This paper is part of the Proceedings of the 1st International Conference on Islamic Heritage Architecture and Art (IHA 2016)
www.witconferences.com

The Riḥla: a trip to Arab–Norman Palermo – a story of a Mediterranean koine by way of two buildings

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to take an architectural journey analogous to the real geographical journey narrated by Ibn Ŷubayr, a writer from Al-Andalus, in his book The Riḥla. A journey that takes him from Granada to Mecca stopping at Altavilla in Sicily in 1185.

The Riḥla is a milestone and a time capsule, of Saladin, the Crusades and the Mediterranean paradise of the four cultures, with its own narrative and expository style.

The translation to architecture is made from the same open-minded point of view as that of the Valencian Ibn Ŷubayr, looking for architectural styles and motifs and discovering them in the court of Guglielmo II, where four cultures coexisted: Arab, Norman, Latin and Byzantine.

In this architecture a harmonious synthesis is formed. The knowledge of Muslim artists naturally translated to new buildings with echoes from Cairo and Ifriqiya resounding in types and tectonics, going far beyond the surface decoration or the methods of construction.
Keywords: Arab-Norman architecture, Palermo, hajj, Ibn Ŷubayr, Riḥla.

1 Introduction

The Mediterranean Sea in the XII century was a paradox. It was the aggressive environment of war and an area of trade. Sailing the waters of the Ponto was anything but safe: the storms, sea conditions in winter and rudimentary naval equipment meant all kinds of danger for warriors, merchants and pilgrims alike.

Each storm was experienced as a deadly affliction and each trip was beset by several of them.

Navigation since the time of the Greek colonists was preferably coastal shipping and, when necessary, boats followed the course of the main routes around the major Mediterranean islands, visual landmarks that allowed for navigation in conjunction with the stars.

The great pilgrimage journeys were supreme tests of faith as Christian pilgrims to the Holy Land or Muslims to the blessed Hīŷaz were exposed to all these dangers along with the probable loss of their properties in their quest for what was holy to them. They were not there to make profits as merchants or take part in the geostrategic warmongering of Francs, Byzantines and Muslims. But with their zeal, they were contributing to the creation of a confrontation-free space on every ship where they coexisted, and in each caravan they shared.

In 1183 an Al-Andalus Valencian began his own hajj. Ibn Ŷubayr was born in Xàtiva in 1145 into a family of Arab origin. His training in jurisprudence and poetry was completed in Granada amidst the splendor of the Almohad Empire and there he reached the position of secretary to the son of the Caliph [1].

The reasons for the trip are uncertain and difficult to understand from the Western perspective of today. Whatever the motivation, a 37-year-old man and his friend Abū Ŷa'far Aḥmad, also Valencian, set out on the pilgrimage along the longest route undertaken by Western Muslims. All his experiences are reflected in a book entitled Riḥla, the name given to the Muslim genre of travel novels. Ibn Ŷubayr's work marks a watershed in the genre. His style is unique, often intentionally almost free of emotion and with great attention to detail. But its study as a literary object is not the subject of this paper. Its significance here is that it provides us with an incredible picture fixed in time. It would not be the same one or two years later; it is proof of the temporary nature of history and existence. Men and women travel overseas and deserts with their desire for transcendent salvation in a world where physical salvation is almost impossible. And in those comings and goings only the land stands still. And that land has its milestones in its geography and its buildings. As always, the frontier is the place of exchange and growth, Ibn Ŷubayr perceives this in his Al-Andalus, the western boundary of Islam, and also in Syria which fulfills the same function: dynamic borders that maintain a secondary order of rules in human relationships beyond the first order rules of wars and skirmishes. In the middle of the sea, the islands are pure borders. Each invasion, each traveler and each colonization is confined to their shores and the echo of their visits remains.

Four Mediterranean islands stand out for their size: Sardinia, Sicily, Crete and Cyprus. Sicily, since the time of Ulysses, was the placid island where cows pastured in the sun.

