

# The Alhambra and Granada in the al-Andalus

## MODULE 3

### 3.3. ANDALUSÍ BATHS IN GRANADA

Por *Carlos Vilchez Vilchez*

Department de History of Art at the University of Granada

---

#### 1. STRUCTURE AND FUNCTIONS ON THE ḤAMMĀMĀT

The Arab ḥammām (plural ḥammāmāt) took its basic structure from Roman baths. These baths were fed by an acequia (channel) and/or aljibe (cistern) which provided the abundant water they needed. They usually included a series of rooms, such as a reception room which was used for undressing and dressing (al-bayt al-maslaj), but also for relaxing and gathering after the bath. In this area there was always a toilet (al-bayt al-mā), which in Arabic means “water room”, because it consisted of a long hole where running water washed away the excreta. Next came the cold room (al-bayt al-bārid), and then the warm room (al-bayt al-waṣṭanī), literally “intermediate”, which was the largest. Finally, one entered the hot room (al-bayt al-sājun) where there were one or two sinks full of water heated with the boiler (al-burma) which was concealed in the service area, completed with the underground furnace (al-furn), where wood was burned to heat the floor in the hot room, which was supported on a series of pillars. There was also a service staircase where the bath workers could go up to the vaults of the public rooms. The heat transmitted from the furn, the classic hypocaust system, to the floor of the hot room and then on to the warm room, and it was used to produce steam when water was poured onto the hot surface. Therefore, bathers would undress but wear clogs to protect their feet from the hot floors. To control the density of the steam, the bath workers would raise or lower the glass covering the star-shaped or polygonal openings (maḍāwī o kuwā) in the vaults of the rooms. The glass was in various colours, such as the red mentioned by the poet Ibn Šuhayd, who worked in the Taifa of Almería.

The ḥammām alternated male and female users, with men visiting in the morning and women, attended by exclusively female staff, in the afternoon. Heavy work and cleaning was done by a series of guards and workers (ṭayyab), many of whom were slaves, and there were also masseurs (ḥakkak), and make-up artists (māšīṭa) who used musk, henna, and kohl for celebrations and important ceremonies.

# The Alhambra and Granada in the al-Andalus

The ḥammāmāt had five values or uses. First and most fundamental was hygiene. Second, the ritual of the full bath of purification by the faithful (muslimīn) after major celebrations, such as the end of fasting after Ramadan (ʿīd al-Fiṭr), or the Feast of Sacrifice (ʿīd al-Aḍḥa), although normal mandatory ablutions (al-wūdū) were performed at the fountains or midà in the courtyards of mosques. Third, therapeutic uses in the form of hydrotherapy, although rather than in the ḥammām, this was more common in the ḥamma, natural baths and hot springs with curative properties; many Spanish towns are called Alhama in honour of their hot springs (for example, in Granada, Almería, Murcia, and Aragón).

The fourth use is the desire for bodily pleasure, typical of the Islamic hedonism celebrated in Andalusí poetry. A poem by Ibn Baqī plays on the voluptuous effect on the body of the contrasts of heat and cold in the different rooms of the ḥammām, while Ibn al-Zaqqāq goes even further, comparing the effect of the baths with the sex act. Ibn Zaydūn tells us that some Andalusí baths were decorated with suggestive marble statues of nude women, known as šuwar al-ḥammām, probably recovered from the Roman period. The final use is as a meeting place for talking about politics and everyday affairs, for example in the warm room (al-bayt al-waṣṭanī) of El Bañuelo (ḥammām al-Ŷawza or bath of the Walnut Tree) in the Albayzín, or the famous Sala de las Camas (al-bayt al-maslaj or Room of the Beds) in the royal baths of Comares palace. We should emphasise that the ḥammām was one of the few places where Muslim women could meet freely without being controlled by men.

## 2. BATHS OF MADĪNAT GARNĀṬA

Within the urban fabric of Granada (madīnat Garnāṭa) in the Andalusí period (8th-15th centuries), Arab baths or ḥammāmāt were one of the city's architectural marks of identification. There were many, whether private ones belonging to palaces, or public in the form of donations (aḥbis) to support mosques. The baths had different uses, the most important being hygiene and ritual, and there was usually at least one in each neighbourhood (ḥārat) of the city, which as we know were mostly divided by occupation. Most of the baths have disappeared, mainly because they were abandoned in the Christian era, beginning in the mid-16th century, but we know from the documentation that there were baths in the districts of Leñadores (woodcutters, ḥammām al-Haṭṭābīn) (7), Guarnicioneros (leatherworkers, ḥammām al-Sarrāyīn) (8), Alfareros (potteries, ḥammām al-Fajjārīn) (5), Curtidores

