

The Muslim West

With their westward expansion from the Middle East, the Muslims invaded territories in Ifriqiya (modern-day Tunisia), Algeria and Morocco (which they called al-Maghreb), and Spain and Portugal (al-Andalus). Islamicisation was a complex process in these lands based on the evolution of existing urban traditions and leading in the AH 3rd / AD 9th century to resurgence in the construction of new towns and cities. With the exception of sporadic conflicts, the Arabs and the native populations of the countries they invaded managed to co-exist peacefully, as did the different religious communities (Jews, Christians and Muslims), a situation made possible by trade and religious tolerance. Initially subjects of the Damascus caliphate, the Western emirates became gradually more independent and were eventually succeeded by local dynasties (Idrisids, Umayyads of al-Andalus, Zirids, Hammadids, Almohads, and so on) that, in their attempts to establish themselves, they would emulate the Eastern caliphs by building their own palaces, exercising and demonstrating their power visually and culturally, and closely defending and controlling their territories. Despite being an integral part of Islamic civilisation, the Muslim West, from the Atlantic to the Straits of Sicily, has always retained its individuality, which is particularly evident in the architectural and decorative innovations taken from the Eastern tradition and developed in al-Andalus and the Maghreb to create an artistic style peculiar to this corner of the Muslim world. Today, the Muslim West displays its cultural heritage in the way of life there; in the cuisine, the gestures, sounds and expressions of the people.



Mértola Mosque

Hegira last quarter of 6th / AD 12th century
Almohad
Mértola, Beja, Portugal



Kutubiya Mosque

Hegira 6th century / AD 12th century
Almohad
Marrakesh, Morocco