Reflections on pleasure: the fourteenth-century Alhambra

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REFLECTIONS ON PLEASURE:
THE FOURTEENTH-CENTURY ALHAMBRA

A Thesis

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ABSTRACT

The Nasrids were the last Islamic power on the Iberian Peninsula. They created a place of luxury and wealth in their hilltop fortress, the Alhambra, which is one of the best-preserved examples of medieval Islamic palace architecture. It was transformed in the thirteenth century into a palace-city and during most of its early history housed the most important figure in an Islamic society, the sultan. The Alhambra displays bare, natural elements on the exterior, while the interior mimics and references these natural elements in a grander fashion with gardens, fountains, beautiful vistas, sculpted porticos and lavish rooms. These interior spaces were settings for the sultan to display his wealth and power. In this thesis, I explore a selection of sites in the Alhambra by examining how decoration, courtyard gardens, water, and patronage reflect medieval Islamic notions of pleasure.

Following the introduction, each chapter is focused on a specific place within the Alhambra: the Palace of the Lions, the Comares Palace, and the Royal Bath. All have survived relatively intact and date primarily to the fourteenth century. In order to best discuss pleasure, each chapter includes a discussion of building layout, decoration, gardens and the role of water, and patronage. Each section is discussed in relation to pleasure and will investigate the means by which the spaces provide pleasure.
Chapter 1: An Introduction to the Alhambra

The Alhambra is the most glorious example of medieval Islamic palace architecture still extant today and the culmination of medieval Islamic culture on the Iberian Peninsula. It is superbly situated on a hilltop and began as a fortress in the late thirteenth century (Figs. 1, 2, and 3). Shortly after, it was transformed into a palace-city and during most of its early history housed the most important figure in an Islamic society, the sultan. Since it is elevated and separated from the city of Granada, the Alhambra possesses a magical and enigmatic aura. The complex displays bare, natural elements on the exterior, while the interior mimics and references these natural elements in a grander fashion with gardens, fountains, beautiful vistas, sculpted porticos and lavish rooms. These interior spaces were settings for the sultan to display his wealth and power. In this thesis, I explore a selection of sites in the Alhambra by examining how decoration, courtyard gardens, water, and patronage reflect medieval Islamic notions of pleasure.

Understanding the concept of pleasure in the medieval Islamic world is a pivotal first step to my thesis. Accordingly, pleasure is explained early in my introduction in order to lay out the terms by which to evaluate my case studies as examples of pleasure architecture. Other important factors, such as understanding the development of Islamic power on the Iberian Peninsula and the history of the construction of the Alhambra, follow in my introduction. My observations on pleasure at the Alhambra are also based on a clear understanding of preceding scholarship, which I present in the section devoted to the state of the scholarship. Each of the three chapters will focus on a specific place within the Alhambra: the Palace of the Lions, the Comares Palace, and the Royal Bath. All have survived relatively intact and date primarily to the fourteenth century. In order to best discuss pleasure, each of my chapters includes a
discussion of building layout, decoration, gardens and the role of water, and patronage. Each section is discussed in relation to pleasure and will investigate the means by which the spaces provide pleasure.

In Chapter Two, the Palace of the Lions is the first example of pleasure architecture I discuss, and it provides insights into how the sultan lived and how he displayed his wealth and power. The next chapter, on the Comares Palace, is important for its juxtaposition to the Palace of the Lions, but also for the insights it offers on the topic of pleasure. The last chapter, focused on the Royal Bath, offers unique glimpses of the role of pleasure in a much smaller space, built primarily for the function of bathing. There, accommodating for pleasure was a priority and the space adds a further facet to our understanding of components of pleasure found within the palaces.

Figure 1: View of the Alhambra Complex, Granada, Spain. (© 1998-2009 Spanish Fiestas Ltd.)
Figure 2: Plan of the Alhambra, Granada, Spain. (http://www.andalusien-web.com/images/alhambra_plan.jpg)
Figure 3: Plan of Nasrid Palaces, Alhambra, Granada, Spain.  
(© 1998-2009 Spanish Fiestas Ltd.)

Key:  1. Room of Presentation 2. Entrance to Nasrid Palaces 3. Mexuar Palace 4. Oratory  
9. Comares Tower/Hall of the Ambassadors 10. Muqarnas Chamber 11. Court of the  

The Concept of Pleasure at the Alhambra

To discuss pleasure, I will first need to explain it within its medieval construct and how  
the medieval Arab would have interpreted it. This section explores the concept of pleasure and  
its connection to beauty, the senses, the intellect, and God through three different Islamic  
thinkers. These thinkers, Ibn Sina, Al-Ghazali, and Ibn Khaldun, were prominent philosophers  
and theologians in the Islamic medieval world. Their work explored different types of pleasure  
and how it was experienced.
The concept of beauty is at the core of pleasure. It is what is contemplated and reflected upon to lead one to God.\(^1\) A common Arabic belief was that beauty had a freeing quality.\(^2\) Regardless of whether it derived from a natural form or a man-made phenomena, beauty had “soothing and healing” effects on the body, which allowed for a greater state of relaxation and contemplation.\(^3\) Beauty was a manifestation of God’s creation to enjoy and to gain knowledge of life after death. It concerned sensual pleasures on one level, while on a second level, knowledge and intellect led to a greater understanding of beauty. Beauty had an inward component, which allowed one to reflect and compose a purer thought in one’s mind. Benrens-Abouseif, a scholar on the subject, suggests that, “the only universal principle that governed beauty in Arabic culture was its association with pleasure.”\(^4\) In other words, beauty was the fundamental idea that is connected to pleasure. Many Islamic thinkers created categories of pleasure, which contained some combination of beauty, cognition, and God.

Ibn Sina (980-1037) was a famous philosopher in the Muslim world. He considered pleasure to be based on perfection and the knowledge gained from it.\(^5\) He incorporated an intellectual component into pleasure, which contrasts with our modern constructs of pleasure that mainly encompass sensual and physical facets. He also believed that “pleasure seeking was deeply rooted in the human soul.”\(^6\) Each soul contained these desires and attained pleasure through its different forms ranging from the innate and sensual to the spiritual.

Al-Ghazali (1058-1111) followed in the footsteps of Ibn Sina. He became a prominent theologian later in his life after turning away from philosophy. Al-Ghazali considered God to be

\(^3\) Ibid., 44.
\(^4\) Ibid., 42.
the utmost form of pleasure and perfection. He believed that beauty was an expression of the divine spirit. Beauty affected the soul and brought one closer to the divine.

Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406), a philosopher and historian that visited Granada, also examined the connections between intellect and pleasure. He emphasized harmony, which in his writing is described as being an affinity between the viewer and beauty. In his terms, the enjoyment of beauty “harmonized the cognitive soul,” and brought one closer to understanding. Beauty appears to weave itself through these Islamic thinkers’ ideas, even though each emphasized other aspects of pleasure, such as God, the intellect, and harmony.

In sum, the study of Islamic philosophical thought suggests that pleasure can be defined in three broad types: 1) physical and sensuous pleasure, 2) intellectual and knowledge-based pleasure, and 3) knowledge of the divine, which is considered to be the ultimate form of pleasure. Physical and sensuous pleasure included the enjoyment of food, scent, and the contemplation of the beauty of one’s surroundings. This form of pleasure incorporated—at times quite literally—the beautiful and the feeling of calmness and peace within the body. Sensuous pleasure was experienced in a secluded setting through majlis. Majalis (plural form) were formal gatherings held by a ruler in a decorated audience hall where poetry was performed, music heard, and food and drink enjoyed. The ruler showcased these delicacies to audiences of his court. Many times rewards were given to the performers as a public presentation of wealth. Overall, these gatherings were displays of luxury and taste and constituted the “primary forum

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9 Ibid., 38.
10 Ibid., 24.
11 Ibid., 25.
13 Ibid., 200.
for the pursuit of sensuous pleasures in the Islamic world."¹⁴ Majalis focused mainly on the sultan and his experience of pleasure.

The second type of pleasure is an intellectual one that incorporated both thought and imagination. This type of pleasure included the quest for meaning and power in one’s life. One found delight in the knowledge that was acquired through learning and experiences. Knowledge was considered an “elevated form of pleasure,” which engaged the intellect as an element leading to pleasure.¹⁵ A greater knowledge and intellectual thinking could lead to the contemplation of beauty. This idea of contemplation was also part of the majlis and manifested itself through the decoration and gardens in the Alhambra.

The ultimate pleasure is the knowledge of God, which led to interaction with the divine.¹⁶ The quest for oneness with God included a quest for perfection, for God is the perfect form of beauty. This type of pleasure exceeded the other two types of sensuous and intellectual fulfillment. It was Al-Gahzali who specified that the love for God, oneself, and human nature’s inherent search for pleasure could eventually lead one to God. This ultimate pleasure would have been a desire of the patron, for he is the earthly representative who sought to rule over God’s land.

The palaces of the Alhambra become an ideal setting of pleasure where God can be found in decoration. This divine presence was also seen in the garden, which will be analyzed as the paradise for eternal life. The courtyard gardens of the Alhambra are a garden of earthly delights and a foreshadowing of what is to come in eternal paradise.¹⁷ The palaces of the Alhambra and the Royal Bath area are manifestations of pleasure and patronage. Each was adorned with key

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¹⁴ Ibid., 199.
¹⁵ Benrens-Abouseif, Beauty in Arabic Culture, 24.
¹⁶ Ibid., 25.
components that are essential to Islamic art. These components include decoration, calligraphy, gardens, and water. Some form of pleasure is the desired outcome of each of these components, which, as a whole, showcase the sultan as a figure of power and wealth.

From the perspective of a medieval Arab, the Alhambra was a pleasure ground where the sultan could thrive in luxury. Each case study explores the connection between the many forms of pleasure described and architectural space. But just how do the spaces of the Alhambra become a pleasure palace? Before commencing the case studies, I shall provide a brief historical background in order to root the patronage of the specific spaces I will examine in their proper historical context.

**Historical Background**

Muslim forces invaded Iberia in 711 and established a consolidated power in most of Spain, pushing the Christian powers to the north. In 756, the sole surviving member of the Umayyad caliphate of Damascus fled his homeland besieged by Abbasid attacks to establish himself in Spain as emir Abd al-Rahman I. The land that the Umayyads conquered was called al-Andalus, and Muslims would continue to control it for the next eight centuries.\(^{18}\) Umayyad rulers created a unified Muslim Spain centered around Cordoba. This thriving culture actively mirrored Syrian forms and style, thereby establishing an architectural tradition previously unseen on the Peninsula.\(^{19}\) Some of their architectural masterpieces include the Great Mosque of Cordoba and the royal enclave of Madinat al-Zahra on the city’s outskirts (Fig. 4).

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Madinat al-Zahra is an important precedent for royal architecture that will be discussed later on in this introduction and referenced throughout this thesis.

