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The Scenography of Power in Al-Andalus and the ʿAbbasid and Byzantine Ceremonials: Christian Ambassadorial Receptions in the Court of Cordoba in a Comparative Perspective

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Abstract

This essay considers ceremonial features represented during Christian diplomatic receptions held at the court of Cordoba, under the rule of Caliphs ʿAbd al-Raḥmān III (912–961) and al-Ḥakam II (961–976), in a comparative perspective. The declaration of the Umayyad Caliphate of the West by ʿAbd al-Raḥmān III marked the institutionalization of a carefully elaborated court ceremonial, reaching its greatest development under the rule of al-Ḥakam II. Detailed official ambassadorial ceremonies will be addressed, such as receptions of ambassadors from Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos, and King Otto I, or the reception and submission of Ordoño IV, deposed king of Leon, accounted by both Muslim and Christian sources. Such ceremonies will be compared with ʿAbbasid and Byzantine similar receptions, analyzing furthermore the origin and symbology of those rituals within the framework of diplomatic and cultural exchanges and encounters.

Keywords

Al-Andalus – Umayyads of Cordoba – ceremonial – diplomacy – Madīna al-Zahrāʾ – ʿAbbasids – Byzantium

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The Stage of Ceremonial: Madīnat al-Zahrā'

Ceremonial features were already introduced in the court of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān II, as it can be perceived through the narrative of Ibn Ḥayyān on the *bayʿa* ceremony (oath of allegiance) of the *amīr*, as well as through the account reporting the innovations introduced in the court of Cordoba by the famous musician of the ʿAbbasid court, Ziryāb.[1] In fact, such innovations allow us to perceive the construction of a truly court society in al-Andalus. Ibn Ḥayyān also report several diplomatic missions received in Cordoba under the rule of the fourth Umayyad *amīr* of al-Andalus.[2] Nevertheless, the lack of detailed descriptions of solemn receptions is not only a reflection of the lack of sources but more importantly the lack of a standardized, customized, and established ceremonial. Indeed, Ibn Ḥayyān, al-Maqqarī or Ibn ʿIdhārī, for ʿAbd al-Raḥmān II's rule, do not provide the reader with any specifics of how, where and even when exactly foreign missions were received. It is only possible to learn that envoys were received in audience. Thus, ceremonial details are almost inexistent in such reports of diplomatic exchanges in the ninth century. Although the first Byzantine embassy was received in Cordoba by ʿAbd al-Raḥmān II, nothing reports how both ambassadors were received and thus ceremonial is not mentioned. Only the content of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān's letter is revealed.[3] Some scattered ritualized gestures and situations are reported by Ibn Ḥayyān for the mission of al-Ghazāl to Theophilos's court in Constantinople, sent by ʿAbd al-Raḥmān II after 839/840. Other exchanges took place, such as with a presumable Viking kingdom and with Iberian and Frankish powers.[4]

For exchanges with the Carolingian world, the work of Philippe Sénac is the most complete, surveying not only diplomatic interactions but also military

1 Ibn Ḥayyān, *Crónica de los emires al-Hakam I y ʿAbd ar-Rahman II entre los años 796 y 847* [*al-Muqtabis II-1*], trans. Mahmud ʿAli Makki and Federico Corriente (Zaragoza: Instituto de Estudios Islámicos y del Oriente Próximo, 2001), 167; 193–215.

2 This has been the subject of my MA dissertation. See Elsa Cardoso, "Diplomacy and Oriental Influence in the Court of Cordoba (9th–10th centuries)," (MA diss., University of Lisbon, 2015), which studies diplomatic exchanges with Christian powers. For diplomatic exchanges with Western Christian powers, see also Abdurahman Ali al-Hajji, *Andalusian Diplomatic Relations with Western Europe during the Umayyad Period* (*A.H. 138–366/A.D. 755–976*) (Beirut: Dar al-Irshad, 1970).

3 Ibn Ḥayyān, *al-Muqtabis II-1*, 294–298 ("Noticia de la correspondencia entre el emperador bizantino y el emir ʿAbd al-Raḥmān").

4 See note 2.

and political motivations, typical of a frontier society.[5] However, and as stated above, no ceremonial is mentioned in sources, which only report the arrival of embassies, though also mentioning gifts. The role of gift exchange in diplomatic contexts will be discussed below.

It was only under the rule of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān III that ceremonial was introduced as more developed, institutionalized, and detailed. Receptions of envoys sent from Constantinople are described by Ibn ʿIdhārī, Ibn Khaldūn, and al-Maqqarī, with great pomp and display of ceremonial. The first Caliph of Cordoba initiated the construction of the greatest architectonical project of al-Andalus, the palace-city of Madīnat al-Zahrāʾ, which was indeed a condition for the development of court ceremonial. However, other conditions were necessary to be brought together before such an architectural, ceremonial, and legitimizing construction could be consecrated. As noted by Miquel Barceló, ceremonial that developed around the "evanescent caliph" was not the result of a mere ideological requirement. It was also the result of a strong political power based on the extensive collection of taxes, which gave rise to a wide state bureaucracy, allowing the caliph to become an unattainable and invisible figure, though symbolically present at all times in his palace-city complex.[6] Thus, the ideological requirement of ceremonial, which emanated from the axis of the "evanescent caliph," was indeed the result of a centralized and tax-efficient state. The caliph resorted to symbology to allow the construction of the figure of the sovereign as the center of the cosmos, the sun from which sunbeams irradiate throughout his domains. Al-Maqqarī, citing Ibn Bashkuwāl, mentions that in the center of a hall named Qasr al-Khilāfa there was a basin full of quicksilver. This hall caused the most splendid and terrifying experience for those who visited it, as its roof was made of golden and silver tiles, as well as transparent blocks of marble of multiple colors. The transparent marble was also used for the walls. Once the sun penetrated in this hall, the caliph would order one of his Sclavonians to set the quicksilver in motion, which would create a terrifying and resplendent vision of multiple flashes, as if the room was moving. As mentioned by the historian, the caliph, resorting to luxury materials and quicksilver, meant to create the illusion that the room was always

5 Phillipe Sénac, *Los soberanos carolingios y al-Andalus* (*siglos VIII–IX*), trans. Beatriz and María José Molina Rueda (Granada: University of Granada, 2010).

6 Miquel Barceló, "El Califa Patente: el ceremonial omeya de Córdoba o la escenificación del poder," in *El Sol que salió por Occidente. Estudios sobre el Estado omeya en al-Andalus*, ed. Miquel Barceló (Valencia: Universitat de València, 2010), 137–162 at 153–154.

moving and following the course of the sun.[7] Thus, the caliph was the sun reflected on the basin containing quicksilver, placed in the center of the exuberant and gardened palace-city of Madīnat al-Zahrāʾ, which represented the cosmic order of the world. Ideology, ceremonial, architecture, political centralization, and a strong fiscal system are crucial ingredients for the recipe of the caliphal program of both ʿAbd al-Raḥmān III and his son, al-Ḥakam II, and the first three elements cannot be created without the last two.

The flashing sun on the golden and platinum walls of the Majlis al-Khilāfa described by al-Maqqarī,[8] reflects as well the name of the city, Madīnat al-Zahrāʾ. The construction of the caliphal city, together with its name, were furthermore a response to the continuous strength of the Fatimid Caliphate, which had previously built the palace-city of al-Mahdiyya. Al-Zahrāʾ means "the most resplendent" or "the brightest," and is also the name given to Prophet Muḥammad's daughter, Fāṭima al-Zahrāʾ, from whom the Fatimids claimed to be descendants. Madīnat al-Zahrāʾ thus symbolizes the centralization of power under the Caliphate of Cordoba, held by the righteous Umayyad caliphs who fought through diplomacy against the heterodoxy of the Fatimids in the Mediterranean. Although not covered by this article, Fatimid ceremonial will be subject to some references throughout the text. Fatimid ceremonial has been the subject of various studies by Paula Sanders, who addresses protocol and symbols, referring to the centrality of the figure of the caliph within the architectural ritualized palace-city.[9] In fact, for the Umayyads, it was not easy to compete with the messianic features surrounding the figure of the Fatimid Caliph and Shiiʿte Ismaili doctrine. Fierro has no doubt that the declaration of the Umayyad Caliphate of al-Andalus was a direct response to the previous declaration of the Fatimid Caliphate in 909. She further adds that although the Umayyads of Cordoba considered the ʿAbbasids as usurpers, they only decided to declare their own caliphate in the west once the Fatimid threat was revealed.[10] Innovations from the ʿAbbasid court of Baghdad were introduced in al-Andalus, especially after the rule of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān II, as stated above. Such innovations were not only adopted but also adapted for the Umayyad court. Al-Maqqarī, when describing the adoption of the caliphal title by ʿAbd

7 Aḥmad bin Muḥammad al-Maqqarī, *The History of the Mohammedan Dynasties in Spain. Nafḥ al-ṭib min ghosnī al-Andalusī al-Ratīb wa-Tārīkh Lisān ad-Dīn Ibn al-Khaṭīb*, trans. Pascual de Gayangos, vol. II (London: Oriental Translation Fund, 1843), 236–237.

8 al-Maqqarī, *The History*, 236–237.

9 Paula Sanders, *Ritual, Politics, and the City in Fatimid Cairo* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994).

10 Fierro, *Abderramán III y el califato omeya de Córdoba* (San Sebastián: Nerea, 2011), 74.

al-Raḥmān III, states that the sovereign was legitimized to take such decision and the insignia of the caliphate, as the ʿAbbasid rule was decadent and weak, ruled by Turkish freedmen.[11] This was also the case with the Fatimid Caliphate. As the Fatimids also shared with other Muslim courts the same symbols and culture, and in order to challenge the ʿAbbasid Caliphate, they appropriated their signs of authority.[12]

Madīnat al-Zahrāʾ was also the stage of ambassadorial receptions. Clifford Geertz's theory of the Negara—a Sanskrit word which means palace, capital, or state, and names a Balinese city—describes a "system of superordinate political authority," which represents the most important center of the cosmic hierarchy. It will be used as a model for the analysis of ceremonial symbology undertaken in this article,[13] which posits that ceremonial is indeed a key ingredient to represent such a cosmic center of divine *imitatio* by the ruler.[14]

The construction of the palace-city of Madīnat al-Zahrāʾ had as well its precedents both in Byzantium and in Baghdad. The role of architecture for ceremonial was crucial, as the envoys were conducted through several pavilions of the palace, as in a parade, before reaching the presence of the sovereign. In fact, Madīnat al-Zahrāʾ also reveals a structure of palace-complex, shaped with several pavilions, carefully constructed to mimic the state and divine hierarchy. Madīnat al-Zahrāʾ was also idealized as a terrace construction carefully designed according to the hierarchy of the city. In fact, Madīnat al-Zahrāʾ is seen as the result of the union between the architectonic ideas present at both Baghdad and Constantinople palace-complexes.[15] For Madīnat al-Zahrāʾ, the caliphal residence was part of the uppermost plan of the city, the intermediate level was dedicated to the reception hall, the Majlis al-Sharqī, and the inferior level was accessible to the Cordovan subjects, who would imagine how the caliph and his entourage would live in the upper-level gardens of his palace.[16]

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11 Al-Maqqarī, *Nafḥ II*, 147.

12 Sanders, *Ritual, Politics, and the City in Fatimid Cairo*, 7.

13 Clifford Geertz, *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 4.

14 Expression employed by Suzanne Stetkevych, *The Poetics of Islamic Legitimacy: Myth, Gender and Ceremony in the Classical Arabic Ode* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2002), 246.

15 D. Fairchild Ruggles, *Gardens, Landscapes and Vision in the Palaces of Islamic Spain* (University Park PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), referenced in Nadia Maria El Cheikh, "The Institutionalization of the ʿAbbasid Ceremonial," in *Diverging Paths?: The Shapes of Power and Institutions in Medieval Christendom and Islam*, ed. John Hudson and Ana Rodriguez (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 357.

16 Fierro, "Madīnat al-Zahrāʾ, el Paraíso y los Fatimíes," *Al-Qanṭara* XXV, 2 (2004): 314.

Upon its construction between 953 and 957, the Majlis al-Sharqī became the main axis of the caliphal city, which replaced the centrality of the Dār al-Mulk, the caliphal residence located in the upper level.[17] The terrace-based construction of the palace-city of the western Umayyad Caliphate falls within the paradigm of the Late Antiquity. In fact, the palace-city complex of Constantinople was also architecturally planned as a terrace-based city, erected over the Bosphorus, where the most important buildings, first built in the sixth century, were the Constantinian palace and the Hippodrome, located in the upper level where court ceremonial and court life took place.[18] Nevertheless, due to the antiquity of the Byzantine palace, the uppermost level progressively became only a stage for special ceremonial occasions, and the lower level was developed as the central core of daily court life, with the Chrysotriklinos as its axis. Meanwhile in Madīnat al-Zahrāʾ, a city that only lasted for less than a hundred years, the intermediate level was dedicated to solemn ceremonial occasions, such as ambassadorial receptions. Court ceremonial was also the main cause for the foundation of the palace of Baghdad, established by al-Manṣūr in the eighth century, and by the ninth century Theophilos, who took several court models from the ʿAbbasids, built the Byras Palace in Constantinople in imitation of the palace of Baghdad.[19] The ʿAbbasid dynasty and administration, upon increasing its bureaucracy, founded the palace-city complex of Samarra in the ninth century, and thus Nadia Maria El Cheikh believes its construction opened a new precedent in Islam: the concept of a royal palace "hidden, secluded and self-sufficient."[20] Thus, the same concept persists when constructing the palace complex of Madīnat al-Zahrāʾ, where the caliph was always present, but at the same time evanescent, secluded, evidencing his divine character, as his figure could not be seen nor represented, although the architecture was in charge of attributing to every object a caliphal meaning.

17 Antonio Vallejo, "Madinat al-Zahra: notas sobre la planificación y transformación del palacio," *Artigrama* 22 (2007): 86, 93; Francisco Juez, "Símbolos de Poder en la Arquitectura de al-Andalus," vol. 1 (PhD diss., Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 1999), 245–246.

18 Jeffrey Featherstone, "The Great Palace as Reflected in De Ceremoniis," *Visualisierungen von Herrschaft. Fruehmittelalterliche Residenzen—Gestalt und Zeremoniell* [*Byzas 5*], ed. F.A. Bauer (Istanbul, 2006), 47–49.

