

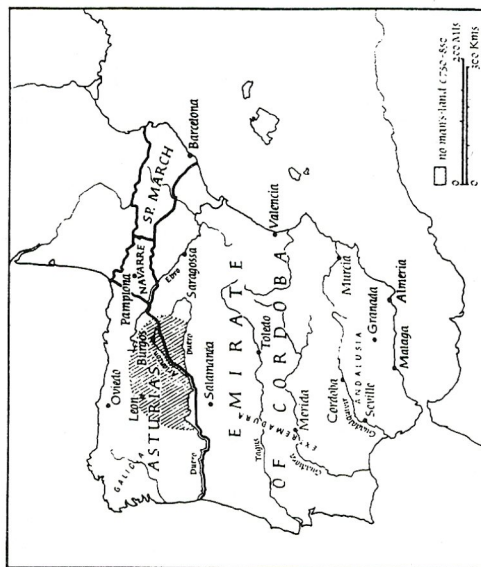


THE CRUMBLING MINARETS OF SPAIN

KHOLA HASAN

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Spain - A Visitors Guide



KHOLA HASAN

Ta-Ha Publishers Ltd
1 Wynne Rd
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Chapter 1

THE CRUMBLING MINARETS OF SPAIN

The glories of Muslim Spain have fascinated generations of people, so it is not surprising that we all jumped at the chance of visiting the land of matadors and paella in March 1985.

Our party consisted of two families, two cars and too much luggage. A ferry boarded at Dover deposited us on French soil and so we spent three days enjoying the sights of Paris and Lyons. Then we moved on towards Perpignan, a tiny French town near the border with Spain. The immigrant Arab population of this town is so high that the road signs are written in French and Arabic! Before reaching this town we first passed another town, on the outskirts of which stood a castle shaped like a mosque.

In 720 C.E. when the Muslims had captured Spain, they swept into France via two routes from its southern side. The area we were in was highly mountainous, and here the Muslim armies had marched through the mountain passes under the leadership of Ambasa and Samih bin Malik. The first route took them two-thirds of the way to Paris, after which they were defeated. The second route resulted in the region of Southern France, including Toulouse, Narbonne and Perpignan, as far up as Lyon, being captured.

The region remained in Muslim hands for a long time. It is to be expected that they left many landmarks behind them when they were driven out of France, and this castle seemed to be one of them.

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We stepped on Spanish soil soon after leaving Perpignan and headed directly for Barcelona. We had read that during their years of rule the Muslims built some splendid mosques in Spain, and so we were looking forward to visiting the city's main mosque. Imagine our horror, then, at being directed to the ground

floor of an unattractive and dilapidated residential building stuck in the middle of a dark and narrow street. However, we were soon told that the thing to be surprised at was not the deficiency in beautiful Muslim mosques, but in the fact that there were enough Muslims still in Spain to warrant the need for a mosque.

We learned that after the Moors of Spain were defeated by the Christians in the 13th century, the new rulers began a ruthless campaign of rapidly obliterating any traces of Spain's glorious past. Queen Isabella, a witch if ever there was one, issued decrees for mass conversion of Muslims to Christianity. Those who refused were either killed or forced to leave the country. The Qur'an and Arabic texts were burned, mosques were destroyed or converted into churches, Islamic prayers were forbidden, and anyone suspected of secretly practising Islam was persecuted.

The lengths to which the despotic Spanish monarchs were prepared to go to eradicate Islam were simply tremendous. The government even set up border stations outside former Muslim strongholds like Granada where any traveller passing through was forced to drink alcohol and eat pork.

The situation continued until the early 20th century when the more tolerant Socialists came into power and allowed some religious freedom. It was then that about fifty 'Christian' families suddenly pronounced that they were in fact Muslims. These families were the

descendants of the Moriscos, the Muslims who had been forced to convert to Christianity, and now, after a passage of many generations, they re-established the faith of their ancestors. It was beautiful to think of these people who were outwardly Christians, but who secretly passed down and kept alive the knowledge that they were Muslims for hundreds of years until they were able to pronounce this publicly. This is a direct and sad contrast to the majority of Muslims today who are publicly Muslims but whose practice and thought is that of the non-believers.

Despite the fact that the people of Spain have been given more religious freedom than they have had for a long time, they are by no means free. The town of Barcelona is full of immigrant Muslims from the North shore of Africa, yet there are no places for them to meet and talk. The only places left are the numerous bars, around which they gather in small groups hoping to evade notice. Instead they are frequently disturbed by the police who view them with open suspicion and always demand to see their passports.

The next day was spent in sight-seeing. At the port we were introduced to a statue of Columbus and a replica of the ship in which he was unfortunate enough to discover America.

Outside the nearby naval headquarters some soldiers in full military uniform, including sub-machine guns, were standing on alert. My brother (who was our official photographer throughout the tour) decided to add to his album and levelled the camera at the soldiers. However, he quickly abandoned his scheme when he found the barrel of a gun pointing directly at his chest and one of the soldiers in a fit. We had unfortunately omitted to read the massive inscription forbidding the use of cameras. Red in the face, we hurriedly retreated.

The next day was Friday and after the Jum'a prayer we said farewell to our friends in Barcelona. Three hours later we reached the small town of Tortosa which houses a massive Moorish castle and fortress built on mountains overlooking the town. The castle was in the middle of the round fort and it has now been knocked down and a luxurious hotel for tourists built in its place.

I can think now of the hotel as being very elegant and comfortable, but at the time I could only view its building and its inhabitants with open contempt. The original cannons which were used in defence by the Muslims still stand in the many openings of the fort walls. Who knows how many battles these cannons have witnessed, with many enemies before them and few friends behind? They

stand as memories to a glorious past when true Islam was preached and practised; a time when the beautiful example of the Muslims won them fame and respect throughout the world; a time when these peace-loving people would rise simply because injustice was being practised and would fight in the name of God with a strength of faith that led handfuls of believers to victory over armies of non-believers.

Today the Muslim is despised and mocked because of his hypocrisy. Armies of Muslims have returned shamefacedly from the battlefield, while those on the path of Satan prosper. The true Mujahid is fast disappearing. Palestine and Lebanon have added their names to the long list of lost Muslim lands. The cannons stand alone and forgotten, covered in rust and weeds. When will another Tariq bin Ziyad or Musa bin Nusair be born?

