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Reassessing an Early Medieval Rural Mosque in Al-Andalus: New Insights from Building Archaeology Analysis of the Cortijo de Las Mezquitas (Málaga, Spain)

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Abstract

Recent investigations at the Cortijo de las Mezquitas complex (Antequera–Campillos–Sierra de Yeguas, Province of Málaga, Andalusia, Spain) have focused on clarifying the construction history of the monument and on contextualising the presence of an early medieval rural mosque, a rare example within the Iberian Peninsula. The reassessment of the complex, conducted within the methodological framework of Building Archaeology, has made it possible to describe the constructive characteristics of the building with greater precision, both in terms of its architectural design and its construction process. This approach has enabled a more detailed definition of the technological context employed in the original construction phase, as well as of the chronological range to which it belongs, spanning between the late ninth and early tenth centuries. Subsequent phases of reoccupation and transformation, particularly from the sixteenth century onwards, were also documented, although the dating of some interventions remains uncertain. This research provides a fundamental framework for the historical contextualisation of the monument within the history of al-Andalus and highlights the urgent need for its conservation, restoration, and valorisation.

Keywords: mosque; early middle ages; countryside; Islamic archaeology; Islamic architecture; stratigraphy; geology; al-Andalus; cortijo or farmhouse modern ages

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1. Introduction

The so-called "Cortijo de las Mezquitas" or "de la Mezquita" is located on a small hill in the open countryside in the northern part of the province of Málaga. This farmhouse is a territorial landmark that functions as a vertex at which the present-day municipal boundaries of Sierra de Yeguas, Campillos and Antequera converge (Figure 1). Approximately 3 km to the east lies the Fuente de Piedra lagoon.

Figure 1. Location of the Cortijo de las Mezquitas (white dot) and immediate surroundings, with the Fuente de Piedra lagoon to the east. Google Earth image modified by the authors.

The current "cortijo" comprises three courtyards, all enclosed by perimeter walls of differing construction and, therefore, of different periods (Figure 2). Between the southern and central courtyards runs a rectangular building with two parallel naves, divided into two sections by transverse partitions, with the western section being significantly longer than the eastern one. Both sections are arranged over two storeys, accessible via staircases located at the western ends of each case. The eastern section, intended for domestic use, leads into another northern structure with the same function, which in turn connects with the central courtyard.

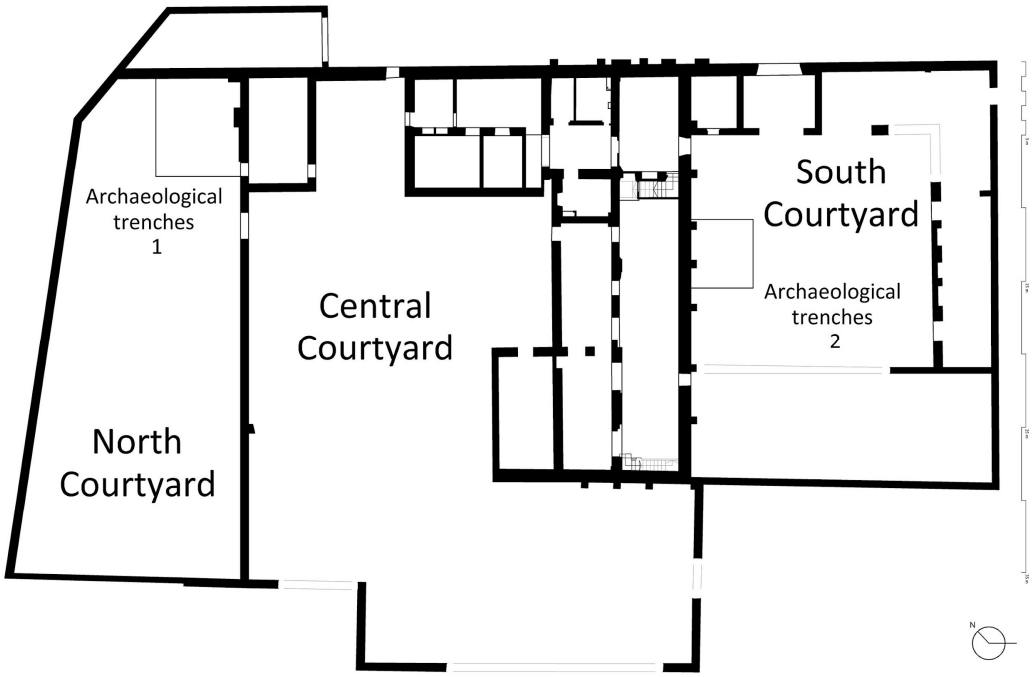

Figure 2. Plan of the "Cortijo de las Mezquitas", including the archaeological sondages excavated in the northern and southern courtyards.

Other smaller and visibly ruined structures complete the complex: a dovecote and a room of imprecise function, located in the northern and southern corners of the central courtyard, and a small outbuilding situated in the northern corner of the southern courtyard.

Access to the farmhouse is provided through a large gateway in the northeastern façade, leading into the southern courtyard. However, the collapse of sections of the perimeter walls at various points allows access to the interior of the complex through more than one breach in the outer walls. Another, much smaller opening—now sealed—also appears in this same façade, formerly providing access to the central courtyard.

The "Cortijo de las Mezquitas" remained virtually unmentioned in scholarly research until the early 21st century. Nevertheless, historical references do exist, such as the 1491 ruling on the boundaries of Antequera, in which the judge appointed by the Catholic Monarchs noted that the first boundary marker for the demarcation of the town was located at "la Mezquitilla" [1] (p. 127). This functional designation of the site changes for the first time in a document from the year 1552, where it is referred to as a "cortijo" [2] (p. 14). In other early modern documents, it appears as an "old building" [2] (pp. 13–14) [3] (pp. 70–72, 76).

The first known reference from the 20th century appears in a note held in the Cánovas del Castillo Library of the Málaga Provincial Council (ref. tbms_cam_0194_4.1), which records a mention made by the architect Antonio Palacios of the "Cortijo de la Mezquita" in Campillos, in the newspaper Unión Mercantil on 4 March 1930. From the summer of 1933 onwards, Palacios collaborated with Leopoldo Torres Balbás—architect-conservator of monuments in the 6th Zone since 1929—and with José González Edo on works carried out at the Alcazaba of Málaga. It remains unknown why Torres Balbás, despite his acquaintance with Palacios, made no reference to or published any remarks concerning the farmhouse.

Later local publications did draw attention to this monument, in some cases noting that the current farmhouse reused materials "from a building of the Arab period", of which "primitive fragments" are preserved [4] (p. 28). These observations, however, also failed to gain significant traction among specialists.

The "Cortijo de las Mezquitas" is likewise absent from subsequent scholarly works, such as the survey of rural mosques in the province of Málaga published by Angelé and Cressier [5] (p. 115). The site was first brought to the attention of the academic community in 2006, when Carlos Gozalbes Cravioto published both a monograph and a short article in which he presented the discovery of the building and put forward initial hypotheses concerning its origin, chronology, and function [2,6].

Gozalbes Cravioto [2] (pp. 68–69) argues for the existence of a mosque constructed in the 10th or 11th centuries, during the final phase of the Caliphate or the early Taifa period. Given its location and features, he interprets it as a vehicle of political propaganda within the context of the Hafsūnī rebellion (*fitna*) led by ʿUmar ibn Ḥafṣūn, who converted to Christianism in 898–899 and died in 918, against the power of the Umayyad emirate of Córdoba. The uprising was finally suppressed by the army of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān III with the conquest of the city of Bobastro (Ardales, Málaga) in 928, located about 30 km south of the Cortijo de Las Mezquitas. In support of this hypothesis, he considers the orientation of the *miḥrāb* and the materials found on the surface (manganese-decorated bichrome glazed ceramics, an Emirate *felús*). He also suggests that the prayer hall had three transverse naves and eight perpendicular to the *qibla* wall [2] (pp. 37–39), that a cistern was located in the third nave [2] (p. 37), now marked by a cement opening, that the mosque featured a *minbar* [2] (p. 55), now occupied by the staircase leading to the second storey of the main

nave, and that there was a pond in the courtyard [2] (p. 57). He also proposes that the minaret may have never been built [2] (pp. 61–62).

Gozalbes Cravioto describes it as "a mosque intended for the foundation of cities" [2] (p. 62), although the urban settlement it was meant to serve was never actually constructed. He estimates that the mosque would have accommodated approximately 740 worshippers [2] (p. 70), also calculating a population of 6000 inhabitants for the prospective medina.

This publication undoubtedly contributed to the site's designation as a Bien de Interés Cultural (Site of Cultural Interest) in 2008 by the Regional Government of Andalusia (Decree 535/2008 of 22 December, BOJA no. 258, 30 December 2008, pp. 47–48), although this recognition has not ensured that the privately owned property enjoys an adequate state of conservation. Familiar with the work of Gozalbes Cravioto [2] in her compendium on the mosques of al-Andalus, Susana Calvo Capilla [7] (p. 351, n. 2) nevertheless casts doubt on the interpretation of this structure as a mosque, pending further research that might confirm it.

More recently, two studies—approaching the question from very different perspectives—have addressed the mosque. On the one hand, Virgilio Martínez Enamorado [3] dates the building to the late 9th or early 10th century, also situating it within the context of the Hafsūnī rebellion in the region. He reconstructs a mosque with a prayer hall comprising two naves, a perfectly centred *miḥrāb*, and a courtyard measuring 30 m per side [3] (pp. 19–25). Martínez Enamorado identifies it with the area of Lamāya, mentioned by Ibn Ḥayyān (987–1076) in the Muqtabis V, where 'Abd al-Raḥmān III is said to have ordered the construction of a city, to which the mosque in question would have belonged. Its urban location would explain the size of the mosque which, in his view, could have accommodated up to 700 people [3] (p. 82).

Consequently, both Gozalbes Cravioto and Martínez Enamorado consider the building to be an urban mosque, although they disagree regarding its chronology. Both also argue that the urban nucleus it was intended to serve ultimately never came into being.

On the other hand, Pedro Gurriarán Daza and María de los Ángeles Utrero Agudo [8], drawing on a photogrammetric survey, a preliminary archaeological assessment, and an analysis of the architectural configuration of the complex, identify two construction phases in the preserved elevations of the mosque and propose an earlier date for the first of these phases—namely, the late 9th century.

On the basis of previous research, significant questions remained about the historical and architectural development of the Cortijo de Las Mezquitas.

The objectives of this paper are:

– Providing a detailed stratigraphic analysis within building archaeology;
– Understanding the constructive and destructive processes;
– Clarifying the constructive sequence in different phases;
– Identifying construction techniques and the original layout of the early medieval phase;
– Proposing a chronology for the construction of the original mosque.

The aim of this paper is to provide a detailed and exhaustive analysis of the Cortijo de Las Mezquitas in order to demonstrate that only a rigorous methodological approach grounded in building archaeology can produce solid data for revealing the original layout of the 'hidden' early medieval mosque and for providing an essential scientific tool for planning future conservation and restoration activities for this severely neglected building.

