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ARCHITECTURE AND ARTISTIC PRACTICES IN FOURTEENTH CENTURY CASTILE:

THE VISUAL MEMORY OF ALFONSO
XI AND PEDRO I UNDER THE FIRST
TRASTAMARAN KINGS.

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Abstract: In 1369 the Castilian Civil War came to an end when Pedro I was murdered by his stepbrother, Enrique II, the first king of the Trastámara dynasty. The importance of the artistic patronage of Pedro I and his courtesans is well known, but 1369 seems to stand as a historiographical watershed, as though the death of the king brought to an end a period of experimentation, interconnections and creativity. This article analyzes the architecture and artistic practices in Castile during the decades immediately following the end of the war, a key moment in the articulation of a Castilian courtly architecture. It considers how the artistic experimentation of the previous decades, which includes the reigns of Pedro I and his father Alfonso XI, was continued and revisited during the early years of the Trastámaras dynasty, not only by the kings themselves but also by the nobility.

In 1369, after several years of armed conflict, the Castilian Civil War came to an end when the legitimate Castilian king, Pedro I, was murdered by his step-brother, Enrique II, the first king of the Trastámara dynasty. The change in dynasty was followed by a transformation also in the Castilian nobility. After the war, major titles and gifts of land were granted to emerging secondary families, which had supported Enrique II and which were, after his victory, promoted to the highest ranks of the court.

The importance of the artistic patronage carried out by Pedro I and some of his courtesans is well known. The close relationship between Castile and Granada during those years, in which innovative ideas crossed back and forth over the border, has been studied,¹ as has the importance of this relationship in developing both an Iberian courtly culture (Rodríguez Porto) and a new type of specialized palace, according to new ideas about power and centrality (Almagro, “Los palacios de tradición” and “Los palacios de Pedro I”; Ruiz Souza, “*Oh lugar*”).

However, our knowledge of the decades immediately following this artistic outbreak is much more limited. The idea of Pedro I’s exceptionalism has become firmly established in the historiographical tradition—both his close relationship with Granada and his specific tastes—and 1369 still seems to stand as a historiographical watershed, as though the death of the king brought to an end this period of experimentation, interconnections and creativity, and thereafter architectonic models or decorative patterns became fossilized and derivative. Yet, a closer analysis of the artistic outlook during the decades after the civil war suggests otherwise.

The decades of 1370 and 1380 were a busy time for the Castilian royal family in terms of their patronage for new architectural projects². In scarcely ten years, the new king, Enrique II, built a new royal palace in the city of León,

¹ For that specific and very complex issue, see the various publications of Ruiz Souza (“Santa Clara,” “Architectural languages,” “Castilla y al-Andalus”) and Robinson (“Mudéjar revisited”).

² It is not by chance a key moment in the elaboration of discourses of legitimization for the new Trastámara dynasty (Valdaliso “Discursos”). Although many written discourses of the time have not been preserved, artistic patronage of that period must be taken into account.

finished in 1377 (Campos and Pérez), and two funerary chapels: one in the cathedral of Córdoba for his father and his grandfather, finished by 1371, and a second one, for himself, his wife and his descendants, located in the cathedral of Toledo (Ruiz Souza, “Capillas”; Nogales). Although the latter was begun in 1374, it was culminated only after his death by his successor, around 1382. The queen, Juana Manuel, was herself involved in refurbishing works in the convent of Tordesillas (Robinson, “Mudéjar”; Gutiérrez Baños, *Aportación*), where she planned to move the body of the king’s mother, Alfonso XI’s mistress, Leonor de Guzmán.

Noble lineages were also very active during these decades. The Velasco family built the Medina de Pomar palace, at the heart of their new domains. The Estúñiga family began the construction of a palace in their new town of Curiel de Duero around 1386, and after 1391 they built another palace in Seville (Cobos y Castro 97). The Tovars built their own palace in Cevico de la Torre around 1384 (Ara Gil). In León, near the new royal palace, the Quiñones family built, or renovated, their own urban palace, which today is a Conceptionist convent (Lavado, “Arte”). These families also showed interest in founding or renovating monasteries and convents, which served as their funerary chapels: the Velasco family in Medina de Pomar, the Portocarreros in Moguer, or the Estúñiga family in the convent of the Holy Trinity in Valladolid, now disappeared.

All these projects make clear the vitality in the fields of art and architecture in Castile at the end of the fourteenth century. After the death of Pedro I, there was not a decrease in the number of important commissions or an interruption in the creation of a Castilian courtly architecture. On the contrary, much of the artistic experimentation of the previous decades, including the reigns of Pedro I and his father Alfonso XI, was continued during the early years of the Trastámaras dynasty, not only by the kings themselves but also by the nobility, who played a key role in the definitive articulation of the previous Castilian artistic tradition.

Transforming Spaces: Memory and Aesthetic (Dis)continuities

One of the first artistic projects of the new king, Enrique II, was the construction of a chapel in the Cathedral of Córdoba as a resting place for his grandfather, Fernando IV, and his father, Alfonso XI (fig. 1). The tomb of Fernando IV had been located in the Cathedral of Córdoba since his death, in 1312 (Jordano Barbudo, *Arquitectura* 197). However, though written sources are very vague, nothing indicates that any kind of representational space was built at the beginning of the fourteenth century (Nieto Cumplido 460; Nogales 1419).³ For his part, Alfonso XI had expressed his desire to be buried in Córdoba in his last will and testament, but his body was taken to Sevilla after his death, in 1350, and was still there when Enrique II came to power.