![Plan of Madinat al-Zahra](http://www.mcah.columbia.edu/ma/htm/dj_islam/ma_dj_image_mz_plan01.htm)

Umayyad rule declined in the late tenth century due to the Christian *Reconquista*. The Christians gained control of important peripheral territory such as Toledo, culminating in the capture of Cordoba in 1246. At this point, the Christians became the dominant force in Spain, with the Muslims on the defensive and only in control of southern al-Andalus. In order to ward off the Christians and maintain power, the Muslims sought assistance from their neighboring allies in North Africa. The entrance of different Moroccan sects such as the Almoravids and the Almohads fragmented Islamic Spain into separate minor kingdoms known as *Taifas*. Ironically,
under this arrangement, leaders ruled separate factions and infighting took place more frequently than hostilities with their historical Christian enemy.

As a result, the Nasrid family, who were part of the Taifas powers and ruled over a small provincial area, rose to power. The Nasrids became the last Islamic power on the Iberian Peninsula. At first, they ruled from Arjona, which is located to the north of Granada in southern Spain. The Nasrids then began conquering other southern cities. They eventually established an Emirate in Granada in 1238, which lasted for the next two hundred and fifty years. This is where they built the Alhambra, their royal palace.

In that year, Muhammad ibn Yusuf ibn Nasr, who claimed to be in direct lineage of a comrade in arms of the Prophet Muhammad, declared himself Muhammad I, founder of the Nasrid dynasty. He set up alliances with the Christians as well as with Moroccans to the south. King Ferdinand III sought his aid in battle, while Muhammad accepted him as his sovereign. The intertwining of Muslim-Christian relations on the Peninsula continued to occur during the fourteenth century. By enforcing alliances with the Christians and North Africans, the Nasrids gained tight control of their region.\(^{20}\) To secure his lineage, Muhammad I declared his son to be his successor.

Muhammad II (1273-1302), the oldest son of Muhammad I, further consolidated power and organized the government. He broke ties with the Christians, in favor of new alliances with the Muslims of North Africa. His main objective was to form a cohesive front against the Christians to regain territory. The alliance he formed with the Merinids of North Africa, however, fell apart when they attacked the coast and captured Málaga, Spain. Muhammad II

was forced to resort to another alliance with the Christian King, Alfonso XI, to expel the Merinids and to strengthen the protection of his Emirate in Granada.

The throne subsequently passed to the son of Muhammad II, Muhammad III (1302-1309), and then to his brother Nasr (1309-1314). At this time, battles persisted over the territory and more alliances were instituted. Two other rulers came into power before the zenith of the Emirate of Granada: Ismail I (1314-1325) and Muhammad IV (1325-1333). These rulers were forced on the defensive by Christian advances and simply tried to hold onto their land.

The Emirate of Granada reached its peak in the mid-fourteenth century under the Sultans Yusuf I (1333-54) and Muhammad V (1354-1391). During the reign of Yusuf I, social unrest was kept at bay due to the many peace treaties he concluded, which allowed him to focus on cultural activities such as building. Luxurious spaces were added to the Alhambra. He opened a Madrasa in Granada that became one of the greatest schools in the emirate. Literature was a focal point in learning, and Nasrid society became fascinated with past literary traditions. The brief mention of literature here is important and will be fully developed in the body of my thesis, given its connections to calligraphic decoration—that is, decorations that are in fact inscriptions. The reign of Yusuf I was cut short when his bodyguard assassinated him in 1354. The throne passed to his son, Muhammad V.

Muhammad V forged successful diplomatic relations with surrounding powers and continued to thrive in the richest culture of the Nasrid dynasty. Although he retreated to Morocco for a couple of years due to a political uprising, by 1370 he returned to power and embarked on a major building campaign of reconstruction and addition to the Alhambra. Religion

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and poetry were particularly important to him, as discernible from the ubiquitous inscriptions that give praise to God and to himself. Under Muhammad V, architects, artists, writers, and philosophers brilliantly came together to form a sophisticated and distinct artistic environment.

Muslim power began to decline after Muhammad V. Constant battling between the Christians and Muslims as well as among the Muslims themselves marked the majority of the fifteenth century. The dynasty created by Muhammad I lasted until 1492, when the Christian Kingdom finally gained complete control of Iberia.

**Brief History of the Alhambra’s Construction**

The Alhambra was the royal city for the Nasrid rulers. The name is an abbreviation of Qal’at al-Hamra, which means “red citadel.” This title is due to the red color of the clay bricks that were used to build the structure. The site extends over twenty-six acres on a hilltop overlooking Granada. The Alhambra is irregularly shaped and was described by the scholar Torres Balbas (1888-1960) as an “enormous boat anchored between the mountain and the plain.” The elevation of the hill served as a natural defense. The site was a strategic location for protection and a symbol of royal power. It is situated on the Sabikah hill, one of the highest spurs in Granada, which is located across the city from the Albaicín hill. Along with the location, other elements, such as a wall around the city, gates, and towers, created the appearance of a fortress. It was a place that could only be sustained by wealth because water had to be brought to the hill via aqueducts and collected in cisterns.

It is a vast complex with a succession of fortifications and palaces tightly or occasionally loosely connected with each other. The Alhambra contained different living quarters,

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bureaucratic offices, the Royal mint, mosques, workshops, barracks, a prison, baths, and a summer residence for the sultan (Fig. 2). The defensive nature of the Alhambra, with exposed bare material on the exterior, contrasts strikingly with the plush, luxurious and carefully appointed interior. Oleg Grabar, a distinguished historian of Islamic art and architecture, suggested that the fortified aspect of the Alhambra derived from two different traditions of palace architecture: a royal private residence and a royal city within a city. The first was the tradition of noblemen establishing private residences in the countryside. It was found in the Mediterranean in late antiquity and was common in Central Asia around the second century A.D. Examples such as Mshatta and Qasr Khardna each contain defensive qualities on the outside without a military purpose. An earlier imperial prototype is Diocletian’s palace in Split, which dates to the early fourth century. In all cases, the use of military elements in royal architecture promoted the authority and prestige of its ruler.

The second tradition Grabar wrote about was the occurrence of a royal city within a larger urban city, which he cited as deriving from ancient examples. Many variations formed within this tradition, but it began with the simple designation of a compound that separated a royal complex from the rest of the city. The development of a city within a city transpired with the growth of the citadel. The citadel was part of an urban landscape, yet it simultaneously contained an independent connection to the outside world. The citadels of Aleppo, Jerusalem, and the Fatimid city of Cairo all serve as examples of a kind of miniature city. It was in the tenth century that these princely cities began in the Islamic world. The Alhambra derives from this

23 Ibid., 103.
25 This occurred in Rome, Byzantine Constantinople, and Abbasid Samarra.
city-citadel tradition and meshed these two traditions together to form a fortified royal monument. The autonomy of the ruler became a literal separation from the city below and a symbol of status.

Another precedent existed on the Iberian Peninsula for this type of pleasure palace. Indeed, when Muhammad II transformed the Alhambra into a palatine city, he was looking directly to the Iberian palatine city of Madinat al-Zahra. In so doing, he connected Nasrid rule to the great Islamic powers that had come before. Madinat al-Zahra was the royal city constructed by the Umayads outside their capital of Cordoba in the tenth century (Fig. 4). It has been called a “pleasure capital” and contained gardens, fountains, and luxurious halls adorned with beautifully sculpted interiors (Fig. 5). Along with the idea that a palace can provide pleasure for the sultan and his court, its use of water, different vistas, and axiality were repeated at the Alhambra. Fernández-Puertas, a prominent scholar who conducted an extensive study of Nasrid art and architecture, traced the connection between these two royal complexes. The Alhambra was a Nasrid re-interpretation of the pleasure palace tradition.

Throughout its construction many rulers added onto or renovated existing palaces, thereby creating a labyrinth of unaligned axes and a complex progression of spaces. Although the earliest date of the Alhambra is unclear because of the many renovations, by the ninth century the site comprised a citadel called the red castle (al-qal‘a al-harma).

27 Jerrilynn Dodds, Al-Andalus: The Art of Islamic Spain (New York: Abrams, 1992), 129.
28 Hillenbrand, Islamic Art and Architecture, 175.
30 The first references to the Alhambra occur in historical accounts of battles that took place between the Arabs and Muladies in the ninth century. The Arabs took refuge briefly in al-qal‘a
Another early structure on the site was for the fortress-palace of the Jewish vizier of the Zirid dynasty, Yusuf ibn Nagralla. The notion that the Alhambra had Zirid roots is founded on the work of Fredrick Bargebuhr and has been widely accepted by others, including Oleg Grabar. The Berber dynasty of the Zirids was one power in the Taifa political era during the eleventh century. They transformed Granada into an important city with a growing population. The construction of the palace began in 1052 in order to protect the vizier and his family after they escaped from Cordoba. Not much remains of this palace built by Yusuf ibn Nagralla, except for several masonry walls.

*hamra* when the Muladies defeated them. It is believed that the site of this castle was where the Torre de la Vela or Watchtower is today.

Muhammad I (1233-1272), founder of the Nasrid dynasty, never lived in the Alhambra complex, but he continued construction on the Sabikah hill at the site of the Jewish vizier’s palace. He set up the complex water supply system that allowed the Alhambra to be independent from Granada. The Alhambra was added onto by Muhammad II (1273-1302) and was transformed into a palatine city. After his reign, Muhammad III (1302-09) continued this tradition of building and is credited with having built the oldest substantially extant portion of the Alhambra, the Partal Palace (Fig. 6). He also built the great mosque of the Alhambra in 1308 and contributed to the infrastructure of the city.

At the height of the flourishing Nasrid dynasty, two rulers stand out in terms of major architectural developments of the Alhambra complex. These patrons, Yusuf I (1334-1354) and Muhammad V (1354-91), created a life of luxury in the Alhambra. The majority of extant palaces, towers, and buildings in the Alhambra belong to these two patrons. The major contributions by Yusuf I were the Comares Palace with its Court of the Myrtles, the Baths, the Gate of Justice, and the mausoleum. It should be specified that Muhammad V was largely responsible for renovating many of the spaces that his father, Yusuf I, had originally constructed. Muhammad V completed the unfinished constructions of his father, such as the Hall of the Ambassadors in the Comares Palace, and covered many surfaces within this palace with inscriptions that commemorated his own rule. He is the main patron of much of the Alhambra as it is known today. Important architectural additions that took place in his reign include the Cuarto Durato gate façade, the decoration of the Bath area, and the well-known Palace of the Lions. Granada was the last surviving Muslim capital in Spain; its Alhambra stands as a final, grandiose instance of Islamic architecture on the Iberian Peninsula.
State of Scholarship

The Alhambra palace is a well-studied monument, yet still a place for new discoveries. In the following pages, I present the current state of the scholarship and indicate its relevance to my thesis. The following authors have taken different approaches in describing the Alhambra. I divide the scholarship based on the major topics into which it actually falls: pleasure, decoration, gardens, and patronage.³²

Oleg Grabar suggested that the Alhambra was a pleasure palace and traced the development of Islamic architecture to show the precedents that influenced the Alhambra.³³ I will expand upon his work to target specific elements of pleasure found before, and at, the Alhambra.