2. Methodology

The building archaeology analysis was conducted in 2022 and followed a well-established procedure of stratigraphic analysis of the elevations. Building archaeology consists of applying the stratigraphic method typical of site archaeology to the study of a

building [9]. The analysis of a building is approached like that of an archaeological site, with a stratigraphy resulting from constructive and destructive actions, whether natural or intentional, that have occurred throughout its history and which have determined its appearance as it has come down to us.

The stratigraphic analysis identifies Stratigraphic Units (SU), understood as minimal constructive or destructive entities with a three-dimensional volume or represented by sections or discontinuities. These units are characterised by their physical and technical unity as well as their structural and constructive function. Each SU is precisely located on the planimetric survey and recorded using standardised forms, exhaustively described, and related in terms of synchrony (contemporaneity) and diachrony (precedence/succession). This approach allows the reconstruction of the building's temporal sequence.

After the stratigraphic analysis, a rigorous topographical survey of the various façades was conducted using photogrammetry. This technique subsequently enabled the production of detailed digital plans and elevations, allowing the precise characterisation and mapping of the different stratigraphic units.

Following this analysis, a synthesis was carried out by constructing a comprehensive diagram or matrix to reconstruct and relate the divided elements [10,11]. To recover the historical unit—not only physically—a reduction and correlation process is applied: redundant relations are removed, SU with the same function or belonging to the same structure are grouped into Activities (A), and the sequence is periodised, situating different units and activities within the same chronological horizon.

3. Building Archaeology Analysis

The historical phases (Table 1) proposed for the building correspond to the general sequence established for the site, following the archaeological analysis of the constructed elevations (Figure 3; Appendices A and B) and the geological analysis of the materials used, as well as the survey of the immediate surroundings and the beginning of the archaeological excavation of the site in 2022, with the opening of test trenches in the northern and southern courtyards (Figure 2).

The construction of the original medieval building corresponds to Phase 3, which, before its function changed, underwent a partial collapse of its structures in Phase 4. The transformation of the mosque into a late medieval farmhouse was carried out in Phase 5, only documented by written sources [2] without material evidence and its construction shows modifications that continued into the recent period, recorded in Phase 6. Finally, Phase 7 corresponds to the current state of the building which, being unused, is at risk of collapse.

Table 1. Phases identified at the site; those recognised in the archaeological analysis of the building are shown in bold.

Phase	Description	Preliminary Chronology
0	**Geological substratum**	
1	Roman settlement	Second third of 1st c./6th c.
2	Abandonment	7th–8th c.
3	**Construction of the mosque**	**Mid-9th–early 10th c.**
4	**Abandonment of the mosque**	**11th–14th c.**
5	Construction of farmhouse (cortijo)	15th–16th c.
6	**Use and renovations of farmhouse (cortijo)**	**19th–20th c.**
7	**Restorations**	**21st c.**

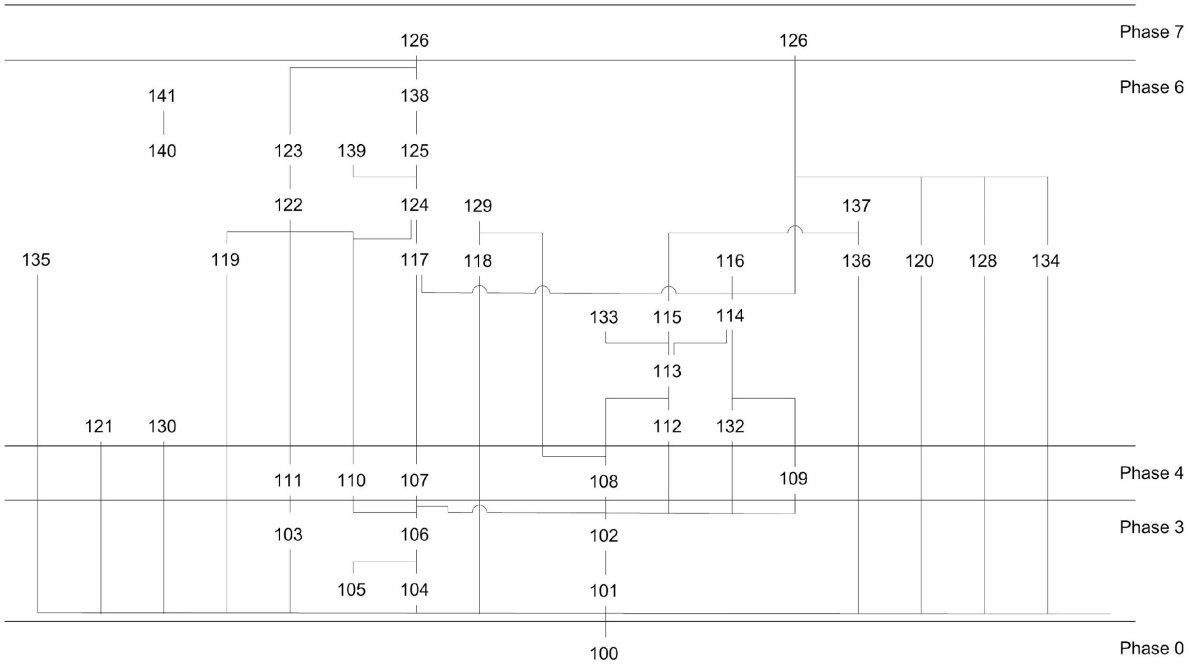

Figure 3. Stratigraphic Building Archaeology Matrix for the entire architectural complex analysis.

3.1. Phase 0: Geological Substratum. A100, SU1000

The province of Málaga is located south of the Subbética Mountains, an area composed of Triassic and Meso-Tertiary rock formations (Figure 4). In this geological context, the Cortijo de las Mezquitas sits on outcrops of variegated clays, marls, sands and gypsum, and calcareous materials, such as dolomite, dolomitic breccias, limestones and carniola, which are arranged in small outcrops in the vicinity of the complex (Figure 5).

Figure 4. View of the Cortijo de las Mezquitas from the northwest, with the Fuente de Piedra lagoon and the Subbética Mountains in the background.

Figure 5. (**A**). Dolomite, limestones and carniola outcrops (Iberpix, IGN). (**B**). Geological map of the Cortijo de las Mezquitas area, with outcrops of variegated clays and sands in purple, and outcrops of dolomite and dolomitic breccias in red (Antequera Sheet 1023, IGME).

Based on the geological materials described, the building stands on a substrate (A100, SU1000) of white limestone sloping towards the southwest, scarcely worked, as evidenced by the fact that the current pebble floor covering much of the southern and central courtyards adapts to its irregular surface. The foundations of the building likewise accommodate this irregularity, as demonstrated by their stepped and sometimes sinuous construction, as well as by the differing heights they present depending on the façade.

3.2. Phase 3: Construction of the Mosque (Mid-9th–Early 10th Century)

All activities that shaped the original structure—interpreted as a mosque—are attributed to Phase 3, within which two construction stages have been identified. These may have formed part of a single architectural project. The first corresponds to the construction of the main nave or prayer hall, divided into two aisles (A102); the second includes the completion of the northeast façade (A103), the erection of a possible minaret at the northern corner (A104), located outside the perimeter of the central courtyard, and the construction of the monumental northwest arcade (A105 and A106), thereby enclosing the mosque's perimeter. Some elements (A101) may be of earlier date; for this reason, they are treated separately and attributed to this phase with some uncertainty.

The analysis began with the exterior of the southeast façade (SU1001, Figure A1). In this elevation, between the third and fourth buttresses from the west, a masonry course (A101, SU1012, Figure A1) approximately 50 cm in height is visible, projecting c. 25 cm from the wall face. It consists of ashlar blocks of irregular arrangement, lithology (oyster stone and limestone), and size (Figure 6). These blocks present a regular outer face—though some protrude more than others—and their joints are filled with fragments of masonry, brick and tile. Similarly, on the east side of the second buttress, another limestone block can be observed protruding from the wall line (thickness: 53 cm; height: 25 cm; projection: 62 cm). The use of cement and later limewash layers (Phase 6 and 7) prevents more precise characterisation of these elements, making it uncertain whether they relate to the foundations of the building, to an earlier structure or to later reinforcement works. This possibility has been proposed by Oliver Léon [12] (p. 39), according to the excavation of this area during the consolidation works of 2015. For this reason, they have been differentiated from the rest of the original fabric. Only direct intervention on this section, removing the layers that cover it, of the elevation may help determine which of the three hypotheses is correct.

Figure 6. Lower course (A101, SU1012) and elevation of the southeast front (A102, SU1001) of the main hall (Stage 3). Window put in later (Stage 6, A128, SU1015). For stratigraphic sequence see Figure A1.

A building with a rectangular plan (main axis NE-SW) corresponding to the original structure (A102) has been documented. It is divided by an arcade that creates two parallel naves, with a southeast closing wall and a second arcade that would have served as a northwest façade, opening onto what is now the central courtyard. Its perimeter walls are reinforced with a plinth and external buttresses (SU1001 to the southeast, Figures A1 and A5; SU1025 to the southwest, Figures A1 and A5; SU1041, 1048, 1050, 1051 to the northeast, Figures A4 and A8).

Many of the supports and arches of the interior arcade (SU1077, 1080, 1081, 1087, 1089; Figure A9) have been preserved, whereas only the easternmost section of the exterior arcade has survived (SU1092, Figure A9). The southeast, northeast and southwest elevations of this structure—or main hall—are in a good state of preservation. The remaining elevations, however, have lost a significant portion of their height, preventing the full layout from being recognised and obscuring their relationship with certain contemporary and later elements.

Thus, the walls and arcades define a hall composed of two rectangular naves, the northern one being slightly wider (4.21 m) than the southern one (4.06 m). This space now separates the present-day southern and central courtyards.

The perimeter walls are reinforced externally with buttresses and with plinths at their base. Variations in plinth height has been attributed to the aforementioned irregularity of the terrain. The slope towards the southwest determines both the position and adaptation of the reinforcements (plinths and buttresses) and the line followed by the masonry courses. The buttresses are not equidistant nor always aligned with the internal elements (such as the arcades), and they are not symmetrical across opposing elevations. The plinths vary in height depending on the elevation, with this difference once again corresponding to the uneven level of the geological substratum.

The southeast elevation (SU1001, Figures A1 and A5) stands on a continuous plinth of a single course, now almost entirely lost (Figure 7). Originally, it had eight buttresses (40 cm in depth, 50 cm in thickness). While the one located at the southern corner projects

onto both adjoining elevations (southeast and southwest), and therefore has four faces, the one at the eastern corner projects only on the southeast elevation.

Figure 7. Southeast elevation of the main hall (Phase 3, A102, SU1001); collapse of the upper part of the walls (Phase 4, A108, SU1005); opening of the access door to the southeast house (Phase 6, A121, SU1002); destruction of the miḥrāb (Phase 6, A120, SU1008); and raising of the hall (Phase 6, A114, SU1007). For stratigraphic sequence see Figure A1.

The southwest wall (SU1025, Figure A2) features a considerably higher plinth, composed of four courses (maximum height: 1.90 m; depth: 25 cm), and was reinforced with at least four additional buttresses (depth: 45–48 cm), each also provided with its own plinth (Figure 8). The buttress at the southern corner is shared with the southeast elevation, as previously noted.