2 The great Trinacria

In the Early Middle Ages that placid island, the Island of the Man and the Sun, was strategically located between the land of the Franks and Al-Andalus and the Holy Land and Cairo. The Strait of Messina separated it from Terra Grande,

while only Pantelleria lay between it and Ifriqiya. From there, the shipping routes opened up onto the high seas to the Kingdom of Jerusalem or Alexandria.

By 670 the Muslim occupation of Tunisia had been completed, establishing their capital in Kairouan. It was natural that ŷihād would look to cross that short stretch of sea and take control of the island. It was ŷihād who moved a large population from the conquered Byzantine Empire to the west coast of Sicily, so that the Byzantine Thema, dividing the island into two provinces through a vertical axis with the center at Enna, further cemented with the new migrations its membership of the Empire in the eastern Siracusian Province.

But the island always had something of the untamed about it and in keeping with this the Byzantine Admiral Euphemius, after killing the Strategos Constantine, fled to Kairouan where he conceived the creation of an independent Sicily, as an ally of Ifriqiya. An expedition was launched by Euphemius in 827 who joined forces with General Asad Ibn Al-Furat: on witnessing the little resistance of the Byzantine troops, Al-Furat changed his mind and began the conquest for Islam of the whole island. In 831 Palermo fell, while the east coast put up more resistance. Finally in 948 the creation of the Sicilian Emirate was consummated, under the Arabic name of Siqiliya, with the ruling Kalbita dynasty linking themselves to the Fatimids of Kairouan. Effective Muslim control of the entire island would be maintained until 1061 [2].

The Muslim conquest did not imply any racial substitution or imposition on the island except in the case of Palermo – Al-Madīna – where the population had been especially decimated. Christians had freedom of worship without external interference, although they were heavily taxed, but they maintained a craving for liberation that led to several civil rebellions over the two centuries of Muslim domination. Afterwards, Muslims born on the island eventually preferred to cut ties with Kairouan and began to look to Cairo, the new Fatimid leading light of Central Islam. All of this, internal rebellion and the changing allegiances, made the Norman Hauteville, or Altavilla invasion by the two brothers Ruggero and Roberto il Guiscardo all the easier. In 1072 Palermo was finally taken and in 1130 the independent kingdom was established with Ruggero II at the head. The Altavilla Government were able to maintain the peaceful integration of the three communities: Franks, Byzantines and Muslims and were quick to generate unity by way of the creation of a national image and identity assimilating the Muslim presence [3].

That was the Sicily onto which the Scylla and Charybdis cast Ibn Ŷubayr in 1185. Before Charybdis could finally suck him down into the dark water, it Guglielmo II himself, who would save him from wreck and slavery.

3 A Riḥla through buildings

The hajj from Al-Andalus was the longest route to Mecca. Like other Western Muslims, the Andalusians usually chose the maritime route to Alexandria aboard Genovese ships that Ibn Ŷubayr called rūm – Christians. The hajj is the search for bārāka, which does not have a direct counterpart in the Christian world. Saintly persons have bārāka, certain places have bārāka, it is a near-magic non-

corporeal entity, a feeling of fullness of faith that the devotee feels in the holy places – tombs of saints and shrines – by touching them, kissing them or rubbing themselves with physical elements. The suggestive acquisition of perfection through physical contact.

In our journey through buildings that is made in parallel to the Riḥla, different architectural typologies are searched out, milestones of the Islam memory.

3.1 Egypt

When Ibn Ŷubayr makes the outward sea voyage, and lands in Alexandria, we are in 1183 and Ṣalāḥ ad-Dīn has been Sultan of Egypt since 1171, after the fall of the Fatimid sí'ies, beginning the Sunni Ayyubid dynasty. At that time Saladin was immersed in the fighting that was raging around Syria and the Holy Land.

In Cairo, Ibn Ŷubayr refers to his visit to the Al-Hussein Mosque. But the oldest Mosque in the city is the Ibn Tulun Mosque, which we know he also visits from his mention of an oracle concerning the Almohad rule. The typology of the courtyard with pointed arches and domed mausoleum makes a great impact. Its sheer enormity is overwhelming and the koubba doesn't aspire to lightness but to the silky finish of its rendering. The profile of this koubba references still the Persian domes of Zoroaster's fire temples, Mongol tents built in stone [4].