³² These loosely correspond to the sections of my thesis chapters: layout, decoration, water and gardens, and patron’s pleasure.
³³ Grabar, The Alhambra.
James Dickie also emphasized the importance of pleasure—particularly to the study and understanding of the Palace of the Lions and the Comares Palace. Dickie argued that the Palace of the Lions was not only a residential space, but also a place for pleasure where the sultan and those closest to him could relax and be entertained. Dickie’s work will be important in aiding and guiding me through the Palace of the Lions as a form of pleasure architecture. However, it is my goal to expand upon his observations by examining the medieval concept of pleasure. Dickie’s work is a foundation that I will build upon in order to create a more historically grounded and nuanced connection between architecture and pleasure.

Robert Irwin countered the idea of pleasure architecture and suggested another theory. He argued that the Palace of the Lions was not a palace at all, but a madrasa, or school, where the most important intellectuals studied writing and literature. His argument will be useful for my work because he studied the space through the importance of the role of literature and poetry. Because Irwin emphasized social life at the Alhambra, his book also explained the daily functions—both social and religious—of the Royal Bath. This space is the subject of Chapter Four.

As already noted, the fundamental role of pleasure that is explored within my thesis is based on several different Islamic thinkers. Doris Benrens-Abouseif is the author of a book entitled Beauty in Arabic Culture. The book analyzed Islamic notions of beauty and pleasure as expressed through decoration, calligraphy, poetry, and nature. Berens-Abouseif interpreted these forms through the different philosophers and theologians of the Middle Ages. This work is

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36 Benrens-Abouseif, Beauty in Arabic Culture.
pertinent to my thesis and will provide a foundation for the concepts of pleasure that I then identify within the Alhambra.

Because decoration is bountiful throughout the entire Alhambra complex, it constitutes a topic of analysis in this thesis. The decorative schemes at the Alhambra, with one exception, follow the Islamic tradition of depicting no figures, only vegetal and geometric designs.37 Antonio Fernández-Puertas is an innovative scholar who has dedicated many years to studying cultural aspects of the Alhambra as well as its chronology and, most importantly, the geometric principles of its decoration.38 He explored architecture, materials, and decoration in order to suggest how geometric design at the Alhambra was based on particular proportional systems. His work has been fundamental to the study of the Alhambra in general and important in my research because he unlocked the formula of the proportions used in Nasrid art and architecture.

On the subject of decoration, Grabar again provided valuable insight.39 He described the palaces as spaces of pleasure, but also as “excitement for the eyes.”40 He has written extensively on the decoration and calligraphy within the Alhambra. His work is essential for understanding Islamic decorative schemes and the use of text as a form of adornment. Text is an important form of decoration found on entryways and walls of the Alhambra. Decoration will be discussed in depth in my thesis, and Grabar’s work will help me explore the ways in which decoration was a form of visual pleasure.

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37 This exception is found in the Hall of the Kings of the Palace of the Lions where different figural images and courtly scenes are painted.
38 Antonio Fernández-Puertas, The Alhambra V. 1; From the Ninth Century to Yusuf I (1354), (London: Saqi, 1997).
40 Grabar, The Alhambra, 90.
Equally enlightening is Robert Irwin’s *Islamic Art in Context*, which includes a section on the exploration of the Alhambra through the importance of decorative text.\(^{41}\) He discusses the palaces in the cultural context in which they were built. In addition to assisting me in explaining why text was used to enliven surfaces, Irwin’s work will clarify the role of the patron, for whom and about whom many of the inscriptions were written.

The third major topic of scholarship is the subject of gardens, which are present throughout the Alhambra and the Islamic world. The work of D. Ruggles Fairchild is central to the study of Islamic gardens on the Iberian Peninsula.\(^{42}\) She traced the development of the Islamic palace garden on the peninsula from the eighth to the fifteenth centuries and distinguished its components, such as pavilions, walkways, fountains, pools, and vegetation. These components call into play the patron and his experience of pleasure. Ruggles’ study of the Alhambra palace gardens will be vital for my thesis because I discuss the role that gardens play in creating a space for pleasure.

James Dickie and Abdel Elah Abdine also explained the main factors and elements that form the Islamic Garden in Andalusia.\(^{43}\) Dickie reconstructed the gardens of the Alhambra through literature and garden design from outside the Iberian Peninsula, arguing that these gardens reflect those of surrounding Muslim cultures.\(^{44}\) For Abdine, the essential element of an Islamic

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\(^{42}\) Ruggles, *Gardens, Landscape, and Vision in the Palaces of Islamic Spain*.


\(^{44}\) Dickie, “Gardens in Muslim Spain,” 78-80.
garden was water.\textsuperscript{45} The role of water in gardens, but also in baths, will be a key component of my study of pleasure at the Alhambra.

A particular aspect of patronage at the Alhambra is the history of Nasrid rule. Michael Jacobs wrote an in-depth account of the Nasrids in Granada and analyzed the different patrons’ contributions to the Alhambra.\textsuperscript{46} This is useful in order to trace a lineage of Islamic rule at the Alhambra, enabling us to trace a tradition from patron to patron. Markus Hattstein’s chapter in \textit{Islam: Art and Architecture} also laid out a thorough historical background of the rulers.\textsuperscript{47} He explained the different political agendas of each sultan and how these were connected to what was built at the Alhambra.

Patronage is a central factor for understanding the building’s design and embellishment; accordingly, it is the fourth topic to be explored in my thesis. The book by Danby Miles, \textit{The Alhambra}, vividly explains the role of the patron and his court.\textsuperscript{48} Along with Miles, Fernández-Puertas also shed light on courtly life at the Alhambra.\textsuperscript{49} Both authors sought to reconstruct the life of the sultan and the court that prospered there in the fourteenth century. The role of the patron is important, and understanding his surroundings will be imperative in order to comprehend the relationships between the sultan, his palace, and pleasure.

I will use the existing scholarship on the Alhambra to reinterpret the Palaces and Royal Bath in light of their function as places of pleasure. Although it should be apparent that many scholars have already examined the idea of pleasure within the Alhambra, my contribution is

\textsuperscript{45} Abdine, “The Islamic Garden in Andalucia, Spain,” 76.
\textsuperscript{46} Michael Jacobs, \textit{Alhambra} (New York: Rizzoli, 2000).
\textsuperscript{48} Danby Miles, \textit{The Alhambra} (Weimar: VDG, 1999).
\textsuperscript{49} Fernández-Puertas, \textit{The Alhambra V. 1} (London: Saqi, 1997).
unique. It is my goal in this thesis to discuss a selection of sites in the Alhambra in order to connect their patronage with specific medieval Islamic notions of pleasure.
Chapter 2: Palace of the Lions

In this Chapter Two, I will explore the complex of the Palace of the Lions and the components that unite to form a place of pleasure. The Palace of the Lions is dated to the latter half of the fourteenth century, which falls in the reign of Muhammad V. I will begin with a short overview of the space in order to understand how it was designed and laid out. It is important to understand how the palace was set up in order to gain insight into how the sultan used the different areas and how pleasure was the central purpose. The next section will be dedicated to the decorations that make up these different spaces. There are two types of decoration that I distinguish between: geometric and calligraphic. Following the section on decoration will be a section on the garden and courtyard space within the center of the palace. Decoration and gardens were both essential to pleasure in the Palace of the Lions. Lastly, the chapter will culminate with a view of the patron and his role in pleasure.

Plan and Layout

The Palace of the Lions was built as an independent structure with its own entrance set in an unobtrusive place off a side street of the palace (Figs. 3 and 7). It is perpendicular and adjacent to the Comares Palace and organized in a peristyle fashion with water channels that run from each of the four chambers. The space is focused onto the interior. It is composed of mainly square units around an open court with a portico on every side and two projecting pavilions placed at the east and west ends (Fig. 8). The courtyard is divided into a quadripartite space with a fountain on lion supports at its core. Water flows from the fountain at the center into the

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channels that lead to the four chambers around the court. The central fountain supplies the complex with its modern name, the Court of the Lions (Patio de las Leones).

Figure 7: Plan of the Palace of the Lions, Granada, Spain. (© ArchNet)

Figure 8: View of the Court of the Lions, Granada, Spain. (© 1997-2009 AG.com)
The portico that surrounds the court has a decorative exterior, which creates a unified space and leads to four reception chambers. On the Western end, by the original entrance, is the Muqarnas Chamber (Sala de los Mocárabes), which opens onto the courtyard through three other muqarnas chambers. Opposite the Muqarnas Chamber is the long, rectangular room called the Hall of the Kings (Sala de los Reyes). This space consists of five alcoves that were meant to show off the beautiful vistas of the Albaicín hill located directly across from the Alhambra hill. However, the most dominant line of vision is the inward-looking one, which connects the central alcove following the water channels to the opposite side of the Court of Lions.

Two other square chambers are off the northern and southern sides. These spaces are the Hall of the Two Sisters (Sala de las Dos Hermanas) and the Hall of the Abencerrajes (Sala de los Abencerrajes) respectively. Both rooms have wonderfully decorated muqarnas domes. The four halls create a balanced arrangement around the axial design of the courtyard (Fig. 7). All of the spaces within this palace are highly decorated and exhibit the proportions and geometry of high Nasrid art and design. The use of repetitive decoration and inscriptions visually binds the Palace of the Lions together by leading the eye across the space.

The Palace of the Lions was intended to be a place for relaxation. It was not a place for permanent living but has been described by James Dickie as a villa rustica, which in this case was

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51 The Hall of the Two Sisters then leads to a pavilion, called the Mirador [or outlook] de Lindaraja. This was a looking point that is named after a certain Lindaraja, whom Washington Irving believed was a Moorish Beauty. Scholars such as Dickie and Ruggles translate Lindaraja as the eye of the house of A’isha. It is a modern name given to a space that is also called the Mirador de la Daraxa. Daraxa is the reference name given to this space in the Alhambra archives. This space is highly decorated and includes important inscriptions, which will be discussed under the patron section. Also, Abencerrajes does not have an English translation because it was named for the Abencerraje family, which threatened Nasrid rule in the fifteenth century. Legend has it that the nobles of the Abencerrajes were invited to the palace and then beheaded in this chamber that bears their name.
situated in an urban space.\footnote{Dickie, “The Palaces of the Alhambra,” 142.} This type of villa contained an estate for informal affairs set among gardens. The influence of the \textit{villa rustica} derived indirectly from the Romans and will be explored in the garden section of this chapter. According to Dickie, the plan and composition of the chambers “reflect the informality of country life.”\footnote{Ibid.} The intimacy created by the design of an inward-focused building lends itself to entertainment and pleasure.

