

# IIUM Journal of Religion and Civilisational Studies

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Volume 5

Issue 2

2022



**International Islamic University Malaysia**

**IJUM JOURNAL OF RELIGION AND CIVILISATIONAL STUDIES**  
**(E-ISSN: 2637-112X)**

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E-ISSN: 2637-112X

**Published by:**

IIUM Press, International Islamic University Malaysia

P.O. Box 10, 50728 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Phone (+603) 6421-5018/5014, Fax: (+603) 6421-6298

Website: <https://www.iium.edu.my/office/iiumpress>

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*Makmor Tumin*

# The Importance of Alhambra as a Fortress and Palaces during the Nasrid Dynasty: The Case of the Alcazaba, the Palace of Comares, and the Palace of the Lions

Nurul Shahirah binti Majlan<sup>1</sup> and Alwi Alatas<sup>2</sup>

**Abstract:** The Nasrid dynasty was the key player during the final episode of al-Andalus in Spain. It was fortified by the gallant fortress of Alcazaba, and adorned by the grand Sultans' palaces, most significantly the Palace of Comares and the Palace of the Lions, which were built to serve royal affairs. Since the monument was among the most cherished relics of Islamic heritage, discussions regarding the contribution of the Nasrids in refining the architecture of Alhambra during their reign are vital in understanding its architectural history. Hence, this article intends to explore the role of Alhambra during the Nasrid dynasty with a focus on its fortress, the Alcazaba, and two of its prominent palaces, the Palace of Comares and the Palace of the Lions. It will also focus on the water management inside the palatine city, since water source was an important element for the survival of the city and as an expression of Muslims' lifestyle.

**Keywords:** Alhambra, Nasrid Dynasty, Palace of Comares, Palace of the Lions, al-Andalus.

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## Introduction

The Muslim conquest of al-Andalus by Tariq ibn Ziyad in 711 C.E. marked the start of Muslim presence in the Iberian Peninsula. The region was gradually put under the rule of Muslim leaders through a series of subsequent conquests and negotiations. Their reign lasted for a long duration of almost five centuries before it was shaken by the continuous threats of the Christians. They eventually lost major parts of their Iberian territories during the Reconquista, which started with the fall of the city of Toledo in the last quarter of the eleventh century. Despite the Christians' aggressive efforts to seize al-Andalus part by part from the Muslims, the Nasrid dynasty managed to survive those forces from Aragon and Castille and became the only remnants of al-Andalus in the midst of the Reconquista.

As the five hundred years of Muslim domination of al-Andalus was cornered by the increasing threats of the Christian kingdoms, namely Castile from the north and Aragon from the west, the vast Muslim region gradually shrank to its south. During that process, the first ruler of the then newly emerging Nasrid Dynasty, Muhammad I (r. 1238-1273), also known as Ibn al-Ahmar, planted the seed of his kingdom in Granada. In his search to find a suitable place for the new capital or citadel of his domain, he stumbled upon the Alhambra which would serve as the new *qasba*, or citadel for the emirate of Granada for as long as the last splendor of al-Andalus stood on its might.

Interestingly, although it is often referred to as a single monument, Alhambra does not consist of only one building. It is an assembly of palaces with supporting towers and buildings set up over the course of the Nasrid dynasty and is headed by the fortress of Alcazaba in the west of Alhambra. The early erection of the Nasrid Alhambra started immediately after Muhammad I moved his capital from Jaén to Granada and with the construction of the Alcazaba. The strategic location of Granada had become the reason why the shifting of the capital city was made. The location was far from Castile's border, and it had a direct coastal exit in case of emergency (Gallardo, 2021). Furthermore, most of the cities surrounding Jaén had already been conquered by the army of Ferdinand III of Castile and when the Christian army reached Jaén, Muhammad I had to negotiate the surrender of Jaén with Ferdinand III. In 1246, Muhammad I and Ferdinand III signed the Treaty of Jaén, which

was referred to by the Arabic text as the Great Peace (Gallardo, 2021). The agreement demanded the immediate surrender of Jaén to Castile and required the Nasrid to pay an annual tribute of one hundred and fifty thousand maravedís. They were also required to provide military assistance whenever Castile needed them (Gallardo, 2020). Aside from the disadvantageous situation in Jaén, Muhammad I also had to take Nasrid's inferior state of military and defense into consideration and the treaty was signed to buy time for the fortification of Alhambra.

