

THE MUDEJAR CITY ELEMENTS OF ISLAMIC-CHRISTIAN SYNTHESIS WITHIN URBAN PLANNING

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Abstract. *This essay analyses the main elements of the Mudéjar City from different points of view: historical, stylistic, religious and mainly urban. We include some examples of how the main Islamic urban structure experienced modifications during the Reconquista period with a focus on those solutions that are characteristics of the Mudéjar style. We observe the main phases of the process (the transformation among the urban tissue and the main buildings) that occurred from the point where the Islamic city underwent change during the new Christian period.*

Keywords: *Mudéjar; Islamic city, khittah, mosque, cathedral, Christian city, urbanism, mozarabe, urban planning, urban syntheses, Reconquista.*

In a brief analysis of urbanization of the Iberian Peninsula, we can identify cities in the southern area which may be defined as adhering to a particular Islamic character of urban structure, while in northern cities Christian features prevail. There are a number of urban centers that are found in the central and southern part which passed through different stages: Romanization, Visigoth and later Islamic period. Among the so called Christian cities, we can mention Leon, which maintained an evidently Roman character of planimetry. The Late Medieval period experienced an unprecedented growth of suburbs that revolved around the Central nuclei, often formed around the triad of *religious building, aulic residences* (the royal court) and *commercial space*¹.

There is a series of cities which developed beginning from this nucleus, respecting in the initial phase a pattern typical for the Islamic urban ideology, this structure evolved during the Reconquista period, experienced a series of transformations which in the end generated a new urban typology specific to this area. The history of urbanism mentions specific types of Islamic cities such as:

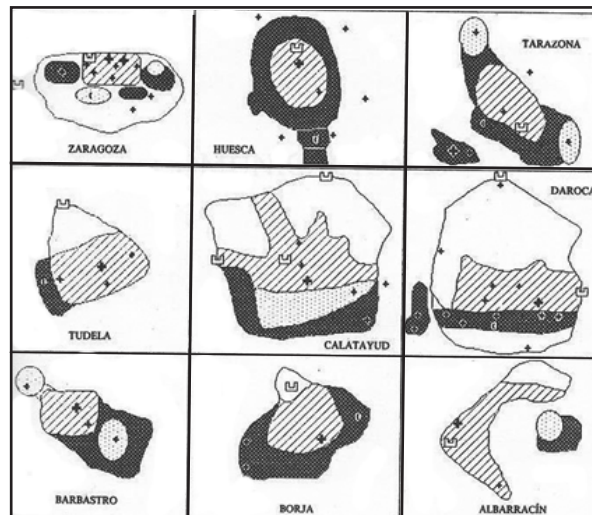
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¹ Fabie, *Via jessor España*, Madrid, 1879, in Simposio Internacional Sobre *La Ciudad Islamica*, op. cit., pp. 433-434.

cities of the Ottoman Empire, North African cities and Saharan cities. According to this enumeration a new type of city needed to be introduced a city specific to the Iberian space, the *Mudejar City*. Representative of this type is a series of cities in the region of Aragon area such as Teruel.

During the Reconquista a series of travelers reminisced about the Moorish population which continued to practice their rites and customs even in the spaces occupied by Christians. There are many examples of these cities in which even after the restoration in force of Christianity important groups of populations preserved their day by day life following the norms and rituals specific to Islamic society, we mentioned Teruel but we can add Palencia to this case study. The travelers indicate the fact that the Christian community willingly accepted the integration of these kinds of groups. This type of tolerance often manifested in the city's inhabitants but was less practiced by the political and religious authorities, but this pattern was implemented and became norm in the mentality of the Iberian Peninsula during the Islamic period.

Paolo Cueneo² specifies that the particularity of this type of medieval town is a main characteristic of an urban phenomenon that could be called urban *Mudejarism*, a phenomenon that has occurred at different intensities causing transformations of the urban tissue in all the Islamic cities after they had been conquered, but this phenomenon was concentrated in the urban centers as well as Avila or Burgos later in Malaga or Valencia. In many of these cities the structuring of the cities in *khittah* was preserved until the late period of the middle age and this took place even in the Renaissance period.



Different type of Mudejar Cities
The Transformations of the Urban Tissue during the Process

² Paolo Cueneo, *Storia dell'urbanistica. Il mondo islamico*, Bari, La Terza, 1986, pp. 216-220.

