

HORSES & CONQUESTS

Umayyad Spain

By Lubna Dairanih

WHO ARE THEY THAT WILL MOURN AFTER MY
DEATH? MY SWORD, MY LANCE AND MY LEAN,
LONG LEGGED CHESTNUT, TRAILING HIS REINS
TO THE FOUNTAIN, DEATH HAVING CARRIED OFF
HIS RIDER - ARAB POET



During Arab conquests and the spread of Islam, the relationship between warrior and horse has been described in many verses of the Quran, in poems, and literary works. A bright period for the Islamic Empire was during the Umayyad rule which had the empire extend to the Iberian Peninsula.

Seven hundred years before Columbus set sail for the New World, the Moors invaded and conquered the Iberian Peninsula. With them the Moors (common term to refer to the Muslims of Islamic Iberian Peninsula and North Africa, who were of Arab and Berber descent) brought Arabian and Berber horses (known as Barbs). These exceptional horses were more than a little responsible for the history of their masters.

Spain was under Muslim Reign for over 800 years from 711 - 1422 AD. The exceptional horses have not been all what the Muslim Empire contributed to Spain; the Moors built magnificent cities as well.

Education was universal in Moorish Spain, available to the most humble, while 99% of Europe was illiterate - not even the kings could read or write. In the tenth and eleventh centuries, public libraries did not exist in Europe, while Moorish Spain had more than seventy, of which the one in Cordova contained over six hundred thousand manuscripts. There were more than seventeen great universities in Moorish Spain, while Europe had only two universities of any value.

Scientific progress in astronomy, chemistry, geography, mathematics, physics, and philosophy flourished in Moorish Spain. Scholars, artist and scientists formed learning societies, while





Mezquita of Cordova ►

scientific congresses were organised to promote research and to facilitate the spread of knowledge. A brisk intellectual life flourished in all Islamic dominated societies.

Architecture was splendour during Muslim Rule as exemplified in The Mezquita De Cordova which is now the Roman Catholic Church in Cordova. The Mezquita represents two worlds, two cultures that are exquisitely combined in it.

This historical encounter will explore the era of El Mezquita highlighting a personal close up with the founder of the Mezquita and the dynamics of Umayyad Spain. The Mezquita, meaning the mosque dates back to the 8th century. It was built in Cordova the capital of Muslim Spain. The construction of the Mezquita started in approximately sixth century A.D. as a Christian Visigothic church. Later, the Mezquita was reworked for over two centuries to refashion it as a mosque, starting in 786 A.D. under the supervision

of the first Muslim Emir Abd ar-Rahman I, who used it as an adjunct to his palace and named it to honour his wife.

The founder of the mosque Abd ar-Rahman I was known as the "Falcon of Andalus" or "The Falcon of Quraish" for he was the founder of the Muslim dynasty that ruled the greater part of Iberia for nearly three centuries. Abd ar-Rahman's establishment of a government in Andalus presented a break from the rest of the Islamic Empire, which was ruled by the Abbasids. But that materialised through this great leader's political shrewdness and wisdom. Descending from an Umayyad Ancestry Abd ar-Rahman was the grandson of Hisham ibn Abd al-Malik, the tenth Umayyad Caliph. Abd ar-Rahman was a prince groomed from an early age to be a caliph.

A 749 A.D. Abbasid revolution overthrew the young princes' ruling family in Damascus and he, along with other family members, fled the city. His journey to his fateful

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Andalusia had started at that point, and this journey, which was faced with many adversaries and plenty of Abbasid trials of assassination of the Prince, was a great test for the Emir who traveled through many countries until he finally reached Morocco in year 755AD. It was from Morocco that Abd ar-Rahman sent his envoy to claim rightful authority over Andalusia.

Greeted by many loyalists, Abd ar-Rahman made his way through Andalusia. Waves of people made their way to Malaga to pay respect to the prince they thought was dead. One famous story which persisted through history related



to a gift Abd ar-Rahman was given while in Malaga. The gift was a beautiful young slave girl, but Abd ar-Rahman humbly returned her to her previous master while saying, "I will not indulge in any distraction, be it of sight or of the heart, until Spain is within my grasp".

