

Just What is *Mudéjar*, Really?

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IT IS ASTONISHING TO note the vast changes that have taken place in the general and even public perception of medieval Spain in the last decades, in these years since some of us first had the privilege of studying with Samuel Armistead. The universe that was opened up to us by his exceptional teaching was a rare one, an unknown and previously unimagined place. Ultimately the world he constructed for us—brick by brick, he was conjuring for us a vast *mudéjar* cathedral—was also confounding, and ultimately deeply seductive, mostly because it was not the “medieval world” of our childhood imaginations or of other scholarly realms. I had arrived at a first course on medieval Spanish literature because I was curious to supplement, or round out, the study of medieval French and, especially, medieval Italian literature I was pursuing as an undergraduate, studies I had first been lured to by Dante. But Spain—the medieval Spain that Professor Armistead had on offer and on display in his always-mobbed seminars at the University of Pennsylvania in the early 1970's—stood out immediately as a dramatically different landscape.

This was a time and place, it rather quickly emerged, peopled with religions and languages and literary forms and god knew what else—all of this stuff that had to do with Muslims and Jews—that some of us had scarcely imagined had anything much to do with anything European, let alone with the Of-Course-Super-Devoutly-Christian Middle Ages.

It was not just that it was different in some ornamental way, or merely that it included these different kinds of people and religions that for all intents and purposes existed nowhere else in medieval Europe; these were differentiations and particularities that were at the heart of what made the question of just what medieval Spain and its culture were a passionately contested one. In a seminar on the Tristan texts one might argue about whether there was a real potion, or whether instead it just stood as a metaphor for falling in love, and in a Dante seminar about whether the

great Florentine was really suggesting Ugolino had really eaten his children. But at the end of the day these questions, these kinds of questions—as instructive and moving as they can be about what literature is and what it can do—in fact rarely produced anything beyond what might be called polite, if occasionally learned, chit-chat. Other than at the personal level, where there is always at least potentially the thrill of first reading a great book, there was little here that provoked passionate engagement, or discussions of the implications of readings of a work of literature beyond narrow scholarly bounds.

But when one opened the door to one of Sam's classrooms, when one went off to read the books and articles he sent us to explore, it did not take long to discover that here instead there was passionate and intense debate, sometimes rancorous even, and almost always it was because it was evident that the literary debates were tied to much larger political and historical questions. Here the questions at stake—even when they were couched in terms of technical questions of meter, for example, or the question of some sort of literary influence—were self-evidently about far more than the orality of the epic poem or the thematic trace of one lyric poetic text—perhaps in Arabic—on a later one—perhaps in Romance. The real questions were never far from the surface of these discussions and they were vast. Here were questions about what a whole culture was, and who had created it, about what the languages of Spaniards had been—indeed, about who Spaniards were, and were not—and even about what kind of impact the whole lot had in turn had on what European culture was. And perhaps best of all, for someone beginning to consider an academic career: because these questions were so large and so contentious, and because the cultural backdrop was so unusual and demanding—here Arabic was a vital *lingua franca*, among many other things—the possibilities for dissertations and books one might imagine writing were wide—open and rich, very different from the mostly overtilled land of much of the rest of medieval studies. And not only would there be the possibility of writing really new things—and how many fellow students could say that about Petrarch or the *Roman de la Rose*, after all?—but it was also virtually guaranteed that whatever it was would be hotly contested by someone else. It seemed to matter; it was most of it taken to heart. Of course, there was a considerable downside to all of this—medieval Spain was still relatively obscure in those days, beyond Hispanism itself, and not at all sexy, in part for all the reasons just alluded to, the difficulties that made it more intriguing to some of us, but kept it

distinctly marginal in the overall picture of literary and medieval studies.

