

# Intersecting Sanctuaries: Exploring Cultural Hybridity at Córdoba's Mosque-Cathedral

Soojeong YI

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This study delves into the concept of cultural hybridity, using the Great Mosque-Cathedral in Córdoba, Spain as a unique case study. This monumental site stands as a testament to the convergence of Islamic and Christian architecture and ideology, a phenomenon that is often discussed in modern contexts. However, this study takes a step further, examining cultural hybridity across historical epochs to reveal its persistent relevance in shaping social and cultural landscapes. Originally a mosque transformed into a Christian cathedral, the Great Mosque-Cathedral is a prime example of this phenomenon, reflecting continuous cultural, architectural, and ideological exchanges between the two religions. This paper meticulously analyzes how the structure's architectural elements embody these exchanges, such as its ornate mihrab and unique double-arched columns. By integrating theories of hybridity with a detailed architectural and historical analysis, the study argues that the mosque-cathedral is not merely a physical space but a dynamic medium through which cultural negotiations and adaptations are articulated. The findings underscore the complexity of cultural hybridity, challenging simplistic interpretations of cultural exchange and dominance, and highlighting the mosque-cathedral's role in ongoing debates about identity and heritage in contemporary society. This comprehensive examination contributes to academic discussions on hybridity and enhances our understanding of cultural resilience and transformation through architectural spaces.

**Keywords:** Great Mosque-Cathedral in Córdoba, Cultural hybridity, Islamic culture in Spain, Islamic architecture, Islam and Christianity

## Introduction

Cultural hybridity began to be discussed earnestly in the 20th century, although various terms and names have historically been used to describe the phenomenon of different cultures interacting and mixing. Initially, the term “hybridity” was applied only to animals and was first used in relation to humans in the 19th century (Kim 2013). However, this early usage was negative and rooted in racism (Young 2014). It was not until the 20th century that the concept of hybridity began to be associated with culture (Park 2015). This raises the question: Is cultural hybridity a strictly modern concept? Is it a term that applies solely to cultural exchange in the contemporary world or is it a broader phenomenon transcending time? According to Peter Burke (Pökü 2012) in his book titled *Cultural Hybridity*, the answer is no. Burke (Pökü 2012, 29-32) points out that cultural hybridity can be observed in various forms of architecture, painting, literature, music, and more throughout history. He suggests that while the term “cultural hybridity” did not historically exist, the concept was continually perceived by scholars who used aesthetics-linked terms to refer to the exchange between two specific cultures. Historical legacies such as the cathedrals of Sicily or the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul demonstrate this cultural hybridity. This article presents the Great Mosque-Cathedral<sup>1</sup> in Córdoba as the preeminent example of cultural hybridity due to its role as a convergence point for Islamic and Christian civilization, where worship spaces for both religions coexist within the same structure.

Therefore, this study posits cultural hybridity as a universal human phenomenon transcending time and space, suggesting that cultural hybridity can occur at any historical point and in any location. The Great Mosque-Cathedral in Córdoba exemplifies this assertion, as it encapsulates the exchange, convergence, conflict, resistance, and acceptance between Islam and Christianity. Consequently, this paper analyzes the Great Mosque-Cathedral from the perspective of cultural hybridity, exploring the origins, processes, and social impacts of such interactions. Although scholars like Burke (Pökü 2012, 29-30) have recognized the significance of architecture in cultural hybridity, research remains limited concerning the detailed historical and architectural elements of the Great Mosque-Cathedral in Córdoba within this framework. Notably, the structure integrates indigenous Iberian, Eastern Mediterranean, and Arab-Islamic styles, presenting a unique case of cultural synthesis (Catlos 2018, 80). Thus, this study aims to synthesize and critically evaluate the existing research on the Great Mosque-Cathedral, integrating it with broader theories of cultural hybridity.

This study will initially discuss the concept of cultural hybridity and then present the history of the Great Mosque-Cathedral in Córdoba in chronological order. Additionally, this paper will analyze specific architectural elements that distinguish the Great Mosque-

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1 The Great Mosque-Cathedral is a modern name given to a historic building that has served different religious functions over time. Ideally, the building should be distinctly labeled according to its specific use in each historical period, such as a mosque or a cathedral. However, for the purposes of this article, which analyzes the building from a contemporary perspective, the current name, the Great Mosque-Cathedral, will be used to avoid confusion.

Cathedral, thereby illustrating its unique manifestation of cultural hybridity. This analysis will include an exploration of historical conflicts and resolutions, spanning from the initial construction phase in the 8th century to the recent naming dispute in 2016. Such examination aims to demonstrate how the architecture, embodying both Islamic and Christian influences, has historically merged these civilizations and continues to impact society today. While this research primarily focuses on the Great Mosque-Cathedral in Córdoba, it also sheds light on broader themes, such as the acceptance of culturally distinct others and the dynamics of struggle, conflict, resistance, negotiation, and acceptance that accompany cultural integration.

## The Concept of Cultural Hybridity

### *What is Cultural Hybridity?*

The term originated around 1600, deriving from the Latin word “hybrida,” a variant of “ibrida,” which describes a hybrid of a boar and a sow. Initially, it referred primarily to the mixing of animal species, where the concept of mixing and hybridization was traditionally viewed as an enhancement of purebreds (Kim 2013, 144). Historically, “hybrid” was employed as an oppositional term to emphasize obedience or pedigree purity rather than a positive quality. It was not until the 19th century that the term began to be applied to humans, often in a derogatory sense, being used from a racist perspective and becoming a discriminatory term associated with inter-racial or inter-ethnic marriages and their progeny (Young 2014, 23–54). Over time, the concept of hybridity was adopted across various academic disciplines, shedding its negative connotations. It gained prominence, particularly in the 1960s and 1970s with the rise of cultural studies in the West, where hybridity was reevaluated and began to be discussed in more nuanced ways as postmodern concepts evolved.