The new Trastámara king built a new and magnificent royal chapel in Córdoba for both his ancestors and moved the body of his father there in 1371, according to the chronicles⁴. The chapel was finished the same year, as is stated in an inscription at the base of its walls: “Este es el muy alto rrey d. Enrique. Por onra del cuerpo del rrey su padre esta capiella mandó facer acabose en la era de M e CCCIX años.”

The fulfillment of the final wishes of the previous king and his magnificent burial were part of the regular duties of any new sovereign (Ruiz Souza, “Capillas” 15), and the possibilities that this action offered for dynastic commemoration made it one of the most important strategies of legitimization for medieval monarchs (Nogales 961). Indeed, written sources and material remains of the earliest cathedral consecrated in the mosque, studied by Laguna, show that Pedro I planned for his father’s body to be

³ The few sources mentioning this burial never mention a royal chapel as such, unlike the cases in Seville, Toledo and after the new construction also in Córdoba (Nieto Cumplido 460). A 1332 reference to a “chapel where the king is buried” opens the possibility of the existence of a prior individualized space. Teresa Laguna, following other scholars, suggests that Fernando IV was buried near the north arch of the presbytery, at least until the enthroning of Pedro I, when some work on the current location of the royal chapel may have been carried out (Laguna 83).

⁴ It is mentioned twice, at the end of the chronicle of Alfonso XI (Rosell 66:392), and the beginning of the chronicle of Enrique II (Rosell 68:9).

transferred to Córdoba but never actually had it moved. After his overthrow, Enrique II made it a priority to carry out the wishes of Alfonso XI, since in doing so he was acting as a loyal son and could therefore claim to be the rightful heir as king. Moreover, the construction of a new chapel allowed him to make his claims of legitimacy tangible, in the exhibition of his own royal lineage and the careful erasure of the memory of his half-brother from this lineage.

Fig. 1.- Royal Chapel in Córdoba (Photo: author).

Typological choices for the new royal chapel played a role in this complex negotiation between lineage, memory and oblivion. First of all, the two-story structure, with the tombs in the upper part of the chapel, is similar to the model used for some previous royal chapels in Castile, especially those of Fernando III and Alfonso X in Seville, as well as a hypothetical analogous

structure in Toledo, in the chapel of Sancho IV (Ruiz Souza, “Capillas” 23).⁵ However, the specific stylistic choices for the ornamentation of the chapel were not necessarily linked to those forerunners; rather, they were governed by the specific place of construction, the dynamics of spatial differentiation and the visual evocation of the memory of Alfonso XI, which, as I will argue, can be perceived throughout the whole project.

The chapel was erected in a lavish and prestigious space within both the former mosque and the first Cathedral of Córdoba. It was situated in the easternmost of the three vaulted spaces that, according to Ruiz Souza (“La fachada”), were constructed at the north end of the expansion of the prayer hall undertaken by al-Hakam II (961–76). These three vaulted spaces would have mirrored the arrangement of the new *maqsura* space and were chosen as the site of the first cathedral after the conquest of Córdoba in 1236 (Nieto Cumplido 449), due to their central position, their east-west orientation and their lavish architecture that also let in natural light.

Regardless of whether the current royal chapel was originally used as part of the presbytery, together with the Villaviciosa chapel, as Ruiz Souza (“Capillas” 18–20) has suggested, or was used as a sacristy for the later one, as other scholars have argued (Nieto Cumplido 449–51; Jordano Barbudo, *Arquitectura* 157), the fact is that the royal chapel was erected in one the most prestigious parts of the new cathedral, immediately next to the main altar. Its vault towered over the roof of the building and its two stories made visually explicit its prominence.

This arrangement singularized the chapel at the core of the pre-existing structure and reinforced its centralized location. Building centralized spaces, following the model of the *qubba*, for royalty was a highly successful strategy in both al-Andalus and Castile during the late Middle Ages.⁶ It probably had

⁵ The possibility that this chapel in Toledo would originally have had two stories is still debated (Gutiérrez Baños, *Las Empresas* 171).

⁶ The *qubba*, its evolution in al-Andalus and the process of its integration into the elite architecture of Castile has been studied in depth by Manzano, Pérez Higuera (“Palacios” and *Arquitectura*), Almagro (“La qoubba,” *Palacios*), among others. For the use in both palaces and funerary chapels see Sánchez Ameijeras y Ruiz Souza (“La planta centralizada”).

an important role during the reign of Alfonso XI, although more research on his architectural patronage is needed. We do not know much about his involvement in the construction of the palace of Tordesillas,⁷ or the Alcázares of Córdoba (Escribano) and Guadalajara, where a big *qubba* structure was identified during archeological excavations (Navarro). Scholars commonly agree in attributing to him the Room of Justice in the Alcazar of Seville,⁸ which is an example of this kind of centralized structure and would serve as a model for his successor's palaces (Almagro, "Los palacios de Pedro," "Los palacios de tradición").

