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The Role of Hispanic Muslim Architecture in the Conquests of James I of Aragon. A Study on the *Llibre dels Feits*

El Paper de l'Arquitectura Hispanomusulmana a les Conquestes de Jaume I el Conqueridor. Estudi del *Llibre dels Feits*

Abstract:

This article examines the role served by Andalusian architecture in the chronicle of James I of Aragon (r. 1213-1276). The autobiographical character of the book and its direct style show the pragmatic approach to Hispanic Muslim architectural heritage seized by Christian armies during the conquest of Al-Andalus. The processes of appropriation and assimilation became especially significant when symbolically relevant buildings such as palaces and temples were involved and had a profound and far-reaching effect in James I's reign and beyond.

Keywords:

Book of Deeds; James I of Aragon; Hispanic Muslim Architecture.

Resum:

Aquest article examina el paper de l'arquitectura andalusina a la crònica de Jaume I el Conqueridor (r. 1213-1276). El caràcter autobiogràfic del llibre i el seu estil directe mostren una actitud pragmàtica envers el patrimoni arquitectònic hispanomusulmà ocupat pels exèrcits cristians durant la conquesta d'Al-Andalus. Aquests processos d'apropiació i d'assimilació esdevenien especialment significatius quan hi intervenien edificis simbòlicament rellevants, com palaus i temples, i tingueren efectes de llarg abast més enllà del regnat de Jaume I.

Paraules clau:

Llibre dels Feits; Jaume I d'Aragó; Arquitectura hispanomusulmana.

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1. Introduction

The *Llibre dels Feits*, traditionally translated into English as *The Chronicle of James I of Aragon* (Forster, 1883), or more recently, *The Book of Deeds* (James I of Aragon, 2003), relates the major events occurred during the reign of James I of Aragon, known as The Conqueror (r. 1213-1276). It is written from the king's perspective and it focuses on his military campaigns, mainly the conquests of Majorca, Valencia and Murcia.

Experts on the book have concluded that James I was actively involved in the writing of the text (Aurell Cardona, 2008: 305-318; Cingolani, 2007: 31-33; Smith, 2003: 6-7; Soldevila, 1983: 33-46). It has been suggested that the chronicle might have an oral origin and was aimed to be read out loud. The king could have initially commissioned the creation of poems to celebrate his military victories to one or diverse troubadours, or he could have recounted his experiences to knights of his household while a scribe wrote his words down.

Although it is essentially a military work, the many personal memories in the text reveal a vivid picture of the times and an intimate self-portrait of the monarch.² The king's account of his own life and reign is sometimes inaccurate and inevitably partial, but I will stick to his story for the sake of space.³

James I was not especially fond of architecture, but he occasionally expressed great pride in his kingdoms' ancient buildings, particularly when that offered the opportunity to praise his ancestors. It would be the case of the "ancient palace, which had been built by the count of Barcelona" (James I of Aragon, 2003: 70 [48]), or "the monastery that was built by Queen Doña Sancha, who was our grandmother" (James I of Aragon, 2003: 284 [379]), referring to the Barcelona Royal Palace and the Royal Monastery of Santa María de Sigüenza, respectively.

He also showed an aesthetic appreciation for the castles and cities in his territories and beyond. In 1239, several noblemen from Montpellier wronged James I and escaped the city to avoid being summoned before the king. He decided to punish the leaders of the revolt by demolishing their houses. The destruction of castles and towns was a common practice, especially in response to treason (e.g., James I of Aragon, 2003: 325 [459], 369 [545]; 373 [550]). Nonetheless, in the case of Montpellier, the monarch's place of birth, he made sure the city's appearance was not greatly affected by his decision.

² For a study on the emotional memories of James I in the *Llibre dels Feits*, see Liuzzo Scorpo (2018).

³ For a comparative study of the *Llibre dels Feits* and the more factual Bernat Desclot's chronicle, see Cingolani (2008)

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[...] we ordered the houses of those who had fled to be pulled down, that is to say, three or four houses of those who had stood out as leaders of those who had escaped us. And we left the others so the town would not look ugly afterwards. (James I of Aragon, 2003: 242 [304]).