Just like Muhammad I, the early Nasrid emirs focused more on perfecting the Alcazaba and completing the perimeter wall surrounding the Alhambra because it was vital to ensure the impenetrability of the fortress and its capability to guard the Nasrid leaders against the Christian threats surrounding Granada. The erection of the palace site only started almost a century later by the fifth Nasrid ruler, Ismail I (r. 1314–1325), with his construction of a sizable complex which was eventually developed into the Comares Palace (Palatio de Comares) by his successors (Fernández-Puertas, 1997). Although the palatial buildings were constantly constructed and renovated until the late mid-fifteenth century, the most significant and interesting buildings were built in the mid-fourteenth century, prominently by Yusuf I (r. 1333–1354) and Muhammad V (r. 1354–1359/1362–1391).

This paper attempts to analyse the importance of Alhambra, particularly during the Nasrid dynasty, and how its architecture helped the monument to serve its purpose as a fortress and palaces for the Nasrid rulers. Information is collected and analysed using library research. Contents from various secondary sources related to the topic are collected and discussed. It is important to note, however, that the Spanish names for the monuments were most likely given after the Nasrid dynasty's demise, and those names are what we, as modern people, popularly refer to. Due to the Islamic nature of the Nasrid dynasty, the actual names of the monuments may be mostly in Arabic. To avoid confusion, English, Arabic, and Spanish names for the monuments are included in parts of this article, though most of the Arabic names are neglected in academic discussions revolving around Alhambra.

The limitation of this study lies in the difficulties faced by archaeologists and historians to determine the actual architecture of Nasrid's Alhambra and the year they were built and inscribed. This is

due to many subsequent alterations over the years, especially by the Christian monarchs after it was captured in 1492. The language barrier also limits this study in terms of understanding and comprehending Spanish and Arabic texts, hence this research solely relies on the available English texts and sources.

### Alhambra's Origin

Little is known about the definite origin of the construction of Alhambra. However, its strategic location on the Sierra Nevada on the top of Sabika Hill, which overlooks the whole city of Granada, provides an advantage that would allow the holders to easily detect the incoming threats of their enemies. Hence, it is not surprising if the site was a hotspot during military expeditions. It is said that during the rebellion of 'Umar Ibn Ḥafṣūn in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, the Arab troops in Granada were held out in a red fort that is besieged by a group of *muwallad* rebels. The fort used by the Arabs might have already been built by the governor of the province in 767 (Calvert, 1908; Foret, 2009).

During the reign of the Zirid dynasty<sup>3</sup> in Granada, the Zirids built a citadel and palace on Albaicín hill which was known as the *al-Qaṣaba al-Qadīma* ("Old Citadel" or "Old Palace") and called as "the big one" by al-Zuhri, an Andalusian geographer who wrote *Kitāb al-Jughrafiya* (Uzal, 2013). Two other fortresses were built on the Sabika and Mauror hills, opposite the main one on the Albaicín hill and separated by the Darro River, to the south of Granada. The fortress on the Sabika hill was known as the *al-Qaṣaba al-Jadida* ("New Citadel" or "New Palace") or the *Alcazaba*. The New Citadel was merely used as a fortress until Zirid's influential Jewish vizier, Yusuf ibn Naghrella (993-1056), built his personal residence there. Frederick Bargebuhr (1956) mentioned that Yusuf's decision to construct his palace on the Alhambra site was driven by the rift in the relationship between the Jews and the Muslim

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<sup>3</sup> Zirid dynasty of Granada was the root of the Taifa states and was a predecessor of the Nasrid dynasty in Granada. It was founded in 1013 by Zawi bin Ziri (r. 1013 to 1019) when people of Zirid dynasty from Ifriqiya fled to Granada and built their city there. The dynasty was short-lived in Granada and was decisively defeated and conquered by the Al-Moravids in 1090 eighty years after they were established.



Zirids particularly his personal relationship with Emir Abd Allah (r 1073–1090), the last emir of the Zirid dynasty. Yusuf’s palace also greatly displeased the emir when some said it was better than the emir’s palace. The Zirid’s *Alcazaba* might have been the initial foundation of the Alhambra structure before its major constructions and modifications by the first ruler of the Nasrids, Muhammad I, and his successors as a site of not only the main fortress but also the royal residences of the emirs for two and a half centuries.

