

In Search of the Origin of the Gothic: Thomas Pitt's Travel in Spain in 1760*

Matilde Mateo

Among the many travellers who toured Spain in the eighteenth century, there is one whose visit has gone unnoticed in the periegetic literature but who is of great interest: Thomas Pitt, First Baron Camelford (fig.1), who visited the Iberian Peninsula in 1760.¹ His impressions were recorded in a manuscript account, kept at The British Library, under the title of *Observations in a Tour to Portugal & Spain, 1760, by John Earl of Strathmore & Thomas Pitt, Esq.* (MSS Add 5845, 217-287/111v-146v).² This document has remained practically unknown in Spain, although not in the English speaking world and Portugal.³ Nevertheless, the published information

* The research for this article, in the United Kingdom and the United States of America, has been made possible by the financial support of the Xunta de Galicia, the University of Vigo, and the Spanish Ministry of Education and Culture. The article was originally published in Spanish, 'En busca del origen del gótico: el viaje de Thomas Pitt por España en 1760', *Goya. Revista de Arte*, published by the Fundación Lázaro Galdiano, No 292, 2003, 9-22. It is reproduced here in an English translation by kind permission of the Fundación Lázaro Galdiano and *Goya. Revista de Arte*.

¹ I am not aware of any study about British travellers in Spain that mentions Thomas Pitt. He is absent from the classic bibliographic repertoires of Arturo Farinelli, *Viajes por España y Portugal desde la edad media hasta el siglo XX. Divagaciones bibliográficas*, Roma: Reale academia d'Italia, 1942, and Raymond Foulche-Delbosc, *Bibliographie des voyages en Espagne et Portugal*, París: H.Welter, 1896. Pitt is also absent from more recent studies such as Consol Freixa, *Los ingleses y el arte de viajar. Una visión de las ciudades españolas en el siglo XVIII*, Barcelona: Ediciones del Serbal, 1993; José García Mercadal, *Viajes de Extranjeros por España y Portugal*, vol. III (Siglo XVIII), Madrid: Aguilar, 1962; Ana Clara Guerrero, *Viajeros británicos en la España del siglo XVIII*, Madrid: Aguilar, 1990; Blanca Krauel Heredia, *Viajeros británicos en Andalucía. De Christopher Harvey a Richard Ford (1760-1845)*, Málaga: Universidad de Málaga, 1986; and Ian Robertson, *Los curiosos impertinentes. Viajeros ingleses por España desde la accesión de Carlos III hasta 1855*, Madrid: Serbal/Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1988. Pitt and Strathmore are also systematically ignored in all previous bibliography on the periegetic literature to Spain (see the sources included in the above mentioned repertoires).

² The specific location of information within the manuscript is provided according to its two different numbering systems: the first one refers to the page numbers, while the second refers to the folio numbers. Lord Strathmore was the travel companion of Pitt and his mention in the title is just a gesture of courtesy, since the manuscript is written in first person and includes direct references to Lord Strathmore in third person.

³ The only reference to Pitt's travel published in Spain is by Tonia Raquejo in her *El palacio encantado. La Alhambra en el arte británico*, Madrid: Taurus, 1989, 17, where she makes a short mention of his pioneering interest in the Islamic architecture of the south of Spain. The published material about Pitt and this manuscript is limited to

about this manuscript is scant and limited to the Portuguese part of the travel. Furthermore, these studies overlook some of its most relevant merits, which can only be evaluated by examining the manuscript as a whole and within a wider context. Pitt's observations are extraordinary for many reasons, but perhaps what makes them unique is the unusual attention that he pays to medieval architecture. In this regard, Pitt has no parallel among the travellers who toured Spain in those years, regardless of their nationality, be it British, French, Spanish or any other. Although it would be easy to fall into the temptation of interpreting this singularity as an extemporaneous caprice of an eccentric personality, this was definitely not the case. His observations, far from being an isolated phenomenon, were, on the contrary, in perfect harmony with the trends of the artistic and scholarly avant-garde. Moreover, they are an exceptional document about the most advanced theories current at the time on medieval architecture and, more specifically, those relative to the origin of the Gothic style. Within this frame of reference, Pitt's observations gain even more interest because they illustrate a hardly known chapter in the past reception of Spanish medieval architecture. Namely, she became the focus of attention due to the possibility, defended by many, that Spain could have been the birthplace of the Gothic. This theory was highly popular in Europe for over two centuries and, paradoxically, has hardly found any echo in Spain, then or now.⁴ The fact that the thesis is erroneous should not detract from its interest, especially if we consider it from the perspective of art reception, since it not only drew

John Frew and Carey Wallace, 'Thomas Pitt, Portugal and the Gothic cult of Batalha', *Burlington Magazine*, 128:1001, August 1986, 582-584; Michael McCarthy, *The Origins of the Gothic Revival*, New Haven: Published for the Paul Mellon Center for Studies in the British Art by Yale University Press, 1987, 17; Maria João Baptista Neto, 'A Arquitectura de Santa Maria de Alcobaça e a discussão em torno das origens do Gótico nos finais do século XVIII. Uma descrição inédita do mosteiro de 1760', in *Actas do Coloquio Cister, Espaços, Territórios, Paisagens, Colóquio Internacional, 16 a 29 de Junho de 1998 Mosteiro de Alcobaça*, Lisbon: Instituto Português do Património Arquitectónico: 2000, vol. I, 271-282, and, by the same author, *James Murphy e o restauro do Mosteiro de Santa Maria da Vitória no século XIX*, Lisbon: Editorial Estampa, 1997, 23-31. The research for this article has been carried out independently from Baptista Neto, and before learning about her works. Prof. Neto has informed me that she is preparing an edition of this manuscript.

⁴ The development of the theory of a Spanish origin of the Gothic in Great Britain has been studied with some detail by Tonia Raquejo, *Palacio encantado*, 42-49, and in her article 'The 'Arab Cathedrals': Moorish Architecture as Seen by British Travellers', *Burlington Magazine*, 129:1001, August 1986, 555-563. For a more detailed account, including some disagreement with Raquejo, see my Ph.D. dissertation, *La visión británica del arte medieval cristiano en España (siglos XVIII y XIX)*, Universidad de Santiago de Compostela, 1994, 302-395. For the knowledge of the theory in Spain see Nieves Panadero Peropadre, *Los estilos medievales en la arquitectura madrileña del siglo XIX (1780-1868)*, Ph.D. diss., Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 1992; and by the same author, 'Teorías sobre el origen de la arquitectura gótica en la historiografía ilustrada y romántica en España', *Anales de Historia del Arte*, 4, Homage to Prof. Dr. D. José María Azcárate, Madrid, 1994, 201-211; and my *Medieval Art in the Neoclassical Age of Spain: Sources and Ideas of Spanish Criticism of Medieval Art (1759-1808)*, dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Art History and Theory, University of Essex, 1994, 49 and ff.

considerable attention to the architecture of the Iberian Peninsula, but it also established numerous criteria for future discussions. Within this process, Pitt's manuscript plays several roles: 1) as a decisive proof of the currency of the theory of a Spanish origin of the Gothic; 2) as a valuable source of information about the cultural archetypes that were conditioning the historiography of architecture at that time; 3) and also, unexpectedly, as a powerful agent of opinion, whose repercussions for the understanding of the Gothic in general, and of Spanish medieval architecture in particular, were greater than one would have expected.



Figure 1. Joshua Reynolds, *Portrait of Thomas Pitt*, 1763. Oil on canvas, 76 x 63.5 cm. Private collection.

The extraordinary character of the manuscript begins with its author and his impeccable pedigree, which turns him into the most illustrious traveller who made a private visit to Spain in the eighteenth century.⁵ Born into the heart of the British political aristocracy, he was the head of the Pitt family and first degree relative of the Grenville, Lyttelton and Temple families, all of them well-known in British history. Nothing less than four close relatives were in charge of the government of the State on six different occasions, and even Thomas was offered such a position, although he declined in the end.⁶ His political career pales in comparison to those of his uncles and cousins, but even so, it was

⁵ For the biography of Thomas Pitt (1737-1793) see his manuscript memoirs titled *Family Character and Anecdotes. For the use & entertainment of my Son when he shall be old enough to draw from them either pleasure or instruction*, dated in 1781, BL. Add Mss 69333. See also his corresponding entries in Sir Leslie Stephen and Sir Sidney Lee, eds, *Dictionary of National Biography. From the earliest times to 1900*, London: Oxford University Press, 1921-1922 (cit. onwards as *D.N.B.*); Sir Lewis Namier and John Brooke, eds, *The History of Parliament. The House of Commons 1754-1790*, Oxford; Oxford University Press, 1964, vol. III, 286-29; John Nichols, *Illustrations of the Literary History of the Eighteenth Century*, London: Nichols, Son, and Bentley, 1831, vol. VI, 67-139. For more information about Thomas and his family see Sir Tresham Lever, *The House of Pitt. A Family Chronicle*, London: John Murray, 1947; and Nikolai Tolstoy, *The Half-Mad Lord. Thomas Pitt 2nd Baron Camelford, (1775-1804)*, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1978.