Today, hybridity is a pivotal concept for researchers explaining various phenomena related to culture, nation, and ethnicity. It is frequently employed in fields such as ethnology, cultural studies, and area studies to challenge essentialism, which posits that each cultural group possesses inherent and immutable characteristics that persist despite interactions with other cultures (Park 2015, 2–3). Cultural hybridity stands as a counter to essentialism and is considered crucial for understanding globalization and addressing decolonization. Prominent theorists of cultural hybridity, including Homi Bhabha, Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, Ien Ang, Edward Said, Nestor Garcia Canclini, Eduardo Archetti, and Peter Burke, have expanded the concept’s application across disciplines such as anthropology, literature, geography, art history, musicology, religious studies, and sociology. This broad application has highlighted the concept’s relevance in various fields of study (Pökü 2012, 19). Despite its widespread use, there is no consensus among researchers on a unified definition of cultural hybridity; instead, scholars adapt and interpret the concept to suit their specific fields of study (Park 2015, 4).

Naturally, the concept of cultural hybridity is not without its critics. Some argue that it attempts to merge distinct and often contradictory elements into a single entity, creating a

misleadingly harmonious image that overlooks existing societal and cultural discriminations (Del Sarto et al. 2004, 760–764). There is also concern that rapid hybridization might lead to the erasure of the distinct traditions and origins of each culture or religion (Pöckü 2012, 20). However, the scope of cultural hybridity extends beyond the superficial understanding of the term; it encompasses not only the outcomes of cultural interactions but also the processes by which different cultures meet, interact, and merge (Kalra et al. 2005, 141–142). Cultural hybridity involves a broad spectrum of social and cultural phenomena, reflecting the various factors that contribute to such interactions and their consequences. Accordingly, this study applies the concept of cultural hybridity to the Great Mosque-Cathedral in Córdoba. The terms “hybridity” and “cultural hybridity” will be used interchangeably throughout this article, depending on the context. Here, “cultural hybridity” is considered a specific instance of the broader phenomenon of hybridity. This approach is justified by the complex nature of the Mosque-Cathedral, which embodies not only cultural but also political, economic, and social elements, thereby enriching our understanding of cultural hybridity.

### ***Various Terminologies Similar to Cultural Hybridity***

British historian Perry Anderson (1998, 68–69) characterizes our modern era as one glorifying “the overlapping, the hybrid.” Similarly, Peter Burke (Pöckü 2012, 12) describes cultural hybridity as the intellectual landscape of our time. When diverse groups interact, the distinctness of each group’s cultural identity may not be as pronounced as previously delineated; instead, elements of cultural continuity persist (Amselle 1998, X–XV). This social and cultural phenomenon is not exclusive to the modern era; it has historical precedence, though the expressions, perspectives, and attitudes towards these phenomena have evolved. Consequently, it is crucial to discern the varying expressions and interpretations of what this study terms “cultural hybridity.” Over time, terms such as imitation, possession, spolia, borrowing, and acculturation have been employed to describe similar processes of cultural interaction and exchange.

Historically, the term “imitation” has been extensively utilized across various disciplines, initially in cognitive science and subsequently in cultural evolutionary studies. In Western scholarship, imitation has often been discussed as a primary method for examining cross-cultural interactions (Pigman III 1890, 1–32). An alternative to imitation is “possession” (Bourguignon 1976, 1-30), while “spolia” represents a more explicit form of cultural appropriation, used to describe the forceful adoption of elements from one culture for use under different circumstances (Kinney 2001, 138–145; 2019). From the mid-20th century onward, the concept of “borrowing” began to be viewed positively, seen as a survival mechanism among cultures (Treffers-Daller 2010, 21–23). Edward Said (1993) emphasized that cultural borrowing is a fundamental aspect of all cultural histories and, traditionally, borrowing has been considered a neutral term (Haugen 1950, 210-231). In modern contexts, particularly within religious frameworks, “tolerance” has evolved to denote the complete acceptance and embrace of another culture, allowing it to flourish according to its own terms

(Spencer-Rodgers 2010, 296–312). Recently, academic discussions have introduced “dialogue” and “negotiation” as nuanced alternatives to tolerance. Additionally, “acculturation” refers to the adaptation process where a subordinate culture assimilates traits from a dominant culture, often implying a hierarchical relationship (Boas 1888, 628–638). This is paralleled by “cultural transfer” and “cultural exchange,” which also suggest inherent cultural hierarchies (Pökü 2012, 68–69).

### ***The Definition of Cultural Hybridity Used in this Article***

As such, cultural hybridity occurs when two or more groups from diverse historical, social, cultural, and customary backgrounds converge to forge a new cultural domain through the adoption of each other’s cultural elements. This interaction involves various reactions—embracing and resisting aspects of each other’s culture followed by negotiations aimed at mutual understanding and acceptance. As these interactions are repeated, new cultural forms emerge, culminating in the creation of a cultural field with dimensions previously nonexistent. Thus, cultural hybridity should be regarded as a process encompassing both the journey and the endpoint. Given its historical presence, it is presumed that cultural hybridity has exerted some influence on contemporary contexts. Consequently, this article will explore the dynamics, outcomes, and characteristics of cultural hybridity, exemplified through the case study of the Great Mosque-Cathedral in Córdoba.