In these last several decades, however, and certainly in the last half-dozen years, Spain has shed most of its old backwater status, both in the political and cultural realities of Europe and the world at large, as well as in academic spheres. And no field has emerged more dramatically out of obscurity and onto something like center-stage than the multi-cultural Spanish Middle Ages which—one might argue either predictably or improbably—have become almost-famous, occasionally even discussed in major articles in places like *The New York Times*, something I think would have made all of us laugh out loud if, thirty years ago, one had predicted such a thing in one of our graduate seminars. And yet, this transformation, all the considerable extra light (and occasional limelight) shed on the famously difficult landscape of medieval Spain, has hardly diminished those features that made it compelling to some of us in the first place. On the contrary, the big questions—what, using shorthand, we can call the *convivencia* questions, all of those that have to do with cultural and religious identity, and what these mean in terms of both Spanish and European cultural identity, not to speak of the questions about whether religious strife among the Children of Abraham is inevitable—are precisely those at the center of broad public interest, and the arguments over them are if anything more intense today than they were when the only real sparring partner one might have would be a medievalist at Cambridge. Today it is possible that the argument about these questions might, indeed, take place (either in reality or in one's head) with someone at *The New York Times*, or someone making defense policy, or writing the speeches of the prime minister of Spain after terrorist attacks there, or perhaps even with Osama bin Laden, who regularly evokes his own version of al-Andalus in his pronouncements and analyses.¹

¹The story in *The New York Times* on 9 October 2001 reports on Bin Laden's widely watched televised speech soon after 9/11, and includes the following paragraph: "In the same broadcast, Ayman al-Zawahiri, Mr. bin Laden's deputy and the leader of the Islamic Jihad group, vowed that 'the tragedy of al Andalus' would not be repeated. He was referring to the period widely considered the Islamic golden age in Andalusia, in Spain, that ended in the ignominy of Muslims being driven out of Europe by Christian armies in the 15th century." It is also the case that the terrorist cell in the Madrid suburb that carried out the attacks at Atocha station identified themselves as "the brigade situated in al-Andalus" and in a public message reconstructed after their cell was stormed, talked about Spain as the "land of Tariq ibn Ziyad." An excellent recounting of much of this can be

At the end of the day—here in this dramatically different day, decades and earth-shattering events after some of us were first happily lured by Armistead to this extraordinary place—that passionately contested and yet fundamental identity question about medieval Spain remains exactly the same: just what happened, and just what was produced, when these three religions and cultures with such ambivalent relations with each other coexisted in varying states of accommodation and hostility for so many centuries? And perhaps no single term or concept better exemplifies the immense conceptual and terminological difficulties at hand than the word *mudéjar*—a word that has itself gone from being an obscure term only a handful of scholars might recognize to one with far more widespread currency. Today it can be seen bandied about in all manner of discussions about the character of medieval Spain, it has become almost ubiquitous in the travel-writing cranked out to hype the “Spain of the Three Religions,” it has even been defined in *The New York Times*: “An architectural hybrid of Moorish and Christian styles, popular between the twelfth and the sixteenth centuries.” In its brevity and generality—in all the questions about such a style it leaves begging for answers—this definition is even so not as problematic as one that appears in a culturally pretentious 2007 booklet distributed to the participants in a high-end international conference on medieval Toledo: “The monuments and remains in Toledo from the time of the Reconquest are extraordinary. The Mudéjar style, created by the Muslims who stayed behind after the Christian reconquest, is particularly outstanding...”² And it was most striking to read the following explanation by the

found in the “Reporter at Large” article by Lawrence Wright in *The New Yorker*, an illuminating narrative of the Madrid bombings which includes the following: “Less than a month after 9/11, Osama bin Laden and his chief lieutenant, Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri, had appeared on Al Jazeera. “We will not accept that the tragedy of Al Andalus will be repeated in Palestine,” Zawahiri said, drawing an analogy between the expulsion of the Moors from Iberia and the present-day plight of the Palestinians. The use of the archaic name Al Andalus left most Spaniards nonplussed. “We took it as a folkloric thing,” Ramón Pérez-Maura, an editor at ABC, told me. “We probably actually laughed.” This January, bin Laden issued a “Message to the Muslim People,” which was broadcast on Al Jazeera. He lamented the decline of the Islamic world: “It is enough to know that the economy of all Arab countries is weaker than the economy of one country that had once been part of our world when we used to truly adhere to Islam. That country is the lost Al Andalus.”

