

Toledo Cathedral

Building Histories in Medieval Castile

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Part 1

Introduction

Attonitus quicumque legis fastigia temple
Ingentes aras, aemula tecta polo,
Destine mirari, superat, quod máxima Virgo
Consecrat plantis haec pavimenta suis.

Whoever you are, stupefied, reading about this church's spires, its great vaults, and roof that rivals the skies.

Stop marvelling. For these are surpassed by the proof that the Virgin consecrated this pavement with her own feet.

- Alfonso Cedillo, introduction to Blás Ortiz's *Summi Templi Toletani*, 1549.

A gilded cage protects Toledo cathedral's most precious relic (fig. 1). Within it a grubby stone, barely visible in the gloom, and worn smooth by thousands of pious kisses and caressing fingers, purports to bear the footprints of the Virgin Mary. Alighting here in c. 666, the story goes, the Virgin bequeathed a sumptuous robe to Toledo's bishop Ildefonso, in gratitude for the robust defense of her virginity in his *De Virginitate Mariae*. Like the stone bearing St Michael's footprints in the Roman church of the Aracoeli, Toledo's relic may once have been a Roman or Early Christian votive plaque with feet marked on it, such as still survive in large numbers in southern Spain. But whatever its origin, this story of the Virgin's presence – recorded by a mark of absence – is the grit around which Toledo's pearl was formed, the foundation for Toledo's claims to be a primatial church, Spain's Canterbury. True enough, the body of St James was *believed to be* buried at Santiago de Compostela, but how much greater was the glory of Toledo, founded by St Eugene, a disciple of Paul, and blessed by the bodily descent of the Virgin herself? Thus was the primacy of Toledo defended in a famous speech by its archbishop, Rodrigo Ximénez de Rada, at the assembly of the Fourth Lateran Council in Rome in 1215.

< fig. 1 >

These are bold claims for Toledo, but it is a city with a formidable history (fig. 2). Roman *Toletum*, resettled by Visigoths in the fifth century, had risen to be capital of Visigothic *Hispania*, site of the great Church councils. Captured following the Muslim invasion of Hispania in 711, *Ṭulayṭula* became a renowned centre of courtly splendor under its eleventh-century Arabic rulers, a glorious prize for Alfonso VI of Castile when he captured it on 25 May 1085. It was a pivotal moment for Spain and for medieval Europe. Fourteen years after the Norman invasions of Sicily, and fourteen years before the Crusader conquest of Jerusalem, Toledo's conquest represented a near unprecedented opportunity for Christian patrons and artists to discover and possess a great Islamic city. Its Friday mosque consecrated as the city's cathedral, its palaces converted into monasteries, Toledo's Arabic identity was covered with only the lightest Christian veil, and throughout the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries scholars from across medieval Europe flocked to this thriving frontier city to discover there the Arabic learning for which Toledo was famed.

< fig. 2 >

Many of those scholars found comfortable livings as canons in the cathedral chapter, and half of that chapter was present in Rome in 1215 to applaud archbishop Rodrigo's rousing speech. In 1226, eleven years after their return, don Rodrigo founded a new gothic cathedral in Toledo, the scale and ambition of which more than matched his rhetoric. Scale, ambition, rhetoric: these are Toledan qualities. Three hundred years after Rodrigo founded the cathedral, one of its canons decided that Toledo's splendor made it worthy of the attention of the world's most powerful man: Blás Ortiz's *Summi Templi Toletani*, one of the earliest detailed histories of any church in Europe, was written for the edification of the future Philip II, ruler of half the world. For José Amador de los Ríos, author of the first truly art-historical study of Toledo, *Toledo pintoresca* (1845), the cathedral encompassed "the whole history of the Spanish arts from the beginning of the thirteenth century until now", fulfilling for Spanish art what had been sought for Spanish history ever since archbishop Rodrigo had completed his great history of all things Spanish, *De rebus Hispaniae*, just over six hundred years earlier.

Archbishop of Toledo from 1209 to 1247, don Rodrigo is to Toledo's history what Abbot Suger is to that of St-Denis – a prolific, articulate, ambitious scholar and career churchman, for whom the construction of churches was simply another offshoot of the construction of history. Born in Navarre c. 1170 and educated in Paris and Bologna, bishop of Burgo de Osma and then archbishop of Toledo; sometime crusader, chronicler and royal chancellor; Rodrigo was a regular traveler between France, Rome and the Iberian Peninsula. His career is the most spectacular of a new generation of cosmopolitan Spanish prelates celebrated in Lucas of Túy's *Chronicon Mundi*

(c. 1232-1237), in a famous encomium on the new churches built in the Peninsula in the early thirteenth century.

