

## Editorial: Spain and Orientalism

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## Editorial: Spain and Orientalism

**"In the age of Western-dominated modernity, every nation creates its own Orient."**<sup>i</sup>

The city council of Córdoba recently published a cultural magazine in which Demetrio Fernández, the bishop of Córdoba, proclaimed that the architecture of its Cathedral/Mosque '*no es musulmán, es bizantino. Es cristiano bizantino. Los moros solo pusieron el dinero*' (it is not Muslim, it's Byzantine. It's Christian Byzantine. The Moors only put up the money).<sup>ii</sup> This extraordinary claim was immediately rejected by the scholarly community, by local Córdoba and national figures in Spain, among them José Miguel Puerta Vilchez (Professor of Art History at the University of Granada), who defended the Umayyad Islamic architectural origins of the building in an article published in *El País* on February 3, 2017, in which he also wholeheartedly rejected what he considered to be attempts by authorities in Córdoba to deny the building's Muslim heritage.<sup>iii</sup>

This is just one recent exchange in the ongoing debate in Córdoba about who controls the narrative of this iconic building. Set within a broader national context, this public clash of opinions over the religious identity of a 1200-year-old Cathedral Mosque, demonstrates how the role of Spain's Muslim history continues to be a point of contention in the national narrative. Though recent political events have brought a new urgency to these questions, this debate about how to reconcile Spain's Muslim heritage within its contemporary identity as a European, broadly Christian country is one that scholars, artists, architects and intellectuals have been struggling with for over two centuries.

This special issue of *Art in Translation* is the outcome of the panel "Orientalism and Spain in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries" at the annual conference of the Association

of Art Historians in April 2016 at the University of Edinburgh. The papers selected for publication in this issue represent fresh research into diverse visual responses to Spain's heritage of its Islamic past (711-1492 CE) and her nearest 'Orient' across the straits of Gibraltar: Morocco. The time span ranges from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, reflecting a period in which the monumental heritage of al-Andalus established itself as a major tourist attraction and, at the same time, shaped internal debates about Spain's national identity and colonial rhetoric vis-à-vis Morocco.

While the 'discovery' of Spain's Islamic heritage by foreign writers, artists, and architects (such as Washington Irving, David Roberts, Joseph-Philibert Girault de Prangey, Owen Jones, or Carl van Diebitsch), has generated a substantial bibliography, Spanish responses to its own Muslim heritage have largely been neglected in art-historical research outside of Spain. The papers included in this issue address this gap.

In his prologue to the second Spanish edition of his book *Orientalism*, Edward Said acknowledged that relations between Spain and Islam were exceedingly dense and complex, and that Spain offered a notable exception to his cultural analysis of French, British and US Orientalism, because Islam had for so long been part of Spanish culture and not an external, distant power.<sup>iv</sup> The papers in this issue build on this understanding of Spain's special relationship with Islam, highlighting the complexities of this relationship as expressed in art and visual culture.

For a better understanding of the paradoxes of Spanish Orientalism, it is useful to consider other forms of Orientalism on the edges of Europe, which, like Spain, have close relations to Islam and have been subjected to the orientalizing gaze. The historian Ussama Makdisi, for example, has persuasively argued that nineteenth-century Ottoman attitudes towards the 'civilized' West and their own 'Arab' periphery offered both an explicit resistance to and implicit acceptance of Western Orientalist representations of the Ottoman world.<sup>v</sup> Spain's position towards the West and its Islamic heritage and Morocco can be similarly understood: on the one hand,

the West's framing of Spain, and of Andalusia in particular, as an 'oriental' space, was often incorporated into Spain's national identity; at the same time Muslim Morocco offered Spain its own "oriental periphery". Spanish artists, architects, writers, and patrons were aware of the orientalizing gaze of foreign artists who regarded all Spaniards, whether in the past or present, as 'exotic', but at the same time, Spanish artists and architects were also capable of orientalizing parts of their own culture and other cultures. It is through this double position of Spanish artists and architects as both subject and object of the gaze that the paradoxes of Spanish Orientalism emerged.

