

Breaking the Myth: Toledo Cathedral on the International Stage

Review of:

Toledo Cathedral: Building Histories in Medieval Castile by Tom Nickson, University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania University Press, 2015, 304 pp., 55 col. illus., 86 b.&w. illus., \$89.95 Hardcover, ISBN: 978-0-271-06645-5; \$39.95 Paperback, ISBN: 978-0-271-06646-2

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In 1865, the British historian of architecture George Edmund Street (1824-1881) confessed in his *Some Account of Gothic Architecture in Spain* that he was not expecting to see any example of the great Gothic architecture of the thirteenth century in his first trip to that country until his way back home, when he could set his eyes again on the cathedrals of Chartres, Notre-Dame of Paris, or Amiens. This assumption, however, was shattered when he visited Toledo Cathedral for the first time because this church, to his surprise and in his own words, was 'an example of the pure vigorous Gothic of the thirteenth century', and 'the equal in some respects of any of the great French churches.' As he admitted, Toledo Cathedral was a startling and pleasant discovery that led him to declare: 'I hardly know how to express my astonishment that such a building should be so little known [among my compatriots].'¹ One has to wonder what would have been Street's reaction should he have learned that, despite his account and praise of Toledo Cathedral, it would take the astounding length of time of one hundred and fifty years for that gap in knowledge to be filled?

Indeed, it has only been recently, in 2015, that a comprehensive monograph in English of Toledo Cathedral has been published. This milestone in the knowledge of Spanish gothic architecture, and arguably of gothic art and architecture in general, is the ground-breaking book by Tom Nickson, *Toledo Cathedral: Building Histories in Medieval Castile* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015). Numerous reviews of *Toledo Cathedral* have been published ever since exalting, and rightly so, its masterful analysis of the problems, wealth of information, rigorous research, and the breadth of its scope.² But the relevance of

¹ George Edmund Street, *Some Account of Gothic Architecture in Spain*, London: John Murray, 1865, 232-33.

² For previous reviews of this book see Henry Kamen, 'Gothic Glory: Tales from the Monumental Cathedral of Toledo', *Times Literary Supplement*, May 20, 2016, 13; review by Walter Cahn in *Choice*, June 2016, 1468-69; Christopher Howse, 'Sacred Mysteries: In Toledo, the very Stone where the Virgin Mary stood', *The Telegraph*, August 6, 2016, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/opinion/2016/08/06/sacred-mysteries-in-toledo-the-very-stone-where-the-virgin-mary/>; Cynthia Robinson, 'Nickson, Toledo Cathedral', *The Medieval*

Nickson's study goes beyond that of providing excellent and sweeping information about a poorly known cathedral. From the point of view of the historiography of art and architecture, Nickson's monograph marks a necessary, subversive, and radical turning point in the study of Spanish gothic architecture. And it does so not only because it employs, as we shall see, a highly-updated methodology, but more importantly because that methodology allowed Nickson to break a centuries-old myth about Spanish gothic buildings regarding their relevance within the international frame of European gothic architecture.

The construction of the myth

The myth in question argues that Spanish gothic buildings are just copies or adaptations of foreign models, or that they were designed by foreign architects. In a historiography that has been dominated by stylistic and national taxonomies focused on the creation of original models and schools, this indictment about Spanish buildings had, as it is to be expected, disastrous repercussions for their study. First, because it placed them in a position of dependence, and thus of inferiority, with regard to French, English, and German monuments. And secondly, because that position implied that Spanish buildings did not have an intrinsic interest of their own, but one just extrinsic and limited to their relationship to established canonical models. This myth, shared by European, American, and Spanish scholars alike, has had an extraordinary persistence and ubiquity, thus acquiring a validity which has hardly ever been called into question, but whose damaging consequences for the study of the Spanish buildings from the gothic period can still be felt today and should not be underestimated.

The consequential indifference towards the gothic architecture of Spain brought about by this myth, as well as the significance of Nickson's study per se, are highlighted by the fact that his book is not just the first monograph on Toledo Cathedral in English, which is not a small breakthrough in itself, but by the fact that it is actually the first comprehensive scholarly monograph of *any* Spanish gothic building ever published in English.³ Without dismissing the importance of the novel

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<https://scholarworks.iu.edu/journals/index.php/tmr/article/view/22564>; review by Charlotte A. Stanford, in *Mediavistik*, vol. 29, 2016, 537-540; review by Danya Crites, *Speculum*, vol. 92, No.2, April 2017, 556-58; Elisa A. Foster. 'Toledo Cathedral: Building Histories in Medieval Castile', *CAA Reviews*, July 20, 2017,

<http://www.caareviews.org/reviews/3020#.WZy36SiGNPY>.

³ This lack of monographs on Spanish gothic buildings is similar in other languages with the notable exception of Henrik Karge, *Die Kathedrale von Burgos und die spanische Architektur des 13. Jahrhunderts: Französische Hochgotik in Kastilien and Leon*, Berlin: Bebr.Mann, 1989.

There are a few books on specific Spanish gothic buildings in English but none of them can be considered a comprehensive and rigorous monograph. One of them is Ralph Adams Cram, *The Cathedral of Palma de Mallorca; an Architectural Study*, Cambridge, Massachusetts:

and abundant information provided by Nickson's study about Toledo Cathedral, which will be analyzed later, his remarkable and unusual display of appreciation of a Spanish gothic monument deserves further commentary and analysis because, for the first time, it is argued that this cathedral has an intrinsic interest of its own. Moreover, Nickson's study reverses the traditional relationship of dependence and inferiority of the Spanish gothic buildings with regard to their European counterparts by demonstrating that Toledo Cathedral is not only their equal, as Street had claimed before him, but also, in some respects, even more interesting than them, and, in any case, a crucial monument in the European panorama of gothic architecture.

Nickson himself is aware of the myth that Spanish gothic architecture lacked an originality of its own, and in fact he is intentionally reacting against it. He traces this tradition back to Bernard Bevan's *History of Spanish Architecture* (London: Batsford, 1938), which argued that the history of Spanish architecture consisted 'largely of tracing foreign influences and recording the story of their "naturalization"', more poetically expressed as a history in which 'foreign waves of influence break upon the shore, recede, and leave their impress'.⁴ Nickson blames twentieth-century historiographical methodology for perpetuating this myth, exposing the anachronism inherent in the assumption that medieval architects had the same opportunity as architectural historians to compare buildings through photographs. He also questions the concept of stylistic influence as something inevitable, arguing that the patrons and architects were not 'passive recipients, victims of an unavoidable influence', but were 'for the most part, informed, connected, cosmopolitan individuals with distinct tastes and skills, responsive to objects, buildings, and ideas from an extraordinarily varied range of sources, who actively negotiated the space between their own aspirations and that which artists

The Mediaeval Academy of America, 1932, which consists mostly of photographs and drawings with a short introduction of thirteen pages. This book is probably related to the commission by The Mediaeval Academy of America of a series of photographs in 1928 of the cathedral of Palma de Mallorca by Thomas Tilerson Waterman, and printed by John O. Brostrup, which are kept at the Library of Congress, in Washington DC. The other monographic studies available in English about Spanish gothic cathedrals are by Spanish authors, and cannot be considered academic studies but rather guides to the monument and its contents, including much more than their gothic fabrics: Manuel Ayala López, *The Cathedral of Burgos: Historical Notes, Tracery Sketch, Naves, Choir, Cloisters, and other Artistic Treasures*, trans. by Jaime Piñeiro, Burgos: Ediciones Aldecoa, 1955; Máximo Gómez Rascón, *León Cathedral: Glass and Faith*, trans. by Gordon Keitch, León: Edilesa, 1996; and Luis Martínez Montiel and Alfredo J. Morales, *The Cathedral of Seville*, London: Scala Publishers, 1999. It must be noted that Ayala and Gómez are canons from the cathedral chapter, and that whereas the guides on Burgos and Seville are mostly descriptive, that on León attempts to provide some interpretation and analysis following the understanding of the Gothic by Otto von Simson.

⁴ Nickson, *Toledo Cathedral*, 5-6, quoting from Bevan, *Spanish Architecture*, 14.

and materials made possible.⁵ Without questioning these arguments, it must be added, however, that although that traditional historiographical methodology played an important role in sending Toledo Cathedral into oblivion, it certainly was not the only reason. Bevan was in fact following a much older tradition, one in which the Spaniards had been cast as a nation incapable of creating any architecture of their own. Since this present review is being published in a journal devoted to the historiography of art, perhaps it may be of interest to explore this problem in order to gain more perspective about the aforementioned myth, as well as a better assessment of the transcendence of Nickson's study.

The belief that Spanish architecture had been designed by foreign architects or following foreign styles and models can be traced back at least to seventeenth and eighteenth-century France, when it was argued that the most important architectural monuments of Spain from the early modern period had been designed by Italian or French architects, a view that included, for instance, the ridiculous claim that the Renaissance palace of El Escorial, designed by the Spanish architects Juan Bautista de Toledo and Juan de Herrera, was in fact a French monument.⁶ This view was sealed by the *Encyclopédie Méthodique*, the expanded and revised version of Diderot's and D'Alambert's *Encyclopédie*, in which the entry on Spain stated that her architecture did not offer 'a piece to be cited as a model', was missing a beauty that would reveal 'the genius of an architect, and the taste of a nation', and was thus inferior to that of her neighbours.⁷ The fact that the entry did not name a single Spanish building or architect, while including names of painters and literary authors, hammered that message home, creating the impression that the country did not have any monuments worth of mention, let alone of further study. It is important to note that this absence could not be blamed on ignorance, because Spanish buildings were often described and illustrated in travel narratives. It was, in short, a deliberate and prejudiced view that had indeed little to do with Spanish architecture, and was rather the product of the long-lasting infamous reputation that the country, as a whole, had gained in Europe during the early modern period. Known as The Black Legend, this traditional negative perception of the Spaniards portrayed them as uncivilized Catholic bigots, irrational, temperamental, lazy, and,

⁵ Nickson, *Toledo Cathedral*, 6.