⁶ Although the figure of Prime Minister did not exist at that time, the following relatives occupied equivalent positions in the dates noted: William Pitt, Lord Chatham (1708-1778), first degree uncle on his father's side, from 1756 to 1761, and from 1766 to 1768; William Pitt the Younger (1759-1805), son of Lord Chatham, from 1783 to 1801, and from 1804 to 1806; George Grenville (1712-1770), second degree uncle on his mother's and father's sides, from 1763 to 1765; and William Wyndham Grenville (1759-1834), son of George Grenville, and brother in law, from 1806 to 1807. George III offered Pitt to lead the House of Commons and a Secretary of State in 1783.

punctuated with high responsibilities that earned him some notoriety. In any case, no other traveller could boast – either of themselves or of their families – having played such an eminent role in national history. Moving on to other issues, his privileged social status determined a specific cultural background and interests, which explain, to some degree, the unique character of his travel. To begin with, it was his Grand Tour, with all the cultural character that this type of travel entailed. This was a very rare combination, since Spain, although a popular destination among British travellers, was not included in that traditional journey undertaken by the young members of the British elite. The image of Spain, fostered by the so called Black Legend as the epitome of intellectual, political, and moral backwardness, turned her into an unfitting destination for a tour whose purpose was, after all, educational. Only the concurrence of extraordinary circumstances could lead to her inclusion, as it was the case with Pitt.

Following the custom among young men of his rank, Thomas Pitt set out to undertake his Grand Tour after ending his studies at the University of Cambridge. He had just got into the possession of the considerable family fortune and needed a change of air. The years immediately preceding had constituted, by his own confession, a 'rough storm', marked by horrible confrontations with his father, and he felt that his 'mind wanted repose, and [his] Health the relief of a mild Climate'.⁷ The traditional itinerary of the Grand Tour to Italy through the continent was, in this case, inadvisable for several reasons. The continuing disputes with his progenitor, a man of violent and instable character, had sunk Pitt in a too delicate health condition for such a long, uncomfortable, and exhausting trip. On the other hand, the Seven Years War was in full rage. To travel across a Europe convulsed by such bellic conflict was not only risky but also practically impossible. The enemy territories to be crossed were many, and obtaining a safe conduct for them was very difficult. All these problems could be avoided by sailing to Lisbon, and then again from the Spanish Levant to Genoa. First, because Portugal, Spain and Italy remained alien to the war. Second, because Lisbon, the first stage of the Grand Tour, was one of the favourite destinations for the British aristocracy for health cures and thus a suitable place for Pitt to recover his strength. And last, because the voyage by boat, and the elimination of the hardships of crossing the Alps, were more comfortable and adequate for his fragile condition.

The political ups and downs and his family connections provided Pitt with an excellent occasion to start his Grand Tour. At that time, Great Britain was in a victorious path in the Seven Years War thanks to the leadership of his uncle, William Pitt. During a decisive confrontation, the British navy had pursued and attacked the French fleet in the Portuguese harbour of Lagos. This event, which happened on 17 August 1759, was a flagrant violation of Portuguese neutrality. The Lusitanian country, which was a traditional ally of Great Britain, reacted with indignation, and this led to the decision to send an extraordinary embassy to appease the mood. As it can be imagined, it was not difficult for Thomas to add his name to the list of companions and thus to start his Grand Tour. The diplomatic mission, with Lord Kinnoul in charge, had expected to leave in early February, on

⁷ Pitt, *Family Character and Anecdotes*, 56v.

board the *Windsor* from Pithead, but the bad weather delayed its departure considerably. Finally, the *Windsor* was able to leave from the port of Plymouth on 28 February 1760. Pitt was then twenty two years old and had as companion for his adventure Lord Strathmore, a young Scottish aristocrat and friend from the university.⁸ His travel through the Iberian Peninsula lasted about nine months, of which they spent a bit over two months in Portugal and the rest in Spain.⁹ Pitt and Strathmore arrived at the Portuguese capital on March 7, where they spent a month and a half resting from the voyage and getting familiarized with its monuments and court life.¹⁰ At the end of April, they travelled for two weeks with the purpose to study the antiquities of Sintra, Mafra, Batalha and Alcobaça. Upon their return to Lisbon, they remained there for a few days before undertaking their trip to Spain in mid-May.¹¹ The itinerary to Madrid was through Mérida and Badajoz and it lasted two weeks. From then on it is extremely difficult to establish a precise calendar of their activities. We know that they remained in Madrid for 'some months', and everything points to the possibility that they undertook short trips from there to Aranjuez, El Escorial, Seville, and Toledo. Thomas was highly interested in visiting Andalusia, the Spanish Levant, and Catalonia, while Lord Strathmore was not willing to keep travelling in the high summer temperatures, so they decided to separate. Thomas thus continued his journey alone through Andalusia, where he visited Cordova, Seville, Cádiz and Granada. From there he went to Murcia and Valencia, and finished his stay in Barcelona, from where he departed by boat towards Genoa at the end of November. In Italy, he kept in friendly contact with Lord Strathmore, although each one went their own way. The sudden death of Thomas' father, in July 1761, hastened his return to Great Britain, although this was,

⁸ Pitt and Strathmore had previously travelled together through Scotland in 1758 (Paget Jackson Toynbee, and Leonard Whibley, eds, *The Correspondence of Thomas Gray*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935, vol. II, 856, note 2). For Lord Strathmore see his wife's entry, Mary Eleanor Bowes, in the *D.N.B.*, as well as Wilmarth Sheldon Lewis, ed., *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1937-1983; and several entries in *Correspondence of Thomas Gray*.

⁹ The journey to Lisbon and the stay in Portugal are the best documented part of their trip, due to the abundant correspondence preserved from the members of the diplomatic mission. See, in this respect, the letters from Lord Kinnoul to Newcastle dated on 25 February 1760 (BL. Add. Mss. 32902, *Newcastle Papers*, 390-391), 19 March 1760 (BL. Add. Mss. 32903, 185-188), 3 May 1760 (BL., Add Mss 32905, 252-255), 17 May 1760 (BL. Add Mss. 32906, 130-131); those from the secretary of Lord Kinnoul, Philip Francis, in Joseph Parkes, and Herman Merivale, eds, *Memoirs of Sir Philip Francis, K.C.B.*, London: Longman's Green, and Co., 1867, vol. I, 29-47. See also the letter from Thomas Pitt to Dr. C. Lyttelton, on 24 March 1760 (BL. Mss Stowe, 754, 58), and the numerous references to this trip in the correspondence from Thomas Gray to Warton and Brown (*Correspondence of Thomas Gray*, vol. II, 659-660, 662-663, 771-773). Further information about this trip in *Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, vol. XXI, 364-365, 380, 500-501, 505, 512, 517, 543, 545, 550 and 558.

¹⁰ Pitt, in his *Family characters* (56v) dates, erroneously, his arrival in Lisbon in February, an understandable memory slip since it had been thirty-one years since the trip.

¹¹ The departure date of Pitt and Strathmore from Lisbon towards Spain is uncertain, since Pitt himself provides two different days, 13 and 21 of May (Pitt, *Observations*, 241/123v, and 245/125v respectively).

in the end, delayed until Christmas due to bureaucratic problems. Meanwhile Lord Strathmore, madly in love with the Countess of San Vitale, prolonged his stay in Italy until the summer of 1763.

Thomas Pitt as a Man of Taste and advanced disciple of the medievalist avant-garde

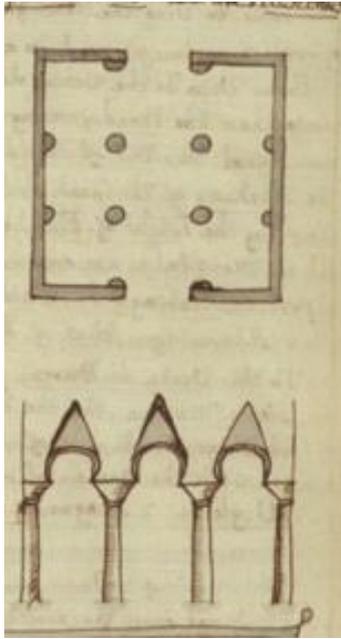


Figure 2. William Cole after Thomas Pitt, 'Ground floor and elevation of the church of Cristo de la Luz, Toledo, Spain', *Observations in a Tour to Portugal and Spain in 1760 by John Earl of Strathmore and Thomas Pitt, Esq.*, 269/133v. © The British Library Board

The manuscript kept at The British Library is the most extensive and detailed account of Pitt's Grand Tour. Its content, however, does not fit the traditional canon of the genre. Such key points as politics, economy or customs appear relegated to a secondary place, while architecture has a greater relevance than usual, especially in the part devoted to Spain. This peculiarity reveals that the young Pitt was a Man of Taste, which was later corroborated throughout his life by his dabbling as an amateur architect, his active role in The Society of Dilettanti, or his generous patronage of the celebrated architect John Soane.¹² Art and architecture were, without a doubt, one of the great passions of this British politician. In his various artistic enterprises, Pitt displayed an eclectic taste that allowed him to appreciate both the virtues of classical architecture and the charms of the Gothic, although the scale leaned clearly towards classicism. His manuscript, nevertheless, shows an unusual predilection for medieval architecture. There is a great contrast between his low interest in other styles, which was limited to the official masterpieces (El Escorial, Golden Age paintings, Roman remains of Mérida and Segovia), and his eagerness, on the other hand, for medieval architecture.