As for the origin of its name, it is commonly believed that Alhambra got its famous name from the Arabic word *al-Ḥamrā’* which means “The Red One” in English. It was also referred to as *al-Qal’a al-Ḥamrā’* which means “The Red Fortress”. The reddish colour of Alhambra was pigmented by the rammed earth material, roughly sand, clay, and stones, which were primarily used for the outer wall of Alhambra in the early construction of this monument (Gil-Crespo, 2016). Historians believed that the earliest mention of the name was found in the record of Ibn Hayyan (d. 1075) in the 9<sup>th</sup> century when he talked about the battles between the Arabs and the Muwallads, as previously mentioned, during the rule of the Emir Abd Allah. The name *al-Qal’a al-Ḥamrā’* was mentioned in a poetry attached to an arrow and shot over the wall of the red fortress. The gist of the poetry was as below:

“Deserted and roofless are the houses of our enemies;

Invaded by the autumnal rains, traversed by impetuous winds;

Let them within the red castle (*al-Qal’a al-Ḥamrā’*) hold their mischievous councils;

Perdition and woe surround them on every side” (Calvert, 1908, p. 6)

As of now, all the subjects concerning the naming of Alhambra were associated with the colour red. Because the first monarch of the Alhambra who elevated it was dubbed Ibn al-Ahmar, which means “the descendant of the red one,” some individuals, such as al-Qalqashandī, a historian and Shāfi’ī jurist, attributed the origin of the Alhambra’s name to Ibn al-Ahmar. His name was derived from the name of his tribe, Banu al-Ahmar (Castro, 2021). Another possibility is that the great red castle was located in Granada, a city that acquired its name from the pomegranate fruit, which is commonly recognised for its alluring red colour (Russo et al., 20120, and this adds to the romantic undertone

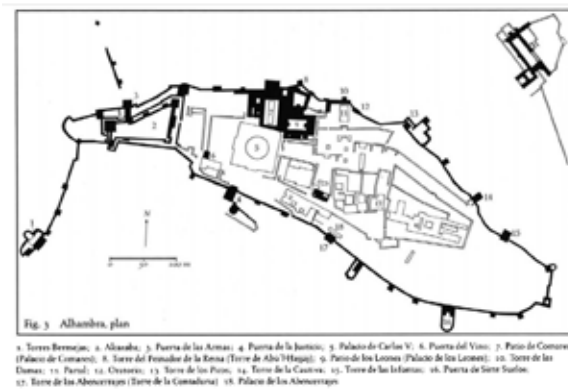
of its name with all the connections with the reddish elements of its settings.

### **Alhambra as a Fortress**

The *Alcazaba* is the military zone of the Alhambra complex. Prior to the erection of the Alhambra complex, this stronghold served as the main residence of Muhammad I and the Nasrid soldiers that guarded him. With the fall of Jaén in 1426 and Seville in 1428, most of the lands around Granada were now under the control of Christian kingdoms, posing a danger to the emirate. This scenario compelled Muhammad Ibn al-Ahmar to concentrate on fortifying Granada, particularly Alhambra, the seat of the reigning administration, with towers and defensive walls. The perimeter wall guarding the palatial residence was designed with several gates for entrance, among them were the gate of Justice or *Bab al-Sharia* (*Puerta de la Justicia*), the gate of Seven Floors or *Bab al-Ghudūr* (*Torre de los Siete Suelos*), the gate of Elvira or *Bab-Ilbira* (*Puerta de la Elvira*), the False Gate, or *Bab al-Faray* (*Puerto del Arrabal*) (Mas Sánchez, 2020). It was not until his son, Muhammad II, took over the reign that the construction of the palatine city he envisioned was started.

The Alcazaba also features a miniature complex (*Plaza de las Armas*) to lodge and supply basic requirements for the Nasrid military personnel guarding the Alhambra and the emirs. The north of the Plaza housed the military quarters (*Barrio Castrense*) which were made of seventeen small houses, most of which were joined together and separated by narrow alleyways that led to the homes' interiors, owned probably by the high-ranking military officials (Lopez, 1992). Meanwhile, on the southern part of the plaza were rooms laid out with several compartments that served as either a dormitory for junior guards or probably just a mere storage facility. Due to the limited space in the internal military complex of the fortress, the rest of the normal army units presumably camped outside the Alcazaba, yet still within the range of the stronghold. Jesus Lopez pointed out the absence of distinct grounds which may operate as a prayer place in the Alcazaba and assumed the likelihood that they conducted their daily prayers in an open-air worship space either inside or outside the stronghold (Lopez, 1992).