⁶ Fernando Marías, 'Cuando El Escorial era francés: problemas de interpretación y apropiación de la arquitectura española', *Anuario del Departamento de Historia y Teoría del Arte (U.A.M.)*, vol. 17, 2005, 21-32.

⁷ 'Quant à l'architecture, quoique les marbres soient prodigués, il n'y a peut-être pas un morceau qu'on puisse citer comme un modèle: mais si on n'y voit point ces beautés mâles & hardies, qui décèlent le génie d'un architecte & le goût d'une nation', il y règne je ne sais quel air de coquetterie dans les ornemens & dans la parure, qui sympatise bien peu avec cette imposante majesté qu'on voudroit dans les temples.' M. Masson de Morvilliers, 'Espagne', *Encyclopédie méthodique, ou par ordre de matières*, Paris: Panckoucke and Liège: Plomteux. vol. 1, 1782, 561. See also 568 for Spain's inferiority with regard to her neighbours. All translations from French are by the reviewer.

more importantly for our purpose, lacking any single contribution to the progress of sciences and arts.⁸

It is against this adverse judgement of Spanish architecture in general that we have to frame the more specific treatment of Spanish gothic architecture in the historiography in English, a treatment that can be described as a condemnation at its best and as an oversight as its worst. Whereas the gothic architecture of other countries such as France, Great Britain and Germany, have been the object of numerous monographs and surveys in English --including individual buildings and specific periods-- the gothic architecture of Spain has received very little attention. It is somehow bewildering that the only survey in English is still the aforementioned Street's *Some Account of Gothic Architecture in Spain* (London, 1865, reprint. 1869).⁹ Furthermore, this survey is not strictly speaking a monograph on Spanish gothic architecture, as the title seems to imply, but a mixture of travel book and scholarly analysis of Spanish Christian art and architecture from the Middle Ages, which paid equal attention to the Romanesque architecture and other arts such as monumental sculpture, painting, and liturgical objects. Despite the fact that it was not a monograph on Spanish gothic architecture, Street's study has been considered as such, praised as 'one of the most remarkable pieces of architectural research ever carried out', whose excellence 'has indeed been a bar to any fresh covering of the same ground'.¹⁰ Hailed as the 'best work on the subject', the validity of Street's study was also prolonged well into the twentieth-century thanks to a revised edition in 1914 (reprint. 1969, 1980) by the American scholar Georgiana Goddard King.¹¹ Yet

⁸ For more information on this topic see Julián Juderías, *La Leyenda Negra y la verdad histórica; contribución al estudio del concepto de España en Europa, de las causas de este concepto y de la tolerancia religiosa y política en los países civilizados*, Madrid: Rev. de Arch., Bibl. y Museos, 1914, and by the same author, in a revised and augmented edition under the title *La Leyenda Negra. Estudios acerca del concepto de España en el extranjero*, Barcelona: Editorial Araluce, 1917; William S. Maltby, *The Black Legend in England; The Development of Anti-Spanish Sentiment in England, 1558-1660*, London: Duke University Press, 1971; Joseph P. Sánchez, *Comparative Colonialism, the Spanish Black Legend, and Spain's Legacy in the United States: Perspectives on American Latino Heritage and Our National History*, Albuquerque, New Mexico: Spanish Colonial Research Center, National Park Service, 2013, 15-24. For more specific information about The Black Legend and imperialism see Margaret R. Greer, Walter D. Mignolo, and Maureen Quilligan, eds, *Rereading The Black Legend: The discourses of Religious and Racial Difference in the Renaissance Empires*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2007.

⁹ Spanish gothic has not received much attention by other European and American scholars either. There is only one study in German: August Mayer, *Gotik in Spanien*, Leipzig: Klinkhardt & Biermann, 1928; and two in French: Élie Lambert, *L'Art gothique en Espagne aux XIIe et XIIIe siècles*, Paris: Henri Laurens, 1931; and Pierre Lavedan, *L'Architecture gothique religieuse en Catalogne, Valence et Baléares*, Paris: Laurens, 1935.

¹⁰ John Harvey, *The Cathedrals of Spain*, London: B.T. Batsford, 1957, 7-8.

¹¹ There is also a Spanish edition: George Edmund Street, *La arquitectura gótica en España*,

one has to wonder, given all this praise, why Street's study did not spark further interest in Spanish gothic architecture, especially since that has not been the case with the Spanish Romanesque, which became, thanks to *Some Account of Gothic Architecture*, the object of several studies in later decades, especially by American scholars.

In order to understand this paradox, it is necessary to take into account another very influential, but nowadays forgotten, Victorian architectural historian: James Fergusson (1808-1886), author of the first survey of world architecture in English, *The Illustrated Handbook of Architecture* (London, 1855).¹² This survey went through numerous re-editions and updates during the second half of the nineteenth-century in Great Britain and the United States, attaining, through them, a considerable clout with far-reaching dissemination and impact on both sides of the Atlantic. Fergusson was a contemporary of Street, and they knew each other's works. Their views of Spanish gothic architecture were, in fact, deeply interwoven. Despite their interdependence, however, they reached opposite conclusions due to their antithetical personalities and, more importantly, their contrasting attitudes towards architecture. Nevertheless, those differences did not detract from each other's impact on the doomed fate of Spanish gothic architecture in the Anglophone historiography. On the contrary, they complemented each other, thus ratifying, rather than questioning, that unfortunate outcome. A discussion, if only brief, of their respective approaches will help to better understand this process.

Fergusson valued above all originality and had the outmost contempt for what he called 'the monkey styles', by which he meant those inspired in past styles, such as the Renaissance, Neoclassicism or the Gothic Revival. In the particular case of the history of gothic architecture, what mattered to him the most was the novel contribution made by each European country to its development. It was an approach that pitted every nation in mutual rivalry through constant comparisons of the design of their respective buildings. Within this competitive frame, his portrayal of the Spanish contribution could not have been more troubling. Revealing the vigorous prevalence at that time of the harmful aforementioned myth about Spanish architecture, Fergusson insisted on proving how the gothic buildings of Spain had been inspired by foreign models, a premise that led him to conclude that they had not made any contribution to the development of the gothic style.

Another important and very controversial feature discussed by Fergusson was the possible Islamic influence on Spanish gothic buildings. In his opinion,

trans. Román Loredó, Madrid: Editorial Saturnino Vallejo, 1929. The quote is from George Edmund Street, *Some Account of Gothic Architecture in Spain*, ed. by Georgiana Goddard King, New York: B. Blom, 1914, xi.

¹² For more information on James Fergusson, his role in the dissemination of Spanish gothic architecture, and the neglect of Spanish gothic architecture in the Anglophone world, see Matilde Mateo, 'La Frontera del Gótico: James Fergusson y la arquitectura gótica española', *Quintana*, No. 13, 2014, 79-99.

Spanish monuments displayed a pervasive Islamic influence, which could be observed in the great gothic cathedrals of Castile and, above all, in the Mudéjar churches.¹³ On this topic he argued that the Mudéjar churches had the potential to have been turned into a worthy alternative to the northern gothic, but that this opportunity did not materialize because the Spaniards were neither 'an inventive or an architectural people', nor had they ever showed any symptom of those qualities. Moreover, argued Fergusson, they were victims of such religious bigotry, a common charge in The Black Legend, that they were unable of appreciating the fine qualities of the Islamic styles.¹⁴

Fergusson never visited Spain and his harsh judgements were based, as he himself acknowledged and bitterly complained, on little knowledge of the matter due to the paucity of accurate drawings, ground-plans and detailed information about the design of the buildings. Despite his criticisms, and somehow paradoxically, he found them worthy of attention and encouraged their further study. Street, who had already been inspecting the gothic architecture of other European countries all throughout his adult life, took upon himself that challenge. The result was *Some Account of Gothic Architecture in Spain*, where he provided the kind of information that Fergusson was asking for.¹⁵

In contrast to Fergusson, Street's interest in the Gothic was deeply personal, fuelled by his profession and religious inclinations. He was a very devout Christian and a prominent architect of the High Victorian Gothic Revival, who, like many others, designed in that style in the belief that the Gothic was the Christian style par excellence, and thus the one that could best fit Christian rituals and promote the Christian faith. Unlike other practitioners of the Gothic Revival, however, Street did not have a nationalistic approach to the Gothic. In his view, it was incongruous to limit the models for the Gothic Revival to British examples, since for him the style was as international as Christianity itself. The medieval Gothic, he argued, knew no political borders, and certainly not the borders of the different European states as they were laid out in the nineteenth-century.¹⁶

Street was not in search of the Spanish contribution to the development of gothic architecture either. Instead, he was just looking for more examples of the gothic style and the deep Christianity that inspired them. In fact, an important part of Street's agenda was to demonstrate the power of medieval Christianity by

¹³ Mudéjar is a controversial stylistic term which is applied to Spanish art and architecture for Christian or Jewish use which exhibits Islamic features. Fergusson actually did not use the term Mudéjar, which had not been coined yet, but Moresco.

¹⁴ Jame Fergusson, *The Illustrated Handbook of Architecture: being a Concise and Popular Account of the Different Styles prevailing in all Ages and all Countries*, London: John Murray, vol.2, 839 and 842.

¹⁵ One indication that this may have been the case is that Street used, by his own admission, the same scale for the ground plans of Spanish buildings as that used by Fergusson in his survey.