19 Nicolas Drocourt, "Quelques aspects du rôle des ambassadeurs dans les transferts culturels entre Byzance et ses voisins (VII^{e}–XII^{e} siècles)," in *Acteurs des transferts culturels en Méditerranée médiévale*, ed. R. Abdelatif et al. (Munich: 2012), 31–47 at 33. El Cheikh, "'Abbasid ceremonial," 355–356.

20 Nadia Maria El Cheikh, "The Chamberlains," in *Crisis and Continuity at the Abbasid Court. Formal and Informal Politics in the Caliphate of al-Muqtadir* (*295–320/908–32*), ed. Maaike van Berkel et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 145–164 at 145.

Ceremonial Accounts

I shall now discuss ceremonial features displayed on receptions of foreign envoys, and their correlations with both the ʿAbbasid and Byzantine ceremonials. Descriptions of ambassadorial receptions taking place in Cordoba, accounted by Ibn Hayyān, Ibn ʿIdhārī, Ibn Khaldūn or al-Maqqārī will be attended to. As for the ʿAbbasid ambassadorial receptions, the protocol contained in *Rusūm Dār al-Khilāfa* of Hilāl al-Ṣābiʾ will be considered for models concerning Iraqi ceremonial, as well as a particular description of a Byzantine embassy received in Muḥarram 305 A.H. (June–July 917 CE) by the ʿAbbasid Caliph al-Muqtadir bi-Allāh, transmitted by Miskawayh in his *Tajārib al-Umām*.[21] Descriptions concerning ʿAbbasid ceremonial receptions are scarce, as already noted by Marius Canard, one of the most important orientalist historians who attempted a comparison between Fatimid and Byzantine ceremonial.[22] The same reception mentioned by Miskawayh is accounted by Hilāl al-Ṣābiʾ,[23] and yet another source describes it with the utmost detail, *Tārīkh Baghdād* by al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, which is conveyed in detail by Hugh Kennedy.[24] As for Byzantine receptions, the descriptions of Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos's *De Ceremoniis* will be attended to.[25]

I will analyze the procedures during receptions of ambassadors, as well as objects or insignia of power exclusively present in such ceremonies. The intent is not merely to compare shared display of ceremonial among the three courts—Constantinople, Baghdad, and Cordoba—but also to attempt to decipher its symbolism. Indeed, the mere fascination caused by such ceremonial descriptions do not display more than its mere presentation, and Clifford Geertz's efforts to scrutinize the symbology of power of the Negara state was a great step for the interpretation of cultures and its structures. As he puts it, if one wants to be left with more than the mere "fascinated wonderment," one must undertake the task of digging out state rituals, as they do indeed embody

21 Miskawayh, *Tajārib al-Umām. The experience of the nations*, ed. H.F. Amedroz, vol. I, Reigns of Muqtadir, Qahir and Radi (London: Oxford, 1920), 53–56.

22 Marius Canard, "Le cérémonial fatimite et le cérémonial byzantine. Essai de comparaison," in *Byzance et les musulmans de Proche Orient*, Marius Canard (London: Variorium Reprints, 1973), 109.

23 Hilāl al-Ṣābiʾ, *Rusūm Dār al-Khilāfa. The Rules and Regulations of the ʿAbbasid Court*, trans. Elie A. Salem (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1977), 16–18.

24 Hugh Kennedy, *When Baghdad Ruled the Muslim World. The Rise and Fall of Islam's Greatest Dynasty* (United States: Da Capo, 2004), 152–156.

25 Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos, *The Book of Ceremonies*, trans. Ann Moffat and Maxeme Tall, vol. 2 (Canberra: Australian Association for Byzantine Studies, 2012).

doctrine, even if its mere form of presentation does not allow the immediate apprehension of its symbolism. Therefore, at first, the approach must be the description of particular symbolic forms, and secondly the aim is to contextualize such forms within the whole "structure of meaning."[26] Thus, this article aims at showing and understanding what the presentation of such display of ceremonial is representative of.

The first detailed account of an embassy received in Cordoba, at Madīnat al-Zahrāʾ, is transmitted in detail by al-Maqqarī. As al-Maqqarī uses other primary sources, Ibn Ḥayyān, as well as Ibn Khaldūn, the Byzantine embassy can either be placed in August 949 or in 947, respectively.[27] A detailed account of an ambassadorial reception at Madīnat al-Zahrāʾ is also transmitted by a Christian source, the biographer of John of Gorze, upon the reception of Otto I's embassy at Cordoba, and details of the reception and its preparation coincide with those described by Arab sources.[28] Descriptions or details missing in one source are sometimes made up for by other chronicles, and thus we can reconstruct each step taken during ambassadorial receptions. Not only were ambassadors sent in foreign missions to Cordoba, but rulers of Iberian Christian principalities also presented themselves at the Andalusi capital. This was the case of Queen Regent Toda Aznárez, who was received at Madīnat al-Zahrāʾ in ca. 958/9, accompanied by her son and King of Navarre, García Sánchez, and her grandson, deposed king of Leon, Sancho I.[29] It was also the case of Sancho I's rival, his cousin Ordoño IV, who was received in 962 by al-Ḥakam II at the palace-city complex with the state of the art ceremonial display. Indeed, although we possess several accounts of embassies that testify the incessant arrival of foreign missions to Cordoba, only a few account the

26 Geertz, *Negara*, 103.

27 Al-Maqqarī, *Nafḥ II*, 137–138. Ibn Khaldūn also accounts directly these exchanges in his ʿIbar: see Ibn Khaldūn, *Kitāb al-ʿibar wa-dīwān al-mubtadaʾ wa-al-khabar fī ayyām al-ʿArab wa-al-ʿajam wa-al-barbar wa-man ʿāṣarahym min dhawī al-sulṭān al-akhbar wa-huwa tarīkh waḥīd ʿaṣrih*, vol. 4 (Cairo: Bulaq, 1284 AH/1867 AD), 142–143. Ibn ʿIdhārī mentions as well these diplomatic exchanges: see Ibn ʿIdhārī al-Marrākushī, *Histoire de l'Afrique et de l'Espagen intitulée al-Bayyano'l-Mogrib*, trans. E. Fagnan, vol. II (Algiers: Imprimerie Oriental Pierre Fontana, 1904), 353.

28 John, Abbot of Saint-Arnoul, was the biographer of John, Abbot of Gorze, who was sent by Otto I in diplomatic mission to Caliph ʿAbd al-Raḥmān III. See Juan, Abad de San Arnulfo, "La embajada del emperador de Alemania Otón I al califa de Córdoba Abderrahmán III. Vida de San Juan de Gortz," trans. Paz y Melia, *Boletín de la Academia de Ciencias, Bellas Letras y Nobles Artes de Córdoba*, 33 (1931): 123–150; Jean de Saint-Arnoul, *La vie de Jean, Abbé de Gorze*, trans. Michel Parisse (Paris: Picard, 1999): 142–161.

29 Al-Maqqarī, *Nafḥ II*, 139.

detailed ceremonial. Thus, the most detailed accounts of Christian embassies are transmitted by al-Maqqarī and John of St. Arnoul, biographer of John of Gorze. Al-Maqqarī compiles both Ibn Ḥayyān and Ibn Khaldūn, regarding the arrival of Byzantine ambassadors, in ca. 947–949, and the mission of the deposed king of Leon, Ordoño IV, received in 962 by al-Ḥakam II. John of St. Arnoul, biographer of John of Gorze accounts Otto I's mission, in June 956. Therefore, I will use mainly these three accounts for a comparative exercise. Foreign missions from North African rulers received in Cordoba are also thoroughly described by Ibn Ḥayyān for al-Ḥakam II's sovereignty, as the account analyzed and commented by Janina Safran, regarding the ceremonial submission of Jaʿfar bin ʿAlī al-Andalusī, former Fatimid governor of Masila.[30] Details regarding such ceremonies prepared for North African rulers and their representatives will also be of value for the reconstruction of ceremonial, though secondary for the theme of Christian diplomatic receptions at Cordoba.

The introduction of ceremonial within the Muslim Empire had a quick development. In fact, the paradox of such a display could be found among the first Muslim conquerors of the 7th century, who saw in ceremonial an unnecessary luxury.[31] Nevertheless, upon developing an urban society, the increasing bureaucracy demanded such protocol and display.

Ceremonial Preparation before the Reception: The Unattainable Caliph

The first characteristic common to Byzantine, ʿAbbasid and Umayyad ambassadorial receptions is the preparation of the ceremony, which goes farther beyond the reception in itself. Al-Maqqarī reports that no sooner had the caliph known about the arrival of Byzantine ambassadors at Pechina, in 949, he ordered preparations to be started, thus sending one of his courtiers, the theologian Yahya bin Muḥammad al-Layth, who was to escort them to their lodgings, at Munya Naṣr, and once in Cordoba the envoys witnessed a military ceremony whose generals and troops were fully armed and equipped to meet them. The caliph also ordered that two of his chief eunuchs were to meet and serve them at all times. The ambassadors were lodged at Munya Naṣr and attended by *ḥujjāb* and a guard of 16 men at the gate, in order to keep the intruders out of

30 Janina M. Safran, "Ceremony and Submission: The Symbolic Representation and Recognition of Legitimacy in Tenth Century al-Andalus," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, vol. 58, no. 3 (1992); Ibn Ḥayyān, *Anales Palatinos del Califa de Córdoba al-Hakam II, por ʿIsa Ibn Ahmad al-Razi*, trans. Emílio García Gómez (Madrid: Sociedad de Estudios y Publicaciones, 1967), 44–47.

31 El Cheikh, "'Abbasid cerimonial," 354.

the residence.[32] Indeed, the lodgings given to ambassadors were intended for their seclusion, in order not to occur any contact with the outside world, which might damage political negotiations. In fact, no other envoy experienced such a seclusion as John of Gorze, ambassador of Otto I, who was kept in his golden cage, lodgings strategically located outside the palace-complex, for almost three years. He lived there in anguish the "invisible presence of the patent caliph," having as intermediaries what he calls "sclavi cubiculari," "endlessly coming and going with letters, reports, notes."[33] These "sclavi cubiculari" were most certainly the eunuchs who were to serve as mediators between the ambassador and the court. The attitude of the caliph, who sent note to the Ottonian ambassador that he planned to keep him at Cordoba three times more than his own ambassadors were held in Germany, thus transmits the message, though exaggerated, of diplomatic reciprocity upon a presumable diplomatic accident caused by blasphemous language included in the correspondence between the two powers.[34] Similarly, at the arrival of Ordoño IV at Cordoba the general Hishām al-Musḥafī was sent at the head of an army, fully equipped. From the city gates of Cordoba, Ordoño IV was then taken to his lodgings, outside both Cordoba and Madīnat al-Zahrāʾ, at Munya al-Nawra, which was previously prepared and fully furnished in a way that both Ordoño and his companions would not have anything more to wish for.[35]

The same procedures are described by Miskawayh, as once Byzantine envoys arrived at Baghdad, via Euphrates, requesting a truce, they were lodged at the House of Ṣaʿid bin Makhald [sic] ("دار صاعد بن مَجَلْد"),[36] outside the palace complex, which was completely furnished by the powerful *wazīr* Abū al-Ḥasan bin al-Furāt.[37] It seems that foreign ambassadors at Constantinople were also lodged outside the main core of the palace-complex, if we assume that the Chrysion, the lodgings provided to the envoys of the *amīr* of Tarsus, as representatives of the ʿAbbasid Caliph, were located outside the palace-city.[38]

The next step, also common for the three courts, was the preparation for the reception. The date of the reception had first to be fixed upon, as it was for

32 Al-Maqqarī, *Nafḥ II*, 140.

33 Barceló, "El califa patente," 154, n. 14.

34 The ambassadors of the caliph of Cordoba were kept at Otto I's court for three years, and thus the sovereign of al-Andalus intended to keep the Germanic ambassadors secluded for nine years. See Juan, Abad de San Arnulfo, "La embajada," 130.

35 Al-Maqqarī, *Nafḥ II*, 161.

36 The vocalization of the word مَجَلْد is not clear.

37 Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, 54.

38 Constantine VII, *De Ceremoniis*, 586.

Byzantine ambassadors, which was scheduled for 29 August 949, according to Ibn Ḥayyān's version, transmitted by al-Maqqarī. Usually, ambassadors were kept waiting for some time before being received. This is more than evident for the reception of John of Gorze, who arrived at Cordoba early in 954 and was received during the summer of 956, after having left his country three years earlier. Hugh Kennedy also points out that, according to a tradition passed down from one of the caliph's concubine, Byzantine ambassadors in Baghdad were kept waiting for two months in Tikrit on the Tigris, in order for the preparations to be taken care of for their reception.[39] Therefore, the waiting seems to be a key factor for the reception of ambassadors, thus aiming at creating an anxiety which would lead to a thorough amazement when presented with the great display of ceremonial.

Furthermore, this anxiety is perceivable in Miskawayh's account. Byzantine ambassadors, having asked for an audience with Caliph al-Muqtadir bi-Allāh, were told by one of the courtiers, Abu ʿUmar ʿUday bin ʿAbd al-Bāqī, who was their interpreter, that a reception was not easy to schedule with the caliph, as they first had to meet with the *wazīr* in order to discuss the issue of the *basileus*'s letter to al-Muqtadir.[40] In fact, it appears that according to the perception of this particular reception, ʿAbbasid diplomacy foresaw that ambassadors, who came to negotiate a peace agreement and exchange prisoners,[41] should first display the content or the issue of the negotiations to the *wazīr*, who would then prepare the caliph for deciding on the matter, who in his turn would schedule an audience once negotiations were agreed upon. Most certainly this was a precaution, in order to prevent unpleasant and unpredictable situations, such as the one witnessed on 17 November 973 at the Majlis al-Sharqī at Madīnat al-Zahrā', when ambassadors of Queen Regent Elvira of Leon and the interpreter, the *qāḍī* of the Christian population of Cordoba, Asbagh bin ʿAbd Allāh bin Nabīl, were expelled by Caliph al-Ḥakam II from the hall during their audience, as both Elvira's message and the translation of the interpreter displeased the ruler.[42] Most certainly, when Caliph ʿAbd al-Raḥmān III tried to persuade John of Gorze to display the content of Otto's letter, he aimed at avoiding such a scene at the *majlis*. The Caliph of Cordoba knew from previous information that his own letter was perceived at Otto's court as containing blasphemies against Christ, or thus this was John of Gorze's perception. Therefore, and upon learning that the response of Otto included what John

39 Kennedy, *When Baghdad ruled the Muslim world*, 153.

40 Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, 53.

