



Absorbing the *Mudéjar*: The Islamic Imprint on the Spanish Architectural Aesthetic

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One of the greatest pleasures of the Spaniards is to sit in the beautiful summer evenings, and listen to traditional ballads, and tales about the wars of the Moors and Christians, and the "*buenas andanzas*" and "*grandes hechos*," the "good fortunes" and "great exploits" of the hardy warriors of yore. It is worthy of remark, also, that many of these songs, or romances, as they are called, celebrate the prowess and magnanimity in war, and the tenderness and fidelity in love, of the Moorish cavaliers, once their most formidable and hated foes.

- Washington Irving, *Recollections of the Alhambra*

Irving's words justly express both the multifaceted history of the Iberian Peninsula and the close rapport between some of its many civilizations throughout time. The geographical placement of this landmass situates it at the threshold of Europe and Africa, two of the most dynamic continents of the Early Modern Era. It is thanks in part to these cultural crossroads that the culture of modern-day Spain has more exotic resonances for foreigners than perhaps other European nations. A great deal of these seemingly "Spanish" characteristics are rooted not in Spain's Catholic and European ancestry, but rather in its history of interaction with the Romans, Visigoths, and various Muslim dynasties. Some traits are faithful examples of an Islamic influence, since they are original mosques, palaces, and other buildings or monuments that exist to this day. While many of these clues of cultures past do exist, there are thousands of others that have been lost, both as a result of the destruction produced by Spain's wars, and intentionally, through purposeful demolition, as if being erased from history to demonstrate a new ruler's power. And while the political power in Spain made a dramatic shift from Muslim to Catholic[1] in the fifteenth century, certain rulers were more lenient than others in terms of the degree to which Muslim inhabitants, their culture, and religion could remain. Particular towns were completely ravaged while others have survived, at least in part, to this day. In examining which Spanish edifices date back to Umayyad, Nasrid and other Muslim dynastic rule, it is mystifying to consider why certain ones were destroyed and why others are still in use today.

Were those rulers who endorsed Catholicism refuting the former Muslim presence by destroying so many of these elaborate buildings when they came to power? Perhaps, since it is not unusual for victors to do so in a newly conquered land. If that is the case, then what is the significance of these rulers and their administrations reusing some, but not all, of the former civilization's architecture? Did the Catholics of Spain only convert that which was utterly spectacular because they could benefit from its use and beauty? If so, were they honoring Islamic architecture, or was the Spaniards' take-over of such structures meant to symbolize their new dominance in the land? Further questions arise around this issue considering the establishment of Spanish colonies in Central and South America where buildings exist that perpetuate the architectural vocabulary of Muslim-dominated Spain.

The goals of this article are two-fold. First, I will explore the significance of Islamic vestiges in modern-day Spain manifested in religious structures and imperial palaces. Many of these (now Catholic Spanish royal) edifices were original architectural examples from cultures even prior to the Muslim presence, namely from the Visigoths and Romans; thus, there seems to be an established tradition in which an architectural motif or geographical location of a building from one civilization is absorbed and reused by the more powerful culture's architectural language. Furthermore, since the purpose of these buildings was either royal or religious, these buildings' style became emblematic of the Crown and its power because the Catholics dominated the peninsula. This ideology serves as a bridge to connect the first to the second point, which posits that once the Spanish had established colonies in the Americas; they had absorbed this foreign architectural language, known as the *mudéjar* style[2], as something of their own. Therefore, examples of this style in places such as modern-day Mexico and Perú are not straightforward allusions to Islamic rule in Spain. Rather, they are Catholic Spanish expressions of what they themselves considered to be their own architecture.

Although this was not a colonial Spanish style created and initially propagated by the Spaniards, in conquering Andalucía, the Spaniards adopted and, in effect, created *mudéjar* architecture and christened it as their own.

Stemming from the Arabic word *mudajjin* for "domesticated,"[3] today the term *mudéjar* has several meanings. It is sometimes applied to the Muslims who were allowed to remain in Spain after the *Reconquista* but were subject to strict Christian rules. It has also become descriptive of the style of architecture from, or modeled after that of, Muslim rule. For the purposes of this project, this term will refer to both buildings and decorations from Spain as well as in the New World that evoke an Arab-esque style.[4] In each case, whether it was the Muslim architects who constructed a given example that was later adopted by the Spaniards or whether Spaniards created it is not central to this paper. What interests me is whether or not the *mudéjar* style was employed at all, where, and in what context. That is, if an Islamic building in Spain was kept in use (even if slightly altered) by Catholic monarchs, or if new edifices were constructed in the *mudéjar* style by (either in Iberia or in the Colonies), and how those structures were used (and reused) by their new inhabitants.

