



THE MOSQUE-CATHEDRAL
OF CORDOBA



The Mosque-Cathedral of Cordoba is one of the most exceptional monuments in the world, a testimony to the ancient alliance of art and faith.

Its Islamic architecture, with Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine touches, comes together with Christian architecture to create one of the most beautiful examples of its kind. Inside, among an impressive array of columns, arches and domes, we come across splendid works of art which bear witness to the passage of the centuries.

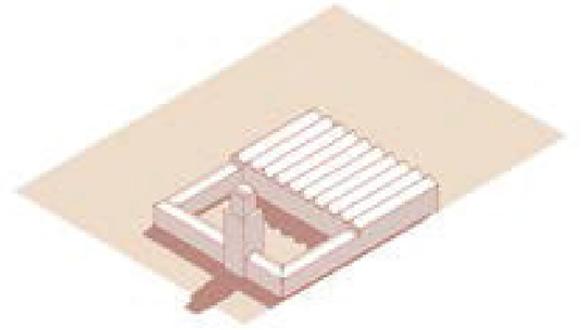
Those who admired the beauty of what was the great Umayyad Mosque of the West made sure that they looked after it. Today the Mosque-Cathedral of Cordoba shows the world the greatness of its history, which began with a Visigoth basilica, flowed into Caliphate splendour, and culminated with Gothic, Renaissance and Baroque art.

You are not looking at a precious relic of the past, nor are you in just another museum. You are entering a sacred place that is open to the entire world. The whole monumental site of the old Mosque was first consecrated as the Cathedral of Santa Maria in the year 1146 and definitively in 1236. Since then, and without missing a single day, the Chapter has held the Holy Mass for the Christian community in this beautiful and magnificent temple.

To better understand this, you must breathe in the air of spirituality evoked by its divine light, listen to the story of its artwork, read the reliefs of its choir stalls and admire the elegance of its two-coloured arches. On discovering the unique beauty of the Mosque-Cathedral of Cordoba, you will understand that it is a living building, one that has been transformed by men from different cultures and religions throughout history. As a result it will be etched in your heart that this temple is not enclosed within its walls, but instead invites you to contemplate the mystery of that which is holy.

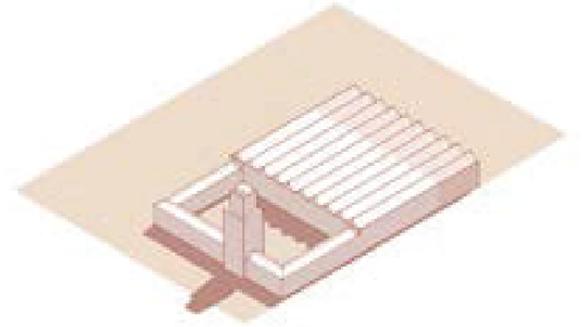
This space has been home to a collection of buildings among which was the **Visigoth Basilica of San Vicente** (mid-sixth century), which became the city's main Christian temple. With the arrival of the Muslims the area was divided and used by both communities.

Abd al-Rahman I built the original Mosque (786-788) in response to the growing population. Its floor plan includes eleven naves standing perpendicular to the qibla wall, with the central one being higher and wider than the side ones. Unlike other Muslim oratories, the qibla wall is not pointing towards Mecca, but instead faces south.



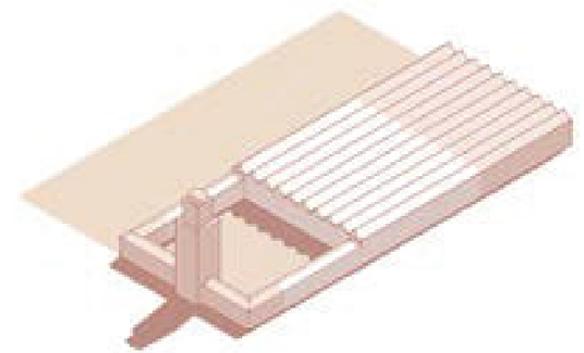
Mosque of Abd al-Rahman I

The period of prosperity experienced under the government of **Abd al-Rahman II** led to the **first enlargement** (833-848). The prayer hall was extended with the addition of eight south-facing naves.