41 Kennedy, *When Baghdad ruled the Muslim world*, 152.

42 Ibn Ḥayyān, *Anales Palatinos*, 185.

of Gorze understood as refutation of such blasphemies, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān III refused to receive the ambassador, unless he would agree to be received only with the king's presents and dismiss the letters, which he did not. The matter was only solved after an ambassador was sent to Otto's court and a new letter was issued by the future Holy Roman Emperor.[43] Both ʿAbd al-Raḥmān III and al-Ḥakam II would always send, as seen before, their courtiers who would either accompany the envoys or stay with them at their lodgings, in order to acknowledge the intents of the embassy.

Nevertheless, the reception and the central role given to the ʿAbbasid vizier evidences Cordoba and Baghdad's different understanding of such administrative office. It has already been pointed out by Lévi-Provençal and Mohamed Meouak the originality of the Cordovan Umayyad state regarding the office of the *ḥijāba*, as gradually the *ḥājib* appears to have become the caliph's right arm instead of the *wazīr*. If by its turn the *wazīr* was the true right arm of the ʿAbbasid Caliph, in Cordoba this administrative office reveals to be a dignity or honorable title and, contrary to the practice in Baghdad, it was shared by several courtiers who served the Umayyad ruler as his advisers.[44] Indeed, both the accounts of Miskawayh and Hilāl al-Ṣābiʾ reveal the prominence and individuality of the *chargé* of the *wazīr* during al-Muqtadir's sovereignty. Miskawayh describes the ceremonial displayed for the *wazīr*'s reception of Byzantine ambassadors, similarly to the caliph's reception which will take place afterwards. It was requested that the army should be in its positions all the way from where the ambassadors were lodged up to the Great Hall, the one with the golden roof, furnished and decorated with expensive furniture and draperies worth 30 thousand dinars, located in the pavilion known as Dār al-Bustān (House of the Gardens) where the *wazīr* was to receive them, surrounded on his right and left by his servants, *quwwād* (commanders) and *āwuliyāʾ* [sic] ("الأَوْلِياء": governors, guardians, supporters)[45] who were lined until filling the terrace.[46] This scenario amazed the ambassadors, who were received by the *wazīr* seated

43 Juan, Abad de San Arnulfo, "La embajada," 123–150; Jean de Saint-Arnoul, *La vie de Jean*, 142–161.

44 Évariste Lévi-Provençal, "España Musulmana, hasta la caída del califato de Córdoba (711–1031 J.C.). Instituciones, Sociedad y Cultura," in *Historia de España*, ed. Ramón Menéndez Pidal, vol. V (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1982), 11–12; Mohamed Meouak, *Pouvoir souverain, administration central et élites politiques dans l'Espagne ummayade* (*II^e–IV^e/VIII^e–X^e*) (Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 1999), 58–59.

45 Mariam Kassem Tawil and Youssef Ali Tawil, Diccionario de Estudiantes Bilingüe Español-Árabe, Árabe-Español (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿAlamīa, 2007), entry: الأَوْلِياء, وَلِيّ.

46 Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, 53–54.

on cushions. Indeed, he could not be seated on a *sarīr*, as this was only reserved to the *amīr al-mūminīn*. According to Miskawayh, the caliph only accepted to receive the Byzantine ambassadors after they had met Ibn al-Furāt and present him the request for redemption, which the *wazīr* discussed with the sovereign previous to the caliphal reception. The reception was scheduled and the courtiers were summoned to be present in such ceremony. Hilāl al-Ṣābiʾ describes, during the reception held in 917, how the Byzantine ambassador was first led to the residence of the *ḥājib* Naṣr al-Qushurī, whom he mistakenly took by the caliph, treating him with reverence until being told he was only the *ḥājib*. The envoy was then led to "the residence assigned to the wizārah [sic]," where he witnessed a greater display of ceremonial and met the *wazīr* Ibn al-Furāt, whom he also took by the caliph. Additionally, Al-Ṣābiʾ reports Ibn al-Furāt received the ambassador surrounded by *ghilmān* (slave boys) and servants, carrying battle-axes and swords, while the envoy was led to seat on a place between the Tigris and the gardens. According to Hilāl al-Ṣābiʾ, the Byzantine envoy was received by the caliph on the same day Ibn al-Furāt held his own reception, as he waited at the residence of the *wazīr* until being called in a few hours to meet the caliph.[47] Whereas the political role of direct deputy of the caliph or *prime-minister* was assigned in Baghdad to the *wazīr*, in Cordoba it was meant for the *ḥājib*. For al-Andalus this is quite evident under al-Ḥakam II's reign, in which Jaʿfar bin ʿUthmān al-Musḥafī acquired a central role. Indeed, upon Ordoño IV reception at Madīnat al-Zahrāʾ, and after the deposed king was received by the caliph at the Majlis al-Sharqī, Ordoño was led to the Western Hall by eunuchs, where he was received by Jaʿfar, who reassured him of his hopes, promising the caliph's help in order to regain his right to rule over Leon. Jaʿfar also received him surrounded by eunuchs, servants and by the utmost luxury, as Ordoño was seated on a cushion of golden brocade and was offered ceremonial attire.

The scenario must have caused an impression on Ordoño, as he is reported to have prostrated at Jaʿfar's feet a few times, and even attempted to kiss his hand, which was an exclusive gesture reserved for the caliph. As seen during Ordoño's reception, eunuchs were direct servants of the ruler, to whom the task of leading a foreign king through the palace was entrusted. Al-Maqqarī, when reporting Ordoño's reception, asserts they acquired a high status in Cordoba, "for the eunuchs of those days were among the highest functionaries at court (…) being entrusted with the custody of the royal palace."[48] In fact, the office of the *ḥijāba* was even held in Cordoba by a eunuch. After the accession to the throne of al-Ḥakam II in 961, the caliph appointed in the same year

47 Al-Ṣābiʾ, *Rusūm*, 17–18.

48 Al-Maqqarī, *Nafḥ II*, 141.

Ja'far bin 'Abd al-Raḥmān *al-Ṣiqlābī* as his *ḥājib*.[49] Ja'far al-Ṣiqlābī was considered the favorite courtier of al-Ḥakam II, who lived in Madīnat al-Zahrā', in the apartments nowadays identified as the House of Ja'far bin 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Ṣiqlābī, where the *ḥājib* lived from 961 to 971, upon his death.[50] As al-Maqqarī witnesses that another *ḥājib*, Ja'far bin 'Uthmān al-Musḥafī, was attending Ordoño, it appears both of them held the office of the *ḥijāba* at the same time. Furthermore, Ja'far al-Musḥafī will held the office of *wazīr ṣāḥib al-madīna* of al-Zahrā' in 971, and in 974 is mentioned as *wazīr kātib al-madīna* of Cordoba.[51]

Both Miskawayh and al-Ṣābi' account the extensive presence of *khadam* (word which usually refers to servant eunuchs)[52] during such ceremonies, employed as direct servants of the caliph and *wazīr*. In Byzantium their presence in court ceremonies and during ambassadorial receptions is documented. The eunuchs were employed as servants of the imperial chamber—the eunuchs *koubikoularioi*—and the *praipositoi* (head of eunuch *koubikoularioi*) played a central role, together with the master of ceremonies and the *logothete* of the post (senior official in charge of the post and foreign affairs, somehow a minister of foreign affairs), during the reception of foreign missions.[53] The *ostiarios*, a palace eunuch who was to introduce dignitaries to the presence of the emperor, played also a central role during receptions of ambassadors, as he was the door keeper who would lead the courtiers and ambassadors into the reception hall of the Magnaura, once the *praipositois* would signal him to do so.[54] The power of eunuchs in Byzantium came to be such that they were even able

49 Ibid., 158; 'Ibn Idhārī, *al-Bayyān II*, 386. Ṣiqlāb (pl. Ṣaqāliba) refers to Slav people from Northern Europe. According to the Encyclopedia of Islam, due to the large number of slaves of Slavic origin, the term Slav came to denote slave. In the Muslim West, the term Ṣiqlābi came to mean "white eunuch," as they underwent castration, performed by Jewish groups in the city of Lucena, due to the demand in al-Andalus for male slaves employed for the service in harems. See Pierre Guichard and Mohamed Meouak, "Al-Ṣaḳaliba. 3. In the Muslim West," in Encyclopaedia of Islam, ed. C.E. Bosworth et al., vol. VIII, NED-SAM (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995), 879–881.

50 Antonio Vallejo, "Madinat al-Zahra. Transformation of a caliphal city," in *Revisiting al-Andalus. Perspectives on the material culture of Islamic Iberia and beyond*, ed. Glaire D. Anderson and Marian Rosser-Owen (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 14–16; Meoauk, *Pouvoir souverain*, 214.

51 Ibn Ḥayyān, *Anales Palatinos*, 44–47, 221–222.

52 A.J. Wensinck, "Khadim," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. E. Van Donzel et al., vol. IV, IRAN-KHA (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1997), 899.

53 Constantine VII, *De Ceremoniis*, 567. For terminology regarding official posts of the Byzantine Empire this article follows the glossary given by the translators of *De Ceremoniis*.

54 Ibid., 568.

to detain the *de facto* imperial power, as it was the case of the *parakoimomenos*, or the most senior eunuch, guardian of the imperial bedchamber, called Basil, who ruled under the nominal power of Basil II.[55] Furthermore, in Byzantium, eunuchs were sent as ambassadors in foreign missions, and such a task assigned to servant eunuchs let us foreseen how eunuchs were highly educated courtiers, who enjoyed much more benefits and privileges than other courtiers who had a free social status. This was the case of eunuch Salomon, whom Liutprand of Cremona met in Venice when on his way to Constantinople in 949.[56] Indeed, Charles Pellat asserts that, even though the castration of servants had been a practice both in Ancient Greece and Ancient Rome, with the intent to create private eunuchs for the palace, Arab chroniclers considered it to have been an innovation of the Byzantines. Furthermore, Arab chroniclers, such as Ibn Ḥawqal, believed all slave eunuchs found everywhere in the world originated from al-Andalus, as the "industry" of such process of emasculation was owned and applied by Jews from Pechina, who castrated especially white slaves, from western Europe, known as *Saqāliba*.[57] Employing eunuchs in high administrative posts, such as the *ḥijāba* held by Jaʿfar, under the rule of al-Ḥakam II, also ensured that the administrative office would not be held within a family lineage, thus avoiding the foundation of a dynastic power associated to that office. The most famous case in al-Andalus was that of the *ḥājib* Ibn Abī ʿAmir, who held the *de facto* power under the nominal rule of al-Ḥakam II's son, Hishām II, taking the *laqab* of al-Manṣūr bi-Allāh, and whose sons succeeded him in his post.

Military Formation and Parade: The Powerful Caliph

The troops and caliphal bodyguard were also part of the ornaments of the ceremonial displayed for the reception of ambassadors. When Byzantine ambassadors arrived at Cordoba, one of the first actions intended to honor their reception was to gather crowds to meet the ambassadors, as well as troops, who were given new arms to display on such occasions, so that a *burūz* or military

55 George Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State*, trans. Joan Hussey (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1969), 300.

56 Liutprand of Cremona. *The Complete works of Liudprand of Cremona*, trans. Paolo Squatriti (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 197.

57 Charles Pellat, "Khasi," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. E. Van Donzel et al., vol. IV, IRANKHA (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1997), 1088; Ibn Ḥawqal, *Configuration de la Terre* (*Kitāb Ṣūra al-Ard*), trans. J.H. Kramers and G. Wiet, vol. I (Beirut: Comission Internatinale pour la Traduction des Chefs-d'Oeuvre; Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1964), 9.

ceremony was performed.[58] Even when outside the capital, the caliph would order the *jaysh* to take their positions and wear ceremonial attire, as happened in 934 when Queen Toda Aznárez of Navarre went to the military camp where ʿAbd al-Raḥmān III prepared a campaign against Pamplona, in order to ask for a truce.[59] Also, upon the reception of Otto I's embassy at Cordoba, the *jaysh* had flanked the road all the way from the ambassador's lodgings until Cordoba's city gates, and from there to the palace. According to the biographer of John of Gorze, "strange moors" executed military drills. The infantry were the first in line, holding their swords against the ground and holding with the other hand projectile weapons; soldiers were mounted on mules, and behind them was the cavalry.[60] Similarly, troops were also prepared, fully attired and equipped as in time of war to meet Ordoño IV upon his arrival at Cordoba in 962, as were the Sclavonian guard of the caliph.[61] This Sclavonian guard evidences once more the role of *Saqāliba* eunuchs at the direct service of the caliph, employed to ensure his safety. Furthermore, on the day scheduled for the caliphal reception of Ordoño, once the ambassadors were near the palace, the parade of the king and his entourage, as well as those Cordovan Christians who accompany and served them as their interpreters, entered a passage flanked on each side by bodies of infantry, and the luxury of the attires, equipment, and armors was such, that the Christians crossed themselves several times.[62]

The reception of Otto's ambassadors is indeed the most complete description regarding the military formation of the troops. Nevertheless, Ibn ʿArabī, in his fantastic description of what is taken to be a Frankish embassy arriving at al-Nāṣir's court from *al-Ifranja*, further adds that lines of soldiers were flanking both sides of the road from Cordoba until Madīnat al-Zahrā', holding scimitars that formed an arch, under which the ambassadors walked.[63] Moreover, the account on the reception of the North African ruler, Jaʿfar ibn ʿAlī al-Andalusī, could reconstruct in detail the military formation, as al-Ḥakam II ordered that

58 Al-Maqqarī, *Nafḥ II*, 137, 140.

59 Ibn Ḥayyān, *al-Muqtabis V*, 252.

60 Juan, Abad de San Arnulfo, "La embajada," 146.

61 Al-Maqqarī, *Nafḥ II*, 160.

62 Ibid., 161.

63 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Musamarat wal-Muhadarat*, in Abdurahman Ali Al-Hajji, *Andalusian Diplomatic Relations with Western Europe*, 136. Al-Hajji translates entirely the account of Ibn ʿArabī, who does not identify either the place of the reception or the specific origin of the envoys. The narrative can be identified as the result of Ibn ʿArabī's own readings or knowledge of several historical sources accounting ambassadorial receptions, which gave rise to the construction of an imagined account of a Frankish embassy, and to the adding of several unrealistic features by the author, discussed in this article.