Terms such as: *las mozarabías, las morerías las juderías*, represented names of such neighborhoods (khittah) areas which have been delimited in the urban space in which the rules of daily life reflected the specific needs to that community. The main transformation produced inside the city during the restoration of the Christian ideology affected the planimetry of the house. The locative structures included large familiar groups which lived in the same building, the division of the inner space followed gender hierarchy and the ways these genders interacted with the public space.

The core characteristics of the Islamic private space were totally contradicted by the Christian way of living. In this sense the house suffered an entire process of morphological changes in their attempt to open towards the public space, to find in-situ solutions to be in direct contact with the street, with the community, the locative spaces are fragmented and the multi-family system is dissolved, this transformation fundamentally modified the urban tissue emphasizing the sense of randomness and the irregularity of the urban structure.

Beginning with the Reconquista we notice that the Arab population migrated to the southern part of the peninsula; those who remained in the middle area which had been reconquered by Christians by Christians were called *Mudejars*. The *Mudejar City* experienced a series of movements which were the reverse of the Islamisation period; more specifically the transformations concentrated on the religious edifices such as the mosques that were either destroyed or adapted to the Christian rituals. The classic example in this case is the great mosque of Cordoba which was converted into a Cathedral as well as the mosque Bab-al-Mardun of Toledo which functioned as a Christian Cathedral.

The *Mudejar City* experienced a process of restructuring and redivision of the public spaces, the entity of the entity of khittah was replaced with another entity patterned on the ideological nature of Christian parishes. At the end of the 12th century in cities already conquered an important campaign of building rural oratories, specifically Christian oratorios placed in the suburbs of ancient Islamic cities.

Pedro Lavado³ considers from the urbanistic point of view the *Mudejar City* does not experience any fundamental change, all the transformations have been generated by the necessity to adapt the urban tissue to new norms and new socio-religious conditions. The city silhouette preserved a defensive characteristic and the surrounding walls which had often been restored by muslim groups such as in Palencia and Teruel, this was a demand that the catholic kings expressed towards the Muslim population.

The *Mudejar* term applied to urban systems was borrowed from the repertoire of decorative stylistics where it defined a new style classifying a series of elements of the synthesis: mixing the typical Christian iconography with decorative elements or patterns of organizing the space typically Islamic, insertions of techniques and materials specific to Islamic decoration in the morphology of Christian style. For example in the case of Compostela it can be noticed that the hospitals which

³ Simposio Internacional Sobre *La Ciudad Islamica, Potencias y comunicaciones*, Zaragoza, Institution Fernando El Catolico, 1991, pp. 444-446.

had been added to the Madrasas of the Islamic cities were fully preserved, having the same function as before: assistance and caring of the pilgrims. Many hospitals are mentioned along the pilgrimage routes mainly in the 15th and 16th centuries, these buildings settled a new architectural style characterised by the *Mudejar stylistics*: *Hospital de rei y de la conception* from Burgos, *Palmero sin Fromista* and the *Santiago* in Benevente. Cities such as Toledo and Madrid took the institution of the hospital as they had been organized in the Islamic period (public buildings raised and supported by the tax system specific to the Islamic administration or by Mecena solutions).

As the phenomenon of forming a new political, military, religious and economical Christian aristocracy became more aware the modification experienced by the urban structures became more evident⁴. Cities such as Toledo, Zaragoza, Almeria, Malaga, Valencia and Cordoba suffered planimetric modifications imposed by the will of this new Christian social hierarchy. Perhaps the most significant change occurring in these cities is synthesized at the level of commercial premises; from the 12th century, markets typically lose their Islamic characteristics. The structuring of the goods within specialized areas, typical for Islamic markets, is dissolved. The preferences to place these markets in the central area of the city, near the religious buildings or in so called public spaces are still preserved.



*Urban planning of Malaga and Valencia
in the Mudejar period*

During the Christian period they had a mixed function. It can be noticed that the phenomenon of migration of the population towards the south took place

⁴ *La Ciudad En Al-Andalus y El Maghreb* in *Actas del II Congreso Internacional La Ciudad En Al-Andalus Y El Maghreb*, Universita de Cadiz, 1999, pp. 328-341.