The competing tensions within Spanish representations of the Alhambra are brilliantly exemplified in the essay by Asun Pérez Gonzalez on Rafael Contreras, the first chief restorer of the Alhambra between 1847 and 1889. Although Contreras' work was aimed at preserving and restoring a 'national' treasure of Spain, he could not resist adding orientalizing features to the palace that would match the romantic visions that had made the building famous. Contreras also produced exquisite architectural models of the Alhambra that were sold as expensive souvenirs to foreign, mostly British, tourists visiting Granada, models which in turn spread a particular, orientalizing vision of the Alhambra around the world.

The essay by Ariane Varela Braga offers an insight into the late nineteenth-century fashion for Alhambra-inspired smoking rooms, a fashion that was as popular in Madrid as it was in London, Paris and Berlin. Her study of the 'Sala Arabe' at the Cerralbo Palace in Madrid, which was built for Enrique de Aguilera y Gamboa, the seventeenth Marqués de Cerralbo, reveals the patron's participation in a global fashion for the Alhambresque, while considering ways in which Spain's Islamic past is integrated into the Cerralbo Palace collection. Shifting focus from private interior spaces to public architectural displays, Anna McSweeney focuses on the state-sponsored, ephemeral architecture of the national exhibition pavilions to examine how ideas about Spain's national identity were expressed through architectural revivals of Islamic styles. Focusing on a selection of Spanish national pavilions at the World's Fairs of the late nineteenth century, her paper contends that there was not one

single Islamic revival style, but rather a number of different and competing Islamic styles, including the Alhambresque and the *mudéjar*, which were invented in the later nineteenth century and employed to represent the part played by Spain's Islamic architectural heritage in framing the national identity of contemporary Spain.

The essay by Oscar Vázquez is concerned with visual representations of the Alhambra as a site commemorating the end of the Nasrid dynasty and of al-Andalus. Through narratives and representations of the Nasrid palace complex, including paintings by Manuel Gómez Moreno and Francisco Pradilla, he examines how the act of looking at the Alhambra and the framing of the view in the depictions, were central to the nineteenth-century creation of the Alhambra as a site of nostalgia, loss, and decay.

The 1859-60 Spanish-Moroccan war opened up new possibilities for Spanish artists, photographers, and writers in terms of subject matter, style, and the art market. At the same time, artists were caught up with broader, often conflicting attitudes towards Morocco: patriotic sentiments and a glorification of Spanish power, an assertion of a Spanish “civilizing mission” in a supposedly backward society, the awareness of historical connections between Morocco and Spain via Spain’s own Islamic past, and an Orientalist fascination with the ‘exotic’. Mariano Fortuny y Marsal, Spain’s most successful and influential Orientalist painter of the second half of the nineteenth century, has been discussed by a number of scholars in relation to such issues.<sup>vi</sup> The last three essays in this issue focus on later and less well-known moments in Spanish Orientalism from around 1900 onwards, a period marked by Spain’s traumatic loss of what was left of her old empire and increasing interests in turning Morocco into a new colony. For King Alfonso XIII (nicknamed ‘El Africano’ for his imperial ambitions) Morocco represented an opportunity, however unrealistic, to revive Spain's “imperial fortunes” and restore its “claims to greatness.”<sup>vii</sup> In this context, David Sánchez’ essay discusses the change that occurs in Rafael Garzón’s photographic gaze when he left his native Granada in order to photograph contemporary Tangiers in around 1902, ten years prior to the establishment of the French and Spanish Protectorates of Morocco in 1912. Garzón’s studio photographs of tourists in Arab dress in Granada, which might be considered a knowingly playful exploitation of the Nasrid past for commercial gain, are strikingly different from his distant images of Moroccan people and places. Sánchez points to José Boada y Romeu’s *Allende el estrecho: viajes por*

*Marruecos 1889-1895* (1895) as a representative example of Spanish colonial attitudes towards Morocco, which, he argues, also underpin Garzón's photographs of Morocco.