During the 1350s-1360s, Pedro I refined and further developed this courtly model, creating new functional palatial spaces in Carmona, Tordesillas, Astudillo and of course the Alcazar of Seville that were very much needed for his political ambitions. As Almagro ("Los palacios de Pedro") has pointed out, he used this model consistently in his palaces in order to demonstrate his ideas of centralized power and sovereignty. Paradoxically, although the nobility was to rise up against this conception of royal power, these palatial complexes would subsequently shape Castilian civil architecture in the aftermath of the dynastic conflict, as I will argue in the second part of this article.

The *qubba* was, then, full of political and symbolic meaning and this was certainly understood by the Castilian elites at that time (Ruiz Souza, "*Oh lugar*"; Almagro, "Los palacios de Pedro"). In Córdoba, Enrique II also created a powerful spatial composition whose origins can be traced to the royal architectural style developed by his father. But, unlike his brother, he did not use it in a palatial context to display his power directly. Instead, he employed it in a royal funerary chapel for his ancestors whose purpose was to exalt the prestigious figure of Alfonso XI as a way to legitimize Enrique II's power.

⁷ Scholars have disagreed about the extent to which Alfonso XI and his mistress Leonor de Guzmán influenced the current layout of the Royal Convent of Santa Clara in Tordesillas, especially the south part of the main cloister and the area of the baths (Pérez Higuera, *Arquitectura*; Ruiz Souza, "Santa Clara"; Gutiérrez Baños, "Doña Leonor"; Almagro, "El palacio").

⁸ Although some authors disagree (Cómez), and others think it is equally possible that this structure was built either by Alfonso XI or by Pedro I (Almagro, "Los palacios de tradición").

The walls of the royal chapel were completely covered with decoration (fig. 1), having a tiled wainscot on the lower part, and carved stucco in the upper parts. The preexisting vault was also reshaped at that time using stucco *muqarnas*, which have been convincingly connected to Nasrid models in recent times (Jordano Barbudo, *El mudéjar* 129). Ruiz Souza has suggested that there was a shared understanding of this feature on both sides of the border, which was associated with ideas of prestige and sacredness. It cannot be overlooked that Enrique II also chose the *muqarnas* motif for the vaulting of some spaces in his funerary chapel in Toledo, as the sacristy, the only surviving part, testifies (Ruiz Souza, “Capillas”).

The high quality of the stucco decoration on the walls has been praised in previous scholarship, but the tendency has been to study it from a formalistic point of view, establishing parallels with the stucco *repertoire* that can be found in Toledo's palaces beginning in the thirteenth century. However, as has been pointed out, the closest parallels for the stuccowork in the royal chapel in Córdoba are found in some prestigious buildings of the middle decades of the fourteenth century, both in Castile (the Alcázar of Seville, the Tránsito Synagogue in Toledo) and in Granada (the Alhambra) (Jordano Barbudo, *El mudéjar* 120–128). Consequently, it should be contextualized within the courtly aesthetic and cultural practices developed in Castile, especially during and following the reign of Alfonso XI, as has been studied by Ruiz and García and Rodríguez Porto.

One of the main stumbling blocks when it comes to analyzing these artistic practices is the label “Mudejar art” and its traditional understanding as a closed, monolithic and atemporal “Islamicized style”, reduced to meaningless ornament without further relation to the artistic background where it was displayed (Ruiz Souza, “Castilla y al-Andalus”; Robinson, “Towers”). Such an understanding fails to take into account the processes of reception, adaptation and semantic transformation that “Mudejar art” underwent as it was integrated into Castile's own visual culture. Thus, the decoration of the royal chapel in Córdoba has been understood as an “Andalusi” feature, erasing the differences with the rest of the Córdoba mosque and with the adjacent Villaviciosa chapel.

Yet, the royal chapel's decorative patterns, which are completely different from the rest of the mosque's caliphal decorations, the expansive nature of its decoration, whose ratio to undecorated surfaces is much higher than it is in the rest of the mosque, and its original polychromies, using blue, red and gold, would have been in striking visual contrast with the surrounding spaces. Moreover, one has to take into account the presence of coats of arms and lions throughout the chapel. As has been argued regarding textiles and other artifacts, the presence of heraldry in Islamicate objects is a sign that they have been completely reworked by the recipient culture and adapted to new cultural coordinates (Feliciano 118).

The spatial models and ornamental features that were used in the royal chapel, therefore, marked a discontinuity and differentiation from the surrounding spaces in the mosque of Córdoba and the high altar of the first cathedral built inside the mosque, despite the fact that today those distinct elements are perceived as having a common Andalusí aesthetic. The artistic choices for the chapel looked back, instead, to the royal architecture that had developed in Castile during the preceding years, although they were adapted to the new political circumstances. Therefore, spatial and ornamental features were adopted from the palatial context and displayed quite innovatively in this royal funerary space, and this selection of forms was consistent with the intention of appropriating the visual memory of Alfonso XI and the prestige associated with him.

