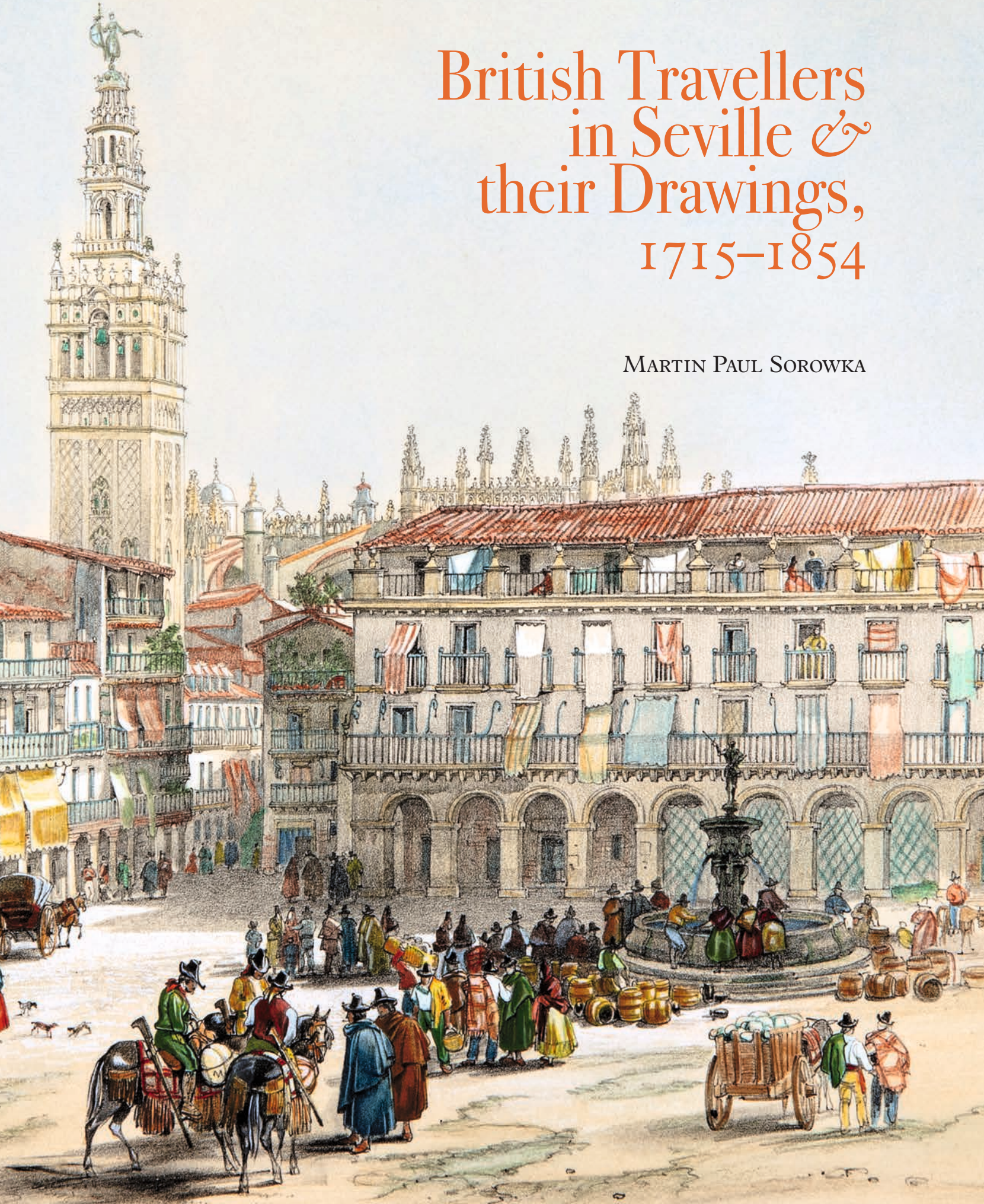
British Travellers in Seville & their Drawings, 1715–1854

Martin Paul Sorowka



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Martin Paul Sorowka

Centro de Estudios Europa Hispánica
Instituto Ceán Bermúdez

Cover image:
Louis Haghe after George Vivian, *Plaza de San Francisco and Tower of the Giralda, Seville* [detail of fig. 182], 1838, hand-tinted lithograph, 272 × 407 mm, in George Vivian, *Spanish Scenery* (London, P. & D. Colnaghi & Co., 1838), pl. vi. Madrid, Instituto Ceán Bermúdez