## **History and Architectural Characteristics of the Great Mosque-Cathedral of Córdoba**

### ***Umayyad Dynasty in Córdoba History and the Architectural History of the Great Mosque-Cathedral of Córdoba***

After the Prophet Muhammad founded Islam in the Arabian Peninsula in 610, the Islamic world saw rapid expansion. Following his death, four successors established the Umayyad dynasty, the first hereditary dynasty after the Orthodox Caliphate’s rule. Originating from the Quraysh tribe, with the Prophet Muhammad himself hailing from the Hashim family within the same tribe, the Umayyads established their capital in Damascus, Syria, ruling from 661 to 750 until their overthrow by the Abbasid Dynasty. In 711, Berber forces from North Africa crossed into Gibraltar and commenced the conquest of the Iberian Peninsula, securing control over nearly all of southern Spain by 715 (Kennedy 2014, 10–12). The Abbasids, rising from the Khorasan region of Iraq, defeated the Damascus-centered Umayyad dynasty in 750. Following their victory, the Abbasids exterminated the Umayyad royal family, except for Abd al-Rahman I, a Berber by maternal lineage. Abd al-Rahman I fled Damascus, journeyed through North Africa, and reached the Iberian Peninsula in September 755 (Grabar 1992, 5). By May 756, he had successfully waged war against other Islamic forces near Córdoba, seizing control of the city and assuming the title of Amir—ruler and governor—of Andalusia.

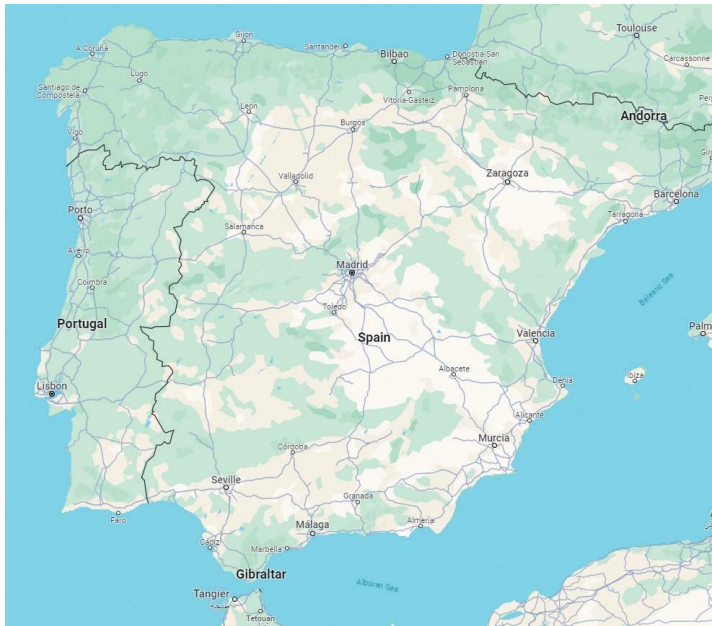


Figure 1. Map of Spain and Andalusia (in the red line). Source: Google Maps.

Andalusia, currently the southern region of Spain, was historically known as Al-Andalus in Arabic. This term once encompassed all the lands of the Iberian Peninsula under Islamic rule (Collins 1995, 115–120; Catlos 2018, 72–73). Abd al-Rahman I was committed to constructing a significant mosque in Córdoba. Initially, during the early Islamic occupation, Christians and Muslims shared the sanctuary of the existing cathedral, practicing their religions together (Cumplido 2007, 55–56). However, Abd al-Rahman I eventually replaced St. Vincent Cathedral, built by the Western Goths, with a mosque (Khoury 1996, 93; Dodds 1992, 11). This act of replacing a shared religious site with an Islamic place of worship mirrors the Umayyad's earlier construction of the Great Mosque of Damascus (Catlos 2018, 80). Apart from St. Vincent Cathedral, other cathedrals in Córdoba were destroyed early during the Islamic occupation (Cumplido 2007, 55–56; Dodds 1992, 11). The Umayyad dynasty's golden age in Córdoba, particularly under the reigns of Abd al-Rahman III and al-Hakim, saw the city's population swell to 200,000. The city boasted thousands of houses and gardens, over 600 mosques, 900 public baths, a university, and a library, marking it as one of the most prosperous cities of its time (Kern 1995, 20–26; Salloum 1992, 145). The Great Mosque-Cathedral, initiated by Abd al-Rahman I, underwent several expansions by his successors Abd al-Rahman II, al-Hakim II, and the vizier al-Mansur. Abd al-Rahman III added the mosque's minaret, symbolizing the iterative process of renovation and expansion that characterized this period (Ecker 2003, 113). The details of this process are described below.