Swallowing bitter tears, we left Tortosa for Valencia. The Muslims built three hundred and sixty magnificent mosques in this town and when the Christians captured it they destroyed most of them, reducing them to rubble.

Today the Muslims have to use a small apartment for congregational worship. The mosques that were not destroyed were the largest ones and were transformed into churches. We went to see a few of these that evening and were saddened into silence. I can remember one of them particularly well.

It was a huge stone building in the middle of a small square. Standing in front of its numerous towering minarets we all felt like shrimps. We entered it in the same frame of mind we would enter any mosque in London or elsewhere, so imagine the torture we experienced when, instead of an Imam, we saw a Priest dressed in flamboyant red; instead of the Qur'an, we heard a choir; instead of prayer mats we saw cold benches; instead of the Mihrab we saw the outstretched arms of Jesus on a cross. Although it was late at night, a service was being conducted because it was Easter Friday.

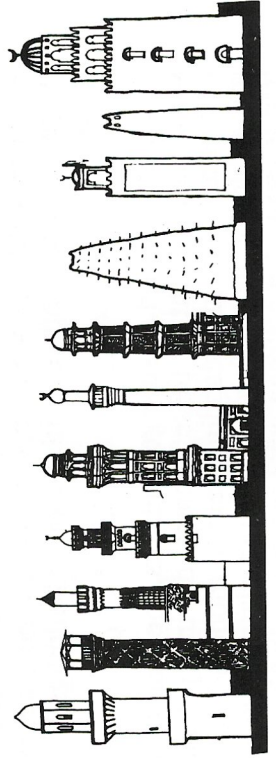
We spent a long time in that square because there were many mosques clustered in that small area. While walking around we met a young Arab. He told us that he came to that area every evening to stand quietly in the dark looking at the remains of a marvellous history. Although the authorities have tried to make these stolen mosques look more like churches, they have not fully succeeded and the buildings remain distinctly Islamic. Because of their rugged exterior and thick unpainted stone walls, there is an air of permanence and solidity in all these buildings, which becomes even more apparent when they are compared with the other buildings around them.

Spain is a land of strange contrasts, the strangest of which is the sight of these ancient, distinctly Islamic castles and mosques standing next to modern flats and office blocks made of thin walls and glass, so delicate that it seems that a strong wind would easily blow them

away. It is as if the whole world may change but these historic buildings are determined to stay the same. And time has in fact proved them right. Living amidst such stubborn reminders of their Muslim past it is not surprising that there has been a growing nationalist movement in Andalusia with an aim to asserting an identity closer to their Moorish heritage.

We then walked to the largest mosque that the Moors built. When the Christians first captured it, after encountering brave resistance, they burned alive the Qadi (judge) of the town as well as his eldest sons outside the mosque. The only memorial today to these martyrs is a faded Spanish inscription on one slab of the pavement at the site of the burning. Our only consolation was that these murderers will forever burn in a fire much stronger than the one they used to burn these brave men.

One of the minarets of this mosque is exceptionally tall and remains the highest in Valencia to this day. The Christians had immediately placed crosses on all the minarets, but for some reason they left this one alone, and so it still stands, unconquered. They also contributed statues of Jesus and horrific figures of various demons to their "churches". These demons are supposed to represent Satan and were placed there to protect the churches against the Muslims. What can one say about a religion whose buildings are placed voluntarily in the protection of the Devil!



Chapter 2

The next day we stopped in the town of Murcia for lunch. It was Easter Day and the streets were crowded with people watching a massive pageant celebrating this day. It was an array of colours and costumes with effigies of Biblical characters being paraded to the accompaniment of music and dancing. One wonders if this is all that is left in the Catholic faith. The sad thing is that Muslims in our own countries try to imitate this sort of behaviour on various occasions such as the birthday of our Prophet (P.B.U.H.) by holding useless rallies, marching and shouting down the streets, and succeeding only in making a ludicrous spectacle of themselves.

As we left Murcia we passed a massive, wooden water-wheel. This was built six hundred years ago by the Moors to water the fields and when the Christians captured the town they realised what a prize they had found and so kept it intact. Today it is still used to water fields for miles and is probably the largest water-wheel in Spain: about eight metres in diameter, and still working as efficiently as if built yesterday. What really annoyed me was that the Information Board nearby only said that it was a Historic Monument, with no details about its date or builders. This applied to all the palaces, bridges, mosques, castles and fortresses that we saw. The jealous Spanish authorities want to keep the world in ignorance about the role of the Muslims in making their country a historian's and tourist's paradise.

We continued with our journey, reaching Granada that night. This town lies in the valleys overshadowed by the Sierra Nevada mountain range. The town used to contain many ethnic minorities which used to live in their own certain quarters. The Muslim quarter, famous for its

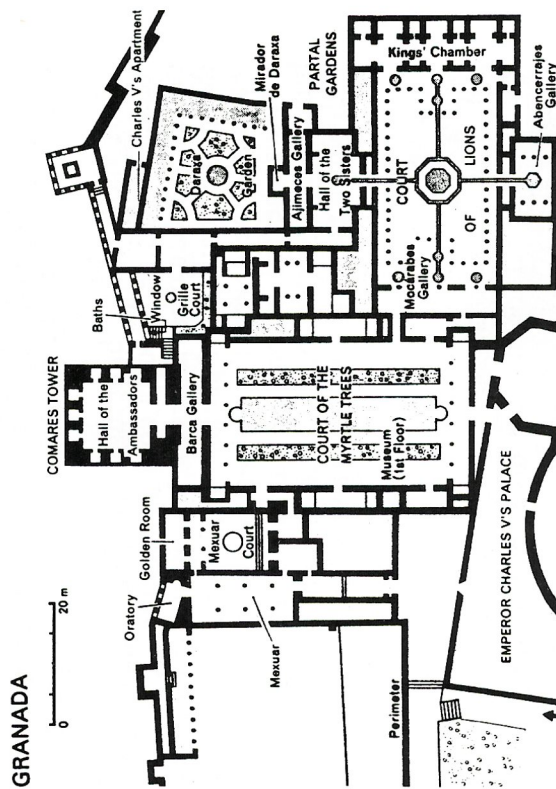
architecture, was the area of Al Baicin and like the rest of Granada it was situated on the hills. The town has now expanded and three-quarters of the modern Granada has spilled down the hills into the valley below.