FIRST PUBLISHED BY

Centro de Estudios Europa Hispánica (CEEH)
C/ Felipe IV, 12
28014 Madrid – Spain
www.ceeh.es

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Design and layout
PeiPe, Diseño y Gestión

Colour separation
Lucam

Printing
Advantia Comunicación Gráfica

ISBN: 978-84-18760-53-2
DL: M-6132-2025

Printed and bound in Spain

Introduction

The current ubiquity of technology allows effortless access to more of the world than ever before, and the future will bring about further advancements that are currently unimaginable. Travel's relationship to technological novelty is long established and lasting, and the immediacy and excitement of accessing up-to-date information today must have been felt as strongly by people at home in Britain in 1837 when turning over a folio to admire a lithograph of the interior of Seville Cathedral by David Roberts [see no. 41], or simply listening to a letter being read aloud after dinner, in which the writer described their impressions of paintings by Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (1617–1682), or the decorative *yeserías* (plasterwork) of the Alcázar. The means of communication were continuously evolving, and people naturally adapted to every innovation in anticipation of the fruits of each development; it is this that can be traced through the experiences of the travellers in Seville in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In 1760 Samuel Johnson (1709–1784) 'exhorted' the traveller Joseph Baretti (1719–1789) to 'write daily, and with all possible minuteness' in order for the reader 'to form an idea tolerably just of Spain',[1] and nearing a century later Richard Ford [see no. 38] advised the traveller in Spain to take 'a blank note-book, for "memory is more treacherous than a lead pencil, and one word jotted down on the spot is worth a cart-load of recollections"'.[2]

What is presented here are those immediate observations from which it is possible to ascertain the travellers' experiences, thoughts, and impressions as accurately as possible, and more easily so when collated as a collection of texts and drawings. This book presents significant new visual and written testimonies of Seville by British travellers between 1715 and 1854, with particular reference to their descriptions of architecture, but above all, it presents an analysis of the drawings they made when in the city. The earliest engravings of Seville are those of John Breval [see no. 1] in 1715, and their subject matter being the city's Roman remains is a substantial counterpoint to the views that followed later in the century. It is no coincidence that his images of Seville [see figs 1, 2, 4] came after the War of the Spanish Succession (1701–14) and the ascension of the first king of the Bourbon dynasty, Philip V (r. 1700–46), which heralded the *Siglo de las Luces*, the Spanish Enlightenment. The final date 1854 is an appropriate point to take leave of the narrative after drawing attention to

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1 Baretti 1770, vol. I, p. VI.

2 Ford 1845, vol. I, p. 58.

CATALOGUE

[12] 1779 – Alexander Jardine, army officer and diplomat

Itinerary in Spain in 1779: San Sebastián – Bilbao – Santander – Ribadeo – La Coruña – Cádiz – Seville – La Carlota – Córdoba – Aranjuez – Madrid – El Escorial – Santiago de Compostela

Information about Alexander Jardine (d. 1799) is scarce. His father, Alexander Jardine, 4th Baronet of Applegirth (1712–1790), was an army officer who spent his military career on the continent, converted to Catholicism in Rome, and died in Brussels. His son was illegitimate and despite his proclivity for writing, almost nothing is known about him beyond his having been born on the continent and having died exiled from Spain in Portugal. In 1771 he was sent from Gibraltar on a diplomatic mission to the Emperor of Morocco. His active military career ended in 1776 when he became a British agent in Spain, gathering intelligence for four years in sometimes dangerous conditions, bearing in mind that war was declared in 1779. It cannot be said with any certainty when he undertook the tour that informed his *Letters from Barbary, France, Spain, Portugal, &c.* (1788). It is likely that the volumes were compiled from various journals written at different times incorporated into those of a tour carried out in 1779.