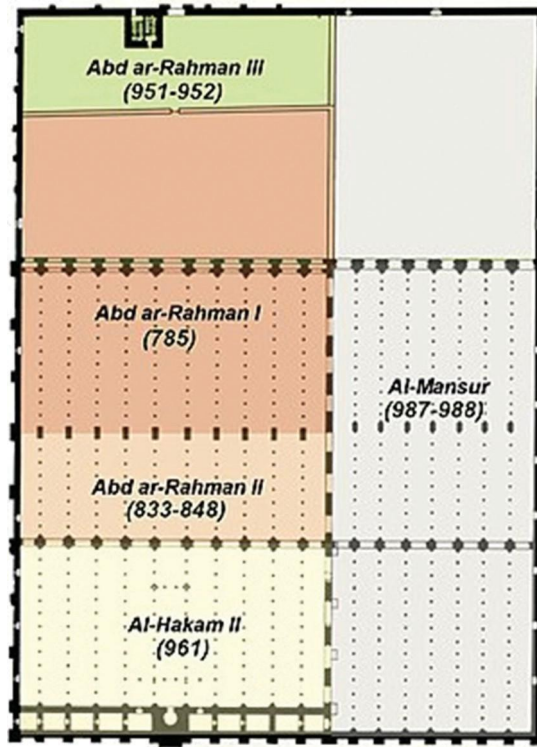


Figure 2. Blueprint of the Great Mosque-Cathedral in Córdoba. Source: Wikipedia.[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Plano\\_de\\_la\\_Mezquita\\_de\\_C%C3%B3rdoba\\_\(revised\\_with\\_labels\\_and\\_dates\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Plano_de_la_Mezquita_de_C%C3%B3rdoba_(revised_with_labels_and_dates).jpg).

The initial construction of the Great Mosque-Cathedral in Córdoba featured a hypostyle design incorporating 120 columns arranged in rows, each comprising 12 columns centered around a nave with five aisles on each side (Cumplido 2007, 68–69). The building was thus characterized by a hypostyle hall with one nave and ten aisles. On the north side, a mihrab was strategically placed facing south, near the Guadalquivir River; the specifics of its orientation and location are discussed further in a subsequent section. The first significant expansion took place between 833 and 848 under Abd al-Rahman II, who added eight more columns to the south, thereby enlarging the worship area (Dodds 1992, 15). Later, in 952, Abd al-Rahman III constructed the minaret, marking a pivotal moment as he elevated his status from amir to caliph, thereby proclaiming the Umayyad dynasty in Córdoba as a caliphate—akin to transitioning from king to emperor. A minaret, a towering, steeple-like architectural feature, serves both a visual and auditory function. From its summit, the *azan*, or call to prayer, is broadcast, ensuring that Muslims can synchronize their worship accordingly. This architectural element not only enhances the mosque's functionality but also symbolizes the presence and authority of Islam (Khoury 1996, 81–83).



Figure 3. Minaret of the Great Mosque-Cathedral in Córdoba. Photo by author.

Between 926 and 966, al-Hakim II orchestrated a significant addition to the Great Mosque-Cathedral in Córdoba, during which the mihrab and maqsura that are visible today were installed (Cumplido 2007, 195–235). The mihrab, a niche marking the qibla or direction of worship, is traditionally built between two pillars and recessed into the wall. In Córdoba, this feature not only indicates the qibla but also embodies elements of cultural hybridity, which will be discussed later. Adjacent to the mihrab, the maqsura provides a secluded area for the Muslim rulers, their families, and entourage to worship, separate from the general congregation. These features are renowned for their ornate beauty, ranking among the world's most exquisite architectural elements. The fourth and final expansion of the mosque was led by the vizier al-Mansur during the rule of Hisham II, a relatively weak caliph. Al-Mansur, possessing authority akin to that of a caliph, expanded the structure eastward, adding eight corridors to the east side and inadvertently shifting the mihrab slightly west of the center. This expansion marked a deviation from the prior southward enlargements.

Following the fall of the later Umayyads in 1031, the Caliphate disintegrated into smaller Taifa kingdoms. In 1236, the Christian ruler Fernando III reconquered Córdoba and consecrated the Great Mosque-Cathedral to the Catholic Church. Subsequently, Alfonso X added the Capilla de San Clemente within the complex. The transformation continued with the construction of a Gothic nave and various chapels beginning in 1489. In 1523,



during the tenure of King Carlos V, a controversial expansion led to the demolition of some existing aisles. Regretting the changes, Carlos V later lamented, “If I had known what you were going to do, I would not have allowed it. Because what you construct is something that can be seen everywhere, and what existed before it does not exist anywhere else in the world” (Ecker 2003, 113–141). Consequently, a Catholic chapel was constructed over the area added by Hakim II, reflecting ongoing cultural and architectural transformations (Giese 2018, 145–146).

The Great Mosque-Cathedral in Córdoba has been shaped by the hands of numerous rulers, each of whom expanded or embellished the structure to consolidate power and project authority internationally. The history of the Mosque-Cathedral mirrors the complex and diverse interactions between Islam and Christianity over centuries. Consequently, the site transcends the simple co-use of space by two religions; it embodies the coexistence of Christianity and Islam’s sacred spaces within a single complex. Architectural legacies of interfaith and intercultural encounters are plentiful, yet it is exceptional to find a site where such varied and profound qualities coexist simultaneously. In subsequent chapters, this study will delve deeper into the unique cultural hybridity of the Great Mosque-Cathedral in Córdoba, examining its architectural history and structure in greater detail. This analysis aims to highlight how the edifice serves as a physical manifestation of the intertwined histories of two of humanity’s major religions, standing as a testament to centuries of shared and contested spaces.