Figure 8. Southwest front of the main hall (Phase 3, A102, SU1025), ruin of the latter (Phase 4, A107, SU1037), and south house of the central courtyard (Phase 6, A117, SU1040). For stratigraphic sequence see Figure A2.

The northeast elevation (SU1041, Figures A4 and A8) was reinforced with at least four buttresses, which are not symmetrical to those on the southwest described above, and included a substantial ashlar base along its southern half, between the first three buttresses (Figure 9). This plinth reaches a height of 1.75 m and, although it was later chiselled back, the remains of its projecting ashlars are still visible on the face of the wall.

Figure 9. Northeast elevation of the main hall (Phase 3, A102, SU1041) and continuation of the structure to the north (Phase 3, A102, SU1048). For stratigraphic sequence see Figure A4.

On the same elevation, starting from the third northern buttress, the northern end has been distinguished as a possibly separate construction (SU1048, Figures A4 and A8), as later limewashing prevents confirmation of continuity with the previous section. On the exterior (Figure A4), only eight courses of ashlar masonry are visible, along with some masonry blocks. Further north, the number of courses is reduced to three. On the interior (Figure A8), only two courses of ashlar masonry are visible in the lower section.

All of these elements display the same typological characteristics and present only slight variations due to their function and, as previously noted, to the irregular shape and southwestern slope of the geological substrate on which they stand. The thickness of the walls ranges between 82 and 87 cm. The break at the western end of the southwest wall (SU1025, Figure A2) reveals that they were built with two leaves of ashlar masonry without a core, using blocks of varying sizes that interlock by projecting inwards and outwards to improve the bond between the two faces.

The ashlars are mainly composed of reddish-ochre sandstone, combined with some blocks of hard white limestone and, occasionally, with others made of oyster shell stone. Its petrographic examination through polarisation optical microscopy has made it possible to establish a correlation between the former and the abandoned quarries of bioclastic calcarenites at the Vadolosyesos area, a material of Upper Tortonian age within the Miocene, located to the west of the municipal territory of Antequera and lying 12.5 km from the mosque. The courses show a slight waviness since the blocks were shaped using a straightedge—a tool that does not allow for precise 90-degree angles, thus producing trapezoidal ashlars. The levelling problems in the courses are particularly noticeable at the lower part of the southern corner of the hall, where the ground slope is especially steep. The horizontality of the courses is gradually restored higher up.

The ashlars are mostly laid in the stretcher position (maximum length: 80 cm), and the course heights range between 40 and 50 cm (Figure 6). The few headers used (length: 35 cm) coincide with the presence of interlocking features that facilitate the bonding between blocks and which, due to their regular spacing, may correspond to construction joints. Those blocks that have not been eroded show clear evidence of adze tooling, with slightly curved, through-running marks (often shared by several ashlars), applied in a fan-shaped pattern. Though not fully dressed, some blocks were nonetheless incorporated into the masonry. No putlog holes have been identified, although their absence does not exclude the use of scaffolding in the construction of these ashlar walls. The joints between the ashlars are extremely fine, and traces of a lime-rich, very hard, fine-grained mortar can be observed.

The maximum height is found at the eastern corner, where the wall reaches 4.60 m, equivalent to ten courses. At this point, a simple impost is also visible, running continuously along the upper part of the walls and buttresses. The buttresses have an average thickness of 38–48 cm and a depth of 45–48 cm, thus being deeper than they are wide. Their ashlars alternately bond with and about those of the walls, meaning that the courses of both elements necessarily correspond in height. In addition, several L-shaped blocks ensure the connection between the reinforcement and the elevation at their junctions. As can be seen in the third buttress from the east on the southeast elevation (SU1001, Figure A1), the central buttress on the southwest elevation (SU1025, Figure A2), and the buttresses on the northeast elevation (SU1041, Figure A4), these reinforcements were finished with a triangular-section block sloping outwards, called a corbel by Gozalbes Cravioto [2] (pp. 21, 35) and Martínez Enamorado [3] (p. 19), equivalent in height to one course of the wall. In addition, both of these authors assume that the walls were crowned with battlements, a hypothesis for which material evidence is lacking. This detail further underlines the structural unity between both elements.

Inside, the main body of the large rectangular hall was divided into two naves by an arcade parallel to the southeast perimeter wall (SU1077, 1080, 1081, 1087, 1089; Figures A6 and A9). Another arcade on the northwest side (SU1092, Figure A9) served as a façade opening onto the central courtyard. Both arcades are currently highly fragmentary. The first section (SU1077) of the interior arcade is preserved (Figure 10). It consists of three piers supporting two horseshoe arches whose lower thirds and *salmeres* (springers) have, however, been hacked away. The piers have regular dimensions (89 cm in length, 64 cm in thickness) and are built of sandstone and limestone ashlars, sharing the same characteristics as the walls (horizontal courses, heights of 46–52 cm, irregular alternation of stretchers and headers). They are constructed as a single, 64 cm-thick leaf. On the westernmost pier, at a distance of 1.45 m above ground level and 24 cm from the perpendicular façade wall (SU1025), the carved frame of an *alfiz* (5 cm deep) is visible, which originally extended across the entire northwest elevation (Figures 11 and A6). This frame is partially visible on the other piers (as a horizontal notch), and also on the southeast face of the piers where it appears with the same dimensions. The last ashlar in the lower course of this first western pier bonds with the façade wall (SU1025, Figure A9), a relationship that confirms the contemporaneity of the wall and the arcade.

Figure 10. Interior of the southeast nave, view from the south, and arcade separating the parallel nave (Phase 3, A102, SU1077). On the right, original lintelled opening in the wall.

Figure 11. Junction between the interior arcade of the hall (Phase 3, A102, SU1077) and the southwest façade wall (Phase 3, A102, SU1025); remains of the carved *alfiz* in the corner, pointed by the arrows.

The arch rings are formed from a springer and two horizontal courses, with only the central voussoired section functioning as the actual arch. Only the second pier stands out in terms of length (2.20 m), being significantly longer than the others (90 cm). Moving northeast, only the three lowest courses of the third (SU1080), fourth (SU1081) and fifth (SU1087) piers are preserved—those situated below the horizontal notch of the *alfiz*. An ashlar projects from the southeast face of the fifth pier, giving it a T-shaped plan and thus explaining why it is longer than the others.

The arcade continues in the northeast section of this structure (Figure A6), now part of a detached house (Figure 12), whose southwest dividing wall coincides with the original partition that may have extended from the last pier described (SU1087). As at the western end, two arches with an *alfiz* frame (SU1089) and two piers of the same dimensions (90 cm in length, 65 cm in thickness) and construction as those described in the other section are once again preserved at this eastern end. It should be noted that, at the junction between the arcade and the southwest dividing wall of the present house, the vertical rebate of the *alfiz* frame is visible, along with two additional ashlars that reinforce it. These features—together with the projecting ashlar on the opposite face of the same wall—indicate the presence of an internal partition (Figure 11). In other words, this pier would have had a T-shaped plan, and the southwest wall of the current house would fos-

silise the original division of the mosque's main hall at this point. However, until punctual tests takes place in this area, it cannot be determined whether this division was a continuous wall or an arch spanning approximately 4 m.

Figure 12. Section of the interior arcade preserved in the southeast house (Phase 3, A102, SU1089) and remains of the *alfiz* at the junction with the later perpendicular wall (Phase 6, A112, SU1097, 110).

The outer, or northwesternmost arcade (SU1092, Figure A9), which functioned as an open façade onto the central courtyard, is preserved only in its two arches at the northeastern end (Figure 13). These exhibit the same characteristics as the interior arcade and bond with the northeast façade wall (SU1041), once again confirming the contemporaneity of the perimeter wall of the hall and the arcade façade. No traces of springers or perpendicular walls are visible on this same northeast wall (SU1041) that would suggest the existence of a third northwestern nave. It can therefore be assumed that the mosque hall was organised into two bays or naves, parallel to one another and to the southeast façade wall (or *qibla* wall). The arches, in turn, created eight naves perpendicular to this southeast wall.

The definition of the mosque's configuration is completed by the identification of another series of distinctive elements. First, on the same southeast elevation (SU1001, Figure A1), between the fourth and fifth buttresses (counting from the east), there is an arch opening towards the interior of which the six sandstone voussoirs forming the upper third are preserved (Figure 14). Both the springers and the jambs have been lost on both the interior and exterior sides, meaning that the complete layout of the arch remains unknown. The current span measures 1.17 m, and the arch was framed on the interior by an *alfiz*, as indicated by vertical rebates in the lateral ashlars, spaced 2 m apart. The horizontal rebate is not preserved. The keystone is monolithic, and the arch ring reaches a thickness of 45 cm. Beneath successive layers of whitewash that partially conceal it, several well-dressed voussoirs and fine joints filled with white, lime-rich fine-grained mortar can be observed. These voussoirs appear to be bonded. On the exterior (Figure A1), the arch is not visible, and successive repairs to this area—above all the opening of a later passage in this location (Phase 6, A120, SU1009)—prevent the recognition of further original elements, apart from two ashlars with chipped faces. In the image published by Gozalbes Cravioto [2] (p. 55), the wooden shutter that closed this opening until quite recently can

still be seen. These would have belonged to the side walls of the *miḥrāb* chamber, as suggested by the presence of the *alfiz* arch. This feature and the space associated with it appear to be notably off-centre with respect to the length of the *qibla* wall, although they are located very near to the southeastern space previously described. The function of this latter space will be revisited below.

Figure 13. Western arch of the preserved pair from the arcade opening onto the central courtyard (Phase 3, A102, SU1092) and later modifications for domestic use, specifically the repair of springers and insertion of steps (Phase 6, A119, SU1093, 1094).

Figure 14. Arch belonging to the *miḥrāb* (Phase 3, A102, SU1001). For stratigraphic sequence see Figure A5.

On this same southeast front (SU1001, Figures A1 and A5), between the sixth and seventh buttresses and almost adjoining the former, an opening is documented with a two-piece lintel, one external (38 cm thick) and the other internal (42 cm). Both display a lower rebate (16 cm thick), and the internal one also features an upper moulding. The reveals of the opening are chipped, but would have originally matched the thickness of the indicated rebates. Moreover, the masonry courses on either side—or jambs—do not align in height, pointing to the existence of an original opening, possibly a doorway. The continuity of the courses is re-established with the insertion of the lintel described. This opening was subsequently modified, meaning its original dimensions cannot be determined (Figure 9). However, its location in the *qibla* wall suggests there may once have been an area on this southeast side of the building still enclosed by walls and thus belonging to the mosque precinct. Otherwise, direct access to the prayer hall from outside the mosque compound would be difficult to explain. In addition to these elements, there appears to have been a doorway where the current entrance to the farmhouse is located on the northeastern front (SU1041, Figure A4), opening onto the central courtyard (Figure 15).

Figure 15. Remains of the jamb of the doorway that opened onto the central courtyard (Phase 3, A102, SU1050, 1051); change in masonry technique (Phase 3, A103, SU1052), right; and collapse of the doorway (Phase 4, A111, SU1053). For stratigraphic sequence see Figure A4.