¹⁶ Street, *Some Account*, v-vi.

arguing that it had triumphed even in a country like Spain, where Islam had had a lengthy and powerful presence from 711 until 1492. Finding buildings that were of a gothic style as pure as those of France, Great Britain, and Germany, would, in his view, prove that proposition. One way to do this was to downplay the influence of Islamic art on the gothic buildings of Spain which had been so highly praised by Fergusson. 'I fully expected when I first went to Spain', Street confessed, 'that I should find evidences of this more or less everywhere'; but to his surprise, and one could add relief, he found that 'these evidences of Moorish influence upon Christian art in Spain are ... rather insignificant, and serve on the whole to prove the fact, that Christianity was nearly as pure here as it was anywhere'.¹⁷ In Street's opinion, that evidence was limited to just small portions of Moorish ornament, 'introduced by the Christian workman evidently as a curiosity, and as it were to show that he knew how to do it, but did not choose to do much of it'.¹⁸ This finding was not surprising, he added, given the religious enmity between Moors and Christians, which would logically have prevented them copying from each other.¹⁹ Although Street's rejection of the Islamic traits, whichever way we may want to define them, was both forced further and motivated by his personal beliefs, it nevertheless set the foundation for another powerful myth with important historiographical consequences: that the Islamic and Christian architecture of Spain were two different schools which hardly intersected with each other, and should thus be studied independently.

The second strategy employed by Street to prove the purity of the Spanish gothic buildings was to demonstrate that they were not different from those of France, Germany or Great Britain, whose Christian character was unquestionable. In order to do so, Street often emphasized the similarities of Spanish buildings with European monuments, or ascribed them to foreign architects, especially French and, for the later gothic period, German. It is important to underline that Street's insistence on the Spanish dependence on foreign models was not the result of The Black Legend, nor did it share the negative connotations that it had for Fergusson. First of all, as a practitioner of the Gothic Revival, he did not value originality above everything else, neither did he share Fergusson's aversion to copying older styles. Street did not believe either that the Spaniards lacked architectural inventiveness, and indeed he credited the Catalonian school of the fourteenth and fifteenth-century as displaying features that were exclusive to the Iberian Peninsula.²⁰ Furthermore, his understanding of the gothic as a transnational style made the issue of national specificities and contributions rather moot. His purpose was instead to find uniformity rather than difference, and more specifically to demonstrate that 'whereas generally men credited Spain with forming an exception to a general rule

¹⁷ Street, *Some Account*, 443.

¹⁸ Street, *Some Account*, 442.

¹⁹ Street, *Some Account*, 443.

²⁰ Street, *Some Account*, 429.

... on the whole, she did nothing of the sort'.²¹ Besides, borrowing models from other parts of Europe, or hiring foreign architects, he insisted, was a common medieval practice, and thus should not be dismissed as a shortcoming.²²

For Street what really mattered was not so much the nationality of the architects, or the Spanish contribution to the development of the gothic style, but rather whether the buildings exemplified and illustrated the principles of that style; and in this respect he concluded that Spanish buildings were as worthy of study as those in France and other European countries.²³ He also encouraged further studies, asserting that he was 'more than satisfied with the purity and beauty of the Christian architecture of Spain', and that he had 'no hesitation in the advice which I give to others, to follow in my track and to make good the deficiencies in my investigations, of which I am so thoroughly conscious.'²⁴ A call, as it has been already pointed out, that had no takers.

The reason is that despite Street's sincere admiration of Spanish gothic buildings, his constant comparisons with European monuments and assessments of European influences ended up, ironically, providing an unintended support to the old myth that the Spanish buildings did not have any intrinsic interest of their own. A key factor for this apparent paradox was that Street's unusual transnational approach, by which he disregarded issues of national hierarchies and abilities, was completely nullified by the widespread belief in the nineteenth-century that architecture, and especially the Gothic, was the most powerful and truthful expression of national identity. One of the most enthusiastic supporters of this view was, as we have seen, Fergusson, who, in the new and enlarged edition of his survey, renamed as *A History of Architecture in All Countries* (London, 3 vols. 1865-67), provided it with further support by incorporating the new argument that architecture was the best tool to determine the racial roots and composition of a given nation.²⁵ The chapter dedicated to Spanish medieval architecture in this edition, published in 1867, incorporated Street's many findings and judgements on the topic, such as, for instance, Street's denial of the pervasive Islamic elements, or the interest of the Catalonian monuments. But he did not agree with Street's claim that the country had 'genuine Spanish Gothic churches'.²⁶ On the contrary, he manipulated Street's comparisons to illustrate the ineptitude of the Spaniards for architectural design, and to develop, even further, the old negative myth.

At the hand of Fergusson, the well-intended European connections argued by Street became the proof that Spanish gothic architecture 'was not indigenous, but borrowed from other nations, and consequently practised far more capriciously

²¹ Street, *Some Account*, 445-46.

²² Street, *Some Account*, 446.

²³ Street, *Some Account*, 420.

²⁴ Street, *Some Account*, 6.

²⁵ On this issue see Mateo, 'La frontera del gótico', 77-99.

²⁶ Street, *Some Account*, 404.

than if it had been elaborated by the Spaniards themselves'.²⁷ According to Fergusson, as soon as the Spaniards could build large edifices, they 'fell into the arms of the French architects, who had advanced far beyond them in the adaption of classical materials to Christian purposes.'²⁸ 'When tired of the French styles', he continued, 'they enlisted the Germans to assist them in supplying their wants, and Italy also contributed her influence, though less directly than the other two'.²⁹ Furthermore, Fergusson argued that the importation of foreign styles in Spain was singular, and more pathetic, because the Spaniards really loved architecture and were unable, despite that love, of producing a single style of their own.³⁰ All the evidence of the lack of architectural inventiveness of the Spaniards demonstrated, in Fergusson's opinion, that the Spaniards were Semites, a race which in his view had the least architectural inclination.³¹ This time around Fergusson was not just echoing The Black Legend, but actually expanding it with a new, powerful pseudo-scientific argument, which illustrates the extent of the identification of national identity, now understood in racial terms, with architecture.

The perpetuation of the myth

Despite their different approaches and attitudes towards gothic architecture and Spain, the truth of the matter is that Fergusson and Street concurred in emphasizing the debt of the Spanish monuments to European models. The fact that they targeted different readerships, Fergusson's becoming, thanks to its ample dissemination, the reference work that introduced the neophytes to the history of architecture, while Street remained the authoritative source for those more specifically interested in Spanish or gothic architecture, ensured that the myth reached not just a wider audience, but all possible interested readers for many decades to come.

The impact of the view of Spanish gothic architecture constructed by both scholars in subsequent histories of architecture is very noticeable. It is easy to trace Fergusson's prejudiced portrayal of the Spaniards and their architecture in the revised edition by Wyatt Papworth of the popular *Encyclopaedia of Architecture*, (London, 1891), by Joseph Gwilt, which relegated Spanish gothic to the less important category of 'imitative gothic', in contraposition to the most highly

²⁷ James Fergusson, *A History of Architecture in all Countries: from the Earliest Time to the Present Day*, London: John Murray, 1867, vol. 2, 119.

²⁸ Fergusson, *History of Architecture*, vol. 2, 119-120.

²⁹ Fergusson, *History of Architecture*, vol. 2, 119.

³⁰ Fergusson, *History of Architecture*, vol. 2, 120.

³¹ The blatant prejudicial view of Spaniards exhibited by Fergusson was very likely further influenced by Henry Thomas Buckle, *History of Civilization in England*, London: J.W Parker and Son, 2 vols., 1857, 1861. In this work, Buckle revitalizes the negative image of the Spaniards endowing them with new pseudo-scientific arguments.

regarded 'original gothic'.³² Almost at the same time, the professor from Harvard University, Charles Herbert Moore, author of *Development and Character of Gothic Architecture* (London and New York, 1890, 2nd. ed. 1899), reinforced the lack of interest of the Spanish thirteenth century gothic buildings because of their dependence from French models. On one hand, he argued that this reliance was greater than in any other European Gothic.³³ And on the other, he explained that the Spanish rendition of French principles was so deficient that Spanish buildings could not be classified as gothic at all.³⁴ Like Fergusson, Moore attributed the architectural incapacity of the Spaniards to their unfavourable racial constitution. And in tune with the image of the Spaniards constructed by The Black Legend, Moore believed that the Spaniards were 'the least advanced in those conditions of political and social organization, and of intellectual and moral life, which favours the development of the fine arts'.³⁵

Later on, this perception of Spanish gothic architecture as being an inferior stylistic province of France was also reinforced in the third volume of Russell Sturgis' *A History of Architecture* (Garden City, New York, 1915-17). Published posthumously after Sturgis' death, its author Arthur Lincoln Frothingham took the unusual decision of placing the gothic architecture of Spain not in the last chapter but immediately after that of France. Far from being a sign of appreciation, the reason behind this organization was, according to Frothingham, that 'the influence of France was more direct and continuous and proceeded from a greater variety of French provincial and monastic sources than was to be the case with any other country.'³⁶ The only interest of Spanish buildings was that they illustrated and reinforced the supremacy and impact of French gothic architecture.

As it has been argued so far, the negative image of the Spaniards constructed by The Black Legend, in combination with the identification of national identity and architecture, played as fundamental a role as the historiographical methodology in the demise of Spanish gothic buildings. Bevan was not thus the beginning of a

³² Joseph Gwilt, *An Encyclopaedia of Architecture, Historical, Theoretical and Practical*, ed. by Wyatt Papworth, London: Longmans and Green, 1891, 252, and 965.

³³ Charles Herbert Moore, *Development and Character of Gothic Architecture*, London and New York: Macmillan and Co., 1890, 198-99.

