Mudejar Tradition and the Synagogues of Medieval Spain: Cultural Identity and Cultural Hegemony

Jerrilynn D. Dodds

Beginning in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the Iberian peninsula underwent profound changes in rule and in the relationships among its three tensely poised religious groups: Muslims, Christians, and Jews. Important changes in political hegemony were taking place as Christian forces made major and often irreversible incursions into Muslim-ruled lands, a movement that resulted in the imposition of new Christian governments in cities that had for centuries been dominated by Islamic political and cultural traditions. The resulting transformations were complex, for though new Christian political structures could be rapidly devised to replace supplanted Islamic ones, the social and economic infrastructures of most cities were left intact, and the new Christian leadership penetrated the social and cultural fabric of cities with a good deal more trepidation than it did authoritative ruling bodies. In the realm of art and architecture, there developed a particularly vivid testimony to the complex interrelationships between cultures that resulted when Christian rulers presided over an artistic tradition that had been developed under Islamic rule: the arts called “Mudejar.”

“Mudejar” and “Mozarabic,” terms specific to the study of Spanish art, were conceived to resolve the problems of classifying the arts of a multicultural society in the Middle Ages. “Mozarabic” refers to the arts of Mozarabs, or Christians who lived under Islamic rule, but very early in their study an ambiguity developed in the term’s use. Some employed it to designate patrons, and others, to refer to any arts made by Christians—inside or outside Islamic political frontiers—that reflected the influence of Islam. This last use constituted a significant and dangerous leap in meaning, for it implied that the only possible reaction of a subjected culture to the art of a dominant one was imitation. We know of course both in general, and in the case of the Mozarabs themselves, that oppressed groups often use their cultures as an important means of demonstrating defiance. They resist the dominant culture by reverting to an old vanquished tradition or by developing new forms in opposition to it.
The case with Mudejar artistic traditions is just as complex. The word refers literally to a subjected Muslim, and early artistic studies assumed Mudejar artisans to be the Muslim slaves of new Christian masters. Today however, it is understood that Christians, Muslims, and Jews alike worked on the buildings and objects we call Mudejar, though there is still some controversy as to the definition and limitations implied by the term. One scholarly opinion defines Mudejar as an artistic style and tradition of construction that was developed by the interaction of Muslim patrons and craftsmen, and then appropriated by new Christian rulers and patrons. Another usage treats much the same group of buildings and objects simply as a chronological and geographical group gathered under the name Mudejar, which identifies any art created in Christian-ruled lands that had previously been under Muslim control, regardless of its stylistic features.

It is significant that the terms of this debate eliminate the medieval Iberian peninsula's eternal other, the Jews, who were nevertheless significant patrons of Mudejar buildings. Because their participation in military and political power structures was limited, they are largely excluded, or treated as marginal, in contemporary scholarly discussions of Mudejar arts (a fact that ought to serve as a warning against the habit of establishing artistic classifications in culturally plural societies according to hegemonic categories). Indeed, the synagogues of Spain are one of the key points of convergence of the rich cultural tensions that make Mudejar architecture unique and compelling.

There are four Sephardic synagogues from the medieval period on the Iberian peninsula, of which three are considered Mudejar by any definition: the congregational synagogue in Toledo (today the church of Santa Maria la Blanca), perhaps built by Joseph ben Meir ben Shoshan; the synagogue of Samuel Halevi in Toledo (El Tránsito); and the synagogue of Isaac Mehah in Córdoba. Another Mudejar synagogue, in Segovia, is known from paintings.
executed before its destruction in the nineteenth century. The fourth surviving synagogue is that of Tomar, from pre-expulsion Portugal, a building that presents particular problems of classification to which I will return. In reviewing their patronage, the historical conditions of their foundation, and the aesthetic language in which they are fashioned, I hope to demonstrate the way in which the synagogues of the Iberian peninsula can be seen as unique documents of three cultures that are both intertwined and divided.

