6.2. GOVERNMENT ACTIVITIES

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The Alhambra is first and foremost the centre of power and the official residenc of the sultan, emir or sovereign. Therefore, its most important function was as the seat of the government and of the central administration.

First of all, the bay ‘a or official proclamation of the sovereign's power usually took place here. This was a public act of investiture in which his power was recognized by all the subjects, both the upper classes (important figures and social groups) and also the ordinary citizenry.

The emir would direct domestic policy and the foreign policy of Al-Andalus from the Alhambra, by means of numerous court employees who worked in different parts of the Alhambra and in whom the sovereign delegated certain functions. The highest among these would be the main vizier or minister (who sometimes held both civil and military power) and then secondary viziers.

The exercise of power in Islam requires that the sovereign consult wise men, and for this reason the 3dra, or council of state, was created. The Nasrid emir also had his own Royal Council, the maswar, a word that can also be used to refer to the place the council met. This explains the name of the hall known today as the Mexuar.

In domestic policy, central and regional administration of the State takes place in the Alhambra. For example, governors of other cities and other political-administrative positions were appointed and dismissed from the Alhambra, through a dahir (decree) issued by the emir. Other posts subject to the same procedure were the chief of police, the person in charge of prayer, sermons, the market and also mortmain property.
Here also is where economic and fiscal policy is decided. The Alhambra is where the bay al- mal or public treasury is located, where taxes are deposited and the state treasury is managed. It is interesting to note that the treasury consisted of both monetary assets and food such as grain (stored in the alfolies or public granaries).

In addition, here is where fiscal agents for each population are appointed. Another very important economic function is the minting of coins (dinars minted at the Alhambra have survived to our day).

In relation to the administration of justice, the Alhambra has a two-fold function:

- **One:** the sultan imparts justice and listens to citizen demands in public audiences, also in the aforementioned Mexuar.

- **Two:** from the Alhambra the sultan names all the general and special judges, such as the special judge named by Muhammad V to attend to the complaints related to the extraordinary taxes that were levied as a result of popular revolts. He also appoints a person entrusted with overseeing judicial matters.

Another important government activity is the control of the army. The sultan appoints and manages all of the officers and alcaides (military chiefs) of the fortresses of Al-Andalus. The Alcazaba of the Alhambra is the seat of military power and as such it houses the highest ranking officers and the special corps for the defence of the palatine city and the royal family. Reviews of the troops take place here.

Since the Alhambra was the centre of power and the seat of the throne, being in possession of the Alhambra meant gaining access to the throne as sultan. In other words, to conquer the Alhambra meant to conquer power. So, the Alhambra was very much disputed by persons hoping to take over the sultanate and it was the setting of many dynastic battles and coups, especially in the 15th century. Such manoeuvres were not always permanent and the overthrown leader could recover the throne if he managed to enter the Alhambra and expel the resident sultan.
The Alhambra thus became a site of political violence and it witnessed various assassinations, some bloody and others more subtle, by poisoning. Viziers and important clan members also died violent deaths in the Alhambra, such as the Abencerrajes.

As for foreign policy, the centre of diplomatic activity and the chancellery are located in the Alhambra. The ambassadors of other states had to come to the Alhambra, where they stood before the sultan in the spectacular Throne Room (which was also called the Hall of Ambassadors), with a setting and ritual intended to impress any visitor and to convey an image of wealth and power to other states. This is also where official correspondence and peace treaties were drafted.

These documents, on red paper, usually specified the place in which they had been written and signed: the Alhambra.