The Spanish Habsburgs and the Arts of Islamic Iberia

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Spanish Habsburgs were acutely sensitive to Islamic presence in their territories. Both Charles V and Philip II, for example, banned the use of Arabic and North African languages as well as Islamic dress in Catholic Spain. The *Moriscos*—a nominally Christian but formerly Islamic population living outside Granada—had been allowed to retain aspects of their Moorish identity, including language and dress. They rebelled in 1568 when these privileges were withdrawn. When the rebellion had been put down, Philip II ordered the *Moriscos* dispersed and resettled in different parts of the country and his son, Philip III, finally ordered them deported to North Africa and other foreign lands in 1609–10. The Spanish Habsburg reception of Islamic art—particularly Islamic architecture—was quite different: they continued to use some Islamic buildings, which they chose to repair and extend rather than replace; and they integrated some features of Islamic origin into their classicizing Renaissance palaces.

This makes one wonder what earlier Islamic art meant to these rulers. There is little scholarship on this issue, but two responses by early modern Spaniards to Islamic art in Spain have been proposed: 1) first, and most generally, that by the sixteenth century some features of Moorish architecture had been so completely assimilated into the artistic culture of Catholic Spain that they were no longer perceived as Islamic; 2) secondly, that some Islamic buildings like the Great Mosque at Córdoba and the Alhambra Palace in Granada were taken over by the Christians and preserved as trophies of Spanish victories over Muslims. As a consequence, it is argued, a few Moorish buildings became monuments of Spanish identity.[1] There is certainly some truth in these assertions: elaborate wood-inlaid Moorish ceilings, generally known as *artesonados*, were widely used in churches in the sixteenth century and the techniques for building them were exported to the Americas, none of which would have been likely if *artesonados* had been closely identified with Islam.[2] The Catholic Kings moved into the Alhambra Palace and preserved it after the conquest of Granada. Later, Charles V spent his honeymoon there and added some rooms; he also decorated one of the Moorish reception rooms with his device *Plvs Vltra*, executed in colored tile, which was certainly a sign of the Emperor's appropriation of the palace (fig. 1). However, I wish to suggest that the reception of Islamic art by the Spanish Habsburgs was somewhat more complex than these two options suggest. In this paper I will try to bring their reactions into clearer focus by looking briefly at how they adopted previous Castilian royal and aristocratic uses of Islamic art.

ISBN 978-94-6018-483-3

Fig. 1 Emblem of Emperor Charles V in the Alhambra Palace, Granada.

First, however, it may be useful briefly to describe the older and broader assimilation of Islamic art in the Iberian Peninsula that forms the backdrop to Spanish Habsburg responses. Moorish building and decorative practices had deeply marked the building trades in Castile and Aragon where the Arab origin of numerous words for building techniques and materials—such as *azulejo*s [fired ceramic tiles], *albañil* [mason] and *alarife* [skilled artisan]—was made perfectly clear by Sebastián de Covarrubias in his *Dictionary* written in the late sixteenth century.[3] The Castilian words for paneled inlaid wooden ceilings and the intricately decorated wooden ceilings to which they referred—*alfarjes*—were understood as Moorish (fig. 2).[4]

Fig. 2 Moorish ceiling of the present church, Monastery of Santa Clara, Tordesillas, 14th century.

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Certain professions also seem to have been dominated by artisans of Moorish heritage still in the sixteenth century. The subject has not been investigated comprehensively but, in the building trades, gesso workers [*yeseros*] and carpenters [*carpinteros*] often had Moorish names in Castile. Such men were mostly nominally Christians or *Mudéjares*, the descendents of Islamic people who had remained in Spain and converted to Christianity in the wake of Christian conquests of Moorish kingdoms from the eleventh through fifteenth centuries.[5] Thus a wide range of originally Islamic techniques and motifs survived in Castilian building trades when Charles V arrived in Spain in 1517. Their Moorish ancestry was clear from the Arabic words that described them, but they appear to have ceased to be associated specifically with Islam: Moorish was no longer necessarily Islamic in the realm of the arts.