¹² We must thank Michael McCarthy for having brought to light Thomas Pitt's artistic activities. Further information about them, as well as more sources on the topic, can be found in the entry devoted to Thomas Pitt in Howard Colvin, *A Biographical Dictionary of British Architects. 1600-1800*, New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 1995 (3rd ed.), 758-759 (the first edition of 1954 has no entry on Thomas Pitt); and in Joanna Vernon, 'Thomas Pitt', in Jane Turner, ed., *Dictionary of Art*, New York: Grove, 1996, vol. XXIV, 893-894. Other supplementary sources not included in the two aforementioned publications can be found in Michael McCarthy, 'Influenze europee nel primo revival gotico in Inghilterra', in Joselita Raspi Serra, and Massimo Venturi Ferriolo, eds, *Il Nuovo Sentire. Natura, Arte e Cultura nel '700*, Milano: Guerini e Associati, 1989, 47-56; same author, 'Art Education and the Grand Tour', in Moshe Barasch, Lucy Freeman Sandler, and Patricia Egan, eds, *Art the Ape of Nature: Studies in the Honor of H.W. Janson*, New York: H.N. Abrams, 1981, 486-491. Pitt was also involved in the establishment of a factory of porcelain in Plymouth; for more information on this topic see Geoffrey Willis, 'The Plymouth Porcelain Factory. Letters to Thomas Pitt, 1766-1769', *Apollo*, 112, 1980, 377-385, and 113, 1981, 29-37.

This keenness on medieval architecture led him not to overlook any specimen, however unknown in Great Britain, that crossed his path, such as the cases of the church of St. Martin in Segovia, the synagogues of El Tránsito and the Cristo de la Luz in Toledo (fig.2), or the lost Visigothic church in Medina Sedonia, which he searched for in vain. Likewise, the most extensive commentary was reserved to the monasteries of Batalha and Alcobaça, the cathedrals of Lisbon and Toledo, and, above all, the Alhambra and the Great Mosque of Cordova (figs. 3-8). His assessment of artistic worth also confirms his preference for medieval architecture: whereas he criticizes the palace of El Escorial as ugly and disproportionate, the church of the monastery of Batalha inspires his most glowing praise. Last, and this is very significant, only medieval buildings are illustrated in the manuscript. This predilection for medieval architecture, almost bordering with obsession, is even more striking if we take into account Pitt's precocity, since it considerably precedes the Gothic and 'alhambresque' furore that inundated Great Britain in the Victorian period. Nor is it less striking the fact that the manuscript is limited to Spain and Portugal, especially if we take into account that Pitt spent a year in Italy, the land of art and architecture par excellence. Such an early, specific, and exclusive interest in the medieval architecture of the Iberian Peninsula is frankly intriguing and demands explanation.

By 1760, the taste for medieval architecture was a minority phenomenon. It was limited to a narrow group of antiquarians devoted to the study of the national monuments, a few literati at the forefront of romantic sensibility, who were enamoured of the medieval for its gloomy and melancholic connotations, and last by the Whig elite, which had enthroned the Gothic as the banner of their political ideology.¹³ Despite the limited extent of this phenomenon, Pitt fell under its influence, due to his privileged social status and circle of friends, both of which put him in contact with the most prominent people of the aforementioned three groups during his youth. The renowned antiquarian and president of The Society of Antiquarians, Charles Lyttelton, bishop of Carlisle, was his uncle.¹⁴ During his time at the University of Cambridge, Pitt also had the opportunity of establishing a friendship with the celebrated romantic poet Thomas Gray, who was considered by many of his contemporaries as one of the most learned man in Europe, and one of the greatest experts in medieval architecture.¹⁵ Last, Pitt, who was born in the midst

¹³ The appreciation of the Gothic in Great Britain is a complex phenomenon that has been the object of numerous studies. For its evolution and further sources see my PhD diss.

¹⁴ Charles Lyttelton (1714-1768) was the brother of Thomas' mother. Lyttelton was an insatiable researcher of English medieval architecture, and one of the most fervent promoters of the study of the Romanesque as an independent style. He was also an advocate of studying architecture with a methodology based solely on formal criteria derived from the buildings themselves. He published some of his studies in several issues of *Archeology*, and his manuscript notes were the seed for future histories of English medieval architecture.

¹⁵ Thomas Gray (1716-1771) owes his fame as a poet to his *Elegy in a Country Churchyard*, a classic of English literary Romanticism. His knowledge of medieval architecture, as well as his empiric methodology, gained him a well-deserved respect among his contemporaries. He wrote an essay titled *Architectura Gothica* (1754) on the Romanesque, but his principal

of a Whig family, maintained a short but intense friendship with another famous offspring of that political faction, his neighbour Horace Walpole. Walpole, who incidentally was a great friend of Gray's, was one of the most effective promoters of the taste for the Gothic in England, counting among his achievements the writing of the first gothic novel, *The Castle of Otranto*, as well as the patronage of one of the masterpieces of the early Gothic Revival, his home, Strawberry Hill.¹⁶ In view of this social circle, Pitt appears not only as a Man of Taste with medievalist interests, but also as a young and outstanding disciple of the medievalist avant-garde of his country, and arguably also of Europe.

The theory of the Spanish-Arab origin of the Gothic

One of the most heated points of debate among medievalist circles was the origin of the Gothic style in architecture. Ever since the Renaissance, different theses were proposed about the genesis of a style that astonished – and disgusted – because of its departure from classicist principles, especially with regard to its pointed arches, its profuse and delicate ornamentation, and its apparent lack of rules and proportions. The most intriguing questions were who invented it, and what was its model. At first, its invention was attributed to the Goths, who would have sought inspiration in the caves and forests where they practiced their rituals. The traditional cliché that the Goths had been destroyers rather than builders – as it was suggested by documentary sources and the archaeological remains – soon led scholars to question whether they could have been the inventors of a new architectural style. Doubts increased even more when, at the end of the seventeenth century, scholars realized that the 'Gothic', a term that hitherto had been applied to *all* medieval architecture, consisted in fact of two different styles. In this regard, the first and most influential distinction was that proposed by Jean François Félibien in his *Recueil historique de la vie et des ouvrages des plus célèbres architectes* (Paris, 1687, preface), in which he argued that there were two distinct styles, the 'Old Gothic' (meaning the Romanesque), which was heavy and austere, and the 'New Gothic' (meaning the Gothic), which was lighter, more ornamented and delicate. According to the mentality of the time, two such opposed styles could not have been created by the same people or have been inspired by the same model.

contribution took place through his ample correspondence with other antiquarians and other relevant figures of his time.

¹⁶ Horace Walpole (1717-1797) was the youngest child of the well-known British politician, Sir Robert Walpole. Horace also wrote a history of English medieval architecture (*Anecdotes of Painting in England*, Twickenham, 1762-1770, vol. I, ch. 5). The friendship between Pitt and Walpole intensified when the former became the neighbour of the latter in Twickenham, when Pitt rented a house upon his return from his Grand Tour, which he humorously called "Palazzo Pitti". Their friendship began to deteriorate at the end of 1763, due to a political confrontation between Walpole and George Grenville, of whose government Pitt was a part. The communications between Walpole and Pitt were indefinitely interrupted in mid-1764.

Searching thus for a more adequate origin for the 'New Gothic', it was proposed that this was in Islamic architecture.¹⁷ The paternity of this thesis has been unanimously attributed to Christopher Wren, to a memorandum he wrote in 1713, in which he argued that the Gothic had been introduced to Europe by the Crusaders, in imitation of the Saracenic buildings, presumably those in the Holy Land.¹⁸ As I have argued elsewhere, the originality of Wren was limited to two theses, that the style was propagated by the Crusaders, and that its model had been Saracenic architecture; since the belief in the Arab ascendancy of the Gothic was already familiar in the architectural and literary circles in France by the end of the seventeenth century. This notion was not only quite wide spread there and then, but also we find it in Fénelon as early as 1679.¹⁹

¹⁷ Despite the fact that the theory of an Islamic origin appears frequently in studies on the many theories about the origin of the Gothic, it has not received hitherto an independent study. Moreover, those studies have errors that I have corrected in my Ph.D dissertation, 302-395, and in my article "The Making of the *Saracen Style*: The Crusades and the Medieval Architecture in the British Imagination of the 18th and 19th century", in Khalil I. Semaan, ed., *The Crusades: Other Experiences, Alternate Interpretations*, Binghamton: Global Academic Publishing- Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance at SUNY-Binghamton, 2003, 115-140. Both of them include more detailed information about this theory as well as sources on the topic. See also the sources in note 4.

