

ART 391: UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH SEMINAR

Al-Andalus & Hispania: Architecture & Art in Early Medieval Iberia

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In 711 the Syrian Umayyad caliphate conquered the Iberian Peninsula, creating the westernmost boundary of the early Islamic empire. By the ninth century the Peninsula was divided into two territories that historians have defined along religious contours: the southern two thirds of the Peninsula (Arabic al-Andalus), was ruled by a new aristocracy, an offshoot of the Syrian Umayyad dynasty, which professed Islam. To the north was a loose conglomeration of nascent Christian kingdoms (Latin Hispania), which resisted Islamic hegemony and whose identities, rooted in Christianity and the Visigothic past, were shaped in reaction against the Islamic south. Art historians have largely maintained this division, separating the monuments and artworks of al-Andalus and Hispania along religious fault lines. Art historical analysis has privileged religious confrontation or, at the opposite end of the spectrum, an idyllic “convivencia” of the Muslim, Christian, and Jewish communities of Iberia. This course takes an integrated approach to the rich artistic production of the early medieval Iberian Peninsula, focusing on the functions and meanings of art and architecture in al-Andalus and Hispania between the eighth century and twelfth centuries, and examining monuments such as mosques and churches, monasteries and palaces, and portable objects produced in royal and monastic workshops. Some of the themes to be considered include female patronage, royal and religious identities as expressed in architecture, art and meaning in the sacred and secular realms, and cultural exchange across religious boundaries.