The survival of Moorish architectural forms may also have been aided by northern architects working in Late Gothic style who immigrated to Castile in the later fifteenth century. Juan Guas (from Brittany) and Simón de Colonia (from Germany) were clearly impressed by the Moorish architecture they saw in Spain. Juan Guas included a splendid Moorish wooden ceiling in the monumental staircase of his Colegio de San Gregorio in Valladolid and his treatment of the stairwell suggests, although it does not copy, the motifs of Moorish mural gesso decoration (fig. 3).[6] We do not know if Guas had learned to design these ceilings himself, or whether he engaged *Mudéjar* carpenters for the design as well as the execution, but he clearly embraced the tradition. Guas provided another showy *alfarje* in the upper cloister above his Gothic vaults in the Monastery of San Juan de los Reyes in Toledo.

Traces of Castilian appreciation of Moorish technique may still be seen in the sixteenth century. The highly original vault of the crossing of the Church of San Gerónimo in Granada designed in the 1520s by the great Renaissance architect Diego de Siloe suggests that he was interested in both Late Gothic and Moorish as well as classicizing vaulting (fig. 4).

Fig. 3 Juan Guas, Moorish style ceiling and stairwell in Colegio de San Gregorio, Valladolid, 1488–96.

Fig. 4 Diego de Siloe, Crossing vault of San Gerónimo, Granada, late 1520s.

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Castilian royal and aristocratic taste for Moorish art should be seen against the backdrop of this widespread and diffused appreciation, but differs from it in one important way: works made for the royal and aristocratic elite did not necessarily mask or dilute their Moorish ancestry; on the contrary, their Moorish character was strongly marked. Although we cannot know if the patrons perceived such works as Islamic, knowing what they purchased and built tells us a good deal.

The appropriation of existing Islamic palaces by Christian rulers—often by the simple gesture of affixing their seigniorial coat of arms or emblems to the building—was a long-standing royal and aristocratic practice. Palaces were powerful symbols of the vanquished enemy, like the booty taken from the battlefield, e. g. the splendid woven tent [*pendón*] of the Almohade Calif Muhammad An-Nasir, which was captured at the Battle of Las Navas de Tolosa in 1212 and is now in the Museo de Telas Ricas in the Cistercian Monastery of Las Huelgas outside Burgos. But Christian kings and nobility also commissioned luxurious silks and ceramics from artisans in the Iberian Islamic states. Beautiful Moorish lusterware from Valencia was purchased by noble families in Spain and Italy well into the fifteenth century.

Fig. 5 Façade of Pedro the Cruel's Palace at the Alcázares Reales in Seville, after 1350.

Fig. 6 Detail of decoration of Pedro the Cruel's rooms at Alcázares Reales, Seville, after 1350.

Castilian nobility went further than merely collecting luxury goods from their Moorish enemies. In the fourteenth and early fifteenth century, Spanish Christian rulers also built entirely new palaces in homogenous Islamic style. Alfonso XI built one at Tordesillas, which is now the Monastery of Santa Clara. A magnificent gilded ceiling of *Mudéjar* woodwork survives from the fourteenth-century palace in the present church (see fig. 2).[7] Most famously, Pedro I the Cruel (1334–1369) built a lavish new palace in the old Alcázares Reales in Seville during the second half of the fourteenth century (figs. 5 and 6). The façade has inscriptions in Arabic script, as well as a Moorish design and decorative scheme. To patrons like King Pedro, Islamic architecture represented more than power. It signified elite culture, the highest level of magnificence and luxury. The splendid rooms of Pedro's palace were designed and decorated by fourteenth-century *Mudéjar* artisans, descendants of Moorish artisans who had stayed to live under Christian rule after the Conquest of Muslim Seville by Fernando III in 1248. These designers and craftsmen maintained the techniques

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and materials of earlier Andalusian Islamic architecture: colorful tile work, molded and painted plasterwork ornament, and elaborately carved and decorated wooden ceilings and cupolas and other woodwork like doors and shutters decorated with the geometrically patterned ornament.