¹⁸ The theory was formulated in a 'Report on Westminster Abbey', addressed to the Archbishop of Rochester, in 1713, which is printed in Christopher Wren, *Parentalia: or Memoirs of the Family of the Wrens*, London: T. Osborn, 1750, 297-298. This same publication includes Wren's son's own account and interpretation of his father's thesis (306-307). Among the authors who consider Wren as the father of this theory are Paul Frankl, *The Gothic: Literary Sources and Interpretations through Eight Centuries*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960, 365; Thomas Cocke, 'The Wheel of Fortune: The Appreciation of Gothic since the Middle Ages', in by J.J.G. Alexander, and Paul Binsky, *The Age of Chivalry: Art in Plantagenet England 1200-1400*, London: Royal Academy of Arts; Published in association with Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987, 184; Georg Germann, *The Gothic Revival in Europe and Britain: Sources, Influences and Ideas*, London: Lund Humphries for the Architectural Association, 1972, 40; Arthur O. Lovejoy, 'The first Gothic Revival and the return to Nature', *Essays in the History of Ideas*, Baltimor: John Hopkins University Press, 1948, 137-140; John Sweetman, *The Oriental Obsession: Islamic Inspiration in British and American Art and Architecture, 1500-1920*, Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988, 57-58; Joseph Rykwert, *The First Moderns: Architects of the Eighteenth Century*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1980, 222; Kenneth Clark, *The Gothic Revival: An Essay in the History of Taste*, London: John Murray, 1983, 15. M.McCarthy, M.J. Baptista Neto, T. Raquejo, and N. Panadero Peropadre, also share the belief that this theory originated with Wren. The only author, whom I am aware of, to acknowledge that this theory was formulated earlier in France is Enrico Crispolti, 'Exoticism: The 17th and 18th centuries', in Bernard S. Myers, *Encyclopaedia of World Art*, New York; McGraw-Hill, 1959, vol. V, 307. I arrived at my own conclusions supporting the French priority before I became aware of Crispolti's essay.

¹⁹ See the Second Dialogue in François Salignac de la Motte Fénelon, *Dialogues sur l'Éloquence*, Paris: Chez Jacques Estienne, 1718, (1st ed. Amsterdam 1717) 156 and ff. Secondary literature about the Arab origin of the Gothic often dates this dialogue erroneously as being later than 1713. This second dialogue is much earlier, dating back to 1679, as it has been proven by C. Revillout, 'Un problème de chronologie littéraire et philologique. Date présumable des "dialogues" de Fénelon "sur l'éloquence"', *Revue des Langues Romanes*, 4th

Even more interesting is that the theory of the Arab origin of the Gothic appears in France in a substantially different version from that of Wren's. This was the case of the Jesuit R. J. Tournemine, who argued that the Gothic had been invented in Spain due to the influence of Islamic architecture on the Christians.²⁰ This version of the thesis has gone unnoticed by scholars, so it is worthy to comment on it in some detail. It must be noted, however, that it displays a simplistic understanding of the relationship between architecture and the people that created it, as well as an articulation of the world based on excessive generalizations. Tournemine argued that the 'Old Gothic' was the work of the Goths, because the solidity, heaviness and austerity of the style reflected their physical strength and bellicose character. Likewise, he saw the Arab people reflected in the 'New Gothic', since Arab poetry showed the same preference for superfluous and delicate ornamentation exhibited by the Gothic buildings. After stressing the role of medieval Spain as the transmitter to Europe of the superior knowledge of Arab culture in philosophy, medicine, or poetry, Tournemine concluded that "'it had [also] been through Spain that [the "New Gothic"] had passed to Europe.' Last, for confirmation of the theory, he advised to consult with those that knew 'the cathedrals of Spain, for example that of Burgos, that had been built by the Moors or in their time.'²¹

Tournemine was not an architect, nor an antiquarian, but a literary scholar, and it is difficult to determine from where he derived his idea that there were cathedrals built by the Moors in Spain. Nevertheless, there are several factors that may have contributed to this belief: the coexistence of Islamic and Christian architects in medieval Spain, the *múdejar* buildings, the re-utilization of Islamic buildings for Christian purposes, or the ambiguity of some primary sources that dated the cathedrals back to the time of the Moors. Another theoretical model for this origin of the gothic was provided by pre-existing theories about the origin of medieval romances. In 1581, the Italian scholar Giammaria Barbieri had proposed that troubadour lyric had originated in Spain due to the influence of Arabic poetry.²²

series, 33, 1970, 210-211. Fénelon made a second mention of this thesis in his 'Lettre écrite à l'Académie Française' (1713) (same article, 416-417). Other French authors that echoed this theory are Augustin Charles Davilier, *Dictionnaire d'Architecture*, Paris: Langlois, 1693; and Florent Le Comte and Rowland Burdon, 'Sommaire historique d'Architecture et des architectes, don't les ouvrages ont le plus éclaté dans la France', *Cabinet des singularitez d'architecture, peinture, sculpture, et gravure*, Paris: N. Le Clerc, 1699, vol. I.

²⁰ The thesis of René-Joseph Tournemine is reproduced in the entry 'Gothique' of the dictionary of architecture that Jean-Louis de Cordemoy added to the second edition of his *Nouveau traité de toute l'architecture* (Paris: Coignard, 1714, 1st ed. 1706). It has not been possible to determine the exact time of when Tournemine elaborated this thesis or put it in writing, but it is clear that Cordemoy was already familiar with it in 1710, since he proposed the term 'moresque' to refer to Gothic architecture in that year (see *Mémoires de Trévoux*, 1710, 1258). For more information about René-Joseph de Tournemine see Pierre Larousse, *Grand Dictionnaire Universel du XIXe siècle*, Paris: Administration du Grand dictionnaire universel, 1876, vol. XV, 365.

²¹ Both quotes from Cordemoy, *Nouveau traité*, 242.

²² Giammaria Barbieri, 'Propagazione della Rima delgi Arabi agli Spagnoli e a "Provenzali"', *Dell'origine della poesia rimatta. Opera de Giammaria Barbieri Modenense, pubblicata ora per ...*

This thesis found early support in France, where it was defended already in the first half of the seventeenth century by Saumaise. Its later dissemination by the highly popular *Traité de l'origine des romans* (Paris, 1670) by P.D. Huet, turned the Arab-Spanish ascendancy of the romances into a well-known idea in the France of Tournemine.²³

The Arab paternity of the Gothic, however, did not become common domain until mid-eighteenth century, when Wren's writings were published in *Parentalia* (1750), and when it was included in the *Encyclopédie* (1751) by Diderot.²⁴ The popularity of the theory at that time supports the belief that Pitt and his circle must have been familiar with it. They also very likely were aware of the possible Spanish origin because, although neither Wren nor the *Encyclopédie* mentioned it, the thesis had been published in French by Cordemoy in 1714 and also in English by William Warburton in 1757.²⁵ Documented evidence suggest that this was the case. In 1760, Johann Heinrich Müntz, an Austrian immigrant who was residing in Great Britain and a friend of Horace Walpole's and Charles Lyttelton's -both of them members of the inner circle of friends of Pitt's- published *Proposals for publishing by subscription a Course of Gothic Architecture* (London 1760). In them, Müntz announced the inclusion of a chapter devoted to the best examples of Gothic architecture, among which were 'Designs of some remarkable fine and curious Remains of Moresque Fabrics, still existing in the Kingdoms of Murcia, Valentia, and the City of Saragossa in Spain'.²⁶ Significantly, no other country was mentioned, only Spain, which was thus unexpectedly turned into the main attraction of the Gothic European production. Unfortunately, Müntz's project did not succeed, leaving open the question of what specific Spanish buildings he had in mind, although given the geographical areas mentioned it is possible that he meant *Mudéjar* buildings. Should that have been the case, we would be encountering an exceptional and early interest in the *Mudéjar* style that was in contrast with the complete lack of printed information about it at that time. In fact, if Müntz knew the *Mudéjar* buildings, it was because he had traveled in Spain in 1743, not because he had read about them. And there is no doubt that if the *Múdejar* buildings, or other Spanish medieval buildings for that

Girolamo Tiraboschi..., Modena: Società tipografica, 1790, 44 and ff. The original date of this manuscript was 1581 (James T. Monroe, *Islam and the Arabs in Spanish Scholarship*, Leiden: Brill, 1970, 39).

²³ I have used the English translation of this work, Pierre-Daniel Huet, *A Treatise of Romances and their original*, London: Printed by R. Battersby for S. Heyrick, 1672, 10-15, 81-89. Huet's work reached great popularity as it is evident from its translation to many languages and the fact that it was the object of more than a dozen editions up to the second half of the eighteenth century.

²⁴ Jean-François Blondel, 'Architecture', in Denis Diderot, Jean Le Rond d'Alambert, and Pierre Mouchon, eds, *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers...*, Paris: Briasson, 1751, vol. I, 617.

²⁵ William Warburton, *The Works of Alexander Pope*, London: A. Millar, J. and R. Tonson, H. Lintot, and C. Bathurst, 1757, vol. III, 292-293.

²⁶ BL. Add.MS. 6771.P.S.3/9168. For a printed version see McCarthy, *Origins of the Gothic Revival*, 180-182.

matter, had raised in him an unprecedented interest, it was mostly because of the newly acquired relevance of Spain in the theories about the origin of the Gothic.

