

Great Mosque of Cordoba



The Mosque–Cathedral of Córdoba^{[1][2]} (Spanish: Mezquita-Catedral de Córdoba), officially known by its ecclesiastical name of Cathedral of Our Lady of the Assumption (Spanish: Catedral de Nuestra Señora de la Asunción),^[3] is the cathedral of the Diocese of Córdoba dedicated to the Assumption of Mary and located in the Spanish region of Andalusia.^[4] Due to its status as a former mosque, it is also known as the Mezquita (pronounced [meθˈkita]; 'mosque' in Spanish)^{[5][6]} and as the Great Mosque of Córdoba.^{[7][2][8]}

According to traditional accounts a Visigothic church, the Catholic Christian Basilica of Vincent of Saragossa, originally stood on the site of the current Mosque-Cathedral, although this has been a matter of scholarly debate.^{[9][10]} The Great Mosque was constructed in 785 on the orders of Abd al-Rahman I, founder of the Islamic Emirate of Córdoba.^{[11][12][13][14]} It was expanded multiple times afterwards under Abd al-Rahman's successors up to the late 10th century. Among the most notable additions, Abd al-Rahman III added a minaret (finished in 958) and his son al-Hakam II added a richly-decorated new mihrab and maqsurah section (finished in 971).^{[15][12]}

CLAIMS OF EARLIER ROMAN TEMPLE

History

A claim that the site of the mosque-cathedral was once a Roman temple dedicated to Janus dates as far back as Pablo de Céspedes^{[21][22]} and is sometimes still repeated

today.[23][24][25] However, Robert Knapp, in his overview of Roman-era Córdoba, has dismissed this claim as speculation based on a misunderstanding of Roman milestones found in the area.[26]

According to traditional accounts, the present-day site of the Cathedral–Mosque of Córdoba was originally a Visigothic Christian church dedicated to Saint Vincent of Saragossa,[27] which was divided and shared by Christians and Muslims after the Umayyad conquest of Hispania.[28][29][18][10] As the Muslim community grew and this existing space became too small for prayer, the basilica was expanded little by little through piecemeal additions to the building.[11]: 136 This sharing arrangement of the site lasted until 785, when the Christian half was purchased by Abd al-Rahman I, who then proceeded to demolish[9][11] the church structure and build the grand mosque of Córdoba on its site.[29][30] In return, Abd al-Rahman also allowed the Christians to rebuild other ruined churches – including churches dedicated to the Christian martyrs Saints Faustus, Januarius, and Marcellus whom they deeply revered[31] – as agreed upon in the sale terms.[32][33]

Original layout

The original mosque had a roughly square floor plan measuring 74 or 79 square meters per side, equally divided between a hypostyle prayer hall to the south and an open courtyard (sahn) to the north.[12]: 40 [15]: 19 As the mosque was built on a sloping site, a large amount of fill would have been necessary to create a level ground on which to build.[15]: 19 The outer walls were reinforced with large buttresses, which are still visible on the exterior today.[12]: 40 The original mosque's most famous architectural innovation, which was preserved and repeated in all subsequent Muslim-era expansions, was its rows of two-tiered arches in the hypostyle hall.[12]: 40–42 [13][15]: 20–21, 69

The mosque's original mihrab (niche in the far wall symbolizing the direction of prayer) no longer exists today but its probable remains were found during archeological excavations between 1932 and 1936. The remains showed that the mihrab's upper part was covered with a shell-shaped hood similar to the later mihrab.[15]: 20

Bab al-Wuzara ("Viziers' Gate", today the Puerta de San Esteban), one of the oldest surviving gates of the mosque. Its decoration dates from 855. The mosque originally had four entrances: one was in the center of the north wall of the courtyard (aligned with the mihrab to the south), two more were in the west and east walls of the courtyard, and a fourth one was in the middle of the west wall of the prayer hall. The latter was known as Bab al-Wuzara' (the "Viziers' Gate", today known as Puerta de San Esteban) and was most likely the entrance used by the emir and state officials who worked in the palace directly across the street from here.[12]: 40

CONSTRUCTION OF THE MOSQUE

Construction

The Great Mosque was built in the context of the new Umayyad Emirate in Al-Andalus which Abd ar-Rahman I founded in 756. Abd ar-Rahman was a fugitive and one of the last remaining members of the Umayyad royal family which had previously ruled the first hereditary caliphate based in Damascus, Syria. This Umayyad Caliphate was overthrown during the Abbasid Revolution in 750 and the ruling family were nearly all killed or executed in the process. Abd ar-Rahman survived by fleeing to North Africa and, after securing political and military support, took control of the Muslim administration in the Iberian Peninsula from its governor, Yusuf ibn Abd al-Rahman al-Fihri. Cordoba was already the capital of the Muslim province and Abd ar-Rahman continued to use it as the capital of his independent emirate.[46][15]

Construction of the mosque began in 785–786 (169 AH) and finished a year later in 786–787 (170 AH).[11]: 136 [12]: 40 [13]: 12 This relatively short period of construction was aided by the reuse of existing Roman and Visigothic materials in the area, especially columns and capitals.[12]: 40 Syrian (Umayyad), Visigothic, and Roman influences have been noted in the building's design, but the architect is not known. The craftsmen working on the project probably included local Iberians as well as people of Syrian origin. According to tradition and historical written sources, Abd ar-Rahman involved himself personally and heavily in the project, but the extent of his personal influence in the mosque's design is debated.[12]: 44 [15]: 20 [31]

EXPANSIONS OF THE MOSQUE

First additions

In 793 Abd ar-Rahman I's son and successor, Hisham I, added to the mosque a *ṣawma'a*, a shelter for the muezzin on top of the outer wall, as the mosque did not yet have a minaret (a feature which was not yet standard in early mosques).[15]: 21 [12]: 45

The mosque was significantly expanded by Abd ar-Rahman II (r. 822–852) sometime between the years 833 and 848.[15]: 21 [a] This expansion preserved and repeated the original design while extending the prayer hall eight bays to the south (i.e. the length of eight arches).[13]: 15 [12]: 45 [15]: 21 This made the prayer hall 64 metres long from front to back.[12]: 45.