

Article

The Alhambra: Transformation and Change through Architectural Ceramics

María Elena Díez Jorge ^{1,*}, Ignacio Barrera Maturana ² and Nieves Jiménez Díaz ²

¹ Department of Art history, University of Granada, 18071 Granada, Spain

² Independent Scholar, 18071 Granada, Spain; nbarrema@gmail.com (I.B.M.);
nievesjimenezdiaz@gmail.com (N.J.D.)

* Correspondence: mdiez@ugr.es

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Abstract: In the following paper, we look at the Alhambra from a perspective of architectural ceramics, an essential element in the understanding of the monument. From the Nasrid era onward, glazed ceramic tile mosaics were used to adorn the walls, a style that extended into the Christian conquest, when the palace complex was used as a royal residence. Since then, restoration work has continued to be carried out on the *alicatados* that cover the Alhambra's walls, especially during an intense period in the 19th century, when it was the subject of much interest from Romantic travellers to Granada. A detailed, documented analysis of this work shows the complexity of the palace and fortress complex, helping us to better understand a part of its history. In the following pages, we specifically focus on one room in the Alhambra, the so-called Cuarto Dorado (Golden Room), outlining the preliminary findings of a research project that we are undertaking in association with the University of Granada and the Patronato de la Alhambra y el Generalife (Council of the Alhambra and the Generalife).

Keywords: Alhambra; Cuarto Dorado; architectural ceramics; restoration

1. Introduction

Construction of the Alhambra monumental complex in Granada began during the Nasrid dynasty (1232–1492), once the city was conquered in 1237. During the more than three hundred years of al-Andalus rule, the palace-fortress was extended and renovated. After 1492, building work did not cease with the Christian conquest, as many of the complex's infrastructures were maintained, albeit being adapted to their new needs and uses.

The Alhambra provides us with a vast repertoire of building types, most of which feature painstakingly-detailed glazed ceramic work on the carved or moulded dadoes, chiselled or moulded plaster wall coverings, and polychrome, either magnificent or more simple ceilings. Of these three elements, this study focuses mainly on the architectural ceramics, as they are clearly an inherent part of the Nasrid Alhambra. However, it would be unwise to think that the ceramic mosaic panels or *alicatados* that currently offer such colourful adornment to Nasrid palaces all come from the time of al-Andalus. Replacement work carried out immediately after the Christian conquest, the introduction of new emblems and symbols, adaptations to new uses, and restoration work to recover an image that is more originally Islamic have all meant that these pieces have undergone significant intervention. The study of the Alhambra's architectural ceramics is therefore extremely complex, requiring the consultation of numerous sources. Nevertheless, it affords us a greater understanding of the palace-fortress as it gives us the chance to better appreciate its many vicissitudes, its successes and failures, which have led to the Alhambra we know today.

Fully aware of this importance, in 2016, the Patronato de la Alhambra y Generalife (Council of the Alhambra and the Generalife) entered into an agreement with the University of Granada entitled

“The Alhambra’s Architectural Ceramics”. Its basis was the recognition that this form of artistic expression has undergone many changes over time. For this reason, detailed research was needed into a large part of this material, which today can be seen in the architecture of the monumental complex as well as in the Alhambra Museum’s collections. The study of this material involves the recovery of all the information from the archive, which becomes essential to ensuring the success of the research and it is undertaken rigorously and thoroughly. This aspect was the aim of the signed agreement, the launch of the Alhambra’s architectural ceramics documentary corpus.

The corpus is systematised via a simple database that nevertheless includes complete archival, bibliographical, and image references. As far as the bibliography is concerned, it includes both classical and general works and more recent articles and books that deal specifically with the Alhambra’s architectural ceramics, offering new research perspectives. We have taken information from a number of works, above all from books on the subject, regarding the descriptions of the areas referred to, facilitating bibliographic searches on the current information that is available regarding specific parts of the palace-fortress complex.

As far as the images were concerned, most came from the Council of the Alhambra and the Generalife Archive’s various digital collections, as well as the Council’s library. The most important criterion was the age of the image, although the greatest possible sharpness was also sought in order to better appreciate the various ceramic elements. As far as possible, we have avoided the repetition of images showing similar views of the same scene and which do not provide any new information. We were interested in images that showed spaces that allowed us to analyse changes to the architectural ceramics, in such a way that, for instance, in one we might see ceramic elements with gaps in the design, while in another, these have been filled in with replacement pieces, or also quite the opposite, since both types of examples can be seen in the Alhambra. We did not disregard any image, from the oldest photographs to the most recent, from paintings and engravings from various periods to drawings and plans of both ground layouts and front elevations showing dados.

With regard to the document database, it contains copies of contracts and reports for the restoration of architectural ceramic elements in a number of areas of the complex. To this end, we consulted the archives of the Patronato de la Alhambra y Generalife and specifically its collection from the Fondo del Patronato de la Junta de Andalucía. We are also carefully transcribing and analysing hundreds of files from the aforesaid archive, which give an excellent account of the Alhambra’s history since the 16th century, extracting the most interesting information and making a brief summary that highlights the essence of each of these documents.

There is much still to be done. In the future, we hope to be able to draw up a “map” of the Alhambra’s architectural ceramic pieces that is sound in terms of its originality and chronology.

2. The Alhambra as a Palatine City

The Alhambra was originally a Nasrid palatine city. It was the centre of power and residence of the sultans who made Granada the capital of what was then called Reino de Granada. The art that was produced during the Nasrid period dates principally from 1237 to 1492, corresponding to the years of the occupation and abandonment of Granada. In order to understand Nasrid art, one has to study Granada as a city and its architecture. However, this is not the only area to be analysed, as the dynasty’s art extended to the region of Murcia, to Almería and to Málaga, reaching the Strait of Gibraltar and its strategically important enclaves of Algeciras and Tarifa (Figure 1).

The Alhambra of the 13th century was very different to that of the first half of the 14th century and the early 15th century. Spaces changed with the new building work that each sultan wanted to undertake in order to leave his indelible mark on history (Díez Jorge et al. 2006, pp. 20–32). Above all, the Alhambra was a city and the experience of living within it was as such. This was a city built for power, for the royal family, and their whole entourage. It required the provision of a wide range of domestic services and workshops.



Figure 1. The Ahambra on Sabika hill, the visible manifestation of power, rising strategically and symbolically above the city. © María Elena Díez Jorge, 2014.

The Alhambra is seen as the pinnacle of Nasrid art. Its beauty and splendour were praised by both the Muslims and Christians who set eyes upon it. One of the Alhambra's poets, Ibn al-Yayyab, made special mention of its fine plasterwork, ceramic tile mosaics, and ceilings (Rubiera Mata 1982, pp. 112, 114) (Figure 2). This widespread admiration has been maintained over time, this is particularly the case with Romantic travellers (on different travellers and their vision of the Alhambra, see Galera Andreu 1992). It is true that nineteenth-century historiography took the view that Nasrid art lacked balance and characterised some of it as being chaotic and extravagant, full of fantasy, caprice, and seduction, and essentially designed to satisfy the corporal pleasures of a decrepit court. The Alhambra was described at that time in some sources as an immense pleasure centre, with its gardens and running water, and the folly and despotism of its corrupt rulers in the harem. The role of the palatine city was identified more than political activities with incessant galas and balls, and yet these learned travelers nevertheless brought the Alhambra to light, holding it in great esteem (Díez Jorge 2005).



Figure 2. Arab sources from the Nasrid period already highlighted the quality of work of the master craftsmen in the *alicatados* and plasterwork. Plasterwork and *alicatados* in the Lindaraja balcony, Palace of the Lions. © María Elena Díez Jorge, 2014.

In traditional historiography, Nasrid art was seen as the beginning of a decline of al-Andalus art, as the ongoing vassalage to Castile represented the end of the independence that had characterised periods, such as that of the Umayyad Caliphate in Córdoba. Obviously, not all of the Nasrid period was one of continuous decline. The most stable periods came during times of peace with Castile during the rule of Yusuf I (from 1333 to 1354) and Muhammad V, a time that also saw the height of Nasrid artistic splendour, materialising in the Alhambra's Comares Palace and the Palace of the Lions. This was also a period in which the export of glazed ceramics grew, as did the prestigious silk industry (see Figure 3). On the other hand, the 15th century highlighted the decadence and artistic twilight of the Nasrids, in which the height of abandonment coincided with the rule of Boabdil in 1482 and from 1487 to 1492. Perhaps this contrast of a period of splendour followed by one of decadence, while nonetheless real to a greater or lesser extent, has been exaggerated, based above all on the chronology and attributes assigned to certain parts to the Alhambra. The reality was somewhat more complex. Although a more stable political panorama obviously contributed toward greater artistic production, which was probably, in contrast, drastically reduced due to the lack of money in subsequent times of crisis; it is also true to say that creativity and imagination do not always depend on the prevailing economic situation. Without forgetting the magnificent Alhambra palaces built by Yusuf I and Muhammad V in the 14th century, there were also important contributions made at other times: the Partal, a fine example of open architecture because it includes a portico with balconies that have views to the river Darro and San Pedro and Albaicín quarters, as well as a covered balcony that is accessed from a staircase (for more information about this palace, see Orihuela Uzal 1996, pp. 57–70) and that is attributed to Muhammad III (1302–1309) at a time of uneasiness, with the Alhambra surviving an internal coup, and problems with the Marinids; or the sumptuous Tower of the Princesses (Torre de las Infantas), built under the rule of Muhammad VII (1392–1408) in the early 15th century (see Figure 4). Such works should cause us to question this idea that Nasrid art was uninventive and repetitive, relying too heavily on al-Andalus's past as it has also been proved with other cultural aspects from the Nasrid period, such as poetry (Puerta Vílchez 2000).



Figure 3. There were periods of architectural splendour manifest in the uniqueness of creations such as the Comares Hall. Detail of one of the *alcoba* (in the Andalusí architecture, this is a lateral room which is connected by an arch to the main hall) in the Comares Hall, completely covered by *alicatados* and plasterwork, 14th century. © María Elena Díez Jorge, 2018.



Figure 4. Interior of the Tower of the Princesses, showing fine plasterwork and *alicatados* from the reign of Muhammad VII (1392–1408), considered historiographically to be a period of decadence. © María Elena Díez Jorge, 2014.