Iberian History: Roman Rule to the Reconquista

Under the auspices of the Roman Empire, the Kingdom of the Visigoths (a group of Germanic peoples who descended from northern Europe) controlled the region during the third century CE (all dates will henceforth be in the Common Era). As the Empire fell further into its demise, Rome relinquished control of far-off lands (such as Iberia), allowing the Visigoths control until 711. Within this period the Byzantines also claimed legitimacy over part of the southeastern Peninsula from 554-624, under Emperor Constantine. The powerful Syrian Umayyad Emirate abruptly ended Visigoth rule on the continent, while maintaining their capital at Damascus. Following the fervent conversion efforts of contemporary Muslims after the death of their Prophet Mohammed in 632, the Syrian Umayyad Emirate gained control of all of Iberia. After a provincial capital in Córdoba was established, *al-Andalus* (from which we have the modern term for the southern territory of Andalucía) became the name of the territory that the Umayyad, Nasrid, and other Islam-endorsing dynasties ruled.

Developing contemporaneously with the Prophet Muhammad's life and teachings, certain architectural traits—especially on religious buildings—in Muslim-dominated lands appropriately reflected and consolidated Islamic values. For instance, the "unwavering Muslim hostility to figural decoration" due to an opposition to idolatry, "encouraged an intense focus on abstract ornament,"[5] which to this day is fundamental to Islamic decoration.[6] Whatever the nature of decoration, whether architectural, functional, or decorative, a primary objective was to create the illusion that the structure on which the designs appear is dissolved. This goal was accomplished often by the seemingly infinite repeating single units: ornamental motifs, arches, arcades, columns, honeycomb cells, etc.[7] Often, this lavish adornment followed a geometrical plan (for example, the square root of two or proportional ratios of 3:2 were often employed), which were further emphasized by bright color schemes.[8] These traits are general characteristics of Muslim architecture, both chronologically and geographically. However, for the purposes of length, this essay will not consider the nuances and evolution of Islamic architecture as it were, but rather the reuse and reiteration of that style on the part of the Spaniards.

Córdoba's importance increased in 756 when the Abbasid Dynasty conquered Damascus, which at the time was controlled by the Umayyad Dynasty. Only one Umayyad family member—Abd al-Rahman—survived, and he fled to Córdoba and made it his capital. However, once he established power there, Abd al-Rahman cultivated strong relations with the Abbasids in Baghdad, the Christian regions in Northern Spain, the Byzantine Empire, and various kingdoms in North Africa. Emir Abd al-Rahman (r.756-788) was responsible for the construction of Great Mosque of Córdoba (fig. 4), which is still considered by some the pinnacle of the early period of Hispano-Islamic art and architecture. The Spanish Umayyads presence existed as an emirate until 929, when Abd al-Rahman III declared himself Caliph and the regime thus became the Spanish Umayyad Caliphate, which remained in power until 1031. This territory did however witness attacks by several European (i.e. Catholic) invaders, such as Charlemagne who conquered Zaragoza and Cataluña (both in Northern Spain) in 777 and 801, respectively. The establishment of the Kingdoms of Asturias-Leon (718-1037), Navarre (9th cent-1035) and Feudal counties of Catalonia (800-1137) further punctuated Umayyad power.

While the Spanish Umayyad Caliphate was most powerful in *al-Andalus*, this group ruled over the other kingdoms and regions in Iberia. Because the peninsula had had such an extensive history with peoples of different creeds and cultures, it is no wonder that there was an acceptance of non-Muslims, and as a result was in general a peaceful coexistence among Jews, Christian and Muslims. In

the eleventh century, there were three principal Christian Kingdoms: León-Castile, Navarre, and Aragon. While often in conflict, they united to wage war against their common enemy (i.e. the dominant Muslims) in what was known, in Spanish, as the *Reconquista* (the re-conquering of the continent from its Muslim inhabitants who, needless to say, did not recognize this term). In fact, this had been theoretically occurring already for several centuries, since 722, from the Battle of Covadonga. Though their efforts were not initially well focused, the operation was largely achieved later in 1492 (though repetitive expulsions of Muslims from Iberia continued for at least another 150 years) with the conquest of Granada under the royal couple Isabella and Ferdinand. However, before that Muslim domination simultaneously began to decline when *taifa* or regional warlord kingdoms rose to power due to lack of centralized Muslim control during 1031-1886.

These struggles ended with the conservative Almoravid dynasty from North Africa, whose Spanish capital became Seville after victory in 1040. Following the Almoravids, the Almohad dynasty (1145-1232) and the Nasrid Dynasty (1232-1492) the last Muslim Dynasty to rule in Andalusia. Intense battles against the Christians following the *Reconquista* campaign punctuated Muslim dynastic rule.

Known to his Spanish counterparts as Boabdil, Emir Mohammad XII of the Nasrid Dynasty was the last of the Muslim rulers in Spain. At the same time, Isabella and Ferdinand, whose marriage several decades earlier had united the Christian kingdoms of Castile and Aragon, were ruling the Christians in the North. Following a drawn-out blockade, Emir Mohammad surrendered to the forces of Isabella and Ferdinand in 1492 also the same year that there was a mass expulsion of Jews from Spain and subsequently they forced him to leave the following January. Upon his departure, the royal couple adopted his palace in Granada, the *Alhambra*, as their *casa real*, which was inhabited later on by Charles V.

