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Sabbatical Report Fall 2018

During the duration of my sabbatical in Fall 2018, I worked on my proposed project “Mosques in Nationalist zones during the Spanish Civil War.” The essay (in progress) examines the construction of mosques during the Spanish Civil War (1936-39) in Nationalist controlled territories of Spain. This piece is part of a larger project that looks at Francisco Franco (1936 – 1975) and his use of Spain’s Islamic heritage to further his political agenda, one noted for emphasizing a Catholic national identity.

My sabbatical began with archival and site research in Spain. I spent a month in Spain searching for information on the mosques built by the Nationalists during the Spanish Civil War. Before going, I knew that two mosques existed, one in Cordoba (Andalucia) and the other in Guitiriz (Galicia). I was hoping to discover whether other mosques also were constructed as well as to find documentation on the mosques that would tell me who designed and built them, what the official rationale for their construction was, other provisions made for Moroccan troops during the war, and what had happened to the mosques after the end of the war. I was able to visit both extant mosques and did discover one additional one, in Vigo (Galicia). The mosque in Vigo was torn down in the 1960s but having evidence that it is existed I was able, upon my return to the US, to locate some photographs of the building.

I also made a significant discovery that considerably expanded my project. Through archival and library work, I found that not only free-standing mosque structures were constructed, but also small prayer halls were created inside hospitals specially designated for the Nationalists’ Moroccan troops. I then began to determine where these hospitals were located and whether any still existed. I did locate a hospital in Granada, that was adjacent to the University of Granada’s School of Medicine and run by one of the university’s professors. I was able to obtain photographs of the hospital prayer chamber that date to the late 1930s.

In addition to the mosques and hospitals, I discovered special cemeteries also were created for Moroccan Muslims who died during the war. I visited the cemetery in Barcia (Asturias), which is completely abandoned, and in Griñon (Madrid), which still serves the Muslim community in Spain.

Finally, at the military archive I was able to obtain numerous documents, including telegrams from Francisco Franco, regarding the creation of prayer spaces for the Moroccan soldiers as well as other orders concerning their well-being during the war. Some examples include documents requiring special staff to tend to the religious needs of the Moroccan troops, tallies of the number of hospital beds available for Moroccan soldiers, and orders that no one should attempt to convert hospitalized Moroccan soldiers while they were recuperating.

During the remainder of my sabbatical, I processed the considerable amount of information I acquired while also determining how to incorporate my new finds (hospital prayer chambers and cemeteries) into my original proposed article, which is in progress. These new finds required further research and greatly expanded the project as a whole.

This project brings to light that not only were Moroccan troops employed in the Spanish Civil War but that their religious needs were given particular attention through the construction of mosques as well as designated cemeteries and hospitals. The significance of these civil war activities is complex and multivalent, especially given Spain’s own Islamic past, its history as a Protectorate government in Morocco, as well as its identity as a Catholic country during the leadership of Francisco Franco.