## The Great Mosque-Cathedral in Córdoba and Cultural Hybridity

### *Summary of Chapter IV*

This paragraph integrates historical context and cultural theory to discuss the architectural significance of the Great Mosque-Cathedral in Córdoba. Here’s a refined version to enhance academic clarity and coherence: Architecture often serves as a tangible representation of cultural hybridity (Pökü 2012, 29). Peter Burke cites the Great Mosque-Cathedral in Córdoba, the San Roman Cathedral (Menocal 2002, 131), and the Mughal Empire’s architecture with its Hindu influences (Mitter 2001, 87, 181–182) as prime examples of cultural hybridity in architectural form. These structures illustrate how architecture, built in regions of cultural confluence, reflects a functional space and the political, social, cultural, and historical contexts of their time. Consequently, in areas where cultures intertwine, buildings inherently display elements of cultural hybridity. Historically, the concept of cultural hybridity has been recognized by art historians, although they often used specific regional terms such as Hindu-Saracenic, Hispano-Mauresque, and Afro-Portuguese to describe the cultural elements of architecture (Pökü 2012, 31–32; Metcalf 1989, 73–74; Cazenave 1925, 594; Terrasse 1958; Hart 2007, 77–86).

This chapter will focus on the Great Mosque-Cathedral in Córdoba by analyzing three

aspects: its locational characteristics, architectural elements, and contemporary influences. The Mosque-Cathedral reflects the Umayyad desire to continue their architectural traditions from Syria while also incorporating the local culture of the Iberian Peninsula. Although not all elements of Iberian culture were adopted—the demolition of Córdoba’s cathedrals and the reuse of their materials for mosque construction suggest a degree of conquest—the ongoing expansions and renovations of the Mosque-Cathedral over the centuries demonstrate an evolving integration of diverse cultural influences. This continuous architectural adaptation highlights not only the hybrid nature of the structure but also the complex cultural dynamics between Islam and Christianity in the region. Both religions, while nostalgic for their respective homelands, have adapted to and been shaped by their new cultural landscapes, making the Great Mosque-Cathedral a quintessential example of cultural hybridity.

### *The Locational Characteristics of the Great Mosque-Cathedral in Córdoba*

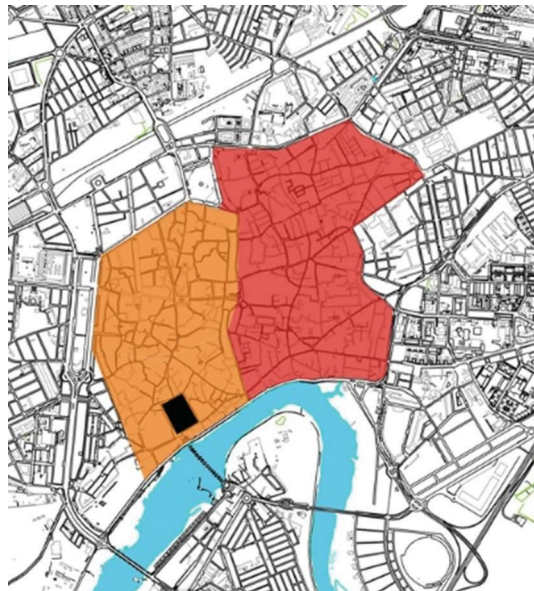


Figure 4. Córdoba in Middle Ages. Left: limits of Roman city; right: Muslim enlargement.  
Source: [https://otraarquitecturaesposible.blogspot.com/2011/05/cathedral-mosque-of-cordoba-for\\_07.html](https://otraarquitecturaesposible.blogspot.com/2011/05/cathedral-mosque-of-cordoba-for_07.html).

When one reviews historical maps of Córdoba, the layout reflects a city sculpted by the ebb and flow of cultural tides. The neighborhoods on the left side, formerly inhabited by the Visigoths before Islamic influence, contrast sharply with the expanded right side, which developed as Islam was introduced and the city grew. The black rectangular building prominently placed near the river, known as the Great Mosque-Cathedral of Córdoba, is a profound symbol of the intersection between Christianity and Islam. This area, which was

originally a stronghold of Christian dominance, underwent a significant transformation as Islamic cultural elements were assimilated, showcasing a vivid example of cultural exchange.

The Mosque-Cathedral's mihrab, traditionally thought to face Mecca in alignment with Islamic customs directly, presents an intriguing deviation from expectation. Recent scholarly research, particularly that by Hong in 2020, proposes that the mihrab actually faces Africa rather than directly towards Mecca. It is strategically aligned parallel to the Guadalquivir River, set at a precise angle of about 29 degrees. This orientation is not merely coincidental but is thoughtfully aligned with significant solar events—the direction of sunrise at the summer solstice and sunset at the winter solstice (Hong 2020, 76). This thoughtful integration of natural celestial patterns into religious architecture suggests a sophisticated understanding of the environment and its relation to spiritual and communal life. Moreover, the architectural style and orientation of the Mosque-Cathedral share similarities with the Great Mosque of Umayyad in Damascus, Syria. Both structures were influenced by the Roman and Byzantine architecture pre-existing in their respective regions, adapting the Islamic architectural requirement of facing the qibla towards Mecca to suit their geographic and cultural contexts. In Damascus, the mosque followed the urban layout and the existing infrastructural elements of the Roman city, which similarly influenced the construction in Córdoba. As such, the mosque in Córdoba was built along an existing Roman road, cleverly integrating into the urban fabric without disrupting the existing layout, thereby maintaining a continuity with the past while embedding new religious significance into the city's landscape.

This architectural adaptation in Córdoba, like its counterpart in Damascus, subtly shifts the qibla orientation to an approximate alignment with Mecca, positioning the mihrab on the southern side of the structure. This alignment showcases the Umayyad dynasty's ability to blend their architectural heritage from Syria with the distinct environmental and cultural characteristics of Córdoba. This synthesis is not merely architectural but also represents a deeper cultural hybridization, where Islamic traditions from the Umayyad dynasty intermingle with the local customs and historical layers of Córdoba, creating a unique cultural and architectural landmark that stands as a testament to centuries of cultural exchange and adaptation.