But we had come to see the ancient Granada and its sleepy cobbled streets, not the new bustling one. After their Dark Ages, the Muslims have returned to Al Baicin. The importance of this area can be judged from the fact that out of the 250 indigenous Muslim families that live in the whole of Spain, two hundred are centred in Al Baicin. All these conversions into Islam have been fairly recent. Funds collected by these Muslims have been used to buy a spacious house in the area and convert it into a beautiful place of worship as well as a haven for travellers. It also has a beautiful garden which contains trees laden with fruit as well as a swimming pool.

The three resident men were all converts, one of whom was a young German called Talib who had embraced Islam in England and then returned to Germany where he slowly converted his parents to Islam. The purpose of these men living in the mosque is to obtain a full-time Islamic education. At every prayer-time, one of them stands outside the main door and says the Adhan at the top of his voice.

There is a convent nearby whose inmates seem to be singularly lacking in Christian spirit. These nuns would give the Muslims the dirtiest looks possible and we enjoyed thinking that they must fume with anger when they hear the call to prayer so regularly. I can only hope that the faithful will answer this call and that one day the Adhan will be heard even more loudly from minarets throughout Spain - Insha'Allah.

At noon we left with Talib, who acted as a guide and interpreter, to see the Alhambra. This magnificent Moorish palace was built by a series of successive kings and is the name usually associated with Muslim Spain. It is situated right at the very top of the hill with the majestic snow-capped Sierras behind it and commanding a picturesque bird's-eye view of Granada which lies in the valley below.

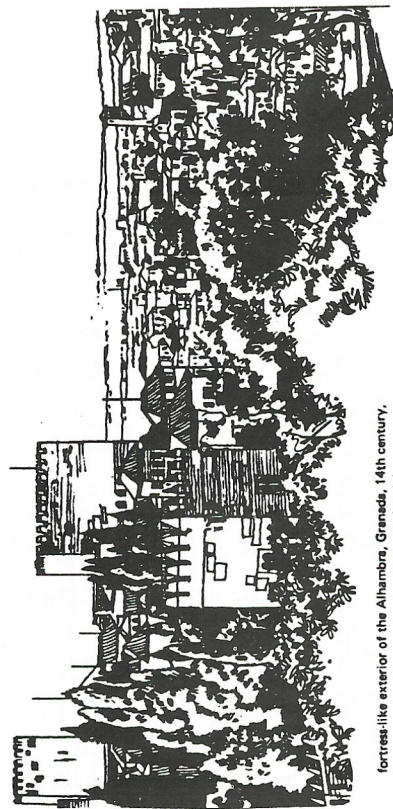


After five hours of walking continuously through its confusing maze of square halls, courtyards, balconies, porticoes and lush gardens, we were still not able to see every part of this architectural miracle. I think it is simply impossible to do justice to the beauty and grandeur of the palace. Each room was different and each was an artistic achievement in itself. The walls, ceilings and pillars were covered with geometrical patterns, verses from the Qur'an, prayers for the royal family, names of the Kings, and the ever-recurring "wala ghaliba illa'Allah" (And there is no victor except Allah). This phrase seems to

have been the trademark of the Muslims as it was nearly on everything they left behind.

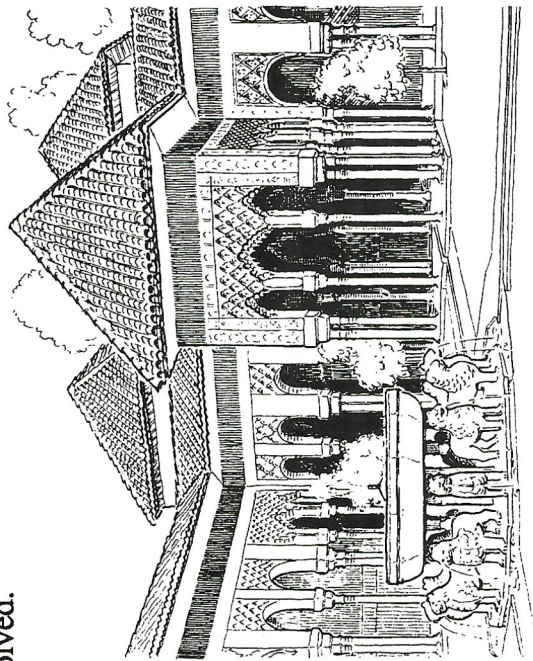
The patterns were intricate and superb with a glorious rainbow of colours. Many of the designs had been filled in with gold-leaf and, although not of much material value, they had still been scraped off by tourists. Even the ceiling of each room had its own special design, the most famous of which gives the impression of being studded with stalactites. Our long gazes of admiration at these had, unfortunately, adverse effects on our necks.

As most of the building was made of stone and marble it was deliciously cool despite the blazing sun outside. Among other things the basement also contained the palace baths. A Spanish guide pointed out that leading to these were three pipes: one brought hot water that was heated in massive storage tanks, the second brought cold water and the third brought scented water with which the royal family perfumed themselves.



fortress-like exterior of the Alhambra, Granada, 14th century, the most splendid example of an Arab ruler's palace

The gardens were extensive and picturesque, their tall hedges carefully pruned to the last leaf by the numerous gardeners. Cool fountains, flowers, fruit trees and even ponds filled this labyrinth of green. The spurting water of these fountains (which were present in all shapes and sizes) enhanced the blending of natural beauty with arabic architecture. Probably the most famous of these is in the Court of Lions: a central fountain supported by twelve carved lions, each squirting water, and flanked by one hundred and twenty-four marble columns. Others consisted of whole avenues of smaller founts, the spurting water of which made enchanting symmetrical patterns when viewed from above. We could only marvel at the ingenuity of the numerous architects who were involved.



The Court of Lions

The different levels of the gardens and the rising towers could be reached by a series of stairs and after climbing an extremely dangerous flight of rickety steps we were able to sweep our eyes over most of the palace. At one end of the Alhambra we were intrigued by the sight of an exceedingly ugly and disjointed circular building. We were wondering what on earth had

possessed the Muslim architects to build such a blot on the landscape when we learned that this was actually a palace built by the Christian King Charles V as a memorial to his great rule. No comment!

