



Arabic Phrases in Christian Places in Seville, Spain

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Background/Abstract



Map of Seville, Spain

Aerial view of the Alcazar; Pedro's Palace.

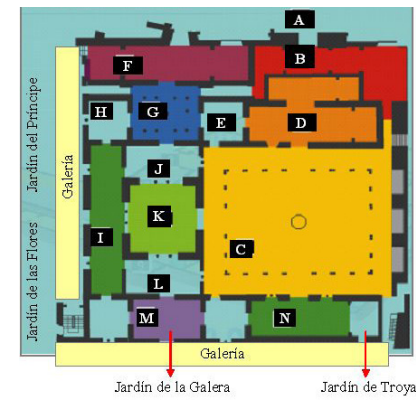
The Alcazar Royal Palace in Seville, Spain, is a site of extraordinary architecture that integrates Arabic phrases in the decoration of its walls. Built in multiple stages by Muslims and then Christians, the site was greatly expanded after the Christian conquest of the city in 1248. Christian kings, interested in the architecture of the Alhambra palace in Granada (finished in the fourteenth century), chose to continue using Arabic to decorate their own palace in Seville. What is intriguing about the Alcazar is the lack of a definitive catalog that lists and maps the inscriptions that were added to the palace during the reign of Christian King Don Pedro I of Castile (d. 1369). What makes this project feasible is the realization that the majority of the phrases in Pedro's palace are repeated over and over again; this means there are only a few dozen phrases to transcribe, translate, and map. Important literary works used to add context to the inscriptions include *The Arts of Intimacy: Christians, Jews, and Muslims in the Making of Castilian Culture* as well as *INSCRIPCIONES ÁRABES DE SEVILLA*, which quickly became a solid base of reference to begin the research process. In order to develop a spatial understanding of the Alcazar, the study uses 360° views and a variety of floor maps to accurately document information about the inscriptions which can then be transcribed

and translated, as well as the different names the rooms of Pedro's palace have had over time. Once fully developed, the produced catalog would be a comprehensive guide to read the writing on the walls of the Alcazar.



Methods

Our project depends on **historical and archival** research to gain a comprehensive understanding of the context surrounding the emergence of Arabic text as a decorative element in the palace. **Comparative analysis** is another pivotal tool for our project. The Alhambra Palace, located in Granada, Spain was the center of Muslim rule in the region and a site of Arabic inscriptions including Quranic verses, original commissioned poetry, and general phrases similar to what can be observed in the Alcazar. It has been the subject of several similar precedent research efforts making it an excellent model



Floorplan of the Alcazar highlighting the rooms which highlights the rooms in Pedro's Palace

to consider. By conducting literary reviews of books like *Reading the Alhambra: A Visual Guide through Its Inscriptions*, we are able to work with pre-existing data that can guide our research forward. The research process also consisted of exploring 360 ° views and the Google street view of the interior rooms to verify and build on the precedent research efforts in transcribing the Arabic text like Rodrigo Amador de los Ríos: INSCRIPCIONES ÁRABES DE SEVILLA. After gathering and organizing all of the necessary images and resources, the next step was to transcribe the text.

الملك الدائم لله العز القائم لله



بركة

ياثقتي يا املي انت الرجاء انت الولي



Here are examples of transcriptions of the walls around Patio de las Muñecas in the Alcazar. One common inscription that repeatedly appears is بركة (baraka): blessing.

Kufic font: Named after Iraqi city, Kufah, this famous script style tends to be more rectilinear, angular, and simplified.



الشكر لله الملك لله

«Sovereignty (belongs) to God, Thanks (belongs) to God»

Cursive font: The term «Nasrid Font» specifically alludes to the decorative style employed by the Nasrid rulers in Granada in their palace, the Alhambra.




الحمد لله على نعمه

«Praise be to God for his blessings/gifts»




Other examples:



A Study of Fonts

The Arabic text in the Alcazar is inscribed in different Arabic fonts. The phrases appear to be in either Kufic font or curisve Nasrid font. Sometimes, the two are mixed together. It is frequent to observe floral

or geometric elements that combine with the Arabic script to produce beautiful architectural calligrams.

