

RESEARCH ARTICLE

# The Distracted Believer and the Return to the First Basilica: Marqués de Ureña's *Reflexiones sobre la Arquitectura, Ornato, y Música del Templo* of 1785

Tomas Macsoy

A key text on Spanish architectural reform, Marqués de Ureña's *Reflexiones sobre la arquitectura, ornato, y música del templo* of 1785, contains a rich and layered discussion of the doctrinal and aesthetic foundations of ecclesiastical architecture. Ureña's *Reflexiones* appears at a moment of transition for Spanish architectural history by calling for a return to the ancient basilica type. The paper reconstructs a discussion waged by Ureña and his contemporaries on problems within the contemporary Spanish church interior: its use of wooden ornament, ephemerals, transformable altars and other Spanish late-baroque ecclesiastical décor. Thus, the return to origins in Christian architecture might be framed in terms of a wider debate on usage, and the sense in which the basilica offered a corrective for the relationship between the religious building and religious practitioners. The integration of doctrine and aesthetic reason in this defence of the original basilica furthermore demonstrates Ureña's wish to modernize devices that had traditionally undergirded religious practice and featured materially in the education of the faithful. Finally, the paper argues for the importance, given Ureña's introduction of a framework that allowed for an aesthetic way of reasoning, of considering affective responses to architecture in the Iberian and Hispanic context.

**Keywords:** Neoclassicism; Late-Baroque; Basilica; Ecclesiastical architecture; Hispanic architecture Ornament

## Introduction

In 1785, in the southern port of Cádiz (**Figure 1**), the writer and amateur architect Gaspar de Molina y Zaldívar, 3rd Marquis de Ureña (1741–1806), wrote a pocket-sized manual that called for a return to the early Christian basilica and the Temple of Solomon as the optimal type of Christian church. The way Ureña's *Reflexiones sobre la arquitectura, ornato, y música del templo* unfolded its reformist argument brought together Catholic dogma and modern, aesthetic reasoning.<sup>1</sup> At the start of the second, and pivotal, section of his manual, Ureña wrote that the form of the temple must be understood from David's instructions to Solomon, in 1 Chronicles 22, for building a temple. David describes a temple inspired by divine revelation, 'the Lord's hand' and the guidance of an angel: "All this," David said, 'I have in writing as a result of the Lord's hand on me, and he enabled me to understand all the details of the plan'" (Ureña 1785: 154).<sup>2</sup> Both the story of the Solomonic temple itself and the idea that the designs for Moses' tabernacle and David's dream for the Temple of Solomon had come about under God's creative intervention were commonly known. Similarly, the need for the ecclesiastical interior and its material provisions to

adhere to the teachings of the Church fathers and other early Christian authors<sup>3</sup> had been raised before. Baroque Spanish treatise literature contained such admonitions, from Isidoro Aliaga's *Las advertencias para los edificios y fábricas de los templos* of 1631 (Aliaga 1631) to Atanasio Genaro Brizguz y Bru's *Escuela de arquitectura* of 1738 (Brizguz y Bru 1738). As Dora Nicolás Gómez recently pointed out (2006: 263–277), Ureña's text was indebted to principles established in such treatises, as was his dogmatic outlook on the basilica. In many respects, as the following discussion suggests, his concept of an 'original' basilica was both a site of Christian authority and a test case for modern concerns over the materiality of sensation.

Ureña devoted the first part of his treatise to explorations on the 'philosophy of the arts', on notions of beauty and taste and on something he called the 'magic' of the arts. As he listed his major influences, he referred to Plato and Cicero only in passing, continuing with mentions of an array of moderns: Yves-Marie André's *Essai sur le beau* from 1741, Christian Wolff (widely regarded as a key instigator of German rationalist aesthetics), Francis Hutcheson (Hutcheson 1725) and Denis Diderot – the latter two likely consulted via the *Encyclopédie* article 'Beau' from 1751 (Marmontel and Diderot 1751).<sup>4</sup> These modern voices are significant, if not surprising in the context of peripheral Cádiz. The focus on Solomon's temple and the quest for architectural choices conforming to early Christian



**Figure 1:** Tomas Lopez, View of Cádiz. Engraving, 1793. Biblioteca Digital de Andalucía.

teachings were a blueprint of dogmatic architectural design, but they contained little in terms of philosophical answers as to why a constellation of spaces, spectacles and sounds in the ecclesiastical environment had the capacity to move the faithful to solemnity and prayer. And it was the potential opened by this new discursive horizon, one that emerging aesthetics had made possible by prioritizing the sensory apparatus over the prescriptions and dictates of *logos*, that the *Reflexiones* sought to chart. The following essay explores some of the ideas propounded in the treatise and the ideas of those who influenced it, paying special attention to problems of beauty and ornament, as well as the importance of metaphors in describing them. The aim is to return Ureña's introduction of an aesthetic way of reasoning to its contemporary Iberian context, where it emerged from debates on the usage and adaptation of ecclesiastical architecture and on the role that emotion should play within religious practices.

### The Quest for Origins

Ureña was from a family of ennobled Genovese merchants and became an active member of Cádiz's patrician class. He left a military career after his parents died, settling in Cádiz where he eventually secured an appointment as marine supervisor at the important military compound of San Carlos, inland from the peninsula of Cádiz. Ureña's interests were those of a polymath: he was granted an honorary membership of the Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando in Madrid as well as the Maestranza (noble militia) in Valencia. He constructed an organ for a local convent, executed a number of depictions of saints and altarpieces, composed poetry, and collected exotic plants. Visitors to Cádiz reported that he spent his time in a laboratory of physics and chemistry, making his own galvanic battery, lenses and optic devices, and some locals even recorded him concocting desiccated cubes of food for seafarers and inventing medical treatments for the local

ill (Sanz 1979: 21). During his short life, he fashioned for himself a version of the outward-looking *ilustrado*: he travelled north, first in a diplomatic convoy to France, then to the Low Countries and Britain — there are even reports of a meeting with King George III, and the *Reflexiones* touched on a gamut of then-fashionable thinkers from Denis Diderot to Benjamin Franklin (Ureña 1785: 370).<sup>5</sup> Like his many other occupations, his work as an architect was undertaken in a spirit of *virtuoso* disinterestedness and civil service. For the planned citadel of San Carlos, he contributed some designs and did some work on its church and astronomical observatory, both of which were completed posthumously (**Figures 2 and 3**).