Now a church dedicated to Santa María la Blanca, the earliest of Toledo’s two surviving synagogues presents an unusual plan and disposition [fig. 25]. A simple trapezoidal building constructed of brick alternating with stone courses, it opens today on a short end to reveal an interior of five aisles of which the central aisle is slightly wider. The aisles are supported by twenty-four piers in octagonal section, and eight engaged piers where the arches meet the wall. The arches are elegant enclosed horseshoe arches that rest on high abacuses, cutting a cool sharp profile against the shadow of the aisle behind [fig. 26]. The stucco relief decoration that adorns the arch spandrels and upper walls of the arcades of Santa María la Blanca draws on architectural, vegetal, and geometric motifs. It has a restrained, linear quality, and is balanced by expanses of plain wall, which have been thought by some to be intended for inscriptions. Only in the carved stucco capitals of the piers does the decoration erupt in what might be considered opulent and mannered fantasies of pinecones and interwoven bands in massive and deeply drilled forms [fig. 27].

We know nothing concerning the original orientation of the building, the placement of its bimah, or of its ark niche, or the disposition of its seating when it served as a synagogue. There are diverse opinions concerning the position of its women’s gallery, roofs, and ceiling. We also know very little for sure concerning its patronage, though a plausible connection has been proposed between this building and Joseph ben Meir ben Shoshan (also called Yusuf Abenxuxen), the finance minister of Alfonso VIII of Castile. Joseph ben Meir ben
Shoshan’s epitaph records him as the patron of a synagogue, perhaps one he restored, since another inscription refers to a synagogue whose “ruins were raised up in the year 4940 [1180].”

A synagogue clearly related in plan and formal tradition to the earliest of Toledo’s synagogues was the congregational synagogue of Segovia, a building that subsequently became the church of Corpus Christi before its destruction by fire in 1899. Like most Mudejar buildings throughout Spain, it was constructed of brick, and covered with both plain and carved stucco. Its arcades, which rested on eight massive piers, were identical with those of the Toledo synagogue, including sharp, enclosed horseshoe arches resting on abacuses, an arcade of blind arches in stucco relief at the clerestory level, and massive, plastic capitals with pinecones and foliage interlace [fig. 28, p. 112].

The existence of the Segovia synagogue forces us to put Toledo’s earliest synagogue in its context. It is not a unique anomaly as has often been thought—an odd aisled type of synagogue that reflected, perhaps, a preexisting mosque plan. Instead, we have here a synagogue type codified in plan and elevation, which was fairly widely dispersed and perhaps issued from a single workshop. It was a lively paradigm as well, for the two surviving examples were constructed on a grand scale in two important cities of the medieval Iberian peninsula [figs. 29-30].

From where then, does this building type derive its particular character? The search for a close parallel in plan yields meager results. Aisled synagogues do exist in North Africa, in particular in Tunis, though their arcades do not run parallel to the long walls as in Toledo and Segovia, and the North African buildings are more recent. Nevertheless, a western Islamic parallel might have some validity, for it is specifically in the artistic tradition of
North Africa that we find the aesthetics and techniques that best recall these synagogue interiors.

The austerity and restraint of decoration on the interior of these aisled synagogues must derive from a tradition of building originating during the Almohad hegemony on the Iberian peninsula. The Almohads, who invaded the Iberian peninsula in 1125 in response to what they believed were the excess of the reigning Almoravid rule and the growing power of the Christian kingdoms to the north, harbored strict convictions concerning patronage of the arts. They themselves were responsible for the destruction and whitewashing of Almoravid mosques, which they considered too distracting and opulent in decoration, and their own constructions in Marrakesh, Tinmal, and Seville show planar relief carving that is confined to a rectangular frame, and sharply curved horseshoe and pointed arches that present cool white profiles against the shadows of the aisles behind [fig. 31].

In their fundamental principals and even certain basic components, then, the synagogues of Toledo and Segovia demonstrate strong links in spirit and design to the architecture of the Almohads. The use of Almohad architectural style is common in the Mudejar tradition, part of a strong craft that survived the fall of Almohad hegemony. One can imagine by extension that—at a certain point in the development of this synagogue type—a plan type evolved that might accommodate this use of freestanding piers, thus continuing within the Jewish community the development of the Almohad tradition of architectural construction and decoration.

