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THE LIBRARIES of the Umayyads.



Abderramán III moved the so-called palace library or royal library from the library of the Alcazar of Cordoba where he had resided to the new city of Medina Azahara, where he would take up residence, once the work on the palatine residence of the Prince of the Believers and his Alcazar (known as *Dar al-Mulk* or House of Power) had been completed.

The transfer of this palatine library to Medina Azahara coincided with the location in the new capital of the Caliphate of the buildings destined to be the seat of government and administration, the mint or factory where coins were minted, as well as the transfer there of Abderramán III himself, accompanied by his family, his concubines, the chamberlain, the viziers with their government departments, the Grand Imam of the Aljama Mosque and his personal guard. This palatine library was directed by Talid al-Qurtubid and was worked on by personalities such as Lubna of Cordoba and Fatima of Cordoba.

Talid al-Qurtubi, a senior palace employee, was appointed to oversee the palatine library of Medina Azahara by Abderramán III (Torremocha Silva, 2023). As chief librarian, he was responsible for the formation and maintenance of the index and the books on the shelves (Ribera & Tarragó, 1925).

Lubna of Cordoba was a Christian slave who was manumitted, i.e. freed from slavery, in the time of the Caliph Abderramán III. Although it is not known for certain when she was born in the 10th Century, she grew up within the walls of Medina Azahara and became an intellectual, specialising in Arabic grammar, calligraphy and metrics. She performed multiple functions in the palatine library located in Medina Azahara by Abderramán III, organising the library and cataloguing and classifying its collections (Torremocha Silva, 2023).

Abderramán III's sons, the princes Mohammed and al-Hakan, inherited their father's love of books and both emulated him, even competing to see which of the two would build up a more select and extensive library.

On the death of Mohammed, his library was inherited by his brother al-Hakan, who would become al-Hakan II, who, on the death of his father in 962, would bring together three libraries: the palace library (in which the collections treasured by his ancestors were kept), that of his brother Mohammed and his own, becoming the "most passionate bibliophile of the family" (Ribera & Tarragó, 1925, p. 82).

The space occupied by the palatine library in Medina Azahara was already cramped and, according to Ribera & Tarragó (1925), the books lay piled up in the rooms and could not fit as many as were being added to daily; so another place had to be found. The move, "with a good number of people working assiduously, lasted six whole months" (Ribera & Tarragó, 1925, p.107).

Al-Hakan II then founded the Great Library of Cordoba in one of the renovated pavilions of the old Alcazar of Cordoba, appointing Khalid ben Idris, a bibliophile and translator known by the nickname of "the intelligent of al-Andalus", as its director (Torremocha Silva, 2023).

Lubna of Cordoba was then appointed curator of the Great Library of Cordoba, also serving as al-Hakan II's personal secretary. She would supervise the acquisition, copying, translation, criticism and annotation of manuscripts (Costero Quiroga, 2023; Radio Televisión Española, 2022; Torremocha Silva, 2023).

Working alongside Lubna of Cordoba was Fatima of Cordoba, who was also a manumitted slave in the time of the Caliph Abderramán III. She was a copyist and in charge of the copying, translation and restoration workshops of the Great Library of Cordoba. She created an innovative system of cataloguing that recorded all the books, making it easier to see their subjects, contents and locations in the various rooms, bookcases, and shelves. She was also responsible for supervising the numerous workshops and smaller libraries established by Caliph al-Hakan II (Torremocha Silva, 2023).

Talid al-Qurtubid would go on to become the curator of the Great Library of Cordoba founded by al-Hakan II. He worked there under the direction of Khalid ben Idris, along with Lubna of Cordoba and Fatima of Cordoba. The functions of all these collaborators also involved organising and carrying out trips to the East to bring books acquired in cities such as Damascus, Baghdad, Alexandria, Cairo, Constantinople and Basra to Cordoba with the mission of searching for books to enrich and increase the bibliographic collection (Capdevila, 1925; Dozy, 1877; Torremocha Silva, 2023).

According to Dozy (1877), the catalogue of the Great Library of Cordoba was composed of 44 notebooks, each containing 20 sheets, according to some, or 50, according to others. Some writers estimated that the number of volumes was as high as 400,000. It included works on philosophy, astronomy, medicine, history, genealogy and poetry.

Among the most important texts that made up the collection were, to cite some of the most significant, Dioscorides' "*De materia medica*" and Galen's "*Liber de curandi ratione per sanguinis missionem*" (Torremocha Silva, 2023). Al-Hakan II would have read them all and, furthermore, he would have made notes on most of them (Dozy, 1877), writing at the beginning or end of each book, the name, the moniker, the patronymic name of the author, his family, his tribe, the year of his birth and death and the anecdotes about him.

In the Great Library of Cordoba founded by al-Hakan II, the best bookbinders, illuminators and draughtsmen worked continuously "decorating the books that skilful copyists wrote and then handing them over to a board of splendidly paid scholars who collated and corrected them" (Ribera & Tarragó, 1925, p.107). In other words, in addition to its function as a repository of knowledge, the library had a workshop of copyists, miniaturists and bookbinders engaged in the reproduction and restoration of books (Pavía Fernández, 2014).

However, that era of cultural splendour did not last long and gave way to an era of barbarism, marked by the plundering and burning of libraries and palaces. Sadly, the Great Library of Cordoba came to a tragic end when Almanzor allowed the most radical ulema to expurgate the most precious library in the West to gain his support and trust, burning the works that were considered opposed to the orthodox precepts of Islam (Pimentel, 2016; Ors, 2019; Pavía Fernández, 2014).

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