Jardine was a man of letters, attuned to the progress of the Enlightenment. In 1771, the year of his Moroccan diplomatic mission, he conceived the idea of a liberal society. In his Spanish publication he refers to many Enlightenment figures, above all to Montesquieu (1689–1755) and Adam Smith.[57] He also mentions John Talbot Dillon's translations of Spanish poetry and of Guillermo Bowles's *Introducción a la historia natural y a la geografía física de España* (1775).[58] Jardine witnessed the decadence of Spain in the emptiness of the countryside.[59] Not so much a travel diary, his writings on Spain reflect his political, philosophical, social, and economic beliefs.[60] They forego any description of the city of Seville and mention only the paintings of Murillo, declaring those in the convent where the artist ended his days to be of the highest art for their reflection of the Enlightenment ideals of art and nature:

> It appears to me, as if Velasquez and Morillo [sic] should stand next to the very first of the Italian school, not only as faithful imitators of nature, but sometimes soaring above her, towards the true sublime, and particularly the former; the one seems to dignify, and the other to beautify nature.[61]

Jardine is probably describing those in the Franciscan friary of Los Capuchinos, but it would seem he had been misinformed about Murillo's final movements, as he was working in Seville but on pictures for a Capuchin friary in Cádiz.

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[57] Ramos Gorostiza 2006, p. 142 n. 2.

[58] Jardine 1788, vol. II, p. 165.

[59] Crespo Delgado 2001, p. 283.

[60] Bolufer Peruga 2009, p. 90.

[61] Jardine 1788, vol. II, p. 207.

Fig. 106. John Frederick Lewis, *A Religious Procession in a Crowded Street*, 1834, watercolour and body colour heightened with white on paper, 838 × 655 mm. Current location unknown

[41] 1833 – David Roberts RA, artist

Itinerary in Spain in 1832: Irún; 6 December, Vitoria; 7 December, Burgos; 16 December, Madrid. **1833:** 9 January, Ocaña; 25 January, Córdoba; 5 February, Granada; 21 February, Loja; 25 February, Málaga; 20 March, Ronda; 21 March, Gaucín – Gibraltar (British territory); 29 March, Tangiers (Morocco) – Gibraltar (British territory); 20 April, Cádiz; 27 April, Jerez; 1 May–15 September, Seville and Alcalá de Guadaíra with excursions to Carmona

Itinerary in Seville: Cathedral, Giralda, Alcázar, Casa de Colón, Maestranza, Cruz del Campo, Torre del Oro, San Marcos, Santa Catalina, San Luis, Itálica, Alcalá de Guadaíra, Castle of Marchenilla

Of the many artists who travelled to Seville, David Roberts (1796–1864) was the most prolific. His creative response to his Spanish experience began immediately upon crossing the border from France in 1832, and continued for many years after his return to London. The resultant works include oil paintings, watercolours, and pencil and watercolour sketches, leading to further engravings, lithographs, and woodcuts. Along with this abundant visual record, many of Roberts's letters have been located, including five from Seville and as many from other Spanish cities, as well as Gibraltar and Morocco, which prove an indispensable resource to chart his tour and reveal his impressions of the places visited. James Ballantine's *The Life of David Roberts, RA: Compiled from his Journals and Other Sources* (1866) provides Roberts's life story without dwelling so much on his œuvre, and is the text upon which all later biographies are based since it includes transcriptions of letters both by Roberts and John Frederick Lewis which have since been lost.

Roberts travelled overland from Irún south to Madrid, then altered his itinerary to visit Granada before improvising an excursion to Morocco from Gibraltar. Later, after arriving at Seville, he stayed longer than he had intended in order to paint monumental works in oil on the spot. His intention to return via Toledo and El Escorial was prevented by the quarantine measures introduced to curtail the rapid spread of cholera. Nevertheless, he stayed in Spain as long as the circumstances and his funds allowed, which was longer than he had envisaged before leaving England.

Like David Wilkie before him [see no. 32], it was Roberts's innate talent coupled with immense effort over many years to advance professionally that brought about the considerable means necessary to undertake such an extensive European tour, coming as he did from humble origins in Edinburgh. The keen observer will notice references to his father's profession of shoemaker in the '*zapateros*' of the shopfronts. Regarding his artistic development, it is recognised that his later success was underpinned by his formative years spent as an apprentice painter of interiors, literally simulating wood and marble effects. He then gained employment as a painter of scenery in the theatre, as did other distinguished artists of his day. As a result, artifice and efficiency complement his natural talent, and both enhance and detract from his work, depending on how it is viewed. Ian Gow underscores Roberts's relationship with architecture beyond that which is depicted in his views.[255] Roberts would frequently paint watercolour perspectives for Edinburgh architects and occasionally made a foray into design, including an interior for the new National Gallery, London. On one occasion, the inspiration came from his Spanish travels: 'The termination of the buttresses' of an unsuccessful design proposal for the Scott Monument, Edinburgh, 'will

[255] Gow 1986.