Similarly, he often praised the beauty of Hispanic Muslim architecture, maybe to magnify his subsequent conquests. A fine example would be his evocation of the city of Majorca after the first battle in the island, which “[...] seemed to us and to those who were with us, the most beautiful we had ever seen.” (James I of Aragon, 2003: 91 [67]). He also demonstrated his knowledge of the structural soundness of Andalusian fortresses in passages like the description of Puig de Santa Maria to his uncle, where he “explained to him that the castle was located on a hill, and it was good and strong and well constructed [...]” (James I of Aragon, 2003: 187 [206]).

Furthermore, the Conqueror was aware of the key role of construction in warfare and occupation of newly conquered territories. In addition to military tactics like cutting off the water supply during a siege, ravaging crops or taking cattle to starve the population, the book describes other techniques which were common at the time, such as digging the foundations of walls to make them sink (James I of Aragon, 2003: 135 [126]), or levelling moats and excavating underground tunnels to access fortresses (James I of Aragon, 2003: 97 [73]).

More relevantly, it is also known that troops included master builders who were capable of transporting, assembling and even building from scratch a great variety of siege devices. On one occasion, the chronicle mentions an Italian master who volunteered to erect a “wooden castle” in eight days during the siege of Borriana (James I of Aragon, 2003: 158 [158]). That “wooden castle” was a complex structure with two stories above the ground, which allowed the crossbowmen to gain height and the soldiers to safely approach the walls. In addition, it provided them with direct access to the different levels of the fortresses from the outside. In this case, it is remarkable that James I remembered the master from the conquest of Majorca, which had taken place four years before. The king also specified his name and place of origin, Nicoloso of Albenga.

Those master builders frequently had an important role after the occupation of a town. Their tasks at that stage included completing the reconstruction of newly occupied fortresses that had been damaged or demolished during the military campaigns (James I of Aragon, 2003: 190 [211]), and erecting walls to divide the Saracen properties from the ones that would be occupied by the new Christian settlers (James I of Aragon, 2003: 256 [331-332]).

2. Occupation of Andalusian buildings

During the Christian conquest of Al-Andalus, the discovery and appropriation of Hispanic Muslim architecture, as well as the demanding technical requirements resulting from the continuous movement of the borders, gave rise to the Christian reuse of Andalusian constructions. That phenomenon proved decisive when it involved socially significant buildings, such as palaces and temples.

The turbulence of the period, especially up to the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa in 1212, resulted in the constant movement of the borders and many cities changed hands repeatedly (see, for example, the case of Coria in García Oliva, 2007: 104-106). The temporary nature of the military advances and the instability of the subsequent situation are likely to have favoured the reuse of all kinds of Andalusian buildings. That practice was probably consolidated by the time Toledo was conquered by Alfonso VI of Castile in 1085 (as described in Jiménez de Rada, 1989: 249-250; Menéndez Pidal, 1906: 540-542 [871]).

2.1 Palaces and fortresses

The reuse of Hispanic Muslim palaces was a common practice since the earliest Christian advances on Al-Andalus. In fact, many fortresses built by the Saracens were still standing at James I's time in territories conquered long before, such as the castles of Lleida and Tortosa.

The Conqueror himself called his palaces in the city of Zaragoza by their Arabic names. The Book of Deeds refers to the royal palace as Zuda (James I of Aragon, 2003: 39 [22]), from the Arabic *sudda*, which was used in Eastern Al-Andalus to refer to the residence of the Taifa princes (Torres Balbás, 1952: 170-171). The royal country residence in the suburbs was and is still known as the Aljafería or *Aliafaria* in the documents of James I's chancery (e.g., Canellas López, 1972: 197). That name is a deformation of the Arabic *al-Qasr al-Yafariyya*, which can be translated as Abu Yafar's palace (Cabañero Subiza, 2007: 106).