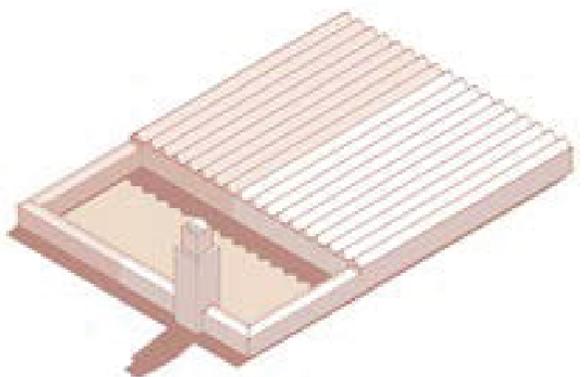
Enlargement of Abd al-Rahman II

Much later, in the year 951, the caliph **Abd al-Rahman III** began construction of a new minaret. This reached the height of 40 metres and inspired the minarets in the Mosques in Seville and Marrakesh. The Umayyad Caliphate saw the continuation of the period of political, social and cultural splendour which led to the city replacing Damascus in terms of importance. **Al-Hakam II** carried out the **second enlargement** (962-966), the most creative of all. Twelve new south-facing sections were added and the building acquired an elongated floor plan which tends to emphasise the mihrab and maqsurah as special focusses of attention.



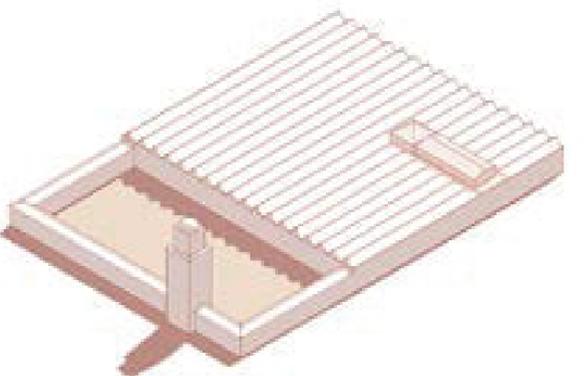
Enlargement of Al-Hakam II

The **final of the enlargements** (991) was a demonstration of power by Almanzor, hajib of the caliph Hisham II. In this phase the site was extended towards the east by adding eight new naves. The end result is a rectangular space characterised by its proportions.



