STATION TWO: UMAYYAD/ CORDOBA CALIPHATES

The Umayyad was the second of the four major Islamic caliphates established after the death of Muhammad. The caliphate was centered around the Umayyad dynasty, hailing from Mecca. The Umayyad family had first come to power under the third Caliph. Syria remained the Umayyads’ main power base thereafter, and Damascus was their capital. The Umayyads continued the Muslim conquests, incorporating the Caucasus, Transoxiana, Sind, the Maghreb and the Iberian Peninsula (Al-Andalus) into the Muslim world. At its greatest extent, the Umayyad Caliphate covered more than five million square miles (13,000,000 km²), making it the largest empire the world had yet seen and the seventh largest contiguous empire ever to exist.

At the same time, the Umayyad taxation and administrative practice were widely perceived as absolutist, oppressive and unjust, deviating from the precepts of Islam. Coupled with rivalries between the Arab tribes, their rule was plagued by unrest in the provinces outside Syria, most notably in the Second Muslim Civil War of 680–692 CE and the Berber Revolt of 740–743 CE. During the Second Civil War, leadership of the Umayyad clan shifted from the Sufyanid branch of the family to the Marwanid branch. As the constant campaigning exhausted the resources and manpower of the state, the Umayyads, weakened by the Third Muslim Civil War of 744–747 CE, were finally toppled by the Abbasid Revolution in 750 CE/132 AH. A branch of the family fled across North Africa to Al-Andalus, where they established the Caliphate of Córdoba, which lasted until 1031 before falling due to the Fitna of al-Ándalus.

The Caliphate of Cordoba subsisted three centuries - 756 to 1031 - attaining its highest power and splendour under Abdalrahman the third, surnamed Alnazar, or the prosperous, who reigned in the early part of the tenth century. His dominions included Catalonia and Valencia, Granada and Murcia, Andalusia and New Castile, Portugal and Sicily. Abdalrahman was probably the richest potentate of his age, his revenues amounting to thirteen millions of gold dinars, equal to about six millions pounds sterling, an immense sum in the days of Athelstan, the contemporary king of England.

Spain was conquered by the Muslims in 710-12 (91-3), and ruled, like the other provinces of the Mohammadan empire, by a series of governors appointed by the Omayyad Caliphs, until 756 (138). Among the few members of the Omayyad family who escaped from the general massacre which signalized the accession of the 'Abbasids was 'Abdal-Rahman, a grandson of Hisham, the tenth Omayyad Caliph. After some years of wandering, he took advantage of the disordered state of Spain, which was divided by the jealousies of the Berbers and the various Arab tribes, to offer himself as king. He met with an encouraging response, and landed in Andulusia at the close of 755. In the following year (138) he received the homage of most of Mohammadan Spain, and successfully repelled an invasion of 'Abbasid troops. His successors maintained themselves on the throne of Cordova with varying success against the encroachments of the Christians of the north, and the insurrections of the many factions among their own subjects, for two centuries and a half.
They contented themselves with the titles of Amir and Sultan, until 'Abdal-Rahman in adopted that of Caliph in 929 (317). He was the greatest of the line, and not only exercised absolute sway over his subjects and kept the Christian kings of Leon, Castile and Navarre in check, but warded off the chief danger of Moorish Spain, invasion from Africa, and maintained his authority on the Mediterranean by powerful fleets. After his death, no great Omayyad carried on his work, but the famous minister and general, Almanzor (Al-Mansur), preserved the unity of the kingdom. After this, at the beginning of the eleventh century, Moorish Spain became a prey to factions and adventurers, and a number of petty dynasties arose, who are known in Spanish history as the Reyes de Taifas or Party Kings. Most of these were absorbed by the most distinguished of their number, the cultured house of the 'Abbadids of Seville, who were the leaders of the Spanish Moors against the encroachments of the Christians, until they were forced to summon the Almoravides to their aid, and discovered that they had invited a master instead of an ally.

Cordoba under the Arabs and especially under the dynasty of the Omayyades from 756 to 1031, became one of the wealthiest and most cultured cities of Europe, rising to the dignity of capital of the Caliphate of Cordoba and metropolis of all Moorish Spain. The city of Cordoba, with its palaces and gardens, extended, at that time, twenty Miles along the banks of the Guadalquivir; and contained within its walls two hundred thousand houses, six hundred mosques, and nine hundred public baths. It was during this period that the city was resorted to by students of Arabic learning from all over the world. After its separation as a dependency of the Caliphate of Damascus Cordoba, rose to a point of such importance in Mohammedanism that its mosque, known as the Ceca, rivaled Mecca, and became known, in fact, as the Western Mecca.

Cordoba is said to have been founded by the Phonicians, but was acquired 152 BC by the Romans. Taken by the Goths in the sixth century, it fell in 711 into the hands of the Saracens. At first it was subject to the Caliphate of Damascus, but in 756 the city became independent under 'Abderrahman I, the founder of the dynasty of the Omayyades, whose rule continued till 1031 and embraced all Mohammedan Spain.

Omayyads of Cordoba were the first to divide the authority of the head of the religion. From 912 to 961 Cordoba was the capital of the Caliphate of Cordoba, and the metropolis of Moorish Spain, rivalling in splendor the Eastern Caliphate of Bagdad.

From the ninth century to the twelfth Cordoba was one of the greatest centers of commerce in the world. According to Arabian historians the city at the height of its splendor contained 200,000 houses, 1,000,000 inhabitants, 600 mosques, 80 institutions of learning, and a public library with 600,000 volumes. Such accounts are doubtless exaggerations, but certainly when all was dark over the rest of the Occidental world Cordoba held aloft the light of civilization. After the fall of the caliphate the decline was rapid; the city was taken by Ferdinand III of Castile in 1236.

The finest edifice is the cathedral, once the chief mosque of the "Infidels" and one of the most splendid examples of Moorish architecture. Together with the court, it occupies a site 570 feet by 425 feet, with a bell tower 300 feet in height. It is surrounded by a wall with strong buttresses and was originally both mosque and fortress. The interior is almost a
labyrinth of pillars, for they number some 850, in "various styles and mostly of marble, porphyry, and jasper. The building has suffered considerably through the changes of different epochs, made in the endeavor to convert the mosque into a Christian cathedral.

After Abdalrahman, the empire of Cordoba gradually declined before the encroachments of the Christian kingdoms, till its power was irrecoverably broken at the battle of Medina del Campo, in the beginning of the eleventh century. Jahmed, the last Caliph of the West, was deposed by his rebellious Emirs, who, from the ruins of that mighty empire, erected a number of petty kingdoms, destined to fall successively under the ascendancy of the Christian states.