The irregular triangular fortress was anchored by the main and oldest towers: the Watch Tower (*Torre de la Vela*) on the western tip, the Tower of Homage (*Torre del Homenaje*), the Broken Tower (*Torre Quebrada*), and the Shieldmaker's Tower (*Torre del Adarguero*)<sup>4</sup> that made up the defensive line on the Alcazaba eastern wall. The main entrance to the fortress was initially through the Gate of Arms, or *Bab al-Silah* (*Puerta de las Armas*) while the remainder of the Alhambra palatial grounds was accessible by the Gate of Tahona (*Puerta de la Tahona*), under the Tower of Homage, in the back wall of Alcazaba.



**Figure 1:** The Plan Of Alhambra. Adapted From *The Alhambra: An Introduction* (Rodriguez, 1992, P. 130).

Alhambra's principal tower is the main Watch Tower (*Torre de la Vela*), which was built on the western tip of Sabika Hill, surrounded by steep slopes on its front, left, and right sides, leaving no room for enemies to ambush the tower unannounced. The square ground plan of the Watch Tower measures 16 meters by 16 meters and its elevation is 26.80 meters in height. It is built on a solid foundation and features a four-story interior with arches supported by pillars and a subterranean dungeon. The tower overlooks the Sierra Nevada mountainous plain and open farmland, making it ideal for forming a network intelligence series. Muhammad I installed a network of signal towers/watchtowers,

<sup>4</sup> There were only fragments remained in the site of Torre del Adarguero today, just like some other parts of the palace city caused by the explosion during the Peninsula War (1807-1814) by the French, hence it was sometimes called The Hollow Tower (*Torre Hueca*).

or the *Atalayas*, designed to warn him of the enemy's movements within his territory.

These mostly cylindrical masonry towers of *atalayas* were commonly built far from accessible areas from the extreme border of the Nasrid-Castile kingdoms with a distance between 5 to 7 kilometres from each other and served for visual observation and communication of movements within the kingdom (Ruiz-Jaramillo & Garcia-Pulido, 2018). They would gather information, especially on Christian advances given by the people who passed the area, and the warnings would be impended on top of the towers through various signalling methods such as using special mirror plates, smoke, or fire. The top of *Torre de la Vela* was equipped with arrow slits, used by the guards to keep an eye on the open air and communicate with those on the *atalayas* and *chemin de ronde* of the palatial towers (Puerta-Vilchez, 2022). This signal was passed from tower to tower towards the *Torre de la Vela* of Alhambra and warned the Emirs of an incoming attack.

The Tower of Homage (*Torre de Homenaje*) had a more rectangular base measuring 12.12 metres by 10.46 metres and was raised to a height of 26 metres, consisting of six floors, with a dungeon on the lowest floor. The top four floors feature central cruciform piling and clusters of four pillars. The *Torre del Homenaje*'s uppermost floor was constructed as a small residence, a novel type of construction centred on a central hypaethral courtyard said to be Muhammad I's dwelling (Puerta-Vilchez, 2022). The tower has an upright crenelated teeth-shaped feature along the top of the tower, which provided protection for the Nasrid soldiers and its separations enabled them to fire arrows at intruders within their sights.

As mentioned above, the lowest floors of the towers, including other towers across Alhambra, were usually reserved as dungeons and prison cells for captives. Aside from that, conically bell-shaped underground dungeons (EFE, 2018), with a central gap on their tip and only accessible by a rope ladder, were utilised to detain high-profile prisoners under the towers. A rope was used to lower the prisoners into the prison chambers from the central gap. This was done as a safety measure to prevent inmates from being able to flee once they entered the prison. When the trap door was closed, the dungeon would be dark, and the prisoners

would not have access to sanitation, food, nor water without permission from the Nasrid emirs and prison guards (Irwin, 2004).