Two years after the completion of the royal chapel of Córdoba in memory of Alfonso XI, Juana Manuel, the new queen, planned the transfer of the body of his mistress Leonor de Guzmán, Enrique II's mother. She had been imprisoned after the death of Alfonso, in 1350, executed in Talavera a year after and buried discretely in an effort to erase her memory during the reign of Pedro I. Parallel to the re-appropriation of the memory of Alfonso XI by his bastard son, Juana Manuel was engaged in restoring and dignifying the memory of her mother-in-law. To that end, she planned a new tomb for her in the Poor Clares convent of Santa María la Real de Tordesillas (fig. 2) and, with that goal in mind, requested permission in 1373 to expand its church accordingly (Castro, doc. 112).

*Fig. 2.- Façade of the palace of Tordesillas
(Photo: author)*

The choice of the site for the new burial was neither accidental nor arbitrary. The convent had been founded in 1363 according to the wishes of Pedro I, who ordered the donation of his royal palace in Tordesillas to the female branch of the Franciscan order (Díez). This palace had been built some

years earlier by Pedro and his mistress, María de Padilla, probably over some previous structures that have been attributed—albeit the attribution is problematic and contested—to Alfonso XI and Leonor de Guzmán, who counted the town among her properties.⁹ Following the death of María de Padilla, in 1361, the palace was transformed into a convent with the stipulation, specified in the founding documents, that the thirty nuns would pray for the souls of María and her deceased son Alfonso, as well as for the souls of King Pedro and the rest of their descendants after their deaths (Robinson, “Mudéjar” 66).

Regardless of the extent to which Alfonso XI and Leonor de Guzmán were involved with the extant buildings in Tordesillas, I agree with Gutiérrez Baños (*Aportación* 431) that the place was associated with the memory of this royal couple, during the reigns of both Pedro I and Enrique II. As Gutiérrez Baños pointed out, the letter from the bishop of Palencia to Juana Manuel granting permission to enlarge the church identified this particular building as “the palace of the battle of Benamarín,” that is, the celebrated victory of Alfonso XI at El Salado.¹⁰ This victory had already been commemorated in times of Pedro I in two inscriptions that can be found on two stone plaques on the façade of the palace (fig. 2). They flank the door leading from the outside to the vestibule and the main reception room, probably a *qubba* (Almagro, “El palacio”), which was later made into the church of the convent.

The new queen took a special interest in this very important convent immediately after the defeat of Pedro I. As several scholars have pointed

⁹ The original configuration of Pedro I’s palace and the extent to which previous structures prevailed in the new plan have been an open debate since the archeological excavations in 1990 discovered new evidence in the cloister of the Vergel (Sancho y Bujarrabal). Different hypotheses giving varying amounts of credit to Alfonso XI have been proposed (Pérez Higuera, *Arquitectura*, “Arquitectura cortesana”; Ruiz Souza, “Santa Clara,” “El patio”; García-Frías; Gutiérrez Baños, “Doña Leonor”; González). The most recent theories, which we follow, date all the structures of the complex, with the exception of the pre-existing *Capilla Dorada*, to the reign of Pedro I and locate a *qubba* in the space now occupied by the church (Almagro, “El palacio,” “Los palacios de Pedro”).

¹⁰ I agree with Gutiérrez Baños (*Aportación* 431) that the word “palace” in the singular (and not the more frequent “palaces”) in the letter from the bishop indicates that he is referring to a specific building or room rather than to the whole palatial complex.

out, this royal interest can be perceived in the heavy concentration of economic activity in the convent during the 1370s, as well as in the large number of papal bulls and privileges issued during those years (Ruiz Souza, “Santa Clara”; Robinson, “Mudéjar” 58–59). Robinson (“La orden”) has convincingly argued that this interest was motivated by two things: first, the desire for a dignified burial for Leonor de Guzmán; and second, the goal of reforming the religious life of the community under the Hieronymite rule. This was never accomplished, probably because of the death of the queen in 1381.¹¹

The project of changing the rule of the convent, a place previously commemorating King Pedro, María de Padilla and their descendants, as well as the relocation of Leonor de Guzmán’s tomb, were two meaningful actions that let us see the negotiations and tensions involved in the recovery and erasure of memories from significant places. In fact, the specific naming of this building after the victory at El Salado in the already mentioned letter, was aligned with Juana Manuel’s two motivations for becoming involved with Tordesillas: it simultaneously blurred the association with Pedro I while reasserting the link with Alfonso XI.

As we have already mentioned, the queen’s intentions involved the transformation of several spaces in the convent, although the work undertaken in the church is difficult to assess, due to the modifications made to the whole building during the fifteenth century. Written sources only mention that the church was expanded, incorporating the “old portals” and that it was “dignified” (*ennoblecida*). The refurbishment of the church was also accompanied by an intervention in the vestibule area, in this case through a new series of paintings.¹² According to Gutiérrez Baños (*Aportación* 87), these paintings had probably been finished at some point

¹¹ This reformation project would certainly have had an impact on the artistic choices for the modifications made during the 1370s, a very complex issue that is beyond the scope of this article. Robinson (“Mudéjar”) analyzes not only the material transformation of the convent in this phase and the iconographic choices but also the reception of the artistic features of the building in the light of the spiritual life of the religious community.