Ibn Ŷubayr also makes mention of the stereotomic Citadel of Saladin and of its construction by Christian foreigners, who in countless number were engaged in digging the moat, carving stones and sawing marble so that no Muslim would have to carry any load [1].

Figure 1: Ibn Tulun Mosque, Cairo.

(a) (b)

Figure 2: (a) Zoroastrian Fire Temple, Niasar, Iran; (b) Fatimids Mausoleums, Aswan, Egypt.

Seduced by the bārāka that permeates the route, the two andalusies spend the night in the cemetery of Cairo. Their route does not pass through the city of Uswān but the cemetery in Cairo at that time would be similar to the well-preserved remains of that site: Fatimid mausoleums of koubba type, some with oriental pointed domes, others with hemispherical domes in stucco.

If Herodotus was amused by Egyptians who worshiped hippos, in the Riḥla there is no trace of the memory of ancient Egypt beyond its monuments. In reference to the ancient city of Schemim he describes horrible images, strangers to the human figure, which produce fear to the beholder. The eagerness of the historian doesn't exist in Ibn Ŷubayr: he merely shows us a traveller's snapshots frozen in time and reproduces what he is told by his hosts.

Figure 3: Al-Azhar Mosque, Cairo, Egypt.

He leaves the Nile at Qift to explore the shores of the Red Sea. From the unfriendly city of Aydāb, with its pearl fishermen, he crosses the Pharaonic Sea aboard a crowded and shaky gerba, the sea, again, always fraught with the greatest danger. Once in Ŷudda, the Arab part of the trip begins.

3.2 Mecca

From Ŷudda the road to his revered Mecca is direct. So now, after six months of travel, Ibn Ŷubayr enters Mecca, on a night of unique beauty: Mecca is a constant yearning for bārāka.

The Ka'ba is a unique and unrepeatable building, a resounding rough masonry cube with four corners: the Iraqi corner to the north, the Syrian to the west, the Yemení to the south and the corner of the Black Stone. As the Andalusí tells us, its kiswa or embroidered silk robe was green – as it was until the XIV century when it was changed to black resembling the haimas of emires – and, as in the present day, replaced annually. Only the gilded silver door and the Black Stone ornamented the granite of the cube, and those are the only two elements that were not covered by the Kiswa. Ŷubayr described the Ka'ba as a bride dressed in green satin. The Ka'ba: the eternal bride surrounded by men, except on certain days of the year, who go around in circles night and day. The House is equally unique and as is evident, it shows a strong inclination of Islam for bare tectonics, diluted here and there by plasterwork, mocarabes, brocades or coffered ceilings [1].

The concept of covering the sacred with garments, which is also reproduced within, is a reference to the textile architecture of the tents and enclosures of the

(a) (b)

Figure 4: (a) Qa'ba and Kiswa change, Mecca; (b) haimas in the desert.

campsites, the veiling of women and their palanquins, the ornament of clothing, the concealment of what should not be contemplated.

3.3 Through the sands toward Baghdad

His stay in Mecca and other nearby sites associated with the Prophet lasts six months. One year and one month from his departure from Granada, Ibn Ŷubayr goes to Baghdad passing through Medina. Halfway through his travel, the Andalusí has broken mental ties with the West, in his style we can perceive the rhythm of the palanquin on which he ploughs through the sands. The Iraqi caravan, the Maḥalla, is the world moving past like a choppy sea: camels, palanquins, parasols and domed tents on the backs of the animals. Across land that never ends, even at night, under the light of the stars and torches. Time is divided into stops for water supplies either at a small palm-treed oasis, villages or unhealthy looking wells. The caravan is a living and secure organism where pilgrims mix with traders from Yemen and India.

Bridges, water systems and lush fertility as well as caravanserais among orchards and palm groves appear as the Maḥalla approaches the Euphrates.