Ureña absorbed a number of ideas from modern writings on the principles of beauty and architecture that made his text move, in unexpected ways, towards developments in architectural theory that were overturning the mimetic model of Vitruvius. When Ureña parsed the particular moods produced by certain interior spaces, he enthusiastically endorsed recent French theory which relied on sensations, not imitation, to explain the effects of architecture. He quotes at length Nicolas le Camus de Mézières' *Le génie de l'architecture, ou L'analogie de cet art avec nos sensations* of 1780, which is the foundation of Ureña's idea that sensations and emotions (in Mézières, *mouvements*; in Ureña, *mociones*) produced by an architectural setting are the same as those produced by a similar landscape setting (Le Camus de Mézières 1780: 56–62). Mézières was one of many French theorists who wrote in the aftermath of Laugier's Rationalism, which, as Richard Wittman has pointed out, prepared the path for an explosion of new theories (Wittman 2007a; Wittman 2007b; Pont 1992).

In France, aided by British garden theories and Claude-Henri Watelet's *Essai sur les jardins* of 1774, which Mézières quoted as the main inspiration for his own method, a type of criticism based on emotions and



**Figure 2:** Royal Armada institute and astronomical observatory, San Fernando, Cádiz, construction directed initially by Ureña (1793–1797), with subsequent modifications (1800–1847). Photo by the author.



**Figure 3:** Military Academy (left) and Pantheon for Illustrious Seamen (right), San Fernando, Cádiz. The Pantheon was designed by Ignacio Imperial Diguera and Ureña (1789–1795) as the church of the Purísima Concepción, completed in the 1850s. Photo by the author.

sensations experienced by a mobile beholder brought the affective possibilities of architecture more fully into view. Since in the theory of sentiment the beholder was subject to the contingent and transitory nature of mental states and emotions, architecture played out as a series of spatial images and focal points through which the public could move.<sup>6</sup> As Christopher Drew Armstrong and Peter de Bolla have argued, this sense of a physically mobile beholder was entirely new to 18th-century conceptions of aesthetic experience (Armstrong 2012; de Bolla 2003).

Another defining influence in the *Reflexiones* harks back to the previous century: for his expositions on early and pre-Christian custom and construction, Ureña relies heavily on Claude Fleury's (1640–1723) *Les mœurs des Israélites*

and *Les mœurs des Chrétiens*, two enormously influential volumes published in quick succession between 1681 and 1682, and available in numerous reprintings (Fleury 1701). Fleury's affectionate portrayal of ancient Jewry as a simple and benevolent community solemnly committed to serve a righteous, strict God, did much to bring Old Testament and early Christian cultures closer together as venerable models of spirituality. In 1988, Alfonso Rodríguez Ceballos proposed that the growing interest in Jewish custom and history around 1770, often instigated by a renewed enthusiasm for Fleury's books, was a symptom of hopes for a reform of Spanish Catholicism, directly reflecting the Jansenist leanings among governors and clerics of the Madrid court and some Spanish dioceses (Rodríguez

G. de Ceballos 1988; Martín González 1988; García Melero 1998). In Spain Jansenism was officially outlawed, but as Ceballos suggests, the sudden onset in the mid-1770s of a centralized neo-classical reform directed at ecclesiastical settings had in fact a suspicious affinity with Jansenist teachings. So did the rhetoric that accompanied reformist writings, including, in the *Reflexiones*, a strident opposition to outward, prejudiced displays of piety, which were to be supplanted by a private practice of solitary worship and a new communitarian culture of charity.<sup>7</sup>

For a description of the perfect temple, the *Reflexiones* draws on Rome's ancient basilica churches. There are no records that Ureña ever visited Rome, and not enough is known of his library at Cádiz to allow us to reconstruct his familiarity with engravings after the early basilicae. But in his *Reflexiones*, Ureña discusses, in varying degrees of detail, the renovated St. Peter's, Santa Maria Maggiore, San Giovanni in Laterano, and briefly the Santa Maria degli Angeli, a reformed thermal complex. The *Reflexiones* scarcely engages with the delicate issue of what survives of the first basilicae and the degree of their preservation after centuries of rebuilding. For instance, one misses references to unscathed ancient basilical constructions like the S. Paolo fuori le Mura or the S. Lorenzo fuori le Mura (**Figure 4**). Either sincerely or disingenuously, Ureña moves back and forth, without much in the way of a historiographical guiding principle, between visions of the Holy City, forms of the old basilicae and the greatest monuments of Rome. Quoting from Vitruvius, and consulting a number of renaissance treatises – Palladio, Scamozzi, Serlio, Vignola – the *Reflexiones* adopts the orthodox view in which the Greco-Roman building orders are regarded as the universal foundation of architecture. Ureña upholds Vitruvius's accounts of the primitive hut as giving rise to the form of the Greek temple and of the five orders as representing the most tested, rational and 'sage' language of construction (1785: 124–128).

Aside from what these hallowed ideas might indicate, Ureña was critical of claims that the history of Christian sanctuaries emerged in a linear manner from the Temple of Solomon. This ambivalence is succinctly captured in the manual's title, when it refers to 'disciplina rigurosa' and then 'crítica facultativa'. At times, but not consistently, Ureña engages in a critical reading of his sources. For instance, he discards Roland Fréart de Chambray's idea, which the French theorist derived from Villalpandus, that the Corinthian order began with the Temple of Solomon (Fréart de Chambray 1650: 61).<sup>8</sup> Moreover, Ureña finds that Fréart's observation that the architect of the Arch of Titus had intended to copy the Temple of Solomon is not archaeologically plausible. By the time of the Roman sack of Jerusalem, Ureña says, the original Solomonic temple-shrine was not extant, having been replaced by the sanctuary complex Herodes had erected after the destruction of the original temple (Ureña 1785: 134–135). Ureña is eclectic and self-contradictory in his estimate of the origins of architecture. He navigates many stances in his *Reflexiones*: an adherence to doctrinal texts and the authority of Rome's great basilicae, scepticism about the influence of the Temple of Solomon in architectural history, an unquestioning acceptance of theoretical classicism, and a plea for purifying architecture that is being recast in terms of an investigation into aesthetic grammars.

