

[MUSIC PLAYING]

Hello. I'd like to welcome you to this episode of Exploring Art History with Ian. My name is Ian McConnell. And today's lesson is about the palace fortress of Alhambra in Spain.

As you're watching the video, feel free to pause, move forward, or rewind as many times as you feel is necessary. As soon as you're ready, we can begin.

Lesson objectives for today-- by the end of this lesson, you will be able to identify and define today's key terms, explain the historical and political background of Alhambra's construction, and describe some of the architectural elements of Alhambra, such as the muqarnas vault.

Key terms, as always, are listed in yellow throughout lesson. First key term is muqarnas-- Islamic or Persian architecture, a type of corbel decorative projecting element. Mirador-- Spanish, an architectural term, a balcony built on an upper floor to assist with an open view. Ibn Zamrak-- famous poet and statesman for Granada, Al-Andalus; his narratives of his writings decorate fountains, i.e. the Fountain of the Lions and palaces. The big idea for today is that Alhambra is an important example of Islamic architecture in Spain.

So when in history are we looking at? Like many forms of large-scale architecture, the construction of Alhambra takes place in stages over many centuries and under many rulers, both Christian and Muslim. We'll focus on the ninth through 14th centuries, which largely covers the beginnings of Alhambra and the muqarnas vault construction from the 14th century. And Alhambra is located just west of the city of Granada in Spain.

So many ancient buildings are lost to modern times as they were destroyed by conquering civilizations. Alhambra is important in how it's a time capsule, of sorts, in its preservation of the Nazarid palaces that were built within it, even after the Christian reoccupation of Spain. It gives us an impression of what royal life was like in Islamic Spain under the Nazarids, who were the last Arabian and Muslim dynasty in Spain before losing their hold on the Iberian Peninsula with the final battleground of Grenada in 1492.

Now, Alhambra is actually an Arabic word meaning red castle, due to the reddish stone used in its construction. It was originally constructed as a strategic military fortress with a high vantage point in view of the city. Now, eventually palaces were built for the Nazarid rulers inside the walls of Alhambra, some of which still exist today, even after the reconstructions that took place after the ownership switched from Muslim to Christian.

Now, one of the most impressive buildings within Alhambra is the Palace of the Lions and Courtyard of the Lions that resides within it. That's a beautiful marble courtyard. It's circled by a colonnade with horseshoe-style arches

above which were the chambers where the sultan's wives lived.

Now, it draws its name from the unusual fountain perched upon 12 stone lions and is decorated with a poem by the famous Islamic poet, Ibn Zamrak. Now, by traveling through the arches, you're led to the Hall of the Abencerrajes and Hall of Two Sisters, where the poet Ibn Zamrak is responsible for other poetic inscriptions within the muqarnas vault, which we'll talk about in just a moment.

Now, the Hall of the Abencerrajes is in front of the Hall of Two Sisters, within which is the famous muqarnas vault. Now, the Hall of the Abencerrajes is actually named after the knights that were supposedly beheaded there. That's a fun fact. But muqarnas are stalactite architectural elements that hang down from the ceiling and were likely intended to reflect the sunlight coming within the room, creating abstract patterns. And the effect is an ethereal and Heavenly quality that contrasts sharply to the military solidity of the outer fortress.

So that brings us to the end of this lesson. Let's take a look at our objectives to see if we met them. Now that you've seen the lesson, are you able to identify and define today's key terms? Can you explain the historical and political background of Alhambra's construction? And can you describe some of the architectural elements of Alhambra, such as the muqarnas vault? And once again, the big idea for today is that Alhambra is an important example of Islamic architecture in Spain.

And that's it. Thank you very much for joining me today. I'll see you next time.