As for the fortresses taken over by James I, he occasionally changed their Arabic names. It is the case of Puig de Santa Maria, previously called Enesa by the Saracens and Puig de Cebolla by the Christians (James I of Aragon, 2003: 187 [206]; 189 [209]). However, it was very common to keep calling those fortresses *alcàsser* (e.g., James I of Aragon, 1982: 240), which is a term that was adopted by the Spanish and Catalan languages (*alcázar* and *alcàsser* respectively). It comes from the Arabic word *al-qaṣr*, originally from the latin *castrum* (camp or castle) (Giralt Radigales, 1998). More exceptional is the case of Mallorca's castle, which maintained its Arabic name Almudaina (James I of Aragon, 2003: 109). Most probably, this

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designation derives from *al-mudayna*, which is a diminutive of the Arabic word for town (Coromines, 1989-1997: II, 163).

Occupying Hispanic Muslim castles after the appropriation of a city was extremely beneficial. In addition to the obvious economic and technical advantages, Islamic fortresses were a potent symbol of power, and a major military asset for the effective defence of the territory against later revolts. Their strategic importance was so critical that James I became indignant when he was told that the castle of Enesa had been demolished by the Saracens while he was planning its conquest, because it meant the loss of a strong military base to attack Valencia, which was his ultimate goal. He was forced to change his plans and secretly started preparing to rebuild a new castle, even before the city surrendered.

[...] some men who came from Valencia told me for certain that the castle of Puig had been dismantled. When we heard that, we were very upset; but in spite of the sadness that we felt, we said that it did not bother us, because we would build another castle there when we went there with the army. And for that purpose we ordered twenty moulds for walls to be made at Teruel, secretly, so that nobody knew about it. (James I of Aragon, 2003: 188 [208])

The reconstruction of the Puig's fortress, which became the king's operations centre during the Valencia campaign, was carried out by his nobles as they arrived to the town and according to the number of men they had. It was supervised by the monarch, who camped nearby, and lasted two months (James I of Aragon, 2003: 190 [211]).

James I advice to Pope Gregory X about his plans for a crusade to recover the Holy Land is also significant. In 1274, at the age of 66 and according to his own recollection, the Conqueror was given the floor during the Second Council of Lyon and recommended to send 2,500 men to the Holy Land not to fight, "[...] but to garrison⁴ the castles and the places that need to be garrisoned [...]" (James I of Aragon, 2003: 363 [531]).

Apart from the aforementioned practical reasons, James I grew to admire Arabic art and culture. Xàtiva was arguably the monarch's favourite conquest not just for its strategic and economic value, but also for its beauty. The king related how he decided to conquer the city when he went there to negotiate the liberation of Don Pedro de Alcalá, who had been made prisoner, and saw how beautiful the place was.

⁴ Smith & Buffery's translation of the Catalan verb *bastir* as "to garrison" is, in my opinion, slightly inaccurate. The term *bastir* in this context means "to stock up" or/and "to build, to manufacture" (Faraudo de Saint-Germain, 1943)

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[...] we saw the castle, so noble and so beautiful; and such a beautiful huerta. And we felt great joy and great happiness in our heart; for it seemed to us that not only for Don Pedro de Alcalá did we have to go upon Xàtiva with our army, but also to win the castle for Christianity [...]. (James I of Aragon, 2003: 250 [318]).

Besides the military occupation of fortresses, the king occasionally took the best Andalusian palaces as royal residences, sometimes immediately after the occupation of a city. The most graphic description of that process provided in the Book of Deeds is the case of Almenara. After the conquest of Enesa, the neighbouring town of Almenara offered James I a capitulation. An agreement was reached after a few days and James I entered the town and the castle. Meanwhile, he sent word to the queen, who was lodged at Borriana (about 16 miles away). At her arrival, they entered the castle for the first time and had dinner there.

And so, with that, we had the castle. Meanwhile, we sent two knights to the queen, telling her that she should come quickly, as Our Lord had shown us such grace and mercy that He had given us the castle of Almenara, and she would be better off and more comfortable there than at Borriana. [...] And we waited there until she arrived, then we went out to the slopes at the foot of the castle, and we and she entered the castle happily and ate with great joy." (James I of Aragon, 2003: 213 [248]).