Moorish architecture seems to have continued to represent a standard of elegance and luxury in fifteenth-century Castile. The great festival halls of the royal *alcázares* at Segovia and Madrid (destroyed) built for the Trastamara king, Enrique IV in the 1460s, were in Moorish style. Although the Catholic Kings were avid consumers of Northern European art, including tapestries and Flamboyant architecture, they occasionally dressed up in Moorish clothing and continued to use their Islamic palaces in Aragon, Andalucía and Valencia as well as Castile. They also patronized Moorish architectural style. They occupied and repaired the Islamic Aljafería in Zaragoza. In the late 1480s they began remodeling and added a second story to this palace with a splendid gilded coffered *artesonado* that was executed by the *Mudéjar* architects of the palace (fig. 7).[8]

The appropriation of Moorish architecture by royal and aristocratic Christians thus had a long history in Spain, where it seems to have been associated with splendor and luxury. The geometry and decorative richness of Moorish vaults and ceilings also appealed to northerners raised on Flamboyant style—which may partly explain the Emperor Charles V's delight in the palace and gardens of the Alhambra in Granada and his construction of a small pavilion in the gardens at the Alcázar in Seville (fig. 8).

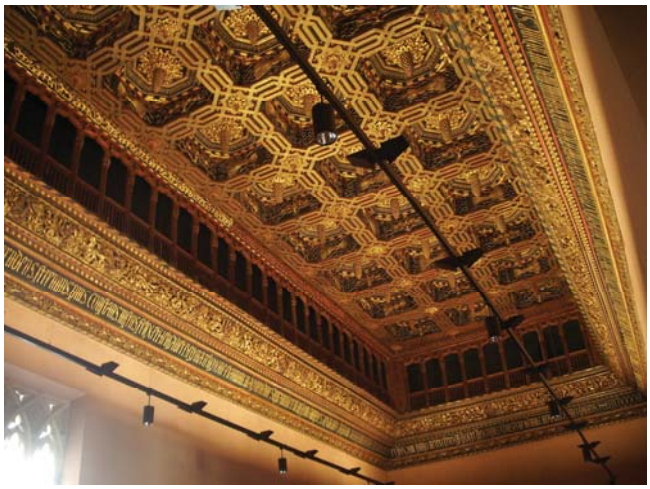

Fig. 7 Ceiling of the great hall built for Catholic Kings in the Aljafería, Zaragoza.

Fig. 8 Garden pavilion of Charles V in the gardens of the Alcázares Reales, Seville, first quarter of the 16th century.

The placement of this structure at some distance from the palace in the midst of carefully planned vegetation recalls the small garden buildings that were a regular feature of Islamic palaces. In the eleventh century, Almamun, the Islamic Taifa ruler of Toledo, constructed a huge pleasure (and productive) garden in the *vega* near the Tagus river below the Alcázar. In 1072 Almamun welcomed Alfonso VI of Castile and lodged him in one of the splendid pavilions in the garden. Alfonso

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X was born in the small Islamic palace, now called La Galiana, near the river outside Toledo. Texts suggest that there were pavilions in Abd al Rahman III's princely city of Medinat al'Zahara near Córdoba in the tenth century and at the later Alhambra Palace in Granada. These gardens and their Moorish pavilions have mostly disappeared.[9]

