

Toledo

The Rose of Historic Spain

Madrid - Dr. Kadhim Shamhoud Taher

Toledo, the central point on the Iberian Peninsula, was the home of the Goths and the center of their kingdom. Historians disagree on the date of its foundation and the people who built it and resided there. Toledo means "the joy of its inhabitants". It has been strengthened, since it was built at the top of a mountain and is surrounded by the deep Taj River on three sides, except the north. In 92 A.H/ 711 A.D Toledo was conquered by Tarek Ibn Zaid and entrusted to Yemeni tribes, becoming the first seat of the Islamic military headquarters in this area.

Located 75 km from Madrid, Toledo is served by two roads and a railway line. Tourist activity is increasing in the city noted for the coexistence of three religious communities, Muslims, Christians and Jews, who left their imprints on the city: the visitor can see mosques, churches and synagogues, old districts, walls, bridges, palaces etc.

One enters Toledo through the old Arab, Andalusian gate, Bab Al-Sahl, also known as Puerte de Bisagra. It is the main gate at the crossroads which lead to the city. In 1550, the architect Covarrubias added a large frontage in homage to King Carlos I. During the time of King Philippe II, the door was extended, two towers added, along with an emblem of an eagle with two heads. Not far from Bab Al-Sahl, towards the east, stands another gate, Bab As-Shams (Puerte del Sol). It was built during the reign of Al-Mamon Di Announ Toledo's governor at the beginning of the 10th century A. D. This door is one of the most beautiful architectural achievements of the Arabs in the city, lovingly restored and preserved. On the front of the gate, one sees a large arch in the shape of a horseshoe - above it multiple intersecting arches, as well as a sun and the moon carved in marble.

Mosque Bab Al-Mardoum

Mosque Bab Al-Mardoum is one of the oldest mosques of the Muslim world, the first mosque built in this city after the Muslim conquest. It does not have the beautiful patterns and decorations seen in the mosques of Cordoba



Toledo Cathedral

كاتدرائية طليطلة

and Granada. After the reconquest of the city by the Christians in 1085, the mosque was transformed into the Cristo de la luz church.

The Islamic decorations on the dome were erased and replaced by Christian drawings and crosses. The Kufic inscription remains on the front door: "In the Name of God the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful, this mosque was

built by Ahmed Ben Hadidi from his own money for God's reward; it was built thanks to God by the builder Ben Ali in Moharram in the year 309 H.", (999 A. D.)". It seems this stone engraving did not constitute a threat to the Christians. Today one sees the front of this magnificent building in its full architectural glory, following the restoration carried out by the city municipality, along the general model of Andalusian mosques with the architectural characteristics of Toledo.

Alcazar

One of the Spanish thinkers wrote about the importance of the old Roman palace (Alcazar) and the city for Spain: "If Toledo is the rose of Spain, Alcazar is the flower of Toledo". It was restored and strengthened by the Muslims. In 797, the emir of Andalusia, Al-Hakam Ben Hashim, made it the seat of his administration and government.

The palace is located in the highest part of the city, towards the east. It had a square or rectangular form, and was surrounded by square towers according to the Umayyad model. The foundations of the walls were made of dry clay, one of

the characteristics of Islamic architecture. Today, only a decorated arcade at the south of the palace 1,86 m x 3,38 m is all that remains of the Muslim influence.

In 932 A. D., Abderrahman III ordered the construction of the fortress and restoration of the palace, in Islamic style. After the reconquest of the city by the Christians, new ➤



The Mosque of Bab Al-Mardoum with the writer standing in front

مسجد باب المردوم،
والكاتب يقف أمامه



Bab As-Shams

بوابة الشمس



The Mosque of Bab Al-Mardoum

مسجد باب المردوم

elements were added to the palace, and the Christian influence became apparent. In 1810, it was burnt during the French occupation of Spain and left in ruins in 1936 at the time of the Spanish civil war. The Christians subsequently rebuilt it and turned it into a tourist attraction.

The cathedral

The cathedral of Toledo, originally a mosque, is one of the most significant Christian monuments of the city. Its Islamic architecture was preserved for nearly one century and half, until the time of King Fernando III who ordered its destruction, under the supervision of the French priest, Father Bernardo, in 1227.

The cathedral was built according to the French Gothic model and lasted until 1492. While entering this church, one notices various artistic styles of sculptures and religious drawings, mosaics, of multi-coloured glasses, with a number of rooms and vaults. Among the treasures of this cathedral, are two standards of

the Sultan Abu Al-Hassan Al-Marini captured by the Spaniards at the time of the Battle of Salada (Tarifa) in 1340. These standards are exhibited in the room of sacred clothes. The first carries the Arabic writings: "Victory and conquest for our lord Abu Al-Hassan, Commander of the Muslims", while the second comprises of various decorations and expressions including: "May God and his Prophet preserve us from Satan".

In the Western part of the city, is the synagogue Santa Maria Blanca. Like most of the synagogues it adopted the Muslim architectural model with Arab columns and arcades.

Beside this synagogue, one finds the house of the famous painter, El Greco (1540) which was transformed into a museum popular with foreign tourists. This artist painted hundreds of beautiful impressionist works, with religious themes.

Toledo is famous for its diversified craft industry,



The Gate of Bisagra

بوابة بساغرا

including inlaid gold artifacts, swords, daggers and shields, which the Arabs introduced to Spain. Pottery was also developed along with Arab pastry making for which Toledo is still famous. The local delicacy is Marzipan, which resembles Arab "Baqlawa".

High quality handicrafts, such as swords with ivory and precious stone handles, wait for today's visitors to Toledo as do friendly, welcoming locals with a long history of generosity and kindness. ■