It is worth mentioning that at least in the cases of Almenara and Murcia, there is record that the Muslim rulers “prepare to come out” (James I of Aragon, 2003: 213 [247]), and “left the Alcazar clear for us” (James I of Aragon, 1883: 565 [442]). However, the Book of Deeds does not describe any apparent changes to the previous state of the buildings, furniture, or equipment before the monarchs occupied the castle.

Regarding the political and social significance of the appropriation of Hispanic Muslim fortresses, the text includes a few standard conventions such as hanging the corpses of traitors and enemies from the walls of the castles (James I of Aragon, 2003: 327 [465]), or more crucial in the king’s narrative, flying the victor’s flag and banner on the main structures of the city (e.g., James I of Aragon, 2003: 65 [44], 215 [251], 230 [282], 248 [314], 304 [414], 318 [443]).

Nevertheless, what seems to be more meaningful, at least to the royal court, is accommodating the queen. At certain times, that was considered a considerable asset, and had a major impact in the Valencia campaign. One of James I’s arguments to persuade Aragonese and Lleidatan noblemen to follow his strategy was that “when we have taken Borriana, we will have the queen our wife go there, so that the

people understand that we are determined to stay there.” (James I of Aragon, 2003: 140 [130]).

2.2 Mosques

In a similar way to civil buildings, the reuse of mosques and synagogues was very common long before James I's reign. There is archaeological and documentary evidence of that practice at least from the 11th century, and all over the former Al-Andalus. One of the earliest documents is Peter I of Aragon's endowment of Huesca Cathedral on the day of its consecration (Durán, 1965: doc. 64). It dates April 1097, just a few months after the conquest of the city, and it is aimed at converting the former Huesca Great Mosque into a church.

Other Iberian contemporary chronicles, especially *De rebus Hispaniae* and *Estoria de España*, narrate the occupation and consecration of mosques after the conquest of the most important strongholds in Al-Andalus, particularly Toledo and Córdoba (Jiménez de Rada, 1989: 249-250, 350-351; Menéndez Pidal, 1906: 540-542 [871], 433-734 [1047]). Those ceremonies are described as part of the rituals to take possession of Hispanic Muslim cities, which could also include royal parades, Christian hymns and triumphal Mass (James I of Aragon, 2003: 321 [451]).

Those epic stories clearly illustrate the almost military character of the appropriation of great mosques as a triumphal sign. The description of the conquest of Coria in the 12th cent. chronicle of Alfonso the Emperor, for instance, mentions the restoration of the city to its “former state when an episcopal seat had been there during the time of Archbishop Ildefonso and King Recaredo” (Lipskey, 1972: [161]), that is to say, during Visigothic times (6th – 7th cent.).

That early example demonstrates that, at least in part, there was a deep religious motivation started long before James I's time. It was fuelled by the deep-seated belief that, in short, it was essential to return to what was considered a legitimate past. That stimulus remains very much alive in the Book of Deeds, where, for instance, the two reasons stated by the king to conquer Majorca were “to convert them or to destroy them, and to return that kingdom to the Faith of Our Lord.” (James I of Aragon, 2003: 79 [56]).

Such political and religious ideology was surely a high motivation, but strong practical reasons cannot be undervalued in this case either. To begin with, there were huge economic and technical advantages. A place of worship needed to be set up immediately after the occupation of the cities, not just to satisfy the religious needs of the new settlers, but also to make possible for the aforementioned ceremonies. The purification of the great mosque was a quick and easy way to get a big enough church in the centre of the city. After those initial arrangements, of

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course, the building usually endured much more relevant interventions, mainly changing the orientation of the temple, bricking up or covering the mihrab, and adding bells and a cross to the minaret (Calvo Capilla, 2016: 133-136).