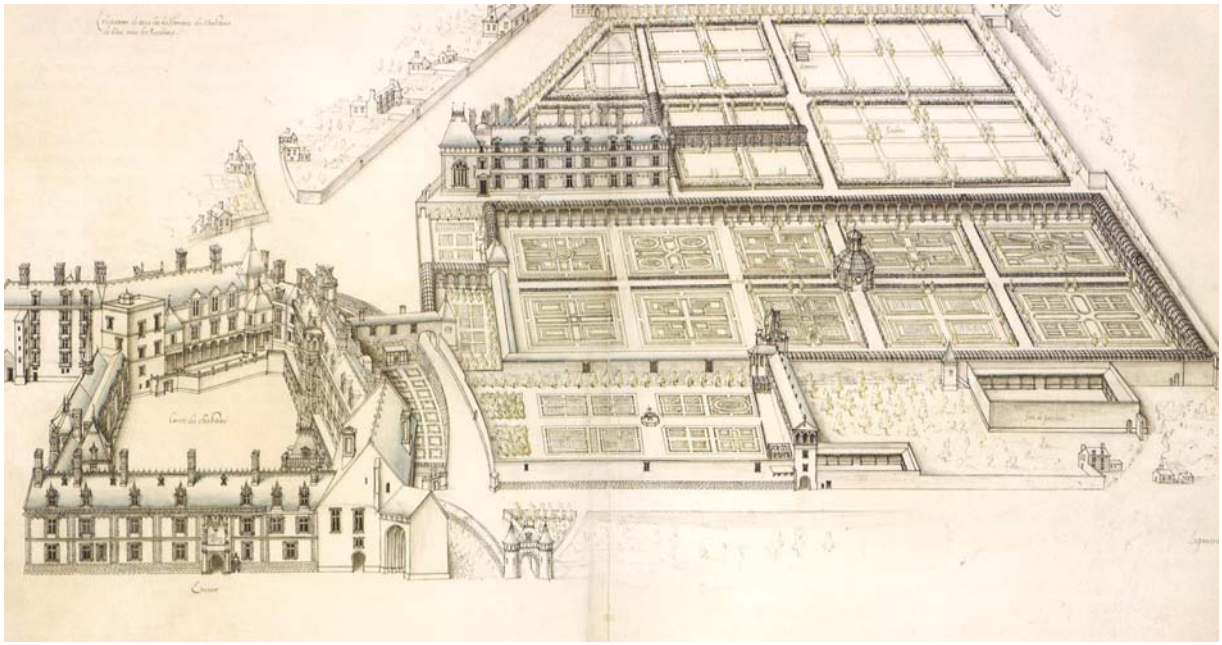

Fig. 9 Jacques Androuet Du Cerceau, garden pavilion at Chateau of Blois, after Boudon and Minot 2010.

One might object that there is no need to look to Islamic precedents when more immediate sources for Charles V's building in Seville can be found in the royal and seigniorial pavilions that Charles knew from his childhood in the north. The pleasure gardens of French and Flemish *châteaux* often included small buildings set in the midst of plantings at some distance from the residence. These structures do not survive either, but the drawings of the French Châteaux by Jacques Androuet Du Cerceau often show them. Several of his views of Blois show small, centralized pavilions of the same diminutive scale and classicizing style of the pavilion in Seville (fig. 9). [10]

Looking more closely at the pavilion in Seville, however, one can see that the materials and composition are different from northern examples (figs. 10 and 11). Brightly colored tiles are extensively used on the outsides and insides of the low wall surrounding the Emperor's pavilion; the columns are raised on free-standing pedestals that are not classical or northern Renaissance in inspiration. Although the composite capitals and round arches are classical, the slender proportions and wide-spacing of the columns of the arcade that surrounds the exterior of the pavilion have more in common with Islamic porticos—as in the pavilion in the gardens of the Generalife in Granada—than with either Late Gothic style or Cinquecento classicism.

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Fig. 10 Charles V's garden pavilion at the Alcázares Reales, Seville, interior.