³⁴ Moore, *Development and Character*, 196. Moore's book was a passionate apology of French gothic architecture. In his view, the buildings of the gothic period from England, Germany, Italy and Spain fell short in comparison with the French, reaching the conclusion that only the latter could be considered strictly gothic. However, there is a great difference in the way Moore argued the inferiority of non-French gothic buildings. While he admitted that England possessed some genius and creativity that resulted in worthy variations of the French model, he denied that capability to Germany, Italy and Spain, making his criticism of Spain the most vicious of all.

³⁵ Moore, *Development and Character*, 314.

³⁶ Russell Sturgis, *A History of Architecture*, ed. by Arthur Lincoln Frothingham, Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1915, vol. 1, 234.

trend, but the inheritor of a centuries-old myth. It is not difficult to detect the echo of The Black Legend in some of Bevan's comments about Spain, such as that 'its ideas of civilization were nearly all imported', or that 'Spain, in fact, was open to the influence of all neighbouring peoples more advanced than herself.'³⁷ He constantly reinforced the notion that Spanish monuments were always inspired in foreign models because that was the assumed *modus operandi* in the country. At a time in which the study of architecture revolved around the creation of original models, Spanish monuments did not seem to offer much interest, and this explains why Bevan's study, like Street's, did not have any followers and it still remains the only general history of Spanish architecture in English until today.

The only other work in English on Spanish gothic architecture, John Harvey's *The Cathedrals of Spain* (London, 1957), covers, as the title indicates, a much smaller ground. Like his predecessors, Harvey insists on the foreign influence and architects, in the design of Spanish cathedrals, once again crediting this phenomenon to the national character of the Spaniards. He also incorporates some of the ideas previously put forward by the Spanish scholar Vicente Lampérez y Romea, who in his *Historia de la arquitectura cristiana en España* (Madrid, 1908), who had endorsed the myth but with important modifications that conceded a more active role for the Spanish architects. If those foreign influences were so readily adopted, claimed Lampérez, it was because the Spaniards were already savvy architects with enough experience to successfully absorb the new models. Furthermore, he added, those foreign styles were not just copied but became naturalized with the incorporation of typical Spanish solutions.³⁸ But Harvey turned Lampérez's arguments on their head, contending that the impact of the *genius loci* on imported styles and on foreign architects working in Spain, deemed their creations 'not pure specimens of the foreign style they represent'.³⁹ It must be added that this endurance of Street's and Fergusson's views illustrated by Papworth, Moore, Frothingham, Bevan, and Harvey, has not been limited to the English speaking world.⁴⁰

³⁷ Bevan, *Spanish Architecture*, xi.

³⁸ Vicente Lampérez y Romea, *Historia de la arquitectura cristiana en España en la Edad Medias según el estudio de los elementos y los monumentos*, Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1930, (1st in Madrid, 1908), vol. 1, 29, and 2, 409-10. Bevan was also familiar with Lampérez's work and his own poetic description of the influences as waves that leave an imprint was taken from Lampérez, and more specifically from Lampérez's well-known phrase, "The Art of Spain is alluvial" (Bevan, *Spanish Architecture*, xiv).

³⁹ Harvey, *Cathedrals of Spain*, 33.

⁴⁰ Some examples that illustrate this focus on the foreign influence in the study of Spanish gothic buildings are the conference on *Spanien und die Europäische Architektur der Gotick*, Georg-August Universität, Göttingen, 4-6 February 1994, (summary in Jan Klaus Philipp in *Kunstchronik*, 1994, 47: 681-85; Élie Faure, *History of Art*, Garden City, New York: Garden City Pub. Co., 1937 (1st ed. in French, in Paris, 1921-24) 368, insisted on the Spanish incapacity to express their collective soul in architecture, and that Spanish gothic

How did Toledo Cathedral fare in this grim panorama? Not very well. It is somehow surprising that the cathedrals of Girona and Palma de Mallorca have enjoyed more popularity than the great thirteenth-century cathedrals of León, Burgos and Toledo.⁴¹ Once again, it is a product of the emphasis on originality, something that the Catalonian school could boast, but not the Castilian cathedrals of the thirteenth-century, whose designs do indeed incorporate many features that had been first developed in France. As Street put it, the fact that they 'were erected by French workmen and artists imported for the occasion', meant that the Spaniards could not claim their authorship, but only their ownership.⁴² In other words, they were considered basically French, an assessment that was often extended, because of them, to all the gothic architecture of Spain. Bevan was actually very explicit about the little interest of these three cathedrals in comparison with the Mudéjar churches or the Catalonian school, both of which offered some degree of difference with regard to other European Gothics, arguing that for this reason he made the chapter devoted to Burgos, León and Toledo shorter, and labelled it, quite significantly, 'French Gothic in Castile'.⁴³

Among the lack of interest outside Spain for these three Castilian cathedrals, that for Toledo is particularly striking given the facts that it is the Primate Church of Spain, that its treasure and furnishing are legendary magnificent, and last, but not least, that it has an extraordinary vast size. Moreover, Toledo has been often produced as an example of the Spanish incompetence for architectural ingenuity. Put in a crude way, anything good in the design of Toledo Cathedral, such as the inventive and elegant solution of the chevet, was considered French and thus could not be credited to the Spaniards, while those parts attributed to Spanish ingenuity were considered either as inferior versions of canonical gothic, i.e. the low elevation of the nave, or as not properly gothic at all due to Islamic elements in the design, i.e. cinquefoil arches in the triforium of the ambulatory. None of these judgements

architecture was a province of France; Henri Focillon, *The Art of the West in the Middle Ages: Romanesque and Gothic*, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1963 (1st. ed. in French, in Paris in 1938) also considered Spanish gothic a province of French Gothic, also arguing that the Catalonian School and the Castilian churches did not belong to Spain, but to the West. The implication of Focillon's view is that Spain did not belong to the West, and that the only value of the Spanish gothic buildings was because of their connection to those of France.

⁴¹ The popularity of Catalonian gothic architecture was fostered by Street's praise and Fergusson's endorsement of his opinion, which resulted in a few monographic publications, such as Cram's study of the cathedral of Palma de Mallorca mentioned in note 3, Lavedan's work on Catalonian religious architecture mentioned in note 9, and, more recently, James W. Millard, *Catalan Gothic Architecture: A Concise Guide to Gothic Cathedrals, Monasteries and Public Buildings in Catalonia*, Thornton-Cleveleys Lancashire: IBERTEXT, 2007, although it must be noted that this last work has reached a very limited dissemination.

⁴² Street, *Some Account*, 420 and 423.

⁴³ Bevan, *Spanish Architecture*, v.

could help to raise the profile of this cathedral outside Spain, nor to foster, despite Street's encouragement, its study by historians, given the value placed on originality, the preference for national taxonomies, and the enthronement of the French High Gothic as the ultimate paradigm for the style.

If devoting a monograph to Spanish gothic architecture would be in itself a very unusual step, to do so on Toledo Cathedral is an even more exceptional choice given its relative greater neglect. It also underlines how noteworthy and ground-breaking is Nickson's decision. He took up the torch from Street following some similar paths, such as bypassing national taxonomies, and embracing a holistic approach that treats the churches not just as architectural shells, but as spaces destined to religious performances, in which sculptural decoration, furnishings, and liturgical objects also play a relevant role. Nickson, however, not only took up the torch but also carried it further into new and thought provoking lines of inquiry that hopefully will be successful in sparking further interest in this cathedral and Spanish gothic architecture in general. To his impressive contributions, we turn now our attention.

The breaking of the myth

As it has already been noted but is worth repeating, Nickson not only has rescued from oblivion a magnificent church but has also related Toledo Cathedral to its counterparts in Europe on complete different premises. Crucial to this subversion of the status quo is his innovative and wide-ranging methodology, explained in the first part of the introduction to his book, which is a sort of manifesto outlining and providing a rationale for his ambitious goals. Instead of focussing on stylistic hierarchies and national taxonomies, Nickson's conceptual apparatus has at its centre the notions of network and interconnectedness. He conceives Toledo Cathedral as part of a multi-layered network that keeps expanding geographically. First, there is the network formed by the different manifestations of medieval art, that is, architecture, sculpture, furnishings and liturgical objects, as well as their manipulation in different rituals. The second network is constituted by the cathedral and its local environment, the city of Toledo in the first place, zooming out to incorporate the Iberian Peninsula. And finally, the last broadest network is the one formed by the art and architecture of Europe and beyond, to include North Africa, the eastern Mediterranean, and other parts of Asia.

His holistic approach treats the cathedral as a highly complex, multi-layered, and kaleidoscopic entity, in which the material elements such as architecture, sculpture, and furnishings, are as relevant as the aesthetic qualities of the space and its performative nature, and as the conceptualization of the cathedral in writing and other means. Nickson elaborates an integrated analysis that also includes the fourth dimension, that of time, or its *longue durée*, acknowledging that the cathedral is not stable and immovable, but dynamic, subjected to a constant process of

transformation. Although Nickson does not mention Nicola Carmelenghi in his study, he is arguing, like she did with regard to Saint Sophia in Istanbul, that the history of architecture cannot assume that there is one single building, which is generally identified with its original plan and construction, but an evolving monument, different at each point in time, whose true understanding can be only properly grasped through a diachronic approach.⁴⁴ Hence the importance of examining the modifications over time of fabric, furnishings, rituals, as well as of their conceptualization. Those modifications constitute key points of inflexion in the nature and history of the building, and are symptomatic of moments of cultural and historical crisis or change in which the building, once more, acquires a revitalized relevance. In other words, Nickson takes into account not just the inception of the cathedral in the thirteenth-century, but also the reception, perception, and transformation of the cathedral until its completion, when the vaulting was finalized in the late fourteenth-century. This is a very welcomed approach, much more nuanced and faithful to the reality of the cathedral than focusing solely on its original design, for it takes into account that architecture is reinterpreted, transformed and given new life after its original design or construction, and that limiting its study to the moment of its inception is like trying to understand a person by only looking at the DNA.

