

Emory Resources on the Middle East

Arabic Influence on Spanish Language, Literature, and Culture

(Devin Stewart)

The Middle East has exerted important influences on Western European culture, and contributed thereby to world culture since the beginnings of recorded history. In ancient history, the cultures of Egypt, Mesopotamia, Persia, and Anatolia influenced the Greeks and the Romans. The Phoenicians established trading colonies throughout the Mediterranean. In the middle ages and the pre-modern period, Arab and Islamic culture exerted a profound effect on western Europe. While this influence showed itself in many ways, it was particularly strong in certain areas and periods. It was strong, for example, in the Crusader states of Outremer (1097-1291); in Sicily, parts of which were first conquered in 827 and which were under Islamic rule for over three centuries and then under the Christian Norman Kings, who fostered Arab cultural achievements; in the Balkans (i.e., what is now Greece, Albania, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, and Romania) under Ottoman rule (ca. 1300-WWI), and in Spain and Portugal, parts of which were under Muslim rule from 712 until 1492, nearly eight centuries! Nowhere else has there been more intense and sustained contact between Christendom and the Muslim world than there was in medieval Spain and Portugal. The large number of Arabic borrowings in Spanish relative to the other Romance languages is just one indication of this prolonged cultural symbiosis which characterized the Andalus. Other relics may be seen in architecture, music, and literature.

The Islamic Expansion:

One of the most important effects of the rise of Islam, regarding world history, was the rapid foundation and expansion of an Islamic Empire after the Prophet Muhammad died in 632. By 712, only seventy years later, the Islamic Empire controlled all of the Middle East and North Africa, spanning from Morocco to Pakistan, and Muslim troops crossed from Morocco into Spain. They rapidly conquered most of the Iberian Peninsula (now occupied by Spain and Portugal), leaving only small sections in the north unconquered (the province of Galicia, for example). They even took over southern France for about thirty years, and were only defeated by Charles Martel near Poitiers in 732. The Muslims did not maintain control of southern France and northern Spain for long, but they would hold on to about two thirds of the Iberian peninsula for over four centuries, one half for two more centuries, and the kingdom of Granada in the south for two more centuries.

After the fall of the Umayyad Caliphate in Damascus as the result of the Abbasid revolution in 750, a member of the Umayyad family escaped in disguise, fled across North Africa, and ended up in Spain, where he was named amir of Cordoba in 756. He established a new Umayyad dynasty which would last nearly centuries. In the mid-tenth century, these Spanish Umayyads would revive their claims to the Caliphate and adopted the Abbasid custom of taking religious titles designed to stress their roles as religious leaders and authorities.

The Umayyad state disintegrated over a thirty-year period as a result of civil war, ushering in a period that is known as that of the “Party Kings.” During this period, Islamic territory was divided between a large number of petty kingdoms—little more than city-states, in many cases. The warring between these states weakened the Muslims, politically. In cultural terms, however, this period was a high point in Andalusian arts and letters because of the expanded opportunities for patronage.

The “Party King” period came to an end with the conquest of nearly all the Muslim territory in the Peninsula by a new Berber dynasty from North Africa, called al-Mur•biṭūn (“border warriors”) or the Almoraves. They ruled in Spain for about a century, until they were overrun by another North African Berber dynasty called al-Muwaḥḥidūn (“those who confess the unity of God”) or Almohades.

A major blow to the Muslims came in 1212, when a combined force of Christian powers defeated a Muslim army in the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa in central Spain. Subsequently, the main cities of the Andalus fell in rapid succession: Cordoba fell in 1236, Valencia in 1238, Seville in 1248, and Cadiz in 1250. From this point on, the only Muslim territory in the Iberian peninsula was the Nasrid Kingdom of Granada, which would survive until 1492.

Even after the establishment of Christian political domination over the entire peninsula in 1492, Arab-speaking Muslim populations continued to be an important part of Spanish society, living as *mudéjars*, that is protected Muslim populations, for a short time in Granada, and longer in Murcia and Valencia. Their status was similar to that which Jews and Christians had held under Muslim rule. In the course of the sixteenth century, this option, too, was closed. Muslims were given the choice to convert or to leave. Many converted, but conversion did not bring an end to their problems. The new converts were termed Moriscos “Moor-like” stressing their continued similarity to Muslims (Moors). They were continually suspected of having converted for convenience’s sake alone and secretly harboring attachment to Islam rather than Christianity. Many became sincere Christians, but it is known that many were crypto-Muslims, pretending to be part of the Catholic Christian faith for fear of punishment while practicing Islam in private. These crypto-Muslims became a primary target for church authorities. In 1502, the Muslims of Granada were baptized by fiat, and Muslims under the rule of Castile had to choose between conversion to Christianity and exile. In 1525, Muslims under the rule of Aragon, particularly the large populations living under protected status in Murcia and Valencia, faced the same choice. The final expulsions of Moriscos took place in 1609-14; after that, the Iberian Peninsula was entirely Christian.

