

To understand the long history of the material remains from what we call the Silk Roads involves a kind of archaeological excavation through the accumulated strata of centuries. Important centers of political and/or religious significance were built and re-built, often leaving little from the earliest structures, but equally often incorporating parts of what had been there before. One thinks, for example, of the great Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, one of the most important early Islamic monuments, built on a site once occupied by a Roman temple and later a Christian Church. When the Umayyads were driven out of the Middle East, they eventually established a new center in Spain under Abd ar-Rahman I, who sponsored in 784-786 construction of the earliest mosque whose remains can still be found in what is popularly known as the Mezquita (mosque). It was built on a site formerly occupied by a 6th-century Christian church, itself undoubtedly having replaced a Roman structure. The view across the Guadalquivir River toward the Mezquita encompasses a historic bridge with its substantial Roman underpinnings. As was the case with so many of the early Islamic buildings, Abd ar-Rahman liberally borrowed construction materials from various sites, evidenced in many of the surviving columns and capitals. Indeed, in the Mezquita are layers upon layers: several different stages of mosque expansion, the preserved mihrab and its skylight domes dating from the 10th-century reign of Al-Hakam II, and the final expansion on the eastern side completed in 987 under Al-Mansur. With the Christian *Reconquista* in the 13th century, the building became (and today remains) the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Assumption. Christian transformation of parts of the building into a cathedral incorporated one of Al-Hakim II's domes into a Gothic chapel, and the massive expansion of the nave and sanctuary in the 16th century altered the profile of the building forever. Some of the decorative features of the building are in the so-called Mudéjar style, combining Christian and Islamic elements. To the non-expert eye, distinguishing such features from the earlier Islamic ones can be difficult. The current bell tower was erected on the remains of the minaret. The photographs here, taken in October 2015, are intended to evoke a sense of the complexity and richness of this remarkable building, whose size, elegance and architectural innovations make it one of the most important monuments of Islamic architecture and remind us of the significance of Islamic Spain in the cultural history of the Silk Roads. Among its distinctive features are the double-tiered arches, making possible a higher roof than single arches resting on the re-purposed columns would have allowed. The polylobed arches in the area around the mihrab are visually striking, as are the domes with their distinctive rib construction.



*The Puerta de San Estebán,
with an inscription dated 855.*



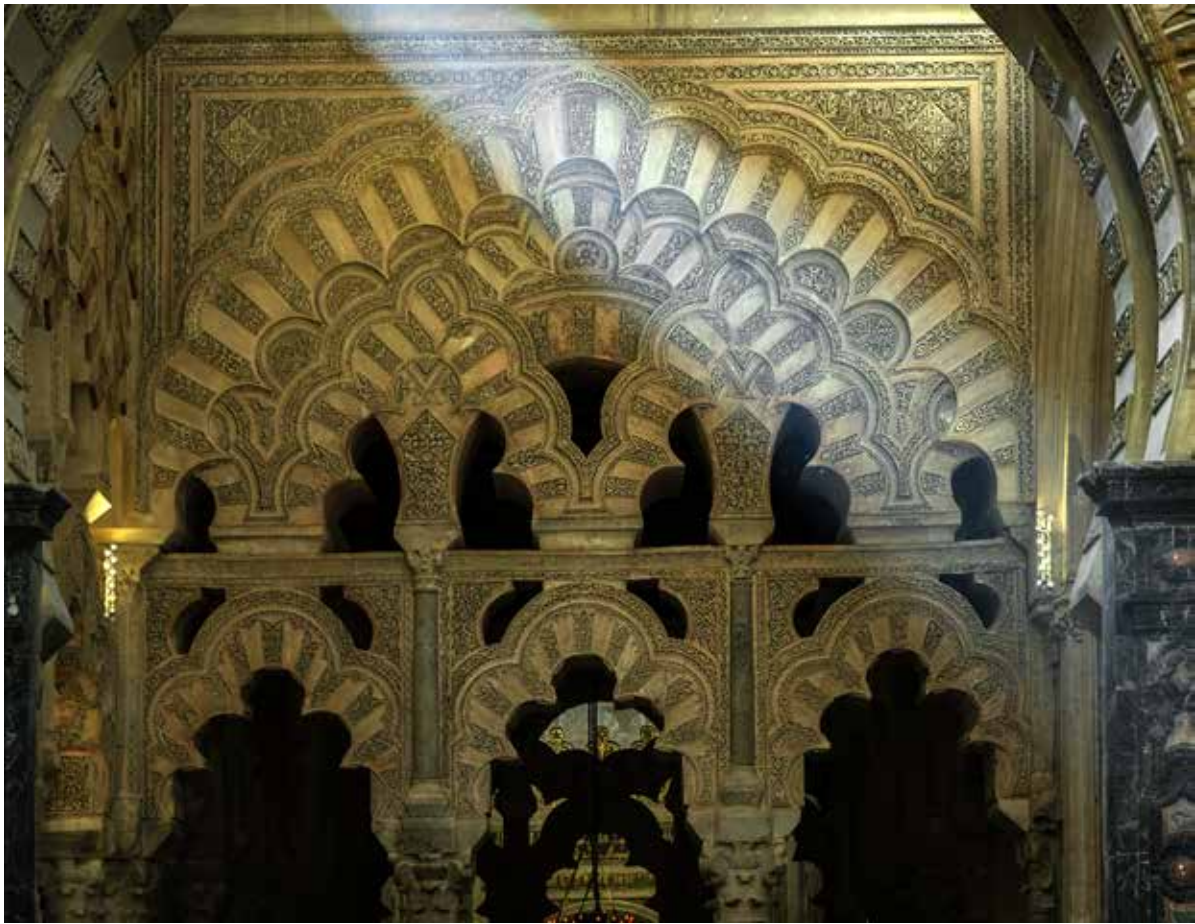
The Puerta de San José.



*Mosaic (from the previous
6th-century cathedral?) un-
der the floor of the mosque*



*A surviving panel
of the earlier painted
ceiling.*











The Reconquista and its transformations.





The dome in front of the mihrab, and view toward the mihrab from the north.

Plate VII – [Waugh, “The Mezquita,” pp. 163, 165]



Plate VIII – [Waugh, "The Mezquita," p. 168]