The caravanserai is a robust type of building. Externally, they are a fortress with battlements and sometimes iwan entrances. Internally, there is a large open courtyard and porches with arcades as well as stables and a large indoor room. The most extensive include a small mosque with dome. These buildings are conceived as hostelries for caravans and travellers, as secure as a fortress in the desert [5].

On encountering the city of Baghdad the writer highlights the beauty of the Tigris, the mirror where that city of pure air and hypocrisy looks and drinks.

3.4 Damasco, bride of all cities

Once the route crossed the Euphrates, it passed to Saladino territory towards Damascus. Along the way it was imperative to stop at the city of Aleppo, a lady without a landlord thanks to its impregnable defensive fortress. The enclosure of the citadel did not have the gateway and bridge built by the Mamluks at that time, but it stood out because of the imposing character of its powerful walls and prismatic towers. From Aleppo, Ibn Ŷubayr begins to cross a land that would

remind him of Al-Andalus, in Ḥamāt or Ḥimṣ he finds echoes of Yayyan –Jaen – or Ishbiliya – Seville – with the image of Mount Lebanon as the border with the rūm people. Orchards and water wheels in clean cities in whose caravanserais he spends the night.

And finally they reach Damascus: the bride among cities whose veil the two travellers would have lifted. The city is described as magnificent, with its surroundings of Mount Qasiyun full of orchards and fields in continuity with the gardens and fountains of the city. The monuments described are many but the Umayyad Mosque stands out above all. For its construction, 12,000 Christians slave labourers were requested from Constantinople, who built it leaving a unique Byzantine imprint on the composition and decoration: the golden mosaics of the great mosque at that time covered even the outer walls, as witnessed by the Valencian traveller. Just as in Sicily the Altavilla kings employed Muslim artisans in the construction of the Sicilian style, in the Citadel of Saladin or in the Umayyad Mosque itself Muslims employed Christian labour. Therefore clearly Christian or Muslim models were created, with a powerful diffusion of the alien and hostile culture which made them unique. And it was not unique to Christianity, building churches over former mosques, this was a historical mechanism of domination and thereby the mosque of Damascus incorporated the old church which remained intact under the threat that the man who dared to demolish it would go mad, until the Umayyad caliph Al-Walid under the cry "I am the first who will become crazy for God" began demolition with his own hands [1].

Figure 5: Umayyad Mosque. Damasco, Syria.

3.5 In the land of rūm

To embark on the return trip, it was necessary to enter the land of the rūm: the Kingdom of Jerusalem. King Baudouin IV, the leper king, was still alive but in November 1184 he had only months to live [3], bringing an end to the great deeds of a sick king against Saladin. The brutal and magical time of the Crusades was about to change. Ibn Ŷubayr did not foretell this despite his rhetoric, "God ruin it and return it to Islam!" For the Andalusí, Franks awoke a rancour, to the point of naming Baldwin as Pig King or considering Saint-Jean-d'Acre as a stinking city full of shit, but also a shameful and powerful temptation: the fitna,

which awakes when Muslims observe a way of living which is sometimes more equitable, with its taste for beauty and celebrations. Muslims were taxed in the kingdom of Jerusalem but had greater comfort and security than in Syria. Between the wars, caravans came and went without opposition. The warriors are employed in their wars, normal people remain in peace. To the victor, the spoils.

In this city of a thousand mixtures, Saint-Jean-d'Acre, the journey begins out of season and so it will become a nightmare. In the Strait of Messina the Genovese ship ran aground after getting into great difficulties and it is Guglielmo II himself who goes to the aid of the castaways and pays for the rescue of the Muslims. Ibn Ŷubayr will later discover that this gesture was in the interest of learning any news coming from Constantinople in relation to the fate of Alejo Comenno, who fled to the island after the massacre of Latins in the principal city of the Empire in 1182.