According to Ureña, the appropriate form for the temple devoted to God would require three rules of thumb that architects should follow: abide by the classical orders; return to an edifice that is freestanding and independent of the urban grid and thus easily visible, like the early Christian basilica was; and finally, apply a particular type of 'ornament', which he defines as the interior arrangement of ecclesiastical furniture, images and devices. This ornament, Ureña says, should serve as a collection of focal points of attention: 'According to the spirit of the church one is taught by the Sanctuary's position, its walls,



**Figure 4:** Piranesi, View of St. Paolo fuori le Mura. Engraving from *Vedute di Roma*. The view represents the portico before its nineteenth-century restoration.

its pillars, its ceilings: one is taught by its Holy Chalice, its censers, its candelabra, its fonts, Easter Candles, lamps, piers, triangle-chandelier, veils and clocks' (Ureña 1785: 156).

Asking questions about the nature of church architecture was, as far as Ureña was concerned, a version of the rhetorical art of providing meaning through adequate words. Such a belief in the correspondence between the material image and the *ars dicendi* was entirely consonant with the theoretical position of *ut pictura poesis*, which defended such tight correspondences between the *verba* of the orator and the representative and expressive means of the visual artist. In Ureña's attempt to wrest from such varied sources an aesthetics of the solemn church, he remains open to new ideas and exemplifies an ambitious modernity. In his passages on beauty, for instance, he defends his right to learn from what the sensorium teaches us. Ureña wrote extensively on sensorial experience in ways that can only be dealt with briefly here. Drawn perhaps to Anton Raphael Mengs's association of beauty with social grace, Ureña posits that our senses, cut off from the faculty of reason, simply constituted 'man's *plebe*' ('la plebe del hombre')—'an extravagant, overindulgent and self-satisfied multitude' (1785: 19). This disenfranchised sensation, this *plebe* of man, revelled in a love of ornament and ostentation, as I will demonstrate. Beauty, by contrast, was the precinct of soulful experience. Sensations or apperceptions of beauty were not subjective: they were as exact and as universal as a thermometer, transmitted with accuracy to our minds by our 'fibres', which respond to sound, visual stimulus and touch like resonating musical strings (1785: 95). Nevertheless, his reasoning on the matter is a fine balancing act, often quarrelling with the godless materialism of some *philosophes*, even as he consulted both radical sensualists, such as Denis Diderot, and moderate deist sensualists, such as Hutcheson and Christian Wolff. 'Some claim that beauty is free from any institution, even the divine one, and that it is nothing but a real character', writes Ureña in a revealing passage on metaphysics and aesthetic reasoning:

Others pretend that there is no beauty superior to God, and that it follows from this that all beauty arising from men is only derivative. As for me, who enjoys his freedom to think, as does every rational being, and who has no intention of shedding this right, [I] imagine that there is a metaphysical good, and that there is beauty. That the former speaks to the soul, and to the inner senses. It follows that the devices of oratory, the demonstrations of mathematics, the expositions of philosophy are susceptible to good and bad. But those objects that are visible, audible, or palpable, that explain themselves to the soul and to the exterior senses, are capable of beauty, and of deformity. Whether we believe [beauty] is an absolute given outside God, or that it is no more than derivative, is of no concern to me: it suffices to know that it is a possible given, even if it may only deserve to be called beauty by virtue of its greater or lesser distance from the most

complete beauty that understanding may obtain. (1785: 25–27)

Ureña's assessment of the question of origins is premised on both an illiberal theology — the idea that Christians copy their temples from a divine thought, and therefore rely on a pre-established design — and a 'philosophical' probing of metaphysics that places divinity at a distance even when keeping God as ruler. This seeming compromise made sense to the extent that one is willing to accept that divine perfection needs to be made to *materialize*: it was obtained by sense-perception and by an awareness of man's earthly distance to the divine. In the spirit of Fleury's adage that 'it is we, not God, who need temples' (Ureña 1785: 8), Ureña made fallible, free agency a condition of the possibility of his ideal type of the Christian temple. The basilica therefore transcended architectural historiography: it was at once a site of Christian authority and a test case for modern concerns about the materiality of sensation.

### The Waning of Ornate Religion

The reformism that triggered the *Reflexiones* revolved around a political bid to bring about a complete transformation of Spanish church architecture, and of church interiors in particular.<sup>9</sup> The Spanish court had long been indifferent to all but its own royal premises. This indifference changed radically after a painter by name of Antonio Ponz published a series of travel journals, *Viages de España*, between 1772 and 1794, recording twenty years' worth of first-hand observations on Spanish towns, villages and convents. Soon Ponz became the aegis of a reform movement, unprecedented in Spain and without parallel in France. In 1776, at King Carlos III's specific request, Ponz was offered the position of secretary at the Real academia de bellas artes de San Fernando, in Madrid. Within months, he channelled the leverage he had gained with the court to coin a policy of taste that was to be centrally organized. Within a year of his nomination, on August 10, 1777, Ponz marshalled the Academy to sign an incendiary report (*Representación*) on the abuses of decoration in the ecclesiastical interior and submit it for the king's consideration.

Ponz's *Representación* led to the issuing, on November 23 and 25 of 1777, of two royal edicts signed by the king's chief minister, the Count of Floridablanca, to be distributed to the Council of Castille, to all archbishops, bishops, prelates and members of cathedral chapters in all corners of the kingdom. The edict contained three clear directives: first, all plans for construction and reconstruction of churches in the kingdom should be submitted to an assessment, free of charge, by the Academy in Madrid; second, all new construction in wood in the church interior was to be suppressed; and third, architecture that served God should demonstrate a steadfast allegiance to an austere nobility (*noble simplicidad*).