² The booklet is entitled simply “Toledo” and it is published by the tourist information office of Castilla-La Mancha. The prestigious *Academia Europæa*, a pan-European academy of arts and sciences, held its annual conference in

celebrated historian Henry Kamen in his new book, *The Disinherited: The Exiles Who Created Spanish Culture*: “Christian rulers hired Arab architects to design and build palaces for them (the impressive palace of the Alcázar in Seville shows every sign of being Muslim and was in fact built by Muslims, but for a Christian king)” (63).

In all of these—perhaps especially in the quote by the scholar Kamen—and in countless other definitions and pseudo-definitions of the term, two fundamentals are pervasive: that this *mudéjar* thing is something fundamentally Islamic, and that it is (thus) not synonymous with what is really “Spanish.” Although experts—mostly art historians, the occasional literary historian—are likely to dismiss these and comparable quotes as being written for (and perhaps even by) the *hoi poloi*, and I have occasionally been told that in fact “no one really believes that any more” (meaning that no one believes that the buildings look as they do because they were built by Muslims) these quotes are in fact demonstrably representative of the kinds of confusion about vital aspects of medieval Spanish identity that is, if anything, far more widespread than ever (however more refined it may in fact be among a small group of specialized architectural historians). And this despite the fact so visible on every street in Toledo: that *mudéjar* is everywhere, and characteristic, that other than the singular (and exceptional) Gothic cathedral *mudéjar* is what Toledo is all about, it is characteristically Toledan, Castilian, Spanish³; and the rest of cultural history tells much the same story, of course, as Francisco Márquez Villanueva has so forcefully argued for years, and in a great variety of publications, noting among other things that almost everything produced at the court of Alfonso X is in fact *mudéjar*. But all of these definitions and basic statements seem to self-evidently beg the core questions: why are we so uncomfortable with the notion that Christians would have built churches in the “Islamic style” that we need to give it a term that is so obviously exoticizing? Why is there so often the suggestion that what it’s really about is the taste, and thus ultimately the style, of the builders, rather than that of the patrons? And why, in fact, do

Toledo in September of 2007, and members from a great variety of fields heard talks on “The Dialogue of Three Cultures and our European Heritage.” An earlier and briefer version of this essay was delivered on that occasion. This essay is also based on the work in my forthcoming Yale University Press book with Jerrilyn D. Dodds and Abigail Krasner Balbale, *The Arts of Intimacy: Christians, Jews and Muslims in the Making of Castilian Culture*.

³ It is also, of course, characteristically Aragonese as well.

we persist in the religious identification for æsthetic styles, when we are discussing precisely instances in which the religious distinctions must have seemed irrelevant: if we had asked a Toledan Christian of the thirteenth century what the style of his local church was, do we really imagine he would have said Islamic? Even if the surviving little mosque around the corner was in exactly the same style?

Let us return for an instant to the beginning of the history of the use of the word *mudéjar* to mean something that is so distinctively—so anxiety-provokingly—Spanish. In the summer of 1859 José Amador de los Ríos was elected to the Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando, and his inaugural lecture he entitled “El estilo mudéjar en arquitectura.” It is more than a curiosity to note that Amador, at that point, had been deeply immersed, for the previous two decades, in the project that would result in the monumental literary history of the age. Thus, from its creation onwards the concept of *mudéjar* is one that may be material in its conspicuous outward expressions—and principally in architecture—but is also inseparable from the literary and intellectual universe it shares so intimately; Amador’s serial publication of the seven volumes of the *Historia crítica de la literatura española* would begin in 1861, shortly after he delivered his *mudéjar* lecture at Bellas Artes. Amador’s lengthy talk—in print it runs to some fifty pages—in effect reveals, defines and explains a vast architectural phenomenon: “Hablo de aquel estilo, que tenido en poco, o visto con absoluto menosprecio por los ultra-clásicos del pasado siglo, comienza a ser designado, no sin exactitud histórica y filosófica, con nombre de mudéjar” (7). Amador thus canonizes the term *mudéjar* for a very broad range of architectural styles which are, grosso modo, all those styles rooted in or in some way shaped by Islamic architecture and decorative styles, as they are used by non-Muslims.

