

## Article

# Open Al-Andalus: Hispanic-Muslim Heritage Impact on Spanish Contemporary Architecture

Sara Núñez Izquierdo

Department of History of Art and Fine Arts, Faculty of Geography and History, University of Salamanca, 37002 Salamanca, Spain; saranunez@usal.es; Tel.: +34-629-377-559

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**Abstract:** Spanish architecture, towards the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, was characterized by the development of a variety of styles, including Neo-Muslim. The Alhambra of Granada, the Mosque of Cordoba, and the Giralda Tower of Seville, served as inspiration to the design of works that would follow these models, some to a greater extent than others, and would eventually give rise to an architectural trend that would make its way all across Spain. As such, this article attempts to provide some examples of said architecture found in different autonomous communities in Spain, examining them through four typologies, as well as to discuss the consideration and use of the Neo-Muslim style after the second half of the 20th century. The methodology behind this research involved extensive reading and analysis of both general and specific works on the subject, the study of archival materials relative to some of the selected buildings, about which preserved evidence was scarce, as well as taking photographs of the properties included in the text.

**Keywords:** Neo-Muslim; Spain; contemporary architecture; typology

## 1. Introduction

The Muslims' presence in the Iberian Peninsula from 711 until 1492 enriched Spanish culture and science; the significance and importance of this historical fact has been studied, scientifically, since the mid-1800s. It was around that time when historians, such as José Amador de los Ríos ([Amador 1846](#), pp. 26–27, 34–35, 42–44) and José Caveda ([Caveda 1848](#)), as well as architects like Rafael Contreras ([Contreras 1878](#)) and Rafael Facundo de Riaño, amongst others, began to take an interest in, and to appreciate, this valuable legacy. They favored incorporating Hispanic-Muslim architecture into the general history of Spanish architecture. As a consequence, at the end of the 19th century, this Arabic style became a reference for some of the architectural movements that would later be developed in the following decades, thus resulting in a style that was characterized by its variety, rather than a very strict adherence to its original models. Hence, it can be referred to as Neo-Muslim, Neo-Islamic, or even architecture “made of an Arab pastiche”, as Pedro Navascués called it. The wide variety of names it receives in Spanish demonstrates both the unique nature of this style<sup>1</sup> and the fact that there have been many different interpretations of it over the years. However, all of these interpretations have placed importance on the style's ornamental essence.

Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that, ever since the early 1800s, there have been numerous foreign authors who have been interested in this cultural heritage. This was the case for the painter David Roberts and the writer Washington Irving, as well as for the traveler Richard Ford and the artist Owen Jones, among others, who, through their well-known works, promoted a reinterpretation of this

<sup>1</sup> T.N.: In Spanish many terms can be used to refer to this trend: *neoárabe*, *neomusulmán*, *neoislámica*, *neoandalusí*, *neomorisca*, *neomudéjar*, and *alhambrina*.

cultural heritage, thus creating a romantic image of Spain. Because of this, England, France and other countries became highly interested in all things Arabic, which consequently turned Hispanic-Muslim architecture into an example for European and American Romanticism (Darby 1983; Sweetman 1987; Raquejo 1989; Danby 1995; Labrusse 2007; Oulebsir and Volait 2009; Calatrava and Zucconi 2012).

During the first decades of the 20th century, the interest in Muslim style followed on at national and international level by means of the development of several architectonic trends. In this sense, it may be worth mentioning the Neo-Muslim Regionalism in Spain, created in order to regenerate the architecture (Bonet 2006, p. 53; Rodríguez 2013, p. 219). This was due to the necessity of retrieving a national spirit after the 1898 crisis, which lasted until 1930. Meaningful examples of this trend are the Manuel Nogueira building (1907) in Seville, analyzed in this paper, or the Ancient Seville Water Works Company Ltd. building (1925) in Seville. Besides, Art Nouveau also turned to the Neo-Islamic. Art Nouveau is being considered as a new art which took place in our country during these same years, and featured a degree of freedom in composing designs, along with its well-known curve motif, called *coup de fouet*. Many decorative elements from the Hispano-Muslim tradition were then integrated, such as horseshoe arches, tiles on the lower part of the walls or domes, among other items; more examples can be found at the Campos Eliseos Theatre (1902) in Bilbao, studied in this text, or the Marquis of Chávarri House (1907) in Mojácar (Almería).

From the 1930s, Rationalism was widespread in Spain; during this period, there were plenty of remarkable designs which refused to use historicist elements; hence, it is from this moment on when Neo-Muslim architecture started to lose popularity. The outbreak of the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) and the later Franco dictatorship (1939–1975) pushed aside Islamic references, which did not reappear until the 1980s. During this decade, social and political changes shaped new designs and architectural typologies, now closely related to Neo-Muslim style.

## 2. Field of Study and Geographical Spread

This text provides some meaningful examples from Spanish architecture constructed between 1862 and 1992, this last year being the year of the Universal Exposition of Spain (Expo '92), as well as the year of the inauguration of the Palacio de Xifré, one of the most important Neo-Muslim buildings of 19th century Spain. The influence of buildings designed centuries ago in Al-Andalus by the Emirates, Caliphs, Taifas, Almoravids, Almohads, and Nasrids, can be perceived in the examples presented in this text. For this reason, four typologies have been selected as criteria for their analysis: architecture in single-family homes and condominiums, religious architecture, architecture of leisure spaces, and that of pavilions for universal expositions, the study of which are justified, due to the Western World's fascination with Muslim contribution; for them, it represented the exotic, picturesque, or sublime, as well as a means of escape from the ordinary. Furthermore, the style could be used as a way to highlight one's social class or status, or even as a representation of one's own identity, among other things.