The process outlined here is one that dissociates architectural style from religious belief and practice. Although the forerunners for the elevation, decoration, and possibly even plan of these two synagogues were probably mosques, the appropriation of these architectural forms.
took on stronger meanings disassociated with Islamic religion. Thus the architectural style begun under the Almohads had come to be part of a shared visual language of Jews and Muslims that lost its religious, and to some extent its political implications. This branch of Mudejar architecture reveals a deep cultural commonality that transcends the differences that separated Muslims and Jews. It also reminds us of the extent to which this style is oriented toward traditions developed under Muslim hegemony: the Jews in Spain would never exercise that level of cultural sympathy with the architectural traditions of the Christians however long they survived under their rule.

Why Spain's multicultural style should, in its essence, be derived from Islamic and not Christian artistic traditions is a complex issue that involves both practical and symbolic concerns. Clearly, Mudejar art evolved in cities that had been ruled for centuries by Muslims, who had patronized ateliers that promoted and responded to their cultural needs and tastes. After centuries of living side by side with the Muslims, indigenous Christians and Jews had become used to these crafts, and had to a greater or lesser extent made them their own. The styles therefore survived the demise of the ruling group that had introduced them. But there is more to the lively way in which Jewish patrons in particular embraced the Almohad-inspired Mudejar style. For the ability of the Jewish community—and for that matter, the Christian community—to identify with this austere, brick-based architecture with aniconic decoration is not related to the direct relationship of the Jewish community with Almohad rule. It derives instead from the generally high level of tolerance exercised by the first Muslim rulers
of al-Andalus, and the lasting cultural identification of one group with another's artistic forms.

It is generally understood that Jews fared better under Islamic rule than under the vigilance of Christian monarchs. Under Islamic rule, Christians and Jews were dhimmis, “protected people” or “People of the Book,” whose autonomy as a group and freedom to worship and follow certain traditional ways of life were protected in return for obedience to Islamic rule and the payment of special taxes. The Jews had fared badly under the Visigoths, and after the advent of Islam on the peninsula, the rights of Jews had varied wildly from laws that granted rights similar to those of Christians, to decrees that insisted on their inferior status, excluding them from normal social and economic life. While dhimmi legislation was somewhat variable in different parts of the Islamic world, one could largely count on a consistent treatment in any Muslim-ruled city on the Iberian peninsula during the years of the Umayyad caliphate and the reigns of the taifa kings. The result of this tolerance was that in the Tenth and Eleventh centuries Jews attained significant court positions and moved freely through each city, intermingling in its social and cultural life and presumably identifying with the visual world that was the setting for this urban society.

When al-Andalus was invaded by the conservative North African dynasties, the Almoravids and Almohads, however, the traditional policy of tolerance was undercut. These Berbers were often herdsmen and soldiers whose entry to al-Andalus was sudden and shocking: they were largely intolerant, both of religious minorities and of the indigenous Muslims whom they regarded as soft and decadent. Under the Almoravids and Almohads there was intermittent persecution of Jews: the massacre of Jews in eleventh-century Granada is perhaps the most salient example, and it occurred significantly in response to controversy surrounding a powerful Jew, Joseph ibn Naghrila, chief minister for the Muslim king of Granada. Similarly, a number of intriguing limitations to the Jews' normal freedom of social behavior appears in twelfth-century legislation, which seem once again aimed at controlling the social and economic mobility of Jews in the Islamic polity. Thus, Ibn Abdun insisted that Jews be forced to wear distinctive dress, and Ibn Idhari recounts that the Almohad caliph al-Mansur insisted that Jews wear a prescribed costume, “with black burnouses and black caps,” “because they had become so bold as to wear Muslim clothing and in their dress looked like the noblest among them, mingling with the Muslims in external affairs, without being distinguished from the servants of God.”

It seems clear that at least one motivation for the persecution of the Jews was their high degree of integration into Islamic society. In their important positions at court, in their wealth and social mobility, certain Jews provided a challenge to the Almohads' conviction
that Muslims ought to enjoy a sequestered social ascendancy, an exclusivity the Umayyads never really insisted upon regarding Jews, perhaps because they were more secure in their own aristocratic identity. Thus, though the Almoravids and Almohads were the least tolerant of masters, their rule reveals to us that already by the eleventh century, the Jews of al-Andalus had come to identify to a high degree with Islamic culture, not only speaking Arabic, but interacting socially with members of the Andalusi elite and adopting Islamic dress. These were surely cultural habits established during the Umayyad Caliphate and the period of the taifas, in which tolerance and fruitful interaction of Muslims and Jews provided fertile ground for the sharing of culture.

