

VISIONS OF AL-ANDALUS IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY SPANISH MOSQUE ARCHITECTURE

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From the very earliest period of the Islamic empire, Muslim rulers commissioned mosques as a way to establish their authority and create a visual manifestation of the presence of Islam. The mosque became an integral aspect of the community's identity as it served as its physical and spiritual centre. Today, as Islam continues to spread beyond its historical borders, the mosque has become an important emblem of identity for Muslim minorities in foreign lands. In the last fifty years especially, mosques and Islamic centres have been constructed in many cities outside the traditional Islamic world, which has created new challenges for architects and mosque patrons.¹ The form and decoration of the mosque can convey information about the community that uses the mosque, and about the particular path within Islam which they follow. The image that is projected by a mosque's architecture therefore poses important questions: for example, to what extent should buildings of the past serve as models? In cities where the Muslim community is composed of diverse origins, whose past should be evoked? How appropriate are new architectural styles? How do contemporary architectural discourses inform mosque design? For instance, does the use of contemporary design change the image of Islam projected by the mosque?

This article aims to examine such questions, by focusing specifically on mosques in Spain, which is unique among the countries outside the Islamic world for having an Islamic history of over seven hundred years. The country's Islamic past, bracketed by the conquest of the Peninsula in 711 and the end of Nasrid rule in 1492, and thereafter the imposition of Catholicism as the predominant religion, creates a rather different context for the foundation of contemporary mosques than is the case for countries in Europe and the Americas, where Islam has

¹ Throughout this article, I use the phrase "traditional Islamic world" to refer to parts of the world where Islam became the predominant religion, or the religion of the rulers, in the seventh to ninth centuries. By the phrase "Islamic world", I refer to countries in which Islam is the majority religion today.

not played an overt historical role. Studies carried out in other regions outside the Islamic world, by Jerrilynn Dodds for example,² do suggest parallels for how Muslims view their mosques. In particular, the emphasis on the services, activities, and sense of community that is fostered by the mosque over the actual physical structure, is evident in Spain, as in New York. However, monuments such as the Great Mosque of Córdoba and the palaces of the Alhambra are important symbols of the grandeur of Islam in Spain and continue to be relevant today to those constructing mosques. In considering the meanings which can be attached to formal issues of architecture—architectural language, decoration, and relationship to urban surroundings especially—this article will explore the mosques of twentieth-century Spain, concentrating on three mosques constructed in Spain since 1980.³

Under the dictatorship of Francisco Franco, from 1936 to 1975, Catholicism was still the official state religion. But during the past twenty-five years, Spain has experienced a resurgence of Islam, as Muslims from the traditional Islamic world have settled there, and Spaniards have converted to Islam. The religion began to be firmly re-established in Spain in the 1960s, with the arrival of Muslim immigrants and students, especially from the Middle East. The changing religious and political climate, brought about by events such as the Second Vatican Council and its declaration of religious freedom, led to the 1967 *Ley de Libertad Religiosa*. While Catholicism remained the official state religion, other religious groups were officially recognized.⁴ Shortly after, in 1971, the *Asociación Musulmana de España* became the first Muslim association in peninsular Spain to be registered with the Ministry of Justice.⁵ Following Franco's death in 1975, and the development in 1978 of a new Constitution declaring that Spain had no state religion, Spain's Muslim communities began to grow more rapidly. In less than two

² See Jerrilynn Dodds, *New York Masjid: The Mosques of New York* (New York: Powerhouse Books, 2002).

³ See also Jennifer Roberson, *The Mosque: Community and Identity in late 20th-Century Morocco and Spain*, unpublished PhD dissertation, Department of Art History, University of Minnesota, 2004. Further information can be found there on the interviews cited here.

⁴ Jordi Moreras, *Musulmanes en Barcelona: Espacios y Dinámicas Comunitarias* (Barcelona: CIDOB Ediciones, 1999), pp. 88–89.

⁵ Muslim associations already existed in Ceuta and Melilla, the Spanish territories on the north coast of Morocco: see Moreras, *Musulmanes*, p. 88.