

Mozarabic religious culture in spain



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

People define art as something which has been molded from talent and skills. It is something made out of inspiration or something that the artist envisions. We consider the remnants of the past as arts, Greek potteries, ancient paintings or buildings, illuminated manuscripts and so forth. These objects may be admired and appreciated in several different ways but what we see may not be the view of the artist who made it centuries ago. There were relics of the past that has shown history. There are objects that we may consider today as an object of art but what we see is just a small fraction of what it has been to the people where it had been before. It may represent what culture it came from, what trials did the creator of the object had gone through to make something that would subsist through the years to be appreciated and be treasured in the present time. In most histories, there were always things found that represents what kind of life they have lived, murals that tells the story of our ancestors' existence just like a diary in the present time. In the history of Spain there existed a group of minorities which made an impact in the country's history- religiously and artistically.

Mozarabs were Iberian Christians living in Al-andalus, a nation in the Iberian Peninsula. " The term Mozarabic is derived from the word *musta'rib* or *musta'rab* which came from the Arab root word ' *araba*, meaning in the active sense, ' to make oneself similar to the arabs' or ' having assimilated Arabic customs' or most specifically designating someone who had the appearance of an Arab, was indistinguishable from the Arabs, and would not stand out in the crowd of Arabs" (Corominas 244). It was a term derived to call the Christians who lived in the control of the Muslim lands and avoid

confusion among old Christians who resided in Al-andalus and other Christians.

Although Spain was Muslim in that period (711-1492), Mozarabs were treated good-naturedly, though they remain unconverted to Islam and didn't actually enjoy equal rights. A few agreed to be converted to Islam to avoid the heavy tax being subjected to them. The conversion also opened opportunities for them to make a better living and alleviate their status in the society since they were in a Muslim community. They have adopted Arab customs, culture and Arabic language. Christians lived in a separate community; they had their own government, and paid a special tax in place of the requirement made of Muslims to serve in the army. There were Mozarab women who married Muslim men and their children were raised as Muslims.

“ Mozarabic was the romance language they spoke” (Hitchcock 12). This language was first documented in the Peninsula in the form of choruses or “ kharjas” in Arabic and Hebrew lyrics called “ muwashshahs”. Even though Arabs were driven out of Spain at the end of 15th century and the language has died out, it is sometimes claimed that Mozarabic has left its mark on the dialects of Southern Spain and Portugal.

In their time, Mozarabs never call their language as Mozarabics nor themselves as Mozarabs. “ At times Christian communities prospered in Muslim Spain; these Christians are now usually referred to as Mozárabes, although the term was not in use at the time” (Hitchcock 1978). Historians started calling them Mozarabs only in the 19th century referring to the

Christians who lived under the Muslim rules in the Iberian Peninsula during the middle ages.

The Mozarabs had ritual worships in the Catholic Church which was Mozarabic Liturgy. It was most celebrated on Sundays and on great feasts. The Mozarabic rite is the second-best most attested preserved documented liturgy in the Latin Church; the first is the Roman rite. The role of the Blessed Virgin Mary is emphasized in their rites more than that of the Romans. They were also the first to use ashes within the liturgical celebrations. “Mozarabic Liturgy is also called Gothic-Spanish, Isidorian and Toledian” (Gehr 334). Many of the existing manuscripts of these rites are in cathedral Chapter Library at Toledo.

There were manuscripts found by the cardinal in the library of the cathedral in Toledo in 1502 as mentioned by Gomez to his edition of *Breviarium Gothicum* which was published in Madrid, 1775. These manuscripts were one of the magnificent Mozarabic arts preserved from their time. It was said that these manuscripts “were written in old Gothic characters and related to the ancient Spanish Liturgy” (Notes & Queries 41). The manuscript was said to have a resemblance to the Roman Liturgy in every essential part. The Mozarabic Liturgy is an essential part of the Spanish Christian History. Their rites continued to be used in the five churches of Toledo until 1842 when the Spanish government suppressed the churches throughout the country and the number of parishes dropped.

Another essential part of the Mozarabic Liturgy is the Mozarabic chant which has a significant influence from the Gregorian chants. It was also a period of

musical creativity in the part of being liturgical, which was still preserved at present time. It was intended to be sung by males, in accordance with the Roman Catholic Tradition and was monophonic and a capella. There were four chant categories, recitation, syllabic, neumatic, and melismatic. Chants were considered a method for spiritual development; it can be performed individually or in a group. Chants may involve throat singing as in Tibetan Buddhists and chanting mantras which are particular to Hindus.