\textbf{Geometric Decoration}

Surface decoration suffuses the entire complex of the Palace of the Lions. It takes the form of intricate geometric patterns that appear disordered but in fact are carefully placed and designed. Decoration comes in three materials through the use of colorful tiles in the dado—the lower portion of a wall—and stucco, which is used for the rest of the wall and most often carved with patterned designs (Fig. 9). Wood is the third medium used to decorate the surfaces, but it is only found in ceilings and domes. The wood and stucco would have been colored and thus mirrored the light of the sun and moon. Light is used decoratively in the Muslim world to highlight patterns or create a dramatic effect. The designs inscribed on the surface imitate textiles or carpets that would have hung on the walls.

According to Muslim thought, geometric designs were symbols of the “infinite” and thus the divine.\footnote{Saeed, \textit{Islamic Thought: An Introduction}, 87.} These abstract patterns were seen as agents of the spiritual world. Not only does decoration lead one to God through contemplation of the beauty of its surfaces, but it is also a form of sensuous pleasure, because pleasure can be experienced visually. The decoration is lively and set in a space allocated for pleasure and contemplation. The rich decoration befits the
luxurious court life at the Alhambra, gives meaning to the space through intricate design, and offers a visual canvas of intimacy for contemplation.

Another form of decoration, heavily centered on geometry and proportion, are the *muqarnas*. *Muqarnas* create three-dimensional spaces frequently described as being of stalactite or honeycomb shapes (Fig. 10). They are original Islamic decorative forms, whose origins and development are hard to trace because they appear in different locations unrelated to each other.\(^{55}\) Grabar claimed that they came into existence around the tenth and eleventh century in different regions such as Iran and North Africa.\(^{56}\) From the eleventh century onward, *muqarnas*

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were common all over the Islamic world, developing through time and taking different shapes and forms.

![Figure 10: Detail of Muqarnas Arch, Alhambra, Granada, Spain.](http://www.flickr.com/photos/amarola/246778736/in/set-72157594289870209/)

In the Alhambra and the Court of the Lions, *muqarnas* are used on different scales. They cover large ceiling domes, but also enliven smaller arches of intimate chambers. Many examples of decoration and *muqarnas* are found in the different chambers at the Court of the Lions and help to promote contemplation and sensuous pleasure. I will explore these geometric decorative themes by going through each space within the Palace of the Lions complex.

The *Muqarnas* Chamber is off the western side of the courtyard and ends in a long rectangular space. The room takes its name from the beautiful *muqarnas* vault found here. It flows into the courtyard via a loggia with three large *muqarnas* arches (Fig. 11). This room was a luxurious setting intended to be a place for receptions and feasting.\(^57\) The wall decoration that once adorned this room, which would have been rich and intricate, has disappeared over time.

Moving across the courtyard, directly opposite from the *Muqarnas* Chamber, is the important Hall of the Kings. It essentially consists of three square spaces with stucco *muqarnas*.

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\(^{57}\) Ibid., 143.
domes in each (Fig. 12). These three spaces are separated by five bays with intricate arches and flat ceilings (Fig. 13). The composition of these spaces is transformed by a dramatic effect of light and dark, which appears to elongate the hall. The effect of light on the surfaces of the Palace of the Lions was viewed as a symbol of “divine unity.” The ultimate form of pleasure, in Al-Ghazali’s opinion, was attained through God and seen through the abstract use of geometric decoration and muqarnas vaulting. As a result, these settings of lavish decoration were a means by which to reach the divine.

Figure 11: Arch Detail in the Muqarnas Chamber, Granada, Spain. (©Area25 2009)

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58 Ibid., 82
59 Saeed, Islamic Thought: An Introduction, 92.
Figure 12: Hall of the Kings, Square Unit Ceiling, Granada, Spain.
(© Adam Woolfitt/CORBIS)

Figure 13: Hall of the Kings, Granada, Spain
(http://www.vivagranada.com/alhambra/lions.htm)
Other decorative schemes saturated the loggia of the Hall of the Kings. It included a colorful tiled dado with organic forms, which wove in and out of each other in the stucco above. The spaces that culminated in muqarnas appear celestial and are intricately carved. Muqarnas were placed at different levels to create a jagged surface whose shape was designed to capture light. Light was again seen as a way to reflect on God and contemplate the beauty that surrounded this space. The pleasure experienced in these two rooms, the Muqarnas Chamber and the Hall of the Kings, was a form of sensual pleasure because they were intended for feasting and parties. The decoration of the chambers enhanced the idea of abundance, where wealth and pleasure come together to create a life of luxury.

An exception to the traditional restriction on figurative decoration is found in the three alcoves between the rectangular space of the Hall of the Kings and the courtyard. In fact, the decorative schemes found in the vaulted leather ceilings depict figures and courtly scenes (Fig. 14). The central alcove contains a painting showing ten dignitaries in Arab costume, which may represent important sultans of the Nasrid dynasty. The other scenes depict tales of chivalry, including one that shows a Muslim nobleman winning the heart of a lady from her Christian admirer (Fig. 15). It is believed that these paintings were commissioned by Muhammad V and possibly done by Christian artists or even Muslim slaves sent by Pedro the Cruel. According to Jerrilynn Dodds, these images reflect the patron’s interest in Northern Spanish taste. It is no coincidence that the scenes depict the triumph of Muslim power over Christians. Although the reign of Muhammad V was mostly peaceful, looming threats from the Christian north were

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60 Irwin, *The Alhambra*, 54.
ever-present. Depicting a scene of triumph, therefore, would have visually emphasized Muslim control.

Figure 14: Hall of the Kings, Vault Painting, Granada, Spain. 
(http://www.alhambra-patronato.es/index.php/The-Hall-of-the-Kings-Paintings/162+M5d637b1e38d/0/)

Figure 15: Hall of the Kings, Detail of Battle Scene, Granada, Spain. 
(© Adam Woofitt/CORBIS)
The Palace of the Lions was set up so that opposite chambers provided similar functions. This was discussed above in regard to the two chambers of the eastern and western sides and also holds true for the Hall of the Abencerrajes and the Hall of Two Sisters, on the southern and northern sides respectively. The Hall of the Abencerrajes has a simple arrangement of a square with two rectangular spaces open on each side. It contains an impressive muqarnas ceiling that is rotated to create a star-shaped interior space (Fig. 16). Other decorative tile work can also be seen in this space, but it was renovated in the seventeenth century.
Located across from the Hall of the Abencerrajes, the Hall of the Two Sisters is one of the most opulent rooms within the complex. It is a square space with three rectangular rooms framing it. The central space has a domed ceiling set above an octagon with magnificent *muqarnas* (Fig. 17). These *muqarnas* allude to the cosmos and God’s creation of the universe because they were viewed as otherworldly. The intricate shapes of the *muqarnas* create the appearance of floating star patterns. A heavenly representation in the ceilings allowed one to contemplate the beauty of God’s creation.

Both spaces contain examples of grand *muqarnas* and are thought to have been used for musical soirées.\(^6^2\) Irwin believed that these rooms were used for recitals and royal concerts,

\(^{6^2}\) Irwin, *The Alhambra*, 55.
following a long tradition in Islamic palaces. These concerts and gatherings were part of the *majalis*, which will be further discussed in the section on the patron’s pleasure. The atmosphere of these particular spaces would have been pleasure with a “therapeutic” function. Al-Ghazali wrote that the enjoyment of beauty “dissipates sorrows.” These rooms created a sense of comfort, and the music enjoyed in them would have added to the soothing nature of the heavenly sky above, offered by the *muqarnas*.

Every room within the Palace of the Lions lends itself to a private or a residential purpose. The design of the space shows an inward-focused area with a plentiful blanket of decoration. The spaces have an intimate feeling to them. Through the exchange of light, these surfaces of decoration and *muqarnas* create an opulent setting where sensuous as well as divine pleasures connected. Each space that comprised the Palace of the Lions contributed to making the building a form of pleasure architecture. This is evident through the enjoyment of music, feasts, and celebrations. Also, sensuous pleasure is found through the intricate design of repetitive forms, which create a visual feast for the eyes to gaze upon and contemplate.

**Calligraphic Decoration**

Another form of decoration adorning the walls of the Alhambra consists of inscriptions. Writing and calligraphy were important for Muslims because they were an integral part of their religion, which was founded upon the sacred text of the Koran. The inscriptions at the Alhambra come in the form of poems written by the court vizier or quoted directly from the Koran. Many times they were placed in a cartouche to separate and distinguish them from mere geometric decoration (Fig. 18). The establishment of the royal scriptorium played a fundamental role at the

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63 Ibid., 55.
65 Benrens-Abouseif, *Beauty in Arabic Culture*, 44.
Alhambra, with secretaries, architects, and craftsmen working together. The scriptorium and its collective nature actively participated as an integral part in the cultural activities of the Alhambra, which led to the poems and lines of praise that decorate its walls.

Figure 18: Detail of Inscription on Wall of the Alhambra, Granada, Spain. (© Adam Woolfitt/CORBIS)

Along with sensuous pleasures, the sultan and members of his court experienced pleasure through intellectual and knowledge-based means, because “to enjoy is to know.” They would have been literate hence able to read these calligraphic inscriptions. In order to gain insight, one had to understand that the beauties of decoration and inscription were a means to approach God and his abundance.

The Palace’s calligraphic decorations make reference to the setting and functions of the spaces as well as the power of the patron. The inscriptions found on the building are a distinctive feature of the Alhambra, which Robert Irwin described as its own “inhabitable

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66 The scriptorium can be traced to the thirteenth century, around the time of Muhammad II. It continued to evolve with each patron. The members of the scriptorium consisted of talibs (apprentices), katibs (secretaries), and ra‘is (chief). The chief usually held the position of vizier to the sultan.

67 Benrens-Abouseif, Beauty in Arabic Culture, 23.

68 The inscriptions in the Palace of the Lions that describe the role and power of the patron will be discussed in the patron’s pleasure section of this chapter.
book.” They were precisely adapted to fit a particular architectural form like a door or window. Many were placed at a low level so that the sultan and those present could read them from a seated position. It is thought that cushions and rugs adorning the floor of the Court of the Lion rooms would have been utilized to enjoy the view of the surrounding decoration and gardens.70

A long poem by Ibn Zamrak runs along the walls of the Hall of Two Sisters, with parts of it also repeated in the Hall of the Abencerrajes. A portion of the poem exclaims:

I excel through the generosity of my lord the imam Muhammad for all who come and go; how excellent is your beautiful building, for it certainly surpasses all others by the decree of the stars! How many joyful solaces for the eyes are to be found in it; in it even the dreamer will renew the objects of his desire!....In here is a cupola which by its height becomes lost from sight; beauty in it appears both concealed and visible. It is no wonder that it surpasses the stars in the heavens, and passes beyond their furthest limits….In it the portico has exceeded [the utmost limits] of beauty, while thanks to it the palace has come to compete in beauty with the vault of heaven…The capitals [of the columns] contain all sorts of rare wonders so that proverbs [about them] fly in all directions and become generally known. 71

The poem contains a cosmic theme and reference to the dome as being from heaven. The sheer beauty of the space transformed with the changing light. Beauty evolved with the cycle of the sun and moon, which created a dramatic effect of altering possibilities. This inscription also underscores the heavenly nature of the architectural elements of the space, such as the cupola, the porticos, and the capitals. The beauty found in these components was seen as rivaling that of heaven itself. The use of such inscriptions, along with geometric decoration, ignited the senses, but it also stimulated the mind because these surfaces were filled with beauty, and beauty was central to pleasure and worthy of reflection according to Islamic thought.