***Characteristic Architectural Elements of the Great Mosque-Cathedral in Córdoba:  
Using  
Two Colors, Double Arch, Horseshoe Arch, Cusped Arch, and  
Mihrab***

The architectural distinction of the Great Mosque-Cathedral in Córdoba is primarily due to its use of double arches, horseshoe arches, cusped arches, and a prominently ornate mihrab (Khoury 1996, 80). Additionally, the arches' vibrant red and white colors contribute to the building's unique aesthetic, elements that emerged from the hybridization of Christian and Islamic cultures. This integration makes the Mosque-Cathedral particularly special. The arches feature alternating red bricks and white stones, giving the structure a festive and bright appearance, often described as carnivalesque (Dodds 1992, 12). The choice of red and white is believed to have been influenced by either the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem

or the Aachen Cathedral in France, which was contemporaneously under construction when the Mosque-Cathedral was being renovated. While some scholars argue that the influence of the Dome of the Rock was minimal due to its 11th-century renovation, others suggest that any existing decoration at the time could have influenced the Mosque-Cathedral's design (Hong 2020, 77; Chejne and Šahnah 1974). Nonetheless, the repeated use of two colors is a recognized feature in Islamic architecture, indicating a broader Islamic influence. Furthermore, the Mosque-Cathedral's columns are uniquely structured with double arches for both structural and aesthetic reasons. Originally, not all columns used in the construction were new; many were repurposed from neighboring structures, resulting in varied lengths and styles. Architects employed double arches and additional support columns to enhance structural stability and adapt to the differing column dimensions. This architectural choice not only ensured the building's integrity but also allowed for a raised floor level, creating an illusion of greater space and adding to the grandeur of the interior.



Figure 5. Hall with double arch structure. Photo by author.

The origins of the double arches in the Great Mosque-Cathedral in Córdoba are a subject of considerable interest and debate. It is widely believed that these arches were inspired either by the monasteries that previously stood in Segovia on the Iberian Peninsula or by the design of earlier Catholic cathedrals (Hong 2020, 72). This architectural feature, which had already been established in the region, was incorporated into the Mosque-Cathedral, necessitating modifications to existing architectural elements to ensure the structure's stability. The incorporation of double arches is not merely a technical or aesthetic choice but a reflection of the broader context of cultural interactions. By adapting and integrating architectural styles that were indigenous to the Iberian Peninsula, the builders of the Mosque-Cathedral created a unique blend of Islamic and Christian architectural traditions. This synthesis of design elements from different cultural backgrounds was instrumental in developing the architectural cultural hybridity that the Mosque-Cathedral is celebrated for today. The

application of these dual-arched forms was pivotal, serving as a catalyst for the emergence of new architectural expressions that symbolized and facilitated the coexistence of diverse cultural influences within a single iconic structure.

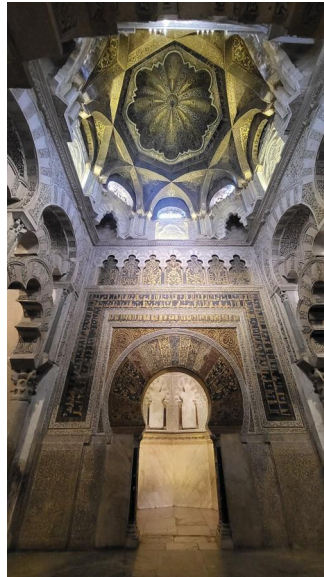


Figure 6. Mihrab in the Great Mosque-Cathedral in Córdoba. Photo by author.

The mihrab holds a central role in mosque architecture, universally present even in the smallest mosques or musallahs, to indicate the direction of the qibla—the direction towards Mecca, which Muslims face during salat (worship). In today's digital age, smartphone apps readily provide the qibla's direction, allowing for flexible prayer locations. Historically, however, such technology was unavailable, making the mihrab's role critical for guiding worship direction within mosques. Distinctively, the mihrab of the Great Mosque-Cathedral in Córdoba incorporates a chamber-like structure behind its ornate walls—a feature not commonly found in earlier local mosques, where mihrabs typically consisted of a simple recessed niche flanked by pillars. This adaptation in Córdoba's mosque is believed to reflect Christian architectural influences, particularly the design of chapels in Catholic cathedrals, where chambers at the front of the chapel have hosted Christian liturgies for centuries. The structure of the mihrab room in the Great Mosque-Cathedral mirrors these Christian elements, suggesting that its design was inspired by the chapel of San Miguel de Escalada, built in 913, which features a worship space strikingly similar to the mihrab's layout in Córdoba (Dodds 1992, 19–20). This architectural borrowing highlights the cultural interplay between Islamic and Christian traditions on the Iberian Peninsula. Muslim architects adapted features from local Christian structures into their sacred spaces, leading to the evolution of the roomed-type mihrab that influenced subsequent mosque designs. Thus, the mihrab

in the Great Mosque-Cathedral not only serves its traditional religious function but also exemplifies the deep intercultural exchange between Islam and Christianity during this period. This architectural synthesis reflects a broader historical narrative of cultural and religious integration in the region, marking the Mosque-Cathedral as a monument to both shared heritage and distinct religious identities.

