Moorish Architecture and Modernism

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Abstract

For 700 years part of the Iberian Peninsula was ruled by Muslims under the name of Al-Andalus. During this period a unique architectural vernacular was established combining the traditional Islamic architecture from cities such as, Damascus, Cairo, and Baghdad, with the locals who have better familiarity with the properties of the land. This combination produced buildings that successfully address the site and its surroundings, and create a healthy, comfortable, and aesthetically unique architecture.

The architecture Spain from the late 19th century to the middle of the 20th has been criticized as being a shallow imitation of the styles that inhabited the region, Historicism. The idea of the Romantic clinging to the aesthetic of the past without an understanding of its elements, or logical justification of these adaptations held the architectural advancement of Spain.

Spanish Modern architects of that rejected the Historicism approach of design in Spain, while struggling to find a Spanish identity in Modernism. In 1953 architect Fernando Chueca Goitia lead a group of architect to creating the “Manifesto de la Alhambra” shifting attention to the Modern elements of the Alhambra Cited-del in Granada. After that in 1973 another architect by the name of Rafael de La-Hoz published “Proporcion de Cordobesa” an analysis of the mathematical proportion used in Moorish buildings in the city of Cordoba.

This research aims to analyze the writings of Rafael de La-Hoz, and Chueca Goitia about the Moorish Architecture, mainly “Proporcion de Cordobesa” and the “Manifesto de la Alhambra”, to perceive the Modern qualities of the Moorish designs as seen by them.

Thesis and Topic Questions

De la Hoz’s writing about the Moorish architecture display a Modern appreciation of their design, and understanding their application can result in rational designs.
* How Does Rafael de la Hoz write about the Moorish Architecture?
* How Does Fernando Chueca Goitia Write about Moorish Architecture?
* Knowing that he read Chueca’s Manifesto de la Alhambra, how does his writing compare to Chueca’s writing?

Body

Chueca claim that the importance of his Manifesto was due to the need to set a new architectural path for Spain. A path away from the antiquated methodology of Historicism, and toward a Modern understanding of Spanish history to avoid losing the Spanish identity amidst the surge of the foreign Modern ideas in Spain.

For Chueca Alhambra was not a mere relic of the past but an ageless monument of true architecture that needed to be analyzed with a critical architectural eye. His approach to analyzing Alhambra was by deconstructing its elements and comparing it to both Modern design sensibilities. He was fascinated with how Alhambra embodies design elements not too foreign to that of the Modern style. Elements such as sincerity of form and materials, lack of molding, and the emphasis on volume and space.

Rafael de La-Hoz on the other hand was fascinated by the rationality applied to the modular proportion the region of Cordoba held, and the basis of geometric compositions formulated by the Cordovan Proportions. He states that the Cordovan ratio is a rational evolution of the ancient Greek Golden Section. However according to de La-Hoz there are crucial differences between the two with the Cordovan proportion being more aesthetically logical.

De La-Hoz’s describe the Great Mosque of Cordoba for its ability to achieve a space that projects a feel of indefinite depth, a feel of imaginative emotions hardly imaginable. He credits this effect to the use of the proportion on both the plan of the Mosque and the array of the columns.

The purpose of de La-Hoz’s analysis is to inform other Spanish architects about the numerous and useful applications of the Cordovan proportion. A proportion that is to him an element of beauty that is rooted in Spain.

Conclusion

The analysis of both Chueca and de La-Hoz showcase Modern sensibility in the Architecture of Moorish Andalusia. Chueca was appreciative of the architectural elements in the Alhambra and its correlation with the Modern style. While de La-Hoz was intrigued by the rationality applied to the modular proportion of the Cordovan ratio.

Select Bibliography

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