Understanding the long fought struggle between the Christians and the Muslims, it is no wonder that towns throughout *al-Andalus* were systematically destroyed. For example, only ruins of the once imperial town of Madīnat al-Zahrâ (fig. 1) exist to this day. However, there are



Fig 1. Madīnat al-Zahrâ 10th Century. Umayyad Dynasty.
(Photo: courtesy of American Institute for Advanced Studies in Cultural History)

several complete examples of Islamic architecture that were not destroyed by the vengeful Christians, many of which have been maintained to appear largely as they had under Muslim rule. In fact, not only were some of these buildings saved, many were even reused in ways similar to how Muslims used them; specifically, Islamic palaces remained as residences for the Christians, and several mosques became Christian equivalents. In addition to the *Alhambra*, other famous remnants of Muslim Spain include the Great Mosque of Córdoba, the Cathedral of Seville, and the Palace of Seville. These structures are celebrated today as some of the most popular destinations in modern Spain, but rarely is it considered why and how these buildings still exist. While each of these individual buildings equally show the Christian take-over of Muslim Spain and much of its architecture, information regarding the *Alhambra* was more accessible, I will thus focus on it in this article. Nevertheless, I am not suggesting a hierarchy of importance among the following structures.

The Mudéjar in Spain

The *Alhambra* (from the Arabic *al-qal'a al-hamrâ* meaning "red citadel") [9], shown in fig. 2,

was commissioned during the 11th century under Nasrid rule. From the beginning, the Red Citadel was intended to be a separate palace-city from Granada for the ruling caliphate, but there was a wall that connected the two locales. While the *Alhambra* is revered today for its exotic beauty, even in the early years of its existence, the palace was highly valued for it was "far more complex than the citadels and palaces of the *taifa* rulers." [10] The *Alhambra* includes twenty-three towers, four gates, seven palaces, and domestic structures for all social classes. In addition, there were offices, the royal mint, mosques, workshops, garrisons, defensive structures, a summer residence, and a fortress. [11]



Fig. 2. The *Alhambra*. 11th Century. Nasrid Dynasty. Granada, Spain.
(Photo: courtesy of Wikipedia.org)

In putting oneself in the position of the xenophobic, anti-Muslim Spanish crown the question as to why the *Alhambra* had been saved becomes more significant. While changes have been instituted over centuries, there was little destruction of the original plan. Both the first Catholic rulers to live in the palace and future ones, namely Charles V, inhabited the *Alhambra*. While they inevitably made certain changes or renovations to suit their taste, the monarchs generally respected the original plan and decorative scheme. [12]

The Catholic Kings took it over, destroying nothing in the process, and made themselves at home there, with the obvious desire to preserve the palaces as far as humanly possible. Even Charles I of Spain (i.e. the Emperor Charles V), whose massive addition does not really harmonize with the aesthetics of the existing palace, that of the Nasrids; and while he had the latter furnished for his own purposes, he did not do anything destructive. [13]

While it is inevitable that the monarchy destroyed older parts of the Palace to make room for changes (most notably the relatively newer Palace of Charles V), it is important to understand that this "destruction" was executed with the objective to modernize and revamp the *Alhambra*. This demolition was not "destruction" for destruction's sake (for instance as an insult on the part of the Spanish monarchs to dynasties past), but rather as a means for the current ruler to make stylistically *avant-garde* renovations for his own comfort and to reflect his political platform. The Spanish Monarchs and their representatives thus did not expend effort on the destruction of the palace, even though they had just ended a multi-century campaign to essentially destroy the creators' presence in the country. This information seems to go against other aspects of the Spanish *Reconquista*, considering other aspects of Islamic culture were hastily erased, and forced conversions to Christianity were frequently carried out. The fact that the *Alhambra* was preserved among the thousands of other buildings that were destroyed is noteworthy. It is further remarkable that even as Christian rulers began to build Renaissance and Baroque style buildings they simultaneously maintained the original Islamic examples.

The etymology from the palace's nomenclature shows a similar adoption of Muslim culture, despite the fact that they were overthrown and expelled from the land. For starters, as previously stated, the word *Alhambra* comes from the Arabic *al-qal'a al-hamrâ* meaning "the red citadel". The complex's far-eastern *alcazaba* structure comes from the Arabic *al-qasbah*, another word for "citadel", which is a walled fort within the walls of the *Alhambra*, and is also the oldest structure of the city. This type of building is not unique to the *Alhambra* since similar examples exist in cities and towns all over modern Andalucía as further evidence of the Spanish absorption of Islamic architecture. For example, such structures exist in Almería (where the largest surviving *alcazaba* stands) as well as in Antequera, Badajoz, Guadix, Málaga and Mérida, all of which are towns within the borders of Andalucía. [14] The fact that these structures are still referred to by derivatives of their Arabic roots, or rather that the names were re-used by the Spanish conquerors, demonstrates it was not imperative for the conquerors to convert these names to something more evocative of their own cultural traditions. The physical relationship between the Palace of Charles V and the original

buildings of the complex illustrates the parallel relationship between former Muslim rule and the Catholic victors. Charles' Renaissance-style "block-design residence with a porticoed round courtyard"[15] was constructed at the heart of the *Alhambra* and stylistically contrasted with the original buildings. The foundation upon which his palace stands today had been both "dilapidated Morisco houses" and "the house of three clerics of the church of Santa María".[16] Thus, this was the logical location on which to build since, for Charles V, the destruction of those buildings was not a great loss, nor were these structures architecturally or functionally important buildings on a grand scale. Such original buildings surround his Palace like the Patio of the Albrea, the Lindaraja Gardens, the Church of Santa María and the Plaza of the Albibes. It seems that while maintaining and benefiting from the original Islamic constructions, Charles V strategically placed his own palace in the center, as the physical and ideological the heart, of the city, as if to demonstrate his power over the conquered Muslims, represented by their architecture. It is further interesting to note that:

No palace was built by Charles' predecessors on the Spanish throne because they often added royal quarters to a favorite monastery or they made the piecemeal alterations in a Moorish residence or castle to adapt it to their needs, usually employing *mudéjar* artisans to repair or decorate the interiors.[17]

Thus, Charles broke away from royal traditions by merely constructing a palace; the fact that it is centrally located further significant. That Charles did decide to build a new palace at the *Alhambra* suggests that he may have intended for the Spanish capital, or even that of the Empire, to be at Granada. [18] Whether or not this is the case, being that he was the ruler of a vast empire, he hosted a great number of ambassadors and other guests who were exposed to both his new palace, as well as the original structures of the *Alhambra*. The juxtaposition of the exotic Islamic edifices and Charles' Renaissance palace would have been an effective demonstration of his power. In addition, because this period was marked by an interest to possess and conquer that which was foreign, the *Alhambra* would have been considered a crown jewel.[19] Though the style at the *Alhambra* was manifested ubiquitously on the Iberian Peninsula it was still associated with its Muslim creators, and was therefore still somewhat exotic to him, but certainly very much so for foreigners visiting Grenada.



Fig. 3. The Palace of Charles V at the *Alhambra*. Pedro Machuga. 1527. Granada, Spain.
(Photo: courtesy of Wikipedia.org)

Another structure that was occupied by the Spaniards is the Great Mosque of Córdoba, or *Mezquita*, Spanish for "mosque", shown in fig. 4. The original building, constructed in 784, is reputed to have "set the standard for all other sacred architecture in Andalucía." [20] Functioning today as a Roman Catholic Church, the *Mezquita* was built on the remains of the Visigothic church of St. Vincent.



Fig. 4. *Mezquita* or Great Mosque. 784. Córdoba, Spain.
(Photo: courtesy of Wikipedia.org)

Despite the fact that the Christians were refuting Islamic culture by destroying their regional legitimacy (following the ideals of the *Reconquista*), the Mosque was immediately turned into a church in 1236, the year that Córdoba was overtaken from the Nasrids by Ferdinand III of Castile (1199-1252). This introduces a pattern on the part of the Christians of conquering Muslim rulers and subsequently assuming use of their buildings.

Although there have been reconstructions of the *Mezquita*, such as a Renaissance nave implanted in the center of the old mosque (also by Charles V), it was never torn down, suggesting a certain degree of respect for the original construction or, at least recognition that the building could benefit them. Unlike the *Alhambra*, the *Mezquita* is a religious compound limited to much fewer buildings. However, the two complexes share a similar evolution from Islamic rule to that of the Christians, in which relatively little changed structurally despite for the new audience's different faith. Even to this day, the building previously designated as the Caliph's palace is now where the Bishop resides.

The *Alhambra* remained a palace and the *Mezquita* remained a religious center for the dominant faith, paradoxically during a time of rampant xenophobia on the part of the Christian Spaniards, as exemplified by the Inquisition. While it may not have been the Catholics' agenda to take credit for these Islamic architectural feats, they nonetheless did advance the *mudéjar* style, though perhaps were unaware of the fact that they were doing it. That these buildings have remained treasured by the Spanish royalty and people for their role in their country's history (and not of Islamic rule) emphasizes this point of view. Therefore, in their eyes, those buildings were no longer Umayyad or Nasrid, but Spanish, and could be (re)used for Spanish purposes. Especially demonstrative of this is the annexation of the *Alhambra* when, on 2 January 1492, Emir Mohammad XII surrendered to Isabella and Ferdinand who subsequently moved in to the grand palace.[21] While it took a great deal of warfare and other violence to get to this point, the royal couple's immediate use of the palace reveals the Spanish relationship to previously Muslim buildings.

The coexistence of older Islamic and new Spanish buildings seems somewhat contradictory considering the history of the relationship between Islamic and Christian Spaniards. However, keeping in mind the dynamic of the contemporary Spanish Empire, one could view the actions of Charles V, perhaps not necessarily as imperial, but certainly as a product of the imperial nature of the state and world. In his book on Spain at this time, Henry Kamen remarks that:

Within a few months of Charles's accession, Castile's horizons began to expand to unforeseen limits thanks to the help of international finance. Very slowly, Spaniards began to identify themselves with a broader destiny.[22]

That is, upon rising to power, the dynamics within Spain and abroad began to develop, largely resulting from the kingdom's international relationships. Since Charles V controlled the German and Austrian states of the Holy Roman Empire, the Netherlands, parts of modern day Italy, and parts of the Americas, there was a worldly sentiment associated with his title considering that he reined over so much of it. Because these political changes took place quickly, their effect was profoundly felt by the people of Spain who, like the nature of the government itself and the country's past, were beginning to have a more international perspective.