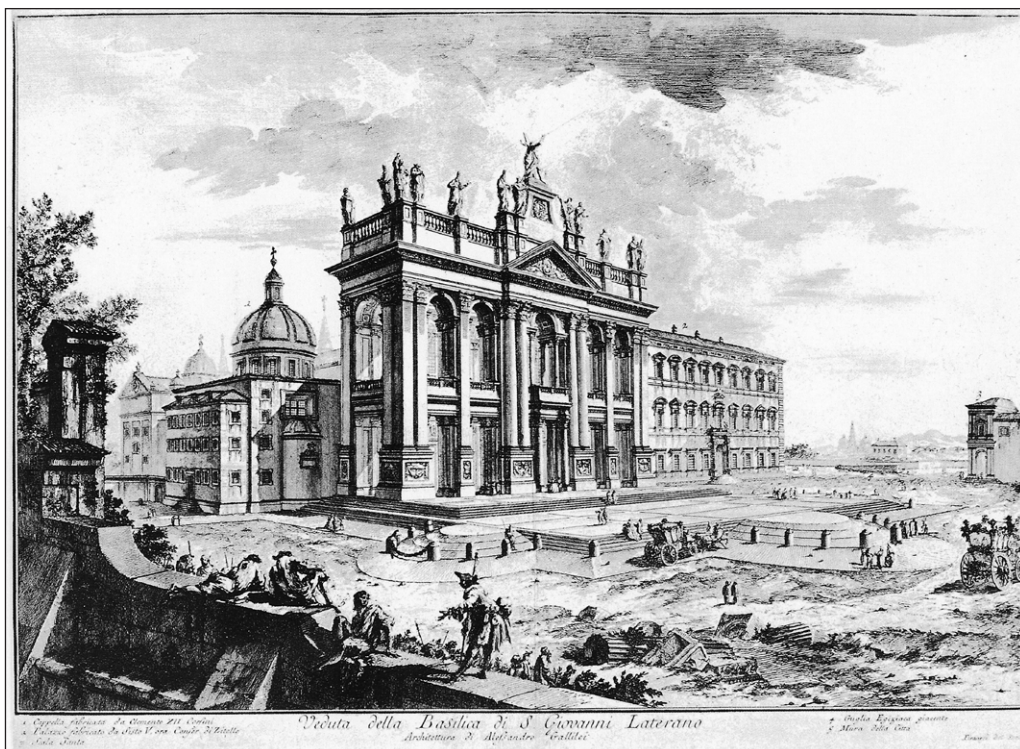
At first glance, the edict was an attempt to make churches safer and tidier. In the Madrid area, recent fires in chapels and convents had spread and severely damaged adjacent buildings (Rodríguez G. de Ceballos 1995: 86–90). It comes as no surprise that the Count of

Floridablanca drew attention to the fact that the presence of woodwork inside the church was the cause of these fires. No mention was made in the edict, however, about any need to prohibit a specific style or ornamental ambition, even though it seems clear from Ponz's many descriptions of wood-studded altarpieces and sanctuaries that he was taking aim at a baroque language that he dismissed as whimsical and ignorant of true languages of architecture.<sup>10</sup> Floridablanca seemed to hope that by enhancing the Madrid Academy's authority as the guardian of 'good taste', and by commending the use of (coloured) marbles and bronzes to achieve a sense of 'decency, cleanliness, tautness and durability', a gradual transformation would ensue.

However, Ponz's earlier *Representación*, the one presented privately to the Court of Floridablanca on August 10, 1777, to provoke a royal response, contained a much harsher indictment of the changes the Spanish ecclesiastical interior had undergone. Ponz proclaims that:

An affront is made to His Majesty to shame his towns, and his Kingdom, and Religion, by filling up the temples with indecorous and ridiculous objects, [an affront] to these times, by imprinting so many and so awkward tokens of discredit, and to the public, by putting before its eyes a plethora of things, that should have shown the way to knowledge and esteem for the good, but instead leave it in blindness, and in the evident habit of loving the bad, without even mentioning the vast wealth that everywhere in the Kingdom is consumed in maintaining this injury of the Nation.<sup>11</sup>

Ureña had a fine understanding of the locally organized expenditure that Ponz and the Count of Floridablanca had attempted to denounce, and he fully agreed with Ponz's indictment of the ornate interior as a harmful distraction for the eyes of the faithful that was capable of hollowing out the very edifice of Catholic morality. Although Ureña was never formally designated an architect, Ponz visited him in Cádiz and in his *Viages* referred to Ureña as a 'fine gentleman' and acknowledged his 'intelligence in the fine arts', suggesting Ponz was familiar with the *Reflexiones*. Nevertheless, Ureña's basilical ideal and his mobilization of an aesthetic reasoning have no parallel in Ponz's work, which is rather limited to outlining infractions against classical rules. Stylistically, too, Ureña rid himself of the prescriptive classicism advocated by Ponz. Ureña was involved in the construction of the Church of the Purísima Concepción, in the compound of San Carlos in Cádiz, a church converted to the Pantheon for Illustrious Seamen, and a project he was unable to complete before his death in 1806 (**Figure 3**). The Pantheon illustrates the monumental and freestanding form that Ureña identified with the solemnity of the original basilica. His austere, unadorned edifice incorporated a wall articulation comparable to the outer wall of Michelangelo's ambulatory for St. Peter's, while its west façade is crowned with a colossal order reminiscent of Alessandro Galilei's façade for S. Giovanni in Laterano in Rome (**Figure 5**). It also formed two wide, heavy transept arms with lunette-shaped clerestory windows, gleaned, perhaps, from Luigi Vanvitelli's renovation of Sta. Maria degli Angeli (**Figure 6**). While operating within the register of a town design by the Italo-Spanish court architect Francisco Sabatini, Ureña took no interest in Sabatini's



**Figure 5:** Piranesi, Veduta di S. Giovanni Laterano, with Alessandro Galilei's façade and front square (completed 1735), Rome.

sculptural baroque walls, imposing instead a sturdy, cube-like design with cut-out window openings.

To the sense of a spectacular, adorned interior decried by Ponz in his *Representación* Ureña opposed a vision of order and natural expression. Following Fleury, the *Reflexiones* explains, part by part, which elements of church architecture and visual and musical decoration best recovered the 'beautiful order, well-tended appearance, decency and majesty of the earliest temples of Christendom' (Ureña 1785: 237). Many of the practical suggestions in the *Reflexiones* deal with distancing: setting the church apart, removing unnecessary clutter, making striking vistas and filling the air with soothing, penetrating sounds. Ureña supports these claims with biblical passages. Ezekiel describes the Holy City, symbol of the church, facing the four cardinal winds. In the Book of Revelation, Saint John describes celestial Jerusalem as equipped with three door openings to the west and three to the east. Ureña moves from scripture to precept:

From this I infer that the appearance of the temple must, as far as circumstances allow, be identical from all sides [...] If that Holy City has doors facing all directions of the wind, it would be separate from any other structure, it should stand on its own, independent from all accessory building [*arrabal*]. (1785: 158)