This is self-evidently not a coherent artistic or æsthetic style, in the conventional sense of that term, since buildings designated as *mudéjar* can be as different stylistically from each other as the humble twelfth century brick construction such as the mosque-transformed-into-church of Bab al Mardum (known also as the Church of Santa Cruz, or the Cristo de la Luz) is from the elaborate fourteenth-century stucco masterpiece that is the synagogue known as the Tránsito, a building unambiguously connected to the style of the Alhambra. What makes something *mudéjar*, for both Amador in the middle of the nineteenth century and for today’s scholars and guide books alike, is not adherence to some general stylistic definition (the way a style such as Romanesque or Abstract Expressionism

might be) but rather by their derivation from the relations among the religious communities of medieval Spain. And the often-cited etymology of the word *mudéjar* itself is both revealing and obscuring: from the Arabic *mudajjan*, “those who remain behind,” i.e. those Muslims who—for whatever reasons—did not emigrate from territories that passed from Muslim to Christian control.⁴

For Amador, and for much of the scholarship that has followed his lead, the transformation of the term from the sociopolitical to the cultural is fraught with difficulties and perhaps purposeful ambiguities. It is easy enough to say what a person called a *Mudéjar* is: a Muslim who lives in a Christian polity in circumstances roughly parallel to those of the *Mozarabs* (the Arabized Christians) or the Jews who lived in Islamic polities, i.e. as a species of *dhimmi*. But *mudéjar* as a general cultural phenomenon—in any of the arts—is ultimately not really about the people we refer to as “Mudéjares” but ultimately really something that speaks to the culture of Christians, and Jews, and their use of what we might prefer to call Arabic, or Arabicate, forms in their aesthetic expressions. Indeed, if there is a truism about medieval Spain that is at once self-evident and yet widely disregarded it is that identity is complex and not at all necessarily tied to religion, rarely purely coterminus with it; and that religion, in turn, is not necessarily coterminus with language, nor with ethnicity; all of this despite the fact that almost all of our terminology suggests otherwise.⁵ Indeed, the conceptual

⁴ For an extended definition and discussion of the terms under which Muslims lived in Christian territories see the *Encyclopædia of Islam*'s entry under *mudejar*. The original *EI* entry was written by Pedro Chalmeta and is available both in the original print version and in the electronic one; the ongoing *Encyclopædia of Islam Three* includes an entry under Andalusian Art and Architecture that indicates that there will be a separate article for Mudejar art and architecture but that does not yet exist.

⁵ The most succinct (and brilliant) exposition of these points about the lack of direct correspondence between religion and other markers of identity in recent years is certainly that by Roger Wright, in his meditation on “Language and Religion in Early Medieval Spain,” which includes among other notable observations the following: “[And yet] religious differences may not have been as consistently psychologically salient as subsequent historians have, until recently, led us to believe... That is, we can suspect that if we had been able to ask individual inhabitants what they were, they could well have answered ‘Cordoban’, or ‘gardener’, or ‘old woman’, or some other category, rather than, or before, ‘Christian’, ‘Muslim’ or ‘Jew’” (120). Although Wright here is clearly focusing on al-Andalus rather than on the later Christian polities what the *mudéjar* phenomenon confirms is precisely the extent to which this continued to be true in later centuries, and the extent to which this lack of a religiously-driven sense