During this period, Spanish architecture, as well as the contemporary political situation throughout these years, underwent many convulsive stages, which resulted in the incorporation of many different tendencies. Therefore, at the end of the 19th century, Historicism and Eclecticism stood out among this wide range of manifestations. In the first decades of the 20th century, a stylistic variety blossomed, including Modernism, Art Deco, and Rationalism, later being completely thwarted by the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939). After the war, and once Francisco Franco's dictatorship was established (1939–1975), design ornamentation reappeared, and a new historicism was retrieved and imposed by the autocracy of the new government. Nevertheless, around the mid-1950s, and as Franco's control gradually began to wane, the country was slowly able to open up to the rest of the world, and Spain realized their architectural style lacked definition. This non-defined type of architecture was still current at the time of the Spanish Transition to democracy during the 1980s, and it came to an end in the last decade of the 20th century, with a wide range of new proposals in postmodern times.

In this article, we have selected fourteen projects from all around Spain to analyze. They were chosen because their source of inspiration was Hispano-Islamic architecture, though they vary in their degree of faithfulness to said style. Regarding their location, representative buildings from the autonomous community of Andalusia have been selected which, for obvious reasons, has numerous outstanding properties with features of this style; other properties constructed in the regions of Extremadura and Castilla-La Mancha were also selected, due to their close proximity to Andalusia. The example from Madrid is a justifiable choice, as it is the capital of Spain, with a cosmopolitan character and the property in the Basque Country for being an exceptional example of this style along the Cantabrian coast, given the lack of this type of architecture there. All of these regions, together, provide a good sample of the Neo-Muslim phenomenon in Spain.

In order to accomplish this task, a more generalized bibliography of this topic was revised and, afterwards, another more in-depth reading of texts, specifically relating to the buildings in question, was also carried out. This research was completed by searching for specific documentation and material which, for some of the buildings, was scarce and, therefore, difficult to find.

### 3. Bibliographical Review

The revision of the bibliography on the proposed topic confirms the recent incorporation of studies dedicated to Spanish architecture from the mid-1800s, and almost all of this research was in the form of doctoral theses in which, on occasion, chapters on the Islamic legacy in the architectural development during this period have been included. On the other hand, there are very few works that are dedicated to this topic at the start of the 20th century, and they are nonexistent from 1920 on. Thus, this text confirms the relevance of the proposal that is presented here as a means of reflection on this topic, constituting an approach that is adequate for future research on a national level.

Therefore, one can deduce that interest in Neo-Muslim influence in Spain came about late, which can be explained, among other reasons, for its ambiguity, as it was often reviled for having been considered to simply be a highly decorative style and, therefore, lacking a theoretical foundation, making it unattractive for research purposes. In addition to this, the state of research on Spanish Architecture from the 20th century must also be considered as, with the majority of cases, the date 1939, the year of the end of the Spanish Civil War, and the start of Francoist Spain (1939–1975), meant the start of a period in which very few contributions were able to be made to the field of architecture (Solá 1976, pp. 19–29; Seguí 1990; Ruiz 1993; González 2003; Sambricio 2004; Núñez 2014).

Thus, *Arquitectura y arquitectos madrileños del siglo XIX* (Architecture and Architects from Madrid in the 19th century), written in 1973 by the famous scholar Pedro Navascués Palacio, is one of the works which best aligns with the aim of this paper (Navascués 1973). This volume is the first scientific attempt to set the theoretical and formal bases, and even includes some of the examples analyzed in this paper. As a direct consequence of the quality of this work, it was soon spread and expanded among general and specific publications. Regarding these general publications, the volume devoted to 19th and 20th century architecture, from the *Summa Artis. Historia General del Arte* series, is to be highlighted, as their topic remains close to that of this text. In 1993, Navascués Palacio dealt with Spanish architecture between 1808 and 1914, from which the chapter on *Islamic Revival Architecture* was found to be extremely relevant for this article; it is a pioneering text that is a must-read for anyone researching this topic.

Another important title on Neo-Muslim architecture is the research devoted to Sevillian Regionalism, works designed in Seville from 1900 to 1935. This was researched by Alberto Villar Movellán, who wrote a book of reference, first published in 1976 and reedited in 2010; his research shows that, among other architectural styles that served as inspiration, some Islamic decorations were incorporated into Sevillian Regionalism (Villar 1979). There are many monographic works on some of the most representative architects of this trend, such as those written by Aníbal González Álvarez-Ossorio, José Espiau Muñoz, Juan Talavera Heredia, etc.

Within this body of research, a communication presented at the International Congress in the History of Art from the year 1977 is noteworthy for being an early incorporation of the specific character of Neo-Muslim architecture in Catalonia. The art historian Santiago Alcolea Gil was responsible for this text (Alcolea 1977, pp. 22–34).

Nearly 20 years after Pedro Navascués' publication, in 1992, Nieves Panadero defended her doctoral dissertation called *Los estilos medievales en la arquitectura madrileña del siglo XIX (1780–1868)* (Medieval Styles in Architecture in Madrid from 1780 to 1868). She includes many invaluable chapters on the consideration of Islamic architecture between the 18th and 19th centuries (Panadero 1992). Another academic study that is especially relevant for the purposes of this paper is that of José Manuel Rodríguez Domingo, who defended his doctoral thesis in 1996. It was centered on the Neo-Muslim style of Spanish architecture from 1840 to 1930. This is the only specific work dedicated to this topic at the beginning of the 20th century and, as such, it established some of the concepts used to develop this research paper (Rodríguez 1997). Furthermore, María Victoria Álvarez Rodríguez's thesis, defended in 2015, is another significant contribution to this field of study; she studied the impact of the consideration of Islamic architecture in the artistic press during the reign of Isabella II of Spain (1833–1868), among other things (Álvarez 2015).

Lastly, a wider work should be mentioned, originating from a research project led by Professors Rafael López Guzmán, expert on Hispanic Islamic architecture, and Rodrigo Gutiérrez Viñuales, both of whom, along with their team, have shed some light on the impact that Neo-Muslim architecture had at the end of the 19th century and beginnings of the 20th in Latin America and the United States (López and Gutiérrez 2016).