Enlargement of Almanzor

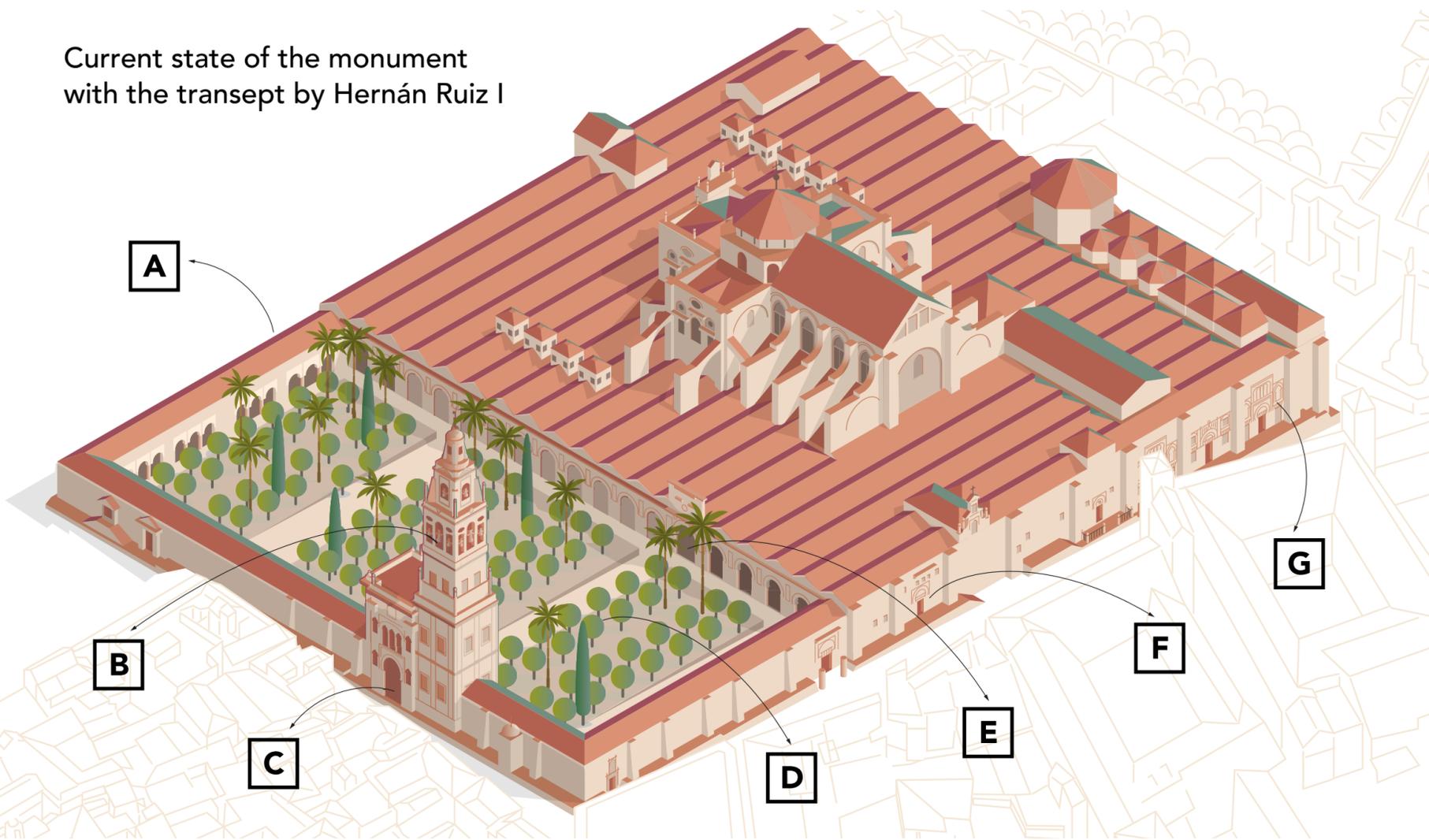
With the conquest of Cordoba in 1236 the Aljama was consecrated as a Catholic church, installing the main altar in the former skylight of Al-Hakam II. In 1489 adaptation works were carried out to reflect the new religion with the construction of a **Main Chapel**. Once the Transept was completed in 1607 this space became known as the **Villaviciosa Chapel**.



Royal Chapel and Gothic Nave

It was **Bishop Alonso Manrique** who ordered the building of the **transept** (1523-1606). The construction process was begun by Hernán Ruiz I in an imaginative way, combining the caliphal naves with the transept in the form of lateral naves. Other architects took over the work after his death, including his son Hernán Ruiz II and Juan de Ochoa. From the outside, the transept's brickwork gives the building an appearance of verticality which contrasts with the horizontal sensation provided by the Mosque.

Current state of the monument
with the transept by Hernán Ruiz I



A PUERTA DE SANTA CATALINA (DOOR OF SAINT CATHERINE)

Its current appearance is the result of the work of Hernán Ruiz II in the sixteenth century.

B BELL TOWER

The remains of the old minaret of Abd al-Rahman III are now integrated into the tower, onto which Hernán Ruiz III added the belfry.

C PUERTA DEL PERDÓN (DOOR OF FORGIVENESS)

This was completed in 1377. It has been the main point of entry to the site from the start and it shows influences from different eras.

D PATIO DE LOS NARANJOS (ORANGE TREE COURTYARD)

This acquired its current form at the end of the sixteenth century, following the concept of a garden filled with palm, cypress and orange trees.

E PUERTA DE LAS PALMAS (DOOR OF THE PALMS)

In 1533 Hernán Ruiz I remodelled this, adding an upper plateresque section.