Urban and organisational factors need to be taken into account as well. Great mosques were strategically located within Hispanic Muslim cities, in a central position with road links to all the city gates (Epalza, 1995: 507-508). They were also the largest public buildings, since they needed to accommodate the whole community during the communal Friday prayers. On the other hand, neighbourhood mosques were not just used for religious purposes, but also as administrative centres. Especially from the 13th cent., when Muslim population was expelled from cities like Córdoba and Seville, neighbourhood mosques were also consecrated. In addition to be places of worship, these parish churches maintained their former administrative role (Ecker, 2005: 47-48).

Another key factor was the substantial economic benefit obtained by the bishops, since by receiving the great mosque in the distribution of the conquered land, they secured all the mosque properties and endowments for their diocese. In contrast, military orders often built their temples in uninhabited areas because whoever built new churches in deserted places taken from the Saracens had pontifical immunity, that is, full authority and right over them (Buresi, 2000: 347-348). The latter option, though, was usually difficult to accomplish by the bishops, since it required a lot of time, economic resources and most importantly, enormous defence capability.

In relation to James I's perception and experience of mosques converted to churches, it deserves mentioning that the memory of many former great mosques in his territories was still very much alive. In Lleida, for instance, the building of the former great mosque was demolished in the last years of James I's father life, and the works to build the new Gothic temple went on during all his reign (Niñá Jové, 2012: 103). Another example would be the privileges granted to Huesca Cathedral to be rebuilt according to the Christian tradition by James I himself in 1273, since the building of the former mosque was still used as a cathedral 176 years after its consecration (Garcés Manau, 2014: 246-249).

James I made clear in his book that "in all the great towns that God has given unto us to win from the Saracens we have built a church of Our Lady Saint Mary" (James I of Aragon, 2003: 321 [450]). That process is described in detail in the account of the capitulation of Murcia, where the king offered the ornaments of his own chapel⁵ for the consecration ceremony.

⁵ The king heard Mass every morning. This chapel probably refers to a mobile chapel he took with him during his military campaigns together with his tent.

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On the second day, when the altar was prepared, we had it decorated in the early morning with the cloths of our chapel, very honourably and nobly. [...] We had all the clergy who were there dressed in cloaks of samite and others in cloth decorated with gold. And with our crosses and with the image of Our Lady Saint Mary we went out from our quarters in the camp. On foot, we entered through the town into the church of Our Lady Saint Mary that we had built.” (James I of Aragon, 2003: 321 [451]).

In that passage, what the chronicle describes as “building a church” takes place in just two days, and it clearly refers to the process of cleansing the mosque, setting up a Christian altar and having it consecrated by a bishop. In a previous section about his stay in Majorca, the king mentions that “we have built here a church dedicated to Our Lady Saint Mary, (and so many others that will be here)” (James I of Aragon, 2003: 121 [105]). That statement probably also refers to the conversion of the great mosque. However, it was made thirteen months after the conquest of Majorca, so the possibility that the works of a new cathedral had started by then must be acknowledged.

Despite being merciless to anyone who challenged his authority, the Conqueror was usually willing to negotiate a capitulation with the rulers of Hispanic Muslim cities to avoid armed confrontation. One of the key questions considered in those treaties was whether the Muslim community would be allowed to practise their religion under Christian rule, which apparently was mostly granted. The Book of Deeds tends to associate the fact of preserving the Islamic religion with keeping at least some of the mosques for Islamic use (e.g., James I of Aragon, 2003: 256 [330]; 306 [418]; 316 [437]; 319 [445]).

A relevant chapter about the occupation of temples by the Christian invaders describes the negotiations to take a mosque in Murcia. It proved to be a very difficult process, which may be the reason why it was included in the chronicle. After the signing of the city’s capitulation, while the king was dividing the land and properties, he realised that one of the mosques was very close to the fortress, so he demanded to have it for himself.

And we said [...] that *that mosque* should be included in our part. They said that that had not been agreed and their documents said that they would keep their mosques and that they would have them as they had them in the time of the Saracens. And we said [...] *that church* shall be at the gate of the fortress. And that from there “Alàlosabba” should be cried near to my head when I am sleeping... that, as you can well understand, is not fitting. Now, you have some ten mosques in the town. Make your prayers in those and leave this one to us. (James I of Aragon, 2003: 319 [445])

The fact that the book uses the word “mosque” and “church” (italicised by me in the quote above) without distinction to refer to the same building at the same moment in time is very significant. It suggests that once the king resolved to secure a temple for the Christian community, he was completely indifferent to the origin of the building and regarded it as a church.