List of Arabic phrases

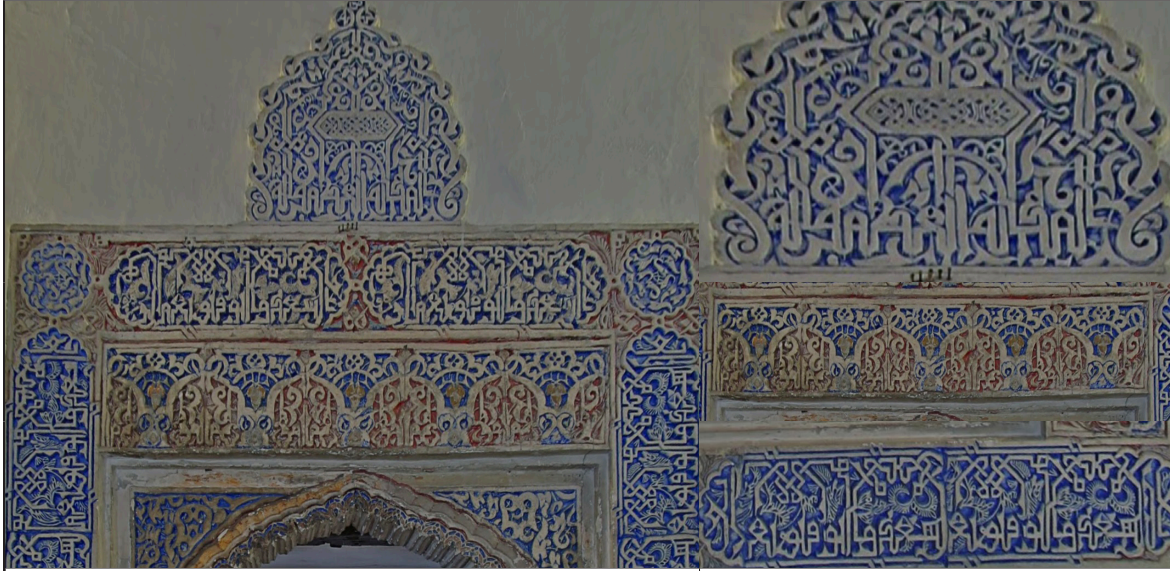


The list of Arabic phrases comes from the direct transcription of the inscribed text. There is noticeable variation in the phrases and their lengths. The research project uses the *Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic* to translate the -thus far- 43 unique Arabic phrases into English.

بركة
البركة
البركة الكاملة
الحمد لله
الحمد لله على نعمه
الحمد انعمه بالرمز ذو بدء
ياثقني يا املي انت الرجاء انت الولي
يا ثقني يا املي انت الرجاء انت الولي اختم بخير العملي
النعمة الشاملة
النعمة الشاملة، البركة الكاملة
يمن
اليمن
اليمن والاقبال
اليمن والسلامة والعز والكرامة
(اليمن والسلامة والعزة والكرامة والسعد الدائم) (لصاحبه
السعد والتوفيق نعم الرفيق
في طالع السعد احد هاذه الدار
الغبطة المتصلة
عز لمولانا السلطان
عز لمولانا السلطان ضن بضر
عز لمولانا السلطان ضن بدرو
عز لمولانا السلطان ضن بضر تع
عز لمولانا السلطان ضن بدرو ايده الله
فما توفيقى الا بالله عليه توكلت واليه انيب
عليه توكلت واليه انيب
المملك
المملك لله
الشكر لله
المملك لله الشكر لله
المملك لله العزة لله
المملك لله العظمة لله
المملك الدائم لله العز القايم لله
البقاء لله
القدرة لله
العيذة بالله
العز لله
ومايكم من نعمة فمن الله
فما بكم من نعمة فمن الله
ولا غالب الا الله
لا غالب الا الله الحافظ الله
يا دخل بهيم والطف العلم الدائم تحر وفي السلامة
يا يها المجلس الجديد يانك الطالع السعيد) لاز لتب الزهر خير مثنوى جنى اعاد وهو عيذ ومن نيل المحجب عينا ومان غليظا لكك)