This brief bibliographical review has shown that the study of Neo-Islamic architecture in Spain has only been partially delved into, as is evident by the fact that the seven works mentioned above have covered designs from the mid-1800s to the early 1900s, while much less is known about the Neo-Muslim architecture from after 1930. Consequently, examples from after this date have been incorporated in this article.

#### 4. Framing the Issue

“When the Arabs had settled, it is evident that they protected the arts, and made progress in jewelry making and silversmithing and added Spanish craftsmanship to their knowledge of these skills; they created, or rather, introduced the architecture in their name, that they perfected with their own decorative style, in the Alcazar of Seville and the Alhambra of Granada; as well as a very different type of architecture similar to that which Abdurrahman's magnificent undertaking presents us with in the celebrated Mosque of Cordoba” (Inclán 1833, pp. 37–38).

With these words in 1833, the architect Juan Miguel Inclán Valdés, one of the most renowned architectural theorists of that time, defined Islamic architecture. Indeed, as was pointed out in the introduction of this article, historians and architects played a decisive role in the rediscovering and admiration for Spain's Hispanic-Muslim heritage. These individuals favored the gradual incorporation of this style as a model for the eclectic and historicist architecture of the 19th and 20th centuries.

In addition to this, both foreign travelers and Spanish architects, alike, helped to spread knowledge of the cultural heritage of Al-Andalus around the Western World by visiting the great representative models from that architectural period. These were the Alhambra of Granada, the Mosque of Córdoba, and the minaret of the main former mosque of Seville, called the Giralda, currently located within the cathedral complex of this city. Artists found inspiration in the quintessential architectural and ornamental features found on these structures. In the monuments mentioned above, it is quite frequent to find the use of horseshoe arches with *voussoirs*, multifoil arches (which may be intertwined, thus increasing their aesthetic effects), as well as longer arches, and slim columns ending in capitals, mainly with abacuses and *alfices* (rectangular molding decorating an arch). In relation to the ornamental exuberance, the use of *atauriques* (plastered vegetal decoration), *muqarnas*, epigraphic decoration in Kufic lettering, ceramics, tiles on the lower part of the walls, columns, and doors, and latticework with

interlacing or geometric patterns, was extremely frequent. Other features could be added, such as brickwork, which may have been used for construction or decorative purposes, or combined with other materials, achieving a polychromatic façade.

## 5. Typologies

The ornate elegance of the Neo-Muslim style favored its being used in a great number of architectural typologies during the period in which this study is centered, four of which are being used in this article to center the study of the architectural style. These are architecture in single-family homes and condominiums, religious architecture, architecture of leisure spaces, and that of pavilions for universal expositions. It is necessary to identify that the reasons behind the choice of this style were not expressly manifested by its promoters, but in their constructions, and one can see that they did consider appropriating and combining the following concepts: of the exotic, the search for social class or status distinction, its cosmopolitan character, its eccentricity, its association with pleasure and escapism, the search for beauty that comes with it, the belief in tradition, as well as the representation of national identity and of the religion itself.

### 5.1. Neo-Muslim Decoration in Single-Family Homes and Condominiums

Considering the above, the Moorish Revival style was sometimes chosen for mansions, single-family homes and, less frequently, condominiums from the mid-19th century onwards. In this context, Madrid was the city with the highest number of buildings with an unusual design; they stood out for their picturesqueness, and helped their developers to display their eccentric and sophisticated personalities, as well as to break with the monotony of the spaces in their homes through an Islamic atmosphere, something that was understood to be a “hidden refuge for an individual’s dreamlike state” (Rodríguez 2014, p. 285). They were often located in wealthy neighborhoods of this city, such as the Paseo del Prado, de la Castellana, or Recoletos. Unfortunately, this circumstance resulted in their bulldozing after the second half of the 20th century, due to real estate interests. There were plenty of private homes built in this area, and many of them featured astounding rooms decorated in the Neo-Muslim style, following the trend set by the Islamic Room of the Royal Palace of Aranjuez (1848), designed by the architect and restorer of the Alhambra of Granada, Rafael Contreras Muñoz. In this sense, the ill-fated Palace of the Duke of Anglada, the Larios Palace (1876), must be acknowledged; it was projected to be built in the Paseo de la Castellana by architect Emilio Rodríguez Ayuso, who was considered one of the experts in charge of the revival of Neo-Mudéjar architecture in the 19th century. The analysis of the preserved photos of this building does not show the made-to-scale reproduction of the Nasrid Patio of the Lions from the Alhambra, hidden behind the eclectic façade (González-Varas 2010, pp. 203–4). In order to make this reproduction possible, the architect counted on the aforementioned Contreras, who modelled the *muqarnas* and the Nasrid capitals, achieving a greater fidelity to the original ones and, also, with these reproductions, was able to spread the ornamental motifs of the Alhambra around Europe and the United States (Rodríguez 2015, p. 197). As Navascués pointed out, this was not the only case of a building whose interior, in spite of not being architectonically Neo-Muslim, boasted astonishingly Islamic designs. This Revival, based on appealing to the senses, also has particular examples from the 20th century. For instance, the painter Joaquín Sorolla Bastida, trusted the design of his house to the architect Enrique María de Repullés y Vargas, who approved the plans of an eclectic building, with a large garden. This garden was created by Sorolla himself who, after his many journeys to Andalusia, was convinced of the idea of incorporating the gardens seen in the Alhambra and the Alcazar of Seville in his own domestic space (Obra Social La Caixa 2017). With this aim in mind, he devoted a wide plot, divided into three interconnected gardens, with typical Mediterranean plant species, such as the orange tree, the myrtle, and the laurel. Among them, the second garden is noteworthy, as it was inspired by the Generalife Gardens of Granada, and featured fountains and a pond, where he enjoyed listening to the sound of water while painting.