It was a heroic age of buildings and battles. In 1195, eight years after Saladin's conquest of Jerusalem, Alfonso VIII of Castile (r. 1158-1214) was crushingly defeated at Alarcos by the Almohads, who then controlled virtually all of Islamic al-Andalus south of Toledo. By that point construction had already begun on Alfonso's Cistercian foundation at Las Huelgas, near Burgos, strategically located on one of the great pilgrimage roads that led to Santiago de Compostela, and long-hailed as the harbinger of gothic architecture in Castile. Building was still ongoing there when Rodrigo travelled to Rome and France to attract support for a new campaign against the Almohads, one that culminated in 1212 with the great Christian victory on the plains south of Toledo: Las Navas de Tolosa. The union of Castile and León (1230) under Alfonso's grandson, Fernando III, followed by Fernando's conquest of Córdoba (1236) and Seville (1248), further transformed the demography, topography and economy of a kingdom that had almost doubled in size in half a century (fig. 3). But as at Toledo's conquest in 1085, victories in the South were also moments of artistic and architectural encounter. For don Rodrigo, writing in the *De rebus*, the Great Mosque in Córdoba "surpassed all other Arab mosques in decoration and size" (fig. 48). In the vernacular continuation of *De rebus* known as the *Estoria de España*, the anonymous author celebrated the great minaret of Seville, "with all its fine features and its great height"; the four golden globes that crowned it were, he opined, "so large and of such fine workmanship that in all the world there could be none more beautiful".

< fig. 3 >

It is tempting to portray Toledo cathedral as some kind of hybrid progeny of these tastes and histories, the material deposit of the confluence of Iberia's many cultures. For Bernard Bevan, writing in the 1930s, the study of Spanish architecture consisted "largely of tracing foreign influences and recording the story of their "naturalization" [...] Foreign waves of influence break upon the shore, recede, and leave their impress." This view still lingers discreetly in much scholarship on Spanish culture, but it is patently wrong. Bevan's admirable study may have gathered together plans and photos of disparate Spanish buildings, but medieval artists, architects and patrons enjoyed no comparable luxury. All knowledge of the objects, buildings and rituals beyond the cathedral walls necessarily depended on the available technologies of transmission: portable objects and texts, the memory of travelling individuals, verbal and written descriptions, or in rare cases drawings – each method of transmission carrying the potential for distortion and misunderstanding. Nor were the artists and patrons that oversaw the construction and decoration of Toledo cathedral passive recipients of artistic and architectural styles emanating from Paris,

Avignon or Córdoba. They 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 and materials made possible.

Those aspirations were considerable, and will be considered at length in the chapters that follow. In terms of its scale, building materials and techniques, Toledo's new cathedral represents a break with local building traditions that is more radical than that of any other major gothic church in the period. Its scale and structural daring were unmatched in the Iberian Peninsula before the construction of Palma and Girona cathedrals in the fourteenth century, and find few rivals anywhere in gothic Europe. And as an ensemble – of a large and cosmopolitan treasury, ambitious architectural design, profuse sculptural decoration, and varied liturgical and archival records – Toledo cathedral is surpassed by no other site from Europe or the Mediterranean in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. St-Denis or San Marco in Venice? Possibly, except that so much belongs to earlier periods. Westminster Abbey or the cathedrals of Chartres and Reims? If only more of their medieval treasuries survived. Cologne or Prague cathedrals? Certainly, although they remained incomplete before the nineteenth century. Bamberg cathedral, or the Cairene complexes of the Bahri Mamluks? These perhaps. What these comparisons make clear, if somewhat crudely, is that Toledo cannot simply be understood within its local contexts, however important they may be: it was built in a “heroic mode”, and has also to be viewed from the perspective of the rest of Europe and beyond.

That tension between local and international contexts is central to this study, which depends to a very considerable extent on the scrutiny of archival sources, molding profiles and carving techniques, but also zooms out to provide a much broader sense of the issues at stake elsewhere. And that “elsewhere” is loaded, for one of my principal aims in writing this book was to find a way of integrating scholarship on Iberia's plural material cultures (dominated by scholars in the US) with research on the architecture, decoration and liturgies of churches of medieval Iberia (largely conducted by Spanish scholars, with greater or lesser reference to northern Europe). Too often these appear entirely separate areas of enquiry: one side implies that everything depends on Iberia's Jewish and Muslim communities, the other acknowledges them only with jejune references to “Reconquista” or “Islamic influences”. I hope to show that in a city such as Toledo – no less than in Venice, Palermo or Jerusalem – the combination of these elements is not only worthy of study in its own right, but also reflects back into those different fields: study of Toledo can reveal fresh insights about Córdoba, Paris and Westminster, in ways that could not be anticipated in studies exclusively focused on those centers. It was precisely Toledo's position on

the frontiers of medieval Christendom that ensured its cosmopolitanism: on the borders between two civilizations, a “contact zone” between Islamic, Jewish and Christian traditions, it was not so much at the edge as at the centre – “hinge, not fringe”.

Three broader concerns have also shaped *Building Histories*. First, anxieties about medieval architectural history: both fears for its demise and a suspicion that – with several honorable exceptions – it has too often been isolated from other disciplines, to the detriment of all. Medieval cathedrals still dominate the cityscapes of modern Europe, and yet there is a growing danger that we understand their contents and contexts better than the buildings themselves. Second, I hope to insert Toledo where it rightfully belongs, both within narratives of Spanish art history and also in medieval art history more generally – the latter still often ignorant of the former. Finally, in recognizing that many questions still remain to be answered, both for Toledo itself and for Spanish art history, I hope this book may serve as encouragement to future generations of scholars to explore these fertile fields of enquiry.