F PUERTA DE SAN SEBASTIÁN (DOOR OF SAINT SEBASTIAN)

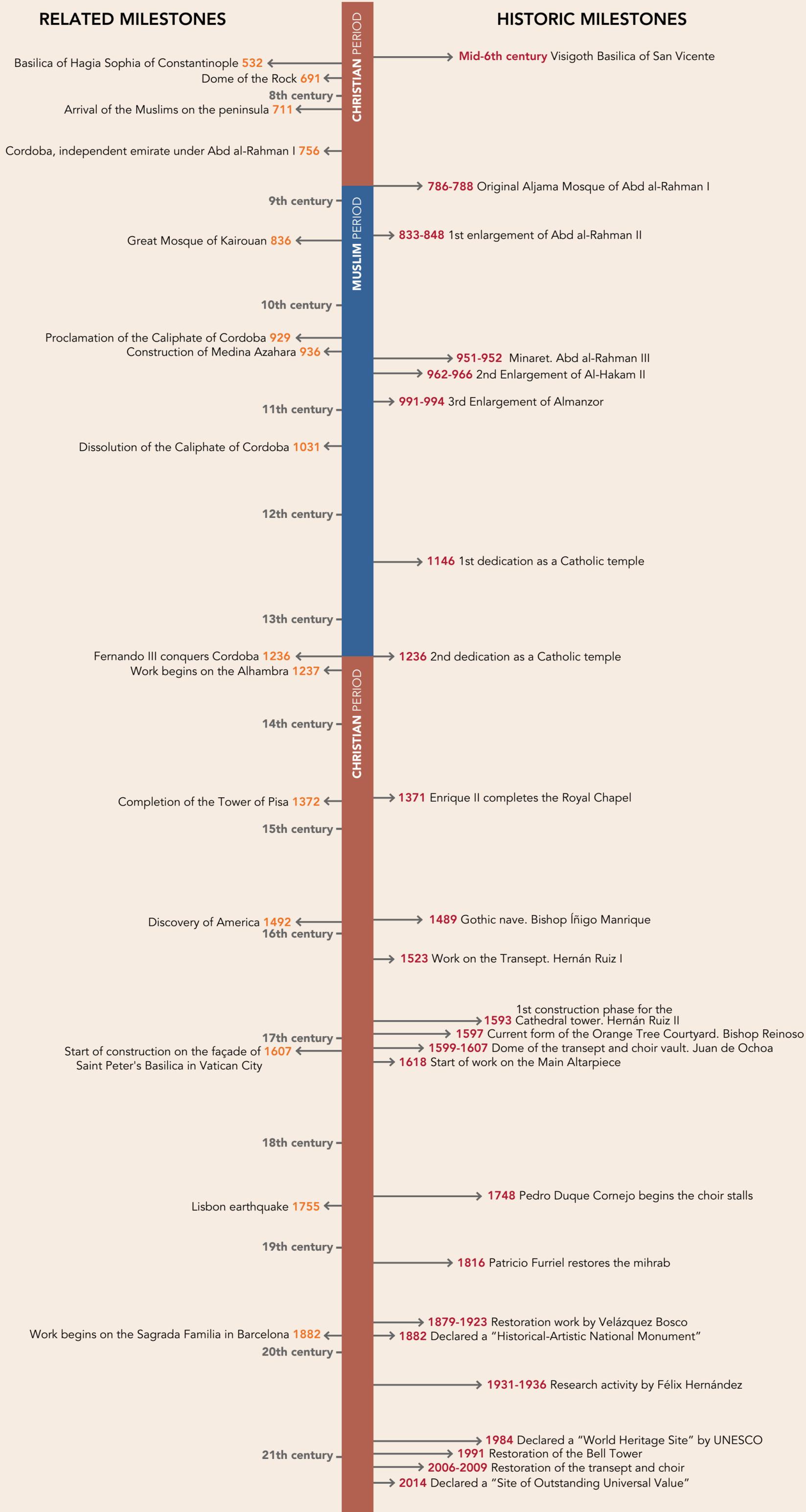
This contains the oldest remains of Muslim architectural decoration in Spain and the first Arabic inscription on the building, dating back to the year 855.

G PUERTA DEL SABAT (DOOR OF THE SABAT)

This door led to a raised passageway that connected the maqsurah with the Umayyad palace. Its function was to allow the caliph to go and pray.

RELATED MILESTONES

HISTORIC MILESTONES



VISITOR MAP-GUIDE



1 ORIGINAL MOSQUE OF ABD AL-RAHMAN I. The floor plan of the original mosque was based on a basilica model and followed the example of mosques in Damascus and the al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem. The reuse of materials gives it a noticeable Hellenistic, Roman and Visigoth feel. Its originality lies in the construction which is based on the superposition of a double arch which allows for higher ceilings and which has determined the constructive evolution of the building and influenced the history of its architecture.