Images, of course, rarely 'illustrate' any specific text and are often ambiguous in meaning, which depends on the context into which they are inserted and presented to the viewer. The extent to which art and visual culture might have been used as soft propaganda for political discourses on Morocco is explored in the last two essays in this volume. It is well known that intellectuals mobilized Spain's heritage of al-Andalus in order to emphasize Spain's historical ties to Morocco, and argue that Spain, amongst all other European nations, was best suited to embark on a 'civilizing' mission that could regenerate Morocco.<sup>viii</sup> The idea of a "blood brotherhood" between Moroccans and Spaniards, first voiced by Joaquín Costa in 1884,<sup>ix</sup> was turned into a key concept during the Protectorate period. It is against this colonial background that Elisabeth Bolorinos Allard's essay examines a selection of photographs of Morocco and southern Spain that were reproduced in widely-read magazines, such *La Esfera*, *Mundo gráfico*, *Nuevo mundo*, *Estampa*, and *Ahora*, and *Revista de tropas coloniales* between 1909 and 1933. She argues that photographs of urban spaces in Morocco and Spain as well as images of Spanish women – gypsies in Granada and women living in rural areas - served to evoke the "traza mora" or the "Moorish imprint" in Spanish culture. Bolorinos Allard conceptualizes this photographic approach as a process simultaneously orientalizing Morocco and the national self. Binaries of "us" and "them" – so familiar from orthodox theories of Orientalism based on Edward Said's theory of 1978 – seem to break down here.

The next essay, by Claudia Hopkins, calls for a nuanced understanding of representations of Morocco through a discussion of two artists, José Tapiró y Baro and Mariano Bertuchi Nieto. As Spanish artists who spent half their lives in Morocco, they played a key role in visualizing the country for Spanish audiences from a position from "within" Moroccan society. Tapiró's ethnographic gaze was as much mediated by his frustration with the art market as by 'racial' thinking and politics. By contrast, the interplay between Bertuchi's work and colonialism mirrors the dynamics of power associated with Orientalism (as elucidated by Said). Yet, his creative strategies aimed at suppressing the cultural differences between Andalusian, Spanish, and Moroccan cultures add a transcultural dimension that resists Said's model.

While the essays in this volume vary in terms of methodology and theoretical emphasis, together they reveal Spanish visual representations of al-Andalus and Morocco as a complex and paradoxical phenomenon. As the first English-language volume dedicated to this topic, we hope that it will stimulate further research into

Spanish Orientalism in art, architecture, and visual culture and widen the perspective of Western Orientalism across these disciplines.

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i

Ussama Makdisi, "Ottoman Orientalism," *American Historical Review* 107, no.3 (2002), 768-96 (768).

ii

From an interview with Demetrio Fernández published in *Revista 17*, Ayuntamiento de Cordoba (Córdoba, December 2016), 108. <https://www.scribd.com/document/337007967/Revista-17-Cultura-Cordoba> (accessed March 2017)

iii

José Miguel Puerta Vilchez, "Cumbre del arte islámico," *El País*, February 3, 2017. [http://cultura.elpais.com/cultura/2017/01/27/actualidad/1485541030\\_175610.html](http://cultura.elpais.com/cultura/2017/01/27/actualidad/1485541030_175610.html) (accessed March 2017)

iv

Edward Said, "Prólogo a la nueva edición española," *Orientalismo* (Barcelona: DeBolsillo, edition 2008), 9-10. Said's prologue is dated 2002.

v

Makdisi, "Ottoman Orientalism".

vi

Andrew Ginger, "Some Cultural Consequences in Spain of the Spanish Invasion of Morocco 1859-60," *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Studies*, 12.2 (2006): 147-158.

Susan Martin-Márquez, *Disorientations: Spanish Colonialism in Africa and the Performance of Identity* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press), 101-160.

vii

S. Gilson Miller, "France and Spain in Morocco (1912-1930)," *A History of Modern Morocco* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 104.

viii

*Ibid.*, 56.