This theory, despite becoming one of the most lasting and popular, was not exempt from criticism. The numerous attacks and counterattacks that it generated made it a key player in the debate about the origin of the Gothic, which captivated medievalist circles until mid-nineteenth century. The passion aroused by this topic cannot be understood fully without taking into account its far reaching implications. What was really at stake were the essence and character of the Gothic style, which determined its conceptualization and, ultimately, its ideological manipulation in the Gothic Revival and in the historiography of architecture. More specifically, the Arab origin posed serious problems for the appreciation of the Gothic from a romantic viewpoint. If the Gothic had Islamic or Arab roots, it could not be appropriated as a national style by the western European countries, nor could it be extolled as the embodiment of Christianity, as happened in romantic nationalism and spirituality. The transformation of the Gothic into a national and Christian style required the rebuttal of its Arab origin. As we shall see, Pitt's manuscript played an important and hitherto unknown role in this process. In order to do so, we need to go back in time to the years preceding Pitt's travel to Spain. It was then that his mentor, Thomas Gray, expressed his scepticism about the theory of the Arab origin of the Gothic in a letter dated in 1754.²⁷ This document is of supreme relevance because it is the first documented instance of a scholar questioning the revered opinion of Wren, thus sowing the seed of discord among British medievalists. At that time, the pointed arch was becoming the principal feature of the Gothic and a fundamental criterion to determine its origin. Consequently, the best way to establish the Arab origin of the Gothic was to prove that pointed arches had been used in Islamic buildings before than in Gothic ones. The study of the monuments of the Near East, known only through prints and written descriptions, led Gray to reject them as the model for the Gothic. But there was still the possibility that the model had been provided by the Islamic buildings of Spain. The deficient information about them did not allow him, however, to reach a conclusion in this respect. His advanced age did not allow him to tour Spain to inspect the buildings, so the question had to remain open until someone was able to do so for him. Everything points in the direction that this someone was Thomas Pitt. Gray's interest in Pitt's travel together with his high opinion of the observational skills of his young disciple, both well documented, invite speculation that Gray entrusted Pitt with the mission of testing the theory in Spain. Among other things, Gray was the one who proposed the unusual itinerary for his Grand Tour, as well as the company of Lord Strathmore. It is also known that Gray and Pitt kept regular correspondence during his trip and that Gray –according to his own confession – expected to collect data about the Spanish buildings upon Pitt's return to Great Britain.²⁸

²⁷ 'Letter from Thomas Gray to Thomas Warton, on October 18, 1754', in Duncan C. Tovey, ed., *The Letters of Thomas Gray, including the correspondence of Gray and Mason*, London: G. Bell, 1900-1909, 251-252.

²⁸ See the letters from Gray to Warton and Brown in *The Correspondence of Thomas Gray* cited in note 9.

Pitt's ruling

Pitt's observations must not have disappointed Gray. In them, Pitt provided the information that had been omitted in the printed sources and that would finally allow Gray to determine whether the Gothic had an Arab origin. The study of Spanish monuments had been traditionally undertaken with a methodology that privileged written documents over the direct inspection of the buildings. Those studies usually relegated the fabric to the background in favour of the history of the buildings and the valuable objects kept within. Consequently, as Gray had complained, it was extremely difficult to form a complete and exact picture of their appearance. The available illustrations did not help much either because they were scant, generally limited to long distance views of the exterior, and with little detail,

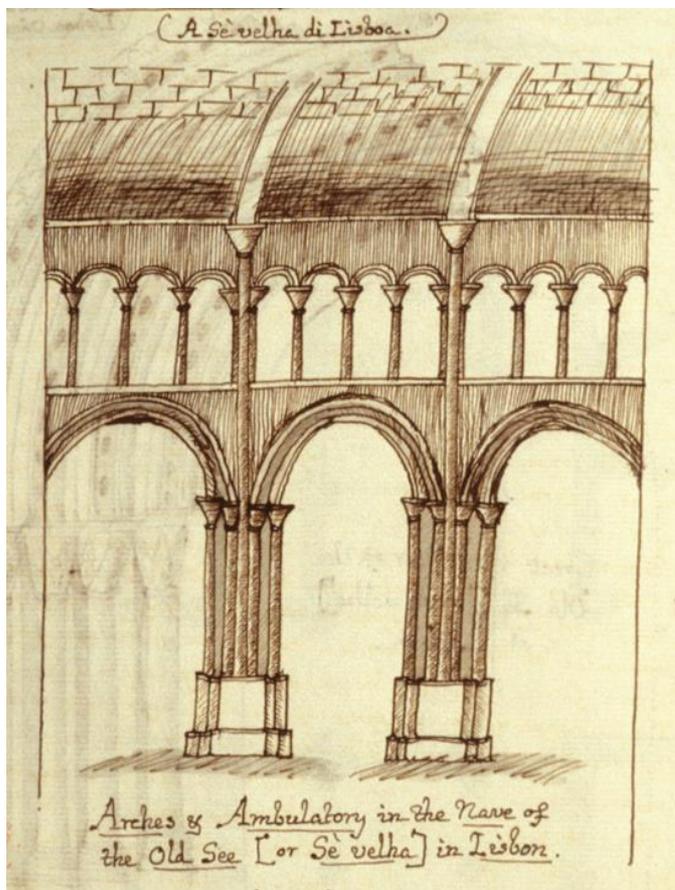


Figure 3. William Cole after Thomas Pitt, 'Arches and ambulatory, nave of the Old Cathedral at Lisbon', *Observations in a Tour to Portugal and Spain in 1760 by John Earl of Strathmore and Thomas Pitt, Esq.*, 228/116v. © The British Library Board, (Mss Add 5845).

especially when it came to the shape of the arches. Pitt, on the contrary, made the fabric of the buildings its main object of study, providing precise descriptions and illustrating them with relative profusion. For that purpose, he followed the methodology advocated by Gray and his uncle Charles Lyttelton, which, although it already had some tradition in Great Britain, had never been applied to the Spanish monuments. Following a set of guidelines derived from the study of zoology and botany, Pitt examined the fabrics directly, proceeding to their systematic description as if they were insects or plants: 1) dimensions and shape of the plan, 2) amount and type of columns, arches, vaults and openings, and 3) the design and appearance of the exterior. For even more

clarity, he illustrated the interior elevations (fig.3) and the façades (fig. 7), the details of doors (fig. 4) and of arches (figs. 2, 8 and 9), as well as the ground plans (figs. 2, 5, 6, and 10). Moreover, revealing an uncommon archaeological inclination, some of these drawings tried to recreate the original appearance of the building as it must have been in the Middle Ages, free from the interventions and renovations of later epochs (figs. 3, 5 and 10). The ultimate objective of his descriptions was to facilitate

the classification of the buildings so that sequences could be established. More specifically, Pitt hoped to determine the evolutionary sequence of the pointed arch in the Iberian Peninsula. Only in this way could he establish the emergence of the pointed arch in Islamic and Christian architecture so that he could rule which one took priority. The veracity of the theory of the Arab origin of the gothic depended on this only piece of information.

His thoughts about this issue were compiled in an excursus titled 'Moorish and Gothic architecture', inserted in the description of the Alhambra (279-282). In them, Pitt settled the matter conclusively for his contemporaries by 'proving' how the Christians had used the pointed arch centuries ahead of the Arabs. This not only confirmed that the gothic could not have been inspired by Arab architecture, but it also inverted the theory by suggesting that the use of pointed arches in Islamic buildings was due to a Christian influence. It is rather surprising to see how Pitt

reached his conclusion, since his arguments were riddled with errors. His demonstration of the Christian priority in the use of the pointed arch was false, and supported by a subjective and fallacious dating system. In order to determine the date of emergence of the pointed arch in Christian architecture, Pitt selected a debatable chronological criterion that dated the buildings to the time of their foundation. Thus, according to him, the oldest arches were those of Alcobaça, whose foundation he dated, erroneously, in 1148.

However, in the case of Islamic buildings, Pitt chose a different and even more debatable chronological criterion; that of the *Reconquista*. The result was a very whimsical evolution of

the arch in Islamic architecture. It began with the Cristo de la Luz, in Toledo, which he dated in 1076, in the erroneous belief that the city had been conquered by the Christians in that year, when in fact it was in 1085. In his opinion, this former synagogue proved that Islamic architects had only used round horseshoe arches before the monastery of Alcobaça. Paradoxically, the Mosque of Córdoba was the next stage, since this city had been conquered by the Christians in 1236, when in fact its construction had begun in the eighth century. This fabric exhibited both round

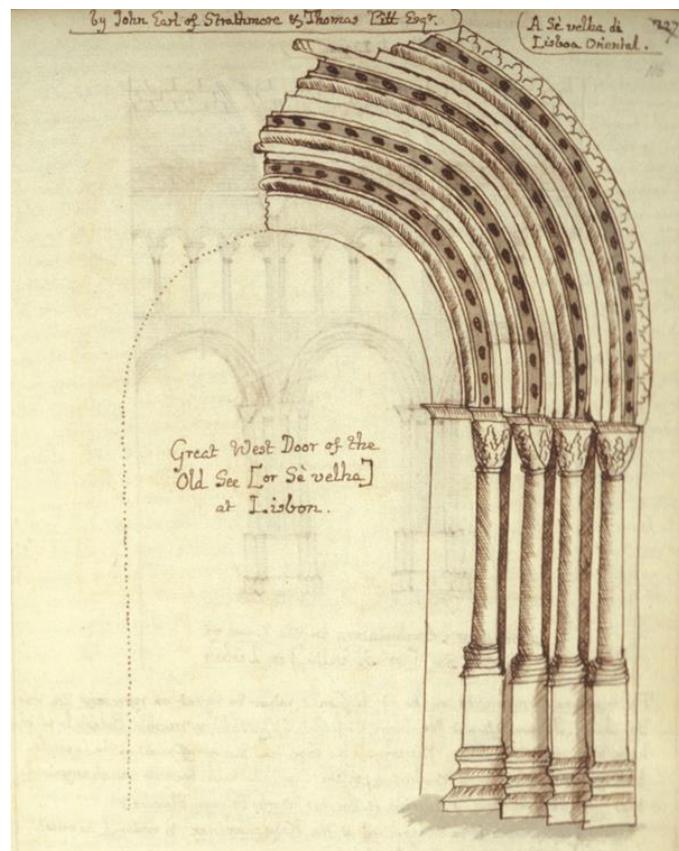


Figure 4. William Cole after Thomas Pitt, 'Western doorway, Old Cathedral at Lisbon', *Observations in a Tour to Portugal and Spain in 1760* by John Earl of Strathmore and Thomas Pitt, Esq., 227/116r. © The British Library Board, (Mss Add 5845).