# The Alhambra and Granada in the al-Andalus

(tanners, ḥammām al-Dabbāgīn) (11), Zapateros (cobblers, ḥammām al-Qarrāquīn) (10), Yeso (plasterers, ḥammām al-Īybs) (13), and others such as the Corona baths (ḥammām al-Tāy) (9) and the al-Šawṭār (ḥammām al-Šawṭār) (12). Fortunately, six baths remain in Granada: Fernando de Zafra, on Calle Elvira street; Mercedarias, on Plaza de los Tiros square; one on Calle del Agua street, in the Albayzín; the remains on Calle Moral Alta street in the Realejo, or ḥammām al-Fajjārīn (“baño de los Alfareros” or bath of the Potters); the remains on Plaza de San Agustín square; and the Bañuelo or ḥammām al-Īwza (“baño del Nogal”, or bath of the walnut tree) on Carrera del Darro street. From the 11th century, the general layout of baths in al-Andalus, and thus in Granada, would follow the model created in the 10th century in the Caliphal Baths of Cordoba, with parallels rooms.

## a) Bañuelo o ḥammām al-Īwza

The Bañuelo stood on Carrera del Darro street, opposite the remains of the bīb al Difāf or Puerta de los Tableros gate, in the Albayzín Bajo area. In the Andalusí period, this stood at the eastern end of the former Arab medina of Granada, next to the Ajšāriš district, and was known as the ḥammām al-Īwza (“baño del Nogal”, or bath of the walnut tree), and by the 16th century as Baño de Sebastián de Palacios. It was built by the Zirid emir Bādīs (1038-1056) under the auspices of his Jewish vizier Samuel ibn Nagra, and remodelled in the Almohad and Nasrid eras. This bath was a public ḥammām donated to help maintain the nearby mosque of the Conversos (masʿūd al-Tāʾibīn) on Calle San Juan de los Reyes street. After the Pragmatic Sanction of 1567 against morisco customs, which was immediately applied to the baths, it gradually deteriorated and was reworked as a large public lavoir in the 18th century, until Leopoldo Torres Balbás expropriated the building and restored it in 1929-1932. A similar lavoir or laundry has been conserved in the baths of the Villardompardo palace in Jaén, restored by Luis Berges Roldán in 1970-1984. The Bañuelo was built with rammed earth walls, and the rooms were roofed with brick barrel vaults and domical vaults, with octagonal and eight pointed star-shaped openings or skylights (maḍāwī) to light the space and allow steam to escape. These openings were closed with coloured glass, as described in a poem by Ibn Šuhayd of Cordoba (11th century). The entrance to the ḥammām is through a new pavilion and then a courtyard with a small central reservoir. In the southwest corner were latrines or al-bayt al-māʾ (in Arabic, literally “the water room” because running water washed away excreta), and on the western wall a tall horseshoe arch frames a low bench,

# The Alhambra and Granada in the al-Andalus

possibly for the guard to sit and take payments. Antonio Almagro believes that this courtyard was remodelled in the Nasrid period, covering it with a lantern or upper pavilion, as in the Sala de las Camas of the baths of Comares palace in the Alhambra, and therefore at that time formed part of the dressing room (al-bayt al-maslaj). In the rectangular area of the dressing room there were wooden benches where users could undress and hand their clothes to one of the attendants (ṭayyab), who stored them in the small cubicle on the corner. The cold room (al-bayt al-bārid) was rectangular with side alcoves separated by horseshoe arches. It was kept cold to ensure a contrast in temperature, which would clean the pores of the skin. The warm room (al-bayt al-waṣṭanī, literally “the intermediate room”) is the largest, on a square plan, with galleries of horseshoe arches on three sides, supported on columns without bases, as in the 10th-century Caliphal Baths of Cordoba, which would be copied in the baths of al-Andalus, and baths in Granada such as the Hernando de Zafra, Mercedarias, and this one, the Bañuelo. On the northern wall there are remains of red ochre painted arches simulating a fourth gallery. Most of the capitals are reused, the majority from the Caliphal period, brought from Cordoba and Medina Azahara after the Berber revolt or fiṭna (“rupture”), plus a Roman one, a Zirid one (11th century), and a few from the Almohad era (12th-13th centuries), added in the remodelling that appears to have taken place at that time. The central area is covered with a large domical vault. The hot room (al-bayt al-sājun) has two basins in the end wall, but missing the marble slabs that once enclosed them. One was for cold water and the other for hot water heated with the boiler. Users took water from them to wash, using ewers to pour it over themselves. They were not immersion pools, because the number of people using them would not be hygienic. The boiler (al-burma) in the service area would have been bronze or copper, but it would quickly have been melted down for other uses when the baths were abandoned. The underground furnace (al-furn) would have been fed with straw and firewood to heat the upper floor, which was supported by a series of brick pillars. Chimneys rose above the vaults to expel smoke and toxic gases from the furnace. In the service area there was also a firewood store and the stairs up to the vaults over the rooms. The Bañuelo or baths of the walnut tree were supplied with water from branch of the channel (al-sāqiya) which ran along Calle de San Juan de los Reyes street, which was stored in a small cistern in the service area.