¹² The iconography of the paintings has been studied by Gutiérrez Baños and by Robinson, also in the context of the spiritual transformation of the community.

after 1384 and before 1389, a chronological frame he deduces from a highly damaged inscription on the cornice in the hall¹³.

These paintings, done in a Gothic linear style, did not clash with the previous palatial ornamentation as much as it might seem at first. They did not ignore their surroundings, nor were they opposed to them. On the contrary, they established a dialogue between the new figurative program—the vegetal motifs in the stucco carvings and the pseudo-Kufic inscriptions—a dialogue that was suited to the queen's desire to change the rule of the convent to the Hieronymite Order (Robinson, "Mudéjar" 59). The preexisting elements—arches and stucco decoration—were not only used as a frame for the new paintings, but the vegetal and floral patterns interacted with both the iconography of the paintings and the devotional practices and readings of the nuns, as Robinson has pointed out. This dialogue and reciprocity fitted the religious sensibility of the new queen and created a new sacred space over the previous one, which was associated with the memory of the defeated king.

One must take into account that the modifications made to the convent also included the construction of rooms for Juana Manuel and her sister-in-law, Juana de Castro¹⁴, to retire to, at least temporarily (Robinson, "Mudéjar" 60). Furthermore, the daughter of Juana de Castro, significantly named Leonor after her grandmother, took her vows as a nun in the convent. The role of women was crucial in mediating conflictual memories and spaces, such as in this case, with the memory of the mother of the king and the convent of Tordesillas.

With her active patronage, in the broader sense of the word, Juana Manuel could take over a significant space from Pedro I, what Robinson has called a "Trastamar *prise de pouvoir*" and forge a direct link between the past and the present of the dynasty, between Alfonso XI and the new generation,

¹³ Molina de la Torre agrees on this general interpretation and, taking into account other written texts, he proposes reading the date as 1385.

¹⁴ Although she signed as Castro, using the name of his husband, Juana Alfonso de Castilla was the daughter of Alfonso XI and Leonor de Guzmán, and should not be confused with the homonymous wife of Pedro I.

through the figure of Leonor de Guzmán. The mother of the king was being celebrated and incorporated into a female religious space, one with strong bonds between the religious community and the women of the Trastámara dynasty, whether they took vows or not. This female space, and this female narrative of the family, was by no means isolated from the male branch and the memory of Alfonso the XI. The connection with the image of the king was visually expressed through the inscriptions on the façade, commemorating the victory of Alfonso in El Salado. The burial of Leonor, surrounded by the tombs of other members of the new dynasty, was planned, then, in the place celebrating one of the main victories of Alfonso over al-Andalus, a key point in the propaganda of the new king against his half-brother.¹⁵

The vestibule, which was located between the inscriptions and the church with the tombs, was a space for connecting memories. Here, a new series of paintings was integrated into the previous space, in accordance with the religious agenda of the new queen. The inscriptions, the paintings and the stucco decoration, despite their differences in chronology, media and style, worked together. They were capable of interacting and were used in a way that was consistent with the perceived need to establish continuities and discontinuities with the surrounding spaces and with the memorialization of the previous kings invoked by these spaces.

Imitating, Experimenting, Innovating

As we have seen, the different visual traditions that made up Castile's artistic legacy were not perceived as independent or mutually exclusive. On the contrary, there was an established practice of combining those traditions, and in this regard the reign of Alfonso XI was a watershed, though the practice was continued, with different emphases, under his two sons during the second half of the fourteenth century. In that specific context, diverse artistic elements that were first developed in royal architecture were fully understood, transformed and used in various kinds of building projects

¹⁵ About this propaganda and the identification of Pedro I as an "enemy of the Church" and a protector of Muslims and Jews, as well as the importance of the genealogical discourse for Enrique, see the works of Valdeón, Mitre and Valdaliso.

undertaken by a new class of nobles after the victory of Enrique II.

After the crowning of the first king of the Trastámara line, the rise in prominence of some noble families accelerated (Gerbert 99–120). Most of the principal noble families that were active at court and in the political arena during the preceding decades were not in position to maintain their status after the change in dynasty. Some of these families died out with the death of their male heirs. Others went into exile after the victory of the Trastámaras, and still others lost economic and territorial resources (Moxó; Gerbert). Conversely, new families, which were already rising and had gained considerable economic and political power at regional levels, were promoted to the highest ranks of the nobility by the new king. Families such as the Velascos, the Estúñigas, or the Toledos, who would constitute the most important political players during the following century, were part of this group, traditionally called the “new Trastámara nobility.”

These families came to be extremely active as artistic patrons, not only as a consequence of their promotion and their need for legitimization, which has been the customary interpretation of the motivations for their patronage, but also as a key tool in the process of shaping their social and political identity. In this context, the nobility looked to two sources for artistic references to be incorporated into their own imposing architectural endeavors. First, they looked to earlier Castilian royal architecture and consciously appropriated the artistic memory of the defeated Pedro I (Almagro, *Palacios* 100; Paulino, *El patrocinio*). Second, they experimented with different features of contemporary royal architecture, both from the Peninsula, including of course the kingdom of Granada, and from the rest of Europe. I will develop this argument focusing mainly on two examples: Medina de Pomar and Curiel de Duero, both fortified palaces built at the end of the century by families loyal to Enrique II, the Velasco and the Estúñiga.