As a result of these expulsions, many Andalusian Muslims migrated to Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and other Muslim territories. The Andalusian immigrants often faced difficulties in their new Muslim surroundings. In many cases, they spoke Spanish more than Arabic and had customs which made them more like their Christian neighbors in Spain than their new Muslim neighbors. Many knew little about Islam or common Islamic practices, and so were viewed with suspicion by the locals. Eventually, they assimilated, but not without exerting important influences on the local cultures. Andalusian dishes, traditional clothing, and music remain an important part of the cultural heritage in certain parts of Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia where there was a high concentration of Andalusian immigrants.

From the Spanish point of view, this period of history is referred to as the Reconquista, the “Reconquering” of the Iberian peninsula from the Muslim powers. Extreme views state that the Reconquista began almost immediately after the Muslim armies invaded and continued throughout the Middle Ages until the last Muslim state in Iberia, the Nasrid Kingdom of Granada, was defeated in 1492. It is often described as a steady, planned, even inevitable march southward to get rid of the “temporary” invaders. It is difficult, however, to imagine that rulers who controlled territory and populations who lived there for many, many centuries were actually alien forces engaging in a temporary foray into Spanish territory. Despite the many conflicts of medieval political history in the Andalus, Islamic rule provided a stable environment in which Muslims, Jews, and Christians flourished and interacted in relative harmony for several centuries.

Glossary:

- judería** The Jewish quarter of a town.
morería The Muslim quarter of a town.
aljama A Jewish or Muslim community living under Christian rule.
muladí Native Iberians who converted to Islam and their descendants.
mozarabe “Arabized” or “would-be Arab”, a term used to refer to Christian communities who had adopted Arabic language and customs after living under Muslim rule for extended periods.
mudéjar A term applied to Muslims enjoying a protected status while living under Christian rule. While they were free to practice their religion, they had to pay a special tax and were subject to other restrictions.
morisco Literally, “Moorish, Moor-like.” Muslim converts to Christianity, often suspected of being crypto-Muslims, that is, of practising Islam in secret while pretending to be Christian in public.
marrano Literally, “chestnut.” Jewish converts to Christianity, often suspected of being crypto-Jews, that is, of practicing Judaism in secret while pretending to be Christian in public.
Reconquista The “reconquest” of Spain and Portugal by Christian powers.
Convivencia “Living together,” a term used to describe the relatively peaceful and tolerant relationships that existed between Muslims, Jews, and Christians in Iberia during many periods in the course of the Middle Ages. Debate about exactly how tolerant the various religious groups were of each other is on-going.

Chronology of the Arab/Muslim Presence in Spain:

- 632 death of the Prophet Muhammad
640 conquest of Egypt by Arab/Muslim forces
690 by this date, all of North Africa had been conquered
712 Berber and Arab Muslim army crosses over from Morocco into Spain.
Gothic kingdom with its capital at Toledo collapses.
Cordova becomes the capital of Muslim territory in Spain.
732 Arab/Muslim army defeated by Charles Martel between Tours and Poitiers in France.
This marked the furthest reach of their invasion.
747-50 The Abbasid revolution. The Umayyad Caliphate in Damascus overthrown.
756 Umayyad survivor, Abd al-Rahman, escapes to Spain and named Prince of Cordova.

- Umayyad dynasty established in Spain (756-1031)
- 759 Muslim armies expelled from southern France.
- 929 Umayyad Caliphate in Spain declared by Abd al-Rahman III (912-961 C.E.)
- 997 Umayyads attack Santiago de Compostela, the famous shrine city of St. James in the far North of Spain
- 1009-1031 Protracted civil war in the Umayyad Caliphate
- 1031 The last Umayyad Caliph, Hisham III, is deposed and replaced by a council of state. Ibn Jahwar is the first consul.
- 1031 Beginning of the "petty kingdom" period, in which there were as many as twenty-three independent city-states at one time
- 1085 Fall of Toledo to the Christian ruler Alfonso VI
- 1086 The Almoravid ruler Yusuf ibn Tashufin crosses over from Morocco.
Defeats Alfonso VI of Leon and Castile at Zallaqa near Badajoz.
- 1091 Almoravids conquer the Abbadids of Seville
- 1094 Almoravids take the Aftasids of Badajoz
- 1094 The Cid (Rodrigo Diaz) takes Valencia and holds it until his death, in 1099
- 1099 Almoravids take Valencia
- 1110 Hudids of Saragossa vassals of the Almoravids; last "Petty Kingdom" left
- 1118 Saragossa taken by Alfonso Christian powers
- 1142 Hudids overrun by Alfonso I el Batallador and Ramiro II of Aragon
- 1144 End of Almoravid power in al-Andalus
- 1147 Almohads cross into Spain; take over territory of the Almoravids
- 1147 Christian powers take Lisbon
- 1178 Treaty of Cazola partitions Muslim territories to be conquered by Castile and Aragon
- 1195 Almohad victory over Castile at the Battle of Alarcos
- 1212 Battle of Las Navas de Tolosa. The Almohads are defeated by combined forces of Castile, Aragon, and Navarre.
- 1228 Almohads leave the Iberian Peninsula
- 1229 Jaime I of Aragon conquers Mallorca
- 1230 Permanent union of Castile-León
- 1235 Nasrid dynasty founded in Granada
- 1236 Cordova conquered by Fernando III of Castile-León
- 1238 Valencia conquered by Jaime I of Aragon
- 1248 Seville conquered by Fernando III of Castile-León
- 1250 Cadiz conquered by Christian powers
- 1266 Alfonso X of Castile-León conquers Murcia
- 1309 Allied forces of Castile and Aragon fails to defeat Granada
- 1469 Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon marry. They become known as *los Reyes Católicos* "the Catholic Monarchs."
- 1478 The Spanish Inquisition is established.
- 1479 Castile and Aragon are formally joined into one kingdom.
- 1492 Granada falls to the Catholic Monarchs, Ferdinand and Isabel.
- 1492 Expulsion of the Jews from Spain.
- 1501-2 Alpujarras rebellion near Granada
- 1502 Muslims under the rule of Castile (including Granada) must convert or be exiled.