In the time of the Moorish invasion in Toledo there was a clash in the liturgical rites because the king and queen preferred the Roman rites so in order to decide which of the two were most favored by heaven they agreed to choose their own champions to fight in mortal combat. But when the Mozarabs won, the king and queen were annoyed by their triumph and later came to a thought that it is not appropriate to question theology in the form of a combat. It is only through a miracle that they will determine heaven's response. Believing that their rituals were exceptional they proposed to make another deal where the two liturgies were thrown into fire while each party prays to heaven. The one which will not be burned will be considered the most favorable to heaven. The Roman ritual came out scorched but the Toledan remained on the spot where it was thrown and remained without injury. The Mozarabic ritual was then preserved and followed for a long period by their descendants until the copies of the rituals were lost and no one was able to perform and understand the services which had caused disputation between them. Having the desire not to discontinue such significant custom, Don Francisco Ximenes, archbishop of Toledo, founded a Mozarabic chapel where Mozarabic services were to be celebrated. The

chapel which still exists is ornamented with interesting Gothic frescoes which were still in a perfect stage of preservation. It represents various combats between Toledans and Moors, another is meticulously painted frescoes which shows the vessels that brought the Arabs to Spain (Gautier 127). One of the paintings represents the old Toledo during that time and information about the arms, costumes, weapons and architecture of their period in vast details. The cloisters, as well, were covered with frescoes. “ They surround a number of elegant and severe arcades of beautiful masses of verdure[...].” (Gautier 127). The cloisters were fittingly located near the church where you can walk about and reflect your thoughts without having to join in a ceremony or in a prayer. It was a peaceful and cheerful surrounding. The church in St. Thome at Toledo which was Moorish in all its details was classified as Mozarabic Architecture. There were many of the same class with horseshoe shaped arches and ribbed domes which were undoubtedly known as made by Christians but has Islamic influences (Fergusson 158). Mozarabic architectures has absence of exterior decoration, diverse in the floor plans, the majority of the structure is emphasized in the small proportions/ carvings (segmented, ribbed of horseshoe transept, etc.). It was known that Mozarabic arts and architecture were a fusion of Christian and Arabic influences whereas the adjective Mozarabic was derived. These practices were seen in the artistic church architectures and manuscript designs. There were various buildings in Spain with Mozarabic influence but there were ones which were purely Mozarabic. Some examples were the Iglesia de San Miguel de Escalada (fig. 1), east of Leon; the Ermita de San Baudelio (fig. 2), beyond Berlanga de Duero in Soria province; and Iglesia de Sta Maria de Lebeña (fig. 3), on the east side of the Picos de Europa mountains.

Various churches with Mozarabic characteristics were built during religiously tolerant periods across Al-Andalus. Eventually, most of them were destroyed or damaged in the years of conflict and persecution between different communities. An important characteristic of the Mozarabs was that they stuck to their customs, cultures and religion although they were not allowed to build new churches.

The eighth century is a fundamental phase for Christian culture in Spain where numerous architectural and artistic customs arose with influences from early Christian and Carolingian Art. When the Mozarabs migrated to north of Spain they established many monasteries where a certain change in the region's concept in architecture, sculpture and painting occurred. Along with the changes in the traditional architecture there arose an illumination of manuscripts mostly from the Bible and the New Testament and Beatus of Liebana's commentary on the Book of Apocalypse also known as the Book of Revelation of St. John. It was the reason that Beatus of Liebana was known in the later decades of the eighth century.

Beatus of Liebana was known as a monk, theologian and geographer. He was also known to have written two other texts, being the co-author of the *Apologeticum* which is also known as the Letter of the Etherius and Beatus to Elipandus and as the possible author of the sixty-line acrostic hymn known as "O Dei Verbum" (Kinane 48).

In his time, having studied the New Testament Apocalypse, he saw the signs which were to his belief the sign of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. The Adoptionist movement which does not believe that Jesus is the Son of God is,

to his view, the anti-christ. He wrote a letter to Archbishop Elipandus of Toledo about the error of his ways. To the latter's annoyance, he wrote a letter to the Asturian abbot Fidel accusing Beatus of the sin of arrogance, being a lowly monk teaching ways to an Archbishop(Kinane 50). The archbishop's words of sarcasm and name-calling might have served for Beatus to write the Apologeticum where he turned the Archbishop's word back on him entwining words based from the Bible. He proved in his own logical form that Elipandus is the Antichrist which caused Doctrinal war and brought Elipandus to scrutiny throughout Europe.

Beatus calculated the Second Coming of Christ based on the events in the Bible and had arrived to the conclusion that the 6th millennium from the time of Adam would be the end of days.

In total, the Mozarabs' religious culture had been of great influence in Spain's customs and its arts and architecture. Although a minority group they have proved to have lived in what they believed and fought for it. They played an essential part in its religious history and had been a foundation of Christianity.