Fig. 121. David Roberts, *The Torre del Oro*, 1833, oil on canvas, 39 × 48 cm.
Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado, P002853

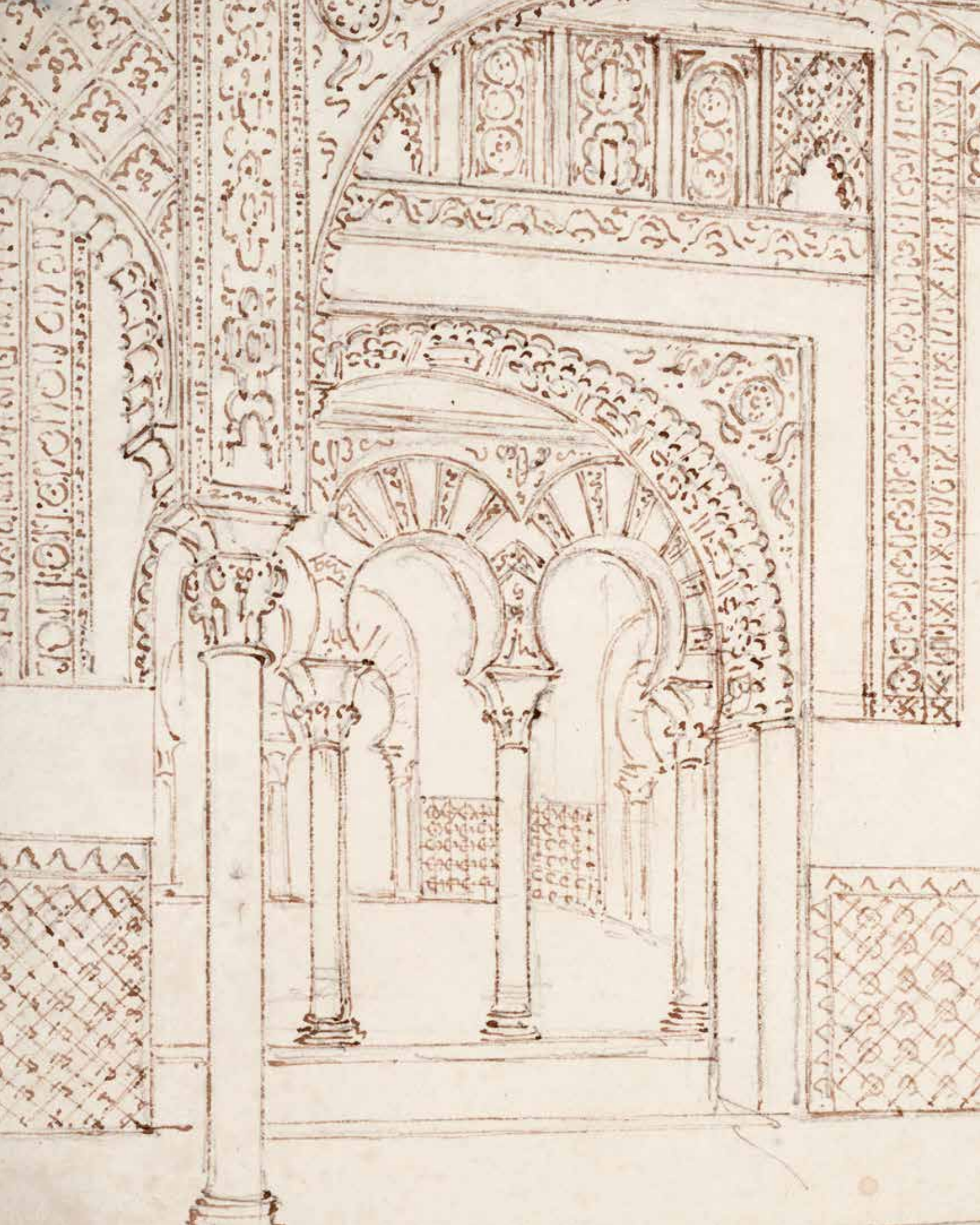
The Torre del Oro

For the many travellers who arrived at Seville by steamer from Sanlúcar de Barrameda, the Torre del Oro would have been the first building they saw up close. The few people portrayed on the banks of the river wear the dress of the period and are accompanied by their luggage. Roberts depicts the quayside under a blazing peach-tinged sky [fig. 120], reflected in the wet foreground. The Torre del Oro almost dematerialises in the light, with only the softest shadow over its twelve-sided structure. The tower has the correct form if not a little squat and the details have been simplified. The darkest tones are for the elm trees that stretched along the bank of the river towards the bridge of boats in the distance. This cropped, centred composition has to be kept in mind when considering the version in oil and the engraving.