Admitting Nasrid art's original forms does not mean that we ignore the imitation of earlier models, nor is it contradictory to recognise artistic multiculturality. Architecturally and artistically, this diversity has not been jointly analysed, although scattered data in a great deal of the existing research constantly point to this being the possible result of the influence of Christian kingdoms in the way that the Partal palace opens to the outside, in the cloister-like forms of the Court of the Lions (Patio de los Leones), and in the paintings in the Kings' Hall (Sala de los Reyes), which have been the source of so many fascinating hypotheses regarding cultural relations at the time (Robinson and Pinet 2008).

Having said this, we should bear in mind that as we walk through the Alhambra today, not all we see is Nasrid. Specialists have attempted to discern the provenance of the architectural and stylistic forms, as well as highlighting the presence of inter-relationships, loans, and exchanges. We should view the various interventions and repairs in such a way that admits the fact that at some point there may have been misinterpretations of how things were during the Nasrid period, or attempts to give the work what was regarded as a "more Islamic" air. One time of unquestionable importance was right after the conquest of the Alhambra by the Catholic Monarchs in 1492, as the Christian forces decided to maintain the complex as a palatine city. The site of the Alhambra makes it a visual and symbolic point of reference, as well as inspiring the admiration and respect of the Catholic Monarchs for this place (Díez Jorge 1998). One element on which the repairs and interventions were well-documented from the outset are the glazed ceramic tiles or the *alicatados* (see Figure 5).

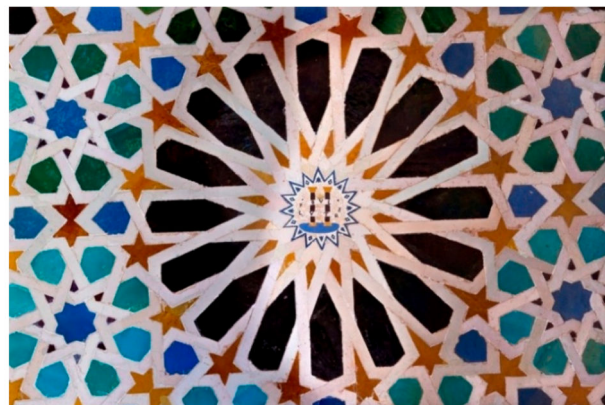


Figure 5. From the outset, there are records of repairs, retouching and other interventions on the glazed ceramics, especially the *alicatados*, as in the case of this dado in the Mexuar, which features the Plus Ultra symbol from the times of Charles V. © María Elena Díez Jorge, 2018.

3. The Alhambra's Architectural Ceramics

Within this world of splendour without which it is impossible to understand the Alhambra, architectural ceramics played a fundamental role. Fabrics and carpets in vivid colours, polychrome plasterwork, gold and blue ceilings, objects replete with metallic reflections, and, everywhere, brightly coloured shining glazed pieces that were used from the floor to the rafters.

Floors combined terracotta tiles with small glazed pieces known as *olambrillas*. Floors also featured *almatrayas*, a series of glazed ceramic pieces which generally formed a rectangle before the main door to a house or other rooms therein. The Alhambra still has the remains of these Nasrid *almatrayas* combined with terracotta tiles, although sometimes the glazed ceramic pieces are missing, as is the case with the houses alongside the Gate of the Seven Floors (Puerta de los Siete Suelos, see Figure 6). However, the Alhambra, as a royal seat and centre of power, had a flooring that is rarely found elsewhere, due to its cost and the techniques involved, such as the ceramic tiles, which are currently on display at the Alhambra Museum, featuring figurative elements dated as being from the 14th century and that seem to have been used in the Queen's Dressing Room tower (Torre del Peinador de la Reina) and the Alijares Palace. Similar pieces from the Alhambra can be found in other collections, such as that pertaining to the Instituto Valencia de Don Juan (Nebreda Martín 2016, p. 530 et seq.), which also includes a ceramic panel known as the Fortuny tile which some researchers claim was found in a house on the Acera del Darro (Nebreda Martín 2016, p. 565) and that is usually interpreted as being from the base of a door frame (Marinetti Sánchez 2000b). Dadoes and column bases also feature glazed ceramics, giving the impression that some parts of the Alhambra were covered in bright colourful glass carpets.



Figure 6. Reconstructed *almatraya* from the Nasrid period with missing glazed ceramic pieces from one of the houses alongside the Gate of the Seven Floors (Puerta de los Siete Suelos). © María Elena Díez Jorge, 2017.

On the walls, the glazed ceramic mosaics appear in the dadoes, the often decorated bottom third of the walls, with a wide range of techniques and designs used. Traditionally, during the different phases of Andalusí art, dadoes received a lot of attention, and not only in palaces, but also in more humble abodes, with their simple geometric motifs or beautifully intricate designs featuring intertwined loops and plant elements (García Granados 2014). The Alhambra also features painted dadoes from the Nasrid era, such as those in the Court of the Harem (Patio del Harén) in the Palace of the Lions, or in the latrine near the Hall of the Boat (Sala de la Barca) in the Comares Palace (see Figure 7). However, undoubtedly, it was the glazed ceramic mosaic tiles, especially the *alicatados*, which were used in the most formal of rooms, as in the 14th century this was an expensive technique that, in general,

although not always, was reserved for more ostentatious places. Some columns appear covered in *alicatado* pieces, making real what had seemed impossible, given that it meant having to cut the pieces to fit a curved surface (see Figure 8). As far as we are concerned, for the specific case of al-Andalus, we have only seen this type of *alicatado* on a curved surface in the Alhambra, although this does not mean that there were not any other ones that we could eventually find. There are capitals made from glazed ceramics that evidently could not withstand heavy loads as they were hollow, and which played a more decorative role. Some of these capitals have become well-known through publications (Marinetti Sánchez 2000a), although the Alhambra Museum's collection has other examples that we have been able to see, some of which are very small fragments of unknown origin (Alhambra Museum, refs. 3815 and 105558). However, they speak to us of the Alhambra in a very different way to how we see the complex today, as, in general, these pieces cannot be seen in situ.



Figure 7. Painted dadoes from the Nasrid period from the western side of the latrine in the Hall of the Boat (Sala de la Barca) in the Comares Palace. © María Elena Díez Jorge, 2017.



Figure 8. Columns faced with *alicatado* pieces, cut in a curve. Comares Palace, 14th century. © María Elena Díez Jorge, 2018.

There are more pieces in the Alhambra Museum collection, such as the glazed ceramic latticework (Marinetti Sánchez 2000b), while others are still visible to any visitor, such as the *sebka* panels on the Justice Gate (Puerta de la Justicia) or the *cuerda seca*¹ on the spandrels on either side of the arch of the Wine Gate (Puerta del Vino) (see Figure 9). We can also mention the tiled roofs that could combine various colours or the vaulted arches of the Nasrid baths, whose skylights are made from glazed ceramic. The vaulted arches of the Comares baths have recently been restored by the architect Pedro Salmerón (between October 2014 and July 2017), while the ceramic skylights, among other pieces, have been returned to their former glory by the restorers María Dolores Blanca López and Lourdes Blanca López. Nonetheless, these are not the only glazed ceramic skylights in the Alhambra, as others have been conserved that are almost complete (Alhambra Museum, ref. 86807) or in fragments (ref. 124440, ref. 124441, ref. 124442, ref. 124444, ref. 12448, ref. 124450, ref. 80200, ref. 87877, ref. 87881, ref. 87882, ref. 87904, ref. 81906, ref. 87911, ref. 87913, ref. 87915, ref. 87916, ref. 87917, ref. 87918, ref. 87931, ref. 87886, ref. 87897, ref. 97927, and ref. 91243). They come from the baths at the current Parador de San Francisco hotel, a former Nasrid palace, while others are of unknown origin (see Figure 10).



Figure 9. *Cuerda seca* ceramics on the spandrels at the Wine Gate (Puerta del Vino). © María Elena Díez Jorge, 2014.



Figure 10. Remains of various skylights from the Nasrid baths in the Alhambra, now in the Alhambra Museum. © María Elena Díez Jorge, 2017.

¹ The most frequent *cuerda seca* technique is mainly based in drawing the contours of the motif with a mixture of grease and manganese, which prevents the colours from mixing when they are melted in the furnace.

The use of architectural ceramics in the Islamic world is wide and varied in terms of the techniques, materials and colours used (DeGeorge and Porter 2001). In the case of Nasrid architecture, in the main areas reserved for the nobility, it is worth mentioning the use of *alicatados* on the dadoes. Traditionally it has been said that *alicatados* (*zillij* or *zellij* in Arabic) could already be found in the Maghreb and al-Andalus in the 12th and 13th centuries, as can still be seen, for example, in Marrakech, both on the Kutubbiyah minaret, which uses turquoise green and white tiling, and in the *qasba* (Benassa 1992). Previously, for example, during the Umayyad Caliphate, *tessera* and *opus sectile* were more commonly used in place of *alicatados*. The best known use of the *alicatado* technique flourished in the late 13th and early 14th centuries, appearing simultaneously in a number of regions, including Granada. The variety of the work in the Alhambra has been studied at length by a number of academics who have analysed in great depth the complex designs and narratives that can be found there (Pérez Gómez et al. 2007; García Granados 2014; Martínez Vela 2017), as well as the wide range of colours used (Bush 2011), although an accurate chronology of them has yet to be made. In the case of the *alicatado* works, and depending on the design in question, a craftsman would cut the pieces (Figure 11) from a fired and glazed monochrome sheet and place them face down almost like a jigsaw puzzle, which is based on the design and the colour used. The individual elements were set into a panel with mortar and then the panel was attached to the wall with the mortar as well.