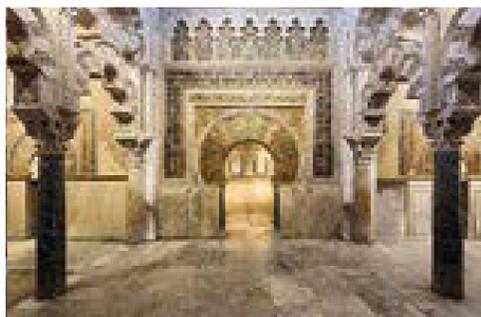
2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AREA OF SAN VICENTE. Under the Mosque-Cathedral of Cordoba is the archaeological evidence of the existence of the Basilica of San Vicente. The pieces recovered during its excavation are now on display in the San Vicente exhibition area. These include a fragment of a Paleo-Christian sarcophagus, a marble plaque with the chi-rho (a monogram of chi (X) and rho (P) as the first two letters of Greek Khristos Christ) and the remains of a Visigoth font.

3 ENLARGEMENT OF ABD AL-RAHMAN II. The original structure was retained, although the bases of the columns were removed. The main contribution from this phase is eleven capitals worked using a boring technique and made by local craftsmen.

4 THE ORIGINAL MAIN CHAPEL. VILLAVICIOSA CHAPEL. The change to Christian worship led to the construction of a large Gothic nave with a basilica floor plan, which originally boasted ornate walls. What stands out here is the roof, where transverse arches were used to support a framework of gabled wooden coffers, on which plant motifs alternate with inscriptions in Latin and Greek.



5 ENLARGEMENT OF AL-HAKAM II. The involvement of Al-Hakam II in the Aljama led, while respecting the original model, to the enrichment of its appearance, making it more innovative and lavish in style. Stylised plant motifs, marble and mosaics were just some of the materials used for the maqsurah and the mihrab to create one of the most beautiful and imaginative structures in the world of architecture. The space is enhanced by the construction of four skylights, the first in the entrance to this enlargement and the other three preceding the mihrab. Their function is to provide more light and to display a rectangular floor plan covered by a corbel vault of intersecting arches.



6 MIHRAB. Instead of being a mere niche to show the direction of prayer this became a small octagonal room covered by a scallop shell dome. The ornamental work of the mosaics comes from the Byzantine tradition, which arrived through the craftsmen sent by Emperor Nicephorus II. Its expressive force lies in the plant motif bays and the richness of the mosaics which cover both the mihrab and the adjoining doors to the Treasury and the Sabat.



7 ROYAL CHAPEL. The power and religiousness of the Spanish Monarchy can also be seen in this building. It was King Enrique II who, in the year 1371, ordered the construction of the Royal Chapel as the burial place of Alfonso XI and Fernando IV. This area, which cannot be visited today, is covered by a vault of crossed arches, decorated with beautiful honeycomb work.

8 ENLARGEMENT OF ALMANZOR. From a sculptural point of view, the extensive work of Almanzor did not lead to any notable contribution, as can be seen from the voussoirs of the arches which do not alternate between stone and brick but have instead been faked through painting. He also extended the patio, to which he added an underground cistern. With Almanzor the building lost the axis around which it was structured, acquiring the quality of an infinite construction and giving the site an enveloping feeling.

9 PARISH OF THE TABERNACLE. Its main attraction lies in the ornamental wall paintings started in 1583 by César Arbasia, an artist who undertook this work focussing on the artistic fashions in Italy at that time. Its iconography focuses on the martyrs of the city, with the highlight being the Holy Supper of the presbytery.



10 TRANSEPT. This is a space that, as a true feat of engineering, provides us with a perfect dialogue between Gothic, Renaissance and Mannerism art. The transept was established as an immense skylight to inundate the building with light and adds a beautiful complexity to the extraordinary building.