In Madrid, nevertheless, another building stands out, in which, almost extraordinarily, there is a synchronization of Islamic motifs in the façade, as well as in its interior, where a patio inspired by the Patio of the Lions was, again, created. This particular example is the palace of José Xifré Downing (1862), though the building is not preserved, it was known in those days as the Arabian Palace of the Prado (Navascués 1973, p. 266; González-Varas 2010, pp. 89–91). The building was considered to be one of the best examples of Neo-Muslim architecture; it lay just in front of the Prado National Museum, which emphasized its exoticism even more. The design was due to the French architect Émile Boeswillwald, who constructed a rectangular building; one of the short sides of the façade faced the Paseo del Prado. The façade was organized into three axes: the ones on the sides were three-storied, and the central one was two-storied and was created as a porch with a balcony on top of it (Figure 1). The elevation used bricks, alternatively, in red and thinner yellowish stripes, displayed as slim layers and horseshoe holes of different spires and spans, decorated with *alfices*; in addition, it had a huge wooden overhanging roof, also of Nasrid inspiration.



**Figure 1.** Façade of the Xifré Palace, also known as the Arabian Palace of the Prado. Photo: Jean Laurent. Between 1860–1886. Archive Ruiz Vernacci, IPCE, Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte. © Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte.

The Moorish Revival style was also implemented in condominiums built in Spain during the 19th century, which were humbler in comparison with the building analyzed above. This kind of ornamentation was timidly incorporated into façade designs in the rooms of the apartments and in entrance hall. An example worthy of mention is the house of Modesto Echaniz and Lino Garay (1881), conceived by the architect Julio Saracibar Gutiérrez de Rozas in María Muñoz Street in Bilbao (Paliza 2009). The facade of this five-story building is laid out over three axes, with the central one being the most prominent because of its large window. There are barely any decorative motifs, and those that are present are geometrical shapes that have nothing to do with the Arabic style. Due to said lack of decorative motifs outside, attention is drawn to the decoration of the entranceway, which does remind us of the Neo-Muslim style (Figure 2). The entrance hall is organized into three parts, the first of which works as a proper hall and is connected to commercial facilities and to the stairs. The access to the apartments is through a fake lower scalloped arch, framed by an *alfiz*, inspired by designs found

in Cordoba, to which the architect added ringed-shafted thin columns, lattice motifs decorating the ceiling, and an *ataurique* in the plaster plafond, from which a lamp hangs.



**Figure 2.** Entrance hall of the building of Modesto Echaniz and Lino Garay (1881). Bilbao. Photo took by María Teresa Paliza Monduate.

Later in time, Andalusian Regionalism became one of the architectural trends at the beginning of the 20th century, which brought about solutions clearly inspired by Islamic heritage, and incorporated colorful elements from said heritage in elevations and patios in these buildings. As Villar Movellán has stated, this trend was developed as a reaction against Spanish values, and the identity crisis that followed after the Empire vanished, with the loss of the last colonies in 1898. The idea was to find new designs based on the core roots of the region where the new buildings were to be built, “taking from them the lessons to make something new” (Villar 2007, p. 31) and achieve a national architecture as the result of the sum of different local solutions. With this mentality, the retrieved motifs in the south of the Peninsula were found in the Hispanic-Muslim, Renaissance, and Baroque styles. The trend was quite popular, especially in Seville, from 1906 to 1935. Experts such as Simón Barris y Bes, Aníbal González Álvarez-Ossorio, and José Espiau Muñoz, cultivated this trend. Among the creations of these creators, some buildings designed by González stand out, such as the Plaza de España (1914) in the María Luisa Park, and the house of Manuel Nogueira (1907), situated on the corner between the streets of Santa María de Gracia and Martín Villa in Seville (Villar 1979, p. 174; Pérez-Escolano 1996, p. 85). This last building has three stories, with the exception of the side axes and the wall on the corner, which are four-storied. The design is remarkable, due to its careful use of brick, and the rich variety of ornamental solutions facing each street, combining different arches, *alfices*, glazed ceramics, and *sebka* patterns (Figure 3). Espiau Muñoz designed the valued buildings Ciudad de Londres (1912–1914), situated in Cuna Street on the corner with Cerrajería Street, as well as La Adriática (1914–1922), in the Avenida de la Constitución, developed by Juan Bautista Calvi and Rives de la Tour (Villar 1985, pp. 72–74).



**Figure 3.** Façade of the house of Manuel Nogueira (1907). Seville. Photo used by permission *Conoce Sevilla y sus cosas*. © Conoce Sevilla y sus cosas.

Andalusian Regionalism spread its influence beyond our borders, especially in Latin America, as well as beyond its own autonomous community. Architects in Extremadura turned to this trend for designs in some of its main cities, due to its closeness to Andalusia. This is the case of the house of Manuel Cancho Moreno in Badajoz, known as La Giralda (1923), situated in the town center, in the Plaza de la Soledad on the corner with Duque de San Germán Street, and designed by architects Luciano Delage Villegas and Rodolfo Martínez González (Lozano and Villalón 1995, pp. 251–53; González 2011, pp. 74–75). Movellán labelled it as an “exotic interpretation of Sevillian Regionalism” (Villar 1979, p. 210). The building was home to a fabric shop of the developer and several houses, including the developer’s own residence. It has been studied by Bartolozzi and Villalón; these scholars consider it part of the phenomenon called *giraldisimo* by Navascués, which refers to the projects that incorporate a nearly identical copy of the famous Sevillian tower, as happens in this case. It is a remarkable building, resulting from many extensions or additions made up until 1933. Its elevation is irregular, and many elements from it may be highlighted: its ornamental richness, stressed by the polychromatic façade attained by the combination of brick and rendering, as well as the quality of the decoration of the horseshoe holes, of the simple and intertwined lobed arches, of the *alfices*, of the ledges arranged as latticework with interlacing patterns, and of the slim columns ending in capitals with abacuses, among many other motifs (Figure 4).