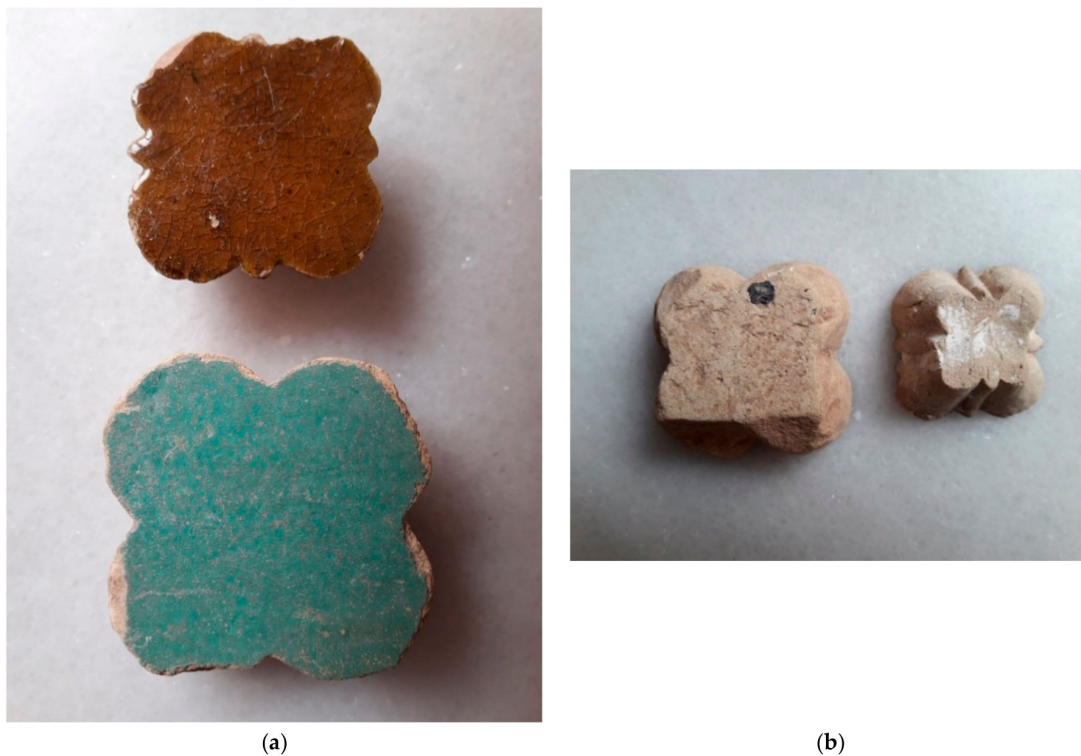


Figure 11. The front (a) and reverse (b) of *alicatado* pieces of unknown origin. © Private collection.

Nevertheless, as we have previously mentioned, other techniques were also used. Among these is that of *incrustación*, which is very specific to the Alhambra (Sánchez Gómez et al. 2018), which consisted of producing glazed tiles that were then encrusted into these other glazed ceramic pieces.

The technique of *alicatado* continued to be used, with certain variations, after the Christian conquest, making the study of architectural ceramics in the Alhambra all the more complex and rewarding. Some examples of this work can be seen at the Architectural Ceramics exhibition at the Alhambra Museum, which opened on 18 May 2018 and will run until 21 April 2019.

Since the Christian conquest, there have been a number of repairs to and other intervention on the Nasrid pieces, as well as new additions. Some are easily recognisable, as they employ techniques

such as those used on the *cuenca* or *arista*² tiles that were more common in the late 15th century, and, above all, in the 16th century; or else because they use motifs from the 16th century onward (see Figure 12). However, in other cases, it is difficult to situate them chronologically. It is this aspect that has, in part, been the motivation for this project. One of the Alhambra's most vulnerable areas has always been its *alicatados*, as various pieces have been replaced without a reliable study of their chronology. This has meant that it is not unusual to find Nasrid mosaic tiles mixed with later pieces, the result of repairs made not only long ago, but also more recently. Fortunately, in the present day, interventions are more carefully controlled. This complexity can clearly be seen in the case of the numerous repairs and other interventions that have been made to the Comares baths throughout history (Díez Jorge 2007). Nonetheless, it is also evident in other pieces, such as some of the repairs made to the Mexuar (Sánchez Gómez et al. 2018).



Figure 12. Detail of *alicatados* in the Comares Baths, built in the 14th century, although featuring some ceramic pieces from the 16th century which are clearly visible in the *arista* tiles from this period bearing the initials of Plus Ultra. © María Elena Díez Jorge, 2014.

As a result, what we find today in the Alhambra is Nasrid *alicatado* panels that have been altered since the Christian conquest, pieces from the 16th century mixed with others from the Nasrid period, 19th century interventions that have invented new designs and the replacement of pieces with the sole criterion that the gaps should not be visible to visitors. A complex situation, in other words.

It should be remembered that, after the Christian conquest, architectural ceramics were used in numerous buildings in the Kingdom of Granada. This was not only the case in the Alhambra, which passed into the hands of the Christian royal household, but also in numerous other instances throughout the city, in the churches and other civil buildings in which mainly *arista* tiles and *olambrillas* were used in the floors, on the landings on staircases, dadoes in hallways and other rooms, altars, bell towers, and so on. In the case of the Alhambra, the problem is discerning between work from the Nasrid and the Christian periods, as very often Nasrid pieces were reused or copied (Gómez-Moreno Calera 2000).

Based on over 1300 documents that we have consulted to date, the procedure followed throughout the 16th and 17th centuries tended to be that when the Alhambra's royal works needed materials,

² In this technique, the decoration is printed with a metal or wooden matrix on raw ceramics, so that the resulting edges become the contours of the motif and prevent the different colours from being mixed in the furnace.

such as glazed tiles, bricks, and roof tiles, at the behest of the master builder and his officials, they would be put out to tender, which would be announced for days before in the city's public squares by the town crier, accompanied by the Alhambra's scribe who would attest to the proceedings. As far as the roof tiles and bricks were concerned, the town crier might be accompanied by the scribe and the bailiff to announce the tender in the villages where there were brick and roof tile kilns, nearly always in Gambia la Grande and Pago del Campo del Fresno. Very often, when there was a pressing need for these materials, they would be directly embargoed, ordering the brick and tile makers to take them to the Alhambra, where they would later be paid at the going rate in the city.

The bills of materials and promissory notes from the period also document the payments that were made for the roof tiles and the *rasilla* and *mazari*³ bricks to be used in the Alhambra and delivered to the site manager. In most cases, there is no record of the location where the materials had to be sent. Daily and weekly payments were also documented in the receipts and payment notes given to the brick cutters, scrapers, and layers, as well as the floor layers and wall liners; in all cases, they were the master craftsmen, the journeymen, and the labourers.

From the late 16th century to the early 17th century there are letters and deeds of obligation to master tile makers that set out the stipulated delivery and payment conditions, as well as records of the warrants and orders given to master craftsmen and senior journeymen in the tenders, reverse auctions, reserved bids, prices pre-offered by the buyer, new tenders, and successful bids.

Payments were normally made in three or four installments. The first two or three of these were advance payments, with the first corresponding to a third of the total sum established in the contract, allowing the craftsmen to purchase their materials. The second advance payment (and third, if required) would pay a further third when the materials had been delivered to the site manager at the Alhambra, with the final payment made when all the materials cited in the contract were delivered. On occasion, the materials were not delivered to the Alhambra, but taken there by mule teams.

There is documentation referring to inventories from various years detailing the tiles that were kept in the stores. Of special interest here are the declarations made by master craftsmen inspecting the spaces in the Alhambra, highlighting the lack of these glazed tiles specifying with the *vara castellana* (0.83 m) on the *alicatado* panels.

It is clear to see that there was incessant activity with regard to the Alhambra's architectural ceramics for centuries. By way of example, here we have our case study of the Cuarto Dorado.

4. Case Study: The Cuarto Dorado and "Restoration Work" on Architectural Ceramics

The Cuarto Dorado tends to be dated as being from the 14th century. It is especially associated with the reign of Sultan Muhammad V, as some of its inscriptions make specific reference to him (Puerta Vilchez 2010, p. 64). Its name comes from the gold colour that characterised the polychrome ceiling of the main room and some of its corridors from after the Christian conquest (Díez Jorge et al. 2006, p. 137). Therefore, whether it is in fact prior to or after the building of the Comares facade in 1369, it is nevertheless an outbuilding of the Comares Palace. There have been a number of hypotheses regarding the room's use during the Nasrid period: the room in front of the Comares Palace facade in which the sultan received his subjects for a public audience or in which he imparted justice, with the sentences that he passed duly transcribed (Gómez-Moreno González 1892, vol. II, p. 52). In the opinion of Leopoldo Torres Balbás, it was a room used by Muslim women, due to its scant decoration (Torres Balbás 1951). Fernández Puertas provides a probable hypothesis with his view that it was used as an anteroom in which visitors waited before entering the palace, in other words, a transitory space between the Alhambra's public and residential areas (Fernández Puertas 1980,

³ The differences between both types of bricks are not clear. *Mazari* bricks are usually identified with a $28 \times 14 \times 4$ cm size, while *rasilla* bricks are usually $30/33 \times 15 \times 4/6$ cm. In view of the documentation we have used in this paper, *rasilla* bricks are normally found in combination with *olambrillas*; and, they are, therefore, specifically used for flooring.

pp. 16–20). We should not forget to mention Olga Bush’s interesting theory that takes the view that if the Comares facade fronted the throne and it was used for royal audiences, “the precinct of the Cuarto Dorado might well be inserted into that long historical trajectory, not only as a site where architectural decoration resembles textiles and textiles join architectural decoration in the creation of a harmonious space, but also where architectural decoration took on textile functions and textiles functioned like architecture” (Bush 2018, p. 214), giving way to a hybrid form that she describes as “textile architecture” (Bush 2018, pp. 166–227).

The Cuarto Dorado consisted of several parts, of which today we can identify at least the following: one room, which the Christians called the “Sala Dorada” (which also means “golden room”), also known as the “Sala del Bosque” or Forest Room; a portico between the walls of the Mexuar and the Comares Palace; and the Cuarto Dorado court, incorrectly called “The Mosque Court” (see Figure 13).



Figure 13. Patio of the Cuarto Dorado precinct with the portico on the north side, Alhambra. © María Elena Díez Jorge, 2011.

4.1. Works Documented between 1492 and 1631

After mid-March 1492, a number of adaptation and restoration work was done on the Cuarto Dorado in order to convert it into a place of residence for the Christian monarchs, creating new rooms on a second floor. What appears in official records as the “Cuarto Nuevo del Mexuar” or “New Mexuar Room” has been identified as being the Cuarto Dorado, containing information on painters and gilders from the late 15th century onward (Domínguez Casas 1993, pp. 448–49; Vilar Sánchez 2007, pp. 49–50). The painters Juan Casto and Jorge Fernández are attributed with having done the polychrome work in this room, finishing it in 1499. The gilding was undertaken by Alonso de Tordesillas and Juan Vizcaíno y Dionisio (Domínguez Casas 1993, p. 93, naming the painter as Casco instead of Casto; Vilar Sánchez 2007, pp. 86 y 93). The master stonemason was Diego Martínez, with Fernando de las Maderas, the master builder (Domínguez Casas 1993, p. 93). In 1500, work on the spiral staircase that ascends to the Cuarto Dorado chapel was recorded (Vilar Sánchez 2007, p. 121).