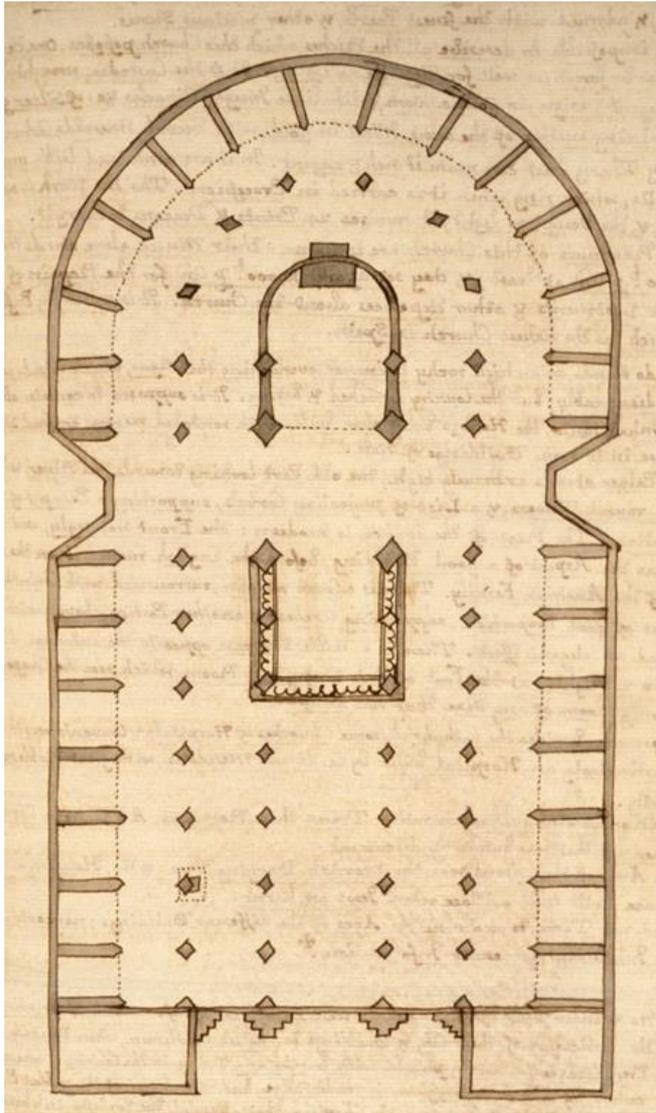


Figure 5. William Cole after Thomas Pitt, 'Ground floor of the Cathedral of Toledo', *Observations in a Tour to Portugal and Spain in 1760 by John Earl of Strathmore and Thomas Pitt, Esq.*, 267/136r. © The British Library Board, (Mss Add 5845).

and lightly pointed arches, and while the former were adduced as examples of the long survival of round arches, the latter were rejected as evidence of an Islamic origin of the Gothic because, according to Pitt, they were still far from the Gothic prototype, and because, in any case, they were later than those at Alcobaça. Last, the Alhambra, in Granada, which had been taken from the Muslims at the end of the fifteenth century, displayed the first Islamic pointed arches that were similar to those of the Gothic, and these arches were, in his opinion, the product of a Christian influence. All these errors, and the fact that they went undetected by his contemporaries, question Pitt's impartiality as well as that of his audience. It also invites us to speculate whether his real mission was that of finding proofs to refute the theory, and whether the theory was thus condemned beforehand by Pitt and his antiquarian friends.

Impact

Pitt's refutation also illustrates how the impact of an argument can be unrelated to its veracity, especially if the argument comes from someone with the right credentials, and confirms what people want to hear. His refutation was backed up by his illustrious last name and his prestige as a connoisseur. John Soane, for instance, went as far as comparing Pitt publicly to the famous Lord Burlington,²⁹ whereas Horace Walpole recruited Pitt, because of his solid knowledge of the Gothic for The Committee of Taste in charge of the design of Strawberry Hill. Being recognized in this way by such prominent figures of the British artistic circles, endowed his manuscript with great authority, an authority that helps to understand

²⁹ John Soane, *Lectures on Architecture*, London: Jordon-Gaskell, 1929, 56.

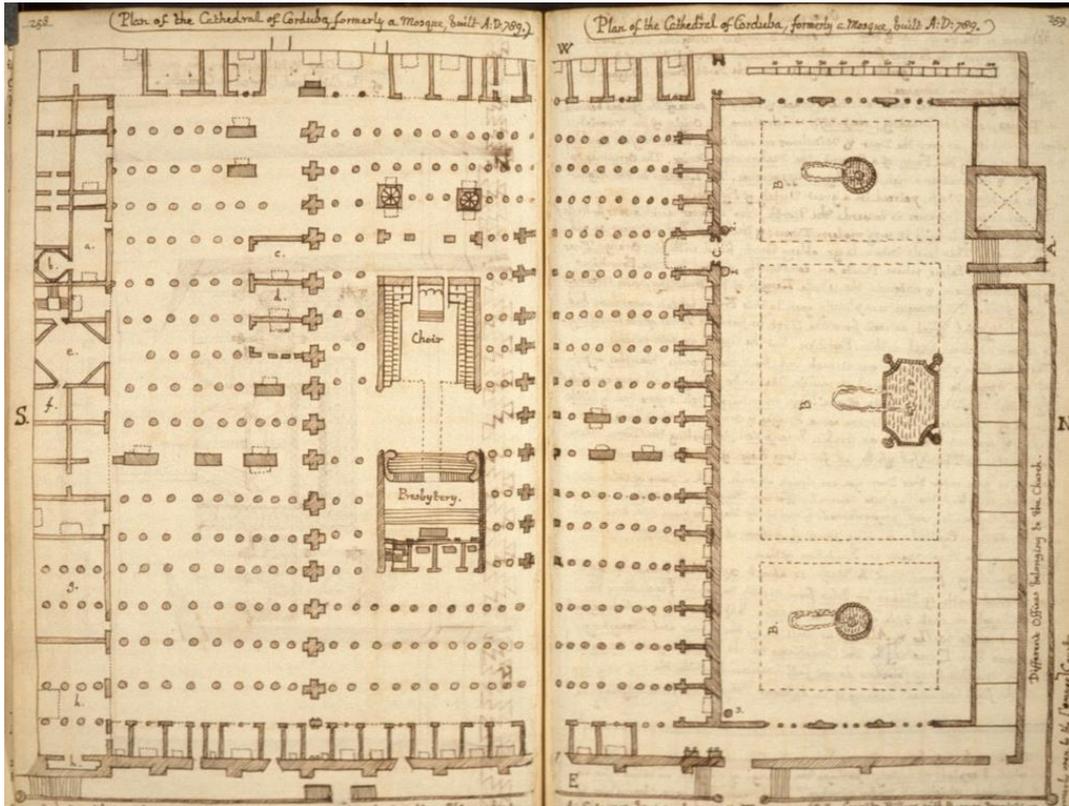


Figure 6. William Cole after Thomas Pitt, 'Ground floor of the Mosque of Cordova', *Observations in a Tour to Portugal and Spain in 1760* by John Earl of Strathmore and Thomas Pitt, Esq., 258-259/131v-132r. © The British Library Board, (Mss Add 5845).

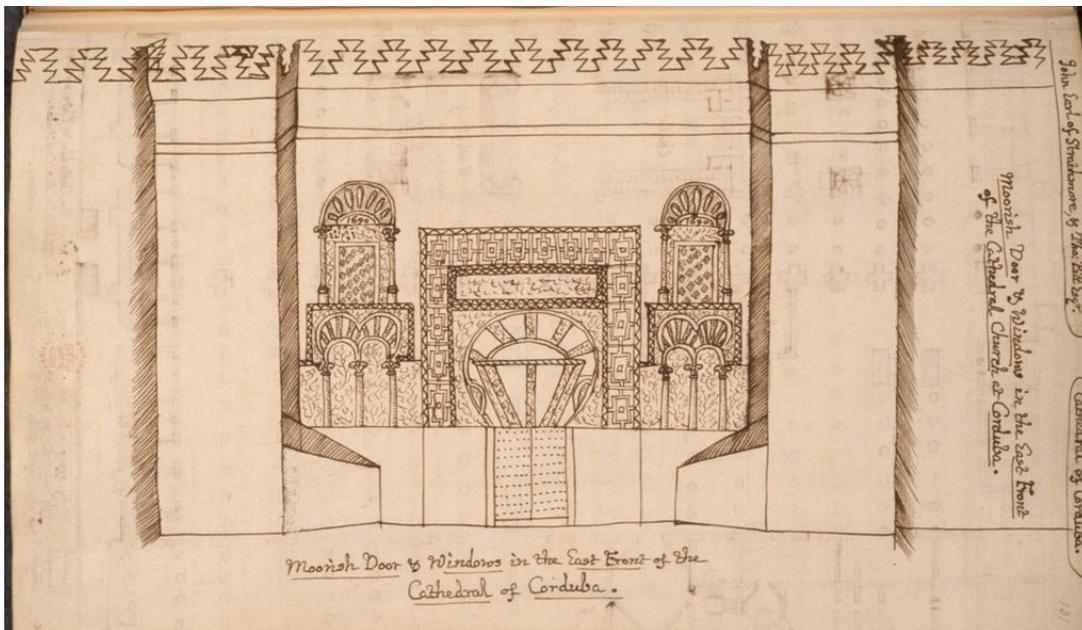


Figure 7. William Cole after Thomas Pitt, 'Eastern façade of the Mosque of Cordova', *Observations in a Tour to Portugal and Spain in 1760* by John Earl of Strathmore and Thomas Pitt, Esq., 257/131r. © The British Library Board, (Mss Add 5845).