**Figure 4.** Façade of the building of Manuel Cancho Moreno, known as La Giralda (1923). Badajoz. Photo took by author.

The Spanish architectural panorama changed dramatically, due to the new scenario in the country that emerged as the Spanish Civil War broke out in 1936, ending in 1939. It was then that the New Government, led by dictator Francisco Franco, was in charge of the moral and material reconstruction of the country. With this aim, the Directorate General for Architecture was founded, the Government being aware of the “representative importance that architectural works have as an expression of the strength and mission of the State” ([Boletín Oficial del Estado 1939](#), p. 5427), so that the “rebuilding of the unity of Spain by means of tradition” could take place through this institution. Effectively, with this idea in mind, architectural models based on a glorious past were imposed in the very post-war period; in this context, the Renaissance works of Juan de Herrera and Neoclassical buildings of Juan de Villanueva were considered the quintessence of Spanish identity, but, on the other hand, the Islamic style was dismissed. However, the imposed architectural referents and the limited freedom of architects started to fracture from 1949, when a group of young technicians refused to follow that historicist and monumental trend and discussed the necessity of architectural updates in order to provide the country with modernity according to the current times. Most of the members were well-known names from the Spanish architecture of the second half of the 20th century, such as Antonio Coderch y de Sentmenat, Alejandro de la Sota Martínez, Francisco de Asís Cabrero Torres-Quevedo, or Miguel Fisac Serna, among others. In their attempt to change the direction of our architecture, they organized many meetings; particularly relevant for the issue discussed in this paper, is the meeting held during two days in October 1952, on the premises of the Alhambra. The choice of this site was justified as it allowed, “in a cubist manner” ([Chueca 1953](#), p. 24), the study of “an essential deposit of modern architecture” ([Fernández 1995](#), p. 64). As a result, the Manifesto of the Alhambra was shaped, written by Fernando Chueca Goitia, and published in 1953. This document gathered the proceedings of the 24

architects who attended the meeting, where they discussed the relationship of the Alhambra complex within contemporary architecture in Spain.

The publication in December 1949, of the competition result of drafts for the Trade Unions' building in Madrid, which is currently home to the Ministry of Health, Consumer Affairs and Social Welfare, situated in the Paseo del Prado ([Concurso de anteproyectos 1950](#), pp. 11–12), was another fact which contributed to the beginning of the search for modernity during the dictatorship, and which is closely related to our topic. Although many architects close to the Regime participated, the jury opted for the project jointly designed by Francisco de Asís Cabrero and Rafael Aburto, whose proposal clearly stated their intention of breaking away from the imposed historicism and promoting a new design according to current times. However, in order to accomplish this task, it was necessary to bulldoze the building considered the best example of Neo-Muslim architecture in Spain, the aforementioned Xifré Palace, in the Paseo del Prado, as the new building was to be erected on the same site ([El Palacio Árabe del Prado 1949](#), pp. 44–45). This was how Neo-Islamic architecture lost popularity as an architectural trend, regaining its position in 1975, due to the Spanish Transition and, especially, with the first socialist government in 1982. It was then when our country turned into an attractive place for investment for wealthy Arabian sheiks, who decided to build their mansions on the Costa del Sol. In these constructions, their developers displayed a wide variety of Orientalizing motifs; examples of this could be the palaces and mansions built by King Fahd bin Abdul-Aziz in Marbella from the 1980s.

## 5.2. Architecture for Leisure and Entertainment

The peculiarity of Neo-Muslim architecture turned it into an appropriate style for other architectural typologies, especially constructions for leisure and entertainment, which should be outlined. The approval of this style was justified not only for aesthetic reasons, but also due to its relationship with hedonism, delight and opulence, since this type of architecture is the “object of the pleasure of the senses” ([Fernández 1988](#), p. 15), which resorted, amongst other solutions, “to emotional elements that encompass anything from the way they played with light in each part of the building and the babbling water trickling in fountains and canals to the magic of the iridescent colors found in the varnish used on tiles” ([Gómez-Moreno 1970](#), p. 181). Mostly, there was an interior decoration that opted for designs that had a playful, almost theater set-like ambiance. Therefore, this trend became an ideal one for use in public baths, such as the one in Alhama de Aragón (1852), province of Saragossa, or the Vichy Catalán Spa (1900) in the thermal town of Caldes de Malavella (Gerona), the health resort of Archena (1900) (Murcia), the San Telmo Spa (1912) in Jerez de la Frontera (Cádiz) and, also, sometimes used in theaters, the most exceptional among them being the Great Falla Theater (1884), located in the Plaza Fragela in Cádiz and designed by architects Adolfo Morales de los Ríos and Adolfo del Castillo Escribano. Pedro Navascués considers it the “Spanish theater with the greatest commitment to Islamic architecture both inside and out” ([Navascués 1993](#), p. 336), due, in large part, to details such as the stalls, whose layout forms a horseshoe arch, or the triple gallery of lower arches and multifoil horseshoe arches inspired by Nasrid architecture and, also, due to the elevation, fairly inspired by the Mosque of Córdoba.

However, the direct reference to the abundant Islamic heritage was, for the most part, seen as less attractive for use in theaters. Nevertheless, there are certain examples in the next century which can be tracked, and which prove the role of this trend more subtly. That is the case of the Campos Eliseos Theater (1902) in Bilbao, located in Bertendona Street, and designed by French architect Jean Baptiste Darroqui following the Eclectic style with a clear influence from Art Nouveau<sup>2</sup> ([Pérez 1998](#); [Paliza 2012, 2017](#)). The main motif is a great horseshoe arch delightfully decorated with leaves and spirals, which makes of this theatre an original interpretation of Islamic design. In addition, the noticeable

<sup>2</sup> Archivo Histórico Foral de Bizkaia n.d., File 5-567-1.

