



## Review/Recensão

**SARR MARROCO, Bilal – *Maqbara. Espacios, rituales y ceremoniales de enterramientos islámicos*. Granada: Alhulia, 2024, 578 pp.**

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Data recepção do artigo / Received for publication: 16 de Maio de 2025

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.34619/5co8-6nlz>

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<sup>1</sup> These results are part of the grant RYC2023-044101-I, funded by MCIN/AEI/10.13039/501100011033 and FSE+.



The collective volume coordinated by Bilal Sarr Marroco (University of Granada), an outcome of his project “Maqbara. Arabización, islamización y resistencias a partir de los espacios cementeriales del SE de al-Andalus”, constitutes a major contribution to the study of al-Andalus and the Islamic West through the lens of funerary practices. Published three decades after the pioneering work of Manuel Ación and M<sup>a</sup> de la Paz Torres<sup>2</sup>, *Maqbara* updates and expands the field of research on Islamic necropolises as central spaces for understanding processes of Islamization, urban development, and symbolic construction of territory.

*Maqbara* brings together twenty-two studies (in addition to the introduction provided by the volume’s coordinator) addressing Islamic funerary practices in al-Andalus and the Maghreb from an interdisciplinary perspective. The chapters are organized into five thematic sections: the first one (“Las aportaciones de la Antropología física al debate sobre la islamización de Hispania”, two chapters), explores the role of physical anthropology in the study of Islamization and funerary practices. The second and largest section (“Espacios funerarios en el Sureste de al-Andalus”, eight chapters), analyzes specific cemeteries in southeastern al-Andalus, such as Marroquíes Bajos (Jaén), Jabal Fārūḥ (Málaga), Ronda, Madīnat Ilbīra, Granada or Almería. The third one (“Maqābir de otros espacios andalusíes y norteafricanos. Similitudes y casos extraordinarios”, three chapters), studies various funerary spaces in other Andalusí (Xaresa and Balaguer) and Maghrebi (Ceuta) regions, expanding the scope and providing broader context to the previously presented studies. The fourth section (“Microhistoria, tipologías y cultura material del mundo funerario”, six chapters), examines specific aspects such as funerary epigraphy, typologies of burial pits, amulets, talismans, and other objects documented in Islamic funerary contexts, or the transformation of Islamic cemeteries after the Christian conquest. The last section (“Cristianos y judíos. Espacios funerarios previos y de la resistencia a la islamización”, three chapters),

<sup>2</sup> ACIÉN, Manuel; TORRES, M<sup>a</sup> de la Paz – *Estudios sobre cementerios islámicos andalusíes*. Málaga: Diputación Provincial de Málaga, 1995.

addresses the rituals and funerary materials of Christian and Jewish communities in al-Andalus.

One of the book's main strengths lies in its plural and multidisciplinary character, reflected in a rich selection of case studies. From urban contexts such as Almería, Ceuta, or Elvira to rural spaces like Tózar, the work offers a broad and nuanced geographical overview of funerary practices. The volume incorporates archaeological, bioanthropological, epigraphic, and textual perspectives, allowing for a transversal reading of material remains in dialogue with written sources.

Among the most relevant contributions are those addressing the integration of *maqābir* within the urban fabric and their role in social organization. Interventions in Elvira and Gibralfaro - Málaga (chapters by Guillermo García-Contreras and Juan Manuel Piñero), for example, reveal the relationship between cemeteries and social hierarchies, with special attention to pantheons, funerary mosques, and family burial areas. The analysis of the cemeteries in Ceuta, for its part, uncovers mechanisms of internal reorganization in response to overcrowding, such as the emergence of ossuaries (chapter by José Manuel Pérez Rivera). It is worth highlighting the hypothesis that some of these ossuaries correspond to a planned reuse of cemetery space during late phases marked by demographic pressures. Similarly, the study of the cemetery at the rural settlement of Xaresa has identified a grid pattern over the burial area, suggesting the possibility of prior planning even in a rural context such as this (chapter by Joan Negre Pérez, Michelle Alexander, Maite Iris García Collado and Marcos García García). Moreover, archaeological interventions in Granada are shedding light on how the various funerary spaces were integrated into the urban fabric of the city (chapters by Manuel López and Amjad Suliman).

The volume devotes particular attention to the process of Islamization, evident in the reorientation of tombs and the construction of oratories adjacent to pre-existing burials. Paradigmatic examples like Marroquies Bajos (chapter by Mercedes Navarro and Javier Moral) or Elvira reveal moments of ritual and doctrinal transition, linked to the reception of Mālikī doctrine in the 9<sup>th</sup> century or to the

memory of pious figures such as Ḥanash b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Ṣan‘ānī. In this sense, the importance of the *maqbara* as an active element in the Islamization of the urban landscape connects with classic works by Peter Brown on the role of tombs in the sacralization of territory<sup>3</sup>. In this regard, future research could perhaps delve more deeply into the symbolism and significance of burials as, for instance, interreligious and intrareligious frontiers<sup>4</sup>, as well as their role in shaping the memory of Islamization – specifically, the *futūḥ* (Islamic conquests) process and the *ṣaḥāba* (companions of the Prophet) – who were reportedly involved in it<sup>5</sup>. Along these same lines, further research could also explore the relationship between the living and the dead, including practices such as *ziyāra*, the visitation of graves, and the pursuit of religious benefits through relics<sup>6</sup>.