its considerable reach, which was greater than one would have expected. Although these observations were never printed, their dissemination in the past was important and wide reaching, in contrast with their present oblivion. Perhaps nothing proves their popularity better than the fact that the manuscript from The

British Library is not the original one, but a second or third hand copy, made twelve years after Pitt's travel, by William Cole, one of the most respected scholars in Cambridge and, as far as I know, without any personal contact with Pitt.³⁰ There is also evidence that Pitt's observations were circulated from hand to hand among the most eminent medievalists, and that their content was debated in scholarly circles. It is also remarkable that their currency lasted longer than a century. At first, they must have been read avidly by Thomas Gray, Horace Walpole, and the architect Richard Bentley (who possessed a copy), as well as by his uncles, Charles and George Lyttelton.³¹ The circulation of the manuscript also reached people outside antiquarian circles, such as Edward Clarke, chaplain of the British Embassy in Madrid, and author of the well-known *Letters Concerning the Spanish Nation* (London, 1763). Pitt was in Madrid at the same time as Clarke, where Pitt advised him to undertake the study of the Roman and Gothic antiquities of Spain. Pitt also designed an itinerary for Clarke, sent him some of his notes, and made arrangements for drawings to be sent to Clarke from several parts of Spain.³² The numerous plagiarisms of Pitt by Clarke – from the selection of monuments to the verbatim description of a bullfight – indicate that Pitt was also a fundamental, and hitherto unknown, source of this classic of eighteenth century literature about Spain. Clarke's different cultural background – he did not belong to the medievalist avant-

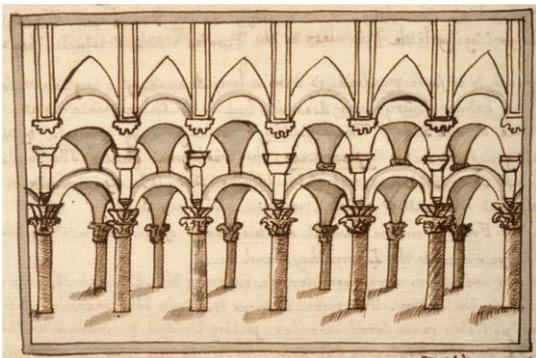


Figure 8. William Cole after Thomas Pitt, 'Section of the arcades of the Mosque of Cordova', *Observations in a Tour to Portugal and Spain in 1760* by John Earl of Strathmore and Thomas Pitt, Esq., 263/134r. © The British Library Board, (Mss Add 5845).

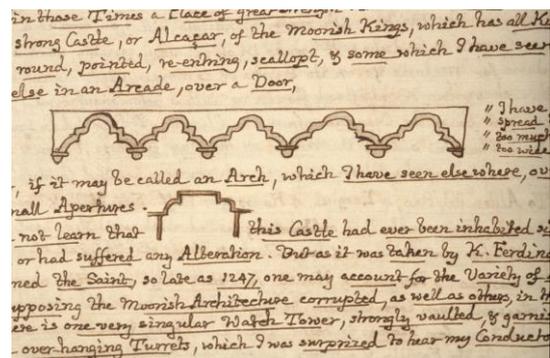


Figure 9. William Cole after Thomas Pitt, 'Arches at the Castle of Carmona', *Observations in a Tour to Portugal and Spain in 1760* by John Earl of Strathmore and Thomas Pitt, Esq., 272/138v. © The British Library Board, (Mss Add 5845).

³⁰ For more information on William Cole see *D.N.B.*, Nichols, *Literary History of the Eighteenth Century*, vols. IV, V, VI and VII, and, by the same author, *Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century*, London, vol. I, 1812, 657-701; also Lewis, *Walpole's Correspondence*, vol. I, preface.

³¹ About Charles Lyttelton's following of his nephew's adventures in Spain see the letters from Thomas Pitt on 24 March 1760 (see above note 6), and to William Clarke on 14 October 1760 (BL. Mss. Stowe 754, 67-68), and Edward Clarke on 22 February 1761 (same place, 82). The fact that Richard Bentley owned a copy of Pitt's manuscript is mentioned in the *D.N.B.* George Lyttelton rejected the Spanish origin of the Gothic because of some information that he had received, presumably from Thomas Pitt, about the arches of the Arab buildings of Spain (*A Gentleman's Tour through Monmouthshire and Wales in the Months of June and July, 1774*, London, 1781, 146).

³² Letters to Charles Lyttelton, William and Edward Clarke (see above notes 6 and 22).

garde nor was he a Man of Taste – led him, however, to ignore the problem of the origin of the Gothic.

Pitt's manuscript kept captivating scholarly interest for a long time. Its popularity is especially well documented in the 1770s. It was then that Richard Gough, successor of Charles Lyttelton as president of The Society of Antiquaries, copied it. He expressed his opinion about it in a letter, which provides information about why the manuscript was so highly appreciated.³³ It was mostly because it provided abundant and precise information, with illustrations and descriptions, of monuments hitherto unknown, but that were of great interest for their possible role in the formation of the Gothic style. Gough's enthusiasm was such that he gave a

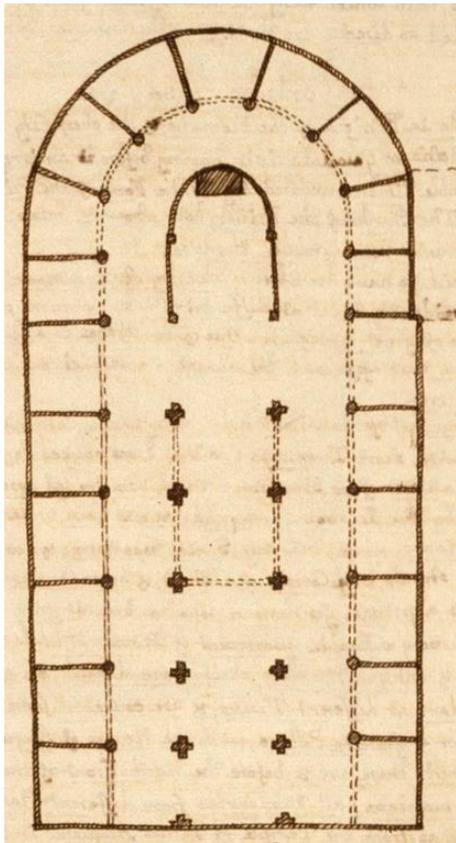


Figure 10. William Cole after Thomas Pitt, 'Ground floor of the Cathedral of Segovia', *Observations in a Tour to Portugal and Spain in 1760 by John Earl of Strathmore and Thomas Pitt, Esq.*, 255/130r. © The British Library Board, (Mss Add 5845).

copy of the manuscript to another eminent Cambridge scholar, Michael Tyson, who, in his turn, passed it on to his colleague William Cole. A few years later the manuscript was also mentioned in a discourse read before The Society of Antiquaries in London.³⁴ It is fair to assume that these documented instances are only the tip of the iceberg of a dissemination which must have been even greater. A clause in William Cole's will, according to which all his manuscripts, including Pitt's *Observations*, would be donated to the library of The British Museum, made possible an even further dissemination, although not immediately. An additional clause in the will required that the collection of manuscripts remained closed to the public for twenty years after Cole's death. So, although Cole died in 1782, his copy of the *Observations* by Pitt was not available to the general public until 1803. While it is impossible to determine the frequency with which this manuscript was read after this date, it is pretty significant that it deserved publication in such a late date as 1864, and in such a paradigmatic periodical of the Gothic Revival as *The Ecclesiologist*.³⁵ In any case, the quantitative dissemination of the manuscript is irrelevant

when contrasted with the extraordinary reach achieved in qualitative terms. Its readers could not have been more consequential and varied, from the medievalist avant-garde around Gray in Cambridge, to the more traditional and official circle of

³³ Letter from Richard Gough to Michael Tyson on 28 March 1772 (Nichols, *Literary anecdotes*, vol. VIII, 588).

³⁴ Edward King, 'Observations on Ancient Castles', *Archeologia*, 1776, 410.

³⁵ M.E.C. Walcott, 'Spanish cathedrals in 1760', *The Ecclesiologist*, 25, 1864, 337-339.

The Society of Antiquaries, to highly influential travellers in Spain, and important figures and ideologues of the Gothic Revival.