pivot on which the cultural concept of *mudéjar* turns is that it was the *Mudéjares*, those Muslims “left behind”—those who chose to stay behind, in other words—who were the highly skilled craftsmen who knew, for example, how to do the intricate brick-work that transformed Bab al-Mardum into the little church of Santa Cruz. The surprisingly widespread belief—visible in both tourist guides and in a major book such as that of Henry Kamen—is in fact that the *mudéjar* style is something that turns principally on the skills and traditions of the conquered, rather than on the desires and tastes of the conquerors. Let alone that these might be overlapping or perhaps even identical matters.

But if one reads Amador’s *discurso* carefully it is clear that from the outset, even for this pioneer, *mudéjar* is really something of an extended metaphor, whose basis is the historical phenomenon of *Mudéjares*, and thus of that most remarkable and (for very many) surprising fact that the Christians of medieval Spain, almost invariably characterized as the champions of the *Reconquista*, in fact had a version of the *dhimma*, and in fact embraced, rather than expelled, a great deal of the “Moorish” culture they conquered. At stake here, then, is the very character of Castilian culture after 1085. It is abundantly clear from the first pages of Amador’s “El estilo mudéjar en la arquitectura” that he is really interested in Castilian—for him of course synonymous with Spanish—culture, and that the real importance of the architectural monuments is what they reveal about the culture that produces them:

Doctrina es vuestra, como lo es también de consumados críticos, que los monumentos de las artes y de las letras llevan impreso viva y profundamente el sello especial de las civilizaciones que los producen. Sus sentimientos, sus creencias, sus costumbres, su estado social y político, sus deseos y esperanzas, en el vario y contradictorio sentido de la vida, todo se halla revelado con sorprendente ingenuidad en las creaciones del arte, ora escriban el arquitecto y el estatuario en inmensas moles de piedra la historia de pueblos que ya no existen, ora confine el pintor y el poeta a frágiles tablas e inestables cantares los prodigiosos triunfos de sus héroes, la pacífica gloria de sus sabios, la justicia o la omnipotencia de sus monarcas. (6)

What Amador then goes on to make crystal clear is that it was a Castilian

of identity is what allows for the very existence of *mudéjar*.

culture that desired much of what they saw and thus made it their own. It is not—as an extraordinary number of explanations and definitions suggest—that there happened to be *Mudéjares* around and they were good builders so the Castilians ended up with “Islamic” buildings pretty much *faute de mieux*. On the contrary, its hallmark distinction is precisely the desire and the cultural ambition of the Christians that makes the *mudéjar* possible in the first place, and then flourish, and become as natural a part of the Castilian (and Aragonese) cultural landscape as anything else. For Amador what is remarkable, and what he is telling his audience of good Catholic gentlemen (at least some of whom were no doubt surprised by such assertions) is that the Castilians whose military and political prowess transformed Islamic lands into Christian ones were also Castilians whose “política tolerante que da vida a los vasallos mudéjares” in fact transformed their Christian culture into something profoundly, visibly, and FOUNDATIONALLY intertwined with Islamic and Arabic culture.

Mudéjar is thus a wonderfully ambivalent term, which speaks to the power of the conquered. Or, better yet, to the symbiosis and intimacy of the conqueror and the conquered. Or, best of all, for me, to the difficulties we have in imagining and describing medieval Spanish cultural identity precisely because it is so rarely about clean-cut religious or cultural divisions. Even the now-ubiquitous expression “tres culturas” seems on second glance problematic—and the *mudéjar* phenomenon, in such a context, a perfect example of the pervasive assumptions about the divisions among the three religious communities. Just which one of those three cultures is it that we are looking at when we are inside the gorgeous Tránsito synagogue, to take just one among hundreds of possible examples? Here we see the arms of Castile and León set inside tangled ribbons of Arabic calligraphy, vegetation—decoration unambiguously Nasrid in style, although the term Nasrid here is ultimately problematic too, since it is also the Castilian court style; and just below that we find the Hebrew inscription proclaiming this to be the oratory of Samuel Halevi, servant of Peter of Castile, “Savior of Israel.” Are we really looking at one of those “tres culturas,” the Jewish culture of that synagogue? Or are we instead somehow seeing three cultures at the same time, inside the same perfectly unified building? Did Halevi and his contemporaries see this as a synagogue that had “Christian” and “Muslim” features? Or are we not in fact in the presence of what the term *mudéjar* tries so valiantly to evoke, the great paradox that this is not in many cases definable by religion at all? That there is, instead, a complex and yet easily shared culture, created

