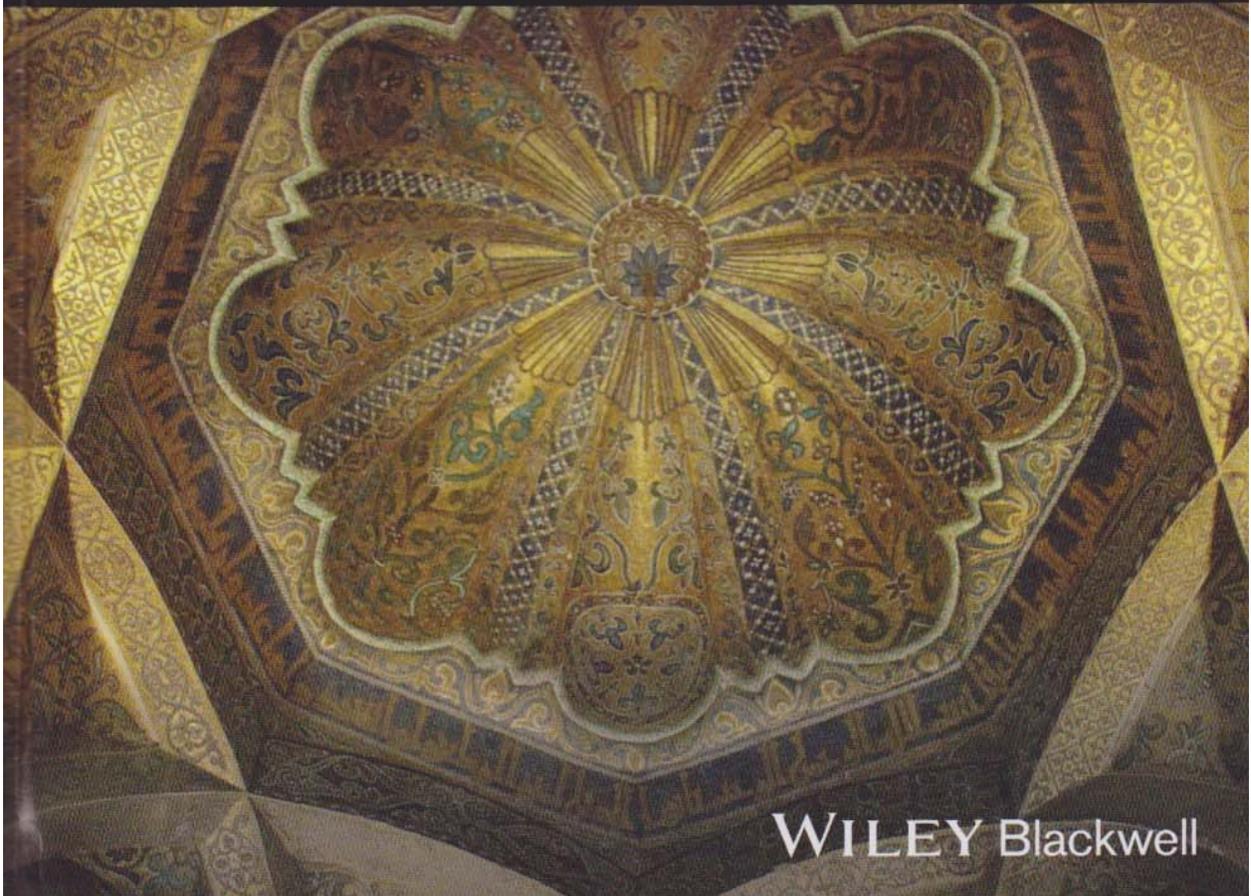
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# The Three Caliphates, a Comparative Approach

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## Introduction

By the end of the ninth century a shared international Islamic visual language, exhibiting local variations but recognizably engaged with models established by the Abbasid caliphal court, was established across the Islamic empire and evident in broad trends in urbanism, architecture, portable objects, and material culture (Hoffman 2008: 107–108; Saba 2012: 187–190). Comparable perhaps to the development and subsequent spread of the Romanesque and Gothic modes across Europe, the early caliphal period of the ninth and tenth centuries is marked by similarities in overall concepts and visual modes, which found expression in the imperial capitals of Baghdad and Samarra, and subsequently in Cordoba and Cairo. Monuments and artistic developments of the caliphal courts were, however, indebted to regional practices and materials as well as expressive of negotiations between factional dynastic and pan-Islamic trends.

The appearance of the Fatimid dynasty (r. 909–1171) in North Africa made explicit the political and religious fragmentation of the caliphal lands. At this time, the Fatimids challenged Abbasid religious and political hegemony, declaring their rival Shi'i caliphate in 909. The emergence of this Fatimid claim to the caliphate was a catalyst in the Cordoban Umayyads' (r. 756–1031) subsequent assumption, after centuries as a semi-independent emirate, of caliphal authority in 929. Thus for the very specific period between 909 and 1031 (the year when the Cordoban caliphate was dissolved) the Islamic lands witnessed an unprecedented contest for caliphal authority, a contest in which art and architecture played a major role. Art historians have yet to step back from detailed analysis of specific case studies

to consider the broader contours of this period and its art in light of caliphal competition. This is despite the acknowledgment that the period marks, on the one hand, the spread of artistic forms within the Abbasid Empire (in part as a means of asserting hegemonic power and authority) and on the other, heightened diplomatic and economic interactions between emerging dynasties and neighboring powers beyond the Dar al-Islam.

The complexity of the political landscape of the caliphal period was expressed in art and the built environment (Milwright 2010a: 666–678; 2010b: 76–83). Nevertheless, only the Cordoban Umayyad and Fatimid dynasties vied to establish what each saw as their rightful caliphal authority, unlike other regional polities that accepted Abbasid tutelage but did not lay claim to the title of caliph. So while the importance to the art of the caliphal period of dynasties such as the Buyids, Samanids, and Qarakhanids in the eastern parts of the Abbasid caliphate, and the Tulunids, Aghlabids, and their contemporaries in North Africa has to be acknowledged from the outset, it lies outside the scope of this chapter. Our aim here is to focus on and provide a synthetic overview of major architectural and urban developments of the Cordoban Umayyads and Fatimids, drawing attention to the means by which ceremonial practices and public texts served caliphal competition in the period between 909 and 1031. This chronology is bracketed by the establishment of the Fatimid caliphate in the early tenth century, and by the changing political landscape of the mid-eleventh century, by which time the dissolution of the Cordoban Umayyad caliphate was paralleled by a Fatimid transition into a state controlled by powerful viziers (Kennedy 2010: 390; Manzano Moreno 2010: 613–618; Bierman 1998: 100–132).

The art of the competing caliphates is rooted in eighth- and ninth-century models established by the Umayyads of Syria and the Abbasids in their imperial capitals of Baghdad and Samarra. Rather than attempting to fully delineate those earlier caliphal models, addressed elsewhere in the volume (see Northedge, CHAPTER 6 and Milwright, CHAPTER 7), this chapter sketches out the relevant ninth- and tenth-century developments.

### **Urban Foundations: Abbasid, Umayyad, and Fatimid**

The Abbasid caliph al-Mansur founded the famous Round City of Baghdad in 762. Medieval texts describe this new royal capital in detail (Micheau 2008: 221–245; see Northedge, CHAPTER 6). It featured a palace and adjacent congregational mosque at its center, surrounded by a vast open space, while housing, streets, and markets that supported the military and administrative population were situated within a ring just inside the city walls. However, destruction in the wake of the Mongol conquests and the continued occupation of the city over subsequent centuries has led to the disappearance of early Abbasid Baghdad (see Tabbaa, CHAPTER 12). The earliest surviving remains date to the twelfth and thirteenth

centuries, after the period on which this chapter focuses. Our knowledge of Abbasid architecture during the caliphal period is therefore derived from the excavated remains at Samarra, the Abbasid capital between roughly 836 and 892, and elsewhere in the Abbasid territories, especially in Iraq and Syria (Leisten 2003; Northedge 2005).