On a metaphoric level, the physical separation of the temple re-enacted the separation of the divine and the mundane. Christ, who carries the name of 'Holy Pontifice, pure and innocent, segregated from all sinners' (Ureña 1785: 159), impels us to construct his dwelling far from any human precinct. Similarly, the vision of Ezekiel, who speaks of a ramp or stairway for the temple, results in Ureña's pre-

scription of a heightened platform and elevated ground for the erection of a church. The best of Roman churches provided yet another rule: opening a square to serve as entrance to church, a formula that can be observed in Saint Peter's, San Lorenzo in Laterano, and Santa Maria Maggiore. If these instructions were followed, the interior would be bathed in optimal lightening, animating a soulful engagement with the interior environment:

The composition of the church, which is made more or less accessible to the eye by the definition of masses, and by the alternation of clear and dark passages, no less than by the projected shadows – this form established the particular character, and depended in turn on an advantageous placement with regard to the four cardinal directions; this gives all its soul, and therefore one of the speculations that touch the core of construction is the distribution and disposition of lights. The vicissitudes of nature visible in an open field follow *caeteris paribus*, in accordance to the mute position of the star that illuminates it, and at the same time varies the nature of the scene. Inside the temple this must be as constant as possible. The distribution and disposition of lights is essential to sustain this balance. (Ureña 1785: 162–63)

Setting the right parameters for illumination was important, since daylight was key to the orchestration of masses inside the church. Ureña reserved a similar discriminating treatment for elements of sound: the architect must equip his church with a vault that would enhance the musical accompaniment of liturgy. Following Mézières's general directions for creating an architectural correspondence between space and our 'sensations', Ureña moved on to



**Figure 6:** Sta. Maria degli Angeli, Rome. Transept view, previously baths of Diocletian, with interior adaptations from ca. 1563–1564 (Michelangelo) and ca. 1749–1750 by Luigi Vanvitelli. Photo by the author.

match a number of basic emotions (joy, sadness, terror) with out-of-doors settings and their corresponding situations of brightness or shade, plenty or emptiness. He mentions a number of sonic attributes as well, such as wind, thunder, or falling water. 'In order to attract sadness', Ureña wrote in a passage directly inspired by the French *L'analogie de cet art avec nos sensations*:

The author [Mézières] says: *let the site be sombre, hazy and producing half-tones*: imagine yourself in a mountain range, not one covered in arid rocks, but made up of mountains and hills uniformly covered with trees and bushes without other objects; now we find a sensible analogy between spectacle and sensations. Observe the half-tones of shadow, that occupy a great surface of the masses, and that of half-shadow in the valleys at two o'clock: the strength of light that loses itself in the green carpet sharp and monotonous: and after that certain weariness that sight suffers when it has nothing else to occupy it. Note the anguish that the soul feels in a narrow creek, or in a crevice, without the ability to register the horizon freely. (1785: 67–68; italics in original)

In the *Reflexiones*, Ureña suggests such sensational arrangements according to the linear sequence of spaces the visitor traverses from the exterior to the zenith of the temple. As the visitor moves from one space to the next, the scenery unfolds, beginning with the exterior spectacle of the church rising up like a mountain, a freestanding monument elevated on a ramp, then the front court and vestibule, and on to the internal scenery of open space, mellow light, chapels that invite solitude, altars elevated on staircases and behind fretwork to avoid trespassing, and a grave soundscape.

Ureña intermingles two types of architectural expression. He refers to an *architecture parlante* that depends on a choice of orders, ornaments, images and symbols, all concurring to animate the surfaces of walls in the terms of an explicit grammar of religious communication. 'Good architecture is eloquence for the eyes' is an important adage, Ureña says (1785: 292). For Ureña, the character of the orders enlisted the same qualities that belong in oratory for the use of styles or *modi dicendi*, so that like the styles of oratory, every choice of order must be dictated by the demands of decorum and representation. He therefore follows the traditional dictum that architects should at all costs avoid contamination of the orders and hybridity.<sup>12</sup> However, to Ureña the orders and wall surface articulation not only possess an 'eloquent' capacity for supporting a religious narrative, but they also contribute to his second mode of expression by providing a sensational dimension to the circulation route that carries a visitor through the building. In its purely physical manifestation, architectural form is an echo chamber of natural emotional resonance, even before, and well after, it is read as a classicist compositional effort. Visually, architectural form draws its expressive potential from a set of abstract spatial conditions, such as openings between pillars and walls, the distribution and intensity of light, the presence and shape of

cast shadows. The building's designer is in effect acknowledging the visitor as a fully sentient being; to Ureña, even the feeling of a breeze inside the church could augment the experience. In line with this, the ecclesiastical interior needs to affect the visitor by the way it stimulates hearing through music and the spoken word, both affective forms Ureña spends over a hundred pages scrutinizing.

### The Othering of the Church

As far as the Spanish reformist movement is concerned, the issue of correct architectural form was closely interwoven with a polemic over the ornate ecclesiastical interior. Speculations about God's will for temple architecture at times involved a process of 'Othering' that aligned the edifice of the church with the user's desire. A more detailed look at the metaphorical value of the ornate church should help to better understand Ureña's intervention. On March 27, 1789, the Academy of San Carlos in Valencia elected as a new honorary member Andrés de Valldigna, who was a well-known representative of the clergy: a Capuchin, lector of theology and official censorer to the Holy Office (the Inquisition) in the bishopric of Valencia. In his inaugural oration, he instructed artists to convert their work into doctrinal spaces and renewed a call to teach virtue through the senses. Valldigna referred to the image of the Temple of Solomon to illustrate how it served the people of Israel, whose unruly mindset was contrary to 'the spirit of true religion' by which Moses and David had wished to educate them:

Architecture, which until then had made itself serviceable, with all its means and skills, to superstition and idolatry, started to serve the true God. In the Book of Deuteronomy (chap. 21) this Lord directed the Hebrews that when in war they took as prisoner and slave some foreign and beautiful woman, they should not marry her without first shaving her hair from her head and cutting her fingernails. God proceeded in the same way on that occasion [i.e., the building of Solomon's temple]. Architecture had until then been false [*exagerada*], idolatrous and gentile. But as God wished to take advantage of her beauty and splendour and, let us put it this way, to wed her, he purified her, cleansed her, removed the filth from her head, cut her nails and habilitated her for his service in the most famous edifice of the world.<sup>13</sup>