3. Temporary architectures of power

Beyond the approach to Andalusian buildings, the careful arrangements made by James I in his military camps when he met with representatives of Muslim communities are particularly revealing of their strong influence upon the Conqueror. The narrations of those episodes vividly illustrate the intense power relationship established between the different rulers engaged in the negotiations and show the deep knowledge of Arabic culture the monarch acquired over time.

The first of those meetings was organised by the king of Majorca, who requested James I to send Don Nunó as his messenger during the siege of the capital. Don Nunó was cousin of James I's father and one of the most important members of the court (Ferrer Abárzuza, 2019). The Book of Deeds simply relates that “the king of Majorca came out through the gate of Porto Pí, and ordered a tent to be prepared and seats so that he and Don Nunó could sit there.” (James I of Aragon, 2003: 99 [76]).

In 1231, just a couple of years after the conquest of Majorca, James I followed the advice of the commander of the Templars in the island and sent messengers to Menorca to negotiate its submission. The messengers were welcomed by the governor and other leaders of Menorca, who “had sent for mattresses, mats and cushions, so that they could sit down and assemble” (James I of Aragon, 2003: 130 [119]). The arrangements described above were made at a moment's notice and outdoors, somewhere between the harbour and the town of Ciutadella, Menorca's capital.

In the meantime, the king moved from his quarters at the Almudaina, the recently occupied fortress in the city of Majorca, and set up a military camp on the coast facing Menorca. Eventually, his messengers arranged a meeting with representatives of Menorca in the house he was temporarily staying. He was 23 years old at the time and it was the first time he held one of those meetings, so he probably had not anticipated the requirements for such an occasion. In fact, he narrates how he had to be told by his men to arrange his rooms and how he had to improvise in the last minute.

And our messengers sent word to us that we should prepare the dwellings which we were in fittingly. And we ordered them to be

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decorated and adorned with much fennel, because we had no other type of reed, and we placed our bedcovers and those of all who were with us on the walls of the house, in the part where we would receive them. [...] And when they were in our presence, they greeted us with great reverence and went down on their knees [...]. (James I of Aragon, 2003: 133 [122]).

The king clearly disliked being put in that almost embarrassing position, particularly when compared to the welcomes received by his men in the past. Even when those meetings were improvised, proper and comfortable seats were provided, together with other luxuries such as mats and cushions. From then on, he made sure he was never placed in a similar situation. The Book of Deeds details the careful preparations for the following meetings with Muslim rulers in military camps. It is also specified that the king personally ordered suitable arrangements or supervised them, as illustrated in the three examples below.

During the siege of Valencia (1238), when the nephew of Valencia's king "entered our quarters (which were very tidy and adorned) and was near us, we got up for him." (James I of Aragon, 2003: 225 [274]). After lengthy negotiations with the *alfaquí*⁶ of Xàtiva (1240), the *alcald*⁷ and the best hundred men of the town finally sworn fealty to James I. "And all participated in that oath. And we had seats prepared in the *reial*⁸ we had given to the bishop of Valencia [...]." (James I of Aragon, 2003: 255 [327]). After besieging Murcia (1266), the Conqueror sent for the governor "to speak to him for his good and that of the townspeople." The king explained that:

And when we learnt that they were coming, we had our house draped with good cloths and fine couches prepared. And we ordered that they should have live fowl, sheep and goats prepared, so that when they arrived these might be slaughtered, and that the guests should remain with us. (James I of Aragon, 2003: 315 [435]).