In 936–937, roughly a century after the construction of Abbasid Samarra began in the east, and some eight years after staking claim to the title of caliph, ‘Abd al-Rahman III began the construction of the new royal city of *Madinat al-Zahra’* near Cordoba in the Islamic West (Vallejo Triano 2010; 2006: 9–26). He followed a well-established pattern of founding new royal cities near established urban centers, exemplified by Baghdad, Samarra, and the North African cities founded by Abbasid vassals in the ninth century and by the Fatimids in the early tenth century. Indeed, the name of ‘Abd al-Rahman’s new city may in itself have alluded to Fatima, the daughter of the Prophet Muhammad, and its foundation can be seen as a challenge and response to the Fatimids, who claimed descent from Fatima (Fierro 2004: 316–321).

Located some 8km west of Cordoba’s old city walls, *Madinat al-Zahra’* consists of three broad terraces ascending the lower slopes of the Sierra Morena mountain range. In plan the city forms a rectangle of approximately 1500 × 745 m, with fortified double walls enclosing an area of 9 hectares. It was arranged hierarchically, with the lowest level used for markets, housing for soldiers, and other functions associated with city life. The administrative, residential, and official buildings of the Umayyads and their court were situated upon the two upper terraces, separated from the lower level by walls and gates, and oriented toward the south. The city was thus designed to take maximum advantage of a site that afforded dramatic vistas of the fertile plain that stretches from the mountain range south to the Guadalquivir River.

The majority of the structures found within the new palace city of *Madinat al-Zahra’* remain unexcavated. However, since the 1920s a number of structures identified as administrative and palatial buildings, along with residences and service areas, all of which are centrally located on the upper two terraces, have been excavated and reconstructed. The most celebrated of the structures is the so-called *Salon Rico* (Rich Hall), or the Hall of ‘Abd al-Rahman III (Figure 9.1). The building is believed to be the reception hall mentioned in Arabic texts as the site of many Umayyad court ceremonies. The signal elements from the Umayyad Great Mosque of Cordoba – horseshoe arches with red and white alternating voussoirs – appear in this palatial space. Throughout the city, interiors of court buildings were covered in stone panels carved with intricate vegetal motifs whose execution combines the vegetal forms of Syrian Umayyad ornament with the abstraction characteristic of much of the architectural ornament of Abbasid Samarra. Yet they differ significantly in their style and in the absence of the distinctive beveled mode of ornament developed in Abbasid Iraq (see Milwright, Chapter 7, this volume); instead, they are closer to the Romano-Byzantine Mediterranean spirit of earlier Umayyad vegetal decoration.



FIGURE 9.1 Reception Hall of 'Abd al-Rahman III, Madinat al-Zahra', Cordoba.  
Source: Glaire D. Anderson. Reproduced with permission.

This Mediterranean dimension is also relevant to urban foundations of the Fatimids of North Africa. Unlike the Sunni Abbasids and Cordoban Umayyads, the Fatimids were Isma'ili Shi'is, tracing their lineage to the Prophet Muhammad via his cousin and son-in-law 'Ali. Hence, in addition to his political leadership, the Fatimid ruler (imam) held a special, semi-divine status. Although the initial origins of the Fatimids are difficult to unravel, their first major urban centers were in Tunisia, where, in 921, they founded a new capital city, al-Mahdiyya, named after the caliph 'Ubayd Allah al-Mahdi (r. 909–934). The new capital was situated on a narrow, tightly controlled peninsula in eastern Tunisia and must have been particularly threatening to the nearby Cordoban Umayyads (Bloom 2007: 22–23; Halm 1996: 235–240). Al-Mahdiyya was highly fortified, with a long, stone wall along the sea, and a deep gate known as “the dark vestibule” (*al-saqifa al-kahla*) cutting off the peninsula from the mainland. Within this heavily fortified enclave, the caliph and his court resided, while the remainder of the population lived in a satellite city outside the city walls, known as Zawila. At the center of the new royal city was a mosque and palace separated as distinct entities. Little is known of the palaces of al-Mahdiyya, though remains of mosaic floor pavements with geometric designs in stone tesserae suggest the luxury with which it was decorated



FIGURE 9.2 Cup bearer and musician, from al-Mahdiyya, in the Bardo National Museum, Tunis. Source: Jennifer Pruitt. Reproduced with permission.

(Bloom 2007: 31). A stone relief from al-Mahdiyya depicts a seated figure holding a cup and wearing a crown and *tiraz*, flanked by a musician (Figure 9.2), evoking the courtly culture of the Fatimids.

As caliphal competition between the Cordoban Umayyads and North African Fatimids increased, al-Mahdiyya was quickly abandoned as a capital city, and a new one was formed further inland nearer to Qayrawan, the former capital of the Aghlabids (who had been Abbasid vassals). Named after the Fatimid caliph, al-Mansur (r. 946–953), al-Mansuriyya (city of Mansur, the Victorious) was constructed on a round city plan like the Abbasid al-Mansur’s Baghdad. By adopting the round city plan, the Fatimids expressed both their caliphal power and their eastern ambitions. While the rulers may not have had direct experience of the Abbasid capital, the round plan with a mosque and palace at the center, in addition to some of the names of the palaces at al-Mansuriyya, including Khawarnaq (a celebrated pre-Islamic palace in Iraq), suggest a knowledge and emulation of eastern building models (al-Muqaddasi 1994: 187). Its location near Qayrawan, unlike al-Mahdiyya that had been purposefully located far from it, suggests that the Fatimid rulers no longer considered the Sunni stronghold as a major threat. The use of urban planning as a form of caliphal rivalry was made visually manifest in the competition between Madinat al-Zahra’ and the foundation of al-Mansuriyya. While Madinat al-Zahra’s terraces, with its halls, gardens, and larger landscape

views can be seen as a response to Abbasid Samarra, Fatimid al-Mansuriyya alluded to Baghdad, founded earlier by the Abbasid caliph al-Mansur (Ruggles 2000: 92).

In 1947, aerial investigations of the site of al-Mansuriyya revealed a circular city plan, with a diameter of approximately 750 m. Impressions of many of the pools remain, but little else can be found indicating the original city. What seems evident is that, like the palace-cities in Madinat al-Zahra' and Samarra, the royal residences of al-Mansuriyya were not a single palatial entity but a series of buildings, constructed over a period of time. Like Madinat al-Zahra', this was a separate palace-city, with royal residences, a mosque, as well as the caliphal workshops and mint, a model that would later be implemented in the foundation of Cairo. Numerous fragments of carved and painted stucco decoration, characterized by mainly vegetal motifs but including figural imagery as well, have been recovered from the site (Barrucand and Rammah 2009: 350–352). Court poetry points to the splendor of al-Mansuriyya, in contrast to the defensive priorities of al-Mahdiyya, and suggests a growing concern with luxury that would later be realized as the Fatimids expanded into Egypt. The lavishness of the al-Mansuriyya court is likewise suggested by accounts of a visit by an embassy of the Byzantine emperor Constantine VII in 952–953, indicating Byzantine appreciation of the growing importance of Fatimid power. The Byzantine ruler was said to have been overwhelmed with the majesty of the Fatimid court “finding it unequalled even in his own land” (Bloom 2007: 41).