Within this diachronic approach Nickson also examines the ideological agency of art and architecture addressing issues of great relevance in the contemporary discourses of several disciplines: memory and the construction of an identity, in this case for Toledo Cathedral. Hence the apt subtitle of his book, *Building Histories in Medieval Castile*, because it interweaves the history of the building with the history built by the memories triggered by the cathedral, its contents, and the rituals in it performed. Memory is understood by him following well established theories in the fields of sociology and anthropology, and most famously by Pierre Nora and his *lieux de mémoire*, according to which memory is deliberate, fluid, selective, and with the purpose of clarifying, justifying, and legitimizing, the power structure of the time in which the memory is being formed.⁴⁵ Memory, thus understood, becomes an active process of producing history, rewriting it according to different circumstances, and establishing, at the same time, evolving identities in response to them. As Nickson rightly argues, memory is embodied in the cathedral of Toledo through the sacred topography of the fabric itself, through the tombs, reliquaries and sculptural decoration, and through the rituals performed in it. The combination of formal analysis and questions of memory, identity, and networks, succeeds in overcoming one of Nickson's

⁴⁴ Nicola Carmelenghi, 'The *Longue Durée* and the Life of Buildings', in *New Approaches to Medieval Architecture*, ed. by Robert Bork, William W. Clark, and Abby McGehee, Burlington, VT and Ferham, England: Ashgate, 2011, 11-20.

⁴⁵ For a summary of Nora's theories in English see Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*,' trans. Marc Roudebusch, *Representations*, 1989, 7-24.

concerns, namely the isolation of the history of medieval art and architecture from other disciplines, providing a study that is of interest to specialists in other fields within the humanities and social sciences.

The multi-layered network of networks, together with his new concerns about performativity, identity, and memory, allowed Nickson to place Toledo in the international stage on a complete different footing. He reverses the traditional approach of examining how other European buildings help to understand Toledo, claiming that since all medieval art and architecture of Europe is interconnected, the study of Toledo Cathedral will also provide valuable insights, which could not be attained otherwise, on many other monuments, such as the Great Mosque of Córdoba, Notre-Dame of Paris, or Westminster Abby. In other words, Toledo Cathedral is an essential piece of a very broad, international network. As Nickson aptly puts it, Toledo was not so much a fringe –as it had been traditionally considered to be– but a hinge. This way Nickson addresses once more his concern about the danger of isolation of the history of medieval architecture from other disciplines by broadening even further the potential audience for his study, from those interested in Spanish Christian medieval architecture, to those interested in medieval architecture and history in general, as well as in the Jewish and Islamic legacies.

It is refreshing and highly effective to see that Nickson frames the historical figures and events related to Toledo within relevant counterparts in Europe and beyond. For instance, the conquest of Toledo from the Muslims on 15 May, 1085, is positioned between two other notable takeovers of Islamic cities, such as the Norman invasion of Sicily, which had occurred fourteen years earlier, and the First Crusade, which took place fourteen years later. These two points of reference allowed him to assess the case of Toledo as ‘a near unprecedented opportunity for Christian patrons and artists to discover and possess a great Islamic city.’⁴⁶ Likewise, Bishop Rodrigo Ximenez de Rada of Toledo (1170-1247), the promoter of the gothic cathedral, is presented as a new Abbot Suger. This is just a small sample, for all throughout his study, as we shall see, there are evaluations of Toledo within the European context, noting all the ways in which it is unique, and the many excellent opportunities it provides, for this reason, to investigate new questions that will enhance our knowledge of the mechanisms inherent to the production of art and architecture of the Middle Ages.

Moving onto more specific methodological problems in the study of Toledo Cathedral, Nickson takes issue with the endless debates about terminology that mar so many historiographical efforts pertaining medieval Spain, especially among Spanish scholars. He considers it futile to discuss the adequacy of terms such as Castile, Spain, Iberia, Gothic, Islamic or Mudéjar, arguing that it ‘is to miss the point that they always refer to an imaginary and that they belong to a historiographic

⁴⁶ Tom Nickson, *Toledo Cathedral: Building Histories in Medieval Castile*, University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015, 4.

tradition that cannot simply be deleted away through “scare quotes” or the selection of another adjective’.⁴⁷ It is certainly a controversial opinion that downplays and oversimplifies the ideological implications regarding national identity of terms as Spain, Iberia and Castile, or what it is meant by Islamic. But it also has, in the opinion of this reviewer, an important element of truth, that in the field of historiography, they may perhaps be treated as conventional, neutral denominations such as, for instance, Gothic, which is clearly a misnomer but which nobody interprets as barbarian or the Whig political faction in the United Kingdom, two of the many meanings that supported the term Gothic in the past.

In the introduction Nickson also anticipates some of the main reasons that make Toledo unique within the European context. Firstly, because it offers the greatest break from local traditions than any other gothic building in Europe. Secondly, because its structural boldness and vast scale have few parallels in Europe during the whole Middle Ages, and was not matched in Spain itself until the cathedrals of Girona and Palma de Mallorca were built in the fourteenth and fifteenth-century. And thirdly, because it constitutes an extraordinary ensemble that combines a very ambitious architectural design, rich sculptural programs, an extensive and cosmopolitan treasury, and a diverse collection of liturgical and archival records. This ensemble, emphasizes Nickson, was greater than any other in Europe or the Mediterranean, in the thirteenth and fourteenth-century, including those of Saint Denis, San Marco in Venice, Westminster Abbey, Chartres, Amiens, Cologne or Prague.⁴⁸ This is not the end of Toledo’s exceptionality, and many more arguments are provided by Nickson throughout all his study.

He also includes a critical review of the sources about Toledo and its cathedral since the sixteenth century until today. Constructed itself as an engaging narrative, Nickson unfolds the fortune of the city and monument over the course of five centuries. There is one mistake, though, that needs correction: the *España artística y monumental* (Paris, 1842-50), a series of lithographs based on drawings by Jenaro Pérez Villamil, and accompanied by an explicative text by Patricio de la Escosura, was not, as Nickson states, sponsored by the state.⁴⁹ It was a private enterprise financed by the banker Marqués de la Resilla.

The introduction concludes with a narrative describing the procession of Corpus Christi and the cathedral of Toledo as it stands today. It takes a subjective point of view, trying to convey the impression that the building creates on a visitor, from the first glimpse of its exterior, to the itinerary through its interior, an account in which Nickson leaves aside technical and historiographic concerns, to focus instead on the emotional and visual impact. He certainly can afford this departure from academic impartiality, for the rest of the book is an impressive exercise of impeccable, facts-supported research, that will continue to expand the

⁴⁷ Nickson, *Toledo Cathedral*, 8.

⁴⁸ Nickson, *Toledo Cathedral*, 6.

⁴⁹ Nickson, *Toledo Cathedral*, 12.

transcendence of Toledo Cathedral within the European gothic art and architecture.

Toledo Cathedral on the international stage

Nickson unravels and demonstrates the relevance of Toledo Cathedral for the city, Spain, Europe, and beyond, in ten chapters followed by an epilogue, each one of which are written so that they can also be read independently. In them, Nickson explains the history of Toledo Cathedral, its significance and meaning, with a scrupulous analysis of the problems, a rigorous discussion of the architectural evidence and written sources, many of which are newly discovered, and an elegant and engaging prose that leads the reader seamlessly from one problem to the next. All the points he makes are lavishly illustrated with colour and black and white photographs. There are also very useful plans and drawings of great help for the reader and for use in the classroom: a ground-plan of the cathedral super-imposed over that of the old mosque of Toledo; a color-coded plan indicating the dates at which walls were constructed and a similar one indicating the dates of windows and vaults; a plan showing the location of chapels and altars which is accompanied by a table indicating the information available for their dating, as well as changes in dedications; a couple of drawings reconstructing the east end of the cathedral while the mosque was still standing, in 1244 and 1307; and comparative ensembles of profiles of vaulting, ribs, and arches, and of ground plans of different European gothic cathedrals. In addition, he includes a couple of tables comparing the measures of Toledo with regard to other churches in meters and in Parisian feet, and another one listing all the subject matters of the choir enclosure. At the end of the book are a glossary, and an appendix summarizing the construction campaigns, especially useful for those interested in reading individual chapters of the book. These chapters are grouped in three major divisions: the first part is dedicated to the city of Toledo, the second to the construction of the cathedral, and the third to rituals, furnishings and the creation of memories.

The first part of the book is titled 'On the Edge, at the Center', and consists of just one chapter, 'The City'. In it, Nickson provides a portrait of the city of Toledo in the early thirteenth-century, when the cathedral was begun, emphasizing its multiplicity of languages, confessions, cultures and buildings types and styles. He analyzes the complex identity of the population of Toledo, made up of Jews, Mozarabs, Mudejars, Christians, and how their demographics changed over time. A careful selection of objects allows him to examine how those identities were reflected and produced through the material culture. He departs from traditional interpretations of the use of Arabic inscriptions in Jewish and Christian settings in terms of cultural hybridity or aesthetic preferences, arguing that they were also considered signs of a culture associated with learning and magic, and thus imbued with apotropaic powers. The remaining of the chapter is devoted to the Friday mosque of Toledo, which was converted into the cathedral after the taking over of

the city by the Christians in 1085, and which would be later recognized as the Primate in 1088. Nickson elaborates a description of its interior, arguing that its elevation probably was similar to that of the church of San Román, with open galleries on top of the arcades. He also reconstructs the sacred topography of the converted mosque, identifying the location and dedication of many of its altars.