*voussoirs* in the archway, the decoration along the horizontal parts of the façade, and the identical spaces positioned symmetrically on the axes, must also mentioned (Figure 5).

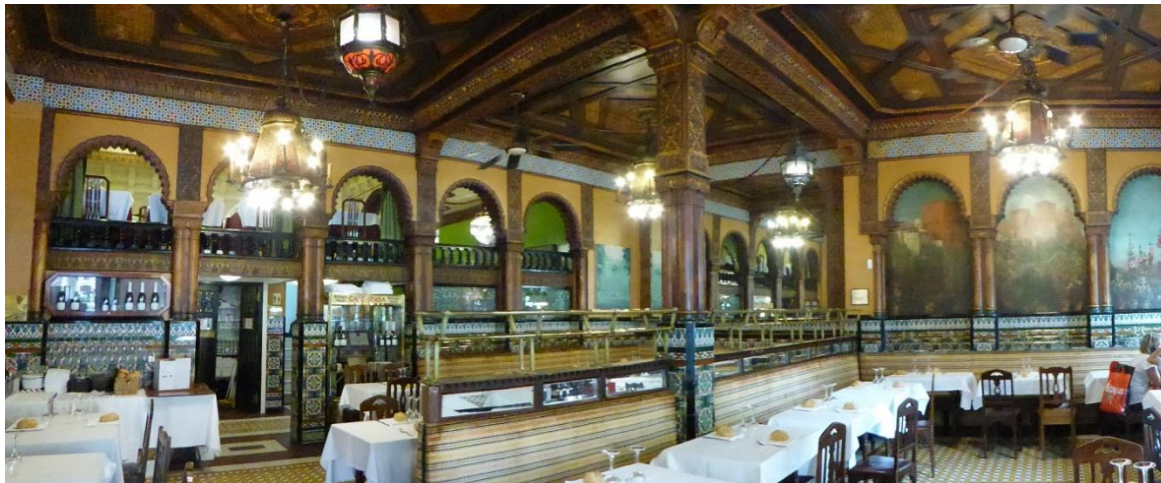


**Figure 5.** Detail of the Campos Elíseos Theatre (1902). Bilbao. Photo took by author.

The spaces for social gatherings, such as kiosks, cafés, and restaurants, were also adequate for displaying a wide ornamental repertoire with oriental references, that provoked emotions of wonder, exoticism, sensuality, and escapism, in the visitor in the city centers where they were built (Rodríguez 2014). Unfortunately, many valuable works have disappeared, such as the Café Pasaje de Oriente (1911) in Seville, located then in Albareda Street, and designed by architect Francisco Hernández-Rubio Gómez. This expert conceived an eclectically styled façade with Art Nouveau ornamental details whereas, inside, he recreated the atmosphere of some rooms from the Alhambra, like the Mirador de Daraxa (Villar 1979, p. 163; Merino 1995, pp. 82–84). Nowadays, some shops reminiscent of the Neo-Muslim style still pervade, although they may not be as splendid as the Café Pasaje de Oriente, for instance, the Café Iruña in Bilbao, located in Colón de Larreategui Street (Figure 6). Information about this structure was scarce, but according to what information could be found, it was ascertained that the building was constructed in 1892 by the architect Luis Landecho Jordán de Urries in a Neoclassical style<sup>3</sup>. This fact further emphasizes the presence of this establishment on the ground floor of the building in question, built in the year 1903, and the decoration, whose authorship remains unknown, is mostly in the restaurant room. This room has a rectangular plan, with decoration on three of the four sides, arranged from bottom to top: the lower level is decorated with tiles and, upon this level, a triple multifoil arcade rises, framing mirrors and paintings representing the Alhambra and, lastly, covered by a coffered ceiling with simple geometric motifs which ultimately make this a unique space.

<sup>3</sup> Archivo Histórico Foral de Bizkaia, File 0158/047.





**Figure 6.** Café Iruña (1903). Bilbao. Photo took by author.

### 5.3. Bullfighting Rings

Next, another architectural typology worthy of mention, where the Neo-Muslim style was definitely consolidated, is the bullfighting ring. From the second half of the 19th century on, bullfighting rings were built in main provincial capitals; during this process, the Nueva Plaza in Madrid, also called Goya, became the model to follow nationwide. In 1872, the project designed by architects Emilio Rodríguez Ayuso and Lorenzo Álvarez Capra was chosen. They were two experts who completely identified with this trend, and this decision was justified, as it was believed that bullfighting had an Arab origin. In effect, among those who stood up for this theory was Nicolás Fernández de Moratín, who stated that “this show was celebrated in Spain by the moors from Toledo, Córdoba and Seville” (Fernández 1777, p. 25). The arena in Madrid, bulldozed in 1936, was entirely built of brick and had three stories. Each of them had identical horseshoe arches, and a single pavilion from which to access the ring; this pavilion was also arranged in three vertical stripes, the one in the middle was wider, as it held a great multifoil horseshoe arch. So, in the 1890s, more bullfighting rings were built in other Spanish towns following this pattern, adding some details taken from the Eclectic style and Art Nouveau. Among the most singular designs, the ones in Barcelona stand out: the one called Las Arenas (1899), by Augusto Font y Carreras, and La Monumental (1915), by Ignacio Mas and Domingo Sugañes. Other arenas worth mentioning are El Chofre (1903, not preserved) in San Sebastián, the one in Albacete (1916) and the Plaza Monumental de las Ventas (1919) in Madrid, designed by architects José Espelius Anduaga and Manuel Muñoz Monasterio. The bullfighting ring of Albacete was authored by Julio Carrilero Prat and Manuel Sainz de Vicuña<sup>4</sup> (Núñez 2017, pp. 231–33). The obvious deficiencies of the former arena in Albacete provoked the construction of a new one in the Paseo de la Feria (Gutiérrez 2001). This last one is an interesting example of the surviving model created 40 years before in Madrid, to which the experts incorporated certain new elements. The architects built a two-story building, avoiding the use of bricks, and opened three entrance doors separated from the main wall. It can be inferred from the records that the original aim of the architects was to build a slightly different door from the current one, with a greater Islamic influence, as they had initially intended to construct three horseshoe arches on each side and wrought iron geometric patterns that were ultimately never made. However, they did include other Muslim elements, as can be seen in the richly decorated *alfices* and the rhythm of the gallery, which are reminiscent of the solutions created during the Nasrid Dynasty (Figure 7).