### **Alhambra as Royal Palaces**

Beyond Alcazaba, Muhammad I swiftly envisioned the palatine city, although he had limited contribution in realising the construction of the palatine area, which would eventually house his successors and their royal family, along with gardens and mini township to accommodate them. This led Alhambra to be known as the City of Alhambra, or *Madinat al-Hambra*. He probably got inspired by the *Madinat al-Zahra* of the former Caliphate of Cordoba (Rodriguez, 1992). This mission was then passed through generations of emirs and multiple palaces and installations were built within the area. To leave a lasting impression on Alhambra, the emirs often constructed new palaces or refurbished older ones. Robert Irwin (2004) argued that these buildings may not have been interconnected when the palatine city was still in use by the Nasrids, despite the fact that they appear to be connected now. The familiarity of this area as the residence and centre of the Nasrid government was reflected when the area was known as the Nasrid Palace (*Palacio de los Nazaries*). Although seven discrete palaces were able to be identified by modern archaeologists and historians in Alhambra, as highlighted by Jesus Lopez (1992), there were only two almost fully existing main palaces that we managed to retrieve today within its premises: the Palace of Comares (*Palacio de Comares*) and the Palace of the Lions, or *al-Riyāḍ al-Saʿīd* (*Patio de los Leones*).

### ***Palace of Comares (Palacio de Comares)***

Ismail I (r. 1314- 1325) initiated the construction of the Comares Palace which was continued by his son, Yusuf I (r.1333-1354). The name of the Palace was commonly believed to originate from the Arabic word, *qumarriya*, which describes the multicolored stain glass edifices used to ornament the palace, while James Dickie (1992) mentioned a unique take where he believed it was named as such to honour the artisans from Qumarish who constructed its many buildings. While most palaces are constructed to impress people, the Palace of Comares was installed with a gigantic intimidating tower whose purposes were both to guard and

to intimidate those who laid their eyes on it. The Tower of Comares was designed to overwhelm its visitors with its massive size. Those who observed it from afar were also expected to be intimidated by its enormous proportion. In the heat of his rivalry with Alfonso XI, Yusuf built the mighty 45-meter-tall tower, the tallest in Alhambra, in the north of the palatine precinct as a statement of his authority and invulnerability in the eyes of his subjects and Christian adversaries. The throne space of the Hall of the Ambassador (*Salón de Embajadores*) in the tower was said to be the most accurate depiction of the Great Iwan,<sup>5</sup> of the Mamluks in Cairo (Guichard, 2021). Despite its massive size, Yusuf's Comares Tower lacked military power, thus he had to rely on political and diplomatic discussions, particularly with Christian ambassadors. Therefore, he erected the Hall of the Ambassadors starting in 1310 inside the Comares Tower, which was primarily used for discussions with foreign diplomats, receiving envoys, and ambassadors. However, much of today's Comares Palace was rebuilt by Muhammad V in 1365 (Petersen, 1996).

The hall was meticulously designed utilising geometrical mathematics equations in order to overwhelm the visitors with the Sultan's presence and power in the room by concentrating the emphasis on the space to the Sultan's throne. The hall formed a cubical space, with measurements of 11.30 meters by 11.30 meters and 18.20 meters high, with three deep vaulted nooks on each side, formed by synthetic solid walls. The recesses open into arcuate windows with the panorama of Granada (Petersen, 1996). The *artesonado* ceilings of the hall were aesthetically accessorized with geometric patterns, thus converting the ceiling's design into a cosmic vision of large superimposed geometric panels of the "wooden strap-work cupola" (Bush, 2020). This formed a star-patterned vault, which was inscribed with poetic and Quranic verses of cosmological themes based on the description of the seven Islamic heavens above withstanding the throne of God in the chapter of the Kingdom, *Surah al-Mulk* (Gonzales, 2003).

Opposite the apex of the *artesonado* ceiling, the flooring in the hall's centre was inscribed with the name of God on its tiles through the

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<sup>5</sup> The Great Iwan was a stunning monumental throne hall of the Mamluk Sultan al-Nasir Muhammad built in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Unfortunately, it was demolished in 1825 and was replaced with the Muhammad Ali Mosque.

famous Nasrid dynasty motto, “There is no conqueror, except Allah” (*wa la Ghalib illallah*) and made up the hall’s distinctive flooring design (Dickie, 1992). The hall’s interior walls were fully engraved and reiterated in faience and plasterworks with repeated words of praises for Allah, especially by its motto which indirectly sends the message of the superiority of the Islamic emirate over the Christian kingdoms. It should be noted, however, that these plasterworks were not exclusive to the hall; rather, plasterworks and engravings of the motto can be found in almost every Alhambra official space.