From their base in al-Mansuriyya, the Fatimids made several attempts to conquer Egypt. This ambition was finally realized in 969, under the guidance of the general Jawhar, who conquered an ancient land that had been destabilized by famine and poor administration on the part of the Ikhshidids (Bianquis 2008: 109–119). It was following their conquest of Egypt and establishment of the new royal city of Cairo (al-Qahira, meaning the Victorious) that the Fatimids reached the height of their power. While the roots of the Fatimid interest in luxury and palace-cities may have been found in North Africa, in competition with the Cordoban Umayyads, it would develop further with the establishment of Cairo as a caliphal capital.

Although the Fatimid caliph al-Mu'izz would remain in al-Mansuriyya until 973, construction of Cairo's walls, mosque, and palace began in advance of his arrival there, under the guidance of the general Jawhar. After conquering and marching through the pre-existing city centers of al-'Askar, Fustat, and al-qata'i', Jawhar and his armies camped in an area to the north of these centers. The Fatimid forces walled this new enclave, naming it, initially, al-Mansuriyya, after the Tunisian capital, which continued to house the caliph. The Mamluk historian Ibn Duqmaq (d. 1406) recorded that this walled section was to ensure that the Fatimid entourage was kept separate from the public (Creswell 1952: 21). The establishment of a separate city for imperial troops, constructed to the north of pre-existing urban centers, followed the pattern of previous rulers of Egypt. However, unlike the previous centers, the new Fatimid city was walled, following the prototypes of al-Mansuriyya and al-Mahdiyya.

With the conquest of Egypt and the foundation of the palace city of Cairo, the Fatimid caliphs entered an era in which patronage was focused on this new imperial capital. Following the establishment of the walled city, a *musalla* (open prayer space) was constructed to the north, where the *ʿid* (religious festival) prayers would be performed. The creation of this differentiated prayer space marked a meaningful religious distinction between the new Shiʿi rulers and the Sunni majority population. Not only did the Ismaʿili court celebrate the *ʿid* prayers in a separate space from the population but they did so on Shiʿi rather than Sunni calculations for timing (Sanders 1994: 45). In this way, sectarian difference was expressed both spatially and temporally. This differentiation was made more pronounced the following year, when Jawhar added the Ismaʿili formula “Come to the best of works” (*hayya ʿala khayr al-ʿamal*) to the call to prayer, both in the new royal city and the urban centers to the south (Bierman 1998a: 73; Sanders 1994: 45).

The Fatimid palace was the heart of the new walled city of Cairo. It was the second monumental architectural project in the royal city, following construction of the al-Azhar Mosque, and was located to its north. The transference of the entire, well-organized Fatimid polity from Tunisia to Egypt marked a major administrative feat, and indicated the importance attached to this move eastward, perhaps to be closer to the coveted Abbasid heartland (Brett 2000: 318–325). In addition to moving the entire court, the imam-caliph brought the bodies of his ancestors with him to the new capital city, an act that emphasized the importance of lineage to the legitimacy of the Shiʿi Fatimids. After al-Muʿizz came to Egypt in 973, the arrival of the imam-caliph shifted the role of the city significantly. As Ismaʿilis believed him to be the center of divine light, the storehouse of esoteric knowledge, and the navel of the Ismaʿili world (Bierman 1998a: 60–63; Sanders 1994: 40–41), the site of his presence carried particular significance for the community, which was not common to the Baghdad- and Cordoba-based rivals of the Fatimids.

Unfortunately, the Fatimid palaces no longer remain, and need to be reconstructed through textual records. The area of the Fatimid palace was markedly smaller than those of the Abbasids or Cordoban Umayyads. Based on a description preserved by the Mamluk historian al-Maqrizi (d. 1442), it has been suggested that the palace would have measured 425 × 275 m. It was organized as a series of iwans and pavilions, and divided into two main sections: the Eastern Palace or “Great Palace” (*al-qasr al-kabir*), and the Western Palace or “Lesser Palace” (*qasr al-saghir al-gharbi*), built between 978 and 980 by al-Muʿizz’s son, al-ʿAziz. During this time, al-ʿAziz sponsored the construction of the Golden Palace (*qasr al-dhahab*), the Great Iwan (*al-iwan al-kabir*), which al-Musabbihī (d. 1029) declared was incomparable to anything else in the universe (Sayyid 1999: 214). While the Eastern Palace had a generally more official, administrative function, the Western Palace consisted of pavilions amidst gardens housing the Fatimid descendants, as well as the bodies of their ancestors, brought to the city by al-Muʿizz (Ravaisse 1889: 409–479; Sayyid 1999: 117–126).

Between the Eastern and Western Palaces was a rectangular ceremonial ground, designated “between the two palaces” (*bayn al-qasrayn*). This thoroughfare would come to be a major ceremonial site for the Fatimids, and retain its significance in subsequent eras. Even today, while the palaces no longer remain, the thoroughfare is preserved. The palace complex was perhaps the most famous of Fatimid architectural projects, celebrated for its luxurious furnishings and elaborate ceremonial protocol (Canard 1951; Sanders 1994: 39–82). While it is difficult to reconstruct the form and aesthetics of the palatial structures, it is important to recognize that their function would have been significantly different from that of the Cordoban Umayyad or Abbasid palaces, which is due to the role of the Ismaʿili imam-caliph. As the dwelling place of the Fatimid imam, the palace complex was not only a center for pomp, luxury, and caliphal power. It was also the center of knowledge for the Ismaʿili *daʿwa* (mission) and the center of the Ismaʿili universe as the shelter of the Fatimid ancestors’ bodies, and most importantly of the living imam (Bierman 1998a: 60–62; Sanders 1994: 39–82; Walker 1998: 141–145).<sup>1</sup> Indeed, while the Fatimid palaces are most famous for their luxury, complex ceremonies, and vast libraries and treasuries, in the time of the early caliphs, they were also the locus of the “sessions of wisdom” (*majalis al-hikma*), through which the Ismaʿili doctrine and esoteric interpretation of the Sunna were spread to the Ismaʿili initiates who had sworn a special oath (Halm 1996). The centrality of these sessions to palace life is suggested by an event in 995, in which 11 people were crushed to death because of the crowds gathering to hear the Ismaʿili teachings (Halm 1997b: 43).

The burial of Fatimid caliphs within the palace complex partly echoed Abbasid practices as some of the Abbasid caliphs are known to have been buried in the grounds of the Samarra palaces, several of them within former garden pavilions (Allen 1983: 421). Similarly, the Cordoban Umayyads were buried in a funerary garden (*rawdā*) within the urban palace complex in Cordoba (Ruggles 2000: 130–132). The use of palace grounds for burial was continued in later Spanish dynastic palaces like the Nasrid Alhambra and in North Africa (e.g., the Saadian tombs; see O’Kane, CHAPTER 23 and Robinson CHAPTER 28, and Ruggles 2008: 105–106). The age of the rival caliphates, then, was dominated by palaces and large congregational mosques rather than by smaller scale shrines and mosques, as seen in Fatimid Cairo after the weakening of the caliphate and the arrival of the vizier Badr al-Jamali, in 1072. The caliphates also did not sponsor the multifunction funerary socioreligious complexes, which would proliferate in the post-Seljuq and Ayyubid era.

### Religious Foundations

All three caliphates founded large congregational mosques in their capital cities that introduced variations on the hypostyle plan and modes of architectural decoration established during the preceding Umayyad period. The Abbasid mosques, as known from Samarra, diverge most from the Mediterranean forms and materials

of the earlier period. Their mosques were built of baked brick decorated with carved stucco and featured elongated axial plans whose long axis was underscored by a freestanding spiral minaret situated opposite the prayer hall. The Cordoban and Fatimid mosques display a closer relationship to the Mediterranean visual character of the Umayyad monuments, but in fact they synthesize elements of both the earlier Umayyad and the Abbasid models while introducing innovations that created a distinct visual character for each rival caliphate.