<sup>4</sup> Archivo Histórico Provincial de Albacete, File 1, Folder 32.





**Figure 7.** Design of the bullfighting ring (1916). Albacete. © Archivo Histórico Provincial de Albacete.

#### 5.4. Exhibitions

The universal expositions were also another opportunity to display Neo-Muslim architecture, where it was widely accepted by architects and foreign historians, as well as by the Spanish government, which did not hesitate to show interest in both countries marginalized by Western culture and society, as well as in the search of the intrinsic values of the nation. In 1851, the first Universal Exhibition was inaugurated in London, followed by many other important events organized in different European cities, such as Paris, Vienna, Brussels, as well as in the United States, such as in New Orleans, Chicago, or Philadelphia, among others. In these gatherings, deeply studied nowadays, Neo-Muslim was haphazardly employed, resulting in striking proposals. On the one hand, foreign architects and historians incorporated part of that heritage on foreign soil. The best-known example of this is Owen Jones and the Patio of the Lions of the Alhambra, as he had carefully studied this space some years before, and reconstructed it inside of the second version of Paxton's Crystal Palace (1853), located in Sydenham Park ([Jones 2010](#)), in the outskirts of London, where it was preserved until 1936 when it was destroyed by a fire.

On the other hand, the obligatory reference to the Muslim culture was clearly visible in the pavilions representing Spain in these events, for instance, in the Universal Exhibition of Paris (1878) and Antwerp (1885); this topic has been studied in detail by María José Bueno and Daniel Canogar ([Bueno 1987](#); [Canogar 2000](#)).

Nearer in time is the Universal Exhibition of Seville, organized in this city for the Fifth Centenary of the discovery of the Americas. This event, known as the Expo 92, took place from April to October of that year, and occupied a 650,000 square meter surface, located on the outskirts of the city, over the so-called Isla de la Cartuja. With these aims, 108 pavilions were erected, in which many countries from all the continents participated; 32 of these pavilions currently remain on site ([Rispa et al. 1992](#)). One of them was Morocco's pavilion, current headquarters of the Three Cultures of the Mediterranean Foundation, designed by French architect Michel Pinseau. This is one of the few examples of Neo-Muslim architecture in this exhibition. The plan forms an eight-point star; and its elevation combines the use of new high-tech materials, such as glass as walls. More traditional architectural elements are added to these glass walls, such as stone arcades, upon which *sebka* patterns decorate the rest of the wall, as well as the garden surrounding the building.

#### 5.5. Religious Architecture

As Hispanist Francisco Márquez Villanueva pointed out, "in Al-Andalus and in the Kingdoms of Castile and Aragón, Christians, Jews, and Muslims coexisted during many centuries; this made the Iberian Peninsula a positive rarity within Medieval Europe. Later, the Catholic Monarchs, after the expulsion of the Jews and the Muslims, imposed religious uniformity, whereas the rest Europe started to walk along the path of pluralism, which made this country an exception yet again, but now in negative terms" ([Valenzuela 2003](#)). In effect, the dramatic decision the King and Queen undertook in 1492 resulted in the loss of these communities in the Iberian Peninsula and, along with them, their rich material and immaterial heritage. This situation lasted for centuries, until some changes in international relations started to take place around the two last decades of the 20th century.

These changes encouraged the settlement of these groups back into our country. So, the process timidly commenced during the Franco dictatorship, when some students from Morocco and the Near East were awarded grants to study in different fields at Spanish universities (Fierro 2009; Orozco and Alonso 2013). This scenario helped many of them to become employed and settle down in Spain, thus obtaining Spanish nationality (López 2011). This policy was current until the mid-1980s, when a remarkable increase in the Muslim and Arabian population was recorded. It coincides with the development of democracy, which brought in, among other measures, the approval of the Organic Law 7/1985 on the rights and freedom of foreigners in the country (Boletín Oficial del Estado 1985). Due to this law, illegal immigrants were regularized, as they had never before been counted in the census. Another milestone of that decade was the adhesion of Spain to the European Economic Community in June 1986, the current European Union. This made the country more attractive for immigration, due to the economic development of those years, among other reasons. This phenomenon has thus brought 1.9 million citizens from Muslim regions to Spain, mostly from Morocco, but also from Pakistan, Algeria, and Senegal (Unión de Comunidades Islámicas de España 2017, p. 9).