There was clearly intense activity from 1492 onward in order to adapt it for use by Queen Isabella I of Castile (Vilar Sánchez 2007, p. 140; Domínguez Casas 2017, p. 172). It was incorrectly said that

during the reign of Emperor Charles V the Cuarto Dorado was used to accommodate the queen consort Germaine of Foix (1488–1538), Ferdinand II of Aragon's second wife. In his 1892 guide, Manuel Gómez-Moreno González mistakenly wrote that the rooms near the Cuarto Dorado were for Queen Germaine, although he later rectified this claim and corrected himself, saying that it was actually used by Empress Isabella of Portugal. When he wrote about the Machuca Room, he correctly said that this was Germaine of Foix's room. Despite having corrected himself, the error persisted to such an extent that Emilio García Gómez claimed that the Cuarto Dorado had hosted "the obese, vulgar Germaine" (García Gómez 1988, p. 178), as did Antonio Fernández Puertas (Fernández Puertas 1980, p. 11). Germaine of Foix actually stayed in the Machuca Court area, according to the Alhambra Royal Household Plan in the archives of the Madrid Royal Palace (Díez Jorge 2005. See the study on the ground plan in Gámiz Gordo 2008, pp. 40–50).

In the period of Emperor Charles V (1500–1558), this area was worked on in order to prepare it for use by Empress Isabella of Portugal during her stay in Granada in the summer of 1526, although she would never actually occupy the room (Díez Jorge 2002). At this time, some of the entries and payments that we have come across are overly generic, recording numerous glazed ceramic pieces and other material often without specify where they were to be used. On other occasions their final destination was cited. In particular, we have found wide-ranging mentions of the Cuarto Dorado in this regard. We do not intend to go into greater detail in this paper in order to not distract from its main purpose, it is enough to say that there is evidence that this was an area of the Alhambra that had considerable and meticulous work done on it. For example, in March 1537, payments were made for locks and eyebolts for the Cuarto Dorado, in April 1541 vermilion was purchased for the Cuarto Dorado's shutters and in May of the same year, a filer was paid for work on its doors. Other payments were made for more substantial work to plaster the Cuarto Dorado in March and April 1539, at the same time that Francisco Sánchez was retiling its floor (APAG. L-2-2. Appendix A).

In 1590, there was an explosion in a gunpowder magazine near the Alhambra that affected the Cuarto Dorado, among other areas. The document that describes the damage caused is worth reading, as it clearly mentions a specific golden room (Sala Dorada) on the ground floor of the Cuarto Dorado, which means that the Cuarto Dorado referred at that time to a group of rooms and corridors, one of them being gilded. References to the damage include the roofs, partition walls, and windows. There is no mention of the *alicatados*, although we can assume that some of them formed part of the partition walls. Nevertheless, the payment records do not specify the need to replace glazed ceramic pieces, which are in fact specified in the case of Comares (Bermúdez Pareja and Olmedo 1966). Either they were not broken, or the damage was minimum, or else, and we have to consider this possibility given the information that we currently have, they were unaffected.

During the first quarter of the 17th century, the Cuarto Dorado was subjected to a number of interventions both on its flooring and the facings in the main hall, as well as in other areas that are close by. The floor of the Sala Dorada was retiled on two separate occasions. The first of these times, probably during the first few months of 1630, is cited in an entry in the accounts dated 22 February 1630 of the *Libro diario de entradas en arcas y salidas de caudales para pago de las obras reales de la Alhambra*, in which reference is made to a payment of 680 *maravedíes* from the Alhambra's funds to Francisco Varela, a floor tiler, for work that he carried out in the Sala Dorada (APAG. 1630, February, 22. Libro 15. Appendix A).

From January to March 1631 the floor of the Sala Dorada was retiled a second time. The tiling from the previous year was perhaps not entirely suitable for its purpose due to the material employed, or to a rapid deterioration in its condition as a result of bad use, since, at the start of the following year, the floor was relaid using *rasilla* bricks. This is stated in payment receipts for a thousand bricks to Juan de Rueda, who transported them from Granada to the site of the royal works; and, in the work carried out by Juan de Puebla, brick scraper, who prepared the materials for their use in the Sala Dorada and on the staircase. In the payment record of 4 January 1631 is an entry for seven and a half *reales* to Juan

de Puebla, brick scraper, for three hundred *rasilla* bricks that he had scraped for the floor of the Sala Dorada and the staircase (APAG. 1631, January, 4. L-84. Appendix A).

The following week, *rasilla* bricks were still being scraped for use in the Sala Dorada. In the payment record of 11 January 1631 there is a record of a payment to Juan de Puebla for four hundred *rasilla* bricks that he had scraped for the floor of the Sala Dorada (APAG. 1631, January, 11. L-84. See Appendix A). The payment note for the next day states that the floor of the Sala Dorada was being relaid and the walls replastered, as well as the *olambre* tiling on the staircase used to enter the Sala Dorada from Comares and a section of the Comares hall “the place of dais and bed of the Moorish king”. The payment was made to Francisco Varela, the tiling and flooring master craftsman (APAG. 1631, January, 11. L-84. See Appendix A). Over the following days, scraping continued on a further four hundred *rasilla* bricks to be used on the floor of the Sala Dorada, while two pounds of clincher nails were bought to position and set the linings to the its walls (APAG. 1631, January, 18. L-84. See Appendix A). At this time, the use of nails to position tiled panels was common. It is clearly specified that the payments to the master craftsman Francisco Varela were for the flooring and lining of the wall with glazed tile panels. The record also shows for the week of 25 January 1631: to Juan de Puebla, three hundred *rasilla* bricks that had been scraped that week to floor the Sala Dorada and to Francisco Varela for his positioning of the tile panels (APAG. 1631, January, 25. L-84. See Appendix A).

In early February, work continued on the flooring with *olambre* tiling and the lining of the wall with tiles in the Sala Dorada, on the staircase and at the entrance to the Comares Hall (APAG. 1631, February, 1. L-84. See Appendix A). During the first week of February 1631, the final payment was made for the tiles that had been cut and fixed to the walls of the Sala Dorada, for the cutting and positioning of two hundred ordinary *rasilla* bricks and for the two hundred and eight *olambres* that were added to the floor of the staircase landing that leads from Comares to the Sala Dorada and the two hundred and fifteen *mazarí* bricks that were cut and positioned in a part of the Comares Hall. The record for 8 February 1631 mentions payment of 2540 *maravedíes* to the master craftsman Francisco Varela for the tiles that he had cut and fixed to the lining of the walls in the Sala Dorada, broken down as follows: three thousand, four hundred, and nine tile pieces, at three *blancas*⁴ each, 5173 *maravedíes* in total; the cutting of eight hundred glazed *cintas*⁵ and square tiles at two *maravedíes* each, totalling 1600 *maravedíes*; and, the cutting of one hundred *frailes*⁶ tiles used to trim these walls at four *maravedíes* each, totalling 400 *maravedíes*. Likewise, 800 *maravedíes* were also paid for the cutting and positioning of two hundred ordinary *rasilla* bricks at four *maravedíes* each and 416 *maravedíes* for the two hundred and eight *olambres* that were added to the floor of the staircase landing that leads from Comares to the Sala Dorada, at two *maravedíes* each.

We have documented further payments that we shall not be detailing here but will simply mention in passing: in the second week of February 1631 for flooring in the Sala Dorada and the staircase leading down to it (APAG. 1631, February, 15. Libro 15. See Appendix A); in the third week of February for flooring in the Sala Dorada and sections of the staircase leading to it (APAG. 1631, February, 22. L-84. See Appendix A); in the first week of March 1631, six hundred *rasilla* bricks were bought, some of which were scraped for use on the floor of the Sala Dorada; ten glazed *alizares* were bought for the entrance door to the Sala Dorada, at a cost of 24 *maravedíes* each, paid to the master tiler Pedro Tenorio (APAG. 1631, March, 1. L-84. See Appendix A). In March, there are further references to the flooring of the Sala Dorada and on the steps leading down to the vaults (APAG. 1631, March, 1. L-84. See Appendix A); in the first week of March 1631, two hundred *rasilla* bricks were scraped for use on the floor of the staircase leading to the Sala Dorada from the main vault (APAG. 1631. March, 8. L-84. See Appendix A); in the second week of July 1631, three painted *alizares* painted with *caracolillos* on

⁴ *Blanca* was a coin that was equivalent to half a *maravedí*.

⁵ *Cintas* are long and narrow pieces that were used to frame the tile panels, but this word also makes reference to the fine and narrow pieces that were employed to form the stars in the motifs of the *alicatados*.

⁶ So far we have not been able to identify this type of tiles, but it is important to remark that they were used in the finishings.

two sides were bought from the master tiler Pedro Tenorio for two sections of a doorway giving onto a chamber leading to the staircase to the Sala Dorada, at a price of one *real* and a *cuartillo*⁷ each (APAG. 1631, July, 12. L-84. See Appendix A).

We do not know what architectural ceramics from the Nasrid period there was in the Cuarto Dorado after the Christian conquest in 1492, neither do we have conclusive evidence of what glazed ceramics were there prior to the gunpowder magazine explosion in 1590. Nevertheless, it is clear that, from the information and figures we have cited in this paper, the Sala Dorada was either completely or substantially replastered in the 1630s. Almost one hundred years later we can see that a section of the tiles around one of the Sala Dorada's grilled windows is missing. In his *Reconocimiento de las Casas Reales de los Reyes Moros* ("Exploring the Royal Palaces of the Moorish Kings") from 6 April 1724, Gaspar Barona Muñoz, overseer and accountant for royal buildings, mentions that the Cuarto Dorado lacked *tres cuartas de largo y media vara de ancho*⁸ of a section of the tiles (APAG. 1724, April, 6. L-165-19. See Appendix A). However, this is not the end of the story.