The descriptions of Alhambra in historical records all emphasised the beautiful gardens and courtyards embellishing the palatine courtyards and the Palace of Comares was no exception. Before holding an audience with the emirs, the ambassadors will pass through the exquisite Courtyard of the Myrtles (*Patio de los Arrayanes*) situated in front of the entrance to the Hall of Ambassadors. It was called the court of the myrtles due to the two long myrtle hedges in its interior that grow on the longer sides of the pond. The heart of the courtyard holds a rectangular pool measuring 34 meters in length and 7.10 meters in width with a fountain at either end.

The courtyard held the chambers of the emir’s wives on both sides with the emir’s private parlour, the House of Blessings, *Sala de la Barca*, on the northeast side which was connected to the Hall of Ambassador. This elongated pool apparently had two main purposes. First, to aestheticize the atmosphere of the palace with its captivating mirror effect in which the grandeur of the tower of Comares was amplified by the reflections of the vast expanse of water in the pool. Second, the pool acts as a cooling mechanism for the monarchs’ dwellings surrounding it (Dickie, 1992), particularly in summer. The babbling sounds of the small fountains at the end of the pool soothe the onlookers while the beautiful floral aromas exuded by the blossoms of the myrtle hedges enchanted their sense of smell.

### ***Palace of the Lions, or Palatio al-Riyad/al-Riyad al-Sa’id (Patio de los Leones)***

When Peter I the Cruel of Seville helped Muhammad V to reascend to his throne, the two of them formed a very good relationship and the

everlasting Muslim-Christian rivalry turned into an artistic competition between Muhammad V and Peter I as they both shared the same interest in architecture. When Muhammad V knew the existence of the Alcazar of Seville<sup>6</sup> which was built by Peter in a Mudejar architecture style, he was determined to create something that can challenge Peter's castle. In this quest, he managed to build the Court of the Lions which encapsulated the mixture of Christian and Islamic influences and was viewed by many as the most sophisticated part of Alhambra. On the north and south sides of the palace, two halls, known as the Hall of Two Sisters and the Hall of the Abencerrajes, respectively, were fringed by sideways apartments on their east and west. To the opposite side of the entrance to the Palace of the Lions lies the Hall of the King (*Sala de los Reyes*).

The structure of the courtyard was to be greatly influenced by the Sevillian *Patio de las Doncellas*, the main courtyard of Peter's Alcazar, but in its architecture remained the distinctive Islamic elements. The court was built on the ground which used to be a garden, hence the reason it was initially named the Palace of the Delightful Garden, *Qasr al-Riyāḍ al-Sa'īd* (Arnold, 2017). It was only after the installation of the fountain of lions that the palace's name was associated with its centrepiece and was widely called the Palace of the Lions (*Palatio de los Leones*). Its courtyard was split into four quadrants from which water falls into the enormous polygonal marble basin of a fountain borne on the backs of twelve lions' sculptures in the middle. The four quadrants were once a sunken flower garden encircling the fountain of the lions (al-Majali, 2017).

The fountain of the lions was the centerpiece of the palace and its stunning, yet unusual design sparked debate among scholars. Frederick Bargeburr (1968) discussed its origin extensively in his writing, *The Alhambra: A cycle of studies on the eleventh century in Moorish Spain*. He claimed that the sculptures of the twelve lions originated from an earlier Jewish palace of Yusuf Ibn Naghrella during the Zirid dynasty as described in the poems of Ibn Gabirol, a Jewish philosopher and the grand vizier to the father of Yusuf ibn Naghrella. This unleashed heated debates among scholars, because if his claims are true then that means

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<sup>6</sup> Muhammad resided in Alcazar of Seville with Pedro from 1359 until he reclaimed his throne in 1362.



that the sculptures date from the 11<sup>th</sup> century when Yusuf inhabited the Alhambra site and not the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Although some scholars like Oleg Grabar accepted his claims to some extent (Schirg, 2017), most of them refuted that idea (Arnold, 2017) due to the lack of archaeological evidence. The architect, Torre Balbas (Irwin, 2004), established that the sculptures were dated to the 14<sup>th</sup> century and sculpted with Macael marble (Arnold, 2017) with Nasrids architectural style.