69 Irwin, Islamic Art in Context, 124.
70 Ibid., 124.
71 Grabar, The Alhambra, 144-145.
The Garden and Water: Natural Elements of Pleasure

Another instrument of pleasure situated in the central space of the Palace of the Lions was the garden with its waterworks. The courtyard garden sought to capture the natural landscape in a contained manner through the use of water and the cultivation of vegetation. The sight and smell of fresh vegetation with the sound of flowing water filled the courtyard, evoking a paradisiacal scene. The garden became a space that “offer[ed] contemplation and pleasure”; it was meant for enjoyment and viewing, not as a participatory activity.72 The garden in a sultan’s palace was unequivocally linked with sensuous pleasures.

At this garden’s core was the Lion fountain, which dispensed water into the four channels each of which led into a surrounding chamber (Fig. 19). The layout consisted of four parts divided axially by these channels. The chambers of the east and west sides contained water jets, while those on the north and south had basins where the channel ended. Water united the chambers and flowed between them and the central fountain.

Due to a lack of written and pictorial records, the original state of the Court of the Lions garden is hard to reconstruct, yet several precedents exist. It is generally believed that Islamic garden design was influenced by the older civilizations of Egypt, Greece, and Rome.73 In particular, it was in the villa rustica of imperial Rome that the garden became an important component of a palace and offered a place of pleasure.74 The legacy of the Roman villa was transferred to Spain through literature, stories, and individual estates called munyahs.75 These were spaces for living that contained gardens and pavilions, which were used for the purpose of pleasure. Another aspect of Roman influence was their actual cultivation of land in Spain before

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72 Ruggles, Gardens, Landscape, and Vision in the Palaces of Islamic Spain, 215.
73 Abdine, The Islamic Garden in Andalucia-Spain, 76.
74 James Dickie, “Gardens in Muslim Spain,” 78.
75 Grabar, The Alhambra, 132.
the Visigoths took power.\textsuperscript{76} The Romans left an imprint in the Iberian landscape through agriculture and, more importantly for our purposes, through the adoption of hydraulic systems.

Figure 19: Lion Fountain in the Court of the Lions, Granada, Spain.  
(© 1997-2009 AG.com)  

In fact, especially during the eighth century, the land of Andalusia had been cultivated and transformed into gardens. The first Ummayad ruler, Abd al-Rahman I (756-788), built the first garden, which was called al-Rusafa.\textsuperscript{77} He began the cultivation and acquisition of exotic plants, one of which was the pomegranate. Farming and the cultivation of land as a means of life and productivity became integrated into society in Cordoba and continued in Granada under Nasrid power. The Emirate of Granada comprised a fertile landscape with rivers and streams that provided abundant supplies of water to its palaces. The Alhambra was filled with gardens and fountains since the time of the Zirid vizier, Samuel ibn Naghralla, in the eleventh century.

\textsuperscript{76} Roman Imperial power on the Iberian Peninsula fell apart in 409. At this time, the Visigoths took control, which lasted until the Muslim invasion in 711.

Accordingly, the legacy of lush palace gardens at the Alhambra began several hundred years before they were utilized at the Court of the Lions in the fourteenth century.

Early Spanish Islamic gardens are found throughout the south of Spain including Cordoba, Seville, and Málaga. The most important of these is in the royal city of Madinat al-Zahra in Umayyad Cordoba. It was built during one of the richest periods of Islamic rule, and the materials used, such as marble, bronze, silver, and gold, reflected this wealth. A new type of luxurious garden emerged amidst palace architecture in Madinat al-Zahra. Three gardens, the Prince’s Garden, the Upper Garden, and the Lower Garden, have been found in this palace from archeological evidence. These gardens were used privately by the caliph and also for court ceremonies and celebrations. Each contained many elements found within the Court of the Lions, such as miradors or viewing points, water, axial designs, and differing elevations, but on a grander and more luxurious scale than in the Alhambra. The gardens of the Nasrids continued the vocabulary of its Cordoban prototype in a simplified manner.

Today, the garden of the Lions Palace looks barren with gravel filling in the spaces created by the channels (Fig. 8). However, the four areas would originally have been filled with vegetation, flowers, and orange trees. The level of these spaces was once sunken, a “carpet” of foliage that did not block the view of the fountain in the center. Walkways would have been built up alongside the channels in order to reach the fountain. Today’s courtyard also lacks colors, which would have vividly enriched the space. In fact, the wood and stucco of the surrounding porticos would have been painted, while tapestries would have hung from them. This display of life and color was the luxurious setting around which Muhammad V centered his palace.

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78 Buhyra is the name of the garden estate in Seville, and the Alcazaba of Málaga was built on an elevated site with interior gardens.
79 Ibid.
80 Irwin, The Alhambra, 50.
The lush Islamic garden was not complete without water, which was seen as a symbol of wealth and luxury, as well as a life-giving force. The formal use of water was an essential component of the Andalucian Islamic garden for the Nasrids and for the Muslim powers that had come before. Water was part of the decorative scheme and was manipulated as a device of sensorial stimulation and display. Part of this stimulation was a “theatrical performance,” provided by the fountain that brought the water to life through the lion sculptures. It led the viewer to reflect, ignited his or her senses, and served as a lively feature that enhanced enjoyment.

To best connect the drama and display of water with pleasure, I turn to the poetic inscriptions that explicitly described the garden’s beauty and use. The first half of the poetic inscription that is on the central basin reads:

Blessed be He who gave the Imam Muhammad [V] abodes which grace by their perfection all adobes; or does not this bower contain wonders like unto which God did not allow Beauty to find an equal. A sculpted monument, its veil of splendour consists of a pearl which adorns the environ with the diffusion of gems; silver melting which flows between jewels one like the other in beauty, while in purity.

On the lion fountain these lines of poetry describe water as a “pearl,” and the fountain dispenses “gems” which are beautiful and pure. These descriptions allude to the idea of water being luxurious and precious. The poem also references the beauty of the water, which is a creation of God. Another line of poetry found in the Hall of the Two Sisters exclaims, “I am the garden appearing every morning with adorned beauty; contemplate my beauty and you will be penetrated with [its] understanding.” Thus the inscription calls attention to the beauty of the garden and its function as a place for meditation. The last line of the poem proclaims the garden to be superior to all others of its kind: “Moreover we do not know of any other garden more

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82 Ibid.
84 Ibid., 144.
pleasant in its freshness, more fragrant in its surroundings, or sweeter in the gathering of its fruits.” This line captures the essence of the place and calls to mind the senses that are invoked when experiencing a pleasure garden. These include sight, smell, sound, and taste. It is the sensory aspect of the garden that contributed to the role of pleasure and how the viewer was calmed by its features. It is a space of comfort, excitement, and natural beauty.

The combined use of water and gardens represents a paradise, which evoked the paradise garden illustrated in the Koran with the four rivers of life. The manifestation of something sacred was transformed into a space of earthly delights. The sensual pleasures enjoyed in the garden foreshadow what is to come in Paradise. The garden found in the Court of the Lions is an “ideal” space where Nature is groomed and alive. The sultan showed off his power by being able to “tame and refashion” nature. In this pleasure courtyard, the occupant would have reclined in comfort in the shade of the porticoes while enjoying the scent of the vegetation and the sounds of the water. These sensations were accompanied by the visual pleasures of the colorful and intricate detailing of the arcades and surrounding chambers.

**The Patron’s Pleasure**

Muhammad V’s patronage began after his return from a short period of exile in Morocco around 1370 and coincided with the “Golden Age” of the Nasrid court. Muhammad V’s father, Yusuf I, had surrounded himself with poets, which led his son to patronize literature at court as

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89 Jacobs, *Alhambra*, 28. The Palace of the Lions was constructed after this return from exile. Shortly after, Muhammad V wanted to commemorate his rule with festivities, ceremonies, and poetry readings, which were cataloged in the work of Ibn al-Khatib. This return, along with the victory he gained over the Christians in Algeciras in the late 1370s adds a symbolic meaning of triumph to the Palace of the Lions.
well. The cultural and academic pursuits that took place in the Alhambra reveal the extent to which the sultan was an intellectual patron who encouraged the designs of his palaces to reflect the culture of his court. As a result of this milieu, intellectual pleasure played an important part in shaping the sultan’s experience. Although many aspects of the Nasrid’s courtly and intellectual life were lost when Christians burned the manuscripts that contained these accounts in 1492, modern scholars have tried to piece the information back together. For instance, Fernández-Puertas managed to reconstruct some of the duties of the Diwan al-Insha or scriptorium. Here scholars and bureaucrats busied themselves with keeping official records and correspondence, administrating, and writing poems for religious festivals and important events in the sultan’s life such as births, weddings, travels, and political victories.

One extant account, vital for the literary history of the Nasrids, is the work of Ibn al-Khatib, who was the vizier to Muhammad V and a great polymath. His works ranged in subject matter from medicine to music to the history of Granada. Because he copied his work and sent it to Egypt, it has been preserved. Many scholars have interpreted Ibn al-Khatib’s work in order to define the patron’s experience of his pleasure palace. Some of the most telling moments included the public readings of poetry given in the Court of the Lions.

The poetry readings and gatherings that the sultan would have hosted were called majalis. These social functions were major occasion for interaction between the court and the sultan and often combined sensuous and intellectual pleasure. Some gatherings had a formal tone with debates concerning law, while other, more informal gatherings would have created an

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91 Fernández-Puertas, *The Alhambra V 1*, 143.
92 Ibid.
94 Some of the scholars who interpret Ibn al-Khatib’s work include Robert Irwin, Michael Jacobs, and Antonio Fernández-Puertas.
atmosphere where beauty, poetry, and music were contemplated.\textsuperscript{95} Beauty and poetry intertwined at the \textit{majalis} to bring the sultan and his audiences a heightened experience of pleasure. They were a means through which the sultan could show off the luxury of his palace and his taste for cultural activities.