The second part of the book, entitled 'Building Histories', consists of four chapters in which Nickson analyzes in depth the architectural design of the cathedral until its completion. Chapter two, 'Design', focuses on the first plan of Toledo Cathedral. He concurs with the widespread consensus that the first architect of Toledo Cathedral was Master Martín, and that he had to be French, probably from Paris. However, he is quick to note that Toledo is not an imitation of any particular building, but rather that its features come from different experiments in France. In contrast with an understanding of stylistic influence as something inevitable, and of its enactors as passive recipients, an understanding, let's remember, that fed the theory that the Spaniards were incapable of creating a style of their own, Nickson argues instead that the design was the result of deliberate and informed choices made by the Archbishop Rodrigo and his chapter. Far from finding themselves in an isolating provincialism, Nickson proves that the archbishop and chapter were cosmopolitan and learned individuals, with a good knowledge of buildings in Spain, France, and Italy. In fact, Nickson suggests that the design of Toledo can be understood as a response to Saint-Denis and Notre-Dame of Paris.

Taking into account European gothic architecture as a frame of reference, Nickson also explains the main reasons that make Toledo's plan extraordinary. The first one is that it was the widest cathedral built at that time, and that, furthermore, it remained so until the construction of the cathedrals at Seville and Milan in the fifteenth-century. The second reason is that it is the only double aisle cathedral completed after Amiens. And the third is the design of the double ambulatory, already noted by Street as an original and elegant solution to a problem that had been challenging French architects for half a decade. By aligning the piers of the middle arcade with those of the hemicycle, Master Martín created rectangular vaults, alternating with triangular ones, which provided an unobstructed view from the inner hemicycle to the east central chapel in the outer ambulatory. Moving beyond strictly formal considerations of the architectural elements and structural solutions, Nickson pays attention to the aesthetic qualities of the interior space created by them, noting that its extraordinary spaciousness was, however, closer to that of the converted mosque at Córdoba than to that of the French cathedrals. Finally, the fourth reason of the uniqueness of Toledo's plan was the high number of radiating chapels, fifteen, almost double than most other cathedrals in Europe and Spain. This multiplicity of chapels provided a precedent for the construction of subsidiary chapels in European churches from mid-thirteenth century onwards, and also established a model for the typical Spanish design in which subsidiary chapels almost entirely enclosed the space of the cathedral.

Nickson does not stop at these formal features and also investigates the reasons behind the choices in the plan of the cathedral. In his view, they were motivated by Rodrigo's attempt to establish an apostolic and royal status for Toledo Cathedral with the purpose of asserting its supremacy within Christian Spain. Far from making an empty claim supported only by historical facts, Nickson provides an analytic correlation between historical events, features of the design, the knowledge that Rodrigo and his chapter had of other buildings, and the symbolic meaning attached to the latter. At a general level, the importance and prestige of Toledo was conveyed by its large scale and multiplicity of radiating chapels, as well as by the fact that its geometry and proportions followed intentionally those of Salomon's Temple. More specifically, the apostolic status of Saint Eugene, supposedly the first bishop of Toledo and disciple of Saint Paul, was expressed and promoted in the design of the cathedral through its vast size and double aisle, a clear emulation of the great Constantinian basilicas he and several members of his chapter had seen in Rome when they attended the Fourth Lateran Council in 1212. On the other hand, the intended royal status of this cathedral as a coronation church, which Rodrigo failed to achieve, is betrayed by the position of the choir in the west of the crossing, a similar position to that of other coronation churches, such as Reims and Westminster, which would allow for a large crowd to witness the event.

The first campaign of construction, in Rodrigo's time, which lasted from 1222 to 1244, and was under the supervision of Master Martín, is discussed in chapter three, 'Rodrigo's Project'. It began in the east end, and from the exterior inwards, preserving the western part of the converted mosque certainly until the 1230s, and possibly into the 1260s. In this campaign, only the outer ambulatory and radiating chapels were vaulted, nothing existed of the presbytery except for the stumps for the hemicycle, and some work was done in the eastern bays of the nave. Nickson also provides a thorough analysis of the location, dedication and dates of the twenty chapels that were already built by Rodrigo's death. He concludes that most of the radiating chapels were completed by 1244, and very likely as early as 1238. Other aspects of the construction, such as where the stone was quarried, how the wood was being sourced, who cut the stones, and the salaries of the workers, are also discussed.

Chapter four, 'Between Córdoba and Paris', focuses on the second campaign, from 1253 to 1274, under the supervision of an anonymous Spanish master. It was marked, indicates Nickson, by innovative designs and inspiration from many diverse sources. During this campaign, the vaultings of the inner ambulatory, and of the adjacent transept aisles and chapels, were finished. It was also then that the presbytery was built, according to Nickson, in its entirety, thus bringing the date of its completion to 1274, if not earlier, instead of the generally accepted date in the 1280s. It also makes the lierne vaults of the presbytery, he argues, the earliest known of its kind.

Traditionally, the cinquefoil arches of the triforium of the inner ambulatory

and that of the presbytery, have attracted great interest due to their apparent Islamic inspiration. Nickson suggests the arches of the inner ambulatory were probably inspired by Toledan buildings, rather than those of Córdoba. With regard to the triforium of the presbytery, he claims that its design of an open mesh with interspersed busts and foliate decoration is unique to Toledo. He also argues that it needs to be understood in relation to new ideas about screens that were developed in Burgos and Paris, which, in their turn, were filtered by Islamic designs, such as that of the Chapel of Villaviciosa in the converted mosque of Córdoba. In addition, Nickson ventures several hypotheses of why such Andalusí forms were acknowledged then and there in the cathedral: because of a desire to emulate the screening effect of contemporary Gothic buildings rendered in a more local vocabulary; because it evoked the mosque that had served as the cathedral since 1085; because the taste for Islamic designs had been strengthened by the conquest of cities under Islamic power, in the 1230s and 1240s, and by the consequent conversion of spectacular mosques into churches in Córdoba and Seville; to compete in equal terms with the sees of Córdoba and Seville, which were challenging the power of Toledo; and last, because it could be a triumphalist gesture. In any case, as Nickson rightly points out, it implied an esteem, even admiration, for the culture of al-Andalus, remarking that this was closer to Spanish sensibilities than that of France, whose aesthetic principles must have seemed rather exotic to the Spaniards at that time. This reversal of what would be considered exotic by the inhabitants of Toledo in the thirteenth-century is very suggestive and contrary to the usual projection of western notions of exoticism enforced by many scholars.

The second part of the book concludes with chapter five, 'The Exemplary Form', which follows the construction of the cathedral through its third and final campaigns from 1279 to 1317, and from 1337 to 1381 respectively. Once again Nickson is proposing revised dates for the progress of this building, this time bringing the date of its conclusion to 1381, more than a century earlier than has been generally accepted, in 1492. Aware of the radical point of departure that this date involves with regard to all previous historiography, Nickson not only provides proofs by means of a scrupulous and detailed analysis of newly discovered archival sources and material evidence, but also deconstructs the belief on a long construction that lasted until 1492 as a myth perpetuated throughout Spanish historiography.

Nickson, like other scholars, considers Petrus Petri as the main architect of the late thirteenth-century cathedral. Arguing that Petri probably joined the workshop when construction resumed in the early 1280s, Nickson hypothesizes that he was very likely trained in León under Master Enrique, who was also the chief architect at Burgos, and also perhaps by Juan Pérez, who worked at Burgos and León. Petri, according to Nickson, was responsible for the introduction of important innovations that determined the design of the cathedral for the following one hundred years. The most important of all was, in response to León Cathedral, the elimination of the triforium in favour of large traceried windows, as well as the

inclusion of tramsons, the first ones in Iberia. After Petri, indicates Nickson, the design remained pretty conservative, with only minor amendments. This conservatism, argues Nickson later in the book, was deliberate and not a symptom of ignorance of new developments in the style.

The third and last part of the book is entitled 'The Living Church' and in it Nickson analyzes the cathedral within its social and intellectual context, trying to 'excavate its inner life', through five chapters filled with information and interesting hypotheses.⁵⁰ The first of them, chapter six, 'The Cathedral of Memory', examines 'the intersection of building, liturgy, memory, and objects', illustrating the many ways in which .the memories evoked by the architecture, rituals and objects, constructed an exalted history of Toledo, regardless of whether these memories were real, imaginary, or distorted.

As Nickson suitably articulated it, 'the history of Toledo was performed through the liturgy by the living'.⁵¹ In this respect, he provides minutious information, derived from multiple written sources, about the major feasts celebrated in the cathedral, noting that they were generously endowed and had a magnificence commesurate with its status. Another exceptionality of Toledo was the performance of liturgical dramas, a practice that, as he explains, was resisted in Castile until the fifteenth-century but was common in other parts of Europe. The reasons behind this exceptionalism, he argues, were double. On the one hand, it could be explained by the cosmopolitanism of the Toledo chapter. On the other hand, the performance of liturgical dramas, together with the preservation of some Visigothic feasts and method of administering the sacraments, was meant to replicate the splendour of the Visigothic liturgies, with a view to create the illusion of an uninterrupted continuity of the glory Toledo had in the Visigothic Kingdom, and hide the reality that it had in fact never been fully recovered. In addition to the evocation of the Visigothic past, the dignity and relevance of Toledo within Castilian history was exalted by the appropriation of historical Christian victories over the Muslims, whose memory was perpetuated by their commemoration at Toledo with specific feasts.