In addition, the entire mihrab of the Great Mosque-Cathedral in Córdoba is adorned with intricate mosaics, a decorative style that echoes the facade of the Great Mosque of Umayyad in Damascus. This architectural feature underscores the pervasive influence of Byzantine art, attributable to the interactions between Christian and Islamic civilization over centuries. Historically, the incorporation of mosaic decoration in Islamic architecture, such as that seen in Damascus, represented an adaptation of Christian artistic traditions, which were themselves influenced by earlier Byzantine aesthetics. In the case of the Great Mosque-Cathedral in Córdoba, the mosaic decoration directly reflects the influence of the Great Mosque of Damascus, thereby illustrating a continuity of Umayyad architectural and artistic styles (Dodds 1992, 22). This stylistic choice not only enhances the aesthetic and spiritual ambiance of the space but also serves as a visual representation of the cultural and historical connections between the Umayyad dynasty's major architectural achievements in Damascus and Córdoba. The application of mosaics in Córdoba, therefore, is more than a mere ornamental feature; it is a testament to the deep-rooted exchange of artistic knowledge and religious symbolism between the Islamic and Christian worlds. This feature of the Great Mosque-Cathedral highlights its role as a bridge linking disparate cultures through shared artistic expressions, thereby enriching the cultural fabric of the Iberian Peninsula.

Similarly, the inscriptions adorning the walls of the mihrab in the Great Mosque-Cathedral in Córdoba are not merely decorative but also serve a significant rhetorical function, echoing the Christian art practices of incorporating text to convey spiritual and temporal messages (Dodds 1992, 22–23). These inscriptions also articulate the hierarchy, legitimacy, and power of the caliphate, employing ornate elements to underscore the authority of the rulers. Notably, these were inscribed during the Umayyad Caliphate of Córdoba, after Abd al Rahman III elevated the principality to caliphate status, marking a period when three distinct caliphates—the Fatimid, Abbasid, and Umayyad—existed simultaneously. This context underlines the inscriptions' importance in legitimizing and consolidating the caliphs' power, a practice reminiscent of the decorative strategies employed in the Dome of the Rock, where inscriptions similarly project power and divine sanction. Additionally, the architectural design of the mihrab integrates distinctive elements such as the cusped arch, an ornate structure resembling a cluster of leaves, which enhances the sacred space's visual appeal. Another significant architectural feature within the mosque is the horseshoe arch, its unique shape contributing to the iconic aesthetic of the building. Overall, these elements, while decorative, are deeply imbued with cultural symbolism, reflecting the fusion of Christian and Islamic artistic traditions. This synthesis illustrates how the Great Mosque-Cathedral in Córdoba serves as a repository of shared cultural heritage, showcasing the interplay between different artistic and architectural influences that define this historic monument.



Figure 7. Cathedral of the Great Mosque-Cathedral in Córdoba. Photo by author.

Moreover, the architectural design of the Great Mosque-Cathedral in Córdoba does not aim to insult or denounce the Christian faith or identity; rather, it exemplifies the unique and creative adaptation of Islamic architectural traditions, incorporating and borrowing from the diverse cultural milieu of the Iberian Peninsula. This synthesis led to the creation of the Almudéjar style, which became prevalent in various buildings across the peninsula after the Mosque-Cathedral, underscoring the enduring Islamic influences in even predominantly Christian structures (Giese 2018, 145–146). The transcultural exchange evident in the architecture of the Iberian Peninsula is vividly exemplified by the Great Mosque-Cathedral itself. This site has seamlessly integrated both mosque and cathedral within a single complex, showcasing a dynamic interplay between the two religious architectures. The presence of both a mosque and a cathedral within the same compound illustrates an ongoing dialogue between Islam and Christianity, marking the site as a profound example of architectural and cultural hybridity. Comparable to the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, which has alternated roles between a cathedral, mosque, museum, and back to a mosque, the Great Mosque-Cathedral in Córdoba represents a similar fluidity in function and symbolism. The addition of the cathedral within the mosque complex serves as a testament to the intertwined histories of the two faiths. In a region where Islam and Christianity coexisted, these religions not only influenced and resisted each other but also negotiated and found a way to coexist, contributing to the complex identity of the Great Mosque-Cathedral as we see it today.

### ***The Contemporary Impact of the Great Mosque-Cathedral in Córdoba: From Tourism Commodification to Naming Conflicts***

The monumental significance of Córdoba, particularly its Great Mosque-Cathedral, is profound and widely acknowledged as one of the most important examples of Islamic monumental architecture in the West. It is also the most visited historical site in Spain, underscoring its global appeal and cultural importance and the city has effectively marketed this architectural masterpiece to the world (Rosa and Jover-Baez 2017, 127–128, 136). Historically, the building has been referred to as the Great Mosque-Cathedral in Córdoba but it underwent a lengthy process of conflict regarding its official name, reflecting deeper cultural and religious tensions. Traditionally known as the Mezquita (mosque in Spanish), the local vernacular referred to it simply as a mosque, however, Catholics often called it the “Mother Church” (Rosa and Jover-Baez 2017, 139). The 20th century saw ongoing disputes over its designation, culminating in 1998 when it officially adopted the name Great Cathedral (Gran Catedral), explicitly dropping the term “mosque.” This name change sparked further debate between those advocating for a dual name that reflected its complex identity and history and those preferring it to be recognized solely as a cathedral. From 1998 until 2016, the official designation was the Great Cathedral, however, in 2016, the name was officially changed back to the Great Mosque-Cathedral in Córdoba (Alfonso 2016). This renaming was a significant acknowledgment of the site as a space where two major religious cultures—Islam and Christianity—coexist, transcending its identification solely with the Catholic faith. The adoption of the name Mosque-Cathedral has since become a symbol of religious pluralism. This evolution in naming is emblematic of the broader cultural hybridity characterizing the monument, reflecting an ongoing process of negotiation and conflict resolution that underscores the site’s complex cultural and religious heritage.