Ibn Khaldun provided another glimpse into the mindset of the court when he suggested that luxury in its courtly context meant “power.”\textsuperscript{96} Indeed the patron’s importance was made explicit within the Palace of the Lions through the use of “power inscriptions,” a term I have invented to designate the texts in the Alhambra that reveal the identity of the patron and display his presence through the use of words. For example, the small decorated room located right beyond the Hall of Two Sisters is the \textit{Lindaraja Mirador}. It separates the palace from the surrounding landscape (Fig. 20). This space contains two single windows that originally overlooked a garden below and the distant landscape. Although the Palace of Charles V blocked this view in the sixteenth century, originally the sultan could gaze from this viewing point onto the land that he ruled. A good example of a “power inscription” written by the court poet and eventual vizier Ibn Zamrak surrounded the mirador:

\begin{quote}
In this garden I am an eye filled with delight and the pupil of this eye is none other than our lord, Muhammad [V], praiseworthy for his bravery and generosity, with fame outstanding and virtue graceful; he is the full moon on the empire’s horizons, his signs are lasting and his light brilliant. In his abode he is none other than the sun, the shade from which is beneficent. In me he looks from his caliphal throne towards the capital of his entire kingdom.\textsuperscript{97}
\end{quote}

The poem describes the relation of the viewing point to the garden and landscape below. It was specific to Muhammad V and his capital. Robert Irwin explains it as a form of self-flattery or a

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\textsuperscript{95} Brookshaw, “Palaces, Pavilions and Pleasure-gardens: the Context and Setting of the Medieval \textit{Majlis},”199.
\textsuperscript{96} Benrens-Abouseif, \textit{Beauty in Arabic Culture}, 159.
\textsuperscript{97} Ruggles, \textit{Gardens, Landscape, and Vision in the Palaces of Islamic Spain}, 203.
\end{flushleft}
boastful instance by the sultan because he had no real claim to the title of caliph.\textsuperscript{98} Flattery or not, the poem portrayed the desire of the sultan to be seen as powerful. It also personified the mirador as an eye that is recognized as being that of the sultan Muhammad V. The eye of the sultan looked out onto his kingdom, and it is he who had power over that which he viewed. The mirador surrounded the viewer and “fram[ed] the view,” in order to create a relationship between the sultan and his sovereign realm.\textsuperscript{99} The “power inscription” also portrays the sultan in a setting of enchantment. Sensuous pleasure filled this lavish space. It was a place where the sultan could retreat to enjoy the glories God had given him.

The need for verification of the sultan’s authority is evident in these inscriptions. The sultan, as patron, is the subject of these inscriptions, and he was the natural occupant of the palace amidst its natural setting. The written word in the Muslim faith was powerful, for it was assumed that that which was written was truth and will be believed.\textsuperscript{100} These “power inscriptions” contributed to the control held by the sultan.

In conclusion, the Palace of the Lions displayed all three types of pleasure. Sensuous pleasure was more than abundant in the beauty of decoration and gardens, while intellectual pleasure was more important during cultural expressions such as \textit{majalis} and “power inscriptions.” Heaven was evoked through the architecture, particularly the domes and \textit{muqarnas}, which manifested a divine presence and allowed the sultan to designate himself as an earthly representative of God. The Palace of the Lions was viewed as an otherworldly place of majestic bliss where the sultan commemorated his rule and retreated in search of pleasure.

\textsuperscript{98} Irwin, \textit{The Alhambra}, 56.
\textsuperscript{99} Ruggles, \textit{Gardens, Landscape, and Vision in the Palaces of Islamic Spain}, 203.
\textsuperscript{100} Ibid., 205.
Figure 20: Lindaraja Mirador of the Hall of Two Sisters, Granada, Spain. (© Adam Woolfitt/CORBIS)
Chapter 3: The Comares Palace

In this chapter, the Comares Palace will be explored in a similar manner as the Palace of the Lions. Here too, I will begin with the basic plan and layout of the space. Although the rooms within the Comares Palace form a cohesive unit, the chronology of their construction is complicated. Unlike the Palace of the Lions, the Comares Palace is an older structure dating to the time of Muhammad V’s father, Yusuf I. Muhammad V completed the palace, and most if not all of the decoration in the main rooms dates to his reign. My second section will be devoted to decoration. The generous use of decorative schemes, both geometric and calligraphic, within the rooms of the Comares Palace echo the decoration already seen at Palace of the Lions. The section following the one on decoration will be dedicated to the courtyard garden and its importance in creating a pleasure space for relaxation. The courtyard garden is fashioned in a different manner from that of the Palace of the Lions, yet it still contains similar symbolic references to paradise. The final section of this chapter will demonstrate the power of the patron and how he interacted with the spaces. The Comares Palace was a place for the sultan to show off his taste for abundant beauty and for luxury, and it stands as my second example of pleasure architecture in the fourteenth-century Alhambra.

Plan and Layout

While the Palace of the Lions was a place to see beauty, the Comares Palace was a place to be seen. Even though audiences would have been held in both palaces, the Comares Palace had a more official nature. The Golden Court (Cuarto Dorado) was the royal entry into the palace complex (Fig. 21). James Dickie called this area a “royal porch” that contained a façade onto the interior of the Alhambra and marked the entrance to the private palaces.¹⁰¹ It provided a

waiting area for the palaces that were assembled behind it. The striking façade is on the southern end and is full of stucco decoration, with two doors and five windows. The left door leads into the Court of the Myrtles via a small passageway, while the one on the right goes back into the forecourts of an older palace. A muqarnas frieze runs along the top, while wooden beams and eaves are suspended over the upper edge of the façade.

Figure 21: Golden Court, Alhambra, Granada, Spain. (http://www.cambridge2000.com/gallery/html/PC1110231e.html)
The doorway that leads from the Golden Court to the Comares Palace through a right-angled path enters the Court of the Myrtles on its western side (Fig. 22). The Court of the Myrtles (Patio de los Arrayanes) is centered on a rectangular courtyard with a long narrow pool at its center. To the south of the courtyard a portico with seven arches remains (Fig. 23). It is no longer clear what was beyond this point because the Palace of Charles V was built in its place. The eastern and western sides of the Comares palace contain five openings, which lead into a long room on each side. This space was designated for the sultan’s four wives, the maximum number that was allowed by law.102 These private apartments contained two floors with each side ending in an alcove.

In contrast, the private quarters for the sultan were situated on the northern end (Fig. 24). This side contains three spaces: a gallery space with a small cupola, the Hall of the Blessings (Sala de la Barca), and the Hall of the Ambassadors (Salón de los Embajadores). A decorated loggia is situated between the courtyard space and the Hall of the Blessings. It is a lavishly decorated gallery with a wooden ceiling and niches on either end. The Hall of the Blessings is entered through a central archway from the gallery. This hall is designated as the ground floor apartment of the sultan, which had doors to close off the space for privacy.103 At each end are alcoves, which also functioned as bed recesses.

Through the same central doorway from the Hall of the Blessings is the most important room within the complex, the Hall of the Ambassadors. This is a spacious, square room that occupies the Comares tower with three windows—on each side except the entrance—that peer out onto the landscape and valley below (Fig. 25). The room may have been a reception or throne room where the sultan sat in the central alcove surrounded by sumptuously decorated

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102 Ibid., 145.
103 Ibid.
walls and an exquisite carpentry ceiling. Overall, the functions of the Comares Palace are reflected in an interesting mix of reception rooms where the sultan would have seen audiences and a private space for living. The northern end of the courtyard with the Hall of the Ambassadors was the visual and symbolic culmination of the Palace, for the Hall included the sultan’s throne. He would have entertained publicly in the Golden Court, but only those permitted to pass through this entrance would be granted a private audience with the sultan.

The Comares Palace, unlike the villa plan of the Palace of the Lions, followed another form of domestic architecture, the town house. It has a more symmetrical plan and is composed on a single axis rather than on intersecting ones. The Comares Palace has a more official character than the serene setting of the Palace of the Lions. In fact, the power of the sovereign and his ability to show off his status and taste are more evident in the Comares Palace due to the administrative functions held here. Despite these differences, pleasure was experienced in ways similar to the Palace of the Lions: sensually, intellectually, and spiritually.

Figure 22: Plan of Palaces (after nineteenth-century reconstruction), Alhambra, Granada, Spain: A. Golden Court, B. Comares Palace, C. Court of the Myrtles, D. Royal Bath, E. Palace of the Lions
(© Aga Khan Visual Archive, MIT)

104 Ibid., 146.
Figure 23: View of the Southern End of the Comares Palace with Court of Myrtles, Granada, Spain.
(http://farm3.static.flickr.com/2071/2487656276_843e5e3b96.jpg)

Figure 24: View of Northern End of the Comares Palace with Comares Tower and Court of Myrtles, Granada, Spain.
(©Michael Nicholson/CORBIS)
Figure 25: Hall of the Ambassadors, Interior with Alcove Recesses, Granada, Spain.  
(© 1997-2009 AG.com)

**Geometric Decoration**

Sensual pleasure was promoted in the chambers of the Comares Palace through its impressive geometric decorations (Fig. 25). The lavish decoration found at the Palace of the Lions was mimicked at the Comares Palace. There it invaded the rooms on all four sides of the court and the exterior porticos; here decoration is concentrated within the rooms in a display of luxury and in an abundance of repeating forms. Geometric decoration is found in the northern chambers of the Comares Palace and on the grand entrance façade, which is intricately worked with geometrical stucco patterns. Decorations cover entire wall surfaces and create a daunting space that seems infinite. A tiled dado with geometric designs and different colors is also present, as in the Palace of the Lions.
The showy decoration of the façade of the Comares Palace is captured again in the resplendent decoration found in the two halls on the northern end, the Hall of the Blessings and the Hall of the Ambassadors. Carpets and tapestries probably adorned the walls of the Hall of the Blessings, while the ceiling was a hollowed out space with intricate designs done in wood (Fig. 26). The decoration in this space is repetitive and has a meditative, intellectual quality. It created a comfortable setting for the sultan to rest for the night, which indeed was one of the functions of the spaces.

Figure 26: Wooden Ceiling in the Hall of the Blessings, Granada, Spain. (http://www.vivagranada.com/images/salabarca.jpg)

The Hall of the Blessings connects to the Hall of the Ambassadors through a central doorway (Fig. 27). This spacious room has alcoves that granted the sultan a view of his kingdom. The alcoves are intricately decorated with a frenzy of designs and inscriptions. The luscious decoration created a setting of luxury and separated the sultan from the ordinary world below. The walls are again covered with stucco decoration and tiled dados, while the ceiling is a heavenly view with stars fashioned in the wood (Fig. 28). Such cosmic scenes added the element
of the divine to the sensuous pleasure already displayed in these rooms of the Comares Palace. The bountiful decoration is at once a statement of power and an offering to God. The Hall of the Ambassadors was meant as a reception area where entertaining would have been a formal ritual. Through the wealth of decoration, the room displays the sultan’s taste for luxury.