In Cordoba, ‘Abd al-Rahman III focused the majority of his building efforts on the new palace city, but he also undertook work at the Great Mosque of the city near the end of his reign (Nieto Cumplido 1998: 157–178; Calvo Capilla 2014: 63–109). In 951–952 he had the mosque’s minaret dismantled to make way for a new tower (today encased within a much later outer shell), which was followed in 958 by the restoration of the courtyard façade of the prayer hall. The placement of the minaret at one end of a longitudinal axis terminating in the qibla wall shows the Cordoban adaptation of a feature of Abbasid congregational mosques in Samarra and North Africa. The international Abbasid plan was synthesized with elements, such as a wider central nave and interior double arcades with bi-colored voussoirs, that nevertheless looked to Syrian Umayyad models, notably the Dome of the Rock and the Great Mosque of Damascus.

The expansion of the Cordoba mosque under al-Hakam II (r. 961–976), who succeeded his father ‘Abd al-Rahman III to the Cordoban caliphate, further illustrates how the Cordoban Umayyads looked to their Syrian Umayyad ancestral past to strengthen their claim to the caliphate during the period of competition (Dodds 1990; Calvo Capilla 2014: 85–96). Al-Hakam II expanded the prayer hall, elongating the longitudinal plan created by his father’s addition. The culmination of the prayer hall is a spectacular *maqsurā* (royal enclosure) and mihrab completed in 965 (Figure 9.3). Here, architectural elements – colored marble columns and intricate screens of interlacing, lobed arches – visually demarcate the rectangular space of the *maqsurā*, which terminates in three domed bays fronting a mihrab that are given the unprecedented form of a discrete chamber with a classicizing shell-shaped vault (Khoury 1996: 90–91; Nieto Cumplido 1998: 228–230). The dome and the mihrab are ornamented with vegetal motifs and Qur’anic verses in Kufic epigraphy, worked in carved marble and splendid glass mosaic of blue, green, and red on gold ground. Scholars have rightly emphasized how the mosaics strongly evoke the decoration of previous Syrian Umayyad monuments, such as the Dome of the Rock accompanied by the al-Aqsa Mosque and the Great Mosque of Damascus, understanding them as a statement of Umayyad political and religious authority against that of the Abbasids (Dodds 1990: 94–109; Flood 2001: 193–194; Khoury 1996: 86–94; Calvo Capilla 2014: 97–105).

In their form and decoration, the congregational mosques erected by the Fatimids both in North Africa and Cairo are distinct from those of the Umayyads of Cordoba. The mosque at al-Mahdiyya has been highly restored and it is difficult to reconstruct its appearance in the tenth century. However, it seems to have relied heavily on the local vocabulary of Tunisia, inherited from the Roman tradition.

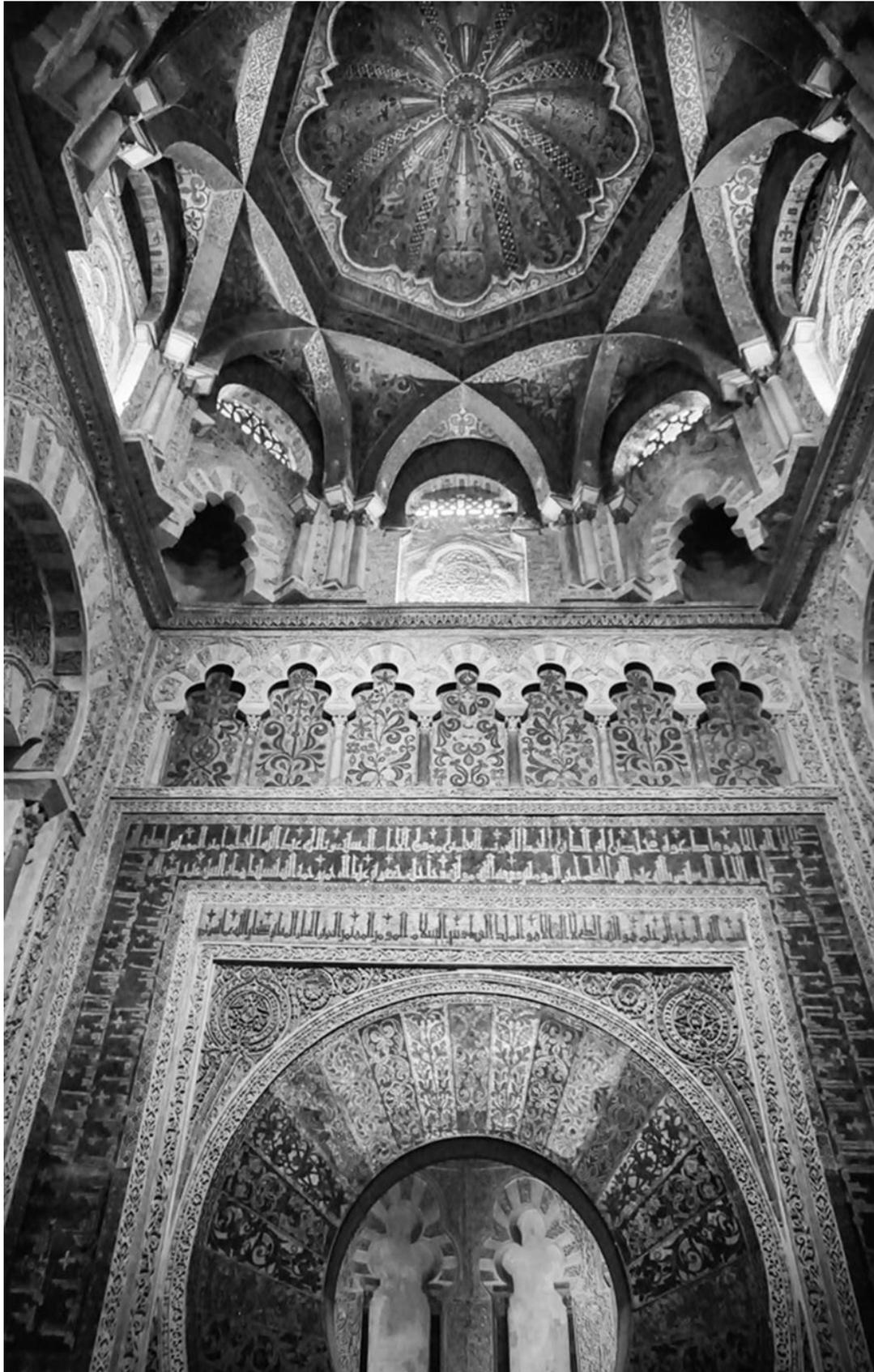


FIGURE 9.3 Great Mosque of Cordoba, Spain, mihrab. Source: Jennifer Pruitt. Reproduced with permission.

Like many caliphal counterparts, the mosque had a rectangular, pier-based, T-shaped hypostyle plan. The wide prayer hall consisted of nine aisles perpendicular to the qibla wall. The central nave was distinguished through greater width, clustered columns, and a higher elevation, with clerestory windows illuminating this area of the prayer hall. A wide aisle ran parallel to the qibla wall, with this intersection marked by a dome, similar to Aghlabid mosques (Bloom 2007: 23–29).

However, the mosque departed from Abbasid caliphal traditions in its inclusion of a projecting, three-arched portal with a wide central arched entrance on the axis of the mihrab, in place of a monumental minaret. The portal consists of a horseshoe arch, flanked by smaller niches on two stories, clearly evoking Roman triumphal arches, examples of which still stand in North Africa (Bloom 2007: 26; Lézine 1967: 82–101). In addition, the entrance façade featured two towers on either corner. It seems that these towers were not meant to serve as minarets but had the functional purpose of cisterns (Halm 1997a: 220–221). This monumental façade was oriented toward a plaza and the main thoroughfare of the city.