Below us we could see the remains of the royal stables - for some reason these had been knocked down and only the foundation stones remained. We then performed the prayer on the tower and I hope that our actions, which surprised the tourists around us, will once again be a common sight in Spain. We then left the Alhambra with its halls, towers and courts still resounding with the eternal truth, "And there is no Victor except Allah."

"Between the sun's rising and setting
Myriad love songs were sung.
And those who were mortal departed,
And He who is Eternal lives on."

Ibn Zamrak

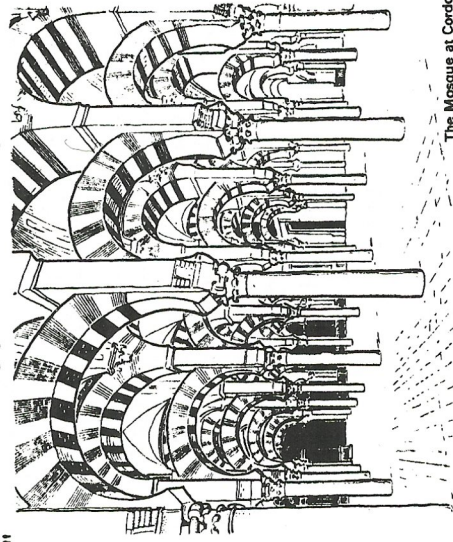
The Poet of the Alhambra

Granada fell to the combined forces of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella, who had married in order to unify their kingdoms and so strengthen their forces, in November 1491. The couple entered the Alhambra in full glory and crosses were placed on the highest minaret of this fortified palace from which the Muslims had resisted. Abu Abdullah, the last king of Granada, and his family were exiled to the hills but they later moved slowly to Morocco. As he looked at the Alhambra for the last time, tears came into his eyes. At this his aged mother Aisha said scornfully: "Abu Abdullah! Cry like a woman for a kingdom you could not defend as a man."

Early the next morning we began our three hour journey to Cordoba. On the way we passed through many small towns, the names of most of which were preceded by the letters "Al" and so were a constant reminder of their Arabic origin.

Cordoba deserves its title of the "Bride of the Cities", and it has also been described as the jewel of the tenth century world. Its showpiece is a magnificent mosque, the construction of which began in 785 C.E., and which is the most famous building of Spain after the Alhambra.

Cordoba fell to the Christians in 1236, two years before Granada was captured. Two hundred and eighty years later, the priests of the city asked permission from their king to build a cathedral. Not understanding their demands the King agreed, and the priests proceeded to have the centre part of the mosque destroyed so that a choir, high altar and transept, main characteristics of all Christian cathedrals, could be built in its place. The King saw this when it was too late and although a Christian himself, he was furious as he had wanted to preserve the mosque in its original splendour. He told them sadly, "The thing you have built here could have been built anywhere. But the thing you have destroyed can never be replaced."



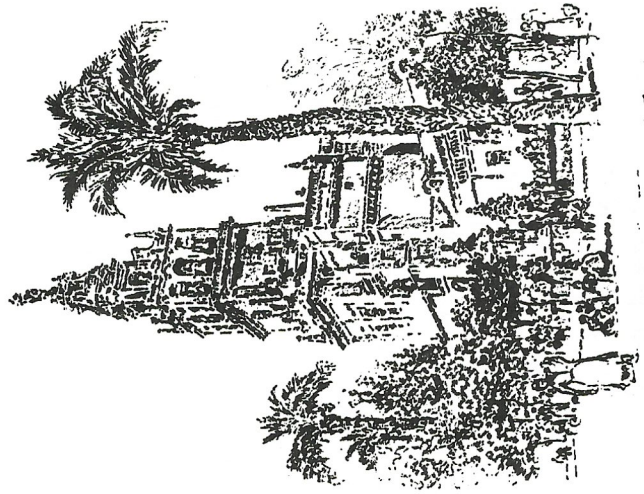
The Mosque at Cordoba

The mosque has a veritable forest of marble, granite and jasper pillars (eight hundred and fifty remain of the original thousand). Arches in stripes of red and white stone connect these pillars and create a magnificent effect like that of canopies. The simple interior has now been filled with chapels, religious paintings, benches and statues. A high altar stands in front of an image of Christ with a row of candles perpetually kept burning. We were obviously subdued by so many changes in what should have been our place of worship, and so cooled our tempers by blowing out the candles.

If there was any consolation it was that the Mihrab had been left untouched. Metal railings had been erected to stop it being touched or closely approached. It rested on a slab of exquisitely carved marble and was supported by pillars covered in mosaic. The arch above it was beautifully ornamented with inscriptions from the Qur'an. This was the only part of the entire building which was as serene and peaceful as a place of worship deserves to be, free from distracting and morbid images of people being crucified and blood flowing everywhere. The rest of the mosque has just been completely desecrated.

I was beginning to feel very bitter and sad as we stood quietly opposite the Mihrab, and suddenly my father gave the Adhan as loudly as he could. It must have been centuries since the mosque resounded with the call to prayer and I could not contain my tears any longer. We prayed on the dusty floor for a lost past, a lost glory and a lost people. Why can't the Muslims retain anything worthwhile, I wonder? Their lands are being snatched away, their dignity and pride have been destroyed, their faith is continually mocked. Their response to all this is either to retaliate with feeble rhetoric or to take up arms - against their own brothers.

The fifty or so tourists around us had frozen still when they heard the Adhan, and throughout our prayers they stood in wondering silence, while their numbers steadily grew. Although they were silent their cameras certainly were not and flashed continuously while we prayed. The authorities would not have allowed us in if they had known our intentions; some time before our visit a group of Muslim tourists from the U.K. had been refused entry into the mosque until they had given written guarantees that they would not pray inside. However, they did not hear or disturb us and so we were able to pray in peace.



The Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem.

Chapter 3

The next afternoon the wife of the Director of the Al Baicin Mosque invited the ladies of our party to dinner. She was a Spanish Muslim from a family of staunch Catholics and even then, eight years after her conversion, they were still not prepared to forgive her for leaving Christianity.