4.2. Replacements of the Alicatados in the 19th Century

Among the romantic travellers who visited Granada and the Alhambra in the 19th century was James Cavanah Murphy, an Irish architect and antiquary. He visited the city in 1802, returning to England seven years later. Among the various engravings that are dedicated to different parts of the Alhambra published in 1813 (Murphy 1813), is Plate XXVIII, *Elevation of a small portico near the chapel*, referring to the front elevation of the portico prior to the Cuarto Dorado (see Figure 14). The engraving also shows the three entry arches to the main room through the portico, as well as the mullioned central window on the north wall. His illustration does not show the stone ledges below the window on either side. Both the portico and the interior of the Cuarto Dorado feature *alicatado* dados. In the latter case, these are visible through the small lateral arches that provide access to the rooms and about which Murphy says "... it is one of the best finished parts of the palace: the delicate execution of its variegated mosaics ... " (Murphy 1813). They all feature the same geometric design with ceramic tile mosaics pieces of differing colours and shapes (see Figure 15). The larger pieces are octagons with a black *sino*⁹ in the centre, around which there are four hexagonal pieces. The intersection of two of these figures forms white crosses with a central black diamond at the top and bottom. The top part of the Cuarto Dorado's dados feature strips of black crenellated designs, although the portico does not. This geometric motif on the dados, here without the *sinos*, can also currently be found in the Comares Hall. Finally, the dado that we see in the illustration under the mullioned window (see Figure 16) seems to be formed by a section of three-pointed helixes, which are popularly known as *pajaritas* or bow ties, in other words, the same decoration that can be seen in the northern portico of the Comares Court.

⁷ The *cuartillo* is a coin that was equivalent to a fourth of a *real*.

⁸ Approximately 0.62 cm long and 0.41 cm.

⁹ *Sinos* are star shapes, normally with eight points, which are the result of rotating two squares 45°, forming a *rueda de lazo*, or an interconnected wheel design.



Figure 14. Elevation showing the portico and the Cuarto Dorado (Plate XXVIII). Drawing by James Cavanah [Murphy](#) (1813). © Archivo del Patronato de la Alhambra y Generalife, Fondo Romanones, A-5-3-13.

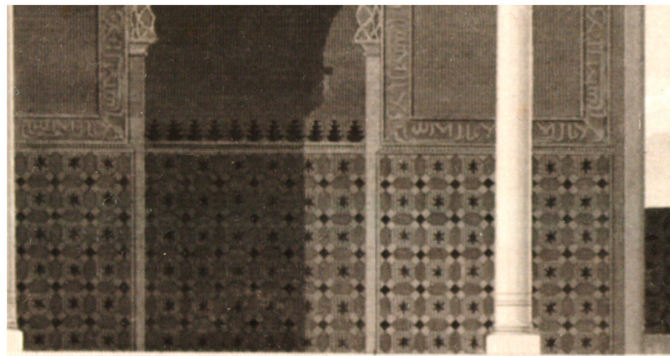


Figure 15. Detail of the *alicatados* on the portico and north wall of the Cuarto Dorado (Plate XXVIII). Drawing by James Cavanah [Murphy](#) (1813). © Archivo del Patronato de la Alhambra y Generalife, Fondo Romanones, A-5-3-13.

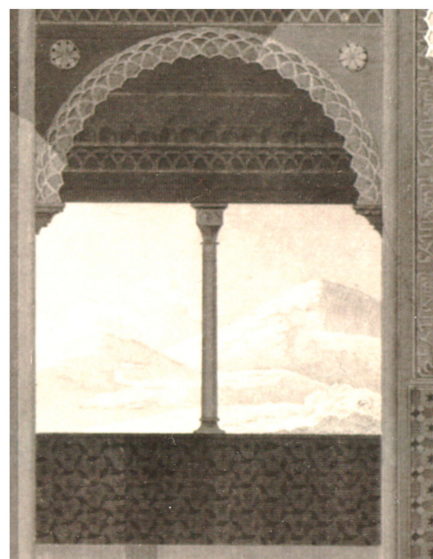


Figure 16. Detail of the *alicatados* beneath the mullioned window in the Cuarto Dorado (Plate XXVIII). Drawing by James Cavanah [Murphy](#) (1813). © Archivo del Patronato de la Alhambra y Generalife, Fondo Romanones, A-5-3-13.

If we look carefully at Murphy’s illustration, we can see how he reinterprets reality by altering different architectural elements, for instance, the four capitals of two different types that still occupy the portico today are wrongly interpreted by Murphy as being of the same type; and, the two plaster latticed windows above the central arch giving onto the Cuarto Dorado become three in the illustration. As we have said, the engraving lacks the side ledges beneath the mullioned window, and finally, the elevation ends in an imaginary overhanging roof that features the *gāliba* or Nasrid motto painted eight times upon the wood. It would be fair to say that the *alicatado* section that we have already described and that is shown in Murphy’s drawing differs completely from what we can see in the Alhambra today. The dadoes are currently framed by green *cintas* that are made up of small square pieces arranged in a diamond shape, creating concentric bands of contrasting colours (black, white, honey-coloured, green, blue, and purple). All of these are crowned by black crenellated wainscots, except in the lower part of the mullioned window with the side ledges (see Figures 17 and 18).

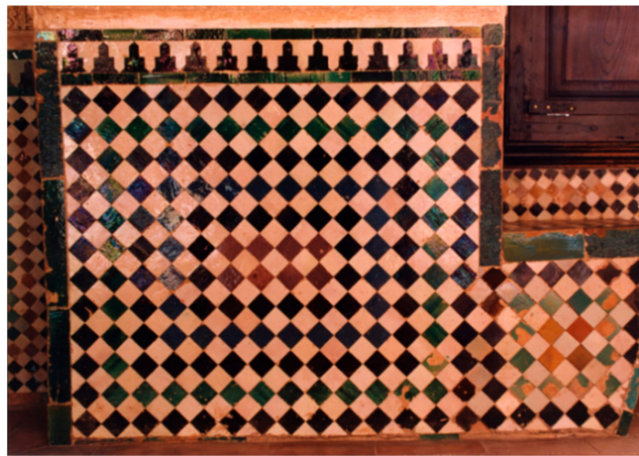


Figure 17. *Alicatado* panel on the north wall of the Cuarto Dorado in 1994. © Archivo del Patronato de la Alhambra y Generalife, Photograph Collection, F-14590.



Figure 18. *Alicatado* panels beneath the mullioned window in the Cuarto Dorado in 1994. © Archivo del Patronato de la Alhambra y Generalife, Photograph Collection, F-14589.

These differences could be due to an intentional search for symmetry as well as a greater “Islamisation” of the space by Murphy—an idea that we have already seen in the case of the *alicatados* in the Comares Baths (Díez Jorge 2007, pp. 34–36)—removing those architectural elements of a more Christian aesthetic that were added in the late 15th and 16th centuries (two arches on pillars, a spiral staircase, gothic windows, a wooden gallery, etc.), which were still present when Murphy visited, as we can see in the drawings by John Frederick Lewis from 1833–1834 (Lewis 1835) (see Figure 19).



Figure 19. North wall of the court of the Cuarto Dorado with architectural elements from the 15th and 16th centuries. Drawing by John Frederick Lewis (1833–1834). © Archivo del Patronato de la Alhambra y Generalife, Photograph Collection, F-006625.

Focusing on the ceramic dadoes in the areas we are looking at here, we have already seen that motifs drawn by Murphy differ completely from what we see today. In contrast, the aforementioned drawing by Lewis offers a small fragment of *alicatado* of a similar design to what we can see today below the mullioned window. In this drawing, we can just about make out blue and black tiles, arranged in a diamond shape and in bands (see Figure 20). As far as the portico is concerned, it is shown without the ceramic dado.

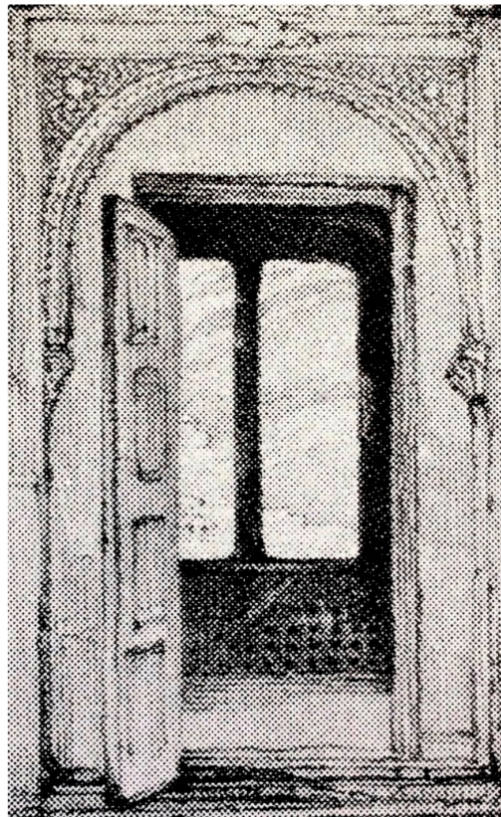


Figure 20. Detail of the *alicatado* beneath the mullioned window in the Cuarto Dorado. Drawing by John Frederick Lewis (1833–1834). © Archivo del Patronato de la Alhambra y Generalife, Photograph Collection, F-006625.

Once again, paintings, drawings, and photographs from the second half of the 19th century—for example, in the photograph entitled *Puerta del Patio Machuca* (“Door to the Machuca Court”) by Jean Laurent, dated 1871 (see Figure 21)—we can see the aforementioned section of *alicatado* from Lewis’s drawing beneath the mullioned window with its side ledges, and even the dadoes immediately to the left and right of these ledges, as seen in photographs by Rafael Señán and González (see Figure 22), as well as in a painting signed by M. Medina published by Jesús Bermúdez Pareja (Bermúdez Pareja 1965, p. 104, Lám. XII). We can therefore say that it is possible that the ceramic dado that we see today under the mullioned window was in place prior to 1833–1834.



Figure 21. Portico and Cuarto Dorado before dismantling the 16th century arches. Photograph by Jean Laurent, 1871. © Archivo del Patronato de la Alhambra y Generalife, Photograph Collection, F-005147.



Figure 22. Portico and Cuarto Dorado before dismantling the 16th century arches. The photograph shows the *alicatado* work below the mullioned window, looking toward the east. Photograph by Rafael Señán y González (undated). © Archivo del Patronato de la Alhambra y Generalife, Photograph Collection, F-038828.