Thus the identification of the Jews of al-Andalus with Islamic culture was already deeply felt by the time of the Almohad incursions, and explains both the disassociation of Islamic style from the intolerant hegemony, and also the Almohads' rather defensive stance toward the Jews as a group.

Later synagogues provide an intriguing extension of this notion. Córdoba's only surviving synagogue was constructed in the first quarter of the fourteenth century and is of a different type than the twelfth or thirteenth-century synagogues of Toledo and Segovia. It is composed of an open court, an entryway (restored) with a gallery above, and a tiny prayer hall of nearly square proportions: twenty-one feet wide by twenty-three feet long [fig. 32]. This single room has no supports, and is broken only by the lambrequin, or scalloped arched openings to the gallery, and the ark niche in the western wall, which is distinguished by an elegant polylobed arch [fig. 33]. The rest of the room's walls are covered by a skin of stucco decoration: in particular geometric patterns based on expanding stars, or the schematized form of interlace called *ataurique* (from the Arabic *alturig*, leafy design).

The synagogue's dedicatory inscription proclaims its patronage and sets the tone for its meaning in Christian Córdoba. It reads: "Isaac
Menhab, son of the honorable Ephraim, has completed this lesser sanctuary (*mikdash me'at*), and he built it in the year 75 [1314-15] as a temporary abode. Hasten, O God, to rebuild Jerusalem.” Wischnitzer points out that the expression “lesser sanctuary” is common usage that alludes to the synagogue as a substitute for the Temple, until it is rebuilt in Jerusalem. Though the inscription is a topos, it also evokes in many ways the recent history of the Jews of Córdoba. Córdoba fell to the Christians in 1235 when it was taken by Ferdinand III. By 1250, tensions between the new Christian rulers and the Jews had already surfaced. A pastoral letter of Pope Innocent IV records Christian resentment concerning the prominence of a new congregational synagogue:

> We have learned that, despite the prohibition of our dear son, the Archdeacon of the Chapter of Córdoba, the Jews of the province of Córdoba are rashly presuming to build a new synagogue of unnecessary height thereby scandalizing faithful Christians and causing much harm to the church of Córdoba, wherefore...we command [you]...to enforce the authority of your office against the Jews in this regard....

I wonder if the diminutive size of the Córdoba synagogue and the insistence of its inscription on the topos of a provisional structure and Jerusalem to come did not evoke for the Jews of Córdoba renewed restrictions on their right to build structures of monumental presence.
and rhetorical force. Wischnitzer has already suggested that the absence of windows on all but the south side of the synagogue might have been a response to further building constraints. In any case, it is clear from Pope Innocent’s letter, composed only sixty-five years before the construction of the small Córdoba synagogue, that it was built in an atmosphere of restricted artistic expression for Jews. It was this atmosphere that led to the renewal of the Jewish community’s identification with cultural roots perceived as distinct from those of the conquering Christians.

The style of Córdoba’s synagogue, like that of the earlier examples discussed, is consistently called Mudejar, though the synagogue’s appearance and sources are quite divergent from the Toledo and Segovia examples. The closest parallels to its decoration can be found in the Islamic palace of the Alhambra in Granada, much of which is later, but whose decoration clearly reflects a Nasrid tradition begun in the thirteenth century [figs. 34-35]. Lambrequin arches in low relief, arabesques, or ataurique, and expanding star patterns in stucco all abound in the Nasrid palace, in a low relief style that recalls the stucco skin of the Cordovan synagogue.

The formal disposition of the Córdoba synagogue grows, then, not from an autonomous development out of earlier synagogue traditions, but from continual contact with new monumental developments in the Islamic world. This is not to say that the Mudejar tradition as it appears in the synagogue of Córdoba is a slavish copy of art according to Islamic rules, but that it is part of an artistic tradition that is alive and growing, and not in isolation but through its identification with an evolving Islamic tradition.