Muslims currently represent 4% of the whole Spanish population, and their presence is an example of the religious pluralism in our country. However, although this coexistence has been a fact ever since the second half of the 20th century, the process of visibility of these communities has gone at a slow pace, and parallel to the approval of a group of laws relating to religious practices. In 1945, the *Lex fori* of the Spanish people (Boletín Oficial del Estado 1945) was published, by which the Catholic confessional nature of the State was declared, although it also indicated that “no one should be bothered for either their religious beliefs nor their private worship” (Boletín Oficial del Estado 1945, p. 358). Furthermore, “other rituals or external manifestations were not allowed, apart from the Catholic ceremonies”. In the 1960s, in a scenario of external openness and renovation flagged by the Second Vatican Council, which declared freedom of religion in 1965, and the Law 44/1967 on the civil right to freedom of religion (Boletín Oficial del Estado 1967) was passed. Lastly, during the Spanish Transition, the Organic Law 7/1980 on religious freedom (Boletín Oficial del Estado 1980) was approved, by which Islam was acknowledged as a religion of “remarkable roots” in Spain. Since then, these communities have counted on the necessary facilities to worship, and have spread all over the country, with those communities established in Andalusia, the Community of Madrid, Catalonia, the Community of Valencia, Murcia, and the Autonomous Cities of Ceuta and Melilla being particularly important. The capital of Spain is the city which received the highest number of immigrants; this justified the construction of two buildings of places of worship: the Omar Mosque and Islamic Cultural Centre of Madrid (1977), and the Abu-Bakr Mosque (1988).

We will focus our attention on the first of these two mentioned, as it is one of the most significant examples of this freedom of religion recently recognized, though, despite this apparent representation, it must be said that it had not been researched prior to this article. This building is also known as the Mosque on the M30 Road, due to its location in Salvador de Madariaga Street, in the Ciudad Linear district, just next to the orbital motorway that circles Madrid. In 1977, after the end of the Franco dictatorship, it was agreed to erect this building over a 12,000 square meter lot, transferred by the Town Hall of Madrid, with the work being sponsored by the League of the Islamic World. Notwithstanding this, the works were delayed and did not start until 1987, thanks to the fund provided by the already mentioned King Fahd and lasted until the inauguration on the 21st September 1992 (Barros 1992, p. 15) (Figures 8 and 9).



**Figure 8.** Façade of the Omar Mosque and Islamic Cultural Centre (1977). Madrid. Photo took by author.



**Figure 9.** Prayer hall of the Omar Mosque and the Islamic Cultural Centre (1977). Photo took by author.

It is a large project, with a modern design. Its plans were drawn by Polish architects Jan Czarny, Marek Zemla, and Jalanta Singer-Zemla, though it was Rafael de la Hoz Arderius who was the project manager<sup>5</sup> after winning an international competition in which various professionals participated

<sup>5</sup> Archivo Colegio Oficial de Arquitectos de Madrid. File FCT/D122/C13-5; File FCT/F021; File FCT/P371/O8-3.

for that opportunity ([La mezquita islámica 1989](#)). The elevation is structured by the combination of cubic forms, covered in white marble from Almeria, with very few thin windows decorated with beautiful latticework with interlacing patterns. The design of the main façade breaks this monotony, as the entrance is separated from the rest of the building, composed of ringed-shafted thin columns, a horseshoe arch, and an *alfiz*. Inside it is a complex that not only serves for religious worship, but is also a social and cultural space, featuring a library, two exhibition rooms, and an auditorium. The plan is remarkably functional and is arranged around two open-air patios; the prayer hall is inspired by the forest of columns from the Mosque of Cordoba.

During the 1980s, also promoted by Saudi Arabia, some of the modern mosques in Andalusia were built ([Moreno 2001](#)). Most of them are not inspired in the Islamic tradition. Among the first works, some may be mentioned: the King Fahd bin Abdul-Aziz Mosque (1981) in Marbella (Málaga), by architect Juan Mora; the Basharat Mosque (1982) in Pedro Abad, a town in the province of Cordoba, designed by José Luis Lope and López de Rego; and the private temple of King Fahd (1985) in Marbella, by Francisco Rambla Bardier, in the Las Lomas del Marbella Club urban area.

Currently, according to the Al-Andalus Observatory, it is estimated that there are around 1279 Mosques in Spain, where Andalusia, Valencia, and Aragon are the autonomous communities that possess the most ([Unión de Comunidades Islámicas de España 2017](#), p. 14). However, it must be said that many of these are authorized solely for this purpose and, therefore, lack any architectural interest. And, the difficulties that they would have gone through in order to just open the establishments in the first place, due to, amongst other reasons, the lack of specific regulations regarding licensing provided by the local governments, in addition to the reluctance of some of the members of society to even have centers like these inaugurated. This reluctance has sometimes occurred in different parts of Spain, due to the general climate of fear and mistrust created by extremist terrorist groups that has negatively impacted the integration of Muslim religious communities in Spain ([Pérez 2015](#)).

## 6. Conclusions

This paper has focused on the impact of Hispanic-Muslim architecture in projects developed between 1862 and 1992. With this aim, fourteen buildings which fall within four typologies, and are located over five Spanish Autonomous Communities, have been chosen as a representative sample. This selection proves the circumstances and pitfalls faced during this research. Some projects designed in the second half of the 19th century still keep their records and bibliography on the topic, as is the case with the Xifré Palace. Nevertheless, there is lack of information and publications on those buildings from the second half of the following century; this is surprising in the case of the Omar Mosque and the Islamic Cultural Centre of Madrid. This paper refers to records and publishes inedited information on this Cultural Centre.

Four architectural typologies have been selected, as they are some of the most representative of the so-considered Neo-Muslim architecture, along the period which this work focuses on; however, the reference term Neo-Muslim still has no exact interpretation nowadays. The works analyzed in this paper were promoted by the bourgeoisie, aristocrats, politicians, merchants, businesspeople, the Spanish Estate, and the kings. All of them contributed to the ambiguous consideration of the Hispanic-Muslim culture during the mentioned period; they may have been moved by personal, religious, cultural, political or social reasons, in a different way, and without having left, most of the times, explicit written proof of the reason for their decision. In this sense, the studied works stylistically feature ornamental motifs from Hispanic Islamic architecture, with the Giralda Tower of Seville, the Alhambra of Granada, and the Mosque of Córdoba being the most common models. These models were integrated within the architectural trends of Historicism, Eclecticism, Art Nouveau, and Postmodernism.

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