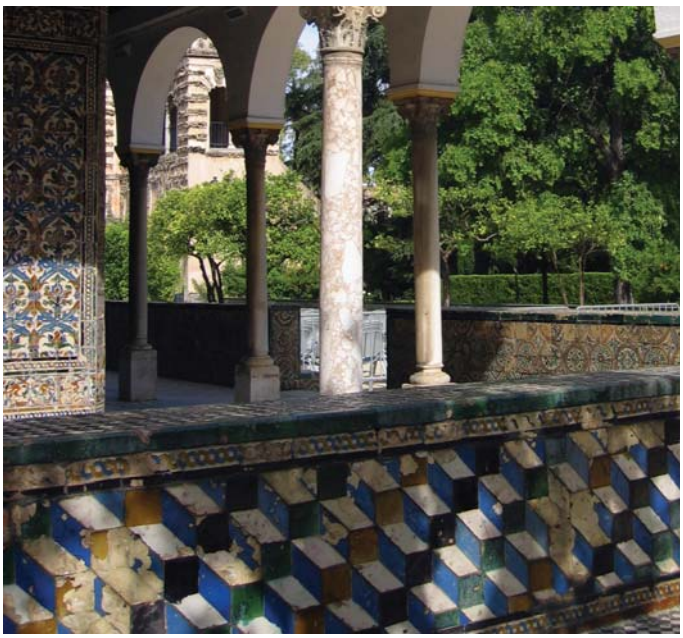

Fig. 11 Charles V's garden pavilion at the Alcázares Reales, Seville, detail of tilework.

Inside the pavilion, the walls are partly covered in glazed tile and there is a carved wooden ceiling above. The most striking Moorish feature of the pavilion, however, is the small fountain at its center. Interior pools fed by circulating fresh water were common in Islamic palaces but were not much used in Spanish Christian architecture, as far as I know.[11] This pool or fountain in Charles V's pavilion recalls the similar interior pool in the Alcázar itself—one of the few surviving elements from the Islamic palace which existed on the site before the city was finally taken in 1248 (fig. 12).

In spite of these seemingly Moorish elements, the pavilion does not represent a revival of Islamic architecture. The tile and gesso decoration is placed high on the wall below the ornamented ceiling as it might be in a Moorish or *Mudéjar* building, but geometric designs are replaced with more naturalistic floral tiles, and the frieze above the tiles consists of Charles V's motto *Plvs Vltra* and coat of arms repeated. The white molded gesso frieze has Greco-Roman figural—not Moorish—content (fig. 13). The syntax of the composition is Islamic, but the motifs are Renaissance: they have been 'translated' from Moorish into a classical idiom.

The pavilion signals some degree of acceptance of Islamic typology, techniques and aesthetics at the Emperor's court. One can perhaps say that the small pool in the interior was inspired by the pool in the earlier Islamic palace. Does this mean that the designers and patron no longer recognized its style as Islamic or Moorish? That seems hardly credible at the Alcázar in Seville, which in all respects, except the verbal and heraldic references to its Christian patronage, is a work of Moorish architecture. Centuries of appropriation, adaptation and imitation of Islamic architecture in a Christian context may not have completely expunged its associations with Islam in the early sixteenth century but they certainly diluted them.

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Fig.12 Interior pool from remains of Moorish palace at Alcázarez Reales, Seville, before 1248.

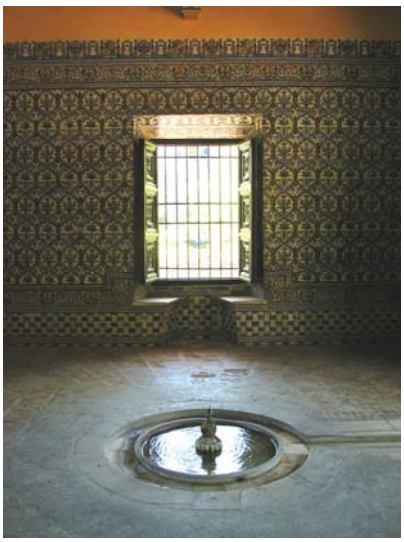

Fig. 13 Interior of Charles V's garden pavilion at the Alcázares Reales, Seville, 1520s, detail of mural tilework.