4 The Norman Sicily of Guglielmo II: the birth of a hallmark

The Sicily of Guglielmo II to which our travellers arrive was a unique enclave in the Mediterranean: far enough from Constantinople and the Holy Land to provide security, close enough to be the launch pad for a brutal Norman campaign against Andronicus. But the seasoned Andalusí does not find many differences between his homeland and the places he has visited and what he sees there: Sicily is developing an identity that includes military power and architecture; the personality of the Frank kingdom achieves a real and unprecedented synthesis of Islamic, Byzantine and Norman heritage.

Architecturally Ruggero II had already established the basis of the image of the new kingdom. The use of tufa gives an external chromaticism and a rough stereotomy with pointed arches that is shared with English and continental Norman style, exactly as those described in the citadels and caravanserais. Although in this respect there was previously some controversy, their Muslim origin is now accepted without exception. In any case the pointed arch had already appeared in Muslim or Christian buildings under the control of the emirate and perhaps therefore the synthesis was a natural development. The enormity of the exterior was combined with domes, roofs and elements of Islam that establish a tectonic contrast, along with a rich inner layer of mosaics and plasterwork.

Not even in the times of the Emirate was there a hajj to Mecca in Sicily. But its influence always reached its shores because of its condition as a border area. And Guglielmo II was well aware of the contribution that could be drawn from the visitor, so that every wise man, doctor or astrologer who came to its ports was immediately honoured so that they might remain on the island. And that powerful fitna is again felt by Ibn Ŷubayr in the softness of treatment by officials and the people of Palermo, Trapani and Cefalù. For him, Sicily is like another Al-Andalus and he was reminded of Qurṭuba –Córdoba- by the Mediterranean Palermo: ancient, elegant, magnificent and pleasant; gardens, ponds and gazebos, like those he had seen in Damascus. In fact, the Norman ideal was to create a green paradise of delights and so the fields and citrus orchards, the sugarcane and

the date palms annexed directly to the city and were spattered with Sollazzi, hunting lodges and koubbas similar to those he had seen in Egypt, shaping the Parco Reale or Conca d'Oro. Ibn Ŷubayr appreciates this synthesis of pleasure and economy that does not distinguish between the Roman villa, the Byzantine palace or the Muslim irrigation systems.

4.1 The Cuba

If Ibn Ŷubayr saw Palermo as a second Cordoba, it was, apart from the old medina of the two cities, because of the fact that Byzantines, Persians, Berbers, Maghrebis, Andalusians and Muslim Sicilians worked in the construction of new buildings or the remodelling of ancient Muslim buildings with great Cairo Fatimid influence [5].

Ruggero I had already begun the synthesis of three cultures: Norman, Byzantine and Muslim. Romanesque architecture was just developing when Ruggero and Roberto Guiscardo left Normandy but cultural interchange with French territory was constant throughout the brief Hauteville dynasty, in a time when everything was brief but there were no boundaries for wars, crusades or nuptials. In the first period, monasteries and palaces were built with mixed walls or with masonry walls of volcanic tufa or sandstone. Brick walls with polychrome courses were typical of the early buildings and the use of blind arches adorned the walls, a clear reference back to Byzantine construction.

In the second phase of Norman domination with Guglielmo II, there is a predominance of the ashlar with clear Islamic elements: pointed arches, Kufic inscriptions, domes with circular tambour, the absence of pendentives but the use of stepped concentric arcs. Byzantine influence was reflected basically on the floor plan and the inner decoration of domes and vaults. The second generation of royal buildings includes the palaces of La Zisa and La Cuba. Neither of them were visited by Ibn Ŷubayr or even caught his attention but the traveller is only seduced by what he sees as different or lush. These two buildings are neither: two pure prisms of ashlar constructed in tufa, Sollazzi in the royal park.