Some of these areas of enquiry are important not just for Toledo, but for medieval history more generally. One is the question of memory and its intimate relationship with history and material culture. There can be no better example of this than the *Summi Templi Toletani*. Based on medieval pilgrims’ guides such as the *Mirabilia Urbis Romae*, Blás Ortiz’s rhetorical journey or *ductus* through the cathedral’s interior not only depends on spaces and objects as prompts for memory, it also relies on Toledo’s sacred topography to structure that memory, formalizing it as history. Memory was thus locked into the very fabric of the cathedral: into its pavement, impressed with the Virgin’s footprints; in its design, reminiscent of the great double-aisled basilicas of Constantinian Rome; and in its tombs, reliquaries and sculptures. That did not mean it was static, however, for memory could be captured and re-performed in other ways. Consider the miracle of “How Holy Mary made the deaf-mute hear and speak in Toledo”, included in the 1260s and 70s in Alfonso X’s *Cantigas de Santa Maria* (henceforth CSM) and discussed at some length in chapter seven of this book. It begins, as always, with one or more witnesses to an event. Their memories of that event – structured perhaps by the recollection of similar miracle narratives – become one or several stories, heard and then edited, translated and written down by the compilers of Toledo cathedral’s books of privileges and CSM (who also versified it and set it to music). It could then be read, rehearsed, performed, and pictured (fig. 71), and then translated, restructured and paraphrased by modern scholars. Each process depends on memories but also creates fresh ones: the past remembered and the past constructed, these are two of the threads that bind together the different strands of *Building Histories*.

Memory is also critical for the question of conversion – of spaces, buildings, objects and peoples – which recurs throughout this book, and more widely in scholarly discussions of medieval art and architecture. In the Middle Ages derivatives of the Latin *convertere* (“turn around, transform”) were applied principally to people, and were associated with a formal process (baptism) that shared features with the ritual sprinkling of water that was essential for the consecration (and conversion) of holy buildings. There was no standard formal process for converting spaces or objects, however, although processions through fields and streets, or around city walls, might serve for the former, whilst objects might be “ritually” converted through their new association with relics or liturgical practices. The umbrella term “conversion” nonetheless recognizes that converted spaces, buildings, objects and peoples stood within ‘memorial networks’ that bound them to their past, whether real or fictive.

Those pasts might be recognized (or forgotten) in different ways. Who in medieval (or modern) Toledo would connect its Zocodover square with the *Sūq al-dawabb*, the Muslim beast market that was held on the site before 1085? In an endowment of July 1238, on the other hand, don Rodrigo recognized that the building that had served as Toledo’s cathedral for one hundred and fifty years had once been a mosque. An inventory of 1400 records “pendones moriscos de alholla” (fig. 62), Moorish banners of lightweight silk, one yellow, the other green, with no acknowledgement that these were military banners captured at the battle of Salado – but then, of what value was that for the treasurer trying to keep track of his treasury? For new converts in fifteenth-century Castile, however, their Jewish past was very difficult to forget: it even ran through their blood, it was increasingly suggested.

Why and when these pasts mattered is of considerable interest to historians and art historians, not least because they shed light on questions of identity and status, and how these changed through time and space. Were these objects and buildings perceived as Islamic, Arabic, Christian, luxury, beautiful, impressive, triumphal, or holy? Was it significant if an object or design originated in northern Europe rather than northern Africa? How, in turn, do we define a gothic building, an Islamic object, a Christian or a Jew? What confessional, geographical and historical circumstances do these terms assume, and need they be exclusive? These are fundamental questions about identity that will be addressed throughout this book, but they cannot be generalized: they depend absolutely on place, function, person and time. And they must be treated with caution, for all too often these questions are reduced to issues of terminological pedantry. In Seville cathedral, for instance, there are preserved four contemporary epitaphs of Fernando III (d. 1252), which describe him as king or lord of Castile, Toledo, León, Galicia, Seville, Córdoba, Murcia, and Jaén. Written in Latin, Castilian, Hebrew and Arabic, the epitaphs

also describe Fernando as ruler of Hispania, España, Sefarad and al-Andalus. Each of these terms was (and is) politically and confessionally loaded, which is precisely the point. But endlessly to debate the merits of terms such as “Castile”, “Spain” or “Iberia”, or indeed “gothic”, “Islamic” or “mudéjar”, is to miss the point that they always refer to an imaginary, and that they belong to a historiographic tradition that cannot simply be edited away through “scare quotes” or the selection of another adjective. It is one of my intentions in *Building Histories* to acknowledge those traditions without being imprisoned by them.

Building Histories

Building Histories is structured in three parts. Part One, the shortest, begins with a sketch of the city of Toledo in the early thirteenth century when the new cathedral was begun. It visits the city’s streets, squares, synagogues and churches, exploring issues of multilingualism, identity and Toledo’s multiple pasts and communities. It then stops to consider in detail the mosque that had served as Toledo’s cathedral since 1086, the ideology of mosque conversions, and the economic basis for its maintenance and replacement.

Toledo’s labyrinthine streets are now almost empty save for the odd tourist, but they were once thronged like those of modern Fez, and must simultaneously have dazzled and daunted the French architect responsible for the design of the new gothic cathedral whose construction I study in Part Two. Both masons and canons knew a world beyond Toledo’s walls, however, and it is their world, from Scotland to Sicily, from Paris to Palencia, that I consider at the start of chapter two. Rather than privileging completed buildings or inserting them in any teleological notion of architectural “development”, this is a survey of the architectural landscape of Europe in the 1220s, of scaffolding and masons’ lodges, of buildings ancient and modern and how people thought and wrote about them. With this in mind I examine the plan and design of Toledo cathedral, some version of which must have been presented to Rodrigo and his chapter in the years before construction began. What might it have meant to them, and what does it owe to contemporary ideas about buildings in France, Rome and elsewhere?