I had already decided to write my experiences of our travels and so bombarded her with questions. She told me about the difficulties her children faced in the country's educational system. Although the Muslims played a major role in the history of Spain and made it a centre of learning for the world, such facts are completely ignored in the schools. Instead they are brainwashed with the usual story of barbaric Muslims attacking the peaceful Spaniards and giving them the choice between Islam and the sword. The little they are told about Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) and Islam in general is a gross distortion of the facts.

This was not new to me as I have suffered at the hands of teachers in London, especially those who teach History and Religious Studies. They seem to have a vendetta against the Muslims, refusing point-blank to acknowledge the truth. I remember being taught that the Jewish Golden Age in Spain was due entirely to their own efforts. The Jews were simply indispensable to the Muslim rulers as without their talents the Muslim civilisation would never have flourished!

Our hostess was a product of a similar education system and the little she knew about Islam as a teenager was incorrect. As part of her teacher-training course she travelled to England and then to Morocco where she studied Islam and finally converted.

She informed us that the Muslims of Al Baicin have collected all the funds needed to build a proper mosque and have also bought some land for the purpose. They plan to build a school attached to the mosque as many of the Spanish Muslims, including herself, are qualified teachers. They will obviously have to follow the curriculum set by the authorities, but are optimistic that once they have the school, anything is possible.

She confirmed my suspicions that although the Spanish are not exactly overflowing with manners, they are actually very friendly and hospitable people. This, she said, is the opposite of the English people who cover their racist feelings with well-bred manners. The Spaniards are thus very much like the Arabs and this is to be expected after the latter's eight hundred year stay in Spain and the intermarriages that thus took place. "A lot of my people have Arab blood in their bodies," she remarked, "but they will not thank you for reminding them."

During our journey we were all struck by the calm and clean nature of the people, especially in the smaller, sleepier towns. In every village we would pass women standing at their doorsteps with brooms or dusters in their hands, gossiping non-stop (It's amazing how much they talk!). At every corner there would be a knot of old men and if they were not busy staring at us, they would be talking.

When we got hopelessly lost and screamed for help, which was a regular occurrence, obliging passers-by rushed to help. And if it was possible they would actually fetch their cars and escort us to our destination. Although most of the roads had pavements, these seemed to be reserved for the tourists. The natives would stroll leisurely across the road while the car drivers would take

quick naps in their cars. The atmosphere was tranquil and lazy, and it was hard to believe that we were still in the real world and not in a scene from Enid Blyton.

From Granada we made short journeys to neighbouring towns, such as Sevilla. Sevilla is famous for its Alcazar, a magnificent palace built in the style of the Alhambra.

On entering the town we first encountered a tower by the name of La Giralda. This was originally the minaret of a mosque built in 1171 by Al-Mansour Yaqoub on the instructions of the Moroccan ruler, Abdul-Mu'min bin Yusuf. Mansour also built a twin mosque in the town of Marrakesh in Morocco. This particular minaret was ninety-three metres high with five floors, all of which were lovingly decorated with arches, pillars, carved windows and various geometrical patterns. The top floor also had a balcony, which is presumably where the muezzin stood to say the Adhan. The crowning glory of the minaret was a cluster of four large gold apples. The historian Abdul-Kalin once wrote:

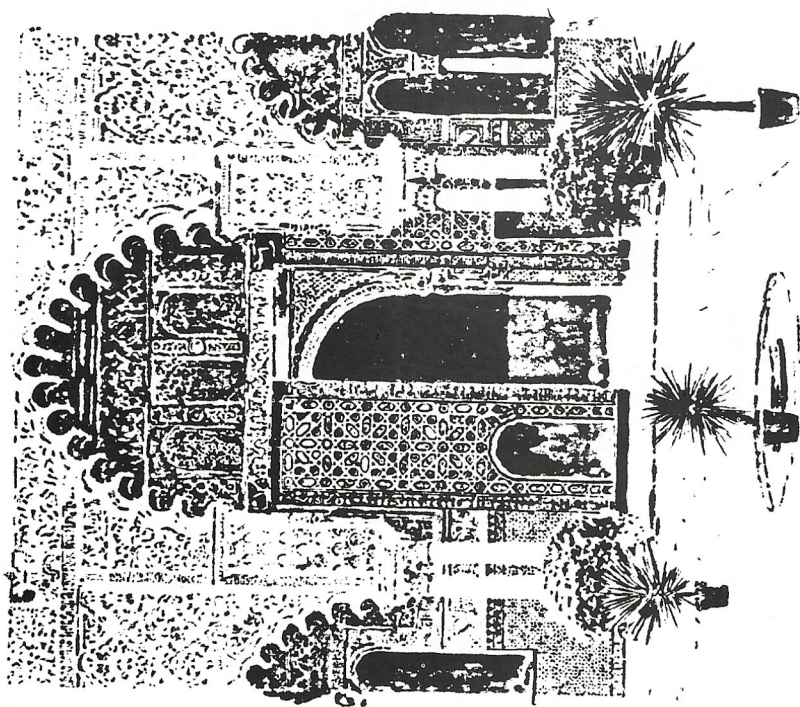
"...the lofty tower, and the beautiful apples, that were so big that there were no other like them, and whose diameter was such that to get them through the door, it was necessary to remove the stone of the threshold."

Although we could not enter the Giralda, we were told that it had no stairs, only a spirally inclining slope. This was so wide that the Caliph of the time used to climb the minaret on horseback.

Sevilla fell to the invaders in 1248. The successive rulers of the town destroyed the mosque and built a church on the same site. The minaret was left standing but was converted into a bell-tower. In 1355 an earthquake destroyed one of its floors and the gold apples

were knocked to the ground. Bells were added and in 1558 a gigantic bronze figure, "Triumph of the Faith", was placed on the top. Because this revolved in the wind it was named the Giralda (the Moving One).

Nearby on the banks of the river stood another gold tower. The Muslims had originally built a palace in Sevilla, and the palace and its extensive green parks were encircled by a huge wall. At intervals in this wall were watchtowers made of gold. The palace and its wall were destroyed after the Muslims lost the town, but this solitary tower was left standing as a relic of the country's luxurious past.



The Alcazar, Seville.