16,000 men from Cordoba were armed and formed lines from the *munya* where the North African ruler was lodged up to Madīnat al-Zahrā'.[64]

As seen before, Miskawayh also describes the presence of the *jaysh*, ordered to flank the road from the ambassadors' lodgings up to the reception hall, not only for the reception held by the caliph but also for the previous session held by the *wazīr* Ibn al-Furāt. The army moreover remained in line once the reception was finished, expecting the return of the ambassadors to their lodgings.[65] Al-Ṣābi' also testifies the presence of soldiers, displaying their equipment, in ceremonial attire, drawn up in two lines and mounted on animals with saddles of gold and silver, stretching from the upper Shammasiyya Gate (now al-Salikh in the eastern part of Baghdad) until near the 'Abbasid Residence.[66]

The Labyrinthine Palace-City Complex: Anxiety and Expectation for the Unreachable Caliph

The reception of Ordoño IV reveals to be a remarkable fragment for the reconstruction of the route undertaken in such occasions. As it describes a strict protocol, it can be safely assumed that other foreign missions received in Cordoba undertook a similar path. The king and his entourage were met at the *munya* where they were lodged and paraded on horseback, first to Cordoba's gates and from there to the palace-complex of Madīnat al-Zahrā'. In fact, the reception of Ordoño can be perceived as a protocol model, except for some variations, as the gates and several pavilions crossed were not the same at all times. Ordoño's entourage arrived through Bāb al-Aqbāb, or Gate of the Domes, where all of those Andalusi officials who went there to meet him dismounted their horses, while Ordoño and his companions continued on horseback until arriving at the inner gate called Bāb al-Suddā', where they all alighted, except Ordoño and Muḥammad bin Qasīm bin Tumlūs, who later assumed the office of *wazīr ṣāḥib al-ḥasham* (minister in charge of the mercenary troops).[67] Thus, the honor of being carried on horseback was reserved for distinguished guests, such as the holder of the title of king, Ordoño, and the courtier who was appointed to guide him, who might be perceived as his own personal master of ceremonies.

The description of the route undertaken by foreign missions is indeed intended to cause the impression of the palace-labyrinth where the envoys had also to experience a continuous walking and waiting. Each gate, each hall or pavilion crossed, was meant by the protocol to be perceived as a new feeling

64 Ibn Ḥayyān, *Anales Palatinos*, 67; Safran, "Ceremony and Submission," 195.

65 Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, 54, 55.

66 Al-Ṣābi', *Rusūm*, 17.

67 Al-Maqqarī, *Nafḥ II*, 162; Ibn Ḥayyān, *Anales Palatinos*, 45.

of anxiety in regards to the reverence intended to be felt towards the monarch. The anxiety grew and gave place to the astonishment of the ceremonial stage of corridors, halls and gates. Ordoño was then led to the gate of Dār al-Jandal or House of Stones, where he sat and waited upon a raised platform carefully prepared and decorated for himself and his entourage.[68] Timing, even the waiting periods, seem to be carefully attended to, even if the route inside the palace-city complex appears as too long. This waiting was also accounted for during the reception of the ambassador of count Borrell of Barcelona, held on 1 July 971, who had to wait at the Dār al-Jund for all the preparations and the caliph to be ready. Jaʿfar bin ʿAlī al-Andalusī had also to wait at the Dār al-Jund (House of the Army), after crossing several gates and passageways upon entering Madīnat al-Zahrāʾ and before being received by the caliph.[69]

Similarly, Miskawayh describes not only the waiting between the reception undertaken by the *wazīr* and the subsequent audience held by the caliph, but also the endless route before finally reaching the presence of the sovereign, as they had to go through several terraces and passageways, being led by the *ḥujjāb*, who were exercising their duty of masters of ceremonies.[70] In the same manner, Hilāl al-Ṣābiʾ intends to transmit the feeling of waiting and anxiety when the Byzantine envoys were led to mistakenly think (twice) they were in the presence of the caliph, first when entering the residence of the *ḥājib* Naṣr al-Qushurī, and then the residence of the *wuzarāʾ*, as mentioned before. The multiple pavilions, halls and passageways are in fact part of the labyrinthine ideal of the forbidden palace, where all the courts can be connected through secret passages, finally culminating with the longed and earned audience with the caliph himself, as noted by El Cheikh.[71] Thus, the evanescent caliph, secluded, was paradoxically present at all stages, as the anxiety was felt upon the thinking of eventually and finally foreseeing him, as the center around whom everything was staged.

De Ceremoniis describes with the utmost profusion the labyrinthine route that should be undertaken by foreign missions, as well as the customary waiting until finally being admitted to the imperial presence. The ambassadors would be led first from their lodgings, the Chrysion, where the envoys from the *amīr* of Tarsos, representatives of the ʿAbbasid Caliph, and ʿAbd al-Raḥmān III's envoys were staying during their reception in 946 at Constantinople. They would then go through a stairway until reaching the Stable of the Augousta;

68 Ibid., 162.

69 Ibn Ḥayyān, *Anales Palatinos*, 44–47, 69.

70 Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, 55.

71 El Cheikh, "Abbasid cerimonial," 360.

then crossing the vault of Anethas until the Chapel of the Holly Well. After arriving at the Chalke gate, similarly to the protocol observed at Madīnat al-Zahrā', they would alight and proceed on foot until reaching the Hall of Scholai and the Tribunal and wait on a vault on the right side of the hall, properly decorated with silks for the occasion, until being advised to proceed to the Magnaura Hall, where they would be received by the emperor.[72] As the construction of Madīnat al-Zahrā' assimilated much of the architectural models of Baghdad and Constantinople, the concept of the forbidden palace could be demonstrated through a *guided tour* for foreign envoys, which was customary for receptions held by the three courts.

The Reproduction of the Janna*: The Paradisiacal Gardens*

Before reaching the hall, foreign missions were conducted through its gardens and terraces, which is how the Majlis al-Sharqī—where most of these receptions took place after 953, and which is identified by present-day historians as the Hall of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān III—is described by Ibn Ḥayyān as the hall which opens to the gardens.[73] Maribel Fierro highlights the paradisiacal meaning within the construction of Madīnat al-Zahrā'. First, its construction was a direct response to the growing Fatimid Caliphate and its prophetic features, thus assimilating a vegetal architectural language, quite evident in the decoration of the walls of the Hall of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān III; second, the gardens evoked not only a Qur'ānic meaning, but also literary traditions, which evoke the gardens of the Muslim *janna* (paradise) as terrace levels, where the most worthy believers, such as prophets, would be secluded in the inaccessible upper level.[74]

Gardens as part of the exuberant and luxurious stage of ceremonial are also present in descriptions of the Byzantine reception in Baghdad. The *wazīr* Ibn al-Furāt received the Byzantine envoy, who was seated in a place between the Tigris and the gardens, where he waited until being summoned by the caliph.[75] The description of al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdadī is even more clear regarding the presence of gardens inside the palace-complex. He describes that when the envoys were led from pavilion to pavilion inside the court, they visited the gardens where the caliph kept a zoo inhabited by wild animals that ate from their hands. Furthermore, they visited other gardens, containing artificial ponds and rivers, four hundred palm trees and other citrus trees.[76] Additionally,

72 Constantine VII, *De Ceremoniis*, 583.

73 Ibn Ḥayyān, *Anales Palatinos*, 44.

74 Fierro, "Madīnat al-Zahrā'," 301, 306, 310.

75 Al-Ṣābiʾ, *Rusūm*, 18.

76 Kennedy, *When Baghdad Ruled the Muslim World*, 153–155.

al-Khaṭīb describes that the envoys, who still paraded during their unending visit through the palace, were, before reaching the reception hall, taken to the famous House of the Tree, which was said to have been built under the rule of al-Muqtadir, the same caliph with whom they were to meet that day. In the center of this court was an artificial tree made of silver and gold branches and carrying jewels in the shape of fruits. Artificial birds, made of silver, sang while the leaves rustled. These were called *automaton* in Greek and are alleged to have extensively existed at the court of Baghdad, where they were ingenuously developed, and at the court of Byzantium in Theophilos's time, which were destroyed by his son Michael III, but again accounted with the utmost fashion in Constantine VII's receptions.[77] The existence of artificial birds, lions, griffins as well as a golden organ, accounted in *The Book of Ceremonies*, was a result of knowledge of the work of Heron of Alexandria (died ca. 70 CE), which explains its mechanisms, and it seems that this tradition was explored by Muslim scholars under the rule of the ʿAbbasid Caliph al-Mā'mūn in the 9th century.[78] Scholars, such as the three Banū Mūṣa brothers, were to collect works in Byzantium relating to this matter. Moreover, such mechanisms seem to be more developed and sophisticated at the court of Baghdad, and it is discussed if their introduction at the Byzantine court of Theophilos could be assigned to the ʿAbbasids, as the Greek manuscripts in Byzantium, regarding the work of Heron, date from the 10th century, when al-Ma'mun's scholars had already collected Heron's work and develop such automatons.[79] Indeed, it is well known the influence played by the ʿAbbasids on the iconoclast court of Theophilos. Michael is accounted to have destroyed these devices, and in 917, the Byzantine ambassadors received at the ʿAbbasid court were presumably amazed by an artificial tree with singing birds placed on a pond,[80] which could mean they were not familiar with such devices. These wind-powered devices survived both in the Fatimid court and Umayyad court of Cordoba, although in less complex forms, particularly animal metalwork statues for fountains.[81]

77 Mary-Lyon Dolezal and Maria Mavroudi, "Theodore Hyrthakenos' Description of the Garden of St, Anna and the Ekphrasis of Gardens," in *Byzantine Garden Culture*, ed. Anthony Littlewood et al. (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, 2002), 105–158 at 129.

78 Juan Signes, *The Emperor Theophilos and the East, 829–842. Court and Frontier in Byzantium during the Last Phase of Iconoclasm* (United Kingdom: Ashgate, 2014), 446–447.

79 Ibid., 448.

80 Dolezal and Mavroudi, "Theodore Hyrthakenos' Description," 129.

81 Oya Pancaroglu, "Sculpture," in *Medieval Islamic Civilization, an Encyclopaedia*, ed. Joseph W. Meri, vol. 1 (New York: Routledge, 2006), 711.

Liutprand of Cremona, who narrates his mission of 949 sent by Berengar II, Margrave of Ivrea, to Constantinople, was fascinated by a "certain tree of gilt bronze, whose branches, similarly gilt bronze, were filled with birds of different sizes, which emitted the songs of the different birds corresponding to their species."[82] In the same passage, Liutprand describes how the throne of the emperor, called the throne of Solomon, moved mechanically, as it was raised and lowered in the same occasion, and was flanked by coated golden lions that "seemed to guard him, and striking the ground with their tails, they emitted a roar with mouths open and tongues flickering."

The artificial automaton tree, both in Baghdad and Byzantium, would perhaps be an allegory for the paradisiacal tree, forbidden to Adam and Eve by God. The tree, in the center of the House of the Tree, which by its turn was in the center of an artificial pond, was unattainable and belonged only to the divine simulacrum of the palace. Furthermore, al-Khaṭīb describes that the caliph received the ambassadors in the Palace of the Crown, facing the Tigris. The paradisiacal meaning of such gardens is evident. The court as the imitation of the divine, displayed its (Eden) garden of creation, containing all the animals, trees, flowers and rivers. The articulation between the Tigris and the garden, reproduced both in al-Ṣābi''s and al-Khaṭīb's accounts, reflects as well another metaphor for the paradisiacal creation, as rivers will flow in the garden.[83] It appears as well that the Magnaura Hall was also facing a vine-covered garden, called Anadendrion.[84]

The Cosmic Centrality of the Sarīr*: The Symbology of Power*

In Madīnat al-Zahrā' the gardens would lead to the terrace and finally to the hall where the caliph was seated. The astonishment of Ordoño is transmitted by al-Maqqarī, who asserts that the king even took off his *bornūs*, a Christian hat.[85] The caliph was seated on his *sarīr*, placed at the end of the central *baḥw* (vestibule, arched roof) of the Majlis al-Sharqī, also located in the center of Madīna al-Zahrā', in its intermediate level, thus connecting the unattainable upper level, only reserved for the caliphal residence, with the lower level, from where the foreign missions arrived. It appears that in Madīnat al-Zahrā' there

82 Liutprand of Cremona, *The Complete Works*, 197–198.

83 L. Gardet, "Djanna," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. B. Lewis et al., vol. II, C-G (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1991), 448.

84 Nigel Westbrook, "An Architectural Interpretation of the Early Byzantine Great Palace in Constantinople, from Constantine I to Heraclius," vol. I (PhD diss., University of Western Australia, 2013), 176, 202, 209.

85 Al-Maqqarī, *Nafḥ II*, 162.

was no "throne room" previous to the reception of Byzantine ambassadors in 949, at least not in the hall where the ambassadors were received, identified by Lévi-Provençal as Majlis al-Zahīr, where al-Maqqarī asserts a glittering throne of gold and jewels was raised there, especially for the occasion.[86] Thus, the transformation of the palace-city probably resulted in the remodeling of the previous central hall, which occasioned the final plan where the Majlis al-Sharqī was the main reception hall, as well as the throne hall.

The caliph, to whom each initiative taken, each appointment and each exoneration had to be known, appears not to be fully satisfied with his leading figure role, and thus he intends to stage and dramatize it.[87] The seat of the ruler represented the axis of the world, inside of the sacred palace-complex, with courts within courts, as a replica of the divine cosmos.[88] Furthermore, all the theatre staged outside the reserved zone of the *majlis* and its surroundings was meant to be a stage of legitimacy targeting the caliph's subjects, who were previously gathered and collected, as underlined before, and the days of such receptions were considered to be festive times in Cordoba. Indeed, if there is no audience, the theatre stage and state does not find its place. Thus, the figure of the sovereign, as the representative of the divine, triggers the exemplary divine shape that is enabled through a quadrangular formula: the ruler, the state, the society, and the self.[89] Indeed, the ruler and the court are the exemplary emanating center, whose models are adopted by society. However, the court society has no meaning without the society that legitimizes its power and centrality. Without the society's belief in its legitimacy, its existence would be doomed. Furthermore, the audience would be inexistent without the construction of symbols, ideology, and legitimacy.

The *sarīr* was the most secluded, intimate, nevertheless the most sacred place, and paradoxically its symbology was present outside the walls of the *majlis*, Madīnat al-Zahrā', outside Cordoba and throughout the provinces and the tributary states. The *sarīr* that was raised in the center of the Majlis al-Zahīr for the reception of Byzantine envoys can be taken as a model for the throne used from then on and after the Majlis al-Sharqī was built. The presence of a throne made of gold and precious gems, which is attested during the reception

86 Évariste Lévi-Provençal, "España Musulmana, hasta la caída del califato de Córdoba (711–1031 J.C.)," in *Historia de España*, ed. Ramón Menéndez Pidal, vol. IV (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1982), 352; al-Maqqarī, *Nafḥ II*, 141.