In chapter three I turn to the cathedral as it was built under Rodrigo, archbishop from 1209 to 1247. First I consider the material and textual evidence for the cathedral’s construction, drawing on little-used or new archival sources to correct extant narratives of that process, and submitting the cathedral to close archaeological scrutiny. Here I am concerned not just with the history of construction, but with the construction of that history – one that requires an archaeology of its own. “Sometimes”, acknowledge Rodrigo in the *De rebus*, ‘the different interpretations of writers makes one doubt the truth of history, [and so] the wisdom of the reader has to dig deeply

in order to discover in the truthful writers what he should believe". The metaphor is apt, for myth-making was (and is) a Toledan specialty, one partly precipitated by the legendary difficulties of working in the cathedral archives. Their erratic opening times, chaotic organization and hostile staff deterred generations of scholars, who were forced instead to rely on eighteenth-century copies of Toledan documents kept in the National Library in Madrid, or other archival material transferred to the National Archive during the nationwide confiscation of church property of 1835. Fortunately, the situation has recently improved, and in the last two decades a number of fine historians have dramatically augmented our understanding of thirteenth-century Toledo, enabling me to set a detailed construction history in the context of the ebb and flow of Toledo's fortunes.

By the 1260s, forty years after the new cathedral was begun, the incomplete skeleton of its eastern arm already towered over the old converted mosque to its west, and in chapter four I pause to consider the remarkable design of Toledo's presbytery and its possible origins in Islamic and gothic structures. Central to my examination is the notion that the cathedral's design was not a monolithic idea, fixed at a particular moment. Instead, I understand it as continually evolving over time in response to new problems and priorities; new tastes and fashions developed hundreds of miles away and distorted and adapted in their transmission to Toledo. Study of the reception of these ideas far from their origins sheds new light on contemporary understanding of gothic and Islamic architecture: Paris and Córdoba do not hold all the answers, I argue.

Chapter five concludes Part Two by following the cathedral's construction up to its completion. For hundreds of years scholars have insisted that Toledo was not finished until 1492, but I deconstruct that myth and demonstrate that the cathedral was substantially complete over one hundred years earlier, and certainly by 1381. With newly discovered archival and heraldic evidence, I document the slow progression of construction, the destruction of the old mosque, and the foundation of subsidiary chapels. The vaulting of the nave in the late fourteenth century certainly did not bring construction to a halt at Toledo, and there were several major construction projects in the decades and centuries that followed. But it does mark the moment when, for the first time, the whole cathedral could be used, when processions could pass to every corner of the cathedral, and out through any of its portals. It thus marks the approximate chronological end for the focus of this book, and a moment to turn from architecture to other considerations.

For all their specialized skills and language, architectural practice and history could not and cannot exist independently of their social and intellectual contexts, and in Part Three I excavate the cathedral's "inner life", and trace its evolution alongside that of the architectural skeleton.

Drawing on contemporary inventories, books and early antiquarian sources – none of them ever properly studied – in chapter six I recover “The Cathedral of Memory”: the great feasts that marked the yearly cycle, the lives and deaths recorded in epitaphs and wills, the multiple chapels and altars that cluttered the cathedral interior, and the splendid objects preserved and processed in the cathedral. Toledo’s liturgy was to be the “light and mirror for all other churches” in the words of one of Toledo’s fifteenth-century archbishops, and the sheer quantity of feasts, chapels and altars testifies to the extraordinary wealth of Toledo’s endowments. Its extensive inventories, the earliest from the 1250s, enable me to track the accumulation of paintings, textiles, reliquaries and precious objects in the cathedral. Only a tiny fraction of these now survive in the cathedral and its treasury, but its inventories provide a vivid insight into the quantity and variety of Toledo’s moveable objects: rock crystal crosses and ampullae, andalusí textiles and *opus anglicanum*, ivory plaques and gilded reliquaries, copper doves, serpent’s tongues and griffins’ claws.

In the following chapter I reconstruct the cathedral’s cultic life. It was in Toledo that the famous *Cantigas de Santa Maria* were sung on special feast days, and I focus in particular on the cult of the Virgin in the cathedral, discussing some of the reliquaries, statues and precious objects that gave it color. In Toledo’s histories it was St Ildefonso, Toledo’s seventh-century bishop saint, who had secured the Virgin’s special favor for the cathedral. It is thus his cult, and the chapel dedicated to him in the late fourteenth century, which dominate the second half of this chapter, though I will also consider the important cults of St Eugene and of the Cross.

Toledo’s sanctity also attracted patronage from the very highest levels. It had been the preferred burial site of *Hispania*’s Visigothic kings, and this doubtless explains the decision of “the Emperor” Alfonso VII (1105-1157) to elect burial in the converted mosque-cathedral. Over the next three hundred years four more kings were buried in the cathedral, which also hosted at least one coronation, and a number of major state occasions. Chapter eight thus examines Toledo’s relationship with the king, and the chapels where the royal presence was most manifest. Toledo’s favor was not uncontested, however, and the proliferation of royal imagery in the cathedral is understood not merely as a reflection of kingly patronage, but also as a negotiation and invitation for support in a period when Seville, Burgos and Valladolid presented serious threats to Toledo’s royal pre-eminence.