Medina de Pomar, located north of Burgos, was donated to the Velasco family in 1369, just after the events of Montiel and the definitive victory of Enrique II. From the beginning of the century, the Velascos had shown interest in this place, purchasing lands and founding a Poor Clares convent

in 1313, where they established their mausoleum. After the royal donation, they made Medina de Pomar the symbolic center of their domains (Paulino, *El patrocinio* 226) and marked it as such with the construction of a fortified palace, known as the Alcázar of Medina de Pomar (figs. 3–4).

The new palace (fig. 3) was designed as a long building with towers on either end, the southern one taller than the other (Sobrinó). The ground floor and the north tower were spaces dedicated to services and guards. The second floor was the *piano nobile*, in which a long chamber occupying the entirety of the central building gave access to the main reception room, a square space located in the south tower. Both rooms were decorated with a stucco frieze, now completely lost in the central room and on two of the four walls of the tower but still visible in pictures from the beginning of the twentieth century. They also had carved wooden ceilings, also lost, although a general reconstruction of their design is possible following the traces of the beams on the walls (Sobrinó).

Fig. 3.- Palace of medina de Pomar according to Sobrinó (2011).
With Permisson of the author.

The main reception room, in the south tower, occupied a centralized space in the building's overall plan. As can be seen from the few remains on the walls,

it was covered by an octagonal carved wooden ceiling, which according to some written sources could have taken the form of a wooden cupola.¹⁶ It also had a more lavish stucco decoration than the central room (fig. 4): each wall had a frieze with different motifs that were more refined and were combined in more varied compositions. This frieze had a central band made up of scalloped and lambrequin arches, as well as combined vegetal and geometric ornament, heraldry, and Arabic inscriptions. It was framed by two registers with religious inscriptions in Latin and other heavily damaged inscriptions in Castilian, barely legible today (Paulino, “Identidad”). This room was, therefore, planned according to the model of the royal *qubbas* in earlier palaces.

Fig. 4.- Palace of Medina de Pomar. Stucco frieze in the *qubba* (Photo: author)

The *qubba* was used as a model for the reception room of Medina de Pomar not only in its formal design but also in its function, in that it conveyed some of its symbolic associations with political power. It was the most public space of the palace and thus served to project the family's power.¹⁷ As was

¹⁶ Some sixteenth-century inventories refer to this room as the “cuadra de la naranja,” significantly a very similar name to the one given to the Embajadores Room of the Alcázar of Seville (Paulino, *El patrocinio* 258).

¹⁷ I disagree with the interpretation that associates this space with a chapel, among other reasons, because of the huge space it occupies and its direct communication with the long room, which once shared its decorative program, although it has been lost. The existence of a chapel as a separate room of those dimensions would not be consistent with the palatial architecture of the nobility at the end of the fourteenth century. Moreover, the inventories of the palaces fail to mention any chapel and name this space a “cuadra” (square room).

stated earlier, the *qubba* was consistently used during the reign of Pedro I as a space where his ideals of centralized royal power came to be translated into architectonic terms. Yet it is in Medina de Pomar that we have the first example of a palatine *qubba* after the defeat of Pedro I, built before any similar structure in the royal architecture of the Trastámaras. The new dynasty would not incorporate this type of space into its own palaces until the second decade of the fifteenth century, when modifications were made to the Alcázar of Segovia (Almagro, *Palacios* 102).

Enrique II did build a new palace in the city of León around 1377, though. Even if it was destroyed at the beginning of the twentieth century, various remnants from the wooden ceilings and architectural elements in stucco have been preserved in different museums.¹⁸ In addition to it, we also have a few modern plans that record the modifications made to the building in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Campos and Pérez 100, 227). These plans allow us to infer, at least to some extent, the original arrangement of the medieval structures. As far as we can tell, the new king did not include a *qubba* structure in his own palace,¹⁹ and he preferred other spatial arrangements, such as a long room flanked by smaller square rooms and opening onto a garden or a courtyard. This solution had already been integrated into the Castilian architectural tradition during the previous century, and it can be found in palaces in Toledo, Segovia and Seville (Almagro, *Palacios* 59).

As we have seen, Enrique II used the *qubba* in different contexts. He employed it in the royal chapel of Córdoba, which was associated with the power and prestige of his father, as a way to assert his own legitimacy, but in civil architecture he adopted other arrangements, also drawn from the same palatial tradition in Castile. In contrast, noble families such as the Velascos,

¹⁸ One magnificent arch is now at the Archeological Museum in Madrid. Several other stucco remains, including a chimney, are in the Museum of León, although their provenance is still uncertain (Campos and Pérez 104-117).

¹⁹ Both the study of the few extant modern plans, published by Campos and Pérez, and the scarce remains of the ceilings, studied by García Nistal, point in that direction. However, further analysis of this disappeared building is necessary to confirm or reject this hypothesis. According to the latest research, the only square space covered by an octagonal ceiling would have been the area containing the staircase, which raises a different issue related to the development of this element in late medieval palaces, which cannot be addressed here.

who had been victorious in the war and were in need of new structures to display their power, used *qubbas* in their new buildings. As a consequence, noble palaces can be regarded as links between the innovations in Sevilla and Granada at the middle of the fourteenth century and the royal and noble architecture of fifteenth-century Castile.