in Toledo after 1085? At the heart of both the merit and the deficiencies of *mudéjar* as a term describing medieval Castile—and of a city like Toledo and the extraordinary literary and intellectual flowering that is at the heart of the creation of vernacular Castilian culture there—is the question of the ambiguous relationship between religion and culture. And the fact—for many uncomfortable, or simply unbelievable—that in medieval Spain culture regularly and influentially trumps religion.

So, just what is *mudéjar*, really? In art history it is a term that has acquired widespread acceptance, and as a result *The New York Times* and everyone's Michelin guides, and many of those thousand and one articles being written in Spain and elsewhere about medieval Spain will include stock definitions of these buildings, mostly considerably boiled down from the sophisticated specialist literature.⁶ Almost all of the widely read uses of the term, ironically, reinforce the very religious distinctions that a more finely understood *mudéjar* might challenge, or indeed dismantle. And beyond that there is another curious wrinkle, which has to do with its use to talk about culture at large, and especially written culture. Despite its canonization in art history and in the history of literature—which was really Amador's field, although as a nineteenth century intellectual he would rightly have scoffed at our overly-specialized notions of fields, and expertise—for many years no one paid much of any attention to it, even though Amador himself, in his speech to his fellow academics at San Fernando, carefully notes the abundance of translations and other adaptations from Arabic belles-lettres that make up the core of early Castilian prose. If adaptation or "translation" of the Islamic style to the use and traditions of Christians is the working definition of *mudéjar*, then it would be a concept difficult to see as anything other than central to the origins of most Castilian literature.

It was only about a century after Amador's powerful talk, however, that Américo Castro—from whom those of us who are Sam Armistead's students proudly descend, of course—reintroduced *mudéjar* as a cultural concept with central relevance to our understanding of medieval Spanish literature. And it is, once again, more than a matter of mere curiosity that the author, in this case Castro, also maintained the intimate and fundamental

⁶ Of course, the literature on the subject by the relative handful of art historian specialists who work in this area is infinitely more sophisticated and variegated; for a full accounting of the post-Amador use of the term in this academic field see the relevant sections of the bibliographic essays in the forthcoming Dodds, Menocal, and Balbale.

connection between the aesthetics of literature and that of buildings, both as a helpful metaphor and also as a way of underlining the pervasiveness of the phenomenon. In his *España en su historia* he talks about what he calls “mudéjarismo literario” and he defines the *Libro de buen amor* thus: “Su arte consistió en dar sentido cristiano a hábitos y temas islámicos, y es así paralelo al de las construcciones mudéjares tan frecuentes en su tiempo” (360). Since Castro, many medievalists have of course written extensively about the intertwinements of Arabic or Islamic sensibilities into the foundations of Castilian and other Romance literatures, but until relatively recently it was rarely discussed in the context of the *mudéjar* phenomenon per se. But this has now changed, mostly because Francisco Márquez Villanueva has, in recent years, struggled to make *mudéjar* a fundamental working premise, and a baseline term, in literary studies. With both rigor and passion Márquez has argued that the very foundations of Castilian culture in the thirteenth century, principally through Alfonso’s projects—what he calls “el concepto cultural alfonsí”—is thoroughly *mudéjar* as was, he points out, Alfonso himself.⁷