Portals are the subject of chapter nine, considered in relation to the city they faced and the church to which they gave entrance. Royal themes on the north transept portal reflect its proximity to the royal burial chapel within, unfolding themes of epiphany at the threshold between the city’s commercial district and its cathedral. Meanwhile the portals on Toledo’s west façade testify to

the troubled construction history of this area, and its changing functions. They act as billboards for the cult of St Ildefonso within, and also bear traces of the judgments and penitential processions that took place before them.

The closing of Toledo cathedral's vaults in the 1380s does not signal the end of new construction and embellishment, and in the final chapter I consider four major projects that commenced under archbishop Pedro Tenorio in the closing decades of the fourteenth century. The cathedral's massive new cloister, built over the remains of the mosque courtyard. Pedro's remarkable funerary chapel of San Blás, entirely painted by artists familiar with contemporary Tuscan painting. A vast new retable for the high altar, the most expensive project of its type in the Peninsula. And the choir enclosure, with perhaps the largest set of sculpted Old Testament narratives from anywhere in medieval Europe. These projects testify to Tenorio's ambitions for Toledo cathedral, to the transfer of income away from the cathedral's construction and towards other projects, and to Toledo's restored pre-eminence after the difficult years of the fourteenth century, a pre-eminence that ensured it could set the artistic agenda for fifteenth-century Castile.

By Tenorio's death in 1399 the cathedral that survives today was essentially in place, with all its major liturgical furnishings and subsidiary buildings. Some projects were still incomplete, others not yet begun, but the age of radical transformation in Toledo was over. Proper study of projects begun after the 1420s would anyway require proper analysis of the *obra*'s extant account books, which survive in significant numbers from that point onwards – a task of several years, already begun by others. Tenorio's death thus offers an opportunity to reflect on the transformation of Toledo and beyond in the one hundred and eighty years since the cathedral was begun. By way of epilogue, I thus sketch the new architectural, social and political profile of Toledo in the late fourteenth century, and set it against a backdrop of Castile, the Iberian Peninsula, and the wider European and Mediterranean worlds.

This outline is not only intended to help navigate readers through this book. It also embodies my assumption that a cathedral such as Toledo can only be understood as the sum of its many parts, and that these are written, material and performed. Nor is it stable. Ideas about design, devotion and decorum evolved throughout Toledo's long construction, and have in turn been dismantled, distorted and destroyed by later transformations, both physical and scholarly. Clifford Geertz's "webs of meaning" are not static but continually respun. For that reason, it is helpful to think briefly about the historical trajectory from the 1380s till now, including the circumstances under which this book has been written.

The Historical Trajectory

The grand narratives of Castile's fourteenth- and fifteenth-century chroniclers, many of them Toledan, describe ever-changing alliances amongst the peninsular kingdoms, France and England; conflicts between the nobility, crown and urban representatives; and half-hearted attempts at clerical reform. In turn, scholars have characterized these as times of crisis: of plagues, civil war, and anti-Jewish violence, marked especially by the widespread pogroms and forced conversions of 1391, and the founding of the Inquisition in the late fifteenth century. Yet the fifteenth century was also a period of great literary achievement and the revival of Toledo's fortunes, both culminating in the rules of the powerful archbishops, cardinals Pedro González de Mendoza (1482-1495) and Francisco Ximénez de Cisneros (1495-1517).

Those golden decades around 1500 did not last long, however, for just as Ferdinand III's conquests in the thirteenth century had directed attention away from Toledo, so too did the conquest of Granada (1492) and the expansion of the Spanish Empire in the Netherlands, southern Italy and the New World. For all its efforts, Toledo never regained its Visigothic title of *Urbs regia*, and Blás Ortiz's celebration of Toledo's glories failed to dissuade Philip II from establishing Madrid as his *de facto* capital in 1561. The symbolic detriment to Toledo's status was acute, and for the next two hundred and fifty years Toledo desiccated into a city of scholars, clerics, nuns and monks, their gaunt faces memorably recorded by El Greco. It is no coincidence that this initiated renewed introspection for the Toledan Church, its own histories freshly available thanks to new printing technologies. The anonymous *Notas sobre el primado de Toledo, y relación de sus Arzobispos* of c. 1526, was one of the earliest of numerous episcopologies that were penned, carved and painted in Toledo over the next two hundred years. Twenty years later Blás Ortiz wrote his *Summi Templi Toletani*, its significance for Toledan history already discussed.

Amongst the many histories that followed – at least one in every decade up to the present – several deserve mention because of their regular appearance in this book. A manuscript entitled *Vitae archiepiscoporum toletanorum et de primatia eiusdem ecclesiae* was most likely penned in 1579 by Juan Bautista Pérez, canon and *obrero* (master of works) of the cathedral, and later bishop of Segovia. Much mined by later Toledan historians, this includes biographical information on Toledan archbishops, a history of the cathedral, extracts from the cathedral's books of anniversaries, and transcriptions of epitaphs. Amongst other achievements, Pérez was the first scholar to determine that Toledo's foundation stone was laid in 1226, a fact gleaned from a series of chronological notices then conserved in Toledo's archive (BNE Ms 10046, *olim* BCT 47-4), originally compiled in the 1280s/90s by someone associated with the Toledan chapter. Equally valuable is the *Descripción de la Sancta Iglesia de Toledo*, much of it

incorporated into the *Libro de la fundación de la S. Iglesia de Toledo con sus grandezas, primacía, dotaciones y memorias*. Written c. 1603/4 by Juan Bravo de Acuña, Master of Ceremonies in the cathedral, it survives in several seventeenth and eighteenth-century manuscript versions, and contains the earliest accurate plan of the cathedral, along with precious information about the original location of retables and altars in the cathedral.