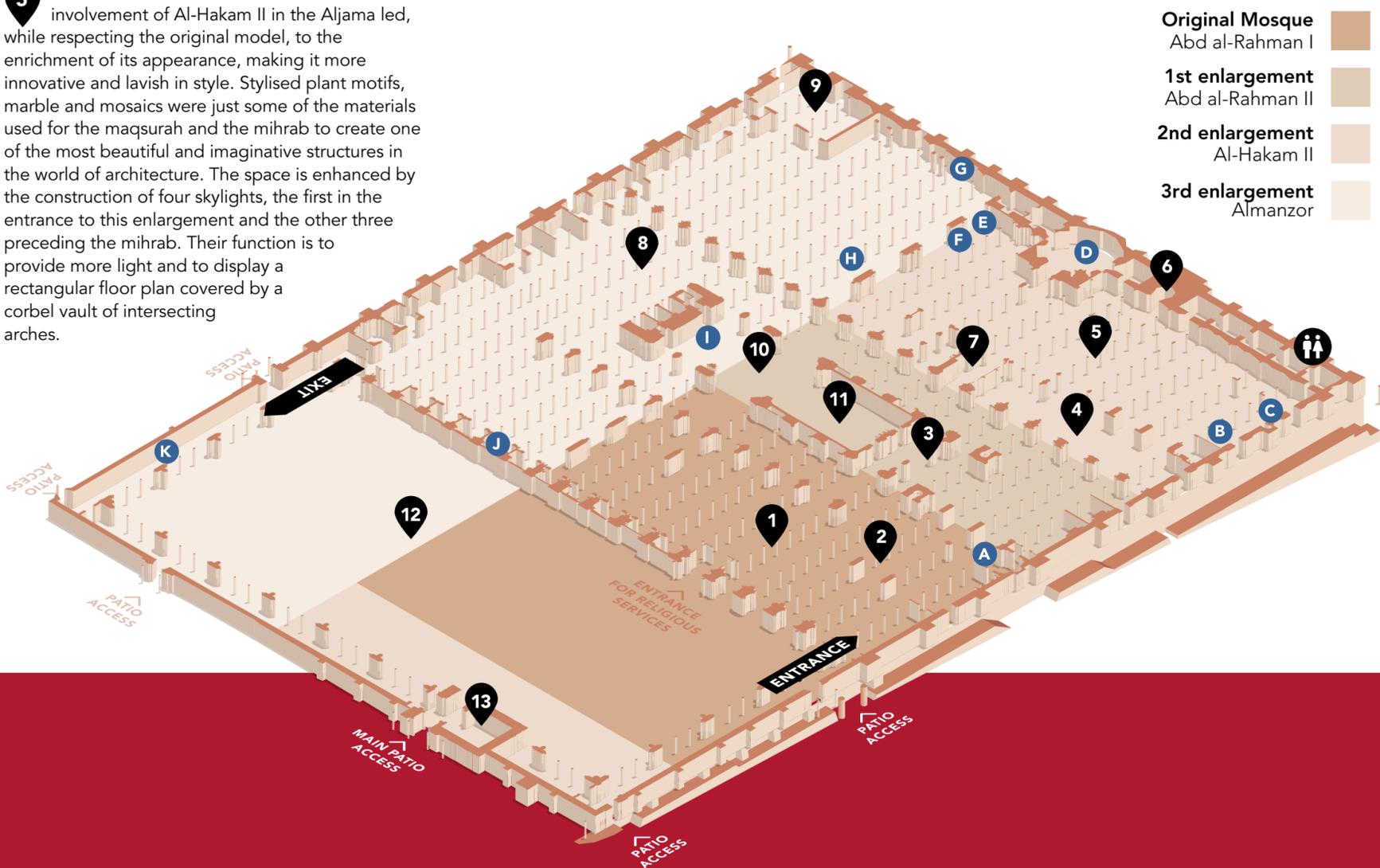
11 CHOIR STALLS. In 1748, the Chapter commissioned Pedro Duque Cornejo with the sculpting of the choir stalls. He created a superb space both in terms of the quality of its execution and its iconographic significance. He also created the Episcopal See that presides over the premises with its particularly magnificent "Ascension of Christ".