Furthermore, Oleg Graber points out that Iberia, under both Muslim and Christian rule, was a frontier territory. Often in these places there is a rather contradictory nature to the dynamic between different groups, which is at times defined by hate and warfare, while at other times exhibits "open-minded cohabitation and creative inventiveness." And, furthermore, a decorative motif can be considered as belonging to a region, rather than to a religion or people in that land.[23] That is, that vestiges of Islamic architecture not destroyed but used by the Christians could have, to the Spaniards been considered "Iberian" or "Andalucian" and not specifically "Muslim". Therefore, their reasons for keeping such edifices may have been influenced by their territorial heritage, and not their religious differences as if these buildings belonged to the land, and not a culture.

The Spanish, whether consciously or not, were developing their own Spanish royal style by adapting these Muslim buildings and complexes. Whether this was accomplished by adding more European-style structures or altering an original one's purpose, by maintaining these buildings as functional, the Spanish royalty was propagating a regal architectural language, since these edifices were seen by civilians and international figures alike. Again, while taking over this foreign style by reusing these buildings was likely not the Spanish monarchy's platform, they nonetheless did so and in effect made it part of their legacy, as the edifices are still occupied and cherished today. When considering these Islamic buildings now, members of the Spanish royalty are evoked as much as (or perhaps even more so than) Islamic figures who lived there before. Since these buildings were host to a great deal of Spanish governance, their architectural and decorative style cannot be divorced from other popular royal styles. Spanish structures that remain from Muslim rule are unique examples that relate to the power structure of the state, since they were either royal palaces or religious structures. By selecting these structures as the ones through which they would govern the country, and by simultaneously destroying countless others of the same exotic style, the ruling Spaniards were creating a stylistic distinction between the architecture appropriate for their rule and that of the rest of the country. In so doing, these buildings were no longer Islamic, but Spanish, and more specifically, regal Spanish. While the demonstration of this style takes a different form in the colonies of the Americas, the association is similar since the buildings on which the *mudéjar* style is manifested were initially only for religious purposes.

Colonial Mudéjar

While Muslim explorers never embarked on voyages to the New World, there are examples of *mudéjar* architecture in both Perú and Mexico. These buildings were neither large-scale, grandiose examples like the *mudéjar* remnants of Andalucía nor were they the result of *Morisco*[24] builders repeating the same style of architecture that was in Spain. In fact, it generally was indigenous people, under Spanish order, who were responsible for building colonial architecture, since "Mudehars [sic] and Moriscos" were banned from traveling to the New World. "[25] Therefore, the only means by which the *mudéjar* style could have been used in New Spain and Perú is by Spanish governmental and religious officials specifically requesting it, and therefore it must be associated with Spanish tastes.

The *mudéjar* style that exists in the New World differs from that of Spain in one fundamental way: While in Spain entire buildings were constructed in this style, (that is, that one building or complex would possess motifs such as geometric decorations, *artesonado* ceilings, striated horseshoe arches etc.), across the Atlantic, the *mudéjar* style was manifested only in fragments on a stylistically composite building (i.e. a building might only have an *artesonado* ceiling, with no other *mudéjar* motifs and instead with more traditionally Western European decoration or architecture). The appearance of the *mudéjar* style in the New World suggests that it had been incorporated into Spain's architectural language. Thus, according to the Spanish, this style was theirs to bring to their colonial architecture. While the Spanish may not have been aware of the fact that they were bringing a style that would later become known as "*mudéjar*", they were in any case perpetuating this kind of architecture in the New World.

Among the first Spanish voyages to the New World were religious campaigns carried out by Catholic orders such as the Franciscans, Dominicans and others. In addition to their religious instruction and conversion efforts, the friars brought elements of Spanish architectural styles to the new churches and monasteries they came to build. Harold E. Wethey aptly describes these structures as "colonial descendants of the Andalusian *mudéjar* churches of Seville and Granada". [26] Although, to a less extravagant degree than churches in Spain, these buildings certainly show a resemblance to their Spanish and as a part of that, Islamic history.

Examples of *mudéjar* architectural elements that were surfaced in the New World include the *artesonado* wooden ceilings, which have either carved or mosaic wood pattern. [27] Other examples of the Spaniard's use of the *mudéjar* are brightly colored geometric or vegetal designs (especially on fired brick, glazed ceramic tile, stucco or plaster), ornamental stylized calligraphy, various types of arches such as leaf, interlacing and horseshoe, and *alfiz* freezes.