We then drove towards the Alcazar ("Qasr" is the Arabic word for palace). There is a general misunderstanding that the Alcazar is the original Muslim palace of Sevilla and that its Western characteristics are additions by later Spanish kings. In fact, the original palace was razed to the ground, but as the Spanish king, Don Pedro, had a palace built on the site of the old one, the mistake can be understood.

As we drove from the watchtower to the palace we passed the usual restaurants, shops, houses and gaping civilians. But we were aware that we were travelling across what was originally the garden of the palace, and the long journey demonstrated the extensiveness of the original grounds.

Although the ground floor of the present Alcazar had a distinctly Islamic theme, it had been built comparatively recently by Christian, Muslim and even Jewish architects from Sevilla, Granada, Toledo and Cordoba.

After Spain was captured, the remaining Muslims and Jews had slowly intermarried with the Spaniards and had gradually forgotten their origins. Their knowledge of the Qur'an was confined to the verses they saw written on the walls of the Alhambra, and if they practised Arabic calligraphy, it was only for its artistic merit. When they built the Alcazar, they copied much of the style and substance of their Moorish heritage.

Among the various rooms of the palace, were the Justice Hall, the Virgin's Hall, the Ambassadors' Hall and the Bride's Wing.

The Ambassadors' Hall is the most famous of these; its Eastern look is accentuated by elaborately designed arches and verses from the Qur'an covering the walls. The phrase, "Kingdom is for Allah", adorns its large

door and "There is no Victor except Allah", which was so characteristic of the Alhambra, could also be seen here. Other phrases engraved on the pillars and walls included: "O my belief! O my hope! O my Master! Die with the best actions!" and "Glory be to our master, King Pedro. May Allah help and protect him." It was obvious from these that the King did not understand Arabic as he would have thrown a fit at being associated with the Muslims in any way. The Ayat al-Kursi was also carved on the walls of the Bride's Court. The windows added to the beauty as they were designed in stained glass of various colours.

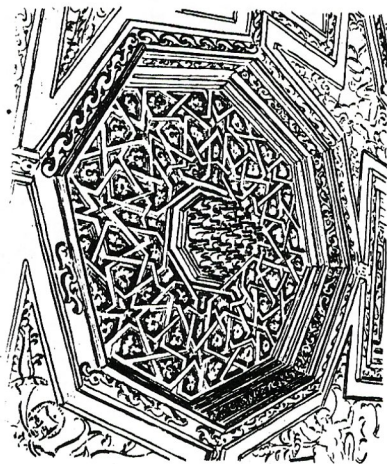
In one hall we could distinguish the eight-pointed star of the Muslims, another boasted a tall cross and a third displayed the Jewish Star of David. On the entire floor only these two latter symbols were present to indicate that non-Muslims were also involved in the construction and decoration of the palace.

Moving from these oriental-style rooms to the Spanish ones, which were on the first floor and had names like the Hall for Catholic Kings and Philip II's Wing, was a shock. While the former had relied on ingenious patterns and elaborate calligraphy for their appeal, the latter could only boast massive paintings that covered the walls.

In addition to portraits of various kings and queens, there were many scenes of battles. These were painted in striking colours, but compared to the rooms we had left they looked dull and unartistic. The battles chosen were, of course, between the Crusaders and the Arabs. The central image, which is one I have seen countless times in writing and in painting, was that of Satanic Muslims fighting the God-fearing Christians.

The only point of interest in these hideous paintings was the way in which one small picture could express so

many ideas. The Muslim soldiers looked evil, malicious and bloodthirsty. Their eyes were bloodshot, their faces were contorted in ugly grimaces, their lips were parted in evil sneers. They were Hate and Fanaticism personified. The Crusaders, on the other hand, were calm and serene. They looked smart and tidy; their uniforms were neat, their lines were in complete order, and they looked the epitome of discipline. They were trained soldiers, while the Arabs looked like unruly lynch parties. We left the palace in disgust at these so-called works of art. The Christians have tried to appease their own guilty consciences with such lies, while history proves it was they who were thirsty for blood.



Ardesonado ceiling with stalactite decoration

Chapter 4

Our destination was now Gibraltar, following the coast on narrow, winding and frightening mountain roads. The town of Tarifa lies at the top of one of these mountains and we stopped near it to enjoy the beautiful scenery. A year before Tariq bin Ziyad conquered Gibraltar, another general by the name of Tariq bin Malik was sent to Spain from North Africa on a reconnaissance mission. The spot he landed at was Tarifa.

We were standing on a piece of rock that jutted out over the sea like a cliff. Behind us were the boulders of the mountain; ahead were the calm waters of the Mediterranean. The sea looked quite crowded. Apart from the Spanish soil we stood on, the Rock of Gibraltar was to our left. In front of us in the distance, shrouded in mist, were the shores of Morocco. So near and yet so far! We could now understand why the Arabs of Africa had first come to Spain and only then moved out to the other European countries. We hoped that the next time we would disembark, it would be on the famous Mountain of Tariq. But due to visa problems presented by our non-British passports we had to abandon this scheme. Spain and Gibraltar are linked by a bridge, and while waiting at this border, we were surprised to see a number of immaculate dark blue uniforms on the other side of the barrier. As Britain is still tenaciously clinging to this last remnant of her empire, law and order on Gibraltar are maintained by her policemen. It was amusing to think that we had travelled a thousand miles to get far away from Britain, and yet when we turned this corner, her bobbies were waiting for us.

Next stop on the list was Marbella, and it was almost midnight when we saw the lights of this town in the distance.

By that time most of us were half asleep, but then a sight jerked us back to life. The never-ending road that led to the town was lined on both sides by tall bushy trees. Except for the twinkling lights of Marbella in the distance, it was extremely dark, and the overhanging branches of the trees made it still more gloomy. The trees then thinned out and we emerged from their shade into the open.

As we came out of this avenue something glittering white on the left caught our attention. A few yards from the road stood one of the most beautiful mosques I have ever seen. It was made of white stone which on its own would have gleamed in the darkness. But this brilliance was enhanced even more by a large number of floodlights, all of which had their beams directed at the building. The combined dazzling effect of the white stone and the powerful light was accentuated by the darkness of the night. We all gasped, first at the sudden brilliance of the sight, and then because it was a mosque. Its name was written in large black letters in Arabic and English on the top: King Abdul Aziz ibn Saud Mosque.