Individuals were also part of Toledan history, and they were celebrated and remembered in the cathedral. The most commemorated people were the royalty, followed by the archbishops, and a group of privileged and wealthy individuals through family mausolea built inside the cathedral. There was also a deliberate attempt to preserve the memory of saints from Toledo: Eugene, Ildefonso, and Leocadia. Tombs and epitaphs were the most common way of triggering the memories of the dead, but altars and chapels, and the liturgies in their honour there performed, also played an important role. Many of those altars and chapels have disappeared or been moved to a different place in the cathedral, but through painstaking and extensive research, Nickson is able to reconstruct their original

⁵⁰ Nickson, *Toledo Cathedral*, 9.

⁵¹ Nickson, *Toledo Cathedral*, 116.

sacred geography

The last part of this chapter recreates the treasury of the cathedral, which according to Nickson is one of the richest, best-documented, most cosmopolitan, but also least known of any treasury from medieval Europe. By analyzing multiple inventories, Nickson is able to rescue many objects that have been lost, as well as others of fantastic nature, such as a griffin's egg. His information portrays a treasury with an incredible variety of objects and materials, whose geographical provenance is equally diverse, and which perhaps conveys, better than anything else, the notion of Toledo Cathedral as part of a very extensive network. He also devotes attention to some of the books, among which are the *Moralized Bible of Blanche of Castile*, made in Paris between 1226 and 1234, and a three-volume edition of Nicholas of Lyra's *Postilles*, made also in Paris around the 1390s. Finally, following the research of other scholars, Nickson notes the uncertain boundaries between book illustration and wall painting, arguing that some of the painters in Toledo may have been involved in both.

Chapter seven is devoted to what Nickson terms the most valued commodity of the cathedral: holiness. It focuses on the most important cults at Toledo: Virgin Mary, Saint Ildefonso, Saint Eugene, and the Cross. With regard to the cult of Virgin Mary, he argues that her cult in Toledo goes beyond the widespread Marian devotion in the Europe of the time, providing a new case scenario for that popular devotion as a result of the specific historical circumstances of Spain. Once again insisting on the exceptionalism of Toledo, Nickson explains her multilayered importance because 1) of her close association with the Visigothic past; 2) she was the banner of the Christians in their battles with the Muslims; 3) she was regarded as the landlady of the conquered territory; and 4) because the mosques converted into churches were dedicated to her. He also examines in some detail the numerous objects, sculptures, and reliquaries that are connected with Mary in the cathedral. Among them are the *Cantigas de Santa María*, which are analyzed by Nickson in relation to contemporary rituals, relics, objects, and to other versions of the same book. He pays particular attention to the cantiga 'How Holy Mary Made the Deaf-Mute Hear and Speak in Toledo', which is absent from other European collections of miracles, analyzing it within a multifaceted prism that comprises the promotion of Toledo's primacy and the Marian cult, the crusading spirit at the time, and the role of images in late medieval devotion. By enumerating and describing the numerous images of Mary that populated the cathedral, Nickson is able to convey her omnipresence as well as her dominion over the space of the cathedral in a most efficient way.

In connection to the cult of Mary was that of Saint Ildefonso. It was believed that Mary appeared in a vision to Ildefonso, a bishop of Toledo from the Visigothic period, in which she descended to offer him a chasuble to wear in liturgies on her honour, leaving her footprints on the stone in the cathedral floor where she had stayed. Nickson discusses the cult itself, arguing that it was first deliberately promoted by Rodrigo because it served as a reminder of the importance of Toledo in

Visigothic times, an importance that was ratified by the appearance of Virgin Mary herself. Later on, in the central decades of the fourteenth-century, cardinal Gil de Albornoz (1302-1367) fostered the cult even further by donating relics of Ildefonso to the cathedral, using the image of the Virgin's descent in his seal, and founding a new chapel dedicated to this saint and intended as the burial place of Gil de Albornoz and his family. Nickson argues and analyzes the relevance of this chapel in terms of its chronology, architectural design, funerary monuments, role in diverse liturgies, as well as its association with the confraternity of the *Obra*.

The cult of Saint Eugene and the cross at Toledo Cathedral are also analyzed in great detail including chapels, rituals, relics, reliquaries, and their role in the promotion of the see. While the cult of St. Eugene never reached the popularity of that of Mary or St. Ildefonso, that of the cross did not fall short. This was due, in great part, to deliberate promotion of the cult of the cross for its connection to the Visigothic past, in which it became the royal emblem, and the crusading ideology that it had carried ever since. As Nickson notes, the many crosses, relics and feasts dedicated to the cross in Toledo placed this cathedral at the end of a narrative that linked the Reconquista to the Visigoths, and they to Constantine, and ultimately to the biblical events themselves.

The eighth chapter, '*Urbs Regia*', analyzes how the cathedral promoted the political pre-eminence of Toledo within Castile. Although Toledo had been declared an *urbs regia* in Visigothic times, the truth of the matter is that the city's political centrality and royal status were being contested at the time of the construction of the gothic cathedral by other cities such as Burgos, Seville and Valladolid. Furthermore, that status was never recovered after Toledo was reconquered by the Christians in 1085, more reason why there were so many efforts to create the illusion of its continuity. Within this historical context, Nickson argues that the fabric of the cathedral was as important a tool as the textual histories written in Toledo at that time for what he terms the 'Toledization' of the history of Castile. By 'Toledization' he means the rewriting of the history of Castile in a way in which Toledo was presented as the preferred city of the Castilian kings. Examining both textual sources and the material evidence provided by the cathedral itself, Nickson explains how the royal chapels, tombs and the sculptures in the screen of the presbytery, acted as prompts for the creation of memories of a glorious past, that of the Visigothic Toledo as an *urbs regia*, and of later acts of royal favour. The purpose was that this process of memory creation would forge the illusion of Toledo as having enjoyed an uninterrupted status as a royal city since Visigothic times, which would also be projected into the future, thus preserving that status for centuries to come.

Decrying that Toledo's royal mausoleum is the least understood of all in Iberia, Nickson takes on the challenge of providing its detailed reconstruction. He does so by going backwards, describing the different architectural designs and sculptural programs of the royal chapel, which was located behind the high altar, in the 1490s, 1430s, 1330s, 1295 and earlier. The attempts by Sancho IV of Castile (1258-1295) to establish Toledo as a royal pantheon, as well as the contents of the tombs,

are also thoroughly examined, interweaving them masterfully with the historical context and the textual histories of the time. Once again, Nickson places Toledo Cathedral on the international stage, noting that the knowledge of this royal chapel and its contents is important for the understanding of other similar medieval chapels beyond Toledo, since the rulers of Castile were related by blood, marriage, political alliances, etc., to other rulers in Iberia and Europe. Last, Nickson analyzes the sculptures in the screen of the presbytery from the point of the creation and activation of memories, arguing that the sculptures were reinterpreted and related to specific historical events, kings, and archbishops, through commemorative rituals. In this respect, Nickson considers these sculptures as *phantasmata*, similar to the illustrations in the chronicles identified as *monumenta* by Rosa Porto, as images generated in the mind through the dialogue between memory and reading. As Nickson concludes: 'Now kings and bishops stood together like prophets and Apostles around Toledo's high altar. Castilian history had been Toledanized: its royal past co-opted for a Toledan present, its royal present persuaded of the benefits of recognizing an emphatically Toledan past.'⁵²

In chapter nine, 'Cathedral and City', Nickson dissects the portals of the cathedral in relation to the city that surrounds them and the interior of the church. He introduces the topic with an explanation of the role of portals as selective boundaries, the mutual dependence of city and cathedral, the latter's relevance in the staging of secular and religious power, how the religious feasts often were conduits for violence against the Jewish community of Toledo, and how they also helped to reinforce social hierarchies. Nickson discusses in length the Puerta del Reloj, in the north transept, which is the oldest portal made in the late thirteenth-century, providing a multi-prong analysis that includes its iconography, its location within the city and the cathedral, its narrative modes, the connection to contemporary religious debates, and the functions it may have served. For instance, the abundance of royal themes was determined by the fact that it was the main entrance for those coming from the Alcazar, the secular centre of power, as well as by the proximity of the royal chapel inside the cathedral. With regard to the narratives, he notes that the iconography of the tympanum about the infancy of Christ and his mission is related to the taste for *amplificatio* in contemporary rhetoric, and that it also displays a 'vernacular' mode. This tympanum presents a few departures from the traditional iconography of this topic, departures which, according to Nickson, may have been motivated by contemporary Christian-Jewish debates specific to Iberia. On another note, the presence of the Marriage of Canan in this portal indicates, according to Nickson, that it functioned as a bride's portal, perhaps in connection with the future marriage of Sancho IV and Maria de Molina, in Toledo, in 1282. In any case, Nickson concludes, the great variety of imagery in this portal is consistent with the multitude of functions it served as the main entrance to the cathedral until the construction of the west façade.

⁵² Nickson, *Toledo Cathedral*, 178.

With regard to the west façade, Nickson observes that it marked, at least in theory, the boundary between secular and sacred jurisdiction, and that sometimes it acted as the backdrop for law courts. In his opinion, the style of the sculpture suggests a date in the late thirteenth-century or early fourteenth-century for the right and left hand portals, while the central portal, known as the *Puerta del Perdón*, was finished in 1337, and the jambs likely added after 1345. The *Puerta del Perdón*, argues Nickson, acted as a billboard for the cult of Virgin Mary and Saint Ildefonso, whose images dominate the tympanum, inviting the visitors to enter, and leading them first towards the footprints of Mary, and next to the chapel of St. Ildefonso. The portal presents a deliberate combination of Mariological and Christological imagery with royal undertones emphasized by inscriptions, some of which, according to Nickson, also were thought to have apotropaic powers. The name of the portal is related to penitential rituals performed there and to the granting of indulgences to those who cross it. But the imagery of this portal, argues Nickson, was also a way to support the authority of the cathedral itself, which flowed directly from Christ and Virgin Mary.