Many of the features that appear in the congregational mosques built by the Fatimids in North Africa before the conquest of Egypt recur later in the mosques of Fatimid Cairo. Al-Azhar (The Radiant) Mosque was the first Fatimid monumental mosque in Cairo, established in 970. The original form and function of the mosque is difficult to determine, as it has been a major focus of later refurbishments and reconstructions. According to Creswell's reconstruction, the mosque was originally a hypostyle construction, made of brick and plaster, measuring approximately 85 × 70 m (Creswell 1952: 43). Initially, it most likely included a projecting portal, following in the model of its North African prototypes, as seen in al-Mahdiyya (Bloom 2007: 60). However, it likely did not include a minaret, unlike Abbasid, Umayyad, and previous Egyptian mosques. This most likely reflects sectarian divisions, as Shi'i practice dictated that the call to prayer would come from either the portal or the roof itself (Bloom 2007: 62; Rabbat 1996: 50).

The mosque was made up of a series of three colonnades, surrounding a central courtyard, a plan similar to those found in all three caliphal contexts. The main sanctuary was supported by pairs of spoliated columns, taken from nearby ancient and Coptic monuments, placed on bases to correct for differences in height (Figure 9.4). The use of *spolia* as architectural supports, despite the difficulty in adjusting for height and resultant structural problems, suggests a meaningful appropriation of these earlier features. A central, perpendicular transept, which stood higher and wider than the rest of the structure, marked the direction of qibla, recalling the structure of the mosque at al-Mahdiyya. The decoration of the original mosque has likewise been heavily restored, making it difficult to determine the original decorative program. However, it seems to have consisted of carved plaster with vegetal scrolls and Qur'anic inscriptions (Bloom 2007: 62–63; Creswell 1952: 51–58). In the early years of the Fatimid caliphate, this relatively small mosque was utilized primarily by the Isma'ili court, although Isma'ili events would attract members from outside the royal city as well (Bierman 1998a: 73–74).



FIGURE 9.4 Mosque of al-Azhar, Cairo. Source: Jennifer Pruitt. Reproduced with permission.

The next mosque project for the Fatimids was begun under the imam-caliph al-ʿAziz, in 990, when ground was broken to the north of the city walls, near the open-air *musalla* (Sanders 1994: 48–52; Sayyid 1998: 332). Although the mosque was begun by al-ʿAziz, it was completed by his son, al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah. The precise dating of much of the mosque is unclear. However, we know that al-Hakim ordered that the monumental portal and two towers be added to its northern and western corners; the mosque, which was known at the time as al-Anwar (The Illuminated) is now renowned as the Mosque of al-Hakim. At  $120 \times 113$  m it was over twice the size of al-Azhar, and consisted of a large rectangular courtyard, surrounded by pier-supported arcades with pointed arches and a five-aisle pier-supported prayer hall. Following in the tradition of North African prototypes, the mosque features a transept perpendicular to the mihrab and three domes on the qibla wall. The mosque's shape is slightly irregular, suggesting hasty initial construction (Creswell 1952: 67).

Unlike the lively vegetal forms carved into the stucco revetments of al-Azhar, the decoration of the Mosque of al-Hakim was more stark, with a series of Qur'anic verses in a floriated Kufic script, carved stone on the exterior, and decorative wooden tie beams carved in the Abbasid-influenced beveled style. The mosque contained 13 entrances, with the main entrance across from the mihrab. Lamps, mats, and other soft furnishings would have originally contributed to the decorative scheme (Bloom 1987: 17).

While the sanctuary of the mosque was constructed in stucco-covered brick and roughly hewn stone, the towers and portal were finely carved and added a



FIGURE 9.5 Mosque of al-Hakim, Cairo, south minaret with encasing, inscription, and reconstructed portal. Source: Jennifer Pruitt. Reproduced with permission.

monumentality to the building's façade (Figure 9.5). The basic form of the portal and two towers followed the precedent established in North Africa, as seen at al-Mahdiyya. However, the addition of a monumental public text with specific Isma'ili resonances (see "public text" section below) was unusual, as was the fact that the original, intricate-carved towers were covered only seven years later, encased in the austere brick bastions visible today.

### **Comparative Analysis of Architecture under the Rival Caliphates**

The preceding sections have highlighted the broad similarities between the Abbasids, Cordoban Umayyads, and Fatimids, evident in the development both of established capitals and of new royal cities along with their requisite

monuments, notably congregational mosques and palace complexes. The articulation of each dynasty's specific identity *vis-à-vis* the others is evident in distinctions and the subtle manipulation of shared social and artistic conventions evident in architectural ornament, court ceremony, and public text.

Significant differences are apparent in the ornamentation of the monuments built by all three caliphates. At least in the eighth and ninth centuries, the Abbasids, like their Syrian Umayyad predecessors, decorated their monuments with carved stucco, glass, and mother-of-pearl mosaics, and wall-paintings which synthesized the preceding great princely traditions of the Hellenistic and Sasanian empires into a new international visual language associated with Islamic rule (Carboni 2001; Hoffman 2008; Leisten 2003). This visual language was characterized by an emphasis on princely luxury and what has been called an aesthetic of wonder (*'ajab*) (Hoffman 2008: 123–124; Saba 2012: 203–207). Exemplified by the architecture of Samarra, an Abbasid aesthetic of ornament emerged that was characterized by symmetrical, abstracted, and undulating abstract vegetal forms (see Milwright, CHAPTER 7). Its distinctive beveling can be seen in panels of molded and carved stucco, as well as in wood, carved marble, and other media (Figure 9.6). Painting fragments from Samarra indicate a flattened, abstracted treatment of the human figure suggestive of eastern visual modes. Although scholars have traditionally emphasized the stylized quality of Abbasid painting and attributed this to a preference for eastern (especially Sasanian) models, there may have been more continuity with Umayyad aesthetic precedents than is usually suggested (Hoffman 2008: 124–127).

At least in terms of materials, there is a notable overlap between the ornament of Abbasid monuments in Iraq and those of Umayyad Cordoba. The architectural ornament favored in Cordoban Umayyad monuments can be summed up by the use of bi-colored horseshoe arches, the covering of surfaces with panels of limestone, marble and stucco carved into luxuriant fields of vegetation, and most spectacularly, the use of glass mosaics in a rich palette of gold, blue, green, and red. The sum total is a complex synthesis of Syrian Umayyad, Byzantine, and Visigothic materials, techniques, and motifs, which is nevertheless also informed to some degree by the abstraction of the carved stuccos of Abbasid Samarra, even if the beveled style as such is absent. Unlike Iraq where marble had to be imported and gold mosaics were scarce, Cordoban architecture of the caliphal period featured both, resulting in a distinctively Mediterranean visual language (Necipoğlu 1995: 93–95). On the whole this decorative program created a powerful visual message that scholars believe was meant to underscore the legitimacy of the Cordoban Umayyad claim to the caliphate (Dodds 1990: 94–109; Khoury 1996: 87–94).

By contrast with both Abbasid Iraq and Umayyad Andalusia, the hallmark Fatimid ornamental style consisted of delicate and elaborate vegetal scrolls, interspersed with human or animal figures in lively, animated poses. Associated most closely with the Fatimid palace beams (Figure 9.7), preserved and reused in the thirteenth-century Maristan of the Mamluk sultan Qala'un, this combination of vegetal scroll and figures is found on smaller scale Fatimid objects, including ivory



FIGURE 9.6 Carved wood doors, ninth-century Iraq. Source: Metropolitan Museum of Art.