⁵ Moeno, Ana Navarro, *Centros urbanos en Al-Andalus*, Madrid, Art Gerust Publicaciones, 2010.

⁶ Palazon Navarro Julio & Castillo Pedro Jimenes, *Las Ciudades de Al-Andalus. Nuevas perspectivas*, Zaragoza, Instituto de Estudios Islamicos y del Oriente Proximo, 2007.

simultaneously to another phenomenon which occurred inside the city, more precisely the Muslim and the Jewish population moved into individual suburbs: so called Moreria and Juderias. They formed individual districts preserving inside these communities the ethnic characteristics and the rituals according to their religious needs⁵. These districts were closed by gates during the evening. As a consequence of this phenomenon inside the cities free areas (uninhabited areas) were formed, houses and entire residential areas had no owners and were occupied by the Christian population which had arrived in the cities after the reconquering.

In this regard the planimetrical change began inside the core of the city. A small locative nucleus were the first to be affected extending to the public space and the main administrative building. The specific Islamic tendency that the industrial and artisanal spaces be placed at the periphery of the city was dissolved, the religious rituals of the new community would radically transform the inner and the exterior space of the building but mainly the interstitial space between the religious building and the urban planimetry⁶. For example in Toledo a whole series of mosques became in the Christian period either sanctuaries or monasteries. Beginning in 1300 it can be noticed in Cordoba, Toledo, Segovia, the initiation of a campaign to build synagogues, a fact that proves the infiltration of the Jewish community in the official structures of the new power.

In the Islamic period the centre of the city was formed by the pair, mosque – official residences. In the Christian period the central area was redefined by the silhouette of the cathedral and the buildings of the local authorities: the city hall. The individual districts which still preserved ethnic characteristics specific to the Islamic period were divided according to new urban systems, as we mentioned the main nucleus of these districts were represented by the parishes.

In conclusion we can establish a series of main characteristics able to define a Mudejar type city:

1. There are no markets (in the sense of Islamic suk) nor any forums, nor palestrae with antique roots as we expected after to resurrect after the Christian conquest. Step by step inside the city a new public space appeared which we can call piazza/plaza, a space which includes the significance of the above mentioned Roman spaces, a space which received an important attention from the urbanists and artists during the renaissance.

2. The city gates with military and defensive function among the towers represents the most important medieval characteristic of the city.

3. The Watchtower had in this new typology a double function, defensive and religious. It was often integrated in the city walls but also in the main public buildings of the city.

4. An element which is inseparable in relation to the tower is represented by the clock, the presence of the clock tower definitely changed the urban physiognomy and the rapport between the public space and the community. Initially this was inside the church tower afterwards becoming an annex of the city hall. an example is Tore Nueva from Zaragoza built on the initiative of the municipal authority. Step by step the clock tower regained its own individuality gaining

authority and the typical architectural morphology. In the late period we notice the integration of the clock tower in the mosques in the Tunisian areas.

5. The existence of 2 ritual (religious) buildings which competed for the public space inside the city: Mosque and cathedral⁷.

6. The market which in this period had a mixed typology tried to adapt the typical Islamic organisation to economic and social demands of the new city hierarchy.

7. The appearance of new public edifices demanded by the new structure of social life: the city hall, public fountains (for decorative purposes), hospitals transformed in the already mentioned way. The mosques occupied in the urban space an isolated space in the meanwhile the cathedral had the tendency to incorporate various utility buildings as well as locative spaces.

8. A dialectic conflict can be noticed at the level of civil life inside the power groups: the nobility and aristocratic one and the rest of the social segments, this intersocial rapport inside the *Mudejar City* involve a series of changes in the urban morphology. One of the main characteristics of the urban functions which concentrated on the commercial spaces would shape the spaces into a structure that follows an order ruled by Christian habits but also Islamic ones taking into account the fact that the majority of the commercial agents were from these two communities.

9. Elements such as water shaped the general form of the city (placement and orientation towards the water source) but also created internal urban points which concentrated among these elements (with decorative or practical functions)⁸.

10. The *Mudejar City* is characterized by a series of morpho-structural synthesis which had an impact on the urban tissue including spaces with different characteristics: Islamic, Christian, Judaist but also public buildings which had to respond to the socio-religious needs of both communities (Islamic and Christian communities).

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