4.3. Works Documented between 1910 and 1971

Among the conservation work undertaken during Modesto Cendoya Busquet's time, in 1910, it is stated that "The flooring of the Cuarto Dorado was lowered to its original level in August. The following month, the wall in this section was repaired". In January 1911, "the wall of the Cuarto Dorado was shored up, removing the struts from the section repaired in 1910 [. . .] From October to the end of the year, the arabesques from the Cuarto Dorado and its Gallery were repaired. They were replaced in December. At the same time, the floor of the Cuarto Dorado was relaid". Three years later, the report that was commissioned by Cendoya on 28 March states that the work on the Cuarto Dorado had concluded (Álvarez Lopera 1977, pp. 91, 142) (Cendoya Busquet 1914, p. 13).

In the aforementioned photographs by Laurent and Señán, we can see that some ceramic tile mosaic used beneath the mullioned window and ledges are missing, leaving gaps that may have been filled in during the restoration of the Cuarto Dorado's *alicatados* by Francisco Prieto-Moreno from 1969 to 1971 (Prieto-Moreno Pardo 1970, p. 131; 1971, p. 81; 1972, p. 87); as in both the photographs prior to restoration (Figure 23) and in a front elevation of the window by Fernando López Díaz de la Guardia dated August 1965 (Figure 24), these gaps can be seen; while the ceramic dadoes visible on the south, east, and west walls of the Cuarto Dorado (Figure 25), stem from the restoration work undertaken by Prieto-Moreno, which shows the section of the dadoes from the north wall of the room (see Figures 26 and 27).



Figure 23. Ceramic dado on the north wall of the Cuarto Dorado, with pieces missing beneath the mullioned window (undated). © Archivo del Patronato de la Alhambra y Generalife, Photograph Collection, F-033020.

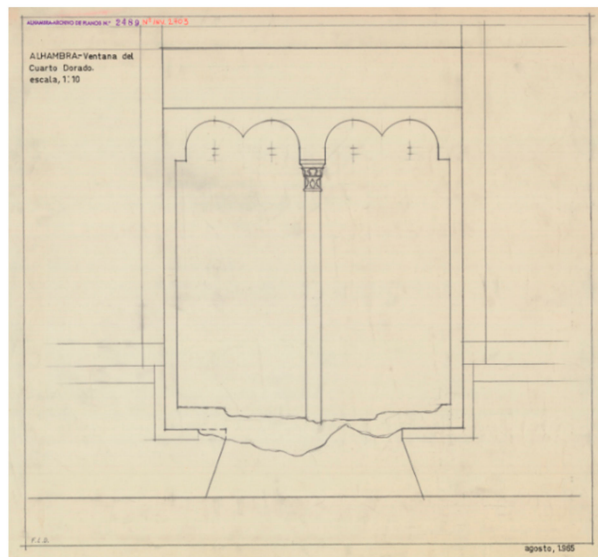


Figure 24. Mullioned window in the Cuarto Dorado showing interior damage. Elevation by Fernando López Díaz de la Guardia in August 1965. © Archivo del Patronato de la Alhambra y Generalife, Photograph Collection, P-002703.

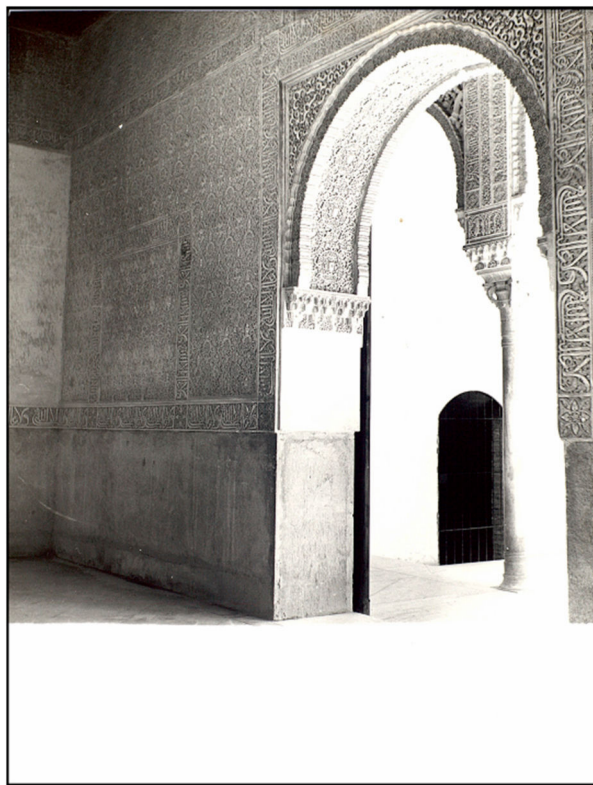


Figure 25. South and east wall of the Cuarto Dorado prior to the replacement of ceramic dadoes in September 1966. © Archivo del Patronato de la Alhambra y Generalife, Photograph Collection, F-20194.

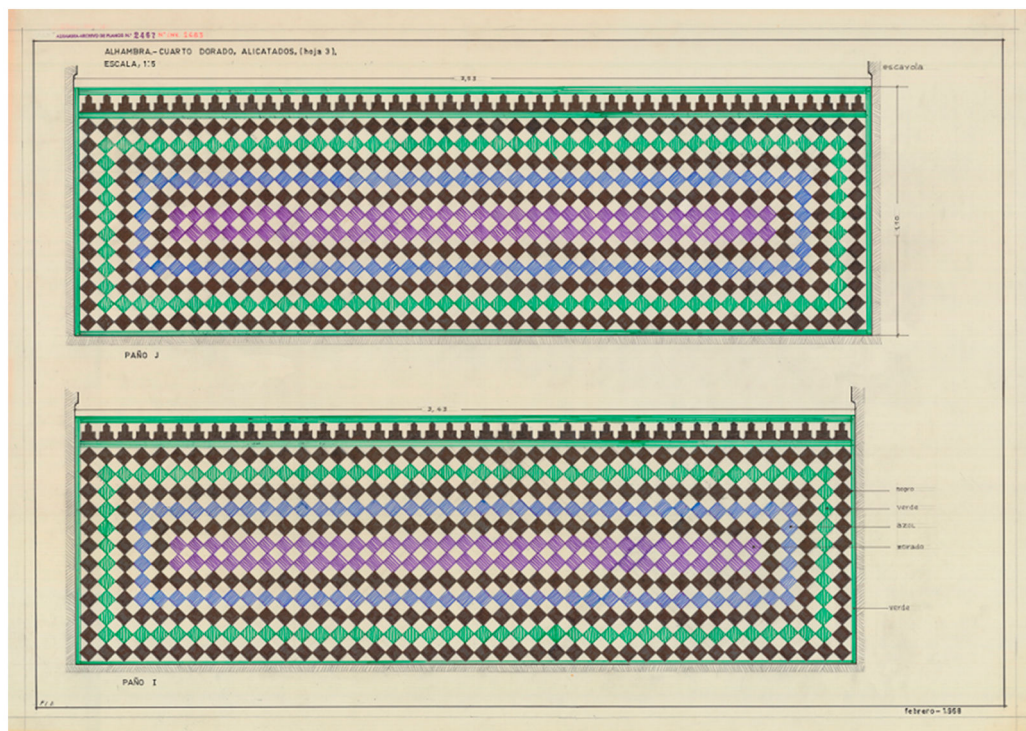


Figure 26. Drawings of the refurbished ceramic dadoes east and west walls of the Cuarto Dorado. Fernando López Díaz de la Guardia, February 1968. © Archivo del Patronato de la Alhambra y Generalife, Photograph Collection, P-002683.

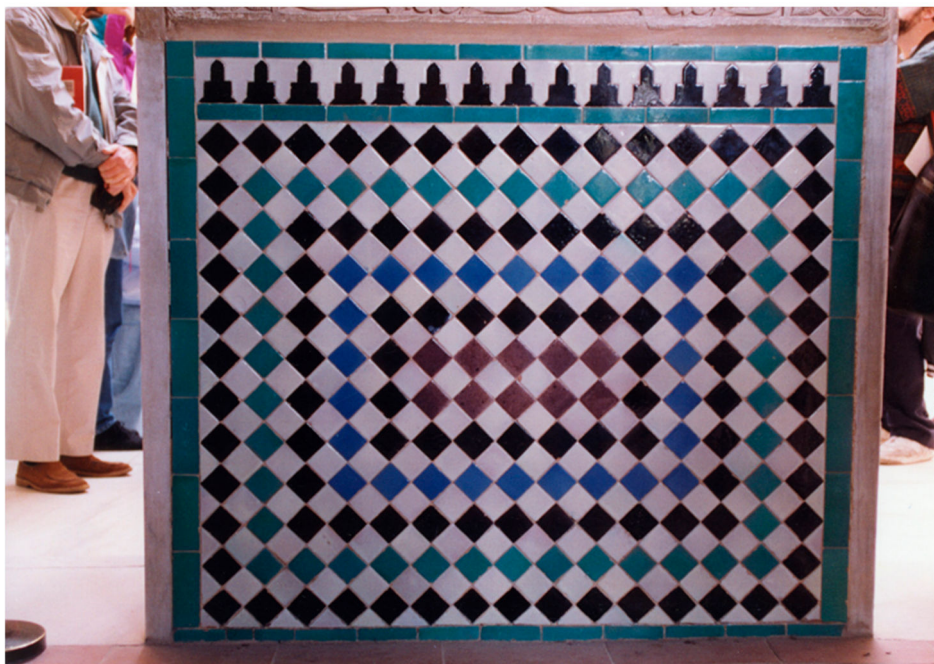


Figure 27. Refurbished ceramic dado of the south wall of the Cuarto Dorado in 1994. © Archivo del Patronato de la Alhambra y Generalife, Photograph Collection, F-14586.

5. Results

With regard to the transformation that the Cuarto Dorado underwent in the 15th century to adapt the living area for occupation by Empress Isabella of Portugal, Jesús Bermúdez Pareja takes the view that:

“[. . .] in order to turn this Muslim room into Christian living quarters, the three lower windows in the north wall, in the Muslim style, were converted into a single high central window of Moorish style and decoration. There is hardly any trace left of the Moorish style central window, although some sign of the openings made for the side windows can be seen on the inside of the building, and, with much greater clarity, in the impressions which are still visible on the facade which looks over the neighbouring wooded area. Of the three doors on the south wall, only the central one remains, with its strengthened main entrance gate. The smaller side doors boarded up [. . .] The new plasterwork decoration and the Moorish ceramic dadoes on the walls covered the boarding up of the doors that had been removed, to the present day. It is very possible that the side, plasterwork doorways leading to the outside were partially hidden underneath the smooth plaster and the ceramic dadoes, until the restoration work that was carried out until early this century”. (Bermúdez Pareja 1967, p. 180)

Meanwhile, Leopoldo Torres Balbás wrote that “the repair of the Cuarto Dorado in the late 15th century must have included the plasterwork of its walls, wainscot and ceiling . . . ”, without making any reference to the ceramic dadoes in the room (Torres Balbás 1951, p. 202).