In regards to the *artesonados*, typical churches were designed with only the most basic plan: a single nave that was long and narrow, and a wooden roof. [28] Despite their widespread implementation, the use of these *artesonados* was not by any means a practical choice. While it was not unique to Islamic architecture to use wooden roofs, given the time period (circa 1550s) there were much more effective means of stone vaulting known by Spain's builders, for example at Seville's famed Gothic Cathedral (which, incidentally was built on the ruins of a mosque) that would have lasted much longer than wooden ceilings against some of the harsh weather conditions, fire, or warfare. This is an instance in which the *artesonados* were used in a land without a history of Islamic peoples, and for entirely decorative purposes thus, they seem to derive from the Islamic architectural tradition adopted in the motherland by the Spanish and later brought to the New World through colonization. This is significant because, unlike most of the *mudéjar* structures in Spain, these were newly constructed Spanish buildings and therefore show an active choice on the part of the Spanish architects to reuse the *mudéjar* style by reiterating it in the colonies. Indeed, these ceilings are a component of this style that was manifested on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean, as evidenced by examples that Charles V had installed in his Palace, suggesting that this trend of new *mudéjar* examples was not limited to the Americas.[29]

To give specific examples, the monastic church of San Francisco (not pictured) in Sucre from the Viceroyalty of Peru (now modern-day Bolivia) still bears most of its original attributes. Of these:

Notable are the fine *mudéjar* ceilings, for they are among the best type so frequently used in South America in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, but so rarely preserved until the present day.[30]

Although many of these fine wooden ceilings have since been destroyed, or replaced by more modern and durable alternatives, early in the history of Spanish colonization in the Americas the *mudéjar* wood ceilings were popularly employed. Like most other instances in which the *mudéjar* style is harkened, only one part of the church, specifically the ceiling in this case, shows that relationship.

Figures 5 and 6 illustrate the similarities between the *artesonado* of the Cathedral of Tlaxcala and that of a room in the *Alhambra*, respectively. Both ceilings use gold and wood, and while that of Tlaxcala belongs to a religious center, the Spanish image is from a palatial setting.



Fig. 5. Cathedral of Tlaxcala *artesonado* ceiling. Tlaxcala, Mexico.
(Photo: courtesy of American Institute for Advanced Studies in Cultural History)

Both examples feature *casetones* (decorative honeycomb-like niches)[31], which are surrounded by larger geometric designs. While in Tlaxcala there is an elevated central panel with a larger decorative scheme than that of the main section, the ceiling at the *Alhambra* consists of one plane and maintains a more regular pattern.

Intricate geometric design is a trademark of Islamic art which is exemplified ubiquitously on buildings in lands that Islamic power reached, for instance on such great complexes as the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, The Great Mosque of Damascus, or from fragments at Abbasid ruins in Samarra. Because the Iberian Peninsula had once been within the boundaries of Muslim rule, its architecture, too, display this motif on several existing buildings.

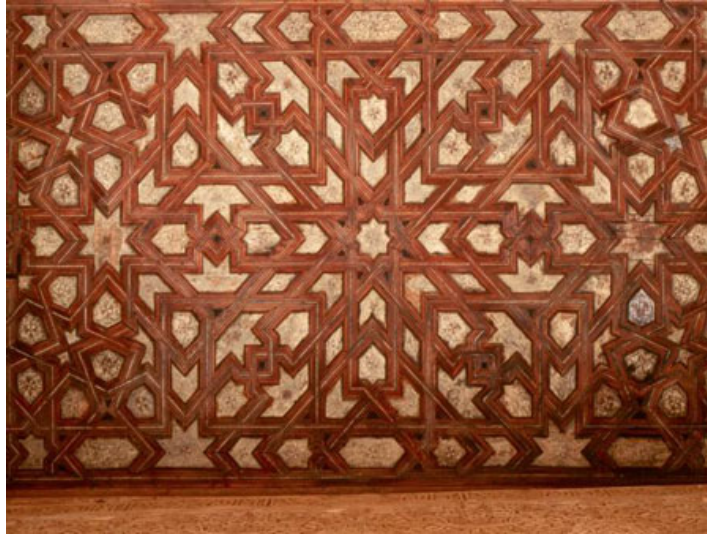


Fig. 6. *Alhambra artesonados*. Wood and Gold. Granada, Spain.
(Photo: courtesy of American Institute for Advanced Studies in Cultural History)

Figure 7 shows a Spanish example of this geometric design. It is a ceiling from *Paranifo* Ceremonial Hall at the University of Alcalá in the town of Alcalá de Henares near Madrid. The Regent of Spain, Cardinal Cisneros, founded this institution in 1499 as an educational project based on the institutions of Paris and of Salamanca. Contemporary with the European renaissance, Cisneros had ambitions that the university would be a gateway through which both the clergy and the royalty receive a world-class education. [32]



Fig. 7. *Geometric Design Ceiling.* University of Alcalá. Alcalá de Henares, Spain. (Photo: courtesy of American Institute for Advanced Studies in Cultural History)

This ceiling, found at the Cardinal's chapel at the university displays the same *casetone* motif interspersed with hexagonal shapes, which are further outlined by a boarder in another color. This type of ornamentation is demonstrated frequently in Islamic art. Its widespread use has been described as:

These endless star patterns in *faïence* mosaic have been used, since the building of the *Alhambra* to cover square kilometer upon kilometer of wall space throughout the Moorish world [33]

These intricate patterns are one of the trademarks of Islamic art and thus it seems ironic that the ceiling shown in fig. 7 was commissioned by a man of such strong Spanish pride and aspirations. One would think that the architectural language of any structure associated with him would reflect uniquely Spanish culture, however his ceiling shows an undeniable Islamic aesthetic. Furthermore, the Muslims had established a tradition of learning in the West during their years in power in Spain, and this kind of decoration in a Spanish university setting may be another case where Catholic Spaniards perpetuated the use of Islamic customs and eventually made them a part of their own culture. If so, then this is an example of the fact that this geometric decoration had been incorporated into Spanish style as one of the fundamentals of *mudéjar* art. A strong support for this cultural appropriation is that this ceiling was created not by Muslims themselves, but by the Christians and, furthermore, for a man of fervent Spanish and Catholic conviction. While Cardinal Cisneros did not physically make this ceiling, he was its patron and had to nonetheless approve its appearance. By allowing this ceiling (which displays historically foreign motifs) to cover a room that hosts the advancement of Catholic Spanish citizens, it seems that the Cardinal would have considered its decoration representative of Spanish style than any other culture's style.