87 Gabriel Mártinez-Gros, *L'idéologie omeyyade. La construction de la légitimité du Califat de Cordoue* (*X^e–XI^e siécles*) (Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 1992), 131.

88 Geertz, *Negara*, 109.

89 Ibid., 109.

of Byzantine envoys in 949 at the Majlis al-Zahīr, could easily blend as an integral part of the luxurious decorated Majlis al-Sharqī, with its walls carved with vegetal motifs, the floors covered with costly carpets and curtains hung over the hall.

The religious and legitimacy symbology of the throne is common for the three courts. The throne of Solomon at the Magnaura Hall in Constantinople is traditionally described as elevated by six steps, made of gold and ivory, with a lamb represented on its backrest, two lions, each by its armchair, as well as twelve more at each side, on each step.[90] Thus, due to the myth of Solomon as the sovereign-builder, several mythical objects have been identified as relics that had belonged to him, such as the table of Solomon, which presumably the Muslim conquerors were hoping to find in al-Andalus, since it was believed that the Visigoths had taken hold of it after the sack of Rome.[91] Such an iconic figure, idealized ruler, and deputy of God, was represented on the throne's symbology, through the mimicking of the mythical throne of Solomon, as several automaton or mechanical devices were constructed as part of the throne. This mythology, not alien to Muslim rulers, pre-existed in the court of Byzantium. Thus, Byzantines, Visigoths and Muslim rulers aimed at attaining the same meaning attributed to Solomon. The Hall of Magnaura, where ambassadors of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān III were received in 946, was the seat of the throne of Solomon, as described by *De Ceremoniis*.[92] The lions flanking the throne, as artificial mechanical devices, would roar and sit upright in their bases, once the customary questions were addressed to the ambassadors, while the birds on the throne would also start to sing. After the ambassador and the emperor had exchanged the standard greetings, the beasts would stop roaring and would sit down on their bases. Nothing similar is described in al-Andalus; nevertheless, the symbology of the throne points to the oriental influence, as before the reception of Byzantine ambassadors, it seems that no throne existed in the palace-city complex, and a glittering throne of gold and precious gems had to be raised or built at the *majlis*. Surely, the caliph, who had already heard from his own envoys how the throne of Solomon at the Magnaura Hall caused such a sensation, and thus understanding its symbology, ordered a precious throne to be built for his own reception of Byzantine ambassadors. The role of ambassadors as cultural mediators has been the subject of several works by Nicolas Drocourt, who underlines the intellectual qualities of Byzantine, medieval

90 Juez, "Símbolos de poder," 66.

91 Ibid., 68.

92 Constantine VII, *De Ceremoniis*, 566–569.

Christian, and Muslim envoys.[93] The transmission of cultural and architectonic models has been mentioned in this article, such as when addressing the construction of Madīnat al-Zahrā', the Byras palace of Constantinople and the use of *automaton*. Thus, it appears that Umayyad ambassadors in Constantinople played the role of transmitters of Byzantine traditions when ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ordered a throne to be built for receiving ambassadors from the imperial court of Constantinople. Drocourt and Becker further assign to the ambassador the image of the political community that they represent, and thus the choice of the envoy retains in it the image of the sovereign.[94]

The military formation of troops and the architecture of the palace-complex composed the ceremonial stage, meant to produce amazement on foreign missions, which would culminate with the appearance of the caliph. Arab historians add another relevant element to the description of the ritualized reception: decoration with luxurious clothes. Ibn Khaldūn, when accounting the reception at Cordoba of Byzantine ambassadors, first mentions the formation and new arms received by troops, especially for the occasion, and secondly proceeds to describe how magnificently decorated the royal apartments were.[95] The reception hall was "spread with the most costly carpets," and furthermore, Ibn Khaldūn describes how the hall was "hung with the richest curtains and draperies." It appears that the Byzantine court was the most concerned regarding customary decoration of the halls and passageways, and indeed the descriptions of decoration of luxury draperies, insignia, and ceremonial dresses are exhaustive.[96] The throne in the Magnaura Hall is also described as having been secluded by a curtain.[97] Luxury draperies were used to decorate the palace during the reception of Byzantine ambassadors in Baghdad, as it is described that 38,000 curtains were hung throughout the palace, as well as 22,000 carpets ornamented the multiple corridors and halls to be covered by the ambassadors' steps.[98] Furthermore, for caliphal receptions at Baghdad, al-Ṣābiʾ asserts it was customary that a curtain was hung in front of the caliph, which was lifted when those who were being received were admitted to the presence

93 Nicolas Drocourt, "Quelques aspects du rôle des ambassadeurs," 45.

94 Audrey Becker and Nicolas Drocourt, "Introduction," in *Ambassadeurs et ambassades au cœur des relations diplomatiques. Rome—Occident médiéval—Byzance* (*VIII^e s. avant J.-C.–XII^e s. après J.-C.*), ed. Audrey Becker and Nicolas Drocourt (Metz: Université de Lorraine, 2012), 6.

95 Ibn Khaldūn, *ʿIbar*, 142; al-Maqqarī, *Nafḥ II*, 137–138.

96 Constantine VII, *De Ceremoniis*, 566–570.

97 Ibid., 575.

98 Kennedy, *When Baghdad Ruled the Muslim World*, 153.

of the ruler and lowered whenever he wanted to dismiss them.[99] Research has pointed out that contrary to customary ceremonial both in the ʿAbbasid and Fatimid courts, the Umayyad Caliph in his receptions appears not to have been veiled by a curtain.[100] Barceló adds that the *sitr* or curtain would make impossible the presence of brothers (or other relatives) on the right and left of the throne, as their presence is attested by sources, contrary to what was observed for ʿAbbasid and Fatimid receptions, at which, historians assert, no brothers are said to have flanked the throne. As al-Ḥakam II did not yet have sons, the spot they would occupy in such solemn receptions was filled by his brothers, while ʿAbd al-Raḥmān III's receptions counted with the presence of his own sons. The passage of the role to brothers was evident when no sons were produced. But, in fact, ʿAbbasid receptions assert the presence of relatives in such occasions, such as the ceremony upon the arrival of Byzantine ambassadors to the court of al-Muqtadir. Al-Khaṭīb recounts that the caliph's sons flanked his throne, three on his right and two on his left.[101] Attention must been drawn for the aforementioned description of Ibn Khaldūn's decoration during the reception of Byzantine ambassadors in 949. The historian reports that curtains and draperies were hung at the *majlis*. Also, when John of Gorze was received, his biographer reports that from the entrance of the hall, the caliph, alone as a deity, was only visible to a few, as everything was covered with draperies so that it was difficult to distinguish floors from walls.[102] It is plausible to think that perhaps such curtains and draperies had the same function as the *sitr* used in the courts of the ʿAbbasids, Byzantines, and Fatimids, in order to distinguish, separate, and seclude the areas of the hall, and especially the caliph seated on his *sarīr*.

Curiously, the chronicler also mentions that the caliph was not seated on a throne, but reclined on a cushion, "as they do not use thrones like other people, but instead beds and cushions where they recline, crossing one leg over the other, either to eat or to talk." The shape of the bed-throne of the Umayyads must have been different from those found in Christian courts, as it caused such an impression on John of Gorze. Although it was golden and decorated with jewels, as asserted by al-Maqqarī's description on the Byzantine embassy received in Cordoba, the Umayyad throne appears to have been bed-shaped, perhaps as a raised platform, as those that still decorate the Ottoman Topkapı

99 Al-Ṣābiʾ, *Rusūm*, 73–74.

100 Janina M. Safran, *The Second Umayyad Caliphate. The Articulation of Caliphal Legitimacy in al-Andalus* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2000), 75; Barceló, "El califa patente," 162.

101 Kennedy, *When Baghdad ruled the Muslim world*, 155.

102 Juan, Abad de San Arnulfo, "La embajada," 147.

Palace. This bed-throne would then be harmoniously fitted under the great horseshoe arch designed on the wall of the end of the central *baḥw* of the Majlis al-Sharqī.

Ceremonial Cosmos: The Representation of State Hierarchy

The *sarīr* was flanked, on both sides, first by the caliph's sons, as described for the Byzantine envoys' reception in 949.[103] They were in line, ordered according to their political relevance. Al-Ḥakam, the heir apparent, was the first on his father's right, followed in order by ʿAbd Allāh, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Asbagh and Marwān. On his left stood al-Mundhir, ʿAbd al-Jabbar and Sulaymān. Next to them, and after them, were the *wuzarā'*, on the right or left of the throne, according to their rank. The *ḥujjāb* were placed after the *wuzarā'*. It should be pointed out that the plural is used, thus Andalusī administrative originality regarding the dichotomy between the office of the *wuzarā'* and that of the *ḥijāba*[104] appears not to be followed, as several *ḥujjāb* are reported to have taken the office title. Furthermore, on the ceremonial stage of the hall that received the Byzantine ambassadors, the *ḥujjāb* were attributed an inferior rank at the caliphal court and placed after the *wuzarā'*. After the *ḥujjāb*, stood the sons of the *wuzarā'*, the freed slaves of the caliph and the wakils, lined. Ibn ʿIdhārī also refers to the same order of precedence, placing the *ḥujjāb* (plural) after the *wuzarā'*.[105] They were all in a row, according to their rank. It seems that they were all drawn in two lines throughout the central vault/*baḥw* of the *majlis*, until reaching its entrance and extending throughout the terrace. Al-Maqqarī, when transmitting Ibn Khaldūn's account, adds that the throne was surrounded on all sides not only by the caliph's sons, but also by his brothers, uncles and other relatives.[106] As for Ordoño's reception, it appears to be one of the few occasions where *ḥujjāb* are not mentioned to have attended in rows placed near the throne, and after the *wuzarā'*. In fact, al-Maqqarī describes that al-Ḥakam II was flanked on both sides by his brothers, nephews, and other relatives,[107] as he did not have any sons yet. They were followed by the *wuzarā'*, judges, civil magistrates, and theologians as well as other high officers. It appears they were all seated in rows, thus contrary to ʿAbd al-Raḥmān III's reception of Byzantine ambassadors, as the relatives and most distinguished courtiers are said to have stood. After Ordoño IV's caliphal reception, he was received by the *ḥājib* Jaʿfar

103 Al-Maqqarī, *Nafḥ II*, 140.
104 Meouak, *Pouvoir Souverain*, 67.
105 Ibn ʿIdhārī, *al-Bayyān II*, 353.
106 Al-Maqqarī, *Nafḥ II*, 138.
107 Ibid., 161.

al-Musḥafī. No other *ḥujjāb* are mentioned to have attended the ceremony. In fact, it is not clear if Ja'far attended the caliphal reception of Ordoño, as he is only mentioned when the eunuchs of the caliph took Ordoño to meet him at the Western Hall of Madīnat al-Zahrā'.[108]

It seems the oriental tradition to appoint several *ḥujjāb*, who served as masters of ceremonies during receptions, was attended to, despite what has been identified as the central role of a single *ḥājib*, perceived in al-Andalus as a sort of prime minister. The perception in al-Andalus of this post has identified it as being a singular office, second in hierarchy after the caliph, which corresponded in Baghdad to the post of *wazīr*. Nevertheless, further reflection on such a perception must be sought, as it appears that several *ḥujjāb* were appointed at the same time, under the rule of both 'Abd al-Raḥmān III and al-Ḥakam II, perhaps playing the role as masters of ceremonies. Moreover, on 12 August 971, when al-Ḥakam II received several Christian Iberian ambassadors, the *sarīr* was flanked by the *wuzarā'*, and the *ḥujjāb* are reported to have led the ceremony,[109] indeed acting as masters of ceremonies. It is also curious that no relatives are mentioned on this occasion. The *ḥujjāb* are also reported to have ministered the reception of Christian ambassadors on 23 September 973, and only *wuzarā'* are mentioned to have attended.[110] The reception on 17 November 973 also does not mention relatives.[111] Perhaps this was omitted, as the relatives seem to have been perceived as part of the administrative categories on other occasions. However, their presence seems to be omitted in what it is considered as minor foreign receptions, since Christian Iberian embassies arrived each year to al-Ḥakam II's court. Whether they were not present or were omitted, it reveals the perception of these embassies as less relevant foreign missions, and points to their lower level when compared with the honor of attending Byzantine ambassadors, the king of Leon, or the rulers of North Africa, who offered their submission, as happened on 19 September 971.[112]

The *ḥujjāb* who led the ceremony for the caliph served somehow as a shield between the ruler and the rest of the court. Their function was intrinsically connected with the seclusion of the unreachable and evanescent caliph. Indeed, the etymology of the word *ḥājib* evidences their function as concealers

108 Ibid., 165.

109 Ibn Ḥayyān, *Anales Palatinos*, 76.

110 Ibid., 174.

111 Ibid., 185.

112 Ibid., 64–71.

of caliphal authority within the court. The Arabic root of the word, h.j.b. (حجب, *hajaba*), means "to conceal," "seclude," "to veil."[113]

The setting of the scenario of the Umayyad audience hall, with the administrative officials arranged in rows, closer or farther from the caliph, according to their rank, seems to be assembled before the caliph enters the *majlis* and sits on his *sarīr*. Barceló, who draws the formation of such stages for religious ceremonies held by al-Ḥakam II, points out that previous to the transfer of the caliph from the mosque of al-Zahrā' to the *majlis*, the bureaucratic and political groups were already at their places. Once the caliph entered the *majlis* alone, the fixed stage started to move around the centrality of the caliph, as the officers would present their greetings to the ruler, according to hierarchical order, returning afterwards to their places.[114]