As described in the northern section of this same wall (SU1048), it is possible that this latter section is preserved up to its junction with the eastern jamb (SU1050, Figure A4). The whitewashing prevents a clear view of the direct relationship between this section and the potential jambs of the opening, to which two almost completely razed lateral structures are attributed (SU1050 to the east, SU1051 to the north). The eastern one (SU1050, Figure A4) consists of four courses of sandstone ashlar (total height 1.50 m) and displays a well-defined eastern corner, resulting in a base thickness of 1.35 m. The northern structure (SU1051, Figures A4 and A8) presents similar characteristics, with only two courses visible on the exterior (thickness 90 cm, height 95 cm) and four on the interior (width 90 cm). Both ashlar-built features project slightly from the external face of the wall, exhibiting a plinth-like base with a bevelled edge, and extend 27 cm into the interior of the main wall. The destruction of the southwestern front (SU1025, Figures A2 and A9) prevents confirmation as to whether a symmetrical opening once existed on that side, at least until the corresponding archaeological excavations are undertaken.

To the north of the possible northern jamb (SU1051, Figures A4 and A8), there is a change in masonry (A103, SU1052) of which only three interior courses are visible (Figures 15, 16 and A8). This elevation rests directly upon the geological substrate and has an approximate thickness of 85 cm. Unlike what has been described so far, this masonry employs right-angled ashlar blocks, cut with a square (not with a straightedge), regularly alternating stretchers and headers of sandstone and limestone, and laid in horizontal (not sinuous) courses, with heights ranging between 40 and 54 cm. No putlog holes or tool marks are visible as the surface is heavily eroded. The joints remain fine and are bonded with a white, lime-rich fine-grained mortar. Its junction with SU1051 involves a marked offset in the courses—a change which, together with the typological difference, suggests a second construction phase within the same original project.

Figure 16. Interior of the northeast façade: regular masonry of stretchers and headers on the left (A103, SU1052) and junction with the earlier masonry on the right (A102, SU1051). For stratigraphic sequence see Figure A8.

Immediately afterwards, there are two structures of large stone blocks which may have formed an independent unit (A104; Figure 17), with a floor plan measuring 3.60 × 3.60 m, but which are now isolated due to later cuts (Phase 4, A110, SU1057). The first (SU1056, Figure A3) consists of several blocks of similar height arranged in three courses (total height: 1 m), forming what would have been a southwest-facing façade. The lowest course rests directly on the geological substrate, assisted by wedges. The second (SU1059, Figure A3) is reduced to a single large stone block located at the northern end of this same northeast façade.

In the western corner of the northwest arcade of the central courtyard, a fragment of paving (A105, SU1076, Figure A7) is located, composed of irregular blocks of white and violet/red quartzite, between 15 and 20 cm thick, which are tightly fitted together. These blocks form a regular, horizontal surface extending for a maximum length of one and a half metres and overlain by the arcade (specifically by pillar SU1064; Figure 18). For this reason, the floor must be considered contemporary with the arcade.

Figure 17. Blocks belonging to a possible structure (Phase 3, A154, SU1056, 1059); dismantling (Phase 4, A110, SU1058); and reconstruction work (Phase 6, A124, SU1066). For stratigraphic sequence see Figure A3.

Figure 18. Blocks belonging to the preserved pavement in the corner of the northwest arcade (Phase 3, A105, SU1076) and detail of the ashlar masonry. For stratigraphic sequence see Figure A7.

The northwest arcade (A106, Figures A3 and A7), which encloses the central courtyard, is preserved in a fragmentary state and no complete arch survives (Figure 19). From east to west, the following supports have been identified:

- A section of ashlar wall (SU1060), comprising three courses and measuring 2.30 m in length.
- A pillar (SU1061), 1.60 m long and 53 cm thick, with three courses preserved (height 95 cm), made of sandstone and conglomerate ashlar.
- 2.10 m from the previous pillar is another (SU1062), 1.78 m long and 56 cm thick, with three preserved courses, a fourth where the springer is located, and a fifth where the first horizontal voussoir of the arch appears, which is thinner (44 cm) than the pillar supporting it. Here, it is evident that the arch is narrower than the pillars; its intrados

has a convex profile outlining the edges of the voussoirs, and the interior is finished with a smoothed mortar surface that fills the natural voids of the stone. This finish contains negative impressions of lost vegetal elements (such as straw) that were part of the original composition.

- 2.07 m from the previous pillar is another pillar (SU1063), 1.76 m long and 55 cm thick, with three preserved courses (total height 1.20 m). The lowest course shows a small step or projecting ledge (20 cm high) which is now chipped away.
- 2.10 m from the previous pillar is another (SU1064), 2.05 m in length, with a T-shaped internal plan and ashlars projecting to the southeast, which are now chiselled off. This detail suggests that a wall or arcade extended from this point, forming a southwest bay whose closing wall would align with—or perhaps correspond to—SU1025 (Figure A2). The lowest course again shows, on both sides, the lost lower step. The inner face of the pillar retains mortar identical to that described for arch SU1062, and this surface appears to have even covered the aforementioned step.
- Finally, there is an ashlar corner (SU1067) whose interior face is 2.06 m from the ashlars projecting inward from the previous pillar (SU1064). This measurement therefore corresponds to the southwest bay that extended between the two structural elements.

Figure 19. Northwest arcade (Phase 3, A106) seen from the south, with detail of the T-shaped pillar (SU1064) and horizontal break in the supports (Phase 4, A110, SU1057). For stratigraphic sequence see Figure A7.

On all these supports, the ashlar masonry was designed using a square, ensuring the formation of completely horizontal courses (40–50 cm in height) without interlocking or additional adjustments between them (Figure 18). The blocks are systematically arranged in a stretcher-and-header pattern. The joints are extremely fine and filled with the same hard, fine white mortar that has been described throughout the structure. This mortar is sometimes spread across the face of the ashlars in bands no wider than 2 cm, thereby sealing the joints. Although the surfaces of the ashlars are heavily eroded, in less exposed areas it is possible to discern the use of an adze as the dressing tool, applied at a 45-degree angle. The pillars originally supported six horseshoe arches, the threads of which were narrower than the supporting elements, with the springers and first two voussoirs set horizontally.

The almost consistent preservation of the three lower courses of the pillars indicates that it was from this point that the horizontal recess of the *alfiz* was developed. In other words, the configuration is identical to that of the arcades in the main hall, from both the interior and the façade.

3.3. Phase 4: Abandonment of the Mosque (11th–14th Centuries)

It is not possible to determine when the destruction of the original building occurred or whether, on the contrary, this process was the result of a prolonged phase of abandonment and ruin. In any case, the collapse of the southwest bay (A107), the southeast bay (A108), the hall arcades (A109), the possible minaret (A110) and the northeast doorway (A111) all took place prior to the conversion of the complex into an estate for agropastoral exploitation.

The collapse of the northwest bay (A107) led to the loss of a large section of the southwest façade wall (Phase 3, A101, UE1025), specifically the stretch that closed off the central courtyard on that side (SU1037, Figures 8 and A2). The absence of buttresses on this wall and the downward slope of the terrain in this direction may have facilitated its collapse. The T-shaped pillar (Phase 3, A106, SU1064) from which the wall or arcade parallel to the aforementioned southwest wall extended was also dismantled (SU1074, Figure A7), possibly deliberately, as suggested by the chisel marks on the projecting ashlars. However, the collapse and dismantling may have occurred successively over time. The same process (SU1075, Figure A7) affected the western corner (Phase 3, A106, SU1067).

The collapse of the upper part of the walls (A108) is also documented and, with it—although it can no longer be observed today—that of the nave roofs. The southeast façade (Phase 3, A102, SU1001) has lost its uppermost courses, possibly two, as evidenced by its more or less regular horizontal upper edge (SU1005, Figures 7 and A1). On this same façade, the third buttress from the south was truncated (SU1013, Figure A1), and only its plinth and the ashlar of the first course are preserved. This truncation is visible in the chipping of the remaining ashlars that formed part of the buttress, as well as in the voids left for the same reason in the wall. The collapse of the upper part of the walls—and consequently of the roofing—would also have facilitated the outward displacement of the corners, i.e., the points where the perpendicular walls meet, as can be seen in the southwest (SU1027, Figure A2) and southeast (SU1042, Figure A4) corners. These movements are necessarily associated with vertical fissures, which in some cases even fracture the ashlars in the sections of wall closest to the corners.

The destruction (A109, SU1082, Figure A6) of the arcade (Phase 3, A102) that divided the hall is evidenced by an approximately horizontal break which, as already noted in the description of the supports, coincides with the horizontal line of the *alfiz*. That is, the fracture occurs at the structurally weakest point of the arcade—the transition from the broader pillars to the narrower arches. A similar process occurred in the northwest arcade of the courtyard (Phase 3, SU106) where the horizontal breaks (A110, SU1057, Figures A3 and A7) mark the loss of the pillars at virtually the same height (Figure 19). Only the vertical break (SU1058, Figure A3) of the possible minaret (Phase 3, A110) appears intentional (chipping; Figure 17). Finally, both the projecting jambs of the northeast doorway (Phase 3, A102) and the northeast wall from the second construction phase (Phase 3, A103) also show signs of ruin (A111, SU1053). These elements were later chipped again (Figure 15).

3.4. Phase 6: Uses and Renovations of Farmhouse (Cortijo; 19th–20th Centuries)

The adaptation of the still partially preserved early medieval structure occurred in various phases; thus, it is necessary to differentiate between activities which, although typologically very similar, show relationships that confirm their diachronic nature. It

remains difficult to establish the length of time that may have elapsed between each intervention; however, all appear to have been carried out within a broadly contemporary timeframe. Likewise, although some structures were built in rammed earth and others in masonry, there is currently no evidence to suggest that some are significantly earlier than others, at least for the time being, given the state of accessibility and the degree of ruin of the building.

Possibly making use of the original partition that separated the eastern section from the rest of the prayer hall, a house was established in this southeast area, preserving the original division into two aisles (A112). For this purpose, not only a wall (Figure 20) but also masonry pillars (SU1097, Figure A6) were introduced, bonded with abundant rubble and lime-earth mortar and finished with earthen plaster. At the centre of this wall, a niche with a segmental arch and an upper shelf was created, revealing a wall thickness of approximately 55 cm. This feature would have functioned as a pantry for this room or kitchen, as suggested by the presence of a fireplace on the northeast side, i.e., on the opposite wall.

Figure 20. Partition wall (Phase 6, A112) separating the eastern and western sections of the original hall, upper storey added (Phase 6, A113), and blocking of the northern opening (Phase 6, A113, SU1095).

Above this structure, there is an upper section (SU1100) built of greyish earth and lime adobe with abundant small stone fragments. This continues into the northwest nave (SU1102, Figures 20 and A10), where it appears entirely whitewashed. Although the junc-

tion between these two elements is not clearly visible, construction logic suggests that the masonry plinth and the adobe superstructure should be regarded as part of a single construction phase. These elevations support a gabled roof and accommodate a roundwood timber floor (SU1022, Figures A5, A6 and A8) that vertically divides the interior space. This floor creates a non-habitable upper storey used for storage purposes, as the usable height would have been extremely limited due to the roof resting directly on the southeast wall. The placement of the fireplace on the ground floor conditioned the layout of the timber floor above and required the construction of a flue that extended into the upper storey, of which the rear wall is still preserved, built in masonry with reused ashlar blocks. This chimney can still be seen in the images of Gozalbes Cravioto's book [2] (p. 10 exterior and p. 41 interior) and in the historical photographs reproduced by Martínez Enamorado [3] (p. 12, Figure 2).