A new and more vigorous antiquarianism emerged in the eighteenth century, typified by figures such as padre Enrique Flórez, or the Jesuit scholar Andrés Marcos Burriel. The latter is responsible for the neat copies of hundreds of Toledan documents (some of them since lost), kept in the Biblioteca Nacional in Madrid and much used in this study. In Toledo itself cardinal archbishop Francisco de Lorenzana (r. 1772-1800) commissioned what until recently were the standard editions of several Toledan authors, *SS PP Toletanorum quotquot extant opera*, printed in four volumes between 1782 and 1797, and including works by St Ildefonso, archbishop Rodrigo, and Blás Ortiz. Lorenzana also ordered new copies of Acuña's manuscript, including one made by Felipe Vallejo, *maestrescuela* in the Toledan chapter. It was Vallejo who in 1785 began the *Memorias y dissertaciones que podrán servir al que escriba la historia de la Iglesia de Toledo*. Opening with an often-scathing survey of Toledan sources and historiography, the *Memorias* more than live up to their name for students of Toledan history and drama, but were little-known outside Toledo until the 1860s, and even to this day have not been properly studied.

Lorenzana did not only care for written history, however. Under the influence of the Spanish painter and antiquarian Antonio Ponz, Lorenzana was also responsible for a precociously sensitive restoration of Toledo cathedral, executed "in the same gothic as the first form of the temple" (fig. 4). And when in 1829 Ceán Bermúdez published his annotated version of Eugenio de Llaguno y Amiro's *Noticias de los arquitectos y arquitectura de España desde su restauración*, he was able to provide the names of several Toledan architects thanks to the then unpublished notes of Francisco Pérez Sedano, the Toledan canon who sometime in the eighteenth century had examined the cathedral's account books.

Yet this revival was short-lived, and the nationwide confiscation of church goods by the Liberal government in 1835 brought an end to the cathedral's famous wealth – its archive displaced and its new-found poverty famously evoked in Vicente Blásco Ibañez's gloomy tales of damp cloisters and spluttering canons, *La catedral* (first published in 1903). When he visited this "Durham of a once golden hierarchy" soon after 1835, the British traveler Richard Ford decried Toledo as a "city of the past. When seen from afar, nothing can be more imposing, but there is rottenness in the core." Such narratives of demise are, of course, the product of wider agendas, often anti-clerical, but they were not restricted to skeptical foreigners. "The past must be a sweet

consolation for the present tribulations”, wrote José Amador de los Ríos in the prologue to his *Toledo pintoresca* (1845), which he conceived as a textual counterpart to the great illustrated volumes of *España artística y monumental*, sponsored by the Spanish state and published from 1842 onwards as a celebration of all that then seemed imperiled. Son of Fernando VII’s favourite sculptor, brother of the restorer of León cathedral, and father to a famous architect and a great Orientalist, José Amador de los Ríos had trained as a literary historian, but relied only on published sources to establish what are still the essential facts about the cathedral’s construction – just as construction and embellishment there finally came to an end. In this he worked closely with Sixto Ramón Parro, who in 1857 published *Toledo en la mano*, still relied upon by modern scholars despite its many errors and lack of critical apparatus.

Meanwhile Toledo was attracting the attention of foreign scholars such as Carl Schnaase and George Edmund Street, both concerned to place the cathedral’s architecture in its proper European context. Street’s *Some Account of Gothic Architecture in Spain* (1865) was less ambitious but more thorough than Schnaase’s monumental *Geschichte der bildenden Künste* (History of the fine arts), and his meticulous scholarship, fine empirical eye and dry humor have ensured that Street’s account of Toledo’s architecture has long been the best in the English language. Read in its entirety, *Some Account* effectively defined the architectural landscape of medieval Spain, and its principle deficiency – its rather blinkered appreciation of andalusí traditions – was soon compensated by two great monuments to Spanish nineteenth-century antiquarianism: *Monumentos Arquitectónicos de España*, published by the Spanish state between 1856 and 1882 (with a reprint of the Toledan volume in 1905), and the *Museo Español de Antigüedades*, published in eleven volumes 1872-1880 as a “virtual” museum of Spanish art. Although short-lived, the latter provides a remarkable insight into the seriousness with which all manner of objects were studied at the time, from seals and keys to textiles, wall paintings and metalwork. This was the period of great expansion in the new Archaeological Museum in Madrid and South Kensington Museum in London, and it was an agent for the latter, Juan Facundo Riaño, who is credited with drawing the attention of the Anglophone world to Spanish “decorative arts”. Riaño’s pioneering studies of early Spanish music also reveal him to have been very thoroughly acquainted with Toledan history and its historians, paving the way for Guido Maria Dreves’ research on medieval Iberian hymns and offices (1894), and Marius Ferotín’s great studies of the Visigothic liturgy (1904 and 1912).