Valldigna's speech was a reminder that the church edifice was a human-made device, not a simple representation or copy of divine intention. The architecture of a church could serve virtue or precipitate distraction and sensual opulence in the guise of religious zeal. The design of a church had always been an object of desire, in the best case for the attainment of greater purity; but it could also, when misused, foster the lower desires. Via an elusive moral reading of the ornate interior, Valldigna treated the first true sanctuary, the one that overcame idolatry and heathen custom, as a woman whose seductions were in need of trimming, of being washed and thus resisted. Doing so echoed a rhetorical tradition stipulating that good dis-



course was economic in its means and avoided distracting and masking adornment. As Jacqueline Lichtenstein has shown, rhetorical literature employs gendered metaphors as a warning against the appeal of discourses that are unduly 'dressed up' and 'adorned'. Quintilian stood out as a staunch and evocative critic of richly surfaced discourse that 'emasculates the subject which it arrays with such pomp of words', similar indeed to some 'effeminate and luxurious apparel' that 'fails to adorn the body and merely reveals the foulness of the mind' (Lichtenstein 1993: 91–113, citing Quintilian on p. 107).

Along with this idea of false pomp from which churches suffered came metaphors of the decorated woman – a seasoned seductress who hoards ornaments because she disdains truth. Such metaphoric possibilities were also fully exploited by both Valldigna and Ureña in their zeal for a purified ecclesiastical space and austere religious practice. But comparing Valldigna's trimmed and washed female captive to Ureña's metaphors of purity reveals how the latter abandoned the rhetorical injunction against ornament in favour of an aesthetic account of the sensorial stimulus. Ureña defended the beholder who succumbed to those pure and unfettered states of the soul created by engaging in the natural outdoor world. It is to this new empiricist value that he contrasted, with opprobrium, the delights of possessing precious jewels, pearls, gold and perfumes, natural resources crafted and consumed in circumstances of luxury:<sup>14</sup>

One can observe that creation in the arts is rather analogous to that which we can observe in nature: because it seems in fact that the most striking should be easier to see, the most harmonious easier to hear, the most odoriferous closer to smell. But where is the gold? Where the silver? Where the precious stones? And as these things await a finishing touch by men's hands, where are these glaring and transparent crystallisations? ... They were entrusted to the earth's concavities: to the abyss filled with inexhaustible waters: to the flower bud, or to the bosom of insects: to the hidden metal, and the tree trunk. Of course it appears to us that a meadow filled with the purest gold, a crystal hill whose trees were made of coral, its leaves of mother of pearl, its grass of emeralds, its flowers of rubies, topaz and amethyst, would be better than what we see. But the Creator disagreed. *Nature*, a modern sage says, *follows the ideas of its maker, not ours*. That pomp, those sparkles, those colours, those metals of voice, were given as waste to the flower-field and the shrub. (1785: 48–49; italics in original)

As the previous pages have shown, such passages suggesting the pleasures of pure nature were essential to Ureña's way of conceptualizing architectural space, and indeed it was a hallmark of his new aesthetic approach that he allowed his prescriptions on ecclesiastical space to rest on nature-induced moods and feelings. Ureña thereby circumvented an anti-ornamental discourse in order to deliver a positive image and a truly aesthetic account of the right design of the church. By Ureña's interest in the

natural connections between the moods men experience among natural geological and climatological formations and men's response to a solemn church, the implication is not just that divine hands had ordered nature in its unique harmonies, but also that the archaic solemn church holds a very real and physical appeal for its beholder and visitor. By digging into a new language of aesthetic rationalization in the *Reflexiones*, Ureña was able to justify his choice of the ancient basilica not just in terms of biblical revelation but also as a sensorial conduit towards knowledge of the divine. Where Ponz and Valldigna merely condemn ornament, using their criticism of the church to tighten up the believer's sensorial activity and to place the flock under the tutelage of a religious thought-content, Ureña creates a new type of natural education for the believer consisting of impression-like sights, sounds and sensations. The purified church he explores in the *Reflexiones* rested on the activity of what he called the fleshy 'fibres', the 'nerves' and day-to-day sensory perception; it rested, therefore, on sensory perception independent of signification through narrative and illustration. He thereby arrived at a modern and liberal adaptation of Ponz's and Valldigna's rather cutting prohibitions: a space of Christian ritual must not be designed to just thwart or restrict the desirous faithful; it instead had to lead the faithful forward to savour the deeper feelings and harmonies of Creation.

### Theatrical and Public Disorder

In this climate of hostility to the ornate interior, asking where God's temple had come from also meant asking what uses believers were to ascribe to the temple. After all, ornateness in the setting of the eighteenth-century Spanish church was often synonymous with the transformability and adaptability of moveable Eucharistic containers; changing lighting conditions; and interventions of clergy and fraternities in adding ephemeral flower, curtain and candle arrangements to altars during religious festive occasions (**Figure 8**). Much of this activity, along with the abundance of wood in altarpieces, had caused the episodes of fire mentioned by the Count of Floridablanca in his charters. Ureña also carefully inventoried all the grievances against church decorum that resulted from the pedestrian nature of the modern altarpiece and chapel décor and appliances (1785: 253–254). Such devices, as Barbara Stafford reminds us, were the basis for associating the Catholic sacristy with media-intensive, theatrical manipulation (2006: 131 ff).

Ureña wove his critique of a 'haptic' use of church goods into a rejection of ever-changing fashion in decoration – a stance that was becoming known in Spain as early as the 1760s through readings of Charles Nicolas Cochin's attacks on *rocaille* or rococo design, published in the *Mercur de France*.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, the reform movement's doctrinal question of how to subordinate church spaces and religious practices to Catholic faith was rephrased in terms of a more encompassing polemic against societal disorder. This polemic emerged in part from the irrational ornamentation of a contemporary Hispanic altarpiece,<sup>16</sup> and in part from the commodification that characterized the enormous success of the wooden décor economy in churches throughout the peninsula and the colonies

(**Figures 7 and 8**). Church décors were to be taken out of the believer's hands because they needed to become dissimilar again to the ostentation of private wealth, and because by blurring boundaries between the public and the private they failed to act as a moral compass.