And yet... despite the heroic efforts of Márquez Villanueva, and of many others, and despite the increasing frequency of use of the term in both the scholarly and also the popular realms, *mudéjar* is still, somehow, a term that seems foreign and exotic. There has been no universalizing or cementing of the notion that *mudéjar* is not some difficult-to-pronounce cultural permutation somewhere in the interstices of that inscrutable medieval Spain, but rather that it is pretty much simply what high culture is in medieval Castile, and beyond that throughout much of the rest of medieval Christian Spain. Worse, with a handful of conspicuous exceptions, the term is often used in ways that reinforce certain kinds of assumptions about social and cultural relations among the religious communities who did indeed share that culture that Amador would have liked to allude to with the trope of *mudéjar*—and about all the vital identity questions about medieval and even early modern Spain that the

⁷ Indeed, he understands Alfonso’s life and education as a young man as being the apotheosis of *mudejarización*, a term he believes we need to just learn to deal with, as he somewhat impatiently notes in his provocative “Meditación de las otras Alambres:” “No habrá que decir que Alfonso el Sabio, nacido en Toledo y legado por su vida, primero a Murcia y después a Sevilla, encarnaba en su persona la mas completa *mudejarización* (*acostumbrémonos a la terminología*)” (266).

term ought to be dismantling.⁸ Very rarely indeed is it understood to be the phenomenon that is coterminous with what we so much more easily call “medieval Spanish,”⁹ despite the fact that the end of the day it is in fact a great deal harder to come up with examples of the medieval culture we study that is not in some measure Arabized or Arabizing.

I would thus like to finish here by asking whether it is even a term that—despite an honorable history, and a refined series of understandings in art history, and now a certain ubiquity in parts of Spain’s tourism universe—we really want to continue to use. The word, I would argue, fundamentally obscures the fact that the phenomenon is no different from so much that is simply Castilian and broadly Spanish; in that obscuring we readily glimpse the age-old problem of how the Spaniards (and those who study them) struggle to conceive of their relationship to their medieval past, which can perhaps also be boiled down by saying the relationship between triumphant Christian Spain and the defeated and expelled Jewish and Islamic Spains. It seems to me, that at this moment when dramatic world events have made medieval Spain a frequent historical reference—and when Europe is struggling to understand what role in their societies will be played by their modern-day *Mudéjares*—these in turn communities with extraordinary and polemic arguments ongoing about their own identity and assimilation questions—in such times, should we not find the clearest possible ways to speak about the complex cultural identities of medieval Spain? And to explain clearly the extent to which the “mudéjarization”—i.e. the cultural trumping of the political and the ideological—of newly-Castilian Toledo was precisely what provided the wherewithal for the translation phenomenon that played such a transformative role in medieval Europe far beyond the boundaries of Iberia? In other words, this still-peculiar term is at the very heart of the vast and increasingly pressing questions of European cultural identity, questions that—like the most basic *mudéjar* question—are concerned with

⁸ A very recent and welcome exception is an article by Barbara Fuchs, where she roots her arguments against allowing 1492 to overdetermine how we trace the history of Spain in the almost complete absorption of the *mudéjar* into the fabric of the local vernaculars, thus shaping the cultures that lie on the other side of 1492, on the other side of the conscious expulsions of “Islamic influences.”

⁹ A rare and wonderful example is “Representation and Identity in Medieval Spain,” where D. F. Ruggles argues that *mudéjar* as a style was seen not as Islamic but as “not French” in Aragonese and Castilian communities where the incursion of the Romanesque and Gothic was experienced by contemporaries as part of a wider Gallic colonialism.

the relationships between culture and religion, between conquerors and conquered, between fear and desire in cultural relations. And thus perhaps the moment has come to help the concept transcend the relatively parochial, and ill-understood confines within which we are still most likely to find it these days.

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