The instructions given by the king about the food in the previous passage reveal not only the considerable knowledge of Islamic culture he had acquired, but also his determination to be considerate towards Muslim rulers in an attempt to win them over (for more references to the king's knowledge of Muslim culture see James I of Aragon, 2003: 211 [244]; 320 [446]). Another clear example of the latter would be the following anecdote about the surrender of Peníscola. When the king

6 Alfaquí: Jurist or doctor of law among Muslims (Faraudo de Saint-Germain, 1943).

7 Alcald: Person in charge of the guard and defence of a castle under oath (Faraudo de Saint-Germain, 1943).

8 Reial, Reyals: Site where an army camps, and especially the tent or lodgings of the king or the general (Faraudo de Saint-Germain, 1943).

related his arrival to the outskirts of the town and the organisation of the camp, he detailed:

“At night, because it was a calm night, we ordered sleeping quarters to be made out of rugs and blankets that we had brought, as we had forbidden anybody to cut down the trees, since it would have greatly upset the Saracens if we had cut them down on our first visit.” (James I of Aragon, 2003: 173 [184]).

With regard to James I’s familiarity with Arabic lifestyle, it also deserves mentioning the allusion to a “tent from Outremer” in the chronicle (James I of Aragon, 2003: 252 [323]). In their Spanish translation of the book, Flotats and Borafull suggested that tent was a gift from the sultan of Egypt to befriend James I, in a period when it seemed plausible that the Conqueror could bring together many Christian princes to conquer Holy Land (James I of Aragon, 1848: 290). However, Flotats and Borafull did not provide a source and their theory remains unconfirmed, so it needs to be acknowledged just as a possibility.

4. Conclusion

James I’s attitude towards the Book of Deeds is far from the systematic approach adopted in other contemporary chronicles. The works produced in the court of Alfonso the Wise and mentioned above, for instance, are far more systematic and almost seem to establish proper occupation procedures to be followed in the future. On the contrary, the Conqueror’s intention is not normative, and it is repeatedly made clear in the book that its goal is not to be exhaustive (e.g., James I of Aragon, 2003: 223 [270]; 343 [492]).

Indeed, James I’s depiction of Andalusian heritage can be considered as a marginal section of the narrative. That neglect could be attributed to the personal preferences of the monarch. However, it could also be due to the fact that the knowledge, appropriation and assimilation of Hispanic Muslim architecture were deeply embedded in daily life by that time and therefore, considered superfluous in the account of the “matters which were great and good” (James I of Aragon, 2003: 223 [270]). On the contrary, the Conqueror’s chronicle vividly describes the king’s deep religious devotion, his vast knowledge of Arabic culture and his intense emotions after seizing a town or when seeing his flag in a conquered castle.

In spite of the scarce references to Hispanic Muslim architecture in the chronicle, when considered as a whole they give a complex and representative picture of the general attitude towards Arabic culture during the reign of the Conqueror. Hispanic Muslim architecture is characterised in the Book of Deeds in

four different ways, according to its value for the Christian community after the conquest:

Firstly, it was a political and military asset. A significant number of Hispanic Muslim buildings served an essential function as subjects of negotiation in the surrender treaties and strongholds to support the control of the territory. That role made them powerful instruments for the continuing occupation of the land.

Secondly, it was part of the spoils of the war. A considerable amount of the newly seized properties was distributed by the king among the Christian occupiers according to the economic or in-kind contributions of each nobleman to the campaign. They were a massive incentive for the members of the court to support their monarch.

Thirdly, it was a potent symbol of power. Beyond the structures with an eminently practical use, the buildings with a social relevance for the Andalusian community served a major symbolic role. The reuse of those constructions involved deep-rooted traditions and ceremonies, and implied significant architectural adjustments in the long term, particularly in the case of mosques converted into churches.

Finally, it was part of a foreign heritage. Jaume I's knowledge of Andalusian customs proved to be an invaluable resource to favour the Muslim community submission and to facilitate the monarch's relationship with his new subjects. On the other hand, a real aesthetic appreciation of Hispanic Muslim art and architecture was developed by the monarch and gradually assimilated by the Christian communities of the peninsula. Mudejar architecture, largely based on Andalusian heritage and techniques, is a paradigm of that process and became an essential part of Iberian visual culture transcending any ethnic and religious associations.

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