FIGURE 9.7 Detail of Fatimid palace beams, from the Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo. Source: Jennifer Pruitt. Reproduced with permission.

fragments and luster ceramics (Hoffman 1999). With pairs of figures engaged in hunting, music, and courtly life, alternating with various animals, this characteristic Fatimid aesthetic has led scholars to note a Fatimid penchant for figural decoration (Ettinghausen 1942; Grabar 1972).

While the palace beams preserve a figural style, Fatimid religious architecture remained aniconic. Al-Azhar's interior aesthetic recalled the classical past, with its reliance on spoliated columns, situated in pairs. The interior of the mosque has been highly restored and the stucco ornament represents several phases of building, most notably the renovations of al-Hafiz (r. 1129–1149), which post-dates the scope of this chapter.<sup>2</sup> The conch of the mihrab at al-Azhar appears to be original and features repeated undulating vegetal scrolls, which are partially abstracted, and partially identifiable as Byzantine-style palmettes. This niche is quite similar to pre-Fatimid mihrabs at the mosque of Ibn Tulun (Behrens-Abouseif 1989: 60) suggesting a continuation of local Egyptian practices. Early Fatimid architectural ornament also continued in the traditions of the Abbasids, which may have been similarly mediated through the Tulunids. A door from the mosque of al-Hakim from 1010, as well as wooden tie beams from the same mosque, combine Abbasid beveled-style carving, with a more delicate execution. Perhaps the most consistent and distinctive ornamental element of Fatimid religious architecture in the early period is the widespread use of floriated Kufic inscriptions,

which is in evidence at both the al-Azhar and al-Hakim mosques. This distinctive style continued and was elaborated throughout the Fatimid period.

Inscriptions were a key feature of monumental architecture from the inception of the Islamic architectural tradition (Sourdél-Thomine, J. et al. (1960–2007)). In addition to architecture, the use of Arabic text on coins and textiles marked the official pronouncements of each caliphate and engaged in competitive rhetoric. The use of Kufic inscriptions was characteristic of the caliphal period, appearing on exterior surfaces, such as portals and courtyard walls, within the prayer halls on walls and ceilings, and carved into capitals and mihrabs. The content of these inscriptions was usually Qur'anic, and also conveyed information about patronage and other facets of medieval architectural production, such as the identity of masons, sculptors, and other artisans. In the tenth century such public texts became another arena in which the contest between the competing caliphates seems to have been waged. Inscriptions from Fatimid and Cordoban Umayyad congregational mosques attest to the manipulation of both the form and the content of monumental inscriptions in the service of each of these caliphal newcomers' political and religious identities and claims to legitimacy *vis-à-vis* the Abbasids. The inscriptions of the caliphates relied on the careful choice and combinations of specific Qur'anic quotations to convey distinct messages, often characterized by sectarian distinctions and, at times, declaring or emphasizing each caliphate's claim to legitimacy.

Inscriptions from the Abbasid monuments of Samarra or Baghdad may not have survived, but epigraphy on Abbasid *tiraz* (official textiles produced in caliphal state workshops) and objects such as marble tombstones suggests that earlier Syrian Umayyad conventions, such as the use of Kufic calligraphy, as well as the kind of information and content conveyed, continued to be utilized by the three competing caliphal dynasties. Abbasid *tiraz* formulae usually consist, for instance, of the *basmala*, the phrase "blessing from God to the servant of God" (*baraka min Allah li-'Abd Allah*) followed by the name of the caliph and his title, the expression of a wish for his long reign, the name of the individual who ordered the fabric, the name of the workshop where it was made, and the date (see Sokoly, Chapter 11, this volume; *Encyclopedia of Islam*, s.v. "*tiraz*" and Stillmann *et al.* 1960–2007).

An intensification of the competition between the two caliphal dynasties is evident in the tenth-century inscription programs of the Great Mosque of Cordoba and the Mosque of al-Hakim in Cairo. Under al-Hakam II, Umayyad inscriptions in al-Andalus ceased to use the elaborated Kufic style commonly used throughout the empire in the ninth century. Cordoban Umayyad inscriptions from the second half of the tenth century, when al-Hakam II reigned as the second Andalusī caliph, were instead articulated in a spare, simple Kufic style that offers a marked contrast to the elaborate foliated Kufic of both Abbasid and Fatimid public texts (Lévi-Provençal 1931).

A message of caliphal competition is evident in inscriptions added to the Great Mosque of Cordoba during the reign of the third caliph Hisham (r. 976–1008

and 1010–1012), by the Umayyad regent Ibn Abi Amir, better known as al-Mansur (Calvo Capilla 2000: 18–26; 2010: 178–181; Rosser-Owen 2002: 121–137). These inscriptions reject Fatimid and Abbasid claims to religious and political authority, highlighting the Umayyad West as defender of orthodox Sunni Islam. Related developments in North Africa during the same period also attest to the ongoing ideological competition between the Amirid regency in Cordoba, and the Fatimids and their North African allies, despite the removal of the Fatimids to Egypt. It is thus against this earlier ideological struggle played out between al-Andalus and North Africa that epigraphy as a signal feature of the later Fatimid architecture and urbanism in Egypt can be understood.

In the case of Fatimid Cairo, the prevalence of large-scale, exterior inscriptions, or “public texts,” executed in the dynasty’s hallmark floriated Kufic style, characterized many of the monuments of the early caliphal period in Cairo. This is very much evident in the inscriptions of the Mosque of al-Hakim, constructed in Cairo in 990, with the inscriptions added in 1002–1003. The reign of al-Hakim ushered in a period of monumental public texts, which would continue to define Fatimid architecture and develop into a characteristic Cairene architectural trait in the centuries to come (Bierman 1998a: 75–95). With al-Hakim’s addition of two towers and a portal to his mosque in 1002–1003, large-scale text and symbolic imagery played an unprecedented role in the decorative program of the façade. As in the case of other caliphal public texts, the towers included many verses from the Qur’an, in this case, executed in large-scale floriated Kufic script, which could be read easily by pedestrians. Although the verses chosen would be universally acceptable to all Muslims, they would have particular resonances to the Isma’ili faithful. In particular, Irene Bierman has interpreted the significance of the concentric circle motif on the façade, as a “sign of Isma’ilism,” meant to evoke the Isma’ili allegorical system, in which the inner (*batin*) truths of the exoteric (*zahir*) dimension of Islamic teachings were revealed – a relationship often represented as a series of concentric circles, moving from the *zahir* to the *batin*. Likewise, the presence of the Qur’anic light verse (Qur’an 24:35) had particular significance to the Isma’ili faithful, since light itself was a common metaphor for the esoteric knowledge transferred to the Shi’i imams and a metaphor for the family of the Prophet (Bierman 1998a: 82–84; Bloom 1983: 19; Sanders 1994: 41; Williams 1983: 46–48). Other aspects of the inscriptional program made overt references to the *ahl al-bayt* – the “people of the House,” referring to the family of the Prophet – the Fatimid rulers. The sectarian function of inscriptions under the Fatimids in this period can also be seen in the large-scale anti-Sunni “cursing of the Companions” (of the Prophet Muhammad) inscribed throughout the city of Cairo-Fustat, sponsored by al-Hakim in 1005. (Pruitt 2013: 123–124). Al-Hakim ordered the covering of these unique towers in 1010, replacing them with austere bastions, more similar to those found at al-Mahdiyya, featuring a single line of Qur’anic text. While the reasons for this effacement have been debated, the shift

is most likely related to the large-scale changes in Fatimid ideology in al-Hakim's later reign (Bierman 1998a: 93–95; Pruitt 2009: 240–262; Sanders 1994: 58–61).