Access to this southeastern house is gained from the south courtyard via a doorway and a step (A121). The doorway (SU1002, Figures A1 and A5) cuts through the original wall, with jambs constructed of masonry bonded with pinkish mortar and a lintel composed of two minimally worked timber beams (Figure 7). The opening measures 2.30 m in height, with an internal width of 1.21 m and an external width of 1.41 m. To bridge the difference in ground level with the courtyard, a step (SU1003, Figure A1) built of calcarenite ashlar blocks was installed. Simultaneously, this section of the south courtyard was levelled with a pavement made of river pebbles and solid brick fragments, framed by a continuous border of 15 cm high limestone slabs. forming a quarter circle. The doorway remained in use following the addition of the southeast annex (A115) and the elevation of the southeastern house (A113), both of which will be discussed below. A recessed rectangular panel above the opening once housed an exterior image. Martínez Enamorado [3] (p. 83, Figure 34) reproduces a colour photograph in which the rectangle of tiles with a possible virgin can be seen above this lintelled entrance. The entire structure is rendered in whitewash, with the exception of the lower plinth, which is painted blue. These finishes may date from a considerably later period.

This house was subsequently expanded through the addition of an upper storey (A113; Figures 20 and 21). Adobe walls approximately one meter in height were constructed (SU1006, Figures A1, A5 and A6), featuring internal openings spanned by timber roundwood lintels. The western opening functioned as a cupboard, as indicated by the remains of internal shelving. The walls were finished with a solid brick cornice. This intervention created a new upper floor, intended for habitation, while continuing to rely on the earlier timber structure (A112, SU1022). This remodelling necessarily involved the raising of both the northeast façade (SU1023, Figures A4 and A8) and the southwest elevation, as well as the installation of a new, higher gabled roof. The northern end of the former northwest bay was subdivided into two rooms by the construction of narrow partition walls made of small-format masonry and reused ashlar, bonded with earth mortar (SU1091, Figure A6). The space was separated from the southeast bay by blocking the easternmost of the original arches (SU1095), using masonry bonded with lime and mud mortar, which also served as render (Figure 20). A second cupboard was inserted in the north face of this wall. All of the described walls are whitewashed, and their structural composition is visible only where the surface coating has deteriorated.

Figure 21. South corner of the second-floor elevation of the southeast house (Phase 6, A113).

Once the eastern section had been adapted for use as a dwelling, although the proximity in time between this and subsequent interventions remains uncertain, the much longer western section underwent a similar transformation into a different type of space, possibly intended for storage (A114), given the absence of internal subdivisions or features such as cupboards or fireplaces, which are present, for example, in the southeast house. It is likely that, at the time of this intervention, the northeast arcade or the façade facing the central courtyard was already largely in ruins. As a result, the southeast façade (SU1007, Figures 6 and A1), illuminated by two rectangular windows with wooden log lintels, and the southwest façade (SU1035, Figure A2), were raised using rammed earth boxwork.

Access to the new upper storey (SU1019, Figure A5) was provided by a staircase located in the southwestern part of the same western section. Another staircase was introduced in the southwestern area of the eastern section (SU1101), corresponding to the southeast house. Consequently, a lower doorway giving access to this latter staircase, and an upper opening linking the previously modified house (A113) to the one under consideration (A114), were introduced at this stage. An eastern room was also created, enclosed by narrow partition walls which are now lost. Within this large western space, a new floor surface was installed (SU1021, Figure A5), the span of the western arches of the southeast arcade of the original hall was reduced (SU1078, Figure A6) by means of walls built with reused ashlar and earth mortar and damaged areas were rendered with cement-based coatings (SU1086, Figure A6).

The area formerly occupied by the northeastern arcade was rebuilt with a wall of heterogeneous masonry bonded with a pinkish mortar, into which two lintelled openings with timber relieving elements were inserted (SU1083, Figure A6). The upper storey, whose façade wall is slightly thicker (SU1084, Figure A6), was constructed using the same technique. On the exterior face, further masonry and adobe structures created a third level with domestic spaces (SU1085, Figure A6), now almost entirely lost and no longer accessible. In the images by Gozalbes Cravioto [2] (p. 30), the elevation of the façade wall parallel to this one is still visible. It included a door on the ground floor and lintelled windows on both the first and second floors.

The conversion of this extensive southwestern sector of the former mosque hall into a domestic environment involved the insertion of two windows (A128), one in the southeast elevation (SU1015, Figures 6, A1 and A5) and another in the southwest elevation (SU1032, Figure A2). Both are small, rectangular and positioned at a similar level, suggesting their simultaneous use. In the same southwest wall, an additional window (A134, SU1031, Figure A2) was opened to provide light to the area beneath the staircase, although it is not possible to determine precisely when this was undertaken. The window (A133, SU1024, Figures A1 and A5) located in the rammed earth wall, representing the raised section of the southeast house (A113) described above, may also date to this phase. Its timber frame, now lost, was secured using a light-coloured earthy mortar.

The larger western section and the smaller eastern section were connected by a doorway located at the northern end of the dividing wall (A140), of which only the wooden lintel remains visible (SU1098). This opening was possibly sealed during the construction of the second floor, using solid brick, and subsequently converted into a pantry (A141, SU1099). A southeast annex (A115, SU1004, Figures A1 and A4) was constructed adjoining the southeast elevation of this house (A114, SU1007, Figure A1). Although it currently occupies only the northern corner of the south courtyard, it originally extended along the entire northeastern frontage of the farmhouse. This would have included the large entrance gate that remains in use today, as well as the rest of the rooms distributed along the northeastern side and the southeastern edge of the south courtyard. Another structure, possibly a storage shed (A116, SU1014, Figure A1), was also added to the southeast elevation of the hall opening onto this courtyard. Now completely ruined, it is only visible through the voids and structural damage caused on the surface of the original walls and buttresses of the southeast elevation. Its construction required the opening of a new doorway (A132, SU1016, Figure A1), which is now fitted with an iron frame and partially covered in places by a pinkish mortar. This same mortar appears in various other interventions associated with this contemporary phase.

The southwest façade (Phase 3, A102, SU1025) was repaired (A117) at various points along its external elevation, as a result of the construction of an additional structure on the northwest side of the former hall. In the lower section, sandstone and limestone blocks were reused together with fragments of masonry and brick (SU1038, Figure A2). The joints are thick and bonded with a light brown, sandy mortar. A similar repair was undertaken at the northern end (SU1039, Figure A2) of the same elevation. Both localised interventions may have served to reinforce a wall that supported the construction of a new dwelling (SU1040, Figure A2) with a mono-pitched roof structure sloping northwards (Figure 8). This building was constructed with irregular masonry at the base and rammed earth for the remainder of the elevation. The corners were reinforced with reused ashlar blocks. The elevation of the southwest wall (SU1040, Figure A2) possibly caused the chipping (SU1079, Figure A6) of the *alfiz* of the central arcade of the former prayer hall, onto whose surface it was attached. This same elevation (A118, SU1028 and SU1096) was also repaired at the lower part of its southern end using ashlar masonry. Although it cannot be confirmed whether the two interventions (A117 and A118), which differ in construction technique, were carried out simultaneously, both appear aimed at reinforcing the base of the wall, the structurally weakest area due to the lack of foundational support. If not executed at the same time, the works must have occurred within a close chronological interval.

The domestic occupation (Phase 6, A119) of the eastern side of the farmhouse involved the refurbishment of the eastern sector which was already functioning as a dwelling, alongside the construction of an additional house to its north. A rectangular window (SU1046, Figure A4) was opened in the northeast elevation, and the adjacent wall section extending northwest was repaired, raised and provided with a second, larger window fitted with a

balustrade (SU1049, Figure A4). The springers of the horseshoe arch (SU1094, Figure A6) connecting the southeast house with the northwestern extension were restored using solid brick and gypsum mortar, and a series of steps (SU1093) was built to overcome the difference in floor level between the two spaces (Figure 13). According to Gozalbes Cravioto [2] (p. 44), this restoration must date from before the second half of the nineteenth century. In our view, it may be more recent, since these materials were also used in the first half of the twentieth century.

Although later surface finishes prevent conclusive verification, it is plausible that the northeast elevation was completed at this stage with the construction of a northern section (Phase 6, A122, SU1054, Figure A4), incorporating the doorway that currently provides access to the central courtyard. This opening is located immediately adjacent to the northwest wall of the northern house.

The old mosque hall was connected to the south courtyard through the dismantling of the *miḥrāb* (Phase 6, A120). For this purpose, the central buttress of the southeast façade (Phase 3, A102, SU1001) was dismantled (SU1008, Figure A1), as indicated by the irregular chipping marks visible on the remaining ashlars of its structure (Figure 7). On its southwest side, an opening (SU1009, Figures A1 and A5) was introduced, breaking through both the wall and the arch that had given access to the *miḥrāb*. The jambs of this opening display double splaying and contain a wooden frame (2 m in height and up to 1.20 m in width), corresponding to the current floor level inside the building. Immediately to the west, an irregular rectangular opening (SU1010, Figure A1) measuring 1.10 m in width and 2.70 m in height, was sealed (SU1011, Figures A1 and A5) with poorly executed masonry. Although difficult to observe due to the long sequence of plaster layers covering it, it appears that an element contemporary with the *miḥrāb* may have existed and been dismantled at the same time. Since only cuts are observed, this element is not identified as such in the construction phase of the mosque (Phase 3).

The original mortar of this possible sealing (SU1011), characterised by a pinkish hue with gravel, coarse finish and medium hardness, was used to repair the lower part of the same southeast wall on the interior (SU1020, Figure A5), particularly in the section between the former *miḥrāb* and the western door of this elevation. Brick fragments, slabs and pebbles were embedded in this mortar and arranged to fill the surface irregularities of the wall, possibly caused by rising damp. These interventions are marked by a lack of precision and reflect an intention to homogenise the surfaces, although the result remains uneven.

Another structure rises in the northern corner of the central courtyard (A123). A southeast wall (SU1055, Figure A7) featuring two windows and a door, together with a parallel northwest wall (SU1065, Figure A3) which includes another door, form a rectangular space. Both are constructed in masonry and finished with whitewash. Inside, the triangular niches made of solid brick suggest a possible function as a dovecote. A very similar construction is seen in the wall that encloses and consolidates the former northwest arcade of the central courtyard (A124, SU1066, Figures A3 and A7). This irregular masonry, bonded with earth mortar, incorporates some larger pieces at its base—reused ashlars—and the remains of the original arcade pillars (Figure 16). Later interventions prevent the establishment of a direct relationship with the previously described structure (A123), but the form of their construction indicates that they may have been built contemporaneously.