For the moment our fatigue was forgotten and we headed for the narrow drive that led to its small car park. If the exterior of a building could be so splendid, we were impatient to see the interior. We did not expect to see anyone so late at night, but an Arab caretaker emerged from behind some bushes which he had been watering.

The Mosque was built in 1981, paid for by the Saudi monarchy. It was a square building with a massive dome covering most of its roof. The walls were battailed like a

castle and were surrounded by palm trees and other exotic shrubbery. A fountain was under construction in the courtyard that led to the praying areas. At the far end were a kitchen and the living quarters for the Imams. The interior of the mosque did not disappoint us and was magnificent in its simplicity. It was also a snowy white with mahogany wood for trimmings such as the galleries, various shelves and pulpit. Glittering like a diamond tiara, a chandelier in the centre completed the decoration.

Two days of sightseeing later we arrived in Madrid. This town's Wax Museum is reputed to be the best of its kind in the world, and now I am prepared to vouch for that - eat your heart out, Madame Tussaud! It took us more than an hour to see it, and it was worth every minute. There were wax characters from every subject possible, ranging from world leaders to entertainers to famous criminals to sportsmen to children's fiction.

The Spaniards were not content with making the figures unbelievably realistic, but had even added moving arms and heads to some. We learned about the moving parts when looking at a scene which depicted a famous bullfight in which a leading matador was fatally injured. Music as well as sounds from the fight, such as the snorting and running of the bull, cheers and screams from the audience and the shouting of the matadors, completed the atmosphere. When the wax figure who had been watching the raging bull suddenly turned his head and looked at us, I was not the only one to jump back in surprise.

Our favourite room was the one that contained historical characters from the time of Muslim Spain. When we entered the room, Tariq ibn Ziyad stared steadily at us, sword in hand. Other generals with him included Abdul-Rahman Al-Dakhil and Boabdil (Abu Abdullah). Small arches in characteristic Islamic designs and the inevitable phrase, "And there is no Victor except

Allah", filled the spaces in the already crowded room. To the Spaniards this phrase must now be synonymous with Islam and the Muslims. After posing for photographs with Mary Poppins, wrinkle-face Reagan and Colonel Gaddafi (who looked more like Gaddafi than Gaddafi himself), we headed for the exit.

A short journey from Madrid took us to the Escorial, a massive monastery which is divided into a number of interesting sections. The most famous of these contains a collection of historical documents, including ancient manuscripts of the Qur'an. However, my father was disappointed as the collection had received more publicity than it deserved.

One of the floors of the building consisted entirely of long corridors that were lined by huge paintings. These depicted recognisable scenes from the Bible, and when we walked from one end of the passage to the other, we could see the whole Biblical story of Jesus in pictures.

The monastery is also the "graveyard" of numerous kings and queens of Spain. The whole basement was devoted to this purpose and consisted of halls and rooms of various sizes, each with its own distinct style and design of coffins. The only feature these coffins had in common was that they were made of marble and were, without exception, magnificent. Some were in the style of the Ancient Egyptians with a marble statue of the occupant lying on the lid of the coffin with his hands folded in prayer. While some coffins were plain, others were magnificently decorated.

To picture one of the rooms imagine a four-tier birthday cake, covered with white icing, decorated with angels and cherubs, and already marked into slices. This is what we saw when we entered one room, except that the cake was nearly ten feet high and that, grotesquely, each slice was a coffin. Small engraved writing on each

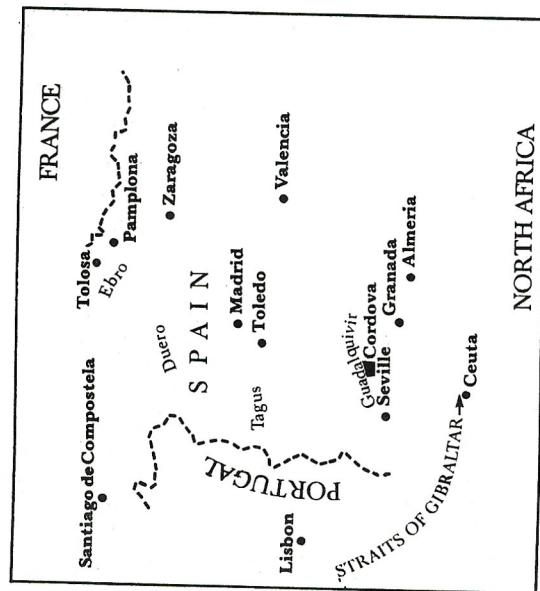
announced the name of the occupant.

The most spectacular room was the most gloomy. It was small and circular with a massive but dim chandelier. The wall had rectangular shelves cut into it, each holding a green marble casket with gold handles. Some of these caskets were open and empty, waiting for the next royal death. We were told that the present king had already expressed a wish to be "buried" there. The most horrible thing about the whole floor was the smell; it was faint but sickly, and everywhere. The stench of decaying bodies mingled with the smell of perfumes, and had the most nauseating effect. We were all impatient to get out of this putrid environment into the fresh air outside.