An indication of the intensity of this identification and interchange can be found in the use of inscriptions in the Córdoba synagogue. While the dedicatory inscription

Figure 34
Mirador of Linda Raja, Alhambra, Granada, 14th century
appears in a solid, legible block, other inscriptions occupy thin bands within the composition of the stucco decoration, much as Arabic inscriptions function in the Nasrid palace. The Hebrew inscriptions of the synagogue serve, on one level, as devotional texts, but they also function as part of the abstract design of the whole stucco composition, and imbue its complex horos vacui with meaning. This is not a copy of Islamic practice, but a deep understanding of its principles, one that regards writing both as holy and as a useful tool for the injection of meaning into an aniconic, abstract composition. In deciphering which fields are abstract design, and which are writing, the viewer becomes involved in an extended, meditative relationship with the work of art, in which writing becomes the elusive bearer of meaning.

This retention of the most basic principles of Islamic decoration is typical of synagogue construction in the Mudejar tradition, but quite different from Mudejar buildings constructed to serve the Christian cult. In Toledo, where these abound in a number of diverse permutations, the indigenous Islamic tradition of construction is especially evident in building exteriors. When the mosque of Bab al-Mardum, near the city walls, was converted into a church upon the conquest of the city in the late twelfth century, an apse was added in the same brick tradition in which the walls of the mosque had been constructed nearly two hundred years before: blind arcades of horseshoe and polylobed arches ornament the apse exterior in a planar decorative system based on the thickness of the brick itself. The exterior of this addition appears almost as a continuation of the mosque structure. The interior, however, is transformed, not only by a new axially, but by the addition of figural wall paintings. These wall paintings and their sacred narrative become the primary means of communication with the Christian community, and their presence becomes a fertile evoca-
tion of the differences between Muslim and Christian worship and their opposing attitudes to images.

Now it is clear that there existed Christian devotional buildings that utilized overall stucco decoration of a type similar to that used in the Cordovan synagogue: the convent of Las Dueñas [fig. 36], whose vestiges are now in the Archeological Museum of Córdoba, or even the vestiges of stucco from the monastery of Las Huelgas in Burgos. But in no Christian religious building do we see the absorption not only of a craft tradition and decorative style but also of principles of expressive meaning, such as we see in Mudejar synagogues. And in no synagogue is this principal more beautifully illustrated than that of Samuel Halevi Abulafia in Toledo, a synagogue known locally as El Tránsito. 18

Constructed in 1360, El Tránsito is an open rectangular sanctuary of comparatively large proportions: about twenty-three by twelve meters in plan and nine-and-a-half meters high [fig. 37]. It possesses a spacious restored women's gallery on the north side, and on the east, three niches for Torah scrolls. The synagogue is covered with stucco relief of extraordinary quality in a unique state of preservation. It possesses the same geometric patterns and interlace we saw in the Cordovan synagogue, together with floral rinceau and cartouches,

Figure 36
Fragment from an Arch, Convent of Las Dueñas, Córdoba, 14th Century, Museo Arqueológico Provincial, Córdoba, no. 579 (cat. no. 59)

Figure 37
Plan of the Synagogue of El Tránsito, Toledo, 1357 (see also cat. no. 58 a, b, c; after Cantera Burgos, Sinagogas Españolas)
Instead, I believe we have here the analogue in literature to the connections we have traced in architectural style: the educated Jews of Toledo felt that much Islamic culture was their culture as well. The Jews of Toledo had spoken Arabic for hundreds of years, and they had long come to understand the literary and scholarly culture of Islam and considered it something that they shared.

The use of inscriptions in the overall design of the ornament is significant, for here we find not only Hebrew writing integrated into the complex stucco ornament, but Arabic writing as well, some of which includes texts from the Qur'an. Various explanations have been offered for these last inscriptions. Wischnitzer contends that they are due to the use of Muslim craftsmen on the project. There is little doubt, of course, that Muslims were among those who worked on the synagogue. However, the idea of their quietly slipping long bands of Arabic writing into the design unbeknownst to Samuel Halevi, or that some carver added texts from the Qur'an at his own whim without being in some way controlled by the patron, does not make any sense—in particular when we take into account the conscious nature of much of the rest of the program.