Conclusions

In view of all the information provided so far, it is necessary to rethink the view of Pitt's manuscript as simply a journal of a traveller with artistic interests. Although his account may have started as such, his observations ended up becoming a specific study of the medieval architecture of the Iberian Peninsula. Likewise, Pitt's absolute authorship of the preserved manuscript must be taken with caution. Although the personal comments of the copyist Cole are clearly differentiated in the manuscript, it is impossible to determine the degree to which previous hands may have altered the original text. Together with the annotations about the progress of his trip, the manuscript interpolates extensive reflections, probably written afterwards, which cannot be dated precisely, and whose authorship cannot be firmly ascribed to Pitt. Last, the fact that Cordova precedes Toledo, going against any logic in Pitt's itinerary, indicates the possibility that some of the pages of the original text got misplaced. None of these uncertainties, however, diminish the relevance of this manuscript in three important respects: its pioneering character in the study and dissemination of Spanish medieval architecture; its role in providing a crucial proof, in the eyes of Pitt's contemporaries, for the refutation of the theory of the Arab origin of the Gothic; and its illustration of what really drew interest in Spanish medieval buildings. Despite its shortcomings, this manuscript is the first attempt to study scientifically medieval Spanish architecture; or at least there is no study earlier than 1760, which examined simultaneously several of the most significant buildings, which employed an empirical methodology, and which was illustrated with elevations and ground plans (whose originals, according to Cole, were much better than his crude and deforming copies).³⁶ It must also be stressed that these ground plans are the oldest known of Spanish medieval buildings. The precocity of Pitt becomes more obvious when we take into consideration that more than a century elapsed before anybody attempted a similar enterprise. It was again a Britton, G. E. Street, whose *Some Account of Gothic Architecture in Spain* was published in 1865. Until then, Pitt's manuscript became, in its own right, an important source of information about Spanish medieval architecture in Great Britain.

On the other hand, Pitt's impact on the development of the theory of the Arab origin of the Gothic was decisive, although this must be qualified. His conclusions exerted a significant influence where it mattered most, in the circle of scholars at Cambridge, who were the indisputable driving force of British and European historiography of medieval architecture. Significantly, nobody from this group defended the Arab theory after Pitt's travel to Spain. It is not a coincidence either that the first printed refutation of this theory took place in the study of Ely

³⁶ It is to be lamented that Pitt's original drawings have not been preserved since his draughtsmanship was highly praised by Horace Walpole (Letter to Mann on 13 April 1762, *Walpole's Correspondence*, vol. XXII, 25).

Cathedral by James Bentham, published under Gray's supervision in 1771, and considered to be the official version of the history of the Gothic of that scholarly circle.³⁷ Although Pitt's name is not mentioned in printed sources, it is very unlikely that the radical, pioneer, and highly influential rejection of the Arab theory by that group could have taken place without the 'proofs' provided by Pitt. In other words, his refutation was not one among many others, but a key gear in the mechanism that would lead to the total abandonment of the theory after Bentham's publication. That said, it is necessary to clarify that Bentham did not succeed, after all, in taking off the field the belief in an Arab, and perhaps Spanish, origin of the Gothic, at least not until mid-nineteenth century. The Arab theory was rooted too deeply and was too widespread for it to be dismissed immediately in less specialized circles because it had been rejected by the medievalist avant-garde. It was not easy, either, to overrule Wren, already respected as a consecrated authority. On the other hand, the thesis of a Spanish origin acquired renewed topicality thanks, among other things, to the dissemination in English of Tournemine's thesis, which was plagiarized with impunity by Stephen Riou in his *The Grecian Orders of Architecture* (London, 1768, 9-10). The supporters of the theory also displayed a great pertinacity, reformulating the theory at their own convenience with the object of dodging the attacks. Thus, the paternity of the Gothic was transferred to the Visigoths, or Spain was turned into the birthplace of the 'Old Gothic' (Romanesque).³⁸ The result was a prolonged survival of the theory that can be illustrated by the fact that the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* defended the Islamic-Spanish origin of the Gothic in all the editions from 1778 to 1848. On other matters, it is quite surprising that the Spaniards were credited with the creation of such an admired style as the Gothic, especially in a Europe plagued with prejudices against Spain, and which denied her – according to the Black Legend – any artistic genius. And it is still more surprising that the Spaniards, so self-conscious of that European disdain, did not know the existence of this theory.³⁹ Leaving paradoxes aside, the thesis of an Arab origin of the Gothic

³⁷ James Bentham, *The History and Antiquities of the Conventual and Cathedral Church at Ely*, Cambridge: Printed at the University Press, 1771, 37. There were several other attempts to write a history of medieval architecture in the antiquarian circle at Cambridge, but only Bentham's was published. It is to be noted that James Essex, another famous member of this circle, also wrote an unpublished history of Gothic architecture in which he rejected the Arab origin of the style (BL Add. Mss. 6771, 41 and 56).

³⁸ For the Visigothic thesis see Warburton, *Works of Alexander Pope*, and Richard Brown, *Sacred Architecture*, London: Fisher, Son, & Co., 1845, 72-74. For Spain as the birthplace of the Romanesque see Henry Hallam, *View of the State of Europe during the Middle Ages*, London: John Murray, 1818, 506.

³⁹ The claim that the Spaniards did not know the thesis of the Spanish origin of the Gothic is valid for the eighteenth century, whose sources I have researched exhaustively. In this century, there were several authors that knew the Arab theory of the Gothic, but none of them mentioned the possibility that the stylistic transfer could have taken place in Spain by the imitation of Islamic buildings by Christian architects, or that the Gothic had spread from Spain to the rest of Europe (as it was argued by many Europeans). My knowledge of Spanish sources from the nineteenth century is not exhaustive (although not deficient), so the claim that the Spaniards did not know then the Islamic-Spanish theory is based rather on a general impression. In any case, if the theory was known, it was just in isolated cases and without

played a crucial role in the understanding of Spanish medieval architecture. It was because of this thesis that the artistic exchange between Christians and Muslims first attracted interest, a point of view that still fascinates many scholars today. The theory of an Islamic and Spanish origin of the Gothic also became the catalyst of cultural constructions regarding the oppositions between Western and 'Oriental' identities, Spain and Europe, Christianity and Islam, and the Middle Ages and Classical Antiquity. These cultural constructions, many of them highly prejudiced, continued to condition the study of Spanish medieval art and architecture, both by national and foreign scholars, even after the theory of the Islamic-Spanish origin of the Gothic was abandoned. From this point of view, the manuscript of Thomas Pitt deserves also to be rescued from oblivion as the prelude to the fascinating and controversial process of ideological manipulation that has underpinned, ever since, the study of medieval art and architecture of Spain.

Matilde Mateo is assistant professor in the Department of Art and Music Histories, Syracuse University. Her research focuses on the ideological and visual

great impact, given its null dissemination. An especial case is that of J.M. Inclán Valdés (*Apuntes para la historia de la arquitectura, y observaciones sobre la que se distingue con la denominación de gótica*, Madrid: Ibarra, 1833, 53-68), who seems to attribute, although in an indirect way, the invention of the Gothic to the Spaniards, arguing that the Gothic style appeared in Spain earlier than in other European countries, while also defending the genesis of the style in the Near East. Inclán Valdés, however, does not consider the possibility that Spain transmitted the Gothic to other European countries, nor that the style was created by the imitation of Islamic architecture in the Iberian Peninsula. His thesis is a compromise solution between the Arab theory in which the models were the buildings of the Holy Land, and his desire to refute that Spain had learned the Gothic style from other European countries. In his opinion, the Spaniards begun to receive beneficial eastern influences even before the Moorish invasion of Spain, thanks to trade with the Near East since the times of the Phoenicians. This eastern influence was prolonged, in his view, by the Moorish invasion and the Spanish participation in the Crusades.

For more information about the Spanish interest in the Gothic during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries see my article, 'Medievalism and Social Reform at the Academy of San Fernando in Spain (1759-1808)', *Studies in Medievalism*, 9, 1997, 123-147, where there is abundant bibliographic information. See also Nieves Panadero Peropadre, *Los estilos medievales*; the various studies by María Ángeles Sanchez de León Fernández, *El arte medieval y la Real Academia de San Fernando*, Tesis Doctoral, Universidad Complutense, Madrid, 1995; by the same author, 'La Edad Media y los discursos de arquitectos de la Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando', *Academia*, 1997, 301-343; Isabel Ordieres Díez, *Historia de la restauración monumental en España (1835-1935)*, Madrid: Ministerio de Cultural, Dirección General de Bellas Artes y de Conservación y Restauración de Bienes Culturales, Instituto de Conservación y Restauración de Bienes Culturales, 1995; Ignacio González Varas Ibáñez, *Restauración Monumental en España durante el siglo XIX*, Valladolid: Ambito, 1996; and José Enrique García Melero, *Las catedrales góticas en la España de la Ilustración: la incidencia del Neoclasicismo en el gótico*, Madrid: Ediciones Encuentro, 2001.

conceptualization of Gothic architecture after the Middle Ages, and on the construction of a national image of Spain in the historiography of Spanish medieval art and architecture. She is the author of *El Pórtico de la Gloria en la Inglaterra Victoriana: La invención de una obra maestra* (Madrid, 1993).

Email: mmmateo@syr.edu



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/)