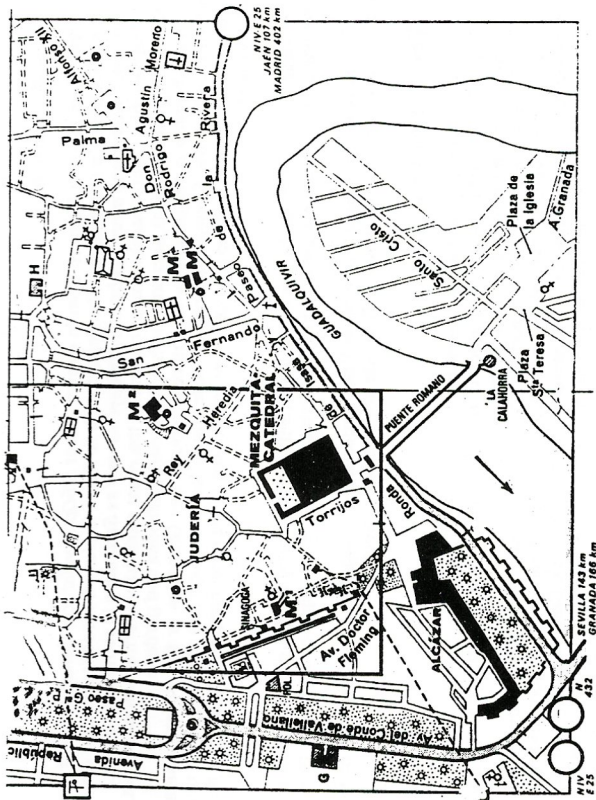
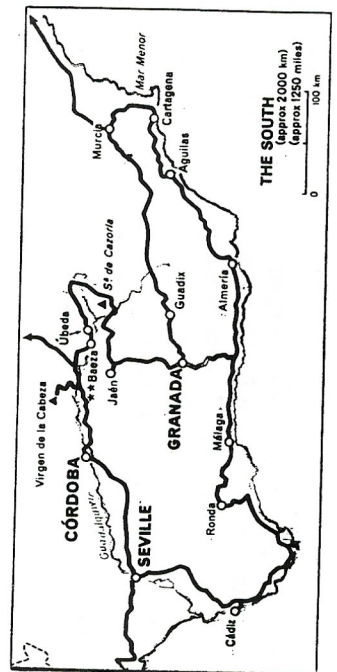
After spending the night in Bilbao, we made our last journey on Spanish soil as we travelled to the port town of Santander. We were nearly late for our ferry (due to circumstances beyond our control), but after breaking a few traffic codes we managed to reach it before it sailed away. We were expectedly the last to board and I must admit that as the harbour of Spain disappeared from view, I had a lump in my throat. But the tears in my eyes were due to the stinging wind - of course!

Our journey across the Bay of Biscay was calm and uneventful. Twenty-six hours later, when we disembarked at Portsmouth, we received an extremely rude welcome. The customs authorities saw the British passports of our companions and cheerily waved them through, but when they saw our green Pakistani ones, we were in for trouble. Every item in our luggage and every corner of our car was searched (they even checked in the ash tray). It was extremely humiliating, but it taught us that innocence and guilt are determined not by actions but by one's nationality in this land of perverted justice.

As London slowly woke up on a chilly May morning we thankfully sped towards home, carrying with us memories of a glorious tour that we will never forget.



Spain and north-west Africa. The Douro and Ebro rivers were the effective boundaries of al-Andalus.



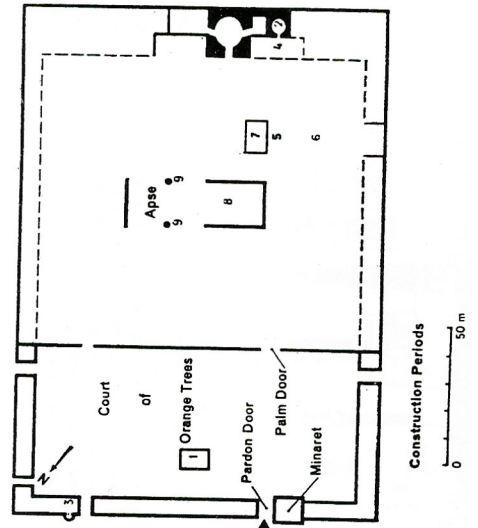
SIGHTS

Mosque

(Mezquita-Catedral) — Open 10.30am to 1.30pm and 3.30 to 7pm (1 October to 31 March 3 to 6pm); closed afternoon of 25 December; 100pts.

History, in superimposing two faiths on one site and erecting two oratories, one within the other, has produced a heterogeneous edifice in which there is much to admire.

The Mosque — Illustration p 16. The forest of pillars, the red and white Moorish arches extending apparently endlessly in all directions, are unique but the overall plan is the traditional Muslim one of a cranelated square perimeter enclosing a forecourt with a basin for ritual ablution, a covered gallery and a hall for prayer in which the wall facing Mecca, the qiblah, is hollowed out in one place in the form of a sacred niche or mihrab (2). In Córdoba the perimeter is entered through the later, 14C, Mudéjar Pardon Door which is faced with bronze.



The Alhambra

Open 9am to 7pm; 10am to 6pm in winter; ticket (25Qpts) valid for: Generalife and the Emperor Charles V's apartments. The Peinador de la Reina is closed. Floodlit visits (at least 25 people) holidays and evenings before holidays as well as Saturdays in summer: 15Qpts.

The beautiful Calat Alhambra must be one of the most remarkable fortresses ever built. Views of the town, the bleak Sacromonte heights, nearby hillsides and gardens.

The Alhambra outer perimeter is entered through Las Granadas or the Pomegranate Gateway built by the Emperor Charles V. A footpath leads through the shrubbery* to the massive Justice Gate **, built so that its tower forms part of the inner ramparts defending the castle terrace.

Alcazaba - The Alcazaba has existed since the 9C and is by far the oldest part of the Alhambra. The two towers overlooking the Cistern Court (de los Aljibes) date back to the 13C.

The lofty Watch Tower (Torre de la Vela) commands a magnificent panorama** of the palace, the Generalife, Sacromonte, Granada and the Sierra Nevada.

The Generalife

Same opening times as for the Alhambra.

The 14C Generalife, the summer palace of the Kings of Granada, is particularly enjoyable for its cool and green, terraced water gardens.

The Cypress (los Cipreses) and Oleander Alleys (de las Adelfas), which are at their best in July and August, lead to the palace, a building of modest dimensions surrounding an elongated court, its axis marked by a narrow slit of water. This Canal Court (Patio de la Acequia), bordered by roses, has a graceful pavilion at either end. Linking these pavilions are, on the left, a gallery and on the right, the palace apartments. The *mirador* overlooks Granada and the Darro Valley.

CORDOBA

Córdoba stands at the halfway point on the right bank of the Guadalquivir where the mines, ranches and farmlands of the Sierra de Córdoba plateau to the north meet the wheatlands and olive groves of the southerly Campiña plains. The city owes its fame to the brilliance of the civilisations which it has twice fostered and which each time raised it to the position of capital. It could live on its past but it has chosen to develop modern industries on its outskirts and maintain its longstanding crafts of silver filigree and tooled leatherwork in their traditional setting in the heart of the city. May is festival time, with competitions in decking crosses, *patios*, windows and balconies, streets and squares with flowers until the end of the month