Fig. 14 Interior of Charles V's garden pavilion at the Alcázares Reales, Seville, 1520s, detail of the frieze and the ceiling.

On the contrary, Charles V was a Renaissance prince and a collector of exotic treasures and artifacts—such as Aztec feather work—from the still non-Christian cultures that made up his realms from the 1520s onwards. Of all people with Humanist training, he was in a good position to historicize such artifacts; seeing them as the productions of cultures separated from his own. To paraphrase Erwin Panofsky's famous characterization: because the Classical world was perceived as separated in time from contemporary society by the Middle Ages, it could be appreciated for itself and so could the Middle Ages. Renaissance patrons and their artists, who could reunite classical subject matter with classical form, could by extension have seen Moorish style in a similar way: sundered from contemporary Renaissance art and so available for selective and self-conscious reuse for aesthetic purposes.[12]

Although we cannot know Charles V's motivations in commissioning the pavilion in the gardens of the Alcázar of Seville, it seems clear from the forms of the pavilion that Moorish architecture, which had seemed the *nec-plus ultra* of civilized life to Pedro the Cruel in the fourteenth century, has been designed to harmonize with the Classical world of Greece and Rome. This creates an explicit layer of cultural dominance—the Greco-Roman—over the residual and still present echoes of the Islamic past. Were it not for their context among Charles V's additions to Pedro's palace, the figural tiles with Italianate *grotteschi* decoration would not themselves suggest the Moorish decoration that is all around them.

In the sixteenth century there were aristocratic patrons, like Don Fadrique Enriquez de Ribera Marquis of Tarifa, who wanted to combine Greco-Roman classicism with Moorish style, and artisans who could produce such work. Don Fadrique was a sophisticated patron with a marked taste for Greco-Roman art. He acquired a good deal of Roman sculpture and commissioned a Renaissance portal, which was carved in Italian marble and shipped from Genoa, for his Casa de Pilatos in

ISBN 978-94-6018-483-3

Seville.[13] The tile decoration of the courtyard and staircase in the Casa de Pilatos from the 1540s, however, is clearly Moorish in inspiration (fig. 14).

Philip II's appreciation of Moorish architecture appears to have been similar to his father's. In the 1550s, he ordered one of the Castilian royal architects, Luis de Vega, to add a second story to part of King Pedro's Alcázar in Seville in the Patio de las Doncellas, where Vega's arcades of the upper gallery respect the materials and colors of the Moorish level bellow. He also doubled columns at the corners and at intervals along the arcade. The classical moldings, arches and Renaissance balustrade harmonize as much as possible with the Moorish ornament (fig. 15).

Fig. 15 Casa de Pilatos, Seville, detail of tilework in main patio.

Fig. 16 Patio de las Doncellas in Alcázares Reales, Seville, upper storey by Luis de Vega in 1550s.

It may be possible on the basis of this brief overview to consider Spanish Habsburg practice in relation to the proposed interpretation with which I began: that the Spanish Christian reaction to their Moorish heritage was either 1) to celebrate objects and buildings as booty from victories over the Moors (e.g. the Alhambra) or 2) simply to forget the Islamic origin of Moorish work (e. g. *artesonados* by *Mudéjar* artisans) under Christian domination. Although the preservation of some Islamic buildings captured from the Moors and the wide use of Moorish-style wooden ceilings in Christian buildings occurred after the Conquest, these two interpretations do not describe the reception of Moorish art by the Spanish Habsburgs in a satisfactory way.

The Spanish Habsburgs seem much closer to the Castilian royal and aristocratic tradition of appreciation for Moorish and *Mudéjar* art. This should not be surprising: the admiration of Alfonso X the Wise (1221–1284) for Islamic science, philosophy and literature as well as practical arts like Islamic medicine and agriculture in the thirteenth century are well known and documented. It is, I think, obvious even from the little that I have presented here that the elite's favorable view of Moorish culture also embraced the arts.