At the western corner of the central courtyard, the masonry wall (A125, SU1068, Figures A3 and A7) adjoins the space known as the northern courtyard, representing the occupation of a western area previously outside the perimeter of the farmhouse. Its attachment to the wall consolidating the previously described arcade (A124) indicates a very recent phase of use of this space, or alternatively, an expansion of the farmhouse. This wall contained an opening on its northwest face, adjacent to the corner, which was sealed

at a later, uncertain date (A138, SU1069). The presence of Alicante tile, combined with rubble and large ashlars, points to a very recent period of disuse of this passage. The final expansion of the farmhouse plot took place with the construction of a new perimeter wall (A130, SU1026, Figure A2) which, at its eastern end, directly abuts the southwest façade of the former mosque hall. This wall is built of irregular masonry without regular courses and is bonded with a pinkish mortar. It thus encloses a large area to the southwest of the complex. Today, much of this wall is in ruins along most of its length.

Repairs were carried out in various areas to ensure the functioning of the farmhouse. Although it cannot be confirmed that these works were contemporaneous, their workmanship indicates a contemporary character. On the southwest façade, repairs (A129) using masonry and pinkish mortar were made to the lower part of the wall (SU1029, Figure A2) and to a vertical crack at the southern end of the same elevation (SU1030, Figure A2). The central buttress of this southwest façade has a pair of notches or grooves at its upper edges (A135, SU1034, Figure A2). Due to the state of preservation, it is unclear whether these are of anthropic origin, possibly intended to support a roof, or were naturally caused by erosion.

3.5. Phase 7: Contemporary Restorations (21st Century)

The renovation (A126) of the former monumental northwest arcade is of contemporary design and includes a 54 cm thick brick wall (SU1072, Figures A3 and A7) with cement facing and a two-piece concrete and cement lintel (SU1070, Figures A3 and A7) constructed to bridge an opening and support the weight of the new gabled roof covered with Alicante tiles (SU1071, Figures A3 and A7). As these elements do not appear on the 2015 plan, their installation must be dated after that time.

In order to consolidate elements at risk of collapsing and seal openings, various minor works were carried out using hollow brick (A127) in 2015 [12]. The jamb of the open aperture (Phase 6, A120, SU1009) in the former *miḥrāb* was renovated and sealed with hollow brick (SU1018, Figures A1 and A5), with cement applied to its exterior face. Similarly, the window in the southwest wall (Phase 6, A128, SU1032), two windows (SU1047, Figure A4) in the northeast wall (Phase 6, A119, SU1046 and SU1049), the upper openings (SU1088, Figure A6) on the second floor of the northwest wall of the hall (Phase 6, A114, SU1084), and the southeast wall (SU1090, Figure A6) were bricked up (SU1033, Figure A2). The tympanum of this same façade was rebuilt (SU1036, Figure A2) to support an asbestos-cement roof. The same work was carried out on the eastern section, which also has a gabled roof. The exterior corners and walls of the southeast house were consolidated and repaired with cement, and the space was re-covered with an asbestos-cement structure.

Finally, a hollow brick and cement partition wall (A131, SU1017, Figure A1) was erected along the lower part of the western end of the southeast façade. This protective work was conducted in parallel with an urgent archaeological intervention at this location [12] (Figure 2).

4. Interpretation of the Historical-Constructive Sequence

4.1. Reconstruction of the Original Building: The Early Medieval Mosque

The sequence identified and proposed throughout this text recognises an original construction (Phase 3), specifically a mosque (Figure 22). The presence of a niche (*miḥrāb*) integrated into the southeastern wall (*qibla*), a roofed area internally divided by naves in the southern part (*haram*), and an open area resembling a central courtyard (*sahn*) broadly correspond to the typical organisation of a mosque of the Umayyad period in the Iberian peninsula (9th–10th centuries). The *qibla* also includes an entrance at its westernmost section, which necessarily implies the existence of a protected area within what is now the

southern courtyard. Another entrance is documented on the northeast front, providing access to the central courtyard. This mosque, however, is the result of two construction sub-phases rather than two separate building projects.

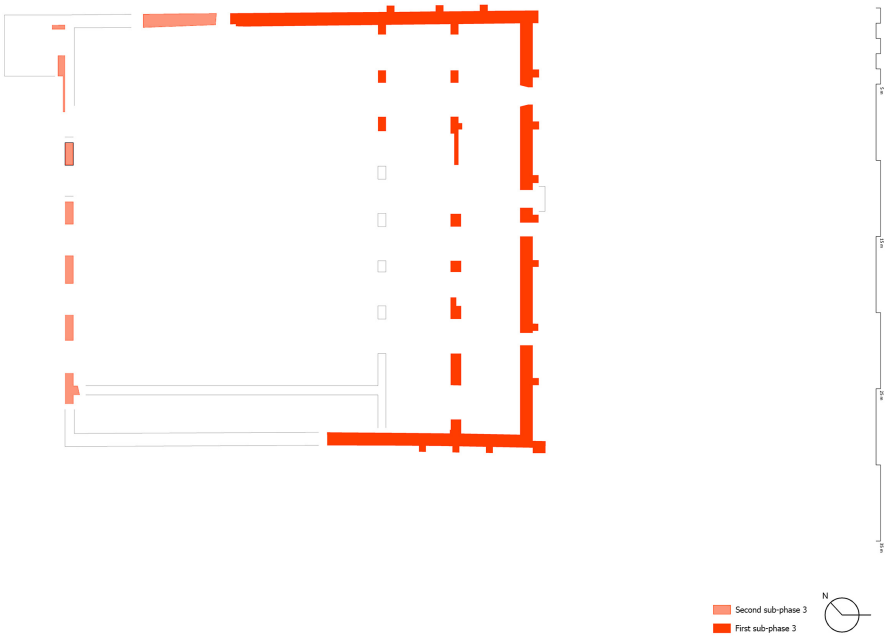

Figure 22. Plan of the preserved remains of the mosque (Phase 3).

During the first phase, the large rectangular hall was constructed, divided into two naves parallel to each other and to the southeast wall (*qibla*), and opening towards the central courtyard through an arcade. A significant portion of the northeast façade was also built, including a narrow entrance—whether arched or lintelled remains unknown—externally marked on the plan by prominent jambs. The walls, approximately 85 cm thick, are characterised by the use of sandstone and limestone ashlars, mainly shaped with a straight-edge and arranged in horizontal but sinuous courses. The southern arcade of the hall is almost completely preserved at the level of its supports, whereas the northern arcade survives only in its two eastern arches and their corresponding pillars. Both arcades comprised eight large ultra-semicircular arches with a span of 2.20 m; their total height is unknown since the southern arcade was altered to accommodate a second floor and the outer arcade is practically lost. At several high points along the arcades, an upper impost similar to that on the building's exterior is preserved. The arches feature long, slender, latticed voussoirs resting upon large rectangular pillars. The fronts of the arches bear carved frames or *alfiz*, resulting in recessed surfaces.

This large hall was, however, divided into two sections, at least in regard to the southeast nave. The observation of the second pillar from the northeast, which is longer than the others and has ashlars projecting from its southeast face and the *alfiz* frame, suggests the presence of a dividing element, whether a wall or an arch, at this point now occupied by the wall that closed off the southeast house in Phase 6. Consequently, this space would have been situated near the *miḥrāb* and was distinct from the rest of the nave, possibly serving a prominent or reserved function.

The main structural requirement for the walls of this construction would have been to counteract the thrust of the wooden gabled roofs covering the two naves, whose axis ran northeast to southwest. However, its remains are no longer extant due to the subsequent construction of walls in Phase 6. The buttresses are concentrated on the walls that delimit covered spaces, namely the hall. The walls rest directly on the rocky substratum without footings and are reinforced with narrow but tall buttresses. The ground slopes gently from north to south, overcoming a difference in level of approximately 1.5 m between the two

ends of the building. Considering that the impost line at the crest shows no interruptions, it is understood that the elevations must have been higher in the lower part of the plot.

During a second phase, the northern end of the northeast façade was completed and the northwest arcade was constructed. This arcade provided access from this side to the central courtyard, of which only the lower halves of the supports and some springing arches remain. It consisted of six arches supported by rectangular pillars with spans of 2.10 m. The building resulting from these two construction phases has a trapezoidal, nearly square floor plan measuring 28.30 by 30.80 m. The western corner confirms that this arcade does not correspond to an internal front of a newly added nave enclosing the courtyard on the northern side, but rather serves as the new external enclosure of the building. It is unclear whether it replaced a previous continuous façade, but the evidence suggests that this arcade was erected before any façade was constructed on this side.

Furthermore, although this cannot be fully confirmed, the elements identified in the northern corner, which now lie outside the perimeter of what would have been the central courtyard, may have formed part of the base of a possible minaret projecting from the northeast façade.

The fact that this monumental northwest arcade was not protected by a northwest wall, which might have formed a bay as is common in many examples, may relate to a possible complementary courtyard-like function of the building. The identification of the aforementioned southeast space would be consistent with this interpretation. However, this hypothesis, originally proposed by Gurriarán Daza and Utrero Agudo [8] who also referenced other similar examples, cannot currently be demonstrated.

This second work differs stratigraphically, as evidenced by the cuts, and typologically from the previous one because it uses orthogonal ashlars squared with a set square rather than trapezoidal ones, which are, arranged in horizontal courses rather than sinuous ones, and which have a regular rhythm of stretchers, now shorter, and headers. The thickness of the arcade wall is less than that of the other perimeter walls, as it consists of a single leaf. This type of stonework is also evident in the arch components, of which only the impost-springer and the first voussoir of the spring remain, both arranged horizontally, with the radial voussoiring reduced to the central third of the arch, a section now lost. The intrados of the arches, finished in situ, are also slightly curved (convex).

Since the entire southwest bay connecting this monumental northwest arcade with the prayer hall has been lost, it is not possible to determine where the junction between the two phases occurs on this side of the building. This work no longer requires the use of buttresses.

Finally, it is important to recall that during recent archaeological work carried out on the building, coinciding with the consolidation of its roofs and the upper sections of its walls using hollow brick, a large and almost completely destroyed structure was discovered on the northern side of the contemporary house (A117) which occupies the northwest side of the former hall. This structure, rectangular in plan with its major axis oriented southeast–northwest, is enclosed by masonry walls and protected with *opus signinum*. Its discoverers [12] (p. 52) have suggested a possible hydraulic function and consider it may have been a Roman-period swimming pool. The ruin of the northwest wall of the aforementioned house on this side prevents observation of this structure, now buried beneath the collapsed masonry, and therefore nothing further can be determined regarding its chronology and function.

Why interpret these two works as two phases within a single project rather than as two separate construction projects? The masonry of both phases shares the use of a white, hard, fine lime-rich mortar. Both phases lack evidence of scaffolding with cores, as demonstrated by the absence of putlog holes. The materials are also consistent: sandstone, limestone and

conglomerate. Therefore, the typological differences and similarities support the interpretation of two construction moments, not distant in time, but the work of stonemasons with differing skills.

Regarding the chronology and authorship of this monumental construction, we endorse the conclusions presented in our initial overview of the complex, albeit introducing some minor but important nuances.

First, it is appropriate to indicate that the present archaeological analysis has not identified any decorative finishing elements, such as architectural sculpture or stucco. However, it has identified the possible original plaster on the walls, specifically on the interior face of the southeastern wall of the hall, where multiple subsequent layers of whitewash have protected the primitive or first plaster applied to the stone. This fact, combined with the absence of other materials datable to the Early Middle Ages in both the excavation [13,14] and survey [15], leads us to question whether the original building, namely the mosque, was completed or abandoned before its conclusion. It is possible that no population centre was linked to the mosque because it simply never became operational. This circumstance may explain why the major chroniclers close to the Umayyads did not record its founding and why it remains absent from sources such as the *Muqtabis*.