Some of the ceramic dadoes that can still be seen inside the Cuarto Dorado, especially on the north wall, may date from the 17th century, as we have previously documented; other parts of this wall are also partly or fully dated from the 19th century.

This idea stems from a reading of the following text by Antonio Orihuela Uzal, regarding the ceramic dado on the facade of the Comares Palace, which occupies the south wall of the Cuarto Dorado Court:

“During summer 1979 [it is clear that this is a mistake and should in fact be 1879], Valeriano Medina Contreras, the highest-ranking master craftsman in the team of restorers, assisted his workers in the replacement of the lower part and the mosaic in the Court of the Mosque (AHA, Leg. 319-5 new). In the photographs taken a few years after the end of the work, it is possible to see that a dado had been added to the lower part of the facade, composed of small square ceramic tiles placed at 45° to the horizontal and topped with a crenellated wainscot, which seems to be the same as the one we see today. We can therefore conclude that at that time tiles were being supplied in the five traditional colours. The design of this dado seems to have been invented by Rafael Contreras, as in previous drawings of the work, such as those published by Lewis in 1835 and Owen Jones, in 1842 (Fernández Puertas 1980, plates VIII, XIII.a), we can see that there is not the slightest trace remaining”. (Orihuela Uzal 2008, pp. 139–40)

Indeed, later photographs of the restoration of the Comares Palace facade show a dado that is similar to the one that we see in the Cuarto Dorado (see Figures 28 and 29). As Orihuela argues, this was a dado invented by Contreras for this facade. In our opinion, it might have been inspired by old dadoes that had been conserved in other parts of the Alhambra; for example, in the Comares Baths, or else in the Cuarto Dorado itself. Could it therefore be possible that the dadoes on the north wall of the Cuarto Dorado were either partly or fully the work of Contreras or his predecessors? In this regard, we should consider the words of Manuel Gómez-Moreno González in 1892 on the way that restorers working before Rafael Contreras and his contemporaries operated:

“ . . . in decorative restorations there was a common yet disastrous tendency to attempt to recover the Alcázar’s original splendour, destroying in the process old adornments, whose condition had deteriorated to a greater or lesser extent, in order to replace them with entirely new pieces in such a way as to render the original decoration indistinguishable, and the restorers were very proud when this was achieved; although on occasion, not satisfied with this, they would also seek to alter the past by adding other pieces on the basis of their whim

and fantasy (. . .) naming Mr. Rafael Contreras as Director and Restorer (. . .). From this time (1847) we may note a greater respect for that which is venerable, although the lightness with which they sometimes proceed is nonetheless regrettable". (Gómez-Moreno González 1892, pp. 41–42)

Among these restorers who preceded Rafael Contreras, special mention should be made of his father, José Contreras Osorio, who worked in the Alhambra from 1840 to 1846, much in the way outlined above by Gómez-Moreno. Regarding the reports that were written by José Contreras inasmuch restoration work carried out from 1843 to 1846 in the Comares Court and the Hall of Abencerrajes, Juan Manuel Barrios Rozúa (based on the documents from the Archivo del Patronato de la Alhambra y el Generalife, L-203-2, L-228-31 y L-233-5, and Archivo General del Palacio Real de Madrid, 12014/13), says that although " . . . they remade many of the plaster and wood adornments (. . .) their work only halted with the tiles because they could not find anyone who would produce them at a low cost" (Barrios Rozúa 2011, p. 252) and that " . . . the restoration of the tile dadoes, which they called 'varnished slabs', was put out to tender, although the money they offered was half what was needed, according to the estimates of the bidders, and thus the tender received no response". These reports made it clear that this was the intention "although [these tiles] were never purchased or installed". José Contreras also proposed the repositioning of tiles in the Court of the Lions (Patio de los Leones), the Kings' Room and the Hall of the Two Sisters (Sala de los Reyes and Sala de Dos Hermanas) (Barrios Rozúa 2016, pp. 75, 92, 97, and notes 170 y 218).



Figure 28. Ceramic dado on the facade of the Comares Palace featuring a similar design to those in the Cuarto Dorado. Missing ceramic dado from the south wall of the same hall. Photograph by Harold Dempster (c. 1900). © Archivo del Patronato de la Alhambra y Generalife, Photograph Collection, F-030384.

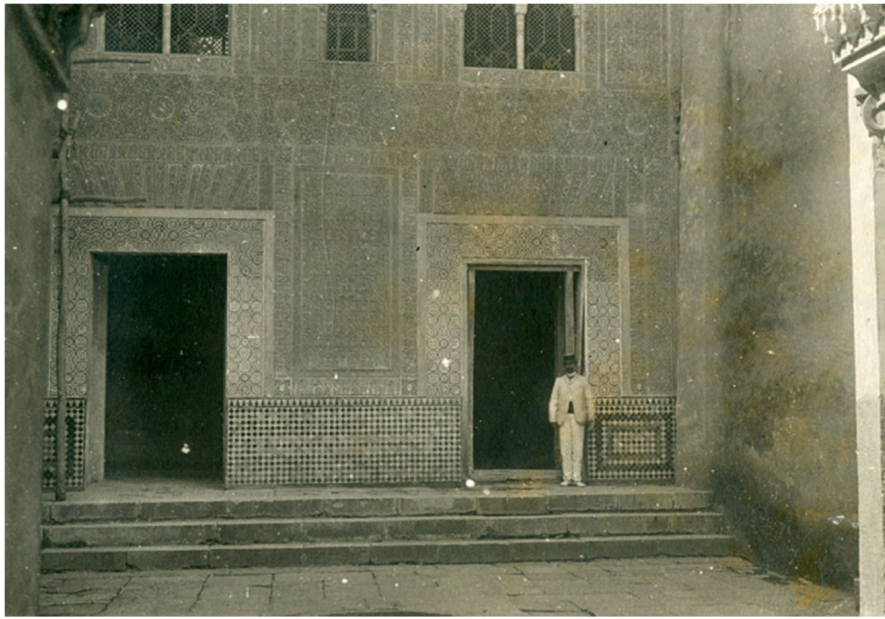


Figure 29. Facade of the Comares Palace showing ceramic dadoes of a similar design to those in the Cuarto Dorado. Photograph by Paul Riches, August 1903. © Archivo del Patronato de la Alhambra y Generalife, Photograph Collection, F-13296.

Having said this, we take the view that some of the ceramic dadoes on the north wall of the Cuarto Dorado may have been replaced during the time of Rafael Contreras (1847–1890) and not before, despite the fact that in 1878 Contreras made no reference to the dadoes in this part: “... passing between the two columns I found a small room that had been rebuilt after the *Reconquista*, as could be seen from its ceiling, in the centre of which there was a window of Gothic design ...” (Contreras 1878, p. 300). In 1890, Francisco de Paula Valladar reported that restoration work had already been undertaken in the Cuarto Dorado: “The room was restored at the time of the *Reconquista* with the work showing many signs of ignorance. The whole facade was whitewashed and it must have been beautiful, to judge by the interesting restoration work that had been done there” (Valladar 1890, p. 51).

The Cuarto Dorado therefore contains fragments of dadoes from the 17th and 18th centuries, and even some from the 19th century, all of which feature the same design. We can also include those added by Prieto-Moreno from 1969 to 1971 in a similar line to the foregoing, echoing the spirit of the Minutes of Patronato de la Alhambra y Generalife (10 November 1967), in which “it is agreed to complete the *alicatado* dado and maintain the *Mudéjar* spirit of the interior” (Fernández Puertas 1980, p. 41).

Pieces of *alicatado* are not only replaced in the main room but also in the portico. In the 20th century, the portico before the Cuarto Dorado underwent a series of changes, which should be highlighted here:

—In 1965 the two 16th century arches resting on pillars which partly obscured the Nasrid portico were removed (Bermúdez Pareja 1965, p. 99), pursuant to an agreement in the Minutes of Patronato de la Alhambra y Generalife (30 June 1964) (Fernández Puertas 1980, p. 41) under the supervision of Prieto-Moreno (Romero Gallardo 2014, p. 90). At the same time, the original door connecting the portico to the small court, which was original part of Mexuar, was opened up. (Vílchez Vílchez 1988, p. 140)

—From 17 April to 15 May 1967 the side arch-doors between the portico and the Cuarto Dorado were restored and opened up by Francisco Prieto-Moreno. (Prieto-Moreno Pardo 1968, p. 129)

With the exception of James Cavanah Murphy's engraving, the iconography of the 19th century (and until 1967) shows a portico where the side arches leading onto the Cuarto Dorado appear as boarded up, possibly from the time of the Catholic Monarchs, as Bermúdez believes, in order to adapt the hall for use as living quarters.

We do not know whether or not this portico featured ceramic dadoes in Nasrid times, and if they did, what they looked like. Neither do we know if a new one was adapted to a Christian aesthetic or replacing an earlier Nasrid piece that might have been there. We only have information in this regard from the 19th century onward as there are two paintings, one that we have already mentioned by M. Medina and another entitled *El Tribunal de la Alhambra* ("The Court of The Alambra") by Mariano Fortuny, dated 1871 and also published by Bermúdez Pareja (Bermúdez Pareja 1965, p. 105, Plate XIII), in which we can see ceramic dadoes on the portico. The first of these shows a dado similar to the ones that we see today on the north portico of the Comares Palace and Baths, while the second depicts a more complex *alicatado* of wheel motifs of different sizes that are very similar to those on the jambs of the side *alcoba* in the Hall of the Two Sisters. In both paintings, the most easterly arch providing access to the Cuarto Dorado is shown as open, or featuring a door. We are of the belief that this is due to a fantasy in the minds of the two painters who have used dado designs that they may have seen elsewhere in the Alhambra, as they do not appear in contemporary photographs of the portico. However, this portico does feature a ceramic element, which can be seen in both the aforementioned paintings and in photographs taken prior to the removal in 1965 of the arches that were added in the 16th century (see Figure 30). Here, we are referring to the remains of the *alicatado* panel that extends around the top of the shaft of the engaged column on the western edge, as well as running from left to right on its facing. It is formed by three-pointed *alicatados* in various colours (black, white, honey-coloured, green and blue), framed by green *cintas* and topped with a black crenellated wainscot. These three-pointed *alicatados* can also be seen in the Comares Baths and on the crenellation on the arch that leads from the Hall of the Boat to the Comares Hall, among other examples.