# The Alhambra and Granada in the al-Andalus

## b) Baño de Hernando de Zafra

The entrance to this public bath is on Calle San Andrés street, next to the church of the same name, in the centre of the city, corresponding to the former Islamic medina. As a donated asset, it contributed to the upkeep of the mosque which stood on the site of the present-day church of San Andrés, in the Elvira neighbourhood (ḥārat Ilbīra) of the Granada medina, near the bāb Ilbīra (Puerta de Elvira gate), the city's main gate. In the first Christian period the bath was acquired by Hernando de Zafra, Secretary to the Catholic Monarchs, hence its name, although it is also called the Puerta de Elvira baths. It was converted to housing, losing part of the vaulted ceilings, and at the turn of the 18th century began to be called “Casa de las Tumbas” or house of the tombs, because somebody thought the vaults belonged to a mausoleum. The building fell into complete ruin, and was excavated in the 2000s by Antonio Burgos Juárez. It is currently being restored by the Patronato de la Alhambra y Generalife with the intention of opening it to the public. The complete structure of the Hernando de Zafra bath is still extant. Its rooms were originally covered by domical vaults with octagonal openings. At present, from the street a small corridor leads to the dressing room, although in the Islamic period the original entrance was on the southwest corner, with a passage in the western part which led through two arches to a courtyard where there is still a small reservoir and to the al-bayt al-maslaj, which is almost rectangular. On the east side an arch leads round a corner to the al-bayt al-bārid, also rectangular, with latrines on the west side of the room and another narrow room to the east with smaller alcoves on the sides with cold water basins. A segmented arch leads to the al-bayt al-waṣṭanī which has a similar layout to the Bañuelo: a large room with three galleries and nine slightly pointed horseshoe arches supported on stone columns, but here the layout is rotated, as can be seen when comparing both plans. Here, the domical vaults have disappeared. The capitals are reused and of various origins: some caliphal and others Nasrid. Gómez-Moreno thinks it was remodelled in the Nasrid period (14th century) and the floor level was raised, and for this reason the springers of the arches were shortened and Nasrid cubic capitals were installed, but most of them were subsequently looted. Parallel to the eastern gallery there is a small rectangular room, a cubicle which is original to this ḥammām, because we have not found it in any other baths in Granada. We continue to the al-bayt al-sājūn, with the same layout as the Bañuelo. In the service area, the base of the boiler and the underground furnace area are still extant.

# The Alhambra and Granada in the al-Andalus

## c) Baño del Colegio de las Mercedarias

This public bath on Plaza del Padre Suárez square was unknown until 1984 when its remains were discovered during the restoration of the school of Las Madres Mercedarias, which occupies the palace of conde de Villa Alegre and the next-door house on Calle Ballesteros street. This bath was excavated by Cecilio Gómez González and Carlos Vílchez Vílchez in 1985-1986. Although located in the former Jewish quarter of Granada, it was not a ritual Jewish bath or Mikvé, but was undoubtedly a donated asset belonging to a nearby mosque, probably the Aben Gimara mosque. It can be securely dated to the Almohad period (12th-13th centuries) because the extant capitals are the classic Almohad type, rustic but well-crafted, with foliage motifs. The excavation did not find the al-bayt al-maslaj, but it did find part of the al-bayt al-bārid, rectangular, with the vaulted ceiling lost due to building on top of it. After excavation it became the school's washroom area. A small straight-topped door leads to the al-bayt al-waṣṭanī. This is a square room with open galleries on all four sides, each with two horseshoe arches supported by stone columns. Not much of the surrounding galleries remain, displaced by the foundations of the palace and the house next door. But fortunately, the lower part of the domical vault of the central area can still be seen. The floors are marble. Another small door leads to the al-bayt al-sājūn, similar to the hot room of the Bañuelo. Although only a small part has been excavated, there is part of a basin, one of the chimneys for extracting smoke, and the pillars of the al-furn under the floor of this room. These remains of the hot room are now underneath the stage of the school assembly hall. The bath was supplied with water by the Cadí acequia, which filled several nearby cisterns, including one in the courtyard of the palace parallel to the warm room, and a larger one on the other side of Calle Ballesteros street, in the basement of the building opposite.

## d) Baño de la calle del Agua

This bath is located between the famous Calle Agua and Callejón Almona streets of Albayzín (rabaḍ al-Bayyāzīn). It appears to have been built in the 13th century, in the late Almohad or early Nasrid period, and was the largest ḥammām in Granada. Very deteriorated, it is camouflaged among several houses which use it as a dumping ground for junk and rubble, and due to illegal remodelling is now very

# The Alhambra and Granada in the al-Andalus

dilapidated, having lost part of its ceilings, which are domical and have barrel vaults with octagonal and star-shaped openings. We believe the Public Administrations must intervene immediately to expropriate and restore this bath.