The oil painting of the Torre del Oro [fig. 121] was given to the British vice-consul in Seville Julian Williams in gratitude for his hospitality. Had it not been for Williams's interest in fostering an art scene in Seville, Roberts would not have enjoyed the friendship of the local artists.

The horizontal composition of the oil is more pleasing than the watercolour, as the solidity of the tower is offset by the expanse of water at its calm point at high tide. The tower's proportions are more convincing than in the sketch, though the windows and other openings are equally simplified. The background of elms has been replaced with a long low classical façade that resembles to an extent the palace of San Telmo, which was behind him. The convent of Los Remedios with its arrangement of pyramidal roofs appears to be upstream

Fig. 151. David Roberts, *Interior of Seville Cathedral*, 1833, watercolour and gouache over pencil on grey paper, 362 × 247 mm. Birmingham Museums, 1940P899



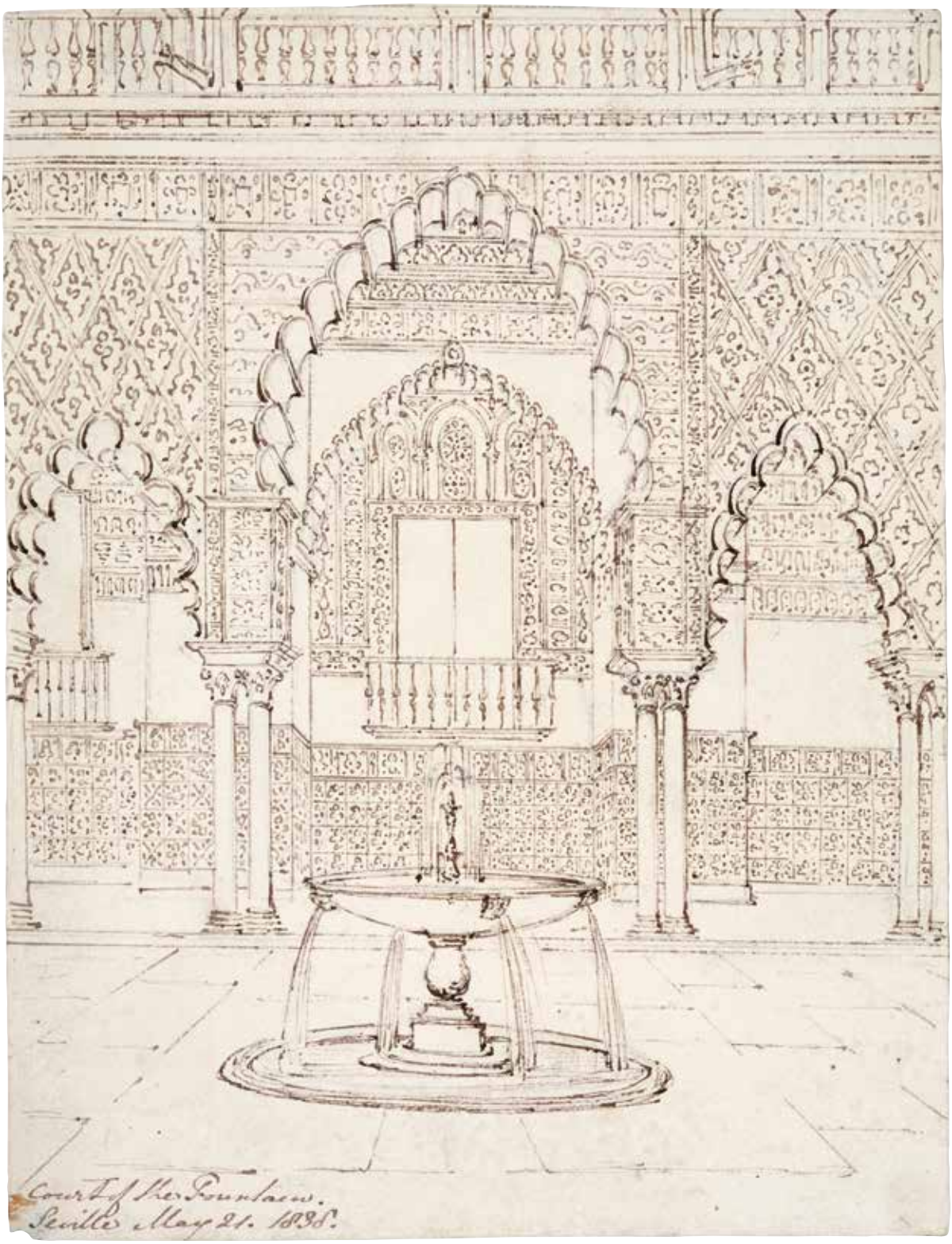


Fig. 192. Cecilia Montgomery, *Patio de las Doncellas*, 1838, pen and brown ink over pencil on paper, 246 × 189 mm. Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford, WA1961.9.15

[52] 1838, 1864 – John Gardner Wilkinson, egyptologist

Itinerary in Spain in 1818: Arenys de Mar – Barcelona

Itinerary in Spain in 1838: 2 September, Cádiz; 4 September, Seville; 13 September, Cádiz; 22 September, Gibraltar (British territory)

Itinerary in Seville in 1838: Cathedral, Alcázar, Casa de Pilatos, Real Fábrica de Tabacos, Lonja, Torre del Oro, Hospital de la Caridad, Biblioteca Colombina

Itinerary in Spain in 1845: September, Málaga

Itinerary in Spain in 1863: 17 December, El Puerto de Santa María. **1864:** 6–9 April, Seville; 3 May, left El Puerto de Santa María

Itinerary in Seville in 1863: Cathedral, Alcázar, Real Fábrica de Tabacos, Hospital de la Caridad, San Isidoro del Campo, Itálica