Moreover, these geometric forms are found in some of the Spanish colonies of the New World. Fig. 8 shows a ceiling from the *portería* at Atlatlauca, Mexico. The detailed pattern strikes a remarkable resemblance to those of Spain. Like that of the University of Alcalá, this design consists of the trademark *casetone* motif scattered with other geometric motifs and a rope-like boarder that outlines the forms. Perhaps the most composite element of this ceiling is the small cherub figures that appear within the geometric forms: this aspect is an excellent example of Catholic Spain's absorption of Islamic motifs, since angels would never appear on a similar Islamic ceiling.



Fig. 8. *Geometric Design Ceiling.* Atlatlauca, Mexico.
(Photo: courtesy of American Institute for Advanced Studies in Cultural History)



Fig. 9. *Bifurcate Horseshoe Arch* The Mezquita. Córdoba, Spain.
(Photo: courtesy of American Institute for Advanced Studies in Cultural History)

In addition to ceiling design, certain kinds of arches that were employed by the Spanish in the New World. Figure 9 is an illustration this type from the *Mezquita*. Among the reasons that this type is perhaps more recognizable than other types of is that they appear in great scale in some of the most famous Islamic buildings, such as in the interior of this building (where there are several aisles of them in the interior as well as older monuments such as the town of Madīnat al-Zahrâ (see fig. 1) and would thus be exposed to a broader audience. Another reason is that it is a much older motif. The horseshoe arch is actually a vestige from Visigoth times that Muslims adopted upon conquering Iberia.[34] Indeed, the Christian Spaniards followed this precedent when they gained control of the peninsula by literally reusing Islamic architecture or architectural elements, since they adapted several Umayyad and Nasrid buildings for their own purposes. The Spaniards also perpetuated use of this arch in the Americas on colonial buildings.



Fig. 10. Bifurcate Horseshoe Arch
Casa de Cortés. Cuilapán, Mexico.

Figure 10 illustrates a bifurcate horseshoe arch from *Casa de Cortés* in Cuilapán, Mexico. While the red and white striated *voussoirs* do not appear on this example as they do so frequently on those of Iberia, the characteristic shape of the arch is nonetheless present. The arch's presence as an individual element of architecture in the Spanish colonies is evidence of Spain's country's selective use of *mudéjar*. An additional motif from Islamic architecture used as a decorative element of arches is the freeze-like motif called an *alfiz*, which borders the upper curve of an arch. This articulation is demonstrated in both figs. 9 and 10: in fig. 9 this is the design and the two-colored striations while in fig. 10 this is the collective presence of the several *voussoir*-like blocks. Wetthey, in his article on Peruvian missionary Franciscan architecture, agrees that the *alfiz* is a motif that has been absorbed by the Spanish as something of their own since he describes it as an "age-old Islamic feature in respect to design which passed through the repertory of Spanish architecture." [35] He duly notes that this was employed at some of the finest and most important sixteenth century Peruvian monuments, such as the Franciscan cloister at Cuzco (not pictured), which had "round arches, Renaissance capitals, plus the peculiarly Spanish *mudéjar alfiz* ♦" [36] Thus it can be seen that while the *mudéjar* style was indeed used architecturally both in Mexico and in Perú, it was used only as individual elements on a larger composite building of Spanish design.

The Legacy of the Mudéjar

One could even say that there is still a fondness for the *mudéjar* style in modern Spain, since this style has been employed on several occasions; one such example is illustrated in fig. 11. The *Mudéjar Pavilion* was designed by Spanish architect Aníbal González as one component of a large-scale urban project for the Ibero-American Exhibition in Seville, in 1929. This building appropriately hosted the decorative arts portion of the exposition. In addition to the lavish ornamental elements of the colorful facade, which boasts horseshoe and leafed arches, complete with *alfizes*, there were also glazed tile fountains, decorative bricks and other architectural elements that celebrate Spain's Muslim past. From the Spanish Monarchy's use of Islamic buildings to decorative manifestations in the New World, to the modern *Mudéjar Pavilion*, the *mudéjar* style is a celebration of Spain's diverse past.