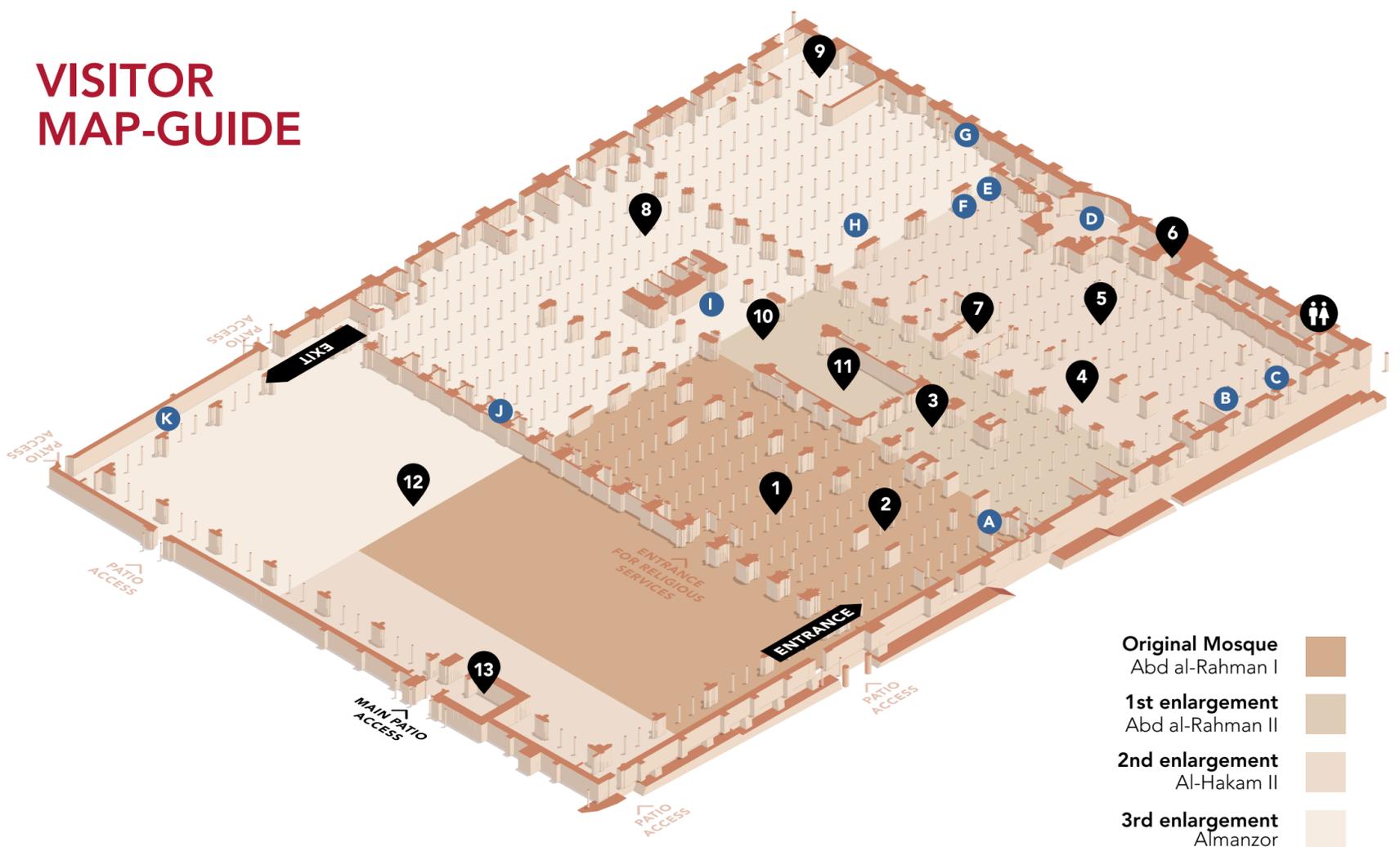
12 ORANGE TREE COURTYARD. The former Muslim ablutions patio made way for the Christian patio. Its current appearance is due to the involvement of Bishop Francisco Reinoso, who added the rows of orange trees as a continuation of the columns in the prayer hall.



13 BELL TOWER. From the original Muslim minaret to the current bell tower, this element has marked the image of the city, rising as it does impressively over the landscape. It has been added to and remodelled by various architects and this gives it the unique appearance that it has today.