What distinguishes John Gardner Wilkinson (1797–1875) from the other British travellers in Spain is the twelve years he spent in Egypt before he first journeyed to Seville. The grand Egyptian cities he knew had existed unchanged for centuries, and he depicted them along with the monuments of the pharaohs. Due to the rigour of his Egyptian studies he is regarded as one of the founders of Egyptology; less known is his close relationship with Spain. Wilkinson travelled to Spain at three times in different stages of his life. In 1818, when he was twenty-one and a student, he made a detour on a tour of Europe to visit Catalonia; in 1838, when he had turned forty, he spent three weeks in Cádiz and Seville; and finally in 1864, when he had turned sixty-seven and married, he spent four months in El Puerto de Santa María, which was his last trip abroad.[396] As a consistent sketcher, he left a considerable legacy of many varied drawings of these places. Additionally, he made drawings of Málaga, and of the coast and coastal towns of Andalusia and Galicia, during Mediterranean voyages in 1842 and 1845. These sketchbooks are complemented by extensively annotated notebooks in which Wilkinson touches on the many different topics of interest to an educated gentleman like himself.

Wilkinson's childhood was beset by tragedy. His mother, Mary Anne Gardner (c. 1774–c. 1804), died when he was six years old, and his father, John Wilkinson (c. 1774–1806), passed away two years later, leaving him orphaned at the age of eight. In the few years he shared with his mother, she taught him Latin and Greek, and also how to draw. His inheritance provided an education and the financial independence to pursue his antiquarian interests. Before he went to Harrow School in 1813, Wilkinson started keeping a sketchbook in which he drew local parish churches. Harrow was where Lord Byron [see no. 22] was educated from 1801 to 1805, and Wilkinson's attraction to places associated with the Romantic poet has not gone unnoticed.[397] Wilkinson went to Oxford University and travelled through Europe in his summer vacations, including a brief excursion into Catalonia in 1818. The seven sketches he made in Catalonia consist of landscapes, architecture, domestic scenes, and people in traditional dress – the typical interests of a gentleman scholar that reappear consistently in his later sketchbooks.[398]

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[396] Sorowka 2022.

[397] Thompson 1992, p. 5.

[398] John Gardner Wilkinson, *Sketchbook*, 1818–19 (Bodl, MS Wilkinson dep. d. 2).