Fig. 11. *Mudéjar Pavilion* Aníbal González, 1929. Parque María Luisa. Seville, Spain.
(Photo: courtesy of Wikipedia.org)

To conclude, this article has argued that as the Christian Spaniards overtook the Iberian Peninsula, they simultaneously adopted the preexisting Islamic architectural language as a component of their own. The resulting style has been named *mudéjar*, and examples of it exist both in Spain and in its colonies. Despite the seemingly paradoxical nature this hypothesis has to hostile the relationship of the Christians to the Muslims, there are several arguments to support it. For one, there had been a preceding tradition in Iberia of a victorious culture's adaptation of certain decorative motifs or examples of architecture that had once been used by the vanquished culture (such as the Visigoth horseshoe arch that is now considered a *mudéjar* trait). Furthermore, the frontier nature of the Iberian Peninsula harbored extremes in cultural relations between the Christians and Muslims, who could at times live in peaceful coexistence, while at others suffered through some of the most brutal battles and conversion efforts. The Islamic structures that exist to this day, for example the *Alhambra* and Great Mosque of Córdoba, have survived because they were absorbed as a part Catholic Spain's royal style, since the buildings that were saved from Islamic rule were used for purposes relating to Spanish authority. This claim is strengthened in considering select *mudéjar* elements of colonial architecture. While the existing *mudéjar* style of Spain was, in most cases, a vestige of former Muslim rule, in the colonies of Perú and Mexico, the style was manifested in fragments (i.e. individually as a ceiling, an arch, a decorative element, etc) on new buildings. By constructing buildings that demonstrate *mudéjar* elements, the Spanish perpetuated this style of architecture that they had absorbed in the motherland. This style has remained present in the Spanish architecture up to modern times, since *mudéjar* motifs have been used on new buildings for national events while older buildings, such as the *Alhambra*, have nearly become national symbols themselves. Indeed, much like other Islamic legacies in Spain, such as the one evoked by this article's opening quotation by Washington Irving, the *mudéjar* style has become a fondly regarded component of Spanish visual culture. Its use beyond Muslim rule in Andalucía and implantation in New World colonies suggests a selective cultural appropriation of Islamic culture along with a refutation of other Islamic values and shared historical conflicts.

[1] In practice this was mainly executed at the end of the 15th century when Isabella and Ferdinand's forces overthrew the Nasrid dynasty in Granada.; however, the *Reconquista* campaign was being carried out since 722 C.E. and lasted through the 17th century.

[2] The term *mudéjar* will be employed in this article to refer to an architectural style of structures in Catholic Spanish dominated territories, whether Muslims were the original architects or if Catholic victors who adapted a formerly Muslim building.

[3] Barrucand and Bednorz, 228.

[4] During the Early Modern Era, similar phenomena took place with other colonial powers, namely the British, as they often employed an "Arabesque" or "Indo-Saracenic" style in their colonies for official buildings. This was primarily executed in lands with Islamic or other non-Christian

populations. While this article will only elaborate on Spain's use of this kind of style, it should be kept in mind that similar styles were being evoked simultaneously around the world.

[5] Hillenbrand, 128.

[6] It should be noted that the worship of idols is forbidden in Islam, not the act or display of figurate images. Indeed, this prohibition is only in religious settings (and thus figurative art can and does justly appear on secular buildings and objects used by Muslims), though due to the ambiguous definition of "Islamic Art", there are often false accusations of blasphemy against the appearance of these motifs in certain domestic (or otherwise non-religious) settings.

[7] Hillenbrand, 128.

[8] Ibid, 14.

[9] Barrucand and Bednorz, 183.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid, 187.

[12] This becomes relevant later on for future generations who, in turn, persevered the appearance of the palace this time out of respect for their ancestors (i.e. Ferdinand and Isabella and Charles V), but in preserving their residence, they were also preserving and perpetuation an originally Islamic vestige in their homeland.

[13] Barrucand and Bednorz, 188.

[14] These fortifications should not be confused with the similar sounding *alcáza*, one of which does not exist at the *Alhambra*, and whose name comes from the Arabic *al-qasr*, meaning castle.

[15] Rosenthal, XV.

[16] Ibid, 58.

[17] Ibid, 3. This quotation employs the term *mudéjar*, as an ethnicity of the laborers and not, as has been done throughout the article, as a stylistic term. In this case *mudéjar* is referring to people who follow Islam and remained in Spain after the Catholic monarchs gained control.

[18] Gallego y Burin, 55.

[19] One might imagine that the Spanish used the *Alhambra* as a *casa real* because visitors could experience the foreign and unknown world without actually leaving it. Similarly the monarchical inhabitants could rule their vast empire from this paradoxically foreign palace in their homeland.

[20] Barrucand and Bednorz, 39.

[21] Kamen, 19.

[22] Ibid, 52.

[23] Graber, 590.

[24] "Morisco" (*Little Moors* in Spanish) was the term for Muslims who remained in Spain after the fall of the Nasrid Dynasty. Sometimes it also can refer to former Muslims who converted to Christianity.

[25] Fox, 87.

[26] Wetthey, 402.

[27] Suderman, 92.

[28] Ibid, 400.

[29] Rosenthal, 3.

[30] Wetthey, 402.

[31] Suderman, 92.

[32] Universidad de Alcalá, "Short History of the University of Alcalá," http://www.uah.es/idiomas/ingles/Little_history.shtm

[33] Barrucand and Bednorz, 217.

[34] Dewald, 316.

[35] Wethy, 404.

[36] Ibid, 403.