Figure 27: View of Central Doorway from the Hall of the Ambassadors into the Court of the Myrtles, Granada, Spain. (©essential-architecture.com)

Figure 28: Ceiling of the Hall of the Ambassadors, Granada, Spain. (http://flickr.com/photos/82651989@N00/248765689)
Calligraphic Decoration

Decorative inscriptions adorn the walls of the Comares Palace, and, as with geometric decorations, calligraphic decorations augmented the sense of pleasure perceived in these areas. Inscriptions, either from the Koran or from secular poetry, recur throughout the Alhambra’s fourteenth-century palaces.

At the entrance gate a verse of the Koran concludes with the words, “His Throne comprises the heavens and earth; the preserving of them oppresses Him not; He is the All-high, the All-glorious.” This verse is a statement about heavenly power, and yet it also describes what is to be seen once one enters the palace.

The heavenly representation of the cosmos on the ceiling of the Hall of the Ambassadors is paired with inscriptions drawn from well-known surahs in the Koran. The Hall has many inscriptions from the Koran as well as descriptive inscriptions. Floor tiles in this room were once inscribed with the name of God and the Nasrid motto “There is no conqueror but God,” which emphasized the sultan’s dedication to God and showed that God was at the heart of his power and his palace. The use of different quotations from the Koran and references to God expressed the sultan’s thankfulness to him and a desire to align his earthly power with the divine one. After all, the ultimate pleasure, according to Al-Ghazali, was knowledge of God, and the ultimate power was the power of God.

Other inscriptions that give praise to God are found at the entrance of the Hall of the Ambassadors. Under the dome is a surah of the Koran entitled the Surah of the Kingdom. This verse begins:

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105 Grabar, The Alhambra, 140.
107 Benrens-Abouseif, Beauty in Arabic Culture, 23.
Blessed is He in whose hand is the Kingdom, He is powerful over everything, Who created death and life, that He might try you which of you is fairest in works; and He is the All-Mighty, the All-Forgiving, Who created seven heavens one upon another.\textsuperscript{108}

This important surah mentions the seven heavens, which are appropriately depicted on the ceiling. The calligraphic inscriptions on the ceiling highlight the importance of God and his desire for those in power to give thanks as they reign over his land. The sultan surrounded the room with these quotations in order to add to the luxurious nature of his palace. The Hall of the Ambassadors was a space for official receptions, where important figures could see the heavenly luxuries of the sultan’s residence.

The expressive use of inscriptions is found in the Comares palace just as it was in the Palace of the Lions. The poetry describes the space as one of heavenly splendor where beauty abounds. Another example is found in the niches of the Hall of the Blessings, where a line of poetry reads, “I am a bride in her nuptial attire, endowed with beauty and perfection.”\textsuperscript{109} These words function as a metaphor for the architecture itself, equating its perfection to that of a bride. This inscription and others filled the Comares Palace, which created a space of plentiful beauty intended for reflection and contemplation. This beauty was seen with the eyes and reiterated with the written word. A quote from Ibn Sina sums up the experience of beauty nicely He said:

\begin{quote}
For all beauty which is suitable and goodness which one perceives, that one loves and desires, the principle of perceiving them relies on the senses, imagination, the estimative faculty, conjecture and the intellect.\textsuperscript{110}
\end{quote}

Indeed, the rich nature of the calligraphic decorations at the Comares Palace lent themselves to visual and intellectual pleasure.

\textsuperscript{109} Grabar, \textit{The Alhambra}, 141.
\textsuperscript{110} Gonzalez, \textit{Beauty and Islam: Aesthetics in Islamic Art and Architecture}, 5.
The Garden and Water: Natural Elements of Pleasure

The Court of the Myrtles is a large rectangular space within which a rectangular pool fits nicely (Fig. 24). Vegetation of myrtle bushes and orange trees once lined the pool on the eastern and western sides. These would have been sunken in order not to block the view of the water. On the outer side of the vegetation are channels of water that are recessed into the pavement. Also, small basins are at both ends of the pool with spouts where water falls into the basin and into the pool via a short channel. The dynamic use of water, as seen before, is again present in this Islamic courtyard garden.

Although the Court of the Myrtles contained many of the Islamic garden components previously explored, here they were utilized differently. Water is a symbol of wealth and freshness, as well as being a life-giving force. At the Court of the Myrtles, however, it is displayed in a diverse way than in the quadripartite plan of the Court of the Lions. A long pool at the center of the Comares courtyard acted as a mirror to reflect the architecture and reproduced the decorative elements on the pavilions. It appeared to create a more spacious setting and emphasized the axis that led directly to the Hall of the Ambassadors. The pool of water created a doubling mechanism through which the sultan displayed his courtyard garden and its surrounding architecture.

Again the garden was meant to be a space for relaxation and meditation, appealing to the senses of sight, smell, and hearing and, in general, providing another setting where sensuous pleasure could be absorbed. The courtyard garden is a sign of prestige, and the sultan, who entertained audiences here and in adjoining rooms, would have wanted this pleasure component to be featured.

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Abdine, *The Islamic Garden in Andalucia-Spain*, 76.
The orange trees that used to be planted in the Court of the Myrtles during the fourteenth century would have added another element of luxury. Ibn Khaldun, who spent some time at the Alhambra in the years of 1363-65, while fulfilling duties for Muhammad V, wrote of how orange trees were a “sign of social decadence and sedentary culture.”[112] One of the first philosophers to write about the cycles of history, he believed that once one came into power and achieved greatness, one would become too comfortable and eventually fall into decline.[113] The orange trees that were once in the Court of the Myrtles showed that the sultan had achieved his power and could relax in its garden setting, but Ibn Khaldun was right: decadent luxury did eventually lead to the decline of Nasrid power in Granada soon after Muhammad V died in 1391.[114]

Again, the natural setting of the interior courtyard provided an ideal scenery suggesting a view of paradise. It was a place for calming and soothing the mind. Within the Comares Palace, it would have offered an additional display of luxury to those who were allowed to be in the presence of the sultan.

**The Patron’s Pleasure**

As mentioned above, Muhammad V was an intellectual, and the highly literate Nasrid court was important in the development of his buildings. The Comares Palace still has traces of Yusuf I, but most of the decoration and its two most important rooms were completed by Muhammad V. He showed off the power he possessed through “power inscriptions” that praised him and the land he ruled over. In my own interpretation, this palace contributes to creating a space for pleasure where the sultan relaxed and surrounded himself with luxuries such as water, beautiful decorative designs, and some degree of privacy.

[114] Although Islamic rule lasted until 1492, a decline of power began after Muhammad V, owing to infighting as well as pressure from the Christian north.
Since the Comares Palace predates the Palace of the Lions, it is interesting to ponder why Muhammad V would have needed another palace with similar components. Perhaps he wanted to finish the Comares Palace for his father, and then added the Palace of the Lions as a place of refuge uniquely associated with him. Since he was the sovereign and he wanted to portray himself in luxury, having two pleasure palaces located adjacent to each other would have conveyed this to his subjects. Another likely explanation is that the two places served different functions. The Palace of the Lions was relatively private and intimate, and the Comares Palace larger and somewhat more public. Yet the same types of pleasure were present at both palaces. Each contained decoration that appealed to the senses and stimulated the mind, each alluded to God through celestial decorative motifs and inscriptions; and each included a garden that afforded a glimpse of paradise.

The rooms in both palaces faced the interior courtyard, not an outer area. This was done in order to create an intimate space.\(^\text{115}\) These privileged spaces for the sultan created a setting of reassurance and security. His power allowed for such a lush and bountiful setting in which to relax and reside.

The most important room of the Comares Palace, the Hall of the Ambassadors, was the throne room (Fig. 29). The throne is thought to have been located in the central alcove space with his land as a backdrop to show what he had accomplished.\(^\text{116}\) James Dickie described the palace as having a “pompous” atmosphere and this room as a “setting for monarchy.”\(^\text{117}\) There is a lot of truth to this description, for the decoration, inscriptions, and miradors create a space of majestic luxury. The sultan would have sat at the center during a formal ceremony or majlis, and it is he who created such a plush setting as a testimony to his reign.

\(^{117}\) Ibid., 140.
Several “power inscriptions” defined the power of the sultan, proclaimed his authority, testified to his accomplishments, and glorified him as ruler. Muhammad V justified his rule to the audience who would have seen and read these praises. The first line of the verse in the central alcove space of the Hall of the Ambassadors reads, “In the name of God the Compassionate, the Merciful, may God bless our Lord Muhammad and his people and grant him salvation.” The sultan was not only praised, but gave praise to God. He sought a deeper connection through the beauty created in this palace to reach the divine.

Figure 29: Alcove in the Hall of the Ambassadors, Granada, Spain. (© Bettmann/CORBIS)

Chapter 4: The Royal Bath

In this chapter, the Royal Bath and its relationship to sensuous pleasure and the divine will be explored. Situated between the Comares palace and the Palace of the Lions (Fig. 22), the Royal Bath dates to the time of Yusuf I (1333-1354), with additional decoration by Muhammad V. This chapter will not include a garden section because gardens are not incorporated into the baths of the Alhambra. As in previous chapters, however, I will discuss the role of water, which is obviously a key component of the bathing ritual. Also, an analysis of decoration used in the bath area will be offered. The Royal Bath was part of the sultan’s private quarters. It is a final, vivid example of the fourteenth-century Alhambra as a form of pleasure architecture.

Plan and Layout

The bath (hammam) had long been present in palatial settings throughout the Islamic world; therefore, it is not a surprising feature to find at the Alhambra. According to Grabar, the Royal Bath of the Alhambra belonged to a standard Islamic type, which resembled a Roman-style bath but lacked a frigidarium because Muslims never immersed themselves in cold water or swam. The medieval Islamic bather was more concerned with perspiration as a way of cleansing himself. The bath consisted of a main room followed by a succession of three vaulted steam rooms, which progressed in temperature. At the Alhambra the bath was only accessible through the private quarters of the Comares Palace. Originally it was entered from a small passage off the Hall of the Blessings, which led to a room where the bath attendant would

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119 Other public baths are found within the Alhambra complex, but will not be treated in this thesis.
A staircase then would have led to the Royal Bath. From the staircase, the bather arrived in the Hall of Repose (*Sala de las Camas*). This was the most important room in the bath complex. It was two-storied and contained two raised alcoves on the sides, enclosed by two arches. The lower room was lit by a lantern and contained no side windows. The upper gallery contained service rooms and was a place where court musicians would have performed to create a relaxing atmosphere. A view into the Court of the Myrtles could be seen from the service rooms on the second story. The bath complex seems to link the Palace of the Lions with the Comares Palace, but in fact it does not connect with the former. Instead, it is on a lower level, next to the Garden of the Daraxa.\(^{123}\)

Off the Hall of Repose were three vaulted steam rooms (Figs. 30 and 31).\(^{124}\) The steam bath rooms have star-shaped skylights, which allowed for light to enter and steam to escape—the combination made for a dramatic effect. Movable glass covers were used in the vaults to regulate the amount of steam desired, while pipes of different sizes ran through the marble floors to cool or heat the space.