## Court Ceremonies and Religious Rituals

Across the realms of the three caliphates, royal cities and their adjacent established urban centers were used as stages for court ceremonies. Descriptions of diplomatic receptions in the courts at Baghdad, Cordoba, Madinat al-Zahra', al-Mansuriyya, and Cairo in the tenth and early eleventh centuries reveal a shared international ceremonial language that crossed political and religious divisions, and was also shared to some extent with the Byzantine court. In all three capitals windows (*shababik*) of appearance on palace gates provided the caliph with a privileged view and created an architectural representation of the caliph's gaze. Ambassadors were led through winding palace routes, through spaces in which soldiers, palace functionaries, and rich textiles and luxury objects were gathered and displayed, until finally reaching the secluded caliph. All three caliphates placed great emphasis on display in palaces meant to evoke wonder in observers: thus we read of sophisticated mechanical devices, such as automata, impressive waterworks, mercury pools, and displays of rare and precious objects (Anderson 2013: 111–113, 174; Grabar 1987: 169–173; al-Qaddumi 1996: 166–224). The separation of palace from mosque and the use of processions between the Friday mosques and palace became a feature of ceremony in Samarra and Cairo (Canard 1951: 355–420; Hilal al-Sabi 1977; Sanders 1994: 38–82). The Cordoban Umayyads likewise instigated ceremonial processions between the palace and mosque from Cordoba to their suburban city of Madinat al-Zahra', incorporating their suburban estates along the routes (Anderson 2013: 152–154).

Caliphs had their own distinguishing regalia and caliphal symbols. Across the caliphates, prerogatives such as the naming of the caliph in the Friday sermon (*khutba*), minting coins with the ruler's name, formal titlature, and the production of textiles (*tiraz*) inscribed with the ruler's name acted as formal signs of caliphal legitimacy (Figure 9.8). In highly regimented ceremonial practices, caliphal wealth, majesty, and power were conveyed through the display of multitudes of rare and costly objects and people (heavily armed soldiers, groups of palace functionaries, and members of the extended caliphal household) within the palatial settings of the caliphal capitals. Ritualized gestures, such as bowing before the ruler, kissing the ground in front of him, formal programs of mounting and dismounting horses, and other prescribed acts dictated caliphal ceremonial protocol (*rusum*) (Sanders 1994: 13–37). Nevertheless, each caliphal dynasty also placed its own particular imprint upon such ceremonies.

The court ceremonies of the Abbasids were set largely within the main public palaces of Samarra and Baghdad. In 917, for example, the palaces of al-Muqtadir

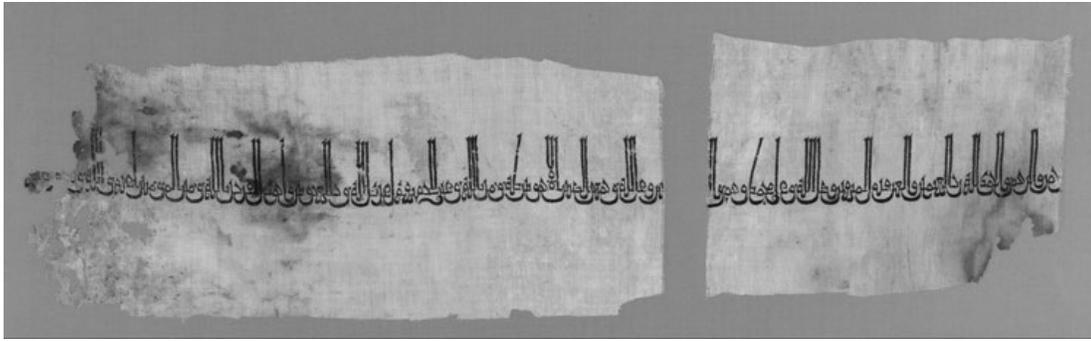


FIGURE 9.8 Abbasid *tiraz*, 991–1031. Its inscription reads: “Bismillah. Praise be to God, the Lord of the worlds, and a good end to those who fear God. And God bless Muhammad the seal of the Prophets, and all his family, the good, the excellent. Blessing from God and glory to the Caliph, the servant of God, Abu’l-‘Abbas Ahmad, al-Qadir billah, Commander of the Faithful, may God glorify him and [ . . . ].” 31.106.56a. Source: Metropolitan Museum of Art.

in Baghdad served as the splendid setting for the reception of a Byzantine embassy, in which the ambassadors were led past such marvels as vast lead-lined ponds and streams and a tree crafted of silver and gold, complete with mechanical singing birds (al-Qaddumi 1996: 148–155). The monumental scale of Abbasid court ceremonial as described in this account, involving great numbers of people and objects, all formally arrayed to make the greatest impression of caliphal majesty upon the visiting dignitaries is echoed in the vast scale of the remains of the caliphal palace at Samarra (Grabar 1987: 169–173).

The Cordoban Umayyads generally shared in the conception of rulership and its articulation in court culture as defined by their Umayyad predecessors as well as their Abbasid and Fatimid contemporaries. But their ceremonial practices, while comparable in terms of the emphasis on strict protocol and the display of luxury objects, for instance, diverged in other ways from those of both the Abbasids and the Fatimids. The movements of the sovereign and his court were occasions for elaborate public processions and public spectacles, in and around Cordoba (Anderson 2013: 138–143; Chalmeta 1960–2007). Celebrations of major religious festivals, receptions of foreign ambassadors, the departure or triumphant return of military expeditions, and military reviews by the caliph and court, were all occasions for ceremony. These took the form of court feasts, processions that included the ruler, notables of the court and of the military, as well as highly staged appearances of the Umayyad caliph and his heir in public places such as major palace gates or within palace reception halls. The caliph, shaded with a parasol of rich cloth, was accompanied not only by important members of his family and court but also by flag bearers flying banners ornamented with eagle motifs, musicians playing drums and perhaps horns, and mounted troops splendidly arrayed in special armor.

Such public and private spectacles also characterized the court culture of the Fatimid rulers of Egypt. In the early years of Fatimid rule of Cairo, many of the ceremonial processions were focused on the palace and the open-air praying space, the *musalla*. In the month of his arrival in Cairo, the caliph al-Mu'izz held a reception in which he was seated upon a golden throne within the palace, while visited by dignitaries, reminiscent of similar descriptions in the Abbasid court (al-Qaddumi 1996; Sanders 1994: 46). Religious celebrations also marked opportunities for ceremonial display in the early Fatimid caliphate. The celebration of the two *'ids* and Ramadan were particularly important for the early Fatimid rulers (Sanders 1994: 39–67). In this case, unlike the palatial reception, the imam-caliph's procession through the city was an important aspect of the ceremonial display. In 973, al-Mu'izz is recorded as celebrating *'id al-fitr* at the *musalla*, where he led prayer and displayed the *shamsa*, a circular jewel-encrusted ornament, which would be added to the *kiswa*, the cover given to the Ka'ba. At the *musalla*, the imam-caliph led the congregational prayers from the minbar, with a theatrical use of banners to conceal and reveal him to his audience. The dramatic covering and revealing of the caliph followed the protocol of both the Abbasids and Sasanians. Following the congregational prayer, the imam-caliph processed to the palace, accompanied by a crowd and two elephants. The strict hierarchical protocol was ensured by the chief *qadi* (judge), who arranged the seated Isma'ilis by rank (Sanders 1994: 47).

Under the caliph al-'Aziz, ceremonial practices were expanded to include Ramadan celebrations, where the imam-caliph would process from the palace to the *musalla* and later to the Mosque of al-Hakim, while a crowd of followers, seated on strategically placed benches, recited "God is Great." The imam-caliph processed with his troops and horses, under a bejeweled parasol, carrying a staff of the Prophet Muhammad in his hand (Sanders 1994: 48–52). The boundaries of ceremonial space were expanded under the third Egyptian caliph, al-Hakim, who built new monuments in Fustat and the Qarafa cemetery to the south of the city, integrating all of these spaces in his ceremonial processions. The increased movement and accessibility of the caliph in this time is demonstrated in al-Maqrizi's record of common people coming between the caliph and his entourage as he processed to the Rashida Mosque and Mosque of 'Amr, to the south of the royal city in Fustat (Sanders 1994: 52–63).