Like the Comares palace, the Nasrid's architects still heavily utilised their knowledge of geometry to design its interior ornaments including the making of the *mucarabe* that were used to decorate the *muqarnas* (stalactites or a honeycomb-looking three-dimensional design) domes, which covered the ceilings of the main rooms of the Court of the Lions. These *muqarnas* were believed to be an architectural manifestation of the atoms according to the Ash'arite atomic theory that Allah had the highest sovereignty over all matters (the smallest form of a particle), space, and time (Guichard, 2021). The reflection of sunlight and moonlight on the *mucarabe* that formed the *muqarnas* was intended to illusion a movement symbolising the "rotating dome of heaven" mentioned by Ibn Zmarak in his poem inscribed in the Hall of the Two Sisters and the Hall of Abencerrajes (Tabbaa, 1985). The Hall of the Two Sisters (*Sala de Dos Hermanasa*) used to be called *al-Qubba al-Kubrā* and the Hall of Abencerrajes (*Sala de los Abencerrajes*) was referred to *al-Qubba al-Gharbiyya* and they contained the finest preserved looking *muqarnas* domes.

### **Water Management in the Alhambra**

One of the prior disadvantages of building the palatine city on top of Sabika Hill was the absence of a flowing fresh water supply. The closest water source was the river Darro, located near the northern side of the Alhambra and even then, it was still too far to act as a direct source for Alhambra's water supply. Be that as it may, Muhammad I managed to overcome this problem by constructing an *acequia* (an aqueduct) located at a higher spot that would be used to redirect the water from the Darro River to the Generalife, or the *Jinnatul A'rif*. The *acequia* was then branched out into two distinguished channels: the *Acequia de Tercio* and the Royal Canal, *al-Saqiya al-Sultāniyya (Acequia Real)*. The first hydraulic canal mainly functioned to irrigate the vast gardens

of Generalife, while the *Acequia Real* on the other hand channelled water throughout the *Madinat* region, the palatial areas, and then the Alcazaba as well as the *Torres Bermejas* and the *Antequeruela* near the foothill (Najjaj, 2014). With the extensive water delivery system plan in Alhambra, Glick and Kirchner (2000) argued that the later constructions and alterations of Alhambra were guided by the hydraulic system as their main concern.

On the other hand, the residents of Alhambra did not solely rely on the flowing water from their irrigation system, but they also stored water in various mediums for storage purposes. Multiple cisterns and *albercas* (large reservoirs or tanks used to store water) can be found between the royal spaces, the *Medina* area, and the gardens within the vicinity of Alhambra. In addition, two other *albercas* were found in the underground of the Alcazaba around the dungeons and bath areas (Malpica, 2002).

As Muslims, the Nasrids needed to have a continuous water supply for ablution before performing their five daily prayers. In line with this demand, water royalties were used to store water for the rite of ablution, while luxurious sculpted marble basins can be found across the palatial areas for the use of the royalties. To a greater extent, the ablution house, or *mida'*, was erected to ease the people to do ablution before entering the mosque (Reklaityte, 2022). Arched aqueducts or shallow pools were designed to slow the running water and to make sure the water keeps constantly running and is not static in a pool. The fountains and water dispensers that can be found throughout Alhambra served the same purpose.

Aside from needing the water source for obvious hygienic purposes and religious observances, water management was also the backbone of the agricultural activities of Alhambra. Najjaj (2014) discussed the recent discoveries that suggested a space between the walls of Alhambra and the Generalife that was probably used to cultivate agricultural productions such as vegetable gardens, and other agricultural holdings. The irrigation for this area might come from the *Acequia de Tercio* which channelled the water source to Generalife.

## Conclusion

Despite their limitations in governing a small territory in contrast to its predecessors' vast political grandeur, the Nasrid did build the Alhambra, which many consider to be the sole existing magnum opus of al-Andalus legacy. The Alhambra had served its purposes, providing its Nasrid masters with stunning shelters and intimidating their Christian enemies for two and a half centuries. The palatine city, which was renowned for its hydraulic system for a kingdom with a harsh climate, acted as a key indicator of the emir's competence and prestige. The beautiful palaces adorned by their impressive architecture and planning made Alhambra the talks of the Islamic world and its capture in 1492 was greatly mourned.

Although many belittled the Nasrids and mocked their palatine city, saying it was built with cheap materials, the Alhambra managed to last for nearly ten centuries from the date it was built and withstand the harsh climates, multiple occupations, and changes of various rulers. The Alhambra, which began as a simple fortress, evolved into a palatine city, and now acts as a monumental museum that stands steadfast in the territory of modern Granada, displaying memories of the past. The fact that the Alhambra enchanted the Christian monarchs and persuaded them to not demolish it like other Islamic architectural sites speak volumes of its fascination.

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