Instead, I believe we have here the analogue in literature to the connections we have traced in architectural style: the educated Jews of Toledo felt that much Islamic culture was their culture as well. The Jews of Toledo had spoken Arabic for hundreds of years, and they had long come to understand the literary and scholarly culture of Islam and considered it something that they shared.
The stylistic use of the Arabic inscriptions and many of the motifs used in the opulent ornament of the Transito synagogue once again reveal a clear relationship to contemporary Nasrid ornament, suggesting a constantly renewed tradition of contact with Nasrid art. One aspect of the patronage of the synagogue of Abulafia relates directly to its use of contemporary Nasrid ornament, as well as its divergences from Córdoba's small temple. This first aspect derives from the patron's close association with a Christian court. Samuel Halevi Abulafia was treasurer and close adviser to King Peter I, the Cruel, of Castile, who was a close ally of the Nasrid monarch Muhammad V, one of the most active builders of the Alhambra. The frequent appearance of the arms of Castile, and the close relationship between the decoration of the synagogue and that of the Alhambra, have not only a general connection with the building as a monument of Mudejar tradition, but also a specific connection arising from Peter's political connections [fig. 39].

Indeed, there are many ways in which this particular brand of Mudejar ornament, which combines Nasrid decoration with symbols of the kingdom of Castile, might be seen as part of a court style of Peter the Cruel. One is in his extraordinary additions to the palace of the Alcázar in Seville, a building that might be termed a Christian monarch's interpretation of an Islamic monarch's palace. In its labyrinthine plan, its Nasrid-style stucco carving, and even in its use of Arabic writing, it is proof of the extent to which Peter considered Islamic style appropriate to manifest royal dignity and power [fig. 40].

Clearly, at the court of Peter I, Islamic developments in stucco ornament and even certain building types were viewed as emblematic of high court culture, of a certain level of erudition and craftsmanship that were signs of strong kingship. We must remember also that the
Alcázar of Seville was a preexisting Islamic palace appropriated by Peter, a symbol of his dominion over lands once under a powerful Islamic hegemony. For though the only Islamic state to survive on the Iberian peninsula was now the elegant but impotent Nasrid kingdom of Granada, the memory and myth of the time when Islam had dominated most of the peninsula was strong, and Christian monarchs had a strong sense of the antiquity and rootedness of the sophisticated culture that had preceded them in the southern part of the peninsula. For Peter, the adoption of Nasrid style was part of the appropriation of the mythic power of Islamic culture, which had come to mean wealth, power, refinement, and sophistication to all Spaniards.

But did the Nasrid style mean the same thing to Samuel Halevi Abulafia? His appropriation of it has, I think, a much more layered significance, as did his place in the social fabric of Christian Spain.

First, it has been noted that the dedicatory inscriptions in the Abulafia synagogue suggest pride on the part of the founder, and a generally more optimistic attitude than that presented in the humble synagogue of Córdoba:

And the house which Samuel built  
And the wooden tower for the reading of the written law  
And the scrolls of the Law and the crowns thereto  
And its lavers and lamps for lighting  
And its windows like the windows of Ariel

And its courts for them that cherish the perfect law  
And seats, too, for all who sit in the shade of God  
So that those who saw it almost said, “This resemblance
Is as the semblance of the work which Bezalel wrought."
Go now, ye peoples, and come into my gates
And seek the Lord, for it is a house of God even as Bethel."

Other inscriptions praise king Peter I, and hail Abulafia himself as "prince among the princes of the tribe of Levi." In general, the synagogue of Abulafia is a monument in the court style of Peter I, bearing the king's coat of arms and appropriately unctuous evocations of his greatness. But it also creates a kind of "micro-court" for Samuel Halevi himself, setting him at the pinnacle of his own minority society, that of the Jews of Toledo. Indeed this largest and most opulent of all the synagogues that survived on the Iberian peninsula was not a public prayer hall at all, but the private temple of Samuel Halevi, with a private entrance from his (now destroyed) house."

Samuel Halevi Abulafia had built a kind of "palatine chapel" for himself, a grand private oratory of the type that Christian kings often built for their private worship and that of their courts. Abulafia's wealth and importance within and outside the Jewish community was both affirmed and augmented by his synagogue, which made its point in a number of diverse formal languages. First, it identified Abulafia as part of a Jewish community that had long seen its cultural identification in terms of Islamic architectural style, including a profound understanding of the importance and use of calligraphy—both in Arabic and Hebrew. Second, there is conscious reference to the particular permutation of that Islamic style at Samuel Halevi's synagogue, for he had adopted the Castilian court style, which superimposed signs of Peter I's hegemony on the latest Nasrid ornament. In this way he identifies himself with his king. Finally, in his inscriptions and in the construction of a private oratory, he gives himself an authoritative position within the Jewish community, one reinforced with architectural signs borrowed from the Christian monarch's architectural idiom.