Its construction, exhibiting clear references to the Cordoban *aljama*—similarities attributable to the presence of Cordoban workshops involved in the work and to the authorship of this state foundation by the emirate and caliphal authorities—would fit within the period of instability at the end of the ninth and the beginning of the tenth centuries, as previously noted by other scholars [2,3]. Its technological characteristics, many of which we have documented in the nearby settlement identified as the city of Bobastro (Mesas de Villaverde) [8,16], further support this dating.

On the other hand, the confirmation of a prior Roman settlement at the site, established through survey and excavation performed outside the southeastern wall [14], is unrelated to the mosque's construction. The documented Roman structures were either in ruins or demolished to erect the mosque, which does not reuse the earlier spaces.

4.2. The Cortijo de Las Mezquitas During the Early Modern Age and Contemporary Period

Neither the survey nor the excavation document materials attributable to the Late Middle Ages [13], nor does the architectural analysis, which records the abandonment and ruin of the complex during what has been termed Phase 4. Although the area came under Castilian control from the fourteenth century onwards, the mosque was not used, for example, as a Christian worship centre (such as a hermitage) or as a residential space for agricultural or livestock purposes. It cannot be determined when the original building was destroyed or whether, conversely, this was the result of a prolonged phase of abandonment and decay.

In any case, the abandonment of the building led to the collapse of the roofs and upper parts of the walls and, with them, to the movement or displacement of the weakest areas, such as the corners. The southwest bay and the arcades of the nave, both the interior and the façade, suffered the same process of destruction. In some cases, it appears that the ruined elements were also deliberately dismantled to facilitate the introduction of new spaces in subsequent phases.

Following this extended period of abandonment, documentary sources indicate that the farmhouse was already in operation by the mid-sixteenth century. However, the structure does not exhibit any constructed elements attributable to either the Late Middle Ages or the early modern period (seventeenth to eighteenth centuries). Contrary to [12], there is no reason to propose that the rammed earth walls date from the modern period (sixteenth to eighteenth centuries) while the masonry walls are contemporary (nineteenth to

twentieth centuries). It is worth noting that Gozalbes Cravioto (2006) [2] (p. 73) to himself downplays the value of this documentary information, stating that "perhaps the references to it as a 'farmhouse' from the late sixteenth century refer to a territorial unit rather than a properly inhabited house", given that, in his view, all the farmhouse's elements also postdate the eighteenth century.

In addition to this questionable documentary evidence, there remains a chronological gap in the materials studied from both the survey and the excavation [13]. For all these reasons, we consider Phase 6 to be dated to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, during which the continued use of the farmhouse is reflected in various renovations which do not present typologies permitting a more precise dating (Figure 23).

Figure 23. Plan of the preserved remains of the farmhouse (Phases 6 and 7) superimposed on the remains of the mosque (Phase 3).

5. Concluding Remarks

The study of the architecture of the Cortijo de Las Mezquitas, conducted through an archaeological methodology, has demonstrated how absolutely essential a detailed stratigraphic reading is to understand and distinguish the different construction phases of a multitemporal complex (Table 2). Thanks to this approach, a clear interpretation of the parts of the complex relating to different chronological periods has been achieved, which is indispensable for planning any restoration and conservation interventions on the monument. Indeed, the current condition of the interior of the farmhouse is quite critical in terms of its structural stability and the extent of its deterioration.

At this stage of the research, it is still premature to propose a historical interpretation within the political context of the revolt of ʿUmar ibn Ḥafṣūn and the subsequent repression by the Umayyad emirate of Córdoba. Although no archaeological evidence has been found of a permanent settlement in which the mosque could be situated, it remains to be clarified whether this should be understood as a sign of the advance of Cordoban authority in the region during the years of conflict between the late 9th and early 10th centuries, or rather as the tangible outcome of the victory over the revolt immediately after the conquest of Bobastro in 928.

Table 2. Comparative summary of the scholarly debate on the mosque of the Cortijo de las Mezquitas.

Debate	Chronology	Context	Identification	Architecture	Technology	Material
Gozalbes Cravioto 2006 [2]	10th or 11th centuries	Urban mosque in a city that was never built during the Hafsūnī rebellion		Oratory with 3 naves parallel to the qibla and 8 perpendicular naves; a minaret on the second floor of the main nave; courtyard with a pond.		
Martínez Enamorado 2018 [3]			Area of *Lamāya* (*Muqtabis V*)	Two-nave oratory with a perfectly centred *miḥrāb*; a courtyard		
Utrero et al. 2026	Late 9th century, early 10th century	First sub-phase 3		Oratory opening onto a courtyard; two naves parallel to the *qibla* with a separate NE section; one entrance on the *qibla* side.	Trapezoidal ashlars laid in straight lines; sinuous courses; buttresses; arches with long voussoirs; *alfiz*	Sandstone and limestone; lime-rich mortars
		Second sub-phase 3; isolated building; unfinished work; long period of abandonment until the 19th century	No direct references in the sources.	W closure of the courtyard with NW arcade; and a SW corridor; an entrance on the NE front; a possible *alminar* on the N corner.	Orthogonal ashlars; horizontal courses; shorter and headers; arches with imposts; curved intrados	

The exceptional preservation of significant portions of the original building of an early medieval mosque (late 9th to early 10th century) is a feature that requires special conservation attention. It is hoped that future restoration projects will make use of the data provided by the building archaeology analysis. This building represents significant material evidence of al-Andalus and, above all, underscores the urgent need to plan strategies for the understanding and conservation of heritage in rural areas that are frequently marginalised and peripheral to the main hubs of mass tourism. The cultural enhancement of this heritage from the Islamic past in the Málaga countryside constitutes a crucial challenge for fostering new avenues for the dissemination of knowledge about al-Andalus.

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Appendix A

Table A1. Sequenced list of Activities (A) and Stratigraphic Units (SU) for the archaeological analysis of the Cortijo de Las Mezquitas, including their anteroposterior relationships and the plans where they are referenced (Appendix B).

Phase	A	A Name	SU	Before A	Post. A	Before SU	Post. SU	App. B
	100	Geological	1000	102		1041		
	101	First course section between third and fourth buttresses southeast façade	1012			1001		1 9
3	102	Mosque bay	1001	108 114 120 121 128 131 132		1002 1003 1005 1008 1010 1013 1015 1016 1017 1019 1020		1 5 9
			1025	107 108 114 117 118 128 130 134 135		1026 1027 1031 1032 1034 1035 1037 1038 1039 1096		2 9
			1041	108 119 136	100	1042 1043 1046	1000	4 8 9
			1048	119		1049		4 8 9
			1050	111		1053		4 9
			1051	103 111		1052 1053		4 8 9
			1077	114 117		1019 1078 1079 1085		6 9
			1080	102		1082		6 9
			1081	102		1082		6 9
			1087	114		1083		6 9
			1089	112 113 119		1102 1091 1094 1095		6 9
			1092	112 119		1093 1094 1102		9

Table A1. *Cont.*

Phase	A	A Name	SU	Before A	Post. A	Before SU	Post. SU	App. B
3	103	Northern end, northeastern façade	1052	111	102	1053	1051	4 11 P3
	104	Possible minaret	1056	106 110		1057 1058 1060 1061		3 P3
			1059					3 8 9
	105	Soil fragment in the courtyard	1076	106		1064		7 9
	106	Northeast arcade in the courtyard	1060		104		1056	3 9
			1061	110	104	1057	1056	3 7 9
			1062	110		1057		3 9
			1063	110		1057		3 7 9
			1064	107 110	105	1057 1074	1076	3 7 9
			1067	107		1075		3 7 9
4	107	Ruin, southwest façade	1037	117	102	1040	1025	2
			1074	124	106	1066	1064	7
			1075	124	106	1066	1067	7
	108	Ruin of the upper part of the walls	1005	113 114	102	1006 1007	1001	1
			1013	116	102	1014	1001	1
			1027	129	102	1030	1025	2
			1042	115	102	1004	1041	4
	109	Ruin of the arcades	1082	114	102	1083	1080 1081	
	110	Ruin of a possible minaret	1057	123 124	104 106	1065 1066	1056 1060 1061 1062 1063 1064	3 7
			1058	122	104	1054	1056	3
	111	Dismantling of the northern gate pillars	1053	122	102 103	1054	1050 1051 1052	4
6	112	First adaptations at the eastern end of the southern bay	1022	113	112	1006 1023	1100	5 8 10
			1097	114		1101		7
			1100	112 114		1022 1101		
			1102		102		1089 1092	10
	113	Compartmentation of ground floor and first floor slab at the eastern end of the southern bay	1006	114 115 127 133	108 112	1004 1007 1024 1090	1005 1022	1 5 6 10
			1023		112		1022	4 8 10
			1091		102		1089	6 8
			1095		102		1089	

Table A1. *Cont.*

Phase	A	A Name	SU	Before A	Post. A	Before SU	Post. SU	App. B
6	114	First level floor slab in the western two-thirds of the southern bay	1007	116	108 113	1014	1005 1006	1 5 10
			1019		102		1001 1077	5
			1021		132		1016	1 5
			1035	117 127	102	1036 1040	1025	2 10
			1078		102		1077	6 10
			1083	114	102 109	1083 1084 1085	1082 1087	6 10
			1084	127 114	114	1083 1088	1083	6
			1085		102 114		1077 1083	6 10
			1086		114		1083 1084	6
			1101		112		1097 1100	
	115	Attached building at the northern end of the southern courtyard	1004	137	108 113	1045	1006 1042	1 4 8 10
	116	Attached building at the western end of the southern courtyard	1014		108 114		1007 1013	1
	117	Attached building at the southern end of the central courtyard	1038		102		1025	
			1039		102		1025	2 10
			1040		107 114		1035 1037	2 10
			1079		102		1077	6
	118	Repairs to the southeast façade	1028	129	118	1029	1096	2 10
			1096	118	102	1028	1025	2
	119	Attached building at the eastern end of the central courtyard	1046		102		1041	4 8
			1049	122	102	1054	1048	4 8 10
			1093		102		1092	
			1094		102		1089 1092	6
	120	Dismantling of minaret and other associated auxiliary elements	1008	120	102	1009	1001	1
			1009	127	120	1018	1008	1 5 10
			1010	120	102	1011	1001	1
			1011		120		1010	1 5
			1020		102		1001	5
	121	Door opening at the northern end of the southern courtyard	1002		102		1001	1 5
			1003		102		1001	1
	122	Attached building at the far-north end of the central courtyard	1054	123 125	110 111 119	1055 1065 1068	1049 1053 1058	4 8 10
	123	Attached dovecote at the northern end of the central courtyard	1055		122		1054	7 10
			1065	126	110 122	1072	1054 1057	3
	124	Northeast wall of the central courtyard	1066	125 126 139	107 110	1068 1070 1071 1072 1073	1057 1074 1075	3 7 10
	125	North courtyard fence	1068	126 138	122 124	1069 1070	1054 1066	3 7 10
	128	Opening windows in the walls of the mosque	1015	127	102	1018	1001	1 5
			1032	127	102	1033	1025	2