In Islamic culture, bathing was part of a purification ritual attached to religious beliefs, as well as a source of contemplation, relaxation, and entertainment.\(^{125}\) It provided all these functions in the sultan’s Royal Bath. Although different types of pleasure were experienced in the Royal Bath, it was sensuous pleasure that abounded. The Royal Bath was at once a place for cleansing and a site for the contemplation of one’s surroundings and of God.

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\(^{122}\) The Royal Bath was altered several times by the Christians beginning in the sixteenth century. The plan was reshaped and an entrance directly into the steam rooms was added.  
\(^{123}\) This area of the Garden of the Daraxa was reconstructed in the sixteenth century, but it is thought that other living quarters were found here during the time of Yusuf I and Muhammad V.  
\(^{125}\) Ibid., 106.
Figure 30: Detail of Royal Bath Ceiling, Alhambra, Granada, Spain. (http://flickr.com/photos/shapeshift/115103299/)

Figure 31: Royal Bath, Alhambra, Granada, Spain. (www.alhambra-patronato.es/.../0/)

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Geometric Decoration

The Royal Bath area is decorated with tiled walls and floors of geometric patterns. The tiles are vividly colored blue, red, green, and yellow. The Hall of Repose contains the majority of the bath’s decoration, with sculpted capitals and geometric designs in stucco leading up the entire wall’s surface to the second floor (Fig. 32 and 33). The decoration is created in precise geometric patterns and proportions. The dado is filled with repetitive geometric forms that were more simplified than the patterns in the two palaces already discussed.

The Islamic bath was a place where artistic designs and images were placed in order to “revitalize the soul.” The beauty of color and proportions relaxed the mind and allowed for anxiety to be freed. Geometric designs of foliage and organic patterns that represented the natural vegetation of the garden were thought to contain restorative powers for the body. The Royal Bath was to be an enjoyable experience with a religious component, but also a purely pleasurable one.

The decoration and geometry within these rooms would have led to contemplation of the beauty they possessed. This contemplation was a form of sensuous pleasure, which would have included the aroma of the bath area as well as the music from above. According to Ibn Khaldun, both visual and audible sensations produce beauty that “harmonizes with the cognitive soul.” while perfumes add their scents to this harmony. All of these elements—the beauty of the decoration, the aromatic perfumes, the sounds of music and water—united to transform the Royal Bath into a place of heightened sensual experience where pleasure was found.

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126 Benrens-Abouseif, *Beauty in Arabic Culture*, 137.
127 Ibid., 136.
128 Ibid., 38.
Figure 32: Hall of Repose, Alhambra, Granada, Spain.  
(© Adam Woolfitt/CORBIS)

Figure 33: Decoration, Hall of Repose, Alhambra, Granada, Spain.  
(© Adam Woolfitt/CORBIS)
Calligraphic Decoration

Decorative inscriptions are found within the Royal Bath as they are throughout the Alhambra. To most contemporary viewers, ignorant of Arabic, the patterns resemble those seen previously, but in fact the inscriptions are a jumble of senseless words. Owing to an unfortunate mistake of a nineteenth-century restorer, the inscriptions were misplaced because the restorer did not know Arabic.129

Calligraphy was used in poetic inscriptions on the walls of the bath. For instance, the Hall of Repose contained an inscription that reads, “What is most to be wondered at is the felicity which awaits in this delightful spot.”130 This inscription related directly to the sensuous pleasures experienced within the Royal Bath. It was a space where beauty of decoration and inscriptions were incorporated to add to the pleasure of the bath itself.

Another inscription that was once placed near two lion-headed spouts in the Hall of Repose compared the use of hot water to the power of the sultan and his role as protector, while cold water was equated to his bounty.131 In this case, the presence of the sultan was made resoundingly clear through the calligraphic decoration. The sultan sought to portray the bath as a form of wealth and a symbol of extravagance, even though bathing was an ordinary event in the life of a Muslim. The last few lines of the verse in the Hall of Repose quoted above stated, “Thus how many wonderful things brighten up the one who marvels at this noble place! Is there anyone like Yusuf I, our sultan, who does not desist from triumph and great victory?”132

129 The architect José Contreras restored much of the bath decoration in the nineteenth century, repainting the area and rearranging the inscriptions so that they no longer make sense. During the sixteenth century, Charles V also adapted this bath area to his liking and placed his imperial motto “Plus Ultra” on some of the tiles.
130 Stewart, The Alhambra, 167.
131 Grabar, The Alhambra, 117.
132 Ibid., 117.
case, Muhammad V left the praise given to his father on the walls, probably because the inscription celebrated a historic triumph for the Nasrids.

The inscriptions within the bath not only sang the praise of the sultan, but also gave instructions for how the viewer was to understand and appreciate the space. The inscriptions became a guidebook for the viewer to interpret the bath. The sultan would have entertained or socialized with important court officials or political figures of rank. These “power inscriptions” would have reiterated his power and displayed his wealth to those fortunate enough to hold an audience with him in the bath.

The use of calligraphic decoration portrayed the bath area as a place where pleasure was present. However, calligraphy was often employed in praise of God. These inscriptions were in an area where a religious ritual took place; therefore, they were also a reminder to the bather of the presence and importance of God. The inscriptions contained a layered meaning that combined pleasure with God.

**The Ritual Role of Water**

The sacred function of bathing was an important one and related directly to the component of pleasure that concerned God. In fact, prayer has to be performed while the Muslim is in a state of purity. Two types of bathing rituals exist in the Muslim world, the *wudu* and the *ghusl*. The first took place after using the bathroom or after sleeping. It involved a lesser ablution where the face, arms up to the elbows, and feet were washed in a customary fashion. This type of ablution could be done in a basin or fountain. The other form of ritualized bathing was the *ghusl*. This involved the complete bathing of the body with water.

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133 Irwin, *The Alhambra*, 46. Bathing activities were single-sex gatherings.
134 Ibid.
135 Ibid.
ablutions. It needed to be performed after warfare or sex and would be done in the bath area. These cleansing rituals were an intermediary to the ultimate form of pleasure that one can attain through God and prayer.

The bath was not only used for religious cleansing, but also employed for relaxation and social gatherings. Water soothed the soul through the use of fountains, which were situated within the Hall of Repose (see Fig. 28). The fountains within the bath created a natural component that produced sounds similar to those heard in a garden. Compared to the other fountains in the Palace of the Lions and the Comares Palace, the fountain was incorporated into the bath in a different way. The royal bath fountains created a space where one interacted with the fountain physically. It became part of the experience, whereas in the other palaces the fountains were untouchable references to Paradise that one looked at and observed. In the case of the Royal Bath, fountains were heard and drunk from, and water became a refreshing and revitalizing element in a setting of relaxation and pleasure.

The Patron’s Pleasure

The Royal Bath provided for both religious and social rituals without designating different sections for these two functions. The religious function, which is so ingrained in the Muslim faith, would have been important for the patron to show his dedication to God. The sultan created a setting where such a purifying ritual would be pleasing to God, and also served as the highest form of pleasure for the sultan himself.

At the same time, the royal bath was a place of luxury where the sultan would again have displayed his status to important guests. Even when Charles V took over the Alhambra, the bath was preserved to provide an element of sophistication for his palace. Charles V knew that the

136 Ibid.
Royal Bath was important and combined luxury, power, and pleasure. Ibn al-Khatib, a vizier to Muhammad V, wrote about the bath in his *Book of Hygiene* and stated, “There are those who maintain that bathing produces in the body the same effects that wine does, in other words happiness and pleasure. This explains why so many people sing when they bathe.” Ibn al-Khatib could not have captured better the different elements of pleasure that the Royal Bath provided its patron: from the opportunity to contemplate power and beauty in decoration to the sensuous and purifying potential of water.

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Chapter 5: Conclusion

Although the Palace of the Lions, the Comares Palace and the Royal Bath were independent units, in addition to having shared a common patron, each space displayed similar decorative components and some combination of courtyard gardens or water. These features have guided my discussion of pleasure within the three sites. At the Alhambra, Muhammad V exhibited his power through pleasure spaces that engaged audiences sensually, intellectually, and spiritually. The luxuries and pleasures with which he surrounded himself were a testament to his power and rule, at a time in which Islamic power on the Peninsula was on the threshold of decline.

This thesis began with an introduction of the notions of medieval Islamic pleasure, which manifested themselves throughout the case studies presented in subsequent chapters. The subject of pleasure was broken down into sensuous pleasure, intellectual pleasure, and the pleasure of the knowledge of God. In all forms, pleasure was central to the enjoyment of beauty, nature, and the praise of God. Following in established royal traditions of the Iberian Peninsula, the Palace of the Lions, the Comares Palace, and the Royal Bath were constructed as forms of pleasure architecture.

Chapter Two focused on the Palace of the Lions, which contained the famous fountain of the lions. The space was united by the repetitive use of geometric and calligraphic decoration. The central courtyard garden added an element of pleasurable relaxation. It was an intimate space, unlike the courtyard in the Comares Palace. Thanks to its paradisiacal associations, it was also the ideal setting for one to observe God’s creations.

The focus of Chapter Three was the Comares Palace. This palace predated Muhammad V, but contained many of his restorations. It integrated a distinct blend of private functions and
administrative duties. This was the premier space to display the sultan’s wealth and cultural knowledge to audiences, since it housed his throne in the Hall of the Ambassadors. It contained the components of beauty, gardens, water, and decoration in a similarly luxurious and tasteful manner as the Palace of the Lions; however, it arranged these components differently to better showcase his wealth.

The last chapter was centered on the Royal Bath. It was important to include such a space because pleasure was essential to its function. In the bath, one’s relation to pleasure was more direct and interactive than in the cases of the two palaces. Although sensuous pleasure was found throughout in the decorative beauty, the smell of fragrant aromas, and the sound of water trickling from spouts and fountains, the bath was used not merely as a place of relaxation and entertainment, but also as a place for religious bathing rituals. All in all, the Royal Bath was a space for the sultan to cleanse for prayer and rejuvenate his soul.

The Palace of the Lions, the Comares Palace, and the Royal Bath accommodated different audiences, which ranged from private and intimate gatherings to public court gatherings for ceremonies. In each case, the experience of the space was centered around the multifold varieties of pleasure in the medieval Islamic world. Muhammad V’s Alhambra was a statement of his power and of the court culture fostered during his reign.
Bibliography


Vita

Amanda Sharon Foret was born in Lake Charles, Louisiana, in January of 1985. When she was growing up, she traveled throughout Europe with her family and grew to love the culture and art of other worlds. This interest led her to study art history at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas. Amanda graduated with her Bachelor of Arts in art history with minors in Spanish and advertising in the Spring of 2007. She was interested in pursuing a career in the art world and decided to gain a Masters degree from Louisiana State University. Amanda is a candidate for the degree of Master of Arts in art history for the Spring semester of 2009. Upon completion of her degree, she plans to move to New Orleans and pursue a career in the art world or a related field.