The main instigator of the Alhambra Manifesto, Architect Fernando Chueca Goitia (1911-2004), was banned from professional practice in 1942, as part of the purges carried out during the dictatorial regime of Francisco Franco (1892-1975). His mentor, architect Leopoldo Torres Balbás (1888-1960), who famously restored the Alhambra between 1923 and 1936, had suffered the same fate. The Alhambra was the royal palace of the Nasrid Kingdom of Granada, the last Islamic state to fall to the Catholic Reconquista in 1492, ending nearly eight centuries of Muslim presence in the Iberian Peninsula. As such, the Alhambra was charged with political and religious symbolism, which Franco tried to use to his advantage charging Francisco Prieto-Moreno (1907-1985), a fascist politician and architect, with the preservation of the ensemble, the interpretation of the Palace of Charles V as a Catholic Imperial residence and museum, and the adaptive reuse of the Convent of San Francisco into a Parador Nacional (National Resort Hotel). Chueca Goitia spent the years of professional banishment doing research on what he called the “invariable” elements of Spanish architecture, defining traits in the layout of buildings and articulation of rooms that remained constant over time despite political and even religious changes. Censors tolerated his research because it seemed to support the idea of Spanish exceptionalism promoted by the regime to justify its international isolation during the postwar. Franco shunned modern architecture as foreign, officially sanctioning historicist styles with clear Catholic pedigrees, such as neo-renaissance and neo-baroque. The Alhambra Manifesto made two claims that were politically dangerous: that Islamic architecture was also Spanish, and that some of its invariable elements, such as volumetric simplicity, could also be detected in modern architecture. Thus, the manifesto tried to simultaneously incorporate two styles that were repressed by the regime, Islamic and modern architecture, one historic and the other contemporary, as sources for a contemporary Spanish architecture. Under normal circumstances, this manifesto would have been censored, but as it turns out, by the early 1950s Franco’s regime was looking for strategies to deal with two geo-political shifts. It needed to appear more open to Islamic culture in order to quell resistance against the Spanish Protectorate of Morocco, and it needed to appear more modern in order to break the postwar embargo and lure American investment to fuel the crippled economy. The Alhambra Manifesto has been celebrated as the theoretical origin of modern Spanish architecture and of the idea that modernism was a continuation of historic architecture, rather than a rupture with heritage. Chueca Goitia was rehabilitated into practice and carried out a number of important preservation projects between the 1950s and 1990s, including the stylistic restoration of Alcañiz Castle in Teruel (completed in 1970), as well as completion of the neo-gothic Almudena Cathedral in Madrid, which he transformed into a neo-renaissance exterior to match the Royal Palace across the court. The Alhambra Manifesto was co-signed by most of Spain’s prominent architects, including Rafael de Aburto, Pedro Bidagor, Francisco Cabrera, Eusebio Calonge, Jose A. Domínguez Salazar, Rafael Fernandez Huidobro, Miguel Fisac, Damian Galmes, Luis García Palencia, Fernando Lacasa, Emilio Larrodera, Manuel Lopez Mateos, Ricardo Magdalena, Antonio Marsa, Carlos de Miguel, Francisco Moreno Lopez, Juana Ontañón, José Luis Ricardo, Francisco Prieto-Moreno, Francisco Robles, Mariano Rodríguez Avial, Manuel Romero, Secundino Zuazo.

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