As descriptions of such religious ceremonies are more precise regarding the order of precedence displayed in the room, it can be presumed that the stage for the receptions held for foreign missions was formed accordingly. Therefore, the omissions regarding all the administrative categories attending ambassadorial receptions are presumed by the chroniclers to have been evident, thus not necessarily to be transmitted in detail, as those descriptions correspond to solemn religious receptions, as the ʿĪd al-Aḍḥā (Feast of the Sacrifice) or ʿĪd al-Fiṭr (Feast for Breaking the Fast). In fact, religious ceremonies, studied already by Barceló, shed light on the order of precedence attended at the *majlis*, which in its turn resulted from their hierarchical status within the state administration and palace. The order of precedence displayed during the ʿĪd al-Aḍḥā, celebrated on 4 October 971, and the ʿĪd al-Fiṭr on 5 July 973, was the following: the brothers of al-Ḥakam II; *wuzarā'*; *aṣḥāb al-shurṭa al-ʿulyā, al-wusṭā* and *al-ṣughrā* (magistrates of the supreme, central and lower police); after leaving an open space, came the *aṣḥāb al-makhzūn* (courtiers in charge of the *khizāna al-māl* or public treasure); treasurers and *ʿurrāḍ* (administrative office in charge of paying the army); *kuttāb* (secretaries) and *umanā'* (trustees). After this first stage was set, it was time for the entrance of the Quraysh, members of the tribe of the Prophet, as well as the *mawālī* (clients) of the Umayyad dynasty, who sat on the lateral *baḥw* of the hall, on the left of the caliph.[115] Nevertheless, it is not clear if the members of the Quraysh tribe and the *mawālī* attended receptions of foreign missions. The description of the ʿĪd al-Aḍḥā of 973 also evidences

113 Meouak, *Pouvoir souverain*, 64.

114 Barceló, "El califa patente," 160.

115 Ibn Ḥayyān, *Anales Palatinos*, 81, 152–153; Barceló, "El califa patente," 160–163. The historian also adds to his article plans displaying the positions in rows, according to order of precedence, of the court bureaucrats and politicians.

that *fityān* and eunuchs, who held administrative posts such as those of the *kitāba*, were standing both on the right and left of the *majlis*, probably behind the high officials.[116] As also noted by Barceló, the reception on the occasion of the ʿĪd al-Aḍḥā of 973 also suggests that during these years, the *wuzarāʾ* and the *aṣḥāb al-shurṭa* would act as *ḥujjāb* in such ceremonies, as they are said to have ministered the reception for the caliph.[117]

The order of precedence for the entrance, greeting, and formation in rows must have also followed the model described for the *bayʿa* (oath of allegiance) ceremony of al-Ḥakam II. Thus, the caliph received in order his brothers, the *wuzarāʾ*, the sons of the *wuzarāʾ*, the brothers of the *wuzarāʾ*, the *aṣḥāb al-shurṭa* (magistrates of the police), and finally the servants of the palace.[118] Some variations are perceived regarding the sons and brothers of the *wuzarāʾ*, as the *ḥujjāb* for some ambassadorial receptions would follow the *wuzarāʾ*. Al-Maqqarī further adds that the eunuchs were standing in lines beginning on the right and left of the throne and extending to the end of the hall. Next to them were the servant eunuchs, drawn over two lines on the terrace; on the adjoining parapets of the terrace were the eunuchs of the guard, and the Sclavonian eunuchs. After these were the Sclavonian eunuchs of inferior rank and afterwards the archers of the guard; next to the Sclavonian eunuchs were the black slaves. At the gate of al-Suddāʾ were the door keepers, and outside was the horse-guard of black slaves, extending in lines to the Gate of the Domes; next to them were the caliph's bodyguards (mawlas or freed slaves), also on horseback; the rest of the army, including slaves and archers, extended until the lines reached the gate of the city leading to the country. Thus, such description shed light on the outside scenario, as well as on the list of precedence, which reflected on the positions taken, either inside or outside the hall. We also know *ulamāʾ*, theologians, and secretaries attended such ceremonies, as well as poets. Poetry played a central role in court culture as well as in ceremonies, such as receptions of ambassadors. In fact, sources describing receptions assign to poets and intellectual men a central role in court ceremonial, as they were commissioned to speak eloquently about the sovereign and his power, and to show their knowledge of eastern masters. They were expected to present to the audience and caliph, seated centrally in his *sarīr*, a *qaṣīda* praising his power, and further endowing the rich tapestry—composed by *ḥujjāb, wuzarāʾ, kuttāb*, eunuchs, and others, carefully placed by order of precedence—an atmosphere of veneration. Sometimes this worship and luxury caused such a

116 Barceló, "El califa patente," 162.

117 Ibn Ḥayyān, *Anales Palatinos*," 152; Barceló, "El califa patente," 164.

118 Al-Maqqarī, *Nafḥ II*, 157.

strong impression that even the poet would stammer and "was soon reduced to silence by the terror that this most imposing scene produced in his mind."[119] On the same occasion, according to al-Maqqarī, a poet, Mundhir ibn Saʿid, was chosen to address the audience, revealing his poetic attributes, which earned him the office of *qāḍī al-jamaʿ*. So, the court and even its most meticulously choreographed ceremonies, presented to poets an opportunity to ascend in the administrative hierarchy, provided their performance would be eloquent in the eyes of the sovereign, who was the highest of the patrons of arts and who appointed poets for administrative offices, as poetic skills were strongly associated with political expertise.

Furthermore, it appears that the eunuchs of the guard, archers, and other soldiers were only allowed on the parapets of the terrace and not inside the hall. This can also be observed through the description of Ordoño's reception at the Majlis al-Sharqī, where the terrace was flanked by two rows of soldiers, one at each side.

The caliph, whose entrance initiates all motion of his subjects around himself like the emanating cosmic center of the sun, would sit on the throne and receive first his sons, brothers, uncles, nephews, and other relatives, and then the *wuzarā'* and other administrative officials, who would then return to their marked positions, in rows towards the central *baḥw* of the *majlis*.

As for the *ḥujjāb* their function appears to be ceremonial, as they would prepare the stage, in order to coordinate and give order for the entrance of different administrative categories. At occasions, such as the religious solemn receptions, they are not mentioned as takin any position in the order of precedence represented by the rows of officials draw in the central *baḥw*, from the throne until the entrance of the hall, perhaps because they were coordinating all the ceremonial features, as masters of ceremonies, admitting courtiers to al-Ḥakam II's presence.

The chief chamberlain (*ḥājib*) in Baghdad, a position that was held by Naṣr al-Qushurī under al-Muqtadir's caliphate, had also the function of master of ceremonies. On procession days he would "sit in the corridor behind the scene," in order to perform his duties as director of the theatre that would take its form at the *majlis*.[120] As happened during Umayyad receptions, it was only after all the administrative groups were ordered to their places that the caliph would enter the *majlis* and sit on the throne. Indeed, the chief chamberlain would only send notice to the caliph after the courtiers had taken their places. For the

119 Ibid., 138. The historian is reporting the account of Byzantine ambassadors received in Cordoba in ca. 947–949.

120 Al-Ṣābi, *Rusūm*, 63.

Byzantine embassy received in 917 by al-Muqtadir, Miskawayh describes that the caliph was seated on his *sarīr* and flanked by both sides, first by his *wazīr* Ibn al-Furāt, as well as by the eunuch Mou'nis, who was commander of the army, and other eunuchs stood on his right and left; however, according to al-Khaṭīb al-Baghādī, the caliph's sons sat before him, on his right and left sides.[121] The *Rusūm* also points out the order of precedence during receptions and procession days. The chamberlain would admit the courtiers at the caliphal presence. The first to be admitted was the *wazīr*, followed by the commander of the army, the chiefs of the diwans (administrative offices), the secretaries, the lieutenant and his generals, by this order.[122] After they all were set on the theatre stage, the chamberlain would command the descendants of the Hāshim (family to which the Prophet belonged to) and the leaders of prayers. Then the chamberlain admitted the judges, preceded by the Judge of the Judges or *qāḍī al-haḍra* (Judge of the capital). Afterwards, the soldiers were ordered to stand in two lines between two ropes, which showed where the courtiers should be lined, at the al-Salām Courtyard. Thus, the soldiers would not enter the *majlis*, standing at the terrace of the main reception hall.

The master of ceremonies in Constantinople, as described by *De Ceremoniis*, also prepared everything previous to the entrance of the *basileus*, together with the *praipositoi* (head of the *koubikoularioi*), the *logothete* (head of secretariat), and the master of ceremonies. The *praipositoi* would advise the rulers to go where the *chlamyses* (cloaks) and imperial crowns were placed and these were put on them by the *praipositoi*, and the emperors would go up and sit on the thrones.[123] The plural form used here is intentional, as the emperor usually named his own successor and son as co-emperor. And thus, both emperors attended the reception, each on his throne. However, as opposed to the procedures in the courts of Cordoba and Baghdad, it was only after the emperor was seated that the *praipositoi* led several groups of courtiers, such as the *koubouk*leion (personal staff of the imperial apartment), the *magistroi*, patricians, senators, the *katepano* (commander of military unit), and the *domestikos* (term which designates several high officials), and other members of the Chrysotriklinos, inside the hall, who would stand on right and left, "in front of the two loose-hanging curtains." Thus the scenography of power would only be completed once the emperor would sit on his throne, giving way for the courtiers to go inside and take their positions.

121 Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, 55; Kennedy, *When Baghdad Ruled the Muslim World*, 155.

122 Al-Ṣābi, *Rusūm*, 64.

123 Constantine VII, *De Ceremoniis*, 567–568.

Ceremonial Attire and Insignia of the Caliph

We do not know what attire was worn by caliphs ʿAbd al-Raḥman III and al-Ḥakam II for such occasions. There are some scattered notes, which allows us to imagine how luxurious ceremonial dresses were, as some of the caliph's clothes are reported to have been offered as gifts to honorable guests and courtiers. The role of costumes and colors in Medieval Islam—and more specifically among the court of Baghdad, according to the *Kitāb al-Aghānī* by Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī—has been thoroughly studied by Elisa Mesa. For Mesa the attire of the caliphal *ṭirāz*, offered as gifts, was meant to show the majesty of the sovereign, whose name or symbol of the dynasty was usually embroidered in it. She further adds that that practice was well established under the Umayyads of Damascus and was developed by the ʿAbbasids of Baghdad.[124]

Also, courtiers would offer luxurious clothes to the caliph, as noted by Ibn Shuhayd, who made such presents to the caliph, which were then handed to the *ṣāḥib al-ṭirāz* (master of the manufacture of cloths) and included and written in the books of the wardrobe.[125] Such impressive gifts granted Ibn Shuhayd the title of *dhu al-wizarataīn* (double vizierate). For a later chronology, Hishām II, al-Ḥakam II's son and successor, is described in a parade wearing luxurious clothes and a turban on his head, around a *qalansuwa*, or hat, with a plume hanging, and carrying on his hand his scepter.[126]

Ibn ʿArabī, in his fantastic description of a presumable Frankish embassy arriving at al-Nāṣir's court, accounts the caliph wearing "cheap clothes," worth four dirhams, and sat on the floor with bowed head, having before him his insignia: a Quran, a sabre, and a brazier.[127] His clothes are unlikely to have been such as those described by Ibn ʿArabī, especially according to more authentic accounts transmitted by Arab historians, which describe such pomp. The Qur'ān and the sabre might have been part of his insignia displayed in such occasions, but the presence of a brazier, and especially with the function Ibn ʿArabī attributes to it (as a symbol of the fire which awaited the ambassadors, in case they would not submit to Islam), seems unlikely.

According to al-Ṣābi', the ʿAbbasid caliph, when seated on his throne for procession and reception days, would wear a long-sleeved garment, dyed in black, as this was the color of the ʿAbbasid Caliphate, with an outer garment

124 Elisa Mesa, *El lenguage de la indumentaria. Tejidos y vestiduras el Kitāb al-Agānī de Abū l-Faraŷ al-Iṣfahānī* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2008), 308.

125 Al-Maqarī, *Nafḥ II*, 152.

126 Maribel Fierro, "Pompa y Ceremonia en los Califatos de Occidente Islámico (s. II/VIII–IX/XV)," *Cuadernos del CEMyR* 17 (2009): 125–152 at 149.

127 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Musamarat*, apud. Al-Hajji, *Andalusian diplomatic relations*, 136–137.

either plain or embroidered with white silk or wool, avoiding at such occasions the wearing of silk brocade or patterned clothes. The caliph would also wear red boots. On his head, he wore a black *rusafiyya*. As his insignia, he would display on his right hand side the sword of the Prophet, keeping another sword on his left, between the two cushions of the throne. In front of him was placed the Qurʾān, believed to have belonged to Caliph ʿUthmān. On his shoulders, the garment of the Prophet was placed, and on his hand he held the staff of the Prophet.[128] Al-Khaṭīb asserts on the day of the reception of Byzantine envoys, the caliph wore *dabiq* brocade embroidered with gold and a high cap on his head, having on his right hand side nine strings of precious stones, and seven on his left.[129] Returning to the meaning of the colors, black was also the color assigned to the garments worn by Prophet Muḥammad and was prescribed the wearing of black garments to the ʿAbbasid staff,[130] and thus the ʿAbbasid caliph would customarily wear a black long-sleeved garment and *rusafiyya*. Furthermore, according to Mesa, the red color, described by al-Ṣābiʾ as the color of the caliph's shoes, was already used to dye caliphal attire and insignia of the Umayyads of Damascus, as the garments worn by Caliph Hishām, seated on a matching carpet, or the red curtain secluding Caliph al-Walīd bin Yazīd.[131]

Most certainly, in a court with such an oriental influence as that of Cordoba, the caliph wore luxurious clothes, although not necessarily as sumptuous as those of the Byzantine emperor, as well as a turban and the *qalansuwa*, and perhaps a scepter, as it is later attested for Hishām II's rule. Fierro also points out the relevance of the ring-seal (*khatam*) of the Umayyads of al-Andalus, inherited from each ruler to his successor, insignia which was not very common for the Muslim world, but had its origins on the seal of the Prophet, used in correspondence with the Byzantine Emperor and lost by Caliph ʿUthmān.[132]

As the ʿAbbasid caliph had the staff of the Prophet, the Umayyad had his scepter, probably with the same meaning. Moreover, the Umayyads of Damascus are accounted to have worn ceremonial dresses, as the long-sleeve jubbah and a *ridāʾ* (cloak) worn by Caliph ʿAbd al-Malik, as well as the turban and *qalansuwa*, considered to be official headwear.[133] The cloak of the

128 Al-Ṣābiʾ, *Rusūm*, 73.

129 Kennedy, *When Baghdad Ruled the Muslim World*, 155.

130 Mesa, *El lenguage de la indumentaria*, 363.

131 Ibid., 357.

132 Fierro, "Pompa y ceremonia," 149.

133 Oleg Grabar, "Notes sur les cérémonies Umayyades," in *Studies in Memory of Gaston Wiet*, ed. Myriam Rosen-Ayalon (Jerusalem: Institute of Asian and African Studies, 1977), 51–61 at 44.

Umayyad Caliph of Damascus might have been one of the multiple Byzantine influences that were adopted by the Syrian dynasty, as the *basileus* also wore a cloak, the *chlamys*.