### ***The Great Mosque-Cathedral in Córdoba as an Example of Cultural Hybridity***

A key issue in discussions of cultural hybridity is whether there is a hierarchy among cultures that come into direct contact. Previous research has indicated varying levels of hierarchy between cultures, affecting the nature of their adaptations (Berry 1997, 5–34). Contrarily, scholars like Bhabha argue against the notion that “higher” cultures influence “lower” ones, suggesting instead that cultures mutually influence each other to create new cultural dimensions, a perspective that critiques colonialist views (Bhabha 1994, 111–118). This study posits that while cultural dynamics often reflect disparities in political and economic power, they do not necessarily mirror class distinctions with a unidirectional impact. The absence of clear class distinctions enables the cross-pollination of cultural influences, as evidenced by the Islamic architectural elements in post-Mosque-Cathedral Catholic constructions, leading to the emergence of the Almudéjar style. As such, cultural hybridity also exhibits continuity over time, not only during periods of direct encounter but also in lasting influences that foster new cultural hybrids. The naming conflicts surrounding the Great Mosque-Cathedral



in Córdoba illustrate such enduring impacts. Burke identifies various societal responses to cultural hybridity, including trendiness, resistance, cultural purification, separation, adaptation, and circularity (Pöckü 2012, 121–151). These responses range from welcoming new cultural influences and integrating them, as seen in the Westernization of non-Western countries, to defending against cultural influx, which can manifest in extreme cultural purification efforts that seek to erase foreign elements.

The Great Mosque-Cathedral of Córdoba is a good example of the mixing of European and Islamic cultures but it's not the only one. In its various forms, European and Islamic cultural hybridization has continued from the past to the present and its transmission has taken place in places as diverse as Damascus, Baghdad, and Cairo, the major cities of the Islamic world, to Spanish cities as well as Sicily and Venice (Darke 2020). Each of these architectural elements reflects a new form that embraces and transforms the cultures of both Islam and Christianity and projects its own perspective, which we can identify through the characteristics that we see in this architecture today. In the end, the Great Mosque-Cathedral itself represents an amalgamation of responses: it is a site where adaptation and the creation of new architectural forms occurred alongside resistance to cultural blending. This resistance, rather than being purely oppositional, often leads to negotiations that eventually facilitate a mutual acceptance and integration of cultural elements. Drawing from Burke's framework, this article argues that cultural hybridity inherently involves conflict, resistance, negotiation, and accommodation. Although Burke discusses adaptation and circularity as forms of accommodation, this study suggests expanding the conceptual framework to include conflict and negotiation explicitly. These elements are crucial for understanding the dynamic interplay of cultures, where resistance can lead to negotiation, setting the stage for a new cultural synthesis that respects and incorporates elements from each interacting culture.

## Conclusion

This study began with an inquiry into whether cultural hybridity is a phenomenon unique to the modern era. By examining the Great Mosque-Cathedral in Córdoba through the lens of cultural hybridity, this research illustrates that cultural hybridity is a universal human phenomenon, transcending both time and geographical boundaries. The Mosque-Cathedral, where the profound religious civilizations of Christianity and Islam converge, serves as a quintessential representation of cultural hybridity. Historically, cultural hybridity has manifested across various epochs under different guises. While the term itself may be modern, the interaction and blending of cultures are as old as humanity itself, evidenced by countless examples throughout history, including the architectural and cultural synthesis seen in the Great Mosque-Cathedral in Córdoba. Human migration, a constant throughout history, has invariably introduced new cultures into dominant ones, inevitably leading to cultural hybridization wherever different cultures interact. Prior to the 19th century, such movement was primarily characterized by conquest and subjugation, often initiated by war.

In contrast, the modern world experiences global migration and social settlement. Since the 19th century, migration has expanded to the individual level, posing the question of whether society should recognize the mixing of cultures where they intersect. This includes examining if a hierarchical relationship exists between superior and inferior cultures and whether an inferior culture is subsumed by a superior one according to this hierarchy. This study argues that such a hierarchical relationship does not exist. Instead, it argues that cultures do not exhibit inherent superiority or inferiority but rather create new cultural elements through mutual influences. The Great Mosque-Cathedral serves as an exemplary historical case of such cultural hybridity. Therefore, it is evident that new levels of culture emerge from the intersection of different cultures, both historically and in the present, despite the differing processes of cultural exchange and formation. Thus, the presence or absence of a hierarchy between cultures would significantly influence the nature of cultural hybridity.

This study contends that while power dynamics may shift, suggesting a temporary hierarchy, cultural influences are mutually transformative, negating a permanent state of cultural dominance. If a rigid hierarchy did exist, the fluid exchange and integration of cultural elements—as observed in the Great Mosque-Cathedral—would be far less feasible. Over time, the initial power structures often diminish in influence, underscoring the adaptive and evolving nature of cultures. Cultural hybridity should be viewed as the creation of new cultural forms that are not only valued for their novelty but also revered as cultural heritage. This ongoing process generates continuity and fosters new values over time. Like a living organism, cultural hybridity thrives and evolves, shaped by the hands of those who participate in its creation. It is a testament to the enduring capacity of human societies to blend and innovate, making cultural hybridity not a characteristic of any single era or society but a perpetual feature of human civilization.

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