The last chapter of the book, number ten, 'Art and Belief', examines four major projects undertaken by Archbishop Tenorio (1328-1399) in the final decades of the fourteenth-century: a new cloister, the funerary chapel of Saint Blaise, a new *retablo* for the high altar, and the choir screen. The scale, cost and quality of these projects testify the high ambitions that Tenorio had for Toledo Cathedral, and Nickson here analyzes the facts that turned Tenorio into such a great patron, from his personal experiences and travels, to financial circumstances and the state of construction of the cathedral. The cloister, argues Nickson, was huge in comparison of other European cloisters, only slightly smaller than that of Salisbury, but with more massive bays than the latter. Among the possible reasons for such a big scale, Nickson suggests the precedents of the cloister at Lérida Cathedral as well as the courtyards of the mosques at Córdoba and Seville.

The funerary chapel in the cloister dedicated to Saint Blaise was founded by Tenorio in 1397, and its construction was overseen, says Nickson, by a local mason, Rodrigo Alfonso. Besides the role that it played within the funerary chapels in the Iberian Peninsula, the chapel of Saint Blaise is also relevant because of its wall paintings, a feature that was not common in Spain, and that had been commissioned personally by Tenorio, although executed after his death. The paintings, analyzed in detail by Nickson, are interesting for their style, iconography, and the connection that they bring to the front between Toledo and Italy. With regard to the style, they reflect Toledan, Valencian and Tuscan influences, while the iconography reinforced Tenorio's sense of episcopal dignity and his support for the Hieronymites. The paintings also adhere to the orthodoxy of Creed of the Apostles, in connection, argues Nickson, with debates about Christian doctrine brought about by the massive conversion of Jews after the pogroms of 1391. Another important painting project due to Tenorio was a new altarpiece behind the high altar. The job was commissioned in 1397 to Esteve Rovira of Cyprus, and opened the era of the

gigantic *retablos* typical of late medieval Iberia.

The rest of the chapter is devoted to a careful stylistic, iconographical and ideological analysis of the choir enclosure commissioned by Tenorio. Nickson suggests a chronology for its making in the 1380s, with a probable beginning in the late 1370s, and a completion date in the first decade of the fifteenth-century. This screen, argues Nickson, is exceptional among similar works in the Europe of the time for several reasons. One is its scale and the huge number of scenes in the narratives, the largest choir enclosure to survive in situ from fourteenth-century Europe. Another two are the fact that its only entry point was from the crossing, and that it lacked a Holy Cross altar on the west side and even a Crucifixion above it. But the most striking feature is perhaps its iconography because, as Nickson points out, it lacked scenes from the New Testament and was limited only to the Genesis and Exodus. Nickson argues that the iconography is especially interesting because of four main reasons. The first is that there were no sculptural models for an Old Testament cycle of this scale and complexity neither in Toledo, Spain or Europe, indicating that the sculptors had to invent the iconographies from verbal and written accounts as well as manuscript illuminations. The second reason is that many of the scenes were not from the Bible, but depended on non-biblical texts, some from Hebrew commentaries, as well as later writings and expansions by St. Augustin and St. Cesarius of Arles, among others. The lack of Eucharistic associations, is the third reason pointed out by Nickson, probably because the enclosure was not related to the high altar. But the most remarkable feature of all is the disregard for any moral and typological potential of the scenes. This is due, according to Nickson, to a deliberate focus on the literal sense of the Old Testament stories with the assistance of Hebrew scholarship, which obviously did not include the New Testament. And this emphasis on literality and the recourse to Hebrew scholarship, argues Nickson, may be a response to the killings, confiscations, and forced conversion of Jews in the second half of the fourteenth-century, especially if the reliefs post-date the pogroms of 1391. In this context, it is possible, suggests Nickson, that the choir enclosure was conceived as a backdrop for conversionary baptisms of Jewish people, as a way of indoctrinating the new converts, and also as medium to calm anxieties about those converts, known as New Christians, among the Old Christians.

The chapter concludes with a discussion of this choir enclosure from the point of view of the image culture in late medieval Castile. Nickson argues that its iconography was meant to defend the use of images in the Christian Church while condemning Jewish idolatry. It thus signalled, in his opinion, a critical moment of transition, in which the relationship between the Jewish and Christian communities entered a new phase with the advent of the new Trastámara dynasty. Providing another argument in favour of the relevance of Toledo Cathedral, Nickson concludes that this was another instance in which this monument set the agenda for the rest of Castile, this time with regard to the use of art as a tool of indoctrination and even conversion.

Nickson's impressive study of Toledo Cathedral ends with an epilogue in which he assesses the legacy of this monument. The big question here is why there were no imitators of this magnificent church. On the one hand, Nickson explains its little impact because the gothic style of Toledo Cathedral was too exotic and could not compete with the popularity of the more familiar Mudéjar style in Toledo and Castile. However, on the other hand, he argues that indeed it had an impact. Some of it was minor, consisting in the imitation of specific elements of the design, such as the elevation, vaults, and arrangement of the chapels in the chevet. But it also had an important impact that can only be discovered if the traditional historiographical practice of focusing on specific details such as profiles, tracery, vaults, etc., is abandoned. If instead, proposes Nickson, one considers other aspects of Toledo Cathedral, such as the emotional and aesthetic experience provoked by the spatial sense of division and expansion, the effects of the filtered light, and the massiveness of the architectural elements, this monument reveals itself as a cathedral built in the 'heroic mode', that is, meant to impress and convey power and authority. It is as such that it became the yardstick by which future cathedrals would try to assert similar ideals.⁵³ This is most noticeable, argues Nickson, in the taste for gigantism that started in Spain in the 1380s and continued well into the sixteenth century, in cathedrals like Gerona, Palma de Mallorca, Seville, or Salamanca, among others. Lastly, faithful to his holistic approach, Nickson also considers other kind of legacy: the continued centrality of Toledo, and more specifically of its Visigothic past, all throughout Spanish history until the present day. This centrality, argues Nickson, is indebted, to a great extent, to the way the gothic cathedral of Toledo re-wrote the history of Castile, and, by extension, of Spain. From a contemporary perspective, the history of the building of Toledo Cathedral is in fact the building of the role of Toledo in the history of Spain.

This summary of *Toledo Cathedral* reveals the ambitious wide-range of questions and types of work considered by Nickson in this impressive study: architecture; tombs; monumental sculpture; *ars sacra*; wall paintings; illuminated manuscripts; traditional formalistic problems of design; patronage; materialistic issues pertaining salary compensation, labour organization, and procurement of materials; symbolism of forms; cult of saints and relics; iconography; liturgy and performativity; sacred topography; architecture and art as a vehicles to convey power; *long durée*; memory; identity; construction of history; reception; ideological manipulation; political history; networks; image culture; historiographic myths; religious disputes... and some others that have surely been left out of this rapid

⁵³ The 'heroic mode' of building in the gothic period was identified and analyzed by Paul Binski in 'The Heroic Age of Gothic and the Metaphors of Modernism', *Gesta*, vol. 52, No.1, March 2013, 3-19.

enumeration meant to convey its variety and comprehensive character. It is, without doubt, a model of its kind, a study in artistic integration and holism taken to a new level, backed up with minutious research and solid scholarship, and beautifully written with an engaging style. It succeeds in conveying the complex interaction of the social, political, religious and material aspects of a monument that has its own agency, that is the product of deliberate, conscious choices, and that is in constant transformation. It provides a careful exploration of its inception complemented by that of its reception. It articulates the analysis around the notions of network, memory and identity. Perhaps Nickson could have paid more attention to theory, providing a more nuanced discussion of some of the methodologies and concepts that he uses. And perhaps he errs a little on the side of a preponderant focus on Christian issues, not as much as Street though, and could have analyzed in more breadth and depth the complexity created by the presence of Jewish and Islamic communities with their own material culture in Medieval Spain. But no study can address all the interests of every scholar, and Nickson is already addressing an extraordinary number of issues and perspectives, so much so that he incorporates in his study half of the current approaches listed by Stephen Murray in 2016, while adding others that Murray omitted.⁵⁴ It is an excellent book that will certainly put Toledo Cathedral on the international stage of gothic art and architecture, that will challenge scholars to reconsider assumptions that are based primarily on English, German, and French monuments, and that will make this monument accessible to a broad audience of students, scholars, and the educated general public, who may not be proficient in Spanish, but are fluent in English.

At the beginning of his book, Nickson acknowledges his debt to Rocío Sánchez Ameijeiras, for having recommended him to study the sculpture of Toledo Cathedral, thus sparking the interest that would end in this much broader monograph. As Cynthia Robinson pointed out in her review of Nickson's book, giving that piece of advice was a good thing; an assesment with which this reviewer wholeheartedly agrees. But it should be added that Nickson also did a good thing, because he, unlike previous scholars, listened to this call for attention. A century and a half later, Street's plea has finally been fulfilled.

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⁵⁴ Stephen Murray, 'The Study of Gothic Architecture', *A Companion to Medieval Art: Romanesque and Gothic in Northern Europe*, ed. Conrad Rudolph, Malden, MA, and Oxford, and Carlton, Victoria: Blackwell Publishing, 2006, 382-402. Murray lists sixteen approaches, of which Nickson incorporates in more or less degree half of them: monograph, artistic integration, primary sources, liturgy, search for meaning, materialism, design and metrology, and anthropology/sociology.

Matilde Mateo

Breaking the Myth: Toledo Cathedral on the
International Stage

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).

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