However a great difference persisted between the personal insignia of the Byzantine Emperor and the Muslim Caliph: the *tāj* (crown). No Muslim ruler dared to wear it, and indeed those who attempted were seen as apostates. That was the case of the eighth century governor of al-Andalus, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, who married the widow of the belated Visigoth king Rodrigo. His wife, Um ʿAshīm, associated the right to rule with the most important (Christian) insignia, the crown, and thus for her a king without a crown was a king without a kingdom, as she described it. He refused at first, stating that Islam forbade it. Nevertheless, she persuaded him to wear such insignia in the intimacy of their home. After he was seen once by a visitor, he was accused of apostasy and killed in 717.[134] Thus, the use of a crown was in fact one of the main distinctions between non-Muslim sovereigns, such as Persians, Byzantines and Visigoths, and Islamic sovereigns, as it was never worn by Prophet Muḥammad.[135]

Moreover, the Qurʾān and the sabre might have been insignia held for such occasions. We know that ʿAbd al-Raḥmān III always carried his Qurʾān, even when he was absent in military campaigns.[136]

While no descriptions are available for tenth-century Umayyad caliphal ceremonial attire, Arab historians report on a few ceremonial dresses worn by foreign envoys. One example is the attire of Ordoño IV, who was given a ceremonial tunic of white brocade, of Christian manufacture, as well as an outer garment of the same quality and color. On his head, he wore a Christian hat, a *bornūs*, ornamented with precious jewels.[137] Ceremonial dresses were provided by the palace, and according to this account it becomes obvious that the clothes were also carefully chosen according to the rank and religion of the foreign. As evidenced by the account of John of Gorze's embassy, the envoy should also present himself groomed and cleaned.[138] However, in this occasion the protocol was defeated by John of Gorze's stubbornness, as he refused to cut his hair, wash himself, or wear ceremonial attire. The caliph sent him 10 lb, in order to provide for John's expenses of ceremonial clothing, which he gave

134 *Akhbār Majmuʿa*, ed. and trans. Emilio Lafuente Alcántara (Madrid: Real Academia de la Historia, 1867), 31–32.

135 Fierro, "Pompa y ceremonia," 129.

136 Ibn Ḥayyān, al-*Muqtabis V*, 328. The Quran of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān III was sacked by Ramiro II after the defeat of Simancas in 939.

137 Al-Maqqarī, *Nafḥ II*, 161.

138 Juan, Abad de San Arnulfo, "La embajada," 146.

to the poor, refusing to dress anything else rather than his black religious costume. In the end, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān III declared John would be received, even if he would wear a sack. Thus, John of Gorze presented himself to the caliph in his poor monk's robe.

As for the ʿAbbasid ceremonial, the cleanliness was also expected from those who entered the presence of the caliph, they should also be perfumed with aromatic scents, avoiding, however, strong perfumes that would displease the ruler, and clean their teeth, while at the same time keeping their breath from the *amīr al-mūminīn*.[139]

Similarly, in Constantinople, when foreign envoys were to dine at the Chrysotriklinos with the emperor, they were provided tailored tunics and ceremonial dresses. In regards to perfumes and cleanliness, the ambassadors of the *amīr* of Tarsos, after dining with the emperor at the Chrysotriklinos, sat on the Hall of Justinian while the emperor sent them vine-flower scent and rose-water, as well as other fragrances and perfumes. There they washed themselves from chased silver basins, and afterwards were given perfumed oils and unguents.[140] Curiously, the Umayyad Caliph of Cordoba appears not to show himself while eating, and in fact no ceremonial banquets are mentioned in sources, even when reporting religious festivities, such as the ʿĪd al-Aḍḥā, or the ʿĪd al-Fiṭr.

Another relevant feature and insignia of these embassies is the letter exchange. In fact, letter exchange and its content reveal the legitimacy and propaganda insignia of the ruler. Likewise, object insignia seem to have been present in such letters. This was the case of Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos's letter to ʿAbd al-Raḥmān III. It was written on gold upon sky blue paper, and it contained the seal of Constantine VII and his son and co-emperor, Romanus II, representing the effigies of both father and son, and on the other side that of the Messiah.[141] The content of the letter also points another protocol and customary characteristic of diplomatic exchanges. The letter contained a list of gifts from the emperor to the caliph. Anthony Cutler points out the central role of gift exchange during receptions of ambassadors. Cutler underlines economic consequences of gift exchange that were fundamental for negotiating trade agreements. Declassified as a part of economic history, gift exchange was dismissed for being perceived as a symptom of "archaic" or "primitive" societies,

139 Al-Ṣābiʾ, *Rusūm*, 30–31.

140 Constantine VII, *De Ceremoniis*, 584, 586.

141 Al-Maqqarī, *Nafḥ II*, 142.

and conventionally seen as superfluous luxury goods, with no consequence on foreign policy.[142]

If John of Gorze had agreed to disregard the letter of Otto I, considered to have contained blasphemies against the caliph, and had instead agreed upon his reception bearing only the gifts, as he was asked to do by the palace, he would have avoided such a "diplomatic incident," as well as his imprisonment for almost three years.

The significance of gifts was also a cultural and intellectual one, as it can be perceived through the reception of manuscripts. Ibn Abī Usayb'iya, Damascene physician of the thirteenth century, in his work *ʿUyūn al-Anbāʾ fi Tabaqāt al-Aṭibāʾ* or *Lives of the Physicians*, reports these exchanges, almost inadvertently, when accounting news on the Andalusi physician of Caliph Hishām II, who was Ibn Juljul. The physician reported the arrival of a copy of Dioscorides's work *Materia Medica*, on medicinal features of plants, to al-Andalus. The book was a present made to the caliph of al-Andalus, in 337 AH (948–949 CE) ("If I am not mistaken," wrote the chronicler), from Armāniūs, or Romanus, who was co-emperor at that time.[143] The book was written in Greek and was illuminated. At the same time, Ibn Juljul reports the offer of another book, the work of the *History* of Orosius. Emperor Romanus is reported to have written on the letter accompanying the presents: "The books of Dioscorides ought to be translated into Arabic by a man well versed in the Greek language, and acquainted also with the properties of simples [medicines]; without this requisite the merits of this wonderful composition will never be duly appreciated and brought to light."[144] As for the book of Orosius, it was written in Latin. However, Ibn Juljul asserted no man in al-Andalus knew Greek, and a translation of Dioscorides's acquired previously in Baghdad was used, until ʿAbd ar-Rahman III, upon returning the embassy of Byzantium, asked the emperor to send a translator who would teach this language in al-Andalus. Therefore, a monk named Nicholas was sent, arriving at Cordoba in 340 AH. Ibn Juljul writes that the Greek monk taught several physicians in al-Andalus, being the

142 Anthony Cutler, "Gifts and Gift Exchange as Aspects of the Byzantine, Arab and Related Economies," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, vol. 55 (2001), 247–248.

143 Ibn Abī Usayb'iya, "Appendix A. V. the life of Ibn Juljul, fo. 137," in *The History of the Mohammedan Dynasties in Spain*, by Aḥmad al-Maqqarī, trans. Pascual de Gayangos, vol. I (London: Oriental Translation Fund, 1840), xxiii–xxvii; Ibn Abī Usayb'iya, "Appendix n.º II. Vie d'Ebn Djoldjol, extraite de l'Historie des Médecins d'Ebn-Abi-Osaïba," in *Relation de l'Égypte*, by Abd-Allatif, trans. M. Silvestre de Sacy (Paris: Imprimerie Impériale, 1810), 495–500.

144 Ibn Abī Usayb'iya, "Appendix A. V. the life of Ibn Juljul, fo. 137," xxv.

most prominent of those, Hasdāī bin Bashrūṭ, the Israelite.[145] Ibn Juljul's himself knew and was taught by monk Nicholas, who died in the first year of al-Ḥakam II's rule, ca. 961/962. Such language was also known by the ʿAbbasid Caliph himself, as al-Muta'did was fluent in Greek.[146] Thus, when mentioning exchange of manuscripts, Beihammer underlines that it is obvious the "scholarly interest" of diplomatic exchanges.[147]

The extract of a letter sent to the caliph of Cordoba is mentioned in a copy of *The Book of Causes* (*Kitāb al-ʿIlāl*), by Appolonius of Tyana, philosopher of the first century CE. At the end of the manuscript, the content of a letter is reproduced, addressed to al-Ḥakam II, from the Byzantine Emperor, in which the *basileus* offers the book to the caliph. The Arabic text of the letter was reproduced and translated by S.M. Stern.[148] In this letter, the Byzantine Emperor—who cannot be identified as no name or date are mentioned in the manuscript—asserts he had read al-Ḥakam's previous letter, in which the Andalusi ruler asked him for philosophy books. The emperor asserts that his interest for science equaled the caliph's, and that himself had acquired such scientific learning that he asked from God to assist the *amīr* in achieving the same highest degree of knowledge, as he had collected such an amount that he did not need any more. The letter from the emperor, preserved in this manuscript, evidences how both courts, the Byzantine and the Umayyad, shared the model of the ideal ruler, which was also taken into account by al-Muqtadir, and his predecessors who founded the Dār al-Hikma (The House of Wisdom): the sovereign should be the seeker of all sciences, until having acquired the semblance of the scholar-ruler, reached by the incessant collection of knowledge through books, until he did not need any more. And, indeed, the pattern of such knowledge was that from Classical Greece. If their direct successor

145 This must be Hasdāī bin Shabrūṭ, Andalusi physician, secretary of ʿAbd ar-Rahman III and diplomat of Jewish faith, as his *laqab* shows (al-Isrā'ilī). He is mentioned by Ibn Ḥayyān (*Muqtabis V*) for several missions to Christian Iberia. See Ibn Ḥayyān, *Crónica del Califa ʿAbdarraman III an-Nasir entre los años 912 y 942* (*al-Muqtabis V*), trans. Maria Jesús Viguera and Federico Corriente (Zaragoza: Anubar Ediciones, Instituto Hispano-Arabe de Cultura, 1981).

146 Al-Ṣābi', *Rusūm*, 71.

147 Alexander Beihammer, "Strategies of diplomacy and ambassadors in Byzantine-Muslim relations on the tenth and eleventh centuries," in *Ambassadeurs et ambassades au cœur des relations diplomatiques. Rome—Occident médiéval—Byzance* (*VIII^e s. avant J.-C.–XII^e s. après J.-C.*), ed. Audrey Becker and Nicolas Drocourt (Metz: Université de Lorraine, 2012), 371–400 at 378.

148 S.M. Stern, "A Letter of the Byzantine Emperor to the court of the Spanish Umayyad Caliph al-Hakam," *Al-Andalus* 26.1 (1961): 38–42.

was Byzantium, the Umayyad and the ʿAbbasid proclaimed themselves as transmitters and keepers of such sciences.[149]

The Ritualization of Praise towards the Caliph: Proskynesis*, Kissing the Hand, and* Taslīm

Once the foreign would be at the entrance of the *majlis*, they would be motioned to proceed, as it happened with Ordoño IV, who moved slowly between the two lines of soldiers drawn by the terrace of the *majlis*, and upon entering the hall he prostrated on the floor, remaining in such a humble position for some time. He stood up and after a few steps, he threw himself on the floor again, thus repeating the same gesture several times, before reaching a proper distance between himself and the caliph, and upon stretching his hand, the caliph gave him his to be kissed. He then took the seat prepared for him, though never turning his face away from the caliph and thus walking backwards.[150]

It appears that in al-Andalus the *proskynesis* was associated to a strictly non-Muslim protocol procedure. References to *proskynesis* in Greek first appears in Herodotus or in Aeschylus when reporting Persian traditions in the court, and it seems to be introduced in Greece by Alexander the Great.[151] Thus, its origins are to be found in the non-Muslim Persian Empire, which by the tenth century was an ʿAbbasid area. Surely, the rejection of such an eastern tradition was intended as a statement by the Andalusi dynasty, as the orthodox Umayyad Caliphs of Damascus were unfairly deposed by the innovative ʿAbbasids.

Hilāl al-Ṣābiʾ states categorically that, "it was not the practice of old for an *amīr*, a *wazīr*, or a high dignitary to kiss the ground when he entered the presence of the caliph."[152] This practice was not accepted before the tenth century. Most probably it was not customary before the coming of the ʿAbbasids, who were influenced by the traditions of the Sassanid Persian court. He describes how kissing the hand of the caliph, who would cover it with his sleeve to prevent it from being touched by mouth or lip, was replaced by prostrating on the ground. Al-Ṣābiʾ asserts that both kissing the hand and *proskynesis* were only customary towards someone considered of high rank by the caliph, who was acknowledging his position and doing him a favor. He also adds that in the

149 Jakub Sypiański, "Arabo-Byzantine Relations in the 9th and 10th Centuries as an Area of Cultural Rivalry," in *Proceedings of the international Symposium Byzantium and The Arab World Encounter of Civilizations*, ed. A. Kralides and A. Gkoutzioukostas (Tessaloniki, 2013), 465–78 at 469–470.

150 Al-Maqqarī, *Nafḥ II*, 162.

151 John A. Scott, "The Gesture of Proskynesis," *The Classical Journal*, vol. 17, no. 7 (1922), 403.

152 Al-Ṣābiʾ, *Rusūm*, 29.

past, "the members of the Hashemite House kissed neither the hand nor the ground." Nevertheless, *proskynesis* and kissing the ground were adopted in receptions among the ʿAbbasids, as al-Ṣābiʾ, asserts that by his time kissing the hand had been replaced by kissing the ground: "Now, however, they (the courtiers) have joined the others in kissing the ground, except for a few who have continued to avoid this practice."[153] Thus, the principle of not kissing the ground and bowing seems to be perceived by Hilāl as one which was once performed to distinguish Muslim rulers and "others."

When John of Gorze was received by ʿAbd al-Raḥmān III he did not perform the act of *proskynesis*. The caliph gave him the palm of his hand to be kissed, which he did, as it was considered in al-Andalus as a gesture only reserved for those whom the ruler intended to honor. Similarly, Jaʿfar bin ʿAlī al-Andalusī, North African ruler submitting to the Umayyad caliphal authority, upon being received at al-Zahrāʾ, kissed the threshold of the hall and then proceeded towards the *sarīr*, from where the caliph gave his hand to be kissed.[154] The account of John of Gorze's reception is quite detailed as it makes obvious that it was the palm and not the back of his hand which was customary to be kissed.