It was not all that of a simple conquest for the Emir, Cordova's then current Umayyad Governor, Yusuf Al-Fihri, was

not going to give up his right to rule Andalusia without a fight.

Even before the fight began, dissension spread through some of Abd ar-Rahman's lines. Specifically, the Yemeni Arabs were unhappy that the prince was mounted on a fine Spanish steed. The Yemenis scoffed that such a fine horse would provide an excellent escape vehicle from the battle. Being the ever-wary politician,

Abd ar-Rahman acted quickly to regain Yemeni support, and rode to a Yemeni chief who was mounted on a mule.

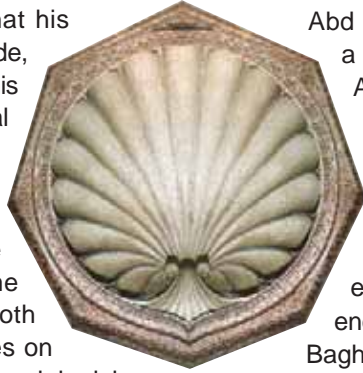
Abd ar-Rahman said that his horse proved difficult to ride, and offered to exchange his horse for the mule, a deal which the surprised chief took advantage of. A possible Yemeni rebellion was stopped with the swap. The mule's name was 'Lightning'. Soon both armies were in their lines on the same bank of the Guadalquivir.

Abd ar-Rahman led the charge towards Al-Fihri's army. After a long and fight "Abd ar-Rahman obtained a most complete

been planning to depose the Umayyad who dared to call himself Emir of Andalusia. In the battle of Carmona,

Abd ar-Rahman is faced with a huge Abbasid army. Allegedly he tells his army of 700 soldiers "today we conquer or we die." His tremendous victory leaves most of the Abbasid army killed and earns him the respect of his enemy the Abbasid Caliph of Baghdad Al-Mansour.

After the aforementioned period of conflict, Abd ar-Rahman continued in his improvement of Andalusia's infrastructure.



to the Caliph's palace by a raised walkway. Also the double arches were a new introduction to architecture, and helped support the tremendous weight of the higher ceilings. Other Caliphs came to complete what Abd ar-Rahman had



▲ Caliph al-bathes temperature room



▲ The Naves & Aisles built by Al-Hakeem II

victory, and the field was strewn with the bodies of the enemy." Rising from his defeat Al-Fihri gathered himself again with an army of 20,000 captivated souls. Abd ar-Rahman defeated the army in small battles and finally Al-Fihri was captured and killed. Al-Fihri's head was sent to Cordova, where Abd ar-Rahman had it nailed to a bridge. With this act, Abd ar-Rahman proclaimed himself the Emir of Andalusia.

That was the time when many of Abd ar-Rahman's relatives flocked from exile to live in Andalusia as it represented a safe haven for the crushed and exiled Umayyads. The long sought after peace would not continue for long. Al-Mansour, the Abbasid Caliph in Baghdad had long

He ensured roadways were begun, aqueducts were constructed or improved, and that a new mosque was well funded in his capital at Cordova. Construction on the mosque started around the year 786. It would in time become world famous and deemed a major holy site for many Muslims; later to be known as the Mezquita de Cordova.

The mosque was famous for the 1 000 pillars made of jade, onyx, marble, and granite that were adorned in the prayer room. It is said that Abd ar-Rahman oriented the Mihrab southward as if he were still in the Umayyad capital of Damascus. The mosque was connected

started. Caliph Al-Hakeem II enriched the Mihrab and its magnificent antechamber in 961. Later it was concluded that the Mihrab was and still is a "masterpiece of architectural art". Abd ar-Rahman III ordered a new minaret. The Mezquita reached its current dimensions in 987 with the completion of the outer naves and orange tree courtyard.

However when the city was later conquered by King Ferdinand III in 1236, the mosque was reconstructed into a Christian church with only 850 pillars remaining. Two religions, two cultures, and two dynasties extended from the Mezquita of Cordova. HT