Thus we see that for Jews and Christians, Mudejar architecture could take on divergent and layered meanings. For Peter I, the use of Nasrid style meant his appropriation of an Islamic image of kingship with its attendant implications of a powerful and old culture. For Samuel Halevi, adaptation of an Islamic style was part of his reaffirmation of the cultural traditions of Jews on the Iberian peninsula, traditions associated with Islamic style for hundreds of years. It was in his use of Christian forms, those associated with Peter I and his position in a Christian court, that Abulafia expressed his desire for power and authority.

That expression of power was not lost on Peter the Cruel. Abulafia's downfall followed closely upon the completion of the architectural expression of his wealth and power. Peter I "The Cruel" imprisoned him, and sent him to Seville where he was tortured and executed, because he failed to reveal the supposed hiding place of his mythical store or treasure.
Each Mudejar building on the Iberian peninsula encases multiple levels of meaning associated with its craft and style. Some of those attitudes are subconscious, and involve the way in which a community sees itself among others; the way it fashions an identity for itself. Others are conscious appropriations of some meaning that can be associated with architectural form. The Jews of the Iberian peninsula consistently used Islamic form because it became part of the way they defined their place on the cultural landscape of the peninsula: architectural style had nothing to do with religion per se, but had become instead part of their own cultural world.

Though the synagogue of Tomar, in Portugal, is not linked by craft tradition or visual sympathy to the Mudejar synagogues described above, it presents an interesting analogy to them. A nearly square prayer hall 9.5 by 8.2 meters, it is centrally planned around a square bay, enframed by four elegant stone columns with simple, abstract capitals. The building is vaulted by nine groin vaults that define nine bays in the building's interior [fig. 41].

Tomar is often dated to the fifteenth century, a unique monument of pre-expulsion Portugal. Though most scholarly efforts attempt to link it with Islamic craft traditions, its stone columns and capitals and its interior space and austere ornamental expression in stone point to a workshop steeped rather in the Christian tradition. What is extraordinary, then, is the fact that this Christian-oriented workshop built a synagogue in a plan typical of neighborhood mosques in Islam. The nine-bay plan is the standard type for a mosque built by a single individual to serve a small district; it is a plan known from Spain to Iran. The open and dispersed space evokes the traditional prayer hall of a mosque more than any other building.
type that might have served as a model\textsuperscript{4} [fig. 42].

It is moving to imagine that this elegant sanctuary might have been built on the eve of the expulsion by a people who saw their own artistic identity enmeshed with that of the Muslims who had for so long dominated the peninsula. The idea that the builders of Tomar might have wished to retain a connection with an Islamic building type, though craftsmen who might reproduce it were not available, is a tempting one. For it would pinpoint for us the extent to which Islamic architectural style—not just the inheritance of a craft tradition—had become part and parcel of Jewish identity on the Iberian peninsula.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{fig42.jpg}
\caption{Interior of the Synagogue of Tomar, Portugal, ca. 1460}
\end{figure}
NOTES
13. The Umayyads did insist on this visual separation in clothing with the Mozarabs, or Christians. See Dodds, *Architecture and Ideology*, chapter 3.
16. Ibid., 30.
17. Ibid.
18. After the Jews were expelled from Spain in 1492, the synagogue became a Christian church and then an oratory dedicated to Nuestra Señora del Transito. See Cantera Burgos, *Sinagogas españolas*, 65-71; J. Krohn, "La Sinagoga del Transito," *Toledo*: 1928; B. Maldonado, "Un problema arqueológico en la sinagoga de El Transito," *Setenad* 26 (1979): 141-44.
20. Ibid., 35.
24. It diverges in possessing a slightly larger central bay, a characteristic that tends to remind one of Byzantine cross plans. However, this aspect of the plan is mitigated by the fact that the tall columns and high vaults emphasize the dispersed nature of the interior, rather than any centralizing quality.