Figure 30. 16th century arch before dismantling and remains of the *alicatado* work which covered the top of the column shaft on the western edge of the Cuarto Dorado portico. See detail. Photograph by Manuel Torres Molina (undated). © Archivo del Patronato de la Alhambra y Generalife, Photograph Collection, F-006628.

Records of the conservation work carried out during Modesto Cendoya's time in the Royal Household state that in September 1911 "the walls of the Cuarto Dorado's gallery were shored up and

the engaged columns of tiles found were repaired” (Álvarez Lopera 1977, p. 144). This repair work may have included the total reintegration of ceramic pieces that are missing from the shafts of these engaged columns, or at least on the column on the extreme western side of the portico, as in December 1966, all that remains of the shaft of the engaged column is the *alicatado* at the top (see Figure 31). We can currently see how the *alicatado* has been completely reintegrated into the shafts of the two engaged columns.

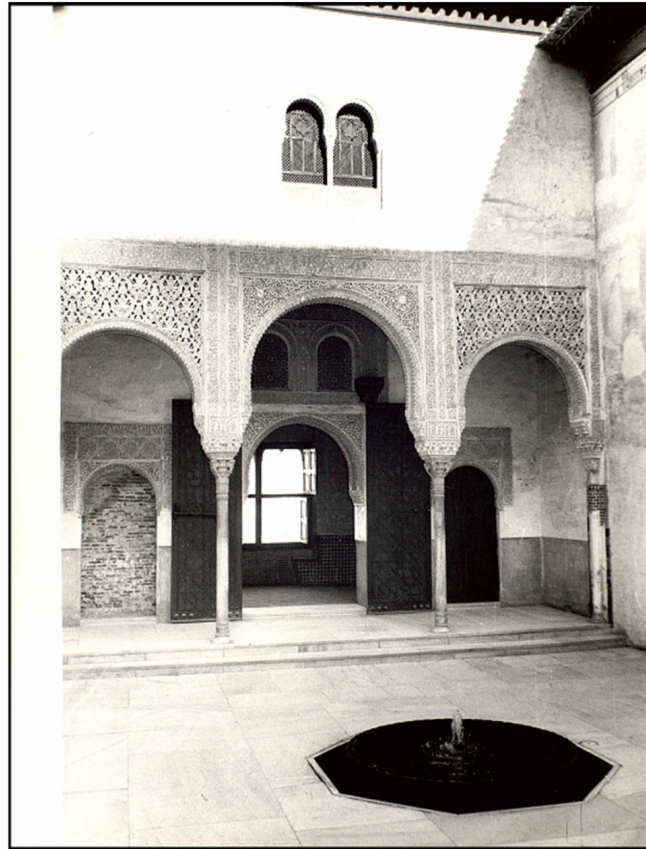


Figure 31. Cuarto Dorado portico showing remains of the *alicatado* work that covered the top of the engaged column shaft in the eastern edge in December 1966. © Archivo del Patronato de la Alhambra y Generalife, Photograph Collection, F-20193.

The rest of the ceramic dados in the portico were added by Prieto-Moreno as a result of the agreement to complete the *alicatado* on the facade, as outlined in the Minutes of Patronato de la Alhambra y Generalife (10 November 1967), reproducing the same sections as those that are found in the Cuarto Dorado, such as the dado on the facade of the Comares Palace (see Figures 32 and 33).

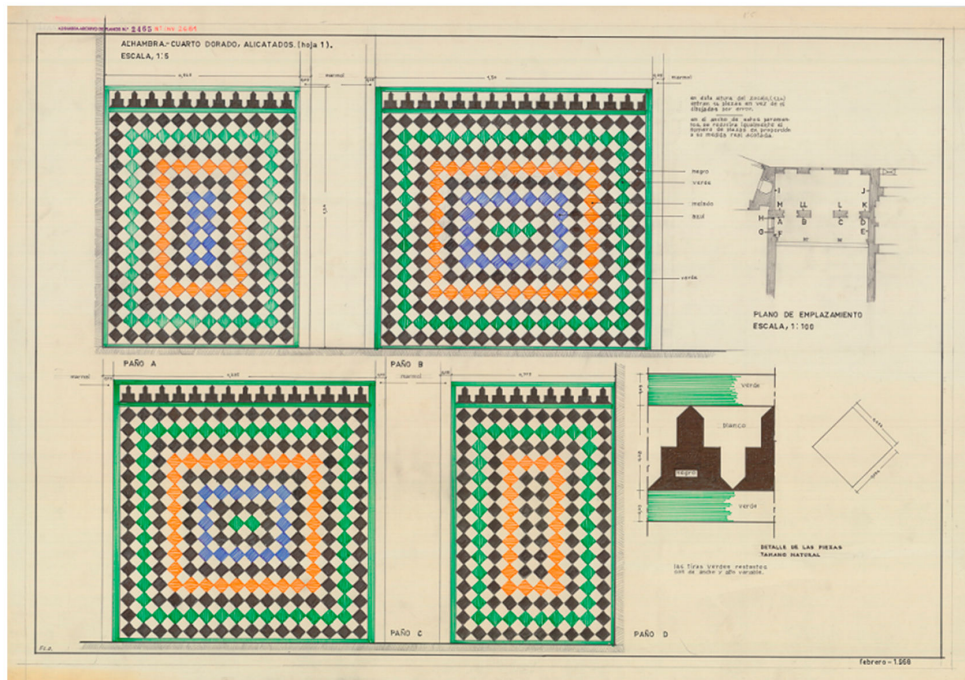


Figure 32. Drawings and layout plan of the ceramic dadoes on the south, east and west walls of the Cuarto Dorado. Fernando López Díaz de la Guardia, February 1968. © Archivo del Patronato de la Alhambra y Generalife, Photograph Collection, P-002681.



Figure 33. Cuarto Dorado portico showing the complete replacement of *alicatado* work on both the dadoes and the engaged columns. Photograph by Abelardo Alonso Gallardo, 19 November 1986. © Archivo del Patronato de la Alhambra y Generalife, Photograph Collection, F-026536.

We can therefore see that, over time, from Rafael Contreras to Francisco Prieto-Moreno and in various restorations and replacements of ceramic tile mosaics in the areas we have mentioned, the same *alicatado* design has been used, based on the remains of the “Moorish ceramic dadoes”, which Bermúdez refers to in the Cuarto Dorado or that were perhaps copied from elsewhere. What is evident is that the result has been the creation in the hall, the portico and the facade of fictitious architectural ceramics in which symmetry and a harmonious design have prevailed.

There can be no doubt as to the importance of architectural ceramics to the Nasrid Alhambra. Proof of this can be seen in the numerous pieces in the Alhambra Museum's collection, as well as other in situ examples. However, what we can see today of the history of the palatine city is like the page of a vast manuscript which brings together eras, repairs, adaptations, major restorations and inventions. Ascertaining from what period each element that we see today dates is a task in which researchers and specialists need to apply stringent standards and which requires of study and an in-depth knowledge of numerous sources, as we have outlined in this paper, from archive documentation covering various periods to a wealth of photographs, drawings, and engravings.

This does not prevent us from recognising the value of the *alicatado* dado replacement work and accepting that not all we see is from the Nasrid era or that it does not correspond to what could be seen before. On the contrary, all of this highlights the complexity and historical treasures of a monument that the country has always sought to conserve. There is a huge task still facing us. Readers of this paper will have appreciated the great difficulties in studying a space that is nonetheless not so large, such as the Cuarto Dorado. Imagine this applied to the whole of the palatine city. Our duty is to not falsify or simplify reality but rather to depict the Alhambra in its whole historical dimension.

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Appendix A. Quoted Files from the Archive, Archivo del Patronato de la Alhambra y Generalife (APAG)

APAG. From 1537 to 1542. *Cuadernos de nóminas del personal de obras de la Casa Real*. L-2-2.

APAG. 1630, February, 22. *Libro diario de entradas en arcas y salidas de caudales para pago de las obras reales de la Alhambra*. Libro 15.

APAG. 1631, January, 4. *Nóminas y libranzas pagadas para obras reales de la Alhambra*. L-84.

APAG. 1631, January, 11. *Nóminas y libranzas pagadas para obras reales de la Alhambra*. L-84.

APAG. 1631, January, 18. *Nóminas y libranzas pagadas para obras reales de la Alhambra*. L-84.

APAG. 1631, January, 25. *Nóminas y libranzas pagadas para obras reales de la Alhambra*. L-84.

APAG. 1631, February, 1. *Nóminas y libranzas pagadas para obras reales de la Alhambra*. L-84.

APAG. 1631, February, 8. *Nóminas y libranzas pagadas para obras reales de la Alhambra*. L-84.

APAG. 1631, February, 8. *Libro diario de entradas en arcas y salidas de caudales para pago de las obras reales de la Alhambra*. Libro 15.

APAG. 1631, February, 15. *Nóminas y libranzas pagadas para obras reales de la Alhambra*. L-84.

APAG. 1631, February, 15. *Libro diario de entradas en arcas y salidas de caudales para pago de las obras reales de la Alhambra*. Libro 15.

APAG. 1631, February, 22. *Nóminas y libranzas pagadas para obras reales de la Alhambra*. L-84.

APAG. 1631, March, 1. *Nóminas y libranzas pagadas para obras reales de la Alhambra*. L-84.

APAG. 1631, March, 1. *Libro diario de entradas en arcas y salidas de caudales para pago de las obras reales de la Alhambra*. Libro 15.

APAG. 1631, March, 8. *Nóminas y libranzas pagadas para obras reales de la Alhambra*. L-84.

APAG. 1631, March, 15. *Libro diario de entradas en arcas y salidas de caudales para pago de las obras reales de la Alhambra*. Libro 15.

APAG. 1631, July, 12. *Nóminas y libranzas pagadas para obras reales de la Alhambra*. L-84.

APAG. 1724, April, 6. *Escrito despachado por el señor don Francisco Cañaverál al señor don Fernando Poblaciones sobre jurisdicción*. L-165-19.

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