Table A1. *Cont.*

Phase	A	A Name	SU	Before A	Post. A	Before SU	Post. SU	App. B
6	129	Repairs to the southwest façade of the mosque	1029		118		1028	2
			1030		108		1027	
	130	Western fence of the central courtyard	1026		102		1025	1 2 10
	132	Renovation of a door with pinkish mortar at the south-east façade opening	1016	114	102	1021	1001	1 5
	133	Window opening at east end of southeast facade	1024		113		1006	1 5
	134	Hole in the southwest façade	1031	127	102	1033	1025	2
	135	Groove in the central buttress of the southwest façade	1034		102		1025	4
	136	Picking surface lower part of the northeast façade	1043	137	102	1044	1041	4
	137	Repair of the lower part of the northeast façade	1044	137	136	1045	1043	4 10
			1045		115 137		1004 1044	4 5 10
	138	Closing of the north courtyard fence	1069	126	125	1070	1068	3 7
	139	Ruin of the arches in the northeast wall of the central courtyard	1073		124		1066	3 7
	140	Door in the wall between the eastern and western parts of the southern bay	1098	141		1099		
	141	Closing of the door in the wall between the eastern and western parts of the southern bay	1099		140		1098	
7	126	Reinforcements and canopy on the northeast wall of the central courtyard	1070		124 125 138		1066 1068 1069	3 7
			1071		124 126		1066 1072	3 7
			1072	126	123 124	1071	1065 1066	3 7
	127	Roof and closing of openings in the bays of the mosque	1018		120 128		1009 1015	1 5
			1033		128 134		1031 1032	2
			1036		114		1035	2 4 8
			1047		119		1046	4 11
			1088		114		1084	6
			1090		113		1006	6
	131	Repair of the western end of the southeast façade	1017		102		1001	1 5

Appendix B

Planimetric drawings illustrating the archaeological analysis of elevations, sections, and plans of the Cortijo de las Mezquitas, organized into phases, activities (A), and stratigraphic units (SU).

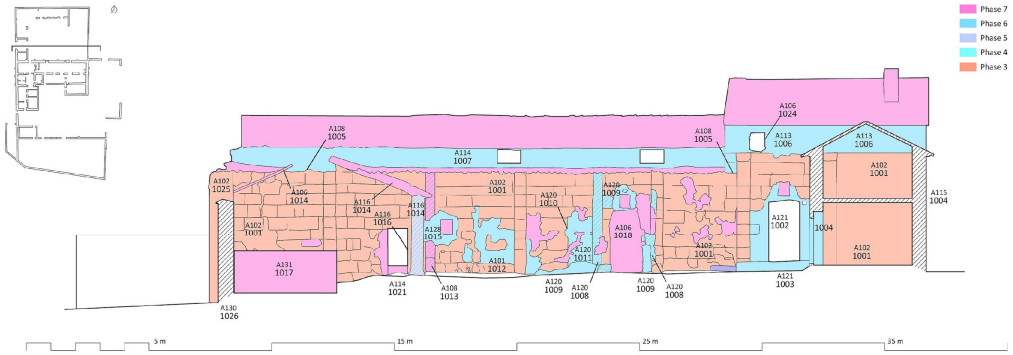

Figure A1. Southeast façade of the original building.

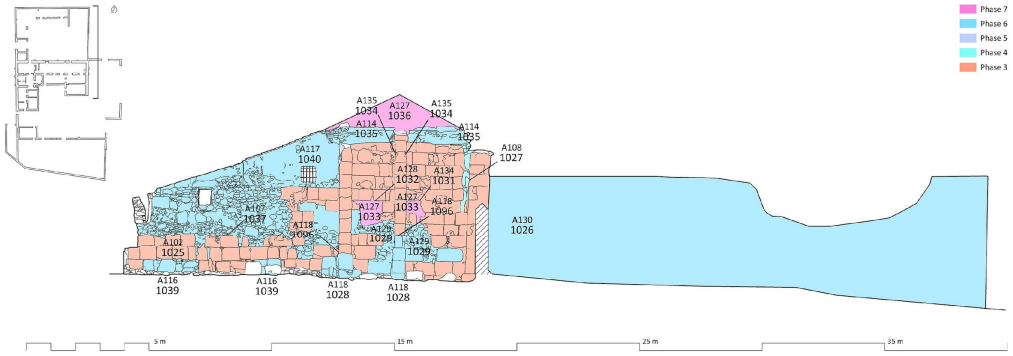

Figure A2. Southwest façade of the original building.

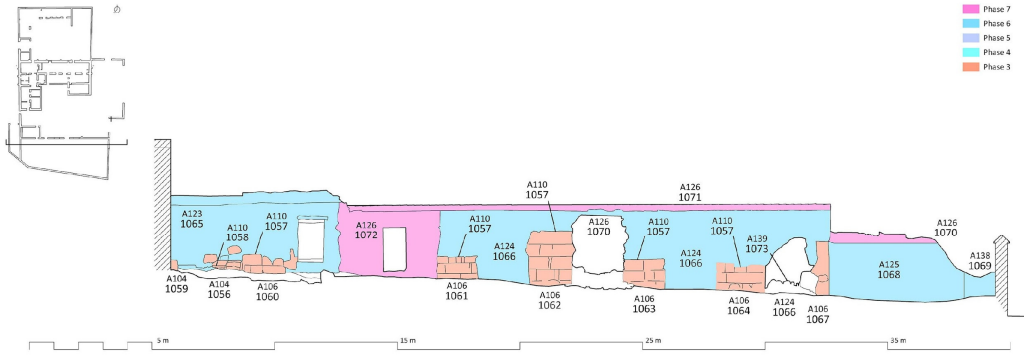

Figure A3. Northwest façade of the arcade of the original building.

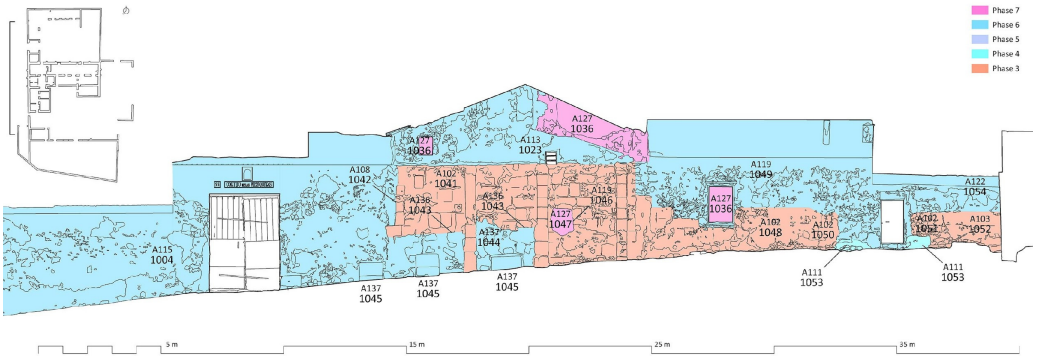

Figure A4. Northeast façade of the original building.

https://doi.org/10.3390/heritage9010026

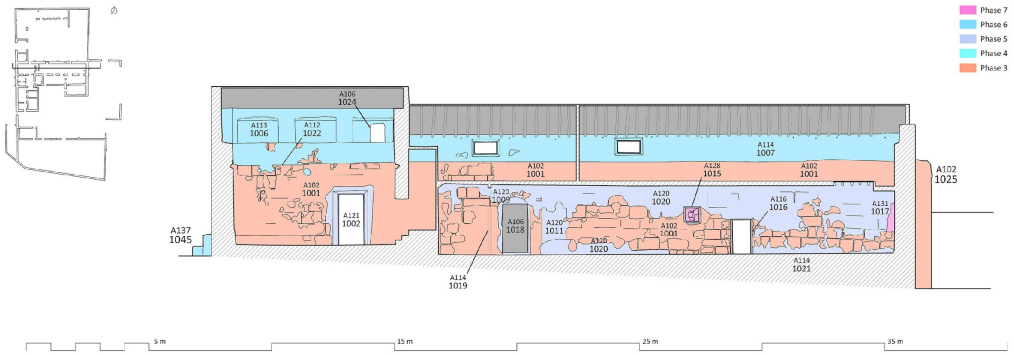

Figure A5. Southeast longitudinal section of the eastern nave of the original building.

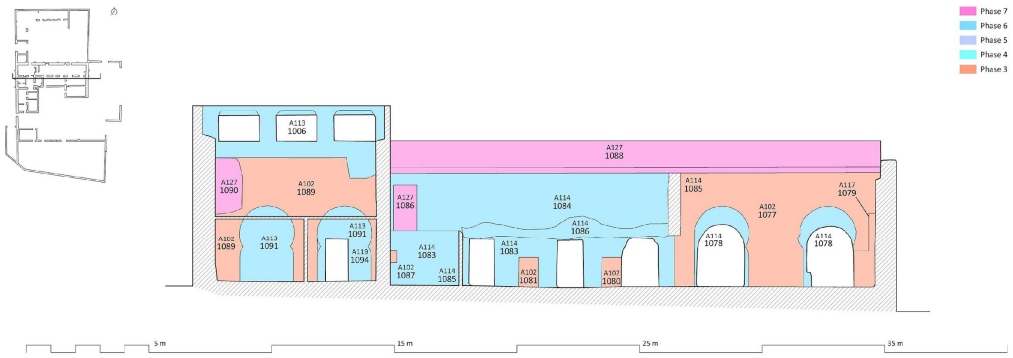

Figure A6. Southeast longitudinal section of the western nave of the original building.

Figure A7. Southeast façade of the arcade of the original building.

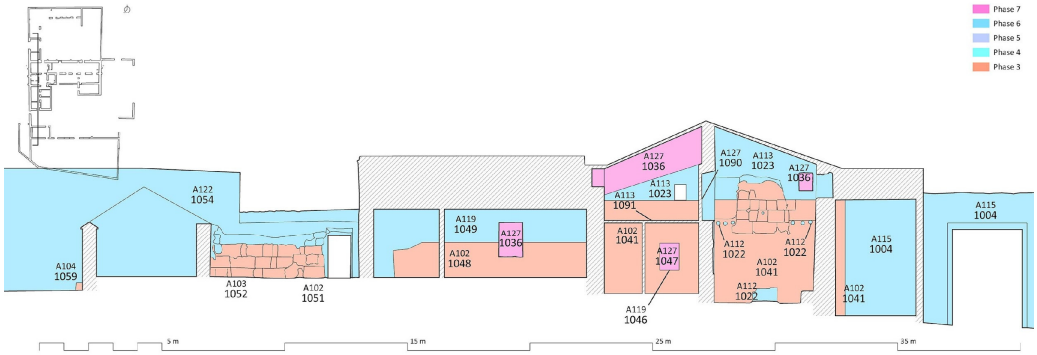

Figure A8. Southwest cross-section of the naves of the original building.

Figure A9. Plan of the sequenced structures in Phase 3.

Figure A10. Plan of the sequenced structures in Phases 6 and 7.

https://doi.org/10.3390/heritage9010026

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