As the Spanish empire collapsed in the late nineteenth century so its intellectual life continued to flourish. Three early twentieth-century publications merit special mention because of their relevance to the contents of this book. The first is Ramón Menéndez Pidal’s exemplary study of

what he called the *Auto de los Reyes Magos* (1900), Spain's earliest liturgical drama, recorded in Vallejo's *Memorias* and central to modern understanding of medieval drama in Castile. Second is Manuel González Simancas' 1904 article on the treasury of Toledo cathedral, the first such study to be truly scholarly, and an important starting point for Part Three of this book. The third is the *Historia de la Arquitectura Cristiana Española en la edad media*, published in 1908 by the architect Vicente Lampérez y Romea, admirer of José Caveda and Viollet-le-Duc, and restorer of Burgos and Cuenca cathedrals. Although his treatment of Toledo cathedral is distorted by his refusal to accept the emphatically French origins of its design, Lampérez's discussion of hundreds of Spanish churches is both broad in scope and forensic in detail.

In the first half of the twentieth century Toledo attracted a number eccentrics and intellectuals, including Laurie Lee, Cecil Beaton, Sacheverell Sitwell, Roy Campbell, David Bomberg and Georges Bataille. In 1922, well before he had become the darling of the Surrealists, Bataille went to Toledo search of French manuscripts in the cathedral archive, and found there instead various documents relating to the cathedral's construction. These discoveries – and those in three Spanish studies prompted by the septcentennial anniversaries of the foundation of Toledo and Burgos cathedrals – were critical for the great Bayonnais architectural historian Elie Lambert as he prepared two seminal studies of Toledo: the first in *Tolède* (1925), as part of a French series on great cities of art, the second in his *L'Art gothique en Espagne aux XIIe et XIIIe siècles* (1931). As a rare case of a scholar as comfortable with andalusí architecture as he was with the gothic architecture of northern Europe, Lambert was able to provide an especially compelling account of Toledo's design that took account of both traditions, tying together archaeological and written evidence as he did so. Published a few years before the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, Lambert's history was destined to become the definitive account of Spanish gothic architecture, sometimes modified but never superseded.

Toledo cathedral was little damaged by the great battle that took place at the Alcázar in the earliest phase of the Civil War in 1936, but it played an important symbolic role in the propaganda campaign between the two sides – each claiming responsibility for safeguarding Spain's artistic heritage. Bruised by these events the cathedral (and the country) closed its doors to all but the most privileged or reverent scholars, and close study of its archive, fabric and treasures once again became nearly impossible. In the 1950s José María Azcárate nonetheless was able to shed new light on fifteenth-century Toledo, profiting from extracts from the *obra's* fifteenth-century account books, originally published in 1914 and 1916, but apparently unknown to Lambert. Yet despite the value of Azcárate's work, I will argue in chapter five that he dated too much too late: in their tidy published extracts those documentary extracts seemed to suggest

new work on Toledo cathedral in the fifteenth century, in fact they were often little more than records of a near-continual process of repair and adjustment. Not until the twilight of the Franco years did any other art historian tackle Toledo. In the early 1970s Guido von Konradsheim wrote his doctoral dissertation on the cathedral, publishing several articles on it between 1975 and 1981. Konradsheim enjoyed privileged access to the cathedral but never submitted his thesis and withdrew from academic life.

As Spain slowly opened up after Franco's death in 1975, so too did Toledo. Admittedly the cathedral archive still kept short and irregular hours, remained uncatalogued, and was vulnerable to occasional strategic "losses". But things were beginning to improve. Beginning in 1970, the cathedral archivist, Ramón González Ruiz, collaborated with other scholars to produce catalogues of juridical, liturgical and biblical books in the cathedral library, publishing his important study of Toledan books and book owners in 1997. In 1985 Francisco Hernández published a scholarly edition of the cathedral cartularies (2nd edition 1996). And for the past forty years he and Peter Linehan have transformed understanding of Toledan history, their distinctive brand of skeptical enquiry epitomized by Hernández's important article on Rodrigo's new cathedral (*La hora de don Rodrigo*, 2003), Linehan's *History and the Historians of Medieval Spain* (1993) and *The Mozarabic Cardinal*, co-authored and published in 2004. All are used heavily in the pages that follow, especially for those sections treating material before 1300.

In the same period two French scholars, Jean-Pierre Molénat and Jean Passini, have also shed new light on the social and urban history of Toledo in the Middle Ages, profiting from a careful archaeological scrutiny of the city and a detailed survey of city dwellings that survives from the late fifteenth century. Meanwhile, Henrik Karge has also brought a new rigor to the study of gothic architecture in Castile. Although he has never focused closely on Toledo, Karge has refined understanding of Toledo's sources and its relationship in his authoritative monograph on Burgos cathedral (1989/1995) and numerous subsequent publications, and his contributions will often be recognized in the second part of this book. Finally, on Toledo cathedral itself there is Christopher Welander's thesis on its construction in the thirteenth century, which for the first time subjected Toledo cathedral to the kind of archaeological scrutiny that Karge had applied to Burgos. Completed at the Courtauld Institute in 1991, Welander's unpublished thesis formed a natural starting point for my own research, but in important areas his arguments – which nuanced Lambert's without significantly challenging them – have been supplanted by new evidence or interpretations, and in the end the thesis provided more a point of departure than something to follow. More useful for this study has been the work of the pioneers of a new, rigorous art history that eventually emerged in Spain after Franco's death: first scholars such as Serafin

Moralejo, Isidro Bango, Joaquín Yarza, Francesca Español and Ángela Franco, and then a new generation that – at least for Castilian art and architecture – includes Fernando Gutiérrez Baños, Rocío Sánchez Ameijeiras, Javier Martínez Aguirre, Eduardo Carrero, Felipe Pereda, Gerardo Boto, Raquel Alonso, Teresa Laguna Paúl, Laura Fernández Fernández, Francisco Prado-Vilar, Manuel Castiñeiras and Rosa Rodríguez Porto. Few have focused their research on Toledo in the period covered by this book, and almost none on its medieval architecture, but they have transformed and enriched understanding of the complex relationships between art, history, liturgy and politics in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Castile, and their work has on many occasions inspired my own ideas.