Construction on the palace of Curiel de Duero (fig. 5) was probably begun around 1386, when Diego López de Estúñiga received the town as royal land grant, and probably ended around 1397 (Cobos and Castro 97).²⁰ Unfortunately, the palace was heavily damaged at the beginning of the twentieth century, and the only documentary evidence we have regarding it are some pictures and vague descriptions,²¹ which makes reconstructing the spaces difficult. The building was U shaped, with rooms arranged in three sections around a courtyard. There were towers at the corners, one taller than the others, as in Medina de Pomar. Unfortunately, due to its poor conservation status, we cannot know if one of the rooms in this main tower was also a reception room, or if there was a centralized space following the model of a *qubba*.

In spite of the material lost, the lavish decoration of the interior spaces (fig. 5) can still be reconstructed after photographs from the beginning of the twentieth century (Regueras). Here we find a use of stucco decoration similar to that in Medina de Pomar, though there are some formal differences, probably due to the difference in chronology, and the fact that artisans from different workshops were involved. Regardless of the introduction of new motifs, such as intersecting circles with naturalistic leaves and lions, the stucco decoration of Curiel also included an epigraphic band with religious inscriptions in Latin (the *Ave Maria* is still legible in the pictures) and some

²⁰ The traditional date for the end of construction is 1412, recorded in a damaged inscription, today lost but transcribed by Martínez Alcubilla. However, Cobos and Castro have convincingly dated the palace to around 1397, since it is mentioned in written sources from that year.

²¹ These descriptions were published in different specialized and non-specialized journals at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth (Hernández; Antón). Of special interest is the report that Martínez Alcubilla, who bought the palace at the end of the nineteenth century, presented to the Academia de la Historia.

fragments of Kufic (or pseudo-Kufic) inscriptions, very much in the same vein as Medina de Pomar.

Fig. 5.-Palace of Curiel de Duero. Detail of a door at the beginning of the twentieth century (Photo: Federico Hernández). With permission of J.J. Moral.

The use of stucco in friezes and doors in the main rooms, as well as the trilingual epigraphic program in both palaces cannot be understood without reference to the Alcazar of Seville and the principal buildings erected during the previous decade. The importance of epigraphy and the use of multilingual inscriptions was a traditional strategy of asserting power in Castile,²² and one that Pedro I used in very sophisticated and conscious ways

²² Just to mention two of the most famous examples, I would like to remind about the use

in his own palaces, as Marquer has studied. Moreover, the stucco decoration that integrated this epigraphic program was not an expression of a general “taste” for luxury or a vague idea of “courtliness.” It was deeply rooted in the aesthetic developed in Castilian palaces since the middle of the fourteenth century. The use of a specific decorative program and very particular and meaningful structures from the recent past, such as the *qubba*, show how the noble families were carefully selecting and using significant artistic elements from the palaces of previous kings to consolidate their own triumphant image (Almagro, *Palacios* 101; Paulino, “Identidad”).

But the Castilian nobility was not only looking to the south and to earlier royal architecture in the process of self-fashioning its power and prestige. They were also aware of contemporary innovations in other European kingdoms which were freely incorporated into their own palaces together with references to earlier palatial architecture. Some scholars have suggested a possible relationship between the general structure and layout of Medina de Pomar and the palaces of the kings and nobles of Aragon in Valencia (Iborra 479). Even more significant, in my opinion, is the typology that was selected for the main staircase in this palace. It is a spiral staircase built inside a hexagonal stone tower that protrudes out from the façade of the building. This hexagonal staircase clearly followed the model of the *grande vis* built in 1364 in the Louvre palace (Whiteley), although on a smaller scale.²³ The use of this type of monumental staircase quickly spread in the 1370s to the principal palaces of the French nobility (Whiteley, “La grande vis”; Mesqui). In the Iberian Peninsula it was also incorporated around 1400 into Olite, one of the royal palaces of the kingdom of Navarre (Martínez de Aguirre).

Medina de Pomar was, then, one of the rare examples of this typology of staircase in the Peninsula, and one of the earliest. The palace was finished by

of multilingual inscriptions in Toledo’s Church of San Román (Ruiz Souza “Toledo”) or in the famous epitaph on the tomb of Fernando III in the Cathedral of Seville at the middle of thirteenth century (Nickson).

²³ According to the measurements proposed by Salamagne (100–106), the staircase in Medina de Pomar would have been one meter per side smaller.

about 1383, when it is first mentioned in the documentation, which means that the Velascos were incorporating the Louvre model at the same time as was the French nobility. Pedro Fernández de Velasco travelled to France at least twice in the 1370s, to the courts of the king and the duke of Anjou, as ambassador of the Castilian king (Paulino, *El patrocínio* 245), and he would have seen the newest examples of palatial architecture being developed there.

However, in the French and Navarrese examples, this kind of staircase was associated with a new and complex articulation of public and private spaces in the palace (Whiteley, “Public”; Bove; Martínez de Aguirre), which was absent in Medina de Pomar. Here, the monumental staircase was part of a display of the different elements of the contemporary architecture of power, and in that sense it is especially worthy of mention that it led to the noble spaces, which were decorated with stucco and carved wooden ceilings.