VISITOR MAP-GUIDE



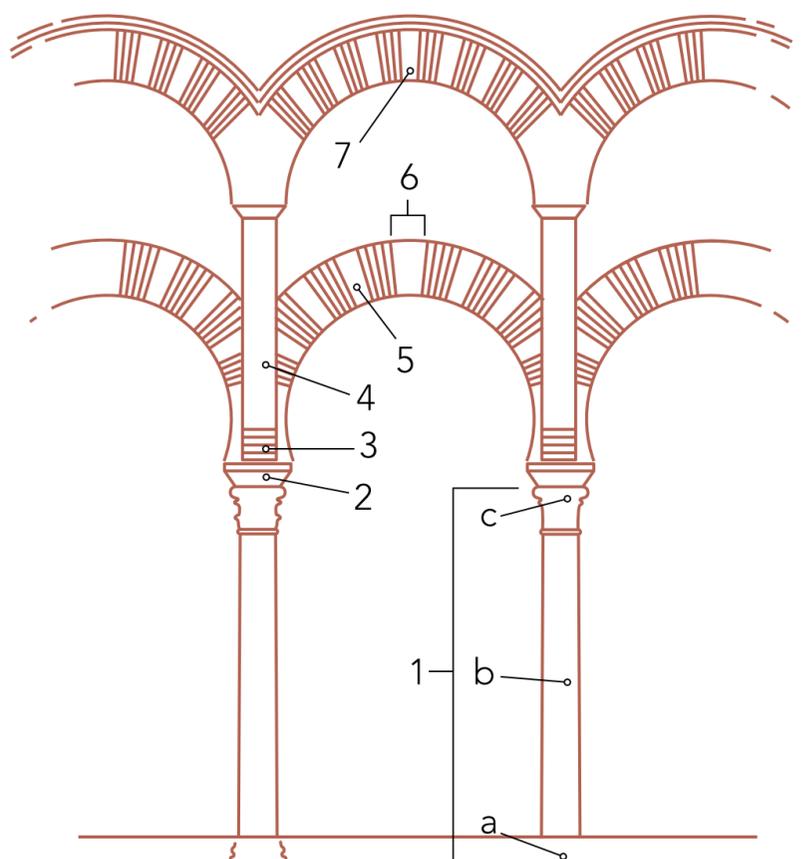
- Original Mosque**
Abd al-Rahman I
- 1st enlargement**
Abd al-Rahman II
- 2nd enlargement**
Al-Hakam II
- 3rd enlargement**
Almanzor

WE ALSO RECOMMEND

- A** Chapel of Nuestra Señora de la Concepción.
- B** Painted altarpiece of the Santa Cena by Pablo de Céspedes.
- C** Exhibition area for the old Basilica of San Vicente.
- D** Chapel of Santa Teresa and Tesoro Catedralicio.
- E** Painted altar of the Encarnación by Pedro de Córdoba.
- F** Anonymous wall painting of Bautismo de Cristo.
- G** Stonemasons' marks from the enlargement of Almanzor.
- H** Original eastern wall from the enlargement of Al-Hakam II.
- I** Main Altarpiece, with paintings by Antonio Palomino.
- J** Altarpiece from the chapel of Nuestra Señora del Rosario, with paintings by Antonio del Castillo.
- K** Beams from the original roofing.

Construction Module.

Being influenced by the aqueducts and triumphal arches of ancient Rome, the space is configured through a framework of columns on which sits a system of superimposed double arches. This creative solution, bringing together various architectural elements, is not only audacious and highly individual, but also creates a noticeable feeling of transparency, gracefulness - and lightness.



- | | |
|------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Column: | 3. Modillion of rolls |
| a. Base | 4. Pilaster |
| b. Shaft | 5. Horseshoe arch |
| c. Capital | 6. Voussoir |
| 2. Cyma | 7. Semi-circular arch |

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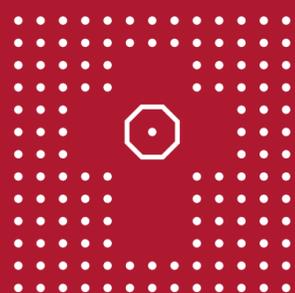
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The **Mosque-Cathedral of Cordoba** has been a National Monument since 1882. It was declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1984 and in June 2014 was given the honour of being classified as a Site of Outstanding Universal Value, recognising that the religious use of the temple has guaranteed the preservation of the monument.

The **Cathedral Chapter of Cordoba**, sensitive to the cultural heritage and aware of the importance of the legacy received, has since 1236 focussed its efforts on preserving and raising awareness about the temple, which has allowed this monument to survive into modern times.

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