At issue here is the separation of culture and religion: Islamic culture was widely admired in Early Modern Castile in the full knowledge that it was Islamic, even as that culture's religious beliefs

ISBN 978-94-6018-483-3

were entirely rejected. The first two Spanish Habsburg kings, the emperor Charles V and his son Philip II were both brought up in the Humanist revival of classical culture but both were capable of admiring Late Gothic architecture—Philip II is said to have called the Flamboyant crossing tower of Burgos cathedral 'a work of angels'—and, I suggest, Moorish architecture also. This appreciation might seem natural in a Renaissance context, but it is worth noting that Spanish Habsburg acceptance of Moorish architecture was neither inevitable nor unprecedented. When the Normans conquered Islamic Sicily they brought their northern architectural tradition with them, but they also adopted the Byzantine mosaics and Islamic decoration that they found flourishing on the island. The Cathedral of Monreale, built between 1174 and 1182 combines all three to sumptuous effect.

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(Unless otherwise noted, photographs are by the author).

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Fig. 10 Charles V's garden pavilion at the Alcázares Reales, Seville, detail of tilework.

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[1] These two options are presented by Grinstead 2009. For a more nuanced examination of the assimilation of Islamic architectural ideas in Spanish tradition see Chueca Goitia 1981.

[2] The Islamic designs for the making of such ceilings survived in the practice of Spanish carpenters, but their transmission to the Americas was probably aided by the important treatise by Diego López de Arenas (Sevilla, 1633). See also López Guzmán 2000 and Sebastián, Henares Cuéllar & Morales 1995.

[3] See Covarrubias, *Tesoro*. Many French architectural terms were imported with Romanesque and Gothic style, e. g. Castilian for vault [*bóveda*] was not Arabic.

[4] Spaniards referred to the Islamic peoples, both Arabs and North Africans, who populated and ruled parts of Spain from the seventh through the fifteenth centuries as "Moors," a practice I continue here.

[5] Covarrubias, *Tesoro,* defines *mudéjares* (*mudexares*) as Moors who converted and lived under Christian domination. The adjective *mudéjar* is now applied to art produced by Christianized Islamic peoples in Spain. The Moorish identity of Mudéjar artists and architects, some of whom had adopted Christian names, is often mentioned in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century documents. See the documents cited in Domínguez Casas 1993 for the Aljafería in Zaragoza (p. 73f), the Alcázar in Madrid (p. 62f) and the Alcázar in Seville (pp. 66–70). Other Moorish carpenters are discussed pp. 74–82.

[6] The Colegio de San Gregorio with its staircase and ceiling in Valladolid was commissioned by Alonso de Burgos 1488–96.

[7] See Lobo 1990 for review of Moorish vestiges and the modern restoration of the palace.

[8] The Moorish architects working for the Catholic Kings were well-established in Zaragoza. Faraig and Mahoma de Gali, called *moros* in the documents, were masters of the royal works in Zaragoza. See Cabañero Subiza 1998 and 2004.

[9] A very useful overview is Ruggles 2000.

[10] See Boudon & Mignot 2010: drawings of Blois (p. 148f) and pavilions at Gailon (pp. 126-32). Du Cerceau was an inventive draughtsman as well as a topographical artist so it is not always possible to determine if details of his drawings precisely reflect the actual structures.

[11] Krista De Jonge has prepared an article on these northern interior fountains (unpublished; personal communication).

[12] Panofsky 1955, pp. 168-225 and 226-235 especially the formulation in p. 189: 'Thus the Italian Renaissance—in a first, great retrospective view which dared to divide the development of Western art into three great periods—defined for itself a *locus standi* from which it could look back at the art of classical antiquity (alien in time but related in style) as well as at the art of the Middle Ages (related in time but alien in style): each of these two could be measured, as it were, by and against the other. Unjust though this method of evaluation may appear to us, it meant that, from then on, periods of civilization and art could for understood as individualities and totalities.'

[13] Casa de Pilatos was begun after 1519 but work continued into the 1540s.

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