Fig. 205. John Gardner Wilkinson, *Torre del Oro*, 1838, pencil and watercolour on paper, 144 × 71 mm. Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, MS Wilkinson, dep. d. 13 fol. 14v

San Juan de Aznalfarache

On his approach to Seville, at the final bend of the river, Wilkinson was attracted by the twelfth-century Almohad fortifications encircling the hill at San Juan de Aznalfarache and made a quick ink sketch between the lines of text in his diary. His finished watercolour [fig. 206], being after that of the Torre del Oro and taken from a position slightly upstream, may have been painted on his leaving Seville.

The iconography of this view dates back to the sixteenth century. In a sketch of Seville and Triana drawn by Anton van den Wyngaerde (1525–1571) in 1565, the fortress at San Juan is seen in the background with ruined buildings extant within the walled precinct.[425] These ruins appear in an early seventeenth-century map though clearly, by 1838 there is no

[425] Anton van den Wyngaerde, *Seville and Triana*, 1567, n.d., ink with wash on paper, 478 × 372 mm (Austrian National Library, AC14451337, fol. 28v).

[59] 1841 – Nathaniel Armstrong Wells, artist and writer

Itinerary in Spain in 1841: February, Cádiz – Seville; July, Madrid – Valladolid

Itinerary in Spain in 1844: Irún – Tolosa – Vitoria – Burgos – Madrid – Segovia; April, Toledo – Torrijos – Valladolid – Zaragoza – Tudela – Tolosa

The artist and writer Nathaniel Armstrong Wells (1806–1846) was a Black Victorian amateur, the son of a wealthy country gentleman of West Indian heritage and as such exceptional in his day, if not unique. He visited Spain on at least two occasions, and his book *The Picturesque Antiquities of Spain: Described in a Series of Letters, with Illustrations, Representing Moorish Palaces, Cathedrals, and Other Monuments of Art, Contained in the Cities of Burgos, Valladolid, Toledo and Seville* (1846) is a noteworthy text for the descriptions and illustrations of these four one-time capital cities of Spanish kingdoms.[470] The original drawings are all of an architectural theme and are of immense value for what they represent both as records of Seville and as the sketches of an insightful connoisseur attuned to the ideas of his time.

Nathaniel Wells (1779–1852), the artist's father, was the eldest natural son of a plantation owner on St Kitts and a slave on the estate, Juggy, who took the name Joardine Wells on manumission. He was educated in England and was one of an estimated twenty thousand Black Georgian Londoners. Upon the death of his father the plantation owner, Wells became substantially wealthy and decided to look for a suitable country estate. He acquired Piercefield, a Neoclassical house designed by John Soane in Monmouthshire, Wales, with renowned landscape grounds that drew people there for the Romantic purposes of enjoying the views along the valley of the River Wye. In 1801 Wells married Harriet Este (1780–1820) and they had ten children, of which the artist was the third child and second son. He was baptised Nathaniel Wells and at some point adopted 'Armstrong' as a middle name. In 1818, the artist's father was appointed Sheriff of Monmouthshire. In all the contemporaneous writing about him there are few references to his heritage.[471]

Piercefield House and the pleasure grounds surrounding it were the place where Nathaniel Armstrong Wells, the artist, grew up, and to which he was associated. Yet, apart from the cold facts of his birth, baptism, marriage, and death, nothing is known about Wells's upbringing or his life until his first visit to Spain when he was thirty-five, as presented in his book. His elder brother William Meyrick Wells (c. 1803–1822) went to Eton College and then to Christ Church College, Oxford.[472] Being a second son Nathaniel had a less certain future, and he did not attend either Eton or Oxford, but on the death of his elder brother he became heir to the estate at the age of sixteen. With no evidence of an education or a career in the army, the Church, politics, or the legal profession, one possibility is that he was a merchant, a career that would have taken him overseas when a young adult. It is assumed he lived in Caen, Normandy, and the drawings of the city in the same deposit in the Tate lend some credibility to that. His book also implies a certain familiarity with the geography and people of France and Italy. It was in Paris in February 1844 where he married Georgiana Lucy Price (fl. 1844–1889), who was a British national born in Saint Germain.[473] In August 1845 his address on the publishing contract he signed with Richard Bentley was Piercefield,

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[470] Wells 1846b, pp. 10, 93, 282–83, 350, 360–61, 378, 433.

[471] Evans 2002; Rainsbury 2020, pp. 263, 266.

[472] Stapylton 1884, pp. 68, 290.

[473] 'Marriages', *Illustrated London News*, 98, vol. IV, 16 March 1844, p. 175.