Ureña's word for all the 'arbitrary work' that so endangered spiritual rectitude in churches was not *rocaille*, as had been Cochin's, but *chinesco*, 'china-style'. Such a term conveyed the sense of a dishevelled and whimsical drifting of fashions in the church interior. The excesses in church décor were not just due to vanguard eccentric architects throwing classical rules overboard, although these get their frowning mention too; but above all they had to do with the commissioners and the public at large. Art historical historiography on the rococo has hailed some of the architects of late baroque and rococo while neglecting the complicity and influence of local elites, as Colin Bailey (2014) has demonstrated. The polemical descriptions of abuses in church ornamentation in the *Reflexiones*, like those of Ponz and other reformist writers, pointed not to artistic conviction or stylistic congruence but to the hazards of *chinesco* as a whim for which enormous resources are mobilized. There are, moreover, obvious parallels between the polemic against the décor articulated by Ureña and Ponz on the one hand and Floridablanca's politics of the 1770s on the other. Floridablanca attempted to censure outgrowths of vernacular religion, to rein in secular *cofradías* and to empower episcopal authority over these local associations, which the reformers viewed as extravagant, vulgar and unconcerned with doctrine (Verdi Webster 1998; Prado Ramirez 1986; Saaveda and López-Guadalupe Muñoz 2002).

Ornament made the beholder feel complicit in the act of adding yet more ornament and exuberance, to transgress the boundaries of the real and of temporality, as Caroline Heering has explored. Ornament was a festive device of excess, a device for creating the disjunctive but also exhilarating sense of 'osmosis between agent and surroundings' (Heering 2013a; Heering 2013b: 28). Reformists in Spain confirm this sense that the derailed form of the church was a sign of societal flux and transgression in ways that far transcend the problem of rococo as an ornate, anti-classical style. The problem of what Ureña called the *chinesco* is its concession to human drives and tastes. The public created the objects of its whims instead of attending to wise classical precepts of harmony and good sense (*razón*):

We have arrived at a moment where good taste is confused with the frivolous director of fashions, and where the senses escape the jurisdiction of good sense. Let us not even speak of the veritable ravage created by this system, son of Epicurus, in morals. (Ureña 1785: 22)

The mentalities of those who usher fashion into the ecclesiastical interior are those of men and women who are on the constant lookout for variety, who live in a state of 'indulgence', of 'disquiet', of high spirits and 'disorder':

These men run continually behind protean fashion, which slips through their fingers with the same speed, representing a drama as interminable and laughable to anyone with a sound, solid and restful mind: a drama that joins the creators



**Figure 7:** Jacint Morató i Soler with Pau Costa, high altar Church of Santa Maria, 1723, gilded 1770s, Cadaquès. Photo by the author.



**Figure 8:** Carlos Morató Brugeroles, high altar of the chapel of the Virgin of Miracles, Riner, Solsonès, 1747–58. Photo by Maria Garganté.

of 'china-style' to the self-proclaimed philosophers.  
(Ureña 1785: 145–146)

Ureña was concerned that educated, compliant Catholics were not the only men who denounced a church entourage that, in its effort to please and impress, had run empty. In fact, the most resounding critics of the practices of these philistine countrymen were fashionable critics of religion, the people Ureña calls *filósofos facultativos*:

Very grave are the consequences of our attempts to apply meditation and serious application to the precepts discussed here, and if this does not happen, the consequences of a negligent indifference, or erroneous conduct, will be grave too. Let us not even mention others outside the core of the Catholic Church, because if we start to consider the heretics and reckless philosophers who are determined to prick and poke fun at our devotion, we can never be too rigorous in the effort to ban from our temples those objects that, although good vehicles in exciting pious affects in one's private life, can nevertheless elicit sinister interpretations, or ungodly and sacrilegious buffoonery, when exhibited in a public site of our adoration. We will not take too great a liberty in pleading that whatever the eye meets in public spaces, it should be capable of inspiring a godly circumspection, and a profound respect. (Ureña 1785: 11–12)

Enemies of Catholic faith — no doubt Ureña had in mind the writings of French materialists and atheists — were not the only ones to deride some embarrassing objects

of devotion in the public church interior. The irony, of course, is that Ureña had himself subscribed to a reformist movement that sought to expose the intersection of private desire and public cult in church décor. Nevertheless, as with Ureña's advocacy of Mézières's architecture of sensations to uncover the emotions of a desirous beholder, this denunciation of anticlerical materialism offered a way of humanizing the enthusiastic believer, who was drawn towards the reform-minded Catholic in common ground against the enemy 'outside'. This amalgamation of wrongdoers high and low had been a trend among reformers: in 1776, an anonymous writer published a series of diatribes against the enemies of the Catholic faith and the monarchic order. Only later did the writer, Fernando de Ceballos, risk revealing his name in new volumes of his *La Falsa filosofía o el ateísmo, deísmo, materialismo y demás nuevas sectas convencidas de crimen de estado* (Ceballos 1774). Ceballos's conservative project was to aid the reader in detecting these enemies of royal and ecclesiastical authority, along with their strategies of persuasion and philosophical sources of inspiration. There were four types: deists (who looked back to the materialism of Epicurus and had particular appeal among 'sodomites'), libertines, agnostics ('incredulos'), and a devious 'sect' of self-proclaimed philosophers ('los siniestramente llamados filósofos'). Indeed, the latter group shared many characteristics with French secularist thinkers. Ceballos noted that behind the respectable image of the retired thinker, self-proclaimed philosophers hid their true purpose of spreading their ideas at social evenings, dinner parties, associations, and indeed in court. Ceballos's quartet of heathen agitators and miscreants offers a reasonable explanation for Ureña's willingness to regard epicurean

patrons in thrall to 'protean fashion' as persons affected by the mindset of the modern secularist thinker, the French-style *philosophe*. The point was of course to suggest a web of social factors undermining the institutions of church and monarchic authority. But the conflation of epicurean patron with secularist thinker itself is highly revealing: what the enemies of Catholicism shared was that they thrived socially, that they benefitted from the advent of the commodity ('protean fashion') and that they used the public sphere to spread their ideas.

