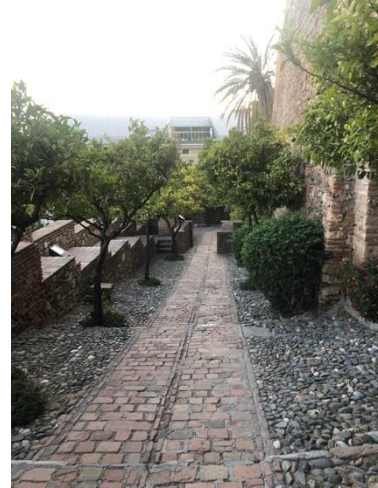


An Investigation into Iberian Identity through Architecture in Spain

During my travel award, as granted by Royal Holloway, I undertook an investigation into the Arabic influence of the Moorish conquest on Spanish famous architecture, a topic which I will discuss further in my upcoming dissertation (final year Spanish degree). From travelling to both southern and northern cities, (including Sevilla, Cordoba, Malaga, Madrid and Oviedo) it is clear that you can track the story of the Spanish / Moorish relationship throughout the architecture present in the country. The architectural discourse throughout therefore has a clear correlation with history and could be argued to be almost synonymous.

During the 7th Century, the Moorish invasion of the Iberian Peninsula took place, leading to Arabic settlements in the majority of the country. Only the small northern areas of now called Asturias and the Basque country (and surrounding areas) were free of the heavy Arabic / Islamic influence until the end of the cohabitation and settlements during the Spanish Inquisition. The heaviest influence, prompted almost certainly by the geography of the country, was the most southern tips of Spain, now known as Andalusia (after Al-Andalus).



La Malagueta - Malaga

This region includes some of the most famous Spanish / Moorish architectural sights like the Alhambra in Granada which is possibly the most iconic piece of Islamic architecture in the whole of Spain, La Giralda in Seville which is a strong example of religious cohabitation (a Cathedral built around a Mosque tower) and the Mesquita in Cordoba which uses Islamic tropes within the Christian cathedral.



Mesquita - Cordoba

The clearly Islamic / Arabic influence in these buildings can be starkly contrasted with the more traditional Visigothic and Christianity dominated architecture of the northern regions. An example of this is Covadonga cathedral. It was around this cathedral that the first battle against the Moorish invasion took place that the Spanish won. Even when this cathedral was destroyed by a fire, the rebuilding was still in stark contrast to the buildings in the south, giving the north its own distinct architectural identity.

The question of Spanish identity therefore, seems to be mutually influenced by the Islamic conquest of the 7th Century. This cultural interconnectivity of the two neighbouring regions and races can be tracked through to modern day, noting the level of multiculturalism in regions of Spain like Melilla and Ceuta. My aim for this trip was to question *'how is Spain imprinted by the Arabic conquest?'* and furthermore *'In what manner is Spanish identity still dependent on its Islamic counterpart?'* Through the architecture of these distinct regions it is clear to see that the mutual cohabitation is not only imprinted on history books, but on the buildings that still represent Spain today.