1525 Muslims under the rule of Aragon (Valencia, Murcia, etc.) must convert or be exiled.

1609-14 Expulsion of the Moriscos from the Iberian Peninsula.

Major Muslim Dynasties in Iberia:

The Spanish Umayyads

756 Abd al-Rahman I
 788 Hisham I
 796 al-Hakam I
 822 Abd al-Rahman II
 852 Muhammad I
 886 al-Mundhir
 888 Abd Allah
 912 Abd al-Rahman III al-Nasir
 961 al-Hakam II al-Mustansir
 976 Hisham II al-Mu'ayyad, first reign
 1009 Muhammad II al-Mahdi, first reign
 1009 Sulayman al-Mustafiin, first reign
 1010 Muhammad II, second reign
 1010 Hisham II, second reign
 1013 Sulayman, second reign
 1016 `Ali al-Nasir [Hammudid]
 1018 Abd al-Rahman IV al-Murtada
 1021 al-Qasim al-Ma'mun, first reign [Hammudid]
 1022 Yahya al-Mu`tali, first reign [Hammudid]
 1022 al-Qasim, second reign [Hammudid]
 1023 Abd al-Rahman V al-Mustazhir
 1024 Muhammad II al-Mustakfi
 1025 Yahya, second reign [Hammudid]
 1027-1031 Hisham III al-Mu`tadd

The Party Kings [Muluk al- \dot{z} aw•\if]:

1. Hammudids of Malaga

1010 `Ali al-Nasir
 1016 al-Qasim I al-Ma'mun, first reign
 1021 Yahya al-Mu`tali, first reign
 1023 al-Qasim I, second reign
 1023 Yahya I, second reign
 1036 Idris I al-Muta'ayyid
 1039 Yahya II
 1039 Yahya II
 1039 al-Hasan al-Mustansir
 1043 idris II al-`Ali, first reign
 1046 Muhammad I al-Mahdi
 1048 Muhammad II al-Mu`tasim

1048 al-Qasim II al-Wathiq
 1054 Idris III al-Muwaffaq
 1054 Idris II, second reign
 1055-57 Muhammad II al-Musta`li
 Conquest of Malaga by the Zirids of Granada in 1057, and of Algeciras by the `Abbadids in 1058.

2. Abbadids of Seville

1023 Muhammad I Ibn Abbad
 1042 Abbad al-Mu`tadid
 1069-91 Muhammad II al-Mu`tamid
 Almoravid conquest

3. Jahwarids of Cordoba

1031 Jahwar
 1043 Muhammad al-Rashid
 1058-69 Abd al-Malik
 Abbadid conquest

4. Aftasids of Badajoz

1022 Abd Allah al-Mansur
 1045 Muhammad al-Muzafar
 1068-94 Umar al-Mutawakkil
 Almoravid conquest

5. Dhu `n-Nunids of Toledo

? Abd al-Rahman Ibn Dhi al-Nun
 1028 Isma`il al-Zafir
 1043 Yahya al-Ma`mun
 1075-85 Yahya al-Qadir
 Conquest by Alfonso VI of Leon and Castille

6. `Amirids of Valencia

1021 Abd al-Aziz al-Mansur
 1061 Abd al-Malik al-Muzarffar
 1065-76 Dhu`n-Nunid occupation
 1076 Abu Bakr
 1085 al-Qadi `Uthman
 1085-90 Dhu n-Nunid Yahya al-Qadir
 1090-96 al-Qadi Ja`far
 Conquest by El Cid and then by the Almoravids

7. Tujibids and Hudids in Saragossa

1019 Mundhir I al-Mansur
 1023 Yahya al-Muzaffar
 1029 Mu`izz al-Dawla Mundhir II