Toledo also raises particular issues of its own. Left relatively undisturbed by the Franquist regime, the cathedral authorities have been slow to come to terms with the new, secular Spain, even as the city's powerful tourist lobby promotes Toledo as city of "three cultures". This reflects in microcosm the great conflict that has dominated Spanish historiography since the 1950s: the struggle to reconcile Claudio Sánchez-Albornoz's vision of a distinctive "Spanishness" that runs throughout Spanish history with Américo Castro's notion of a "melting-pot" nation generated from its pluralistic pasts. And those same issues were being re-examined even as this book was researched and written – the political landscape constantly shifting in response to the Madrid bombings of 2004, massive migration from north Africa, the economic crisis in Europe and political turbulence in the Levant and Maghreb. These politics and histories can doubtless be detected in this book, even if, as its author, I am least able to recognize them.

Toledan Encounters

This introduction began with Blás Ortiz, and finishes in the spirit of his great history with a journey through Toledo cathedral; an opportunity to introduce the building that dominates this book, and something of its character. That character is best understood by journeying to Toledo for the Feast of Corpus Christi, when each year the city re-performs its medieval past. The long, halting procession moves through Toledo's clogged streets to the slow beat of drums, its solemn dignitaries sweating under heavy robes in the hot sun. The crowd strains for a glimpse of the glittering monstrance, shrouded by clouds of heavy incense that mingle with the acrid scent of thyme trodden underfoot. In the still, hot air flowers wilt, hanging from canvas canopies that vainly mask the oppressive sky. The procession circles the cathedral, folded within itself and cluttered with chapels, its form concealed behind heavy walls and worn tapestries. Only at the end, as the procession edges down past the cloister's dark granite walls, does this cathedral turn to face the city. Its west front entirely dominates Toledo's civic square, where each evening boys kick balls while swifts swoop overhead: three great portals, bristling with posturing saints, are

squashed between the vast, thorny northern tower and the squat dome of its southern companion (fig. 4).

< fig. 4 >

For this occasion the great bronze doors of the central portal open into the cool, dim nave. Entering behind the crowds and distant monstrosity, the eye is led east by wide ponderous arcades, squat transomed windows, and the repetitious plain vaults above (fig. 5). Multiple rounded shafts envelop thick piers, their upward movement broken by string courses that bind them at the level of the arcade springings and clearstorey sill. Everywhere there is the paradoxical impression of lateral expansion and yet division. Ahead, the nave's two eastern bays are enclosed by an elaborate stone screen with colored marbles and gilded micro-architecture. To either side, chapels bloom out of the double aisles (fig. 6); glittering *retablos* half-obscurd by iron screens.

< fig. 5 >

< fig. 6 >

At the cathedral's crossing the double, staggered aisles fold into the transepts, as though to create another church running north to south (fig. 7). Each end is marked by a portal and rose window above, and its "transepts" promise gilded statues behind their screens. To the west is the choir, the intricate canons' stalls facing inwards towards an elegantly poised Virgin and Child, the *Virgen Blanca* (fig. 8). To the east is the presbytery, impossible to take in with one glance and proffering a multiplicity of glittering wood and stone: bishops, kings, saints and prophets. Even its masonry joints are highlighted with gilded lead. In the triforium above more figures stand impassively below knotted arcades, the whole space topped by a rich *lierne* vault.

< fig. 7 >

< fig. 8 >

The ambulatories that embrace this space are low and wide, dominated by multiple piers and shafts. The inner ambulatory is separated from the presbytery by more carved stone screens, its light filtered through the dense traceries of high-placed oculi, sitting above a band triforium of exotically cusped arches (fig. 9). The outer ambulatory is lit only by the chapels that ring it – small and dark, concealing behind their screens tombs, retables and statues (fig. 10). On the central axis are the teeming sculptures of Narciso Tomé's famous *Trasparente*, Richard Ford's

“fricassée of marble”, and opposite it two larger chapels – great light-filled octagons with tombs at their centre, the chapels of Santiago and San Ildefonso (fig. 79). Passing into the warm sacristy, the curious visitor finds another world. Below Luca Giordano’s busy painted vault hang dark paintings, optimistically attributed to famous Old Masters, while glass cabinets are filled with dusty reliquaries and vestments, carelessly labeled with old scraps of paper.

< fig. 9 >

< fig. 10 >

One feels a kind of tawdry magnificence in this cathedral. Its huge, dim spaces drip with gold and sculpture, and yet its thick layers of paint cannot disguise the crumbling stones. On ordinary days its glittering treasures compete with camera flashes and fluorescent T-shirts, while barking tour guides intrude on quiet prayers. Its spaces remain as contested as they ever were, and so too are its histories.