The name Zisa refers to al-'Aziz, the strong, and Cuba is explained by its prismatic geometry, both solid and windowless. The two Sollazzi were in line with the concept of combining productive life and pleasure. The Zisa stood in front of a pond and next to ancient Roman baths, with numerous viewpoints and with the Great Hall of the Fountain as a welcome area and the upper impluvium courtyard. A delight for the senses, a place of rest and retreat. The Cuba is an emphatic rectangular prism 25 meters in height, 2.5 meters of which were covered by a surrounding pond, called the Peschiara. The setting was isolated among orchards and vineyards. The rotundity is only relieved by four projections of equal height, one on each side, like a tower or buttress. Unlike La Zisa, La Cuba has an impressive and strict geometry, the facades are organized by an enormous order of blind pointed arches that runs the entirety of its height, the modulation of the longitudinal facade is *a-b-a-b-c-b-a-b-a*, where *a* is the lower modulus, *b* the double and *c* corresponds to the tower or projection, exactly as *b*. In the blind arches *b*, a pair of pointed openings open up to a hypothetical first

floor; in the remaining height, ogival niches in pyramidal disposition animate the blind wall. On the shorter sides of the prism the modulation is *a-b-c-b-a*.

This huge box references the outside of the Al-Azhrar Mosque in Cairo and the Citadel of Saladin or many madrasas, the nearby Usbicene palace also has a similar gigantic order. Essentially this order corresponds to the use and distribution of this indoor recreational jewel that covered the major part of its height. Little of it remains today, only the solid masonry shell. All the interior spaces are oriented to an uncovered central courtyard with ambulatory and four columns, one on each corner, with a central impluvium. Access was gained from the west side by a small bridge that spanned the pond. The midpoints of the courtyard that correspond to the projections of the longitudinal facades, had two nymphaea or springs with small iwanes where some fragments of plasterwork stalactite remain. From the access hall there was a front view of the arcade Diwan-i-Am, or Hall of Hearings [2, 6].

The Cuba is adorned with a frieze of Kufic characters, which praise king Guglielmo II, serving as an upper edging. And there we have the fretwork made in stone, plaster or silk, from the holy Ka'ba to any of the mosques visited by Ibn Ŷubayr en route. Thus, the Cuba was a box enclosing an interior world, a work of masonry full of water games and rest rooms. The Sicilian Middle Ages enclosed within its walls, seen as belonging to Muslims and Christians. As the tale of Pampinea about Restituta of Ischia in Boccaccio's Decameron shows, this building was integrated into the Christian collective imagination as a dream place, not at all alien. The recreation of how the Cuba might have been with an upper dome covering the patio and a smaller qoubba in the middle of a navigable pond, while suggestive, does not appear to be corroborated by theory.

Figure 6: La Cuba. Palermo, Sicily.

4.2 San Giovanni degli Eremiti

In his book, Ibn Ŷubayr describes his visit to La Martorana, which he referred to as the Antioquia Church, the Church of Martorana built by Giorgio de Antioquia at the request of Ruggero II. As we have said the traveller pays attention to that which is different, so the Valencian feels overwhelmed staring at the Byzantine interior of the temple, covered with golden mosaics, as seen in the Mosque of Damascus. Near there, a church was built in 1180 with palatial architecture which makes a decisive contribution to the creation of the Altavilla hallmark.

The Church of San Giovanni degli Eremiti is attached to an old Islamic building. Both the church and the Muslim remains are built with the same volcanic stone which allows a full integration that is still observed today after numerous interventions. The Muslim complex consists of an enclosure that houses the garden, a cloister and the Arab room, oriented to Mecca and penetrated perpendicularly by the Christian church.

As we have seen, Byzantine influence was introduced through the floor plan and decoration, in this case though, there is a basilica floor plan with a single nave in the Christian church. The nave is rounded off with the altar, on the right the diaconicon that invades the Arab Chamber and on the left the prothesis that becomes the bell tower. These three elements are viewed outside as a cascade of tufa prisms that enlivens and rounds off the Islamic masonry wall to which they are attached. The apse of the altar, lower in height than the prism from which it emerges, increases the pulse of the facade which reaches its climax in the bell tower. The nave is divided into two openings by two powerful arches. Each of these spaces – those openings of the only nave, the diaconicon, the altar and the prothesis – are covered with spherical cap domes on cantilevered vaults or concentric arcs.