It is in the incorporation of urban procession beyond the palace-city of Cairo that Fatimid ceremonial differed significantly from its Abbasid counterpart. While Abbasid ceremonial was generally more confined to the palace or to open spaces that preceded its main entrance, the Fatimids increasingly integrated the urban environment into their ceremonial. More significantly, through the system of Isma'ili allegorical interpretation, the *meaning* of the Fatimid ceremonial had an esoteric dimension not shared by that of their caliphal rivals. Sanders has argued that while the visible signs of ceremonial practice were similar to the other

caliphates, the meaning of the rituals had deeper allegorical significance to the Isma'ili faithful, who understood the *batin* (esoteric) dimensions of the *zahir* (exoteric) acts (Sanders 1994: 5–11). The meaning of these rituals in the early years of Fatimid Egypt were outlined and prescribed by the Isma'ili jurist, Qadi al-Nu'man (d. 974). For example, according to al-Nu'man, standing before the Fatimid imam-caliph was not simply a political act but equivalent to standing before God in prayer, a dimension of meaning not shared by the Cordoban Umayyads and Abbasids (Sanders 1994: 16–18). Similarly, in the Fatimid context objects belonging to the caliph, or inscribed with his name, held a sacred status, something not shared by the other caliphates.

The spectacle orchestrated around visits of Byzantine envoys was another commonality in the ceremonial practices of the three courts. In 952–953, for example, the Byzantine emperor Constantine VII sent a monk-ambassador to al-Mansuriyya to renew a truce with the Fatimids. The Byzantine envoy brought silk textiles, gold and silver vessels, and other precious gifts (Bloom 2007: 41). The acquisition of such riches by the Fatimid treasury was repeated in a visit by the Byzantines to Cairo and the court of the Fatimid caliph al-Mu'izz in 972, in which the Byzantine visitors bestowed on the caliph horse trappings originally used by Alexander the Great (Grabar 1997: 122). While the Abbasid ceremonial practices were largely located within or in front of the palace, elaborate urban processions of the Fatimids were analogous to Byzantine ceremonial practices. This emphasis on ridership as a form of ceremonial practice was recognized by horse-related gifts given by the Byzantines to the Fatimid rulers, including the previously mentioned gift to al-Mu'izz, and a gift of embellished saddles to the caliph al-Mustansir (r. 1036–1094) by the emperor Constantine IX Monomachos (r. 1042–1055) and empress Zoe (Soucek 1997: 407).

### Conclusions: The Waning of Caliphal Competition

The ongoing competition between the Cordoban Umayyad caliphate (now under the control of the Amirid regency) and the Fatimids and their allies in North Africa continued to have artistic ramifications at the end of the tenth century and in the first half of the eleventh, but the political changes of the mid-eleventh century constitute the end of the period under consideration here. After 1038 *de facto* power within the Baghdad caliphate passed to the Seljuqs, while in 1058, when the Abbasids were defeated by the Fatimids, the ceremonial *shubbak* (window) within which they had appeared was sent to the Fatimid caliph in Cairo, along with the robes and turban of the Abbasid caliph, as a sign of Abbasid defeat (Behrens-Abouseif 1992: 34; Sanders 2001: 228–229). In Cordoba, the Umayyad caliphate, which the Amirid regents had carefully upheld despite consolidating their hold on effective political power, did not withstand the battles over caliphal succession among various claimants to the title, or the disruption to social life that

accompanied the turbulent *fitna* (revolution) of 1030, and the Cordoban Umayyad caliphate was officially dissolved in 1031. In the social upheaval that marked this period in the Andalusí capital's history, Cordoba and Madinat al-Zahra' were irreparably damaged. Madinat al-Zahra' was sacked and burned, its ruins serving for some time as a reminder to later Islamic rulers of the fleeting nature of earthly power, before disappearing almost entirely from the Cordoban landscape.

To the east, in Cairo the Fatimids continued the spirit of caliphal competition against the Abbasids after the disintegration of the Cordoban Umayyad caliphate. In this contest for caliphal authority, the Byzantines played a key role. The Byzantine emperors saw in the Cordoban Umayyads an ally against both the Abbasids, with whom they clashed along frontier territories in the central Islamic lands, and the Fatimids, with whom they fought over territories in the western Mediterranean, on the coast of North Africa and Sicily. For instance, a 987 treaty between Emperor Basil II and the Fatimid caliph al-'Aziz specified that the oath of allegiance (*khutba*) to the caliph, a key aspect of Friday prayers, be pronounced in the mosque of Constantinople in the name of the Fatimid caliph (Anderson 2009: 99–100). A century later, Empress Theodora broke the oath with the Fatimids by agreeing to have the *khutba* in the Constantinople mosque pronounced in the name of the Seljuq ruler Tughril Beg. At around the same time, the name of the Fatimid caliph al-Hakim was read in the *khutba* in Abbasid realms, which were then under the control of the Buyids, another Shi'i dynasty (Pruitt 2013: 129). Pilgrimage also became a site of Fatimid–Abbasid competition. The Fatimid caliph al-Zahir (r. 1021–1036) restored the Haram al-Sharif in Jerusalem in Umayyad style but with inscriptions bearing Fatimid titles, and gave gifts to pilgrims traveling to Mecca and Medina from Abbasid realms. In 1023, when Sunni pilgrims from Ghazni entered Fatimid territory, he gave them 1000 dinars, luxurious garments, and robes of honor, as a reminder that the Fatimids controlled the holy cities. In response, the Abbasid caliph al-Qadir (r. 991–1031) demanded that these garments be burned publicly (Sanders 2001: 229).

Thereafter, the scale of architectural patronage declined relative to that of earlier monuments founded during the zenith of caliphal competition. In 1125 a new type of monument, oriented toward the city, smaller in scale, and expressing the importance of vizierial – as well as caliphal – rule in its inscriptions appeared in the lavishly ornamented Mosque of al-Aqmar, built in close proximity to the Fatimid palace complex of Cairo (Behrens-Abouseif 1992; Williams 1983). In Egypt, the claim for caliphal power waned as Fatimid territory shrunk and viziers increasingly controlled the empire, exemplified by the arrival of the Armenian vizier Badr al-Jamali in the city in 1073, following a series of crises, which weakened the Fatimid caliphate significantly. Later Fatimid architectural patronage was characterized by smaller commissions, with particular prominence given to *mashhads* (shrines) and saints' tombs (Williams 1985). While these later years of Fatimid rule were characterized by the increasing prominence of

viziers and vastly shrinking territories, the rhetoric of caliphal competition continued. Nevertheless, the final blow to the prominence of the caliphates came in 1055, when the Sunni Seljuqs wrested Baghdad from Shi'i Buyid control, thereby ushering in what has been characterized as a period of Sunni Revival and the end of the tenth-century zenith of caliphal competition.

### Notes

- 1 The extent to which the city was reserved for the Isma'ili court during the early caliphal period is a matter of scholarly debate. While some scholars have suggested that the walled city of al-Qahira was meant for the Isma'ili court, Jonathan Bloom has argued that the city was open, even in the early years of its foundation (Abu-Lughod 1971: 14, 19; Bloom 2000; 2007: 58–59; Bierman 1998a: 72–74; Sanders 1994).
- 2 Many of the most beautiful and unique examples of architectural ornament from the Fatimid period may postdate the scope of this chapter. See Bloom 2007: 117–156; Tabbaa 2001: 81–83.

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