Although all the ceilings in Medina de Pomar have been lost, some parts of those of the Curiel palace survived the destruction of the building and are now on display in the Archeological Museum of Madrid, the Episcopate Museum of Vic, and the Alcázar of Segovia (Chinchilla; Domenge and Sureda). The beams in both museums match the written accounts from the beginning of the twentieth century, in which one of the main rooms is described as having “a frieze depicting pages, knights, and ladies” (Antón). Chinchilla has studied the remains at the Archeological Museum and has divided these beams into three separate groups, based on formal differences between them. She suggests that each one of these groups would have corresponded to a different ceiling in a different room, but due to the lack of detailed accounts and the scarcity of the remains, it is impossible to determine their original location inside the palace. We know that there was also a “Golden hall,” although not much is said in the documentation about its location, size, decoration or iconography, and only the golden ceiling is praised (Martínez; Hernández).

The remaining beams have been related formally with the so-called “artistic school of Burgos,” identified at the end of the fourteenth century with the decorated ceilings in Silos, Vileña and Balbases (Lavado; Chinchilla;

Concejo). Beyond this local context, Pérez Higuera has drawn connections between Curiel and royal architecture in fifteenth-century Castile and the development of royal galleries in the friezes of the main rooms in later examples (Pérez Higuera, *Arquitectura*). These connections, and the chronology of the buildings, show again the key role of princely architecture in the assimilation and development of courtly models in Castile around 1400.

The iconography in the Curiel ceilings was not a complete novelty in the context of Castilian architecture. The specific themes that appear in the beams, though very damaged and lacking context today, may be related to the development of specific chivalric traditions in literature and visual arts (Rodríguez Porto 247), as well as to courtly practices during the middle decades of the century in al-Andalus and Castile (Echeverría). Thus, similar scenes appeared in the Alhambra (Dodds; Robinson, “Arthur” and “La Alhambra”), the Alcazar of Seville, and other palaces built by the nobility during the reign of Pedro I, such as the palace of Ruy López Dávalos in Toledo (Rallo and Ruiz) or the castle of Alcañiz (Pagès).

In those places, different courtly scenes can be seen, such as the knight with the lady, and the wild man, that were well known in the northern European imaginary but quite new in the visual culture of Castile and al-Andalus at that time. There were also musicians, forests with fantastic beasts and, of course, different hunting scenes. These are the same scenes that are still preserved in the few extant beams from Curiel. I don’t want to suggest that the repetition of themes implied a uniform use of images, or to overlook the fact that very different literary and cultural references could resonate in each of them. Various scholars have studied the highly complex and subtle issues related to concrete references to each one of these examples, as well as possible links and differences between them.²⁴ However, it is worth noting that the use of courtly scenes in Curiel was linked to elite cultural practices and that these beams show the existence of a shared chivalric repertoire that,

²⁴ Which include very specific and varied literary references, as well as different political, religious, philosophical and symbolic connotations (Borland; Dodds; Robinson, “Arthur” and “La Alhambra”; Rodríguez Porto).

as Rosa Rodríguez Porto has pointed out, was open to negotiations and fluid exchanges but was never exempt from tensions and subversions.

Conclusions

These palaces, with their use of highly significant structures and features from different traditions—such as the *qubba* or the *grand vis* staircase; stucco decoration, carved wooden ceilings, the display of chivalric scenes, and prominent trilingual epigraphs—must be interpreted in the light of the political and social context of post-1369 Castile. At that time, noble families, having triumphed over Pedro I's politics of centralization, were constructing their own palaces and freely selecting, imitating, mixing and transforming different architectural structures and ornamentation that matched their own needs.

In this process, the Castilian elites played an important role in the articulation of the palatial architecture that would develop during the following century. Some of their innovations were not imitated and had not any impact in the design of later palaces in a significant way, such as the huge trilingual display of epigraphy or the introduction of the Louvre staircase. Other choices, however, link the palatial architecture of the mid-fourteenth century with the royal and noble residences of the following century, such as the incorporation of the *qubba*, the display of coats of arms in the ceilings, or the use of different stucco decorations for the main public areas of the palaces.

Royal patrons also engaged actively with the main architectural forms used by earlier kingdoms, but the selection was conditioned by the negotiations and frictions between the recovery of the visual memory of Alfonso XI and the complications arising from the artistic legacy of Pedro I, from whom the new king worked actively to differentiate himself. Enrique II and Juana Manuel explored the possibilities of combining different structures, media and styles to configure new spaces to express memory and legitimacy for the new dynasty, especially in the sphere of religious architecture.

Castilian elites at the end of the fourteenth century were highly inventive, and their artistic strategies should not be understood only in terms of withdrawal and self-referentiality, as has been usually the case, but as

responsive to the innovations in the artistic centers of their time: from Seville and Granada to the courts of the French kings or the dukes of Anjou. Theirs was an atmosphere characterized by fluid interactions between cultural and artistic traditions in which the most relevant courtly models of the time were not conceived as representing opposed and exclusive artistic conceptions. Selection and transformation, dialogue and contrast, imitation and innovation were inherent aspects of the Castilian artistic language of the time.

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