Another key area of interest is the exploration of funerary rituality through the material record. The presence of amulets (chapter by Rubén Sánchez Gallego), oil lamps, shells, and other objects in contexts like Ceuta suggests the existence of prophylactic practices, funerary banquets, and ritual actions associated with the transition and protection of the soul. The study of *masājid al-janā‘iz* and their role in mortuary ceremonies represents a valuable methodological contribution (chapter by María Marcos Cobaleda). On the epigraphic level, the volume presents unpublished inscriptions, such as an early Naṣrid *maqbariyya* that includes ubi sunt-type eschatological motifs, confirming the discursive richness of Islamic epitaphs as vehicles of memory (chapter by María Antonia Martínez Núñez). In this regard, the study of burial typologies (chapter by María Chávet Lozoya) and their evolution over time is also of great importance, with significant changes observed during the Almoravid and Almohad periods. In Almería, for instance, a notably higher number

<sup>3</sup> BROWN, Peter – *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*. Chicago: SCM Press Ltd, 1981.

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., MULDER, Stephennie – *The Shrines of the ‘Alids in Medieval Syria. Sunnis, Shi‘is and the Architecture of Coexistence*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014.

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., MARÍN, Manuela – “Ṣaḥāba et Ṭābi‘ūn dans al-Andalus: Histoire et légende”. *Studia Islamica* 54 (1981), pp. 5-49; *Al-Ṣaḥāba al-Kirām fī Turāth al-Maghāriba wa-al-Andalusīyyīn*. Rabat: Rābiṭa al-Muḥammadiyya li-l-‘Ulamā’, 2010; ALBARRÁN, Javier – “This Is Your Miḥrāb: Sacred Spaces and Power in Early Islamic North Africa – Al-Qayrawān as a Case Study”. *Religions* 14/5 (2023), n. 674.

<sup>6</sup> See, e.g., BURSI, Adam – *Traces of the Prophets: Relics and Sacred Spaces in Early Islam*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2024.

of *maqbariyya(s)* appear compared to other contexts, most of which date to the Almoravid period (chapter by Lorenzo Cara Barrionuevo).

Bioarchaeology also plays a prominent role, especially through the chapter devoted to paleodiet and pathology analysis (chapter by Sylvia Alejandra Jiménez Brobeil). The presence of dental caries linked to sugar consumption – as attested in medical texts like those of Ibn al-Khaṭīb – and the appearance of collective burials related to epidemics (e.g., in Ronda, chapter by José Manuel Castaño) allow for connections between human remains and broader historical phenomena. Similarly, the study of sex, age, family grouping, geographic origin, and occupational stress markers contributes to a more refined understanding of the social composition of the buried communities (e.g. chapter on Mértola by Clara M<sup>a</sup> Guerreiro Rodrigues, Maria de Fatima Palma and Susana Gómez-Martínez).

A particularly valuable aspect of the book is its treatment of religious plurality in al-Andalus. The identification of Christian (in Tózar, chapter by Luca Mattei) and Jewish burials in Muslim areas – such as Christian tombs in Madīnat Ilbīra, references to the graves of the Banū Naghrīla in the cemetery of Bāb Ilbīra (chapter by Bilal Sarr), or the study of Jewish funerary spaces and rituals (chapters by Arturo Ruíz Taboada and José Ramón Ayaso) – opens new avenues for rethinking interreligious coexistence from an archaeological and spatial perspective. In this vein, it could be useful to abandon the in occasions ideologically charged paradigm of “Mozarabic resistance” in favor of approaches focused on Arabization, social Islamization, and transcultural interactions<sup>7</sup>.

Finally, Maqbara explores in depth the symbolic dimension of cemeteries as sacred landscapes. The scenography of the Ceuta necropolis, laid out on a slope facing the sea, suggests a deliberately constructed sacred topography linked, for example, to

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<sup>7</sup> On these issues, see, e.g., OLSTEIN, Diego Adrián – *La era mozárabe. Los mozárabes de Toledo (siglos XII y XIII) en la historiografía, las fuentes y la historia*. Salamanca: Universidad de Salamanca, 2006, pp. 23-50; HITCHCOCK, Richard – *Mozarabs in medieval and early modern Spain: identities and influences*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008, pp. ix-xx; ALBARRÁN, Javier – “Los cristianos en el emirato y el califato de Córdoba, y la creación de una comunidad andalusí multiconfesional”. In *El monacato cristiano en la España musulmana*. Aguilar de Campoó: Fundación Santa María la Real, 2023, pp. 11-39.

the *ribāṭ* and to the sea as a spiritual frontier. Cases such as Jabal Fārūḥ – with over 1800 tombs and decorated pantheons – open lines of reflection on the function of these structures as family spaces, funerary mosques, or focal points of baraka.

Alongside all these innovative contributions, several chapters provide an excellent overview of the history and historiography of funerary archaeology. In this regard, the study on the necropolises of the Alhambra stands out as exemplary (chapter by Fernando Martínez Ávila, Jesús Bermúdez López, Paz Gázquez Alcoba and Ignacio Martín-Lagos Carreras). Some other chapters also reflect on history – or rather, memory – for example, on the necessity of valuing and memorializing these funerary spaces (chapter by Bilal Sarr).

In sum, *Maqbara* stands as a reference work for the study of Islamic funerary practices in al-Andalus and the Maghreb. Its interdisciplinary approach, documentary richness, and capacity to articulate current historiographical debates make this book an indispensable contribution to medieval Islamic history and archaeology, two disciplines that the volume's editor, Bilal Sarr, has notably combined throughout his career.

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**COMO CITAR ESTE ARTIGO | HOW TO QUOTE THIS ARTICLE:**

ALBARRÁN, Javier – “SARR MARROCO, Bilal – *Maqbara. Espacios, rituales y ceremoniales de enterramientos islámicos*. Granada: Alhulia, 2024, 578 pp.”. *Medievalista* 38 (Julho – Dezembro 2025), pp. 325-332. Disponível em <https://revistas.fcsh.unl.pt/medievalista>.



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