The original entrance was in the house at no. 1 on Calle del Agua street. It seems that the al-bayt al-maslaj had already disappeared by the end of the last century, according to Gómez-Moreno, and the entrance went straight into the al-bayt al-bārid, a room like the one in the Bañuelo, and then via a segmental arch to al-bayt al-waṣṭanī, a rectangular room with alcoves on the sides separated by three slightly pointed horseshoe arches supported by columns, which might be the precedent for the same room in the royal bath of Comares palace. The reused capitals were of the caliphal period, brought from Cordoba and Medina Azahara by the Zirids, two of which are on display at the Alhambra Museum, acquired in the systematic looting which began in 1567, the year in which, according to Gómez-Moreno, the baths were dismantled and sold after their use was prohibited in the Pragmatic Sanction, and which continues to this day. The floor consists of large clay tiles. Next, the al-bayt al-sājūn is laid out in the same way as the Bañuelo. One plunge pool, and the footprint of the other, remain. All of the service area has been conserved. The bath was supplied by the acequia of Aynadamar (al-sāqīya al-‘Ayn al-Dama’ or "fuente de las Lágrimas"), the main channel of which ran down Calle del Agua street.

## e) Baño de la Calle Moral Alta (*Hammām al-Fajjārīn* o baño de los Alfareros)

En el solar de la Calle Moral Alta números 18-20, situada en el extremo oriental del antiguo arrabal de los Alfareros (*rabaḍ al-Fajjārīn*), se conservaron hasta 1957 unos baños de la etapa nazarí que fueron derribados para construir un edificio. En 2010 han sido excavados por Taoufik El Amrani y se han recuperado algunos restos, como parte de *al-bayt al-waṣṭanī* y toda *al-bayt al-sājūn* con sus alcobas laterales, y toda la zona de servicio. Esperemos que la Administración garantice que los restos del baño permanezcan visibles para la visita pública.

# The Alhambra and Granada in the al-Andalus

## f) Baño de la Plaza de San Agustín.

In 1991, work to remodel Plaza de San Agustín square, in the area of the old medina of Granada, uncovered the remains of a bath from the Nasrid period (14th-15th centuries). The excavation was directed by Manuel López López, who located the hot room (al-bayt al-sājun) with its lateral basins, the boiler, and the entire structure of pillars supporting the furnace (al-furn). These remains were protected and covered, and the square was restored.

## Poems

“I have been captivated in wonder by the charm of our ḥammām,  
as I imagined that the dawn (falak) appeared;  
the red and white which were above us  
made us think of the cheek of the beloved when she perspires.  
Marvelling at the beauty of this bath, time has tinted the  
skylights (kuwā) of the ceiling with the blushes of twilight.”

Ibn Šuhayd (Cordoba, d. late 11th century) (Original: Spanish translation by Henri Pérès)

“Our ḥammām, says Ibn Baqī, is as roasting hot as the dog days,  
but at the same time it contains  
the living cold (širr) that does no harm.  
Two opposites between which the human body  
experiences a great voluptuousness, like the branch  
that enjoys sunshine and rain together”

Ibn Baqī (Cordoba, d. 1145). (Original: Spanish translation by Henri Pérès)



# The Alhambra and Granada in the al-Andalus

“First a burning, a gentle fire,  
like that felt by any lover,  
which later brings a sea of tears  
whose flow reveals passion.  
As I enter the baths, I resemble  
a lover in the arms of another”

Ibn al-Zaqqāq (Valencia, d. 1135). (Original: Spanish translation by Emilio García Gómez)

“In the centre (one sees) a statue whose appearance,  
as a whole, seduces, and every detail bewitches.  
Her skin is pure white, her cheek  
a polished opal, her face graceful, and her gaze modestly lowered.  
Her waist is as slender as a branch of Persian willow  
watered and nourished in abundance by a fertile land”

Ibn Zaydūn (Cordoba, d. 1070). (Original: Spanish translation by Henri Pérès)

## Quotes from the Quran

“O believers! When you rise up for prayer (al-ṣalāt), wash your faces and your hands up to the elbows, wipe your heads, and wash your feet to the ankles (al-wūdū). And if you are in a state of full impurity, then take a full bath. But if you are ill, on a journey, or have relieved yourselves, or have been intimate with your wives and cannot find water, then purify yourselves with clean earth by wiping your faces and hands (tayyamn). It is not Allah’s Will to burden you, but to purify you and complete His favour upon you, so perhaps you will be grateful.” (Surah Al-Ma’idah - 6 - Quran).