However, the gesture of *proskynesis* is reported for Christian Iberian embassies, although rejected by the Andalusi rulers and not customary for other foreign envoys, such as North African rulers or Byzantines. Thus, it seems the prostration was gradually introduced in the Umayyad court, especially under the rule of al-Ḥakam II, as a gesture strictly reserved for Christian tributaries. In fact, according to Ibn ʿIdhārī, when ʿAbd al-Raḥmān III received Constantine Porphyrogennetos's ambassadors in Cordoba, the envoys attempted to perform the gesture of *proskynesis* towards the caliph, but he halted them from doing so.[155] In his imagined account of an embassy received by al-Nāṣir, Ibn ʿArabī reports that the Frankish ambassadors prostrated at the caliph's feet. Also, upon the reception of Bon Filio, count Borrell's ambassador, on 1 July 971, the envoy and his companions executed the gesture of *proskynesis* towards Caliph al-Ḥakam II, until reaching the throne and kissing the ruler's hand, and then walking backwards in order not to turn their backs on the ruler,[156] exactly how Ordoño IV did. Similarly, the act of kissing the hand was an honor which the caliph alone would bestow upon his subjects. Indeed, when Ordoño intended to kiss Jaʿfar al-Musḥafī's hand, the *ḥājib* removed his hand, as discussed above.

153 Ibid., 29.

154 Juan, Abad de San .Arnulfo, "La embajada," 147; Ibn Hayyān, *Anales Palatinos*, 70.

155 Ibn ʿIdhārī, *al-Bayyān II*, 353.

156 Ibn Hayyān, *Anales Palatinos*, 46.

In Baghdad, according to Miskawayh, the Byzantine ambassadors entered the presence of the caliph, prostrated and kissed the ground, staying in that position, as advised by the *ḥājib*.[157] The account transmitted by al-Khaṭīb differs from Miskawayh's. Although Hilāl al-Ṣābi' asserts the ʿAbbasid court had joined the practice of other courts regarding the kissing of the ground, al-Khaṭīb asserts both Byzantine ambassadors, when driven towards the presence of al-Muqtadir, only bowed, evading from kissing the ground, as ʿAbbasid envoys in Constantinople were also dismissed from the *proskynesis*, and they feared their performance of the prostration would demand the same gesture from the caliph's envoys.[158] Thus, it appears that a sort of principle of reciprocity was observed between Byzantium and the ʿAbbasid ruler. Indeed, the Byzantine ambassadors appeared to be concerned that the diplomatic principle of reciprocity would be broken. In spite of the protocol and rules of attendance reported by the account of *De Ceremoniis*, regarding *proskynesis*, as it is stated the foreign should fall on the floor and make obeisance before the rulers,[159] it appears Muslim ambassadors were dismissed from this practice. In fact, the gesture of *proskynesis* is omitted in the account concerning the reception of ambassadors from the *amīr* of Tarsos and ʿAbd al-Raḥmān III. *De Ceremoniis* when accounting this reception resorts to the statement that after "the customary ceremonial had been completed the Saracens went out,"[160] thus avoiding its detailed description. If this was in fact the case, and not only a result of the omission of customary regulations stated and described previously, it would explain why Byzantine envoys received in Cordoba did not prostrate towards the caliph. Furthermore, the Byzantine court was aware that Muslim envoys could refuse the performance of *proskynesis*, as evidenced by al- Khaṭīb's accounts on the dismissal of such act by ʿAbbasid ambassadors. A previous incident had also occurred in 839/840, when the poet al-Ghazāl, in his capacity of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān II's ambassador to Emperor Theophilos, refused to prostrate at the *basileus*'s feet. As al-Ghazāl had previously been advised by Byzantine courtiers that he was expected to perform the *proskynesis*, his complaints against such procedure were transmitted to the emperor, who resorted to an artifice: the door which gave access to the platform where the emperor was seated had been lowered, so that the ambassador was only able to cross it on his knees.[161] However, al-Ghazāl escaped to this humility by entering the

157 Miskawayh, *Tajarib*, 55.

158 Al-Ṣābi', *Rusūm*, 29; Kennedy, *When Baghdad Ruled the Muslim World*, 155.

159 Constantine VII, *De Ceremoniis*, 568.

160 Ibid., 584.

161 Ibn Ḥayyān, *al-Muqtabis II-1*, 238–9.

door on his back, which earned him compliments of the emperor, due to his sharpness. According to Fierro, another version of the death of the 8th century governor of al-Andalus, ʿAbd al-Azīz, states that his murder was prompted by a similar trick of lowering the door, so that once his subjects would go inside the hall they would have to do so on their knees.[162] Thus, Fierro concludes that the Umayyad sovereign would neither wear a crown or be saluted by the prostration. Nevertheless, *proskynesis* is indeed reported in al-Andalus, as a salutation gesture towards the caliph by Iberian Christian tributary states.

The information on the chronicles regarding what was said during such receptions are scarce. Thus, the most complete of these are the accounts on the receptions of both John of Gorze and Ordoño IV. They were both prepared a seat at the *majlis*. John of Gorze had a chair and Ordoño a seat covered with golden cloth, located about ten cubits away from the caliph (4.5 meters).

It must have existed a protocol *taslīm* or salutation. Thus, the account of Ordoño IV's reception transmits what it seems as such a customary greeting, which should be used by those tributary northern states who wished to seek a truce and submit to the caliph. The caliph was the first to break the silence: "Welcome to our court, O Ordoño! May thy hopes be realized and thy wishes fulfilled! Thou wilt find in us the best advice and the most cordial reception, much beyond thy expectations."[163]

At al-Ḥakam's words, Ordoño stood and then kissed the ground before the caliph, stating:

> I am the slave of the Commander of the Faithful, my lord and master; and I am come to implore his favour, to witness his majesty, and to place myself and my people under his protection. May he be pleased to grant me his powerful patronage, and consent to receive me into the number of his slaves!

Most certainly, protocol *taslīm* exchanged between the caliph and foreign envoys from Byzantium, the Holy Roman Emperor or North African rulers might have been different. Such formulas seem to have been developed and standardized by al-Ḥakam II, as for the reception of John of Gorze, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān III is said to have broken the unpleasant silence, as a result of the hostility of John of Gorze regarding his long stay at Cordoba, which ʿAbd al-Raḥmān

162 Fierro, "Pompa y ceremonia," 136–137.

163 Al-Maqqarī, *Nafḥ II*, 163.

acknowledged by expressing his understanding of such situation.[164] Thus, it appears that ceremonial becomes more complex under the rule of al-Ḥakam II.

Neither the *Rusūm* of Hilāl al-Ṣābi', nor the historians who account the reception of Byzantine ambassadors in 917 by al-Muqtadir, transmit the customary *taslīm* for ambassadorial receptions. Nevertheless, al-Ṣābi' reports that no one was allowed to talk without being asked or addressed by the caliph, and the voice should be kept low. Additionally, according to al-Ṣābi', before the introduction of the *proskynesis* within the 'Abbasid court, it was customary for those who entered the presence of the caliph to greet him using the following formula: "Peace be upon you, O Commander of the Faithful, and may the mercy and blessings of Allah be upon you."[165] The caliph could be addressed by using a *kunya*, as long as it prevailed the use of the second person singular. Amongst the three courts, it seems Byzantium was the only able to save, through *De Ceremoniis*, its customary greetings, according to the provenience of the foreign envoy. The *logothete* would address the imperial questions to the ambassadors. These questions are accounted in chapter forty-seven of *De Ceremoniis*, book two. Specific greetings and questions must be attended to when dealing with Muslim envoys.[166] This chapter transmits these customary greetings directed towards the emperor ("The greetings to the emperor when ambassadors from the *amermoumnes* come from Syria"):

> Peace and mercy to you, joy and glory from God to the sublime and great emperor of the Romans! Good life and health to you and a long life from the Lord, peace-making and virtuous emperor! May justice and abundant peace dawn in your time, most peaceable and philanthropic emperor!

This was part of a generic address towards the emperor, which should be used by Muslim envoys, as preceding accounts of greetings made by Christian envoys are quite different. The envoys from "Old Rome" should refer the holy father of the church of Rome was paying homage to the imperial power, or the messengers from Bulgaria, on their turn, should address the emperor as "the divinely crowned emperor, the spiritual grandfather of the ruler of Bulgaria" and as "the most holy and ecumenical patriarch."[167]

Such address could not be asked from a Muslim envoy as they did not recognize in Emperor Constantine VII any religious symbolism. And thus,

164 Juan, Abad de San Arnulfo, "La embajada," 148.

165 Al-Ṣābi', *Rusūm*, 31, 29.

166 Constantine VII, *De Ceremoniis*, 683–683.

167 Ibid., 680–681.

when accounting the *logothete*'s questioning of Muslim envoys, *The Book of Ceremonies* directly states that the only changing concerning addressing for Muslim ambassadors should be the *amīr*'s possessions:

> How is the most highly distinguished and most nobly-born and admirable *amermoumnes*? How is the emir and the council of elders of Tarsos? If, however, the emissaries of the *amermoumnes* come from another emirate, they should ask questions about that emir and his council of elders. How are you? How were you received by the patrician and strategos of Kappadokia? How did the imperial emissary conduct you on your journey? We trust that nothing untoward or distressing happened to you on the way? Approach with great gladness and rejoicing; today you are dining with our holy emperor.

In the specific case of the embassy of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān III, as he sent himself his foreign mission and did not rely on any principality or governorate to do so, as it happened with the mission from the *amīr* of Tarsos, representing the ʿAbbasid Caliph, the *logothete* might have only mentioned his concerns towards the *amermoumnes*. Also, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān III's ambassadors were not coming from the East, but from the West and thus they were not received by the *strategos* of Kappadokia. We also ignore if an imperial emissary was sent to escort the Umayyad Caliph's envoys. Furthermore, we know ʿAbd al-Raḥmān III's ambassadors did not dine with Emperor Constantine VII in the Chrysotriklinos on the day of the reception.[168]

Final Remarks

It is not very clear how the scenography of power would be disassembled after reaching its end. Envoys would be led again through the same way until reaching the lodgings prepared for them. Afterwards, perhaps, the theatre stage would vanish once the caliph would leave the *majlis* and the master of ceremonies would act once more as a stage director and lead the actors outside, probably attending the principle of precedence. The caliph would withdraw from his central cosmic *sarīr*, which had testified one of his few court appearances. The courtiers would all go back to their strictly administrative functions, until being summoned once again to take their roles at a ceremonial reception, in which they would be reminded of their hierarchical places within the cosmos.

168 Ibid., 580.

Indeed, if the stage of soldiers, guards and troops (who were not allowed inside the *majlis*), is directed towards the caliphal subjects, the scenography prepared inside the *majlis*, inaccessible for most of the caliph's subjects, was projected not only for the foreign, but for the court society, as the stage portrayed their hierarchy inside the palace.[169]

If the subjects and courtiers were the internal witnesses of the caliphal power, the foreign was the external crucial figure for projecting towards the outside world the ruler's legitimacy. Ceremonial was the result of the bureaucratized and organized power of the dynasty that displayed it. The development of ceremonial was only possible after other features were achieved, such as the centralization of the state within the cosmic centrality of the figure of the caliph, which was only possible after the success of both military campaigns and tax collection. Nevertheless the growing seclusion of the figure of the ruler within the state administration and ceremonial, the evanescent caliph was paradoxically present at all stages, as the anxiety was felt upon thinking of eventually and finally foreseeing him, as the center around whom everything is staged. At the same time, ceremonial was not only the result of the caliphal power but also its cause. The symbology within ceremonial features (throne, gestures, insignia, disposition of the palace-city complex, decoration) was displayed not only to remember the subjects and the courtiers within the society and palace, but also for *international* legitimate purposes. The ambassador was also a leading figure for the interchange of ceremonial traditions between the court he represented and the court who received him. In a perspective of a broader picture, the foreign represented a key figure for the oriental influence of al-Andalus.

The legitimacy of a dynasty lingers for a long time, even after the fall of their creators and their ceremonial stages, its cities. This was evident in al-Andalus, where the Umayyad legitimacy was such—even after their fall and the final extinction of their dynasty in 1031—that the symbolic Umayyad signatures (architecture, ritualization) persisted in the *ṭawā'if* (sing. *ṭā'ifa*) kingdoms, such as the palaces built by them and the mimicking of the Umayyad scenography of power. In fact, the *fitna* of al-Andalus was triggered by the *ḥājib* ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, son of the famous al-Manṣūr, who managed to be appointed in 1008 heir apparent by Hishām II, the puppet Umayyad caliph. Thus, by breaking the legitimacy Umayyad link which allowed the ʿAmirid family to held the *de facto* power, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, better known as Sanchuelo, as he was the grandson of Sancho II of Pamplona, was deposed in 1009, making way for a succession of Umayyad and non-Umayyad rulers to be declared caliphs. Paradoxically,

169 Barceló, "El califa patente," 167.

Sanchuelo when challenging the Umayyad dynasty and sacrificing the sacred figure of the caliph, made use of Umayyad insignia and symbology.

The *fitna* was not only a period of destruction, as it preserved characteristics of the previous order, as seen in the case of the *ṭā'ifa* kingdoms, who continued to justify their claims to rule by asserting they were governing under the nominal rule of Hishām II, son of al-Ḥakam II, as seen in the case of the *ṭā'ifa* of Seville, under the rule of Muḥammad bin ʿAbbād.[170] Furthermore, the Hammudid dynasty, descendants of Idrīs, member of the family of the Prophet, upon the declaration of a new Caliphate of Cordoba during the *fitna*, proclaimed their legitimacy as successors of the Umayyads, taking the insignia of the former, such as the caliphal title al-Nāṣir li-dīn Allāh of ʿAlī bin Ḥammūd, which was the *laqāb* taken by the first Umayyad caliph of Cordoba.[171]

Ibn Khaldūn when speaking of the importance of monuments as stages of political power, which "are proportionate to the original power of a dynasty," addresses the symbolic meaning of their legitimacy. Providing the example of Hārūn al-Rashīd's unsuccessful attempt to destroy the Hall of Khosraw in the Sassanian palace, Ibn Khaldūn could not be more right when asserting, symbolically, that "it is worth noting that one dynasty was able to construct a building that another dynasty was unable to tear down, even though destruction is much easier than construction."[172]

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170 Emmanuelle Tixier du Mesnil, "La fitna andalouse du XIe siécle," *Médiévales* 60 (2011): 17–28 at 19, 26.

171 Fierro, "Pompa y ceremonia," 130, 134.

172 Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah. An Introduction to History*, trans. Franz Rosenthal (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 143.