Blessing
Blessing
Full blessing
Praise be to God
Praise be to God for his blessings/gifts
-
Oh my certainty and my hope! In you I trust, you are my protection.
Oh my certainty and my hope! In you I trust, you are my protection. Bring my deeds to a happy conclusion.
Complete happiness.
Complete happiness, full blessing
Felicity
Felicity
Felicity and Prosperity
Fortune, peace, glory, and generosity
Fortune, peace, glory, generosity, and perpetual felicity
Happiness and prosperity are thanks to the «compassionate one» (lit «companion»)
-
Perpetual prosperity
Praise to our ruler, Sultan
Praise to our ruler, Sultan Dun Badru
Praise to our ruler, Sultan Dun Badru
Praise to our ruler, Sultan Dun Badru, may he be praised!
Praise to our ruler, Sultan Dun Badru, may God support him!
There is no protection except in God, in whom I trust and to whom I turn
In whom I trust and to whom I turn
Sovereignty
Sovereignty (belongs) to God
Thanks be to God
Sovereignty (belongs) to God, Thanks (belongs) to God
Sovereignty (belongs) to God; power/glory (belongs) to God
Sovereignty (belongs) to God, Exaltedness (belongs) to God
-
Eternity (belongs) to God
Power (belongs) to God
Refuge is in God
Glory (belongs) to God
-
-
And there is no victor except God
-
-
-

Catalog sample

The catalog follows a systematic method of documenting the inscriptions as they appear room by room, wall by wall. It displays important information about the appearance and repetition of the inscriptions that are found across the Alcazar.

Wall or section	Inscription	Phrase	Our translation	Spanish translation	Other locations where phrase is found	Orientation	Font
		10. Salon del Techo de Felipe					
		Felipe, wall to Catolicos					
		الملك لله العظمة لله	Sovereignty (belongs) to God, Exaltedness (belongs) to God	El imperio para Allah, el ... para Allah	3.4.8.10.12.13.14.15.	Over the entrance that leads to Catolicos	kufic
		يمن	Felicity	Felicidad	3.7.10.12.14.15.16.17	Repeated and mirrored along the entrance	kufic
		السعد والتوفيق نعم الرفيق	Happiness and prosperity are thanks to the «compassionate one» (lit «companion»)	La felicidad y la prosperidad (son) beneficios del sustentador (de las criaturas) (allah)	1.3.10.	Repeated six times along the entrance	kufic
		Felipe, Upper band on all ε walls					
		الملك لله	Sovereignty (belongs) to God	El imperio para Allah	7.10.12	Repeatedly appearing in the upper band of the wall in the muqarna cornice	cursive
		البركة	Blessing	Bendición	10.	Repeatedly appearing in the upper band of the wall in the muqarna cornice	kufic

Preliminary Findings

The research process has been continuing to confirm the initial hypothesis that the inscriptions originate from a limited set of phrases that repeatedly iterate across the rooms, patios and corridors of the Alcazar. Unlike the Alhambra which has inscriptions of Quranic verses and original, commissioned Arabic poetry, the majority of the 43 inscriptions we observed in the Alcazar are general, devout phrases that share prevalent themes praising the King Don Pedro and God, and blessing the palace.

Future Directions & Dissemination

Depending on the time and resources at hand, we hope to transcribe and accurately translate all of the inscriptions in the Alcazar, including a number of enigmatic phrases we have come across. We are also committed to sharing the story of of the Alcazar by resuming work on the Alcazar film started by professor Ryan Szpiech, and publishing a chapter on the Alcazar inscriptions in the forthcoming volume of collected essays, currently in preparation (and under pre-contract with Brill press), that Szpiech is co-editing with two colleagues in the field: *A Companion to Medieval and Early Modern Seville*, ed. Camilo Gómez-Rivas, Maya Soifer-Irish, and Ryan Szpiech (Leiden: Brill).



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Notes

All images were taken by Ryan Szpiech, July 2022 with the exception of:

Page 1:

Wikimedia Commons. Map of Spain with Seville Province Highlighted. September ,26 2011. Photograph.

Dudek, Pavel. Aerial View of Real Alcazar De Sevilla from La Giralda Tower, Spain Photograph. Seville, Spain, June 2019 ,25.

Page 3:

“Reales Alcázares De Sevilla, -XII. El Palacio Mudéjar, Segunda Parte.” Leyendas de Sevilla. <https://leyendasdesevilla.blogspot.com/07/2014/reales-alcazares-de-sevilla-xii-el.html>.

Page 4:

screenshots from: Google maps. Google.

<https://www.google.com/maps/@5.9916361,2-,37.3835668a,75y,156.31h,85.11t/data=!3m1!6e3!1m1!4sDEW4RgiQHhTUqRkRt6zNgA!2e7!0i8!13312i6656>

Page 9:

screenshots from: Google maps. Google. <https://www.google.com/maps/@-,37.3834332 5.99172,2a,75y,308.59h,107.4t/data=!3m1!6e3!1m1!4sm5YJpnHQb0rpZTm6m4Pvjw!2e!0 7i8!13312i6656> .