Ureña's conviction in the end was that the well-conceived church tamed the wrong impulses of the faithful. In a list of six recommendations for the perfect church building and church decoration, he asked the patron and designer to overlook entirely the preferences of common people. Not only should one suppress the impulse to please them, as it will lead to frivolities and chimeras, one must also understand that the vulgar faithful were kept in a condition of vulgarity by the wrong examples they had been given. But those common people, he says:

Will cease to exist as soon as those who are not common really wish them to. I base this upon experience. In Rome, with regards to the arts, we can observe that common man is impossible to tell apart, because by virtue of seeing and hearing what is good, they form for themselves the taste for the good. (Ureña 1785: 97–98)

In other words, to remove the décor, and thereby to combat the sense of the interior as a pleasure-house, the church needed to become a locus of aesthetic education. Solomon's temple and the early Christian basilica were divinely authorized guides in this reorientation of the church interior, just as were simple, deep emotion and a harmonious aesthetic stimulus.

### Conclusion

Ureña's *Reflexiones* became a unique exponent for balancing doctrine with aesthetics. His work reveals that the confrontation with Hispanic traditions of ecclesiastical construction was more than a clash between one architectural style and another. It was, rather, a move to reform the unhinged panorama of ecclesiastical usage and the problems of emotionality and caprice within Iberian cult spaces. As advocated in the *Reflexiones*, the return to the ancient basilica – and beyond to Solomon's temple – concealed a struggle familiar from other episodes of neo-classical monumentalization of painting, sculpture and architecture. It entailed the recognition of a beholder as aesthetic fact. Ureña proselytized a free-standing, monumentalized body of the church in which the effects from exposure to natural sunlight had been carefully calculated, as had the way 'natural' aesthetic sensations would work on the faithful's senses of vision, hearing and touch. Notably, his ideal church environment was conceived as removing itself from the 'grasp' of the faithful. At the same time, the natural forms of a church were to resonate by visual and sonic means within the beholder's physical and psychological space.

The aesthetic reasoning used throughout the text complicates our understanding of what it meant for Ureña to return to the old basilica and to abide by a doctrinal understanding of religious practice. The problem Ureña set out to resolve was not a lack of communication between religious construction and the flock of the faithful, but rather the way in which that relationship had become organic, gradually empowering the visitors to regard the church as a space they could domesticate. Ornateness stood in the way of sound emotional engagement. The basilica would function both as doctrinal form for correct practice and as a trigger for selecting and elevating affective and aesthetic perceptions. It would in fact pursue affective order and concentration, so as to rein in vulgar impulses and a disorderly sensorial life. It would seem that, as with other instances of Enlightenment pursuits of better paths for public service and education, the search for origins also meant the creation of circumstances favourable to the growth of a subject that polices itself into order, elevation and obedience.

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Scholarly attention on Ureña's treatise has been recent and sporadic. There are no monographs, and in extant surveys Ureña shares the limelight with other architectural tracts (Sanz 1979; Sanz 1988; and León Tello and Sanz 1994: 480, 1005, 1119–1122). The best account, advancing both Ureña's interest in emotion and his understanding of ecclesiastical architecture as guided by doctrinal writings, is Gómez (2006).
- <sup>2</sup> This and all the following passages from the *Reflexiones* are based on the author's translations. To avoid lengthening the text, quotations in the original Spanish have not been added in the footnotes.
- <sup>3</sup> In addition to David's description of the Temple of Solomon and complementary passages in the Holy Scriptures, Ureña's sources include Tertullian, Saint Cyprian, Saint Ambrosius, Saint Irenaeus, Saint Hieronymus, Eusebius of Caesarea, Abbot Racine, Catrou and Rouillé, as Dora Nicolás Gómez acknowledges.
- <sup>4</sup> For the references to Plato, Cicero, Wolff, Leibniz, Hutcheson, André, Diderot and Mengs, see Ureña (1785: 26).
- <sup>5</sup> On Ureña's itinerary and his journal in Suárez, see Japón (1988) and Pemán Medina (1992).
- <sup>6</sup> On sensibility in the French academic language of architectural criticism see, for instance, Baudez (2013: 53–66). On sensibility and poetic association as elements of urban and utopian architectural design in the 1780s, see Rabreau (2008) and Rabreau and Massounie (2006). For the importance of Nicolas le Camus de Mézières to sensualist architecture, see Heß (2013: 73–93). On the garden as a model for emotive spectatorship in France, see Oostveldt (2010). On the medical debates underpinning the new focus on emotions, the outdoors, and the animation of consciousness, see Williams (1994).
- <sup>7</sup> On Jansenist sympathies in the Spanish bishoprics and at the court of Carlos III, see Tomisch (2012).
- <sup>8</sup> To disprove it, he included evidence from the letters published by the Royal Society's *Philosophical Trans-*

actions in 1753, 'An Explication of All the Inscriptions in the Palmyrene Language and Character Hitherto Publish'd. In Five Letters from the Reverend Mr. John Swinton, M. A. of Christ-Church, Oxford, and F. R. S. to the Reverend Thomas Birch, D. D. Secret. R. S.' (Ureña 1785: 133).

- <sup>9</sup> The best study to date on Spanish architectural reform and the instrumental status of academies is Bérchez (1987). For aspects of architectural reform and the Real academia de bellas artes de San Fernando, see Bédat (1989); Navarrete Martínez (1999); García Melero (1997); and García Melero (1996).
- <sup>10</sup> On the relevance of carpentry to Ponz's stance on baroque ornament, see Blasco Esquivias (2010, particularly p. 239).
- <sup>11</sup> ARABASF, Representación a SM, 10 August 1777, *Libro de Juntas Particulares*, fol. 78–79.
- <sup>12</sup> Three 'grand' languages dominate the *modi*, according to Ureña, and only these derive from God: the agreeable sublime (*género agradable*), the majestic sublime (*género magestuoso*) and the terrible sublime (*género terrible*) (1785: 41).
- <sup>13</sup> Inaugural discourse by M. R. P. Fr. Andrés Valldigna in *Continuación* (1789: 38).
- <sup>14</sup> Although it is not clear what Ureña's intellectual sources were, passages in the *Reflexiones* do point to an investment of aesthetic form with gendered ideas of virility. An example occurs in a passage where Ureña states that architecture, sculpture and painting are quite simply 'an eloquence for the eyes' and that 'all virile and nervous eloquence hides artifice so that it is masked as facility' (1785: 291–292).
- <sup>15</sup> On Cochin's attacks on fashion, see Michel (1998). On the interiorized logic of the market in the Paris Academy, see Macsoyay (2014: 168–186, 200–203).
- <sup>16</sup> For a recent account of Portuguese and Hispanic ecclesiastical decors, along with an account of spiritual and social practices that inspired them, see Bailey (2014).

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