This church goes far beyond the first Basilian monasteries that were built during the first stage of the conquest such as Santa Maria in Mili San Pietro or Santi Pietro e Paolo d'Agrò. There, mixed walls that combine masonry with polychrome brick courses are used, and also in in the blind arches [2].

Figure 7: Santa Maria in Mili San Pietro, Sicily.

At Santa Maria, the domes of the altar and the prothesis are also built on tambours and covered with stucco, but in San Giovanni the tambour and the cupula cap are unified under the same layer of red stucco, a new hallmark.

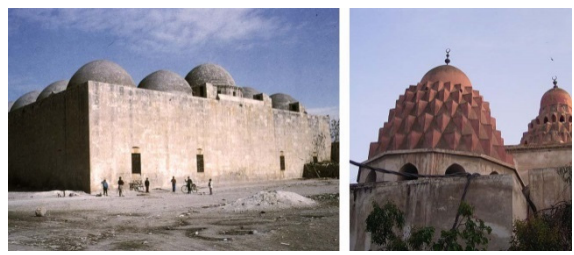
In San Giovanni degli Eremiti a triple contrast is created between the roughness of the porous stone, the voluptuousness of the vermilion cupula caps against the blue sky like a ceramic tile and the enclosed garden in the Arab enclosure with citrus and palm trees. Inside, there are no mosaics, no plasterwork, only the realness of the rough stone. The bell tower of the church, being a Christian type in itself, is topped with another type, paradoxically Muslim. It is not a case of assimilation of minarets or anything like that but a small qoubba, identical to the Piccola Qubba in the royal park. A small mausoleum on the stone prism. As in Ibn Ŷubayr's journey revealed, qoubbas were common in cemeteries and in the courtyards of mosques.

(a) (b)

Figure 8: (a) Sant Giovanni degli Eremiti; (b) Piccola Qubba, Palermo, Sicily.

Figure 9: Inside Sant Giovanni degli Eremiti, Palermo, Sicily.

The Palermo Piccola Qubba was coetaneous with the church and stood amongst fields like a hunting lodge. In both the case of the bell tower and the pavilion, the space is covered with four dressed triple pointed arches on which the dome rests. Again, there are references to the Persian fire temples or chahar-taqi. The Andalusí had also observed similar mausoleums in the cemetery of Cairo or the Mosque of Ibn Tulun, where the dome of the qoubba, though pointed, overlaps the tambour and is covered evenly with a smooth stucco. In Aleppo he observed the same contrast between the sterenotomy of walls and the absolute of the cupola caps in the Al-Firdaws Madrasa that is also highlighted by a strong modulation of spaces. Nothing was alien to him [4, 6].



(a) (b)

Figure 10: (a) Al-Firdaws Madrasa, Aleppo; (b) Nur al-Din Madrasa, Damasco, Syria.

Figure 11: Domes of Ifriqiya, Tunisia.

The chromaticism of these domes, repeated in other Norman churches such as San Giovanni degli Lebbrosi or San Cataldo, is of disputed origin. The domes of Ifriqiya were soft like these but they combined the white and adobes of rural creation with the brick dome of the mosque of Kairouan, none of them were strictly red. Only in Damascus had Ibn Ŷubayr seen red domes, of a completely different profile, in the madrasa Nur al-Din, built in 1167.

5 The end of the hajj

For Ibn Ŷubayr and his partner the stay in Sicily was beneficial, they found no significant differences with everything they had seen and they could assess how Muslims lived under Norman rule, with law and visible permissiveness. It was for him commendable that the king knew Arabic, lavish attention was paid to all knowledge regardless of its origin, and that the favourites of his palace were all Muslim. But this king who had saved them, married to Jeanne Plantagenet, sister of Richard the Lionheart, was also a fierce fighter against Constantinople and Islam. Thus, in a desire to avert the strong fitna that, in Sicily, had replaced the bārāka, he asks God, Powerful and Huge, to make him lose his way and let him meet misfortune on his travels. Paradoxes of his time. After his departure from Sicily, the first Andalusian land to be sighted is the Dāniya coast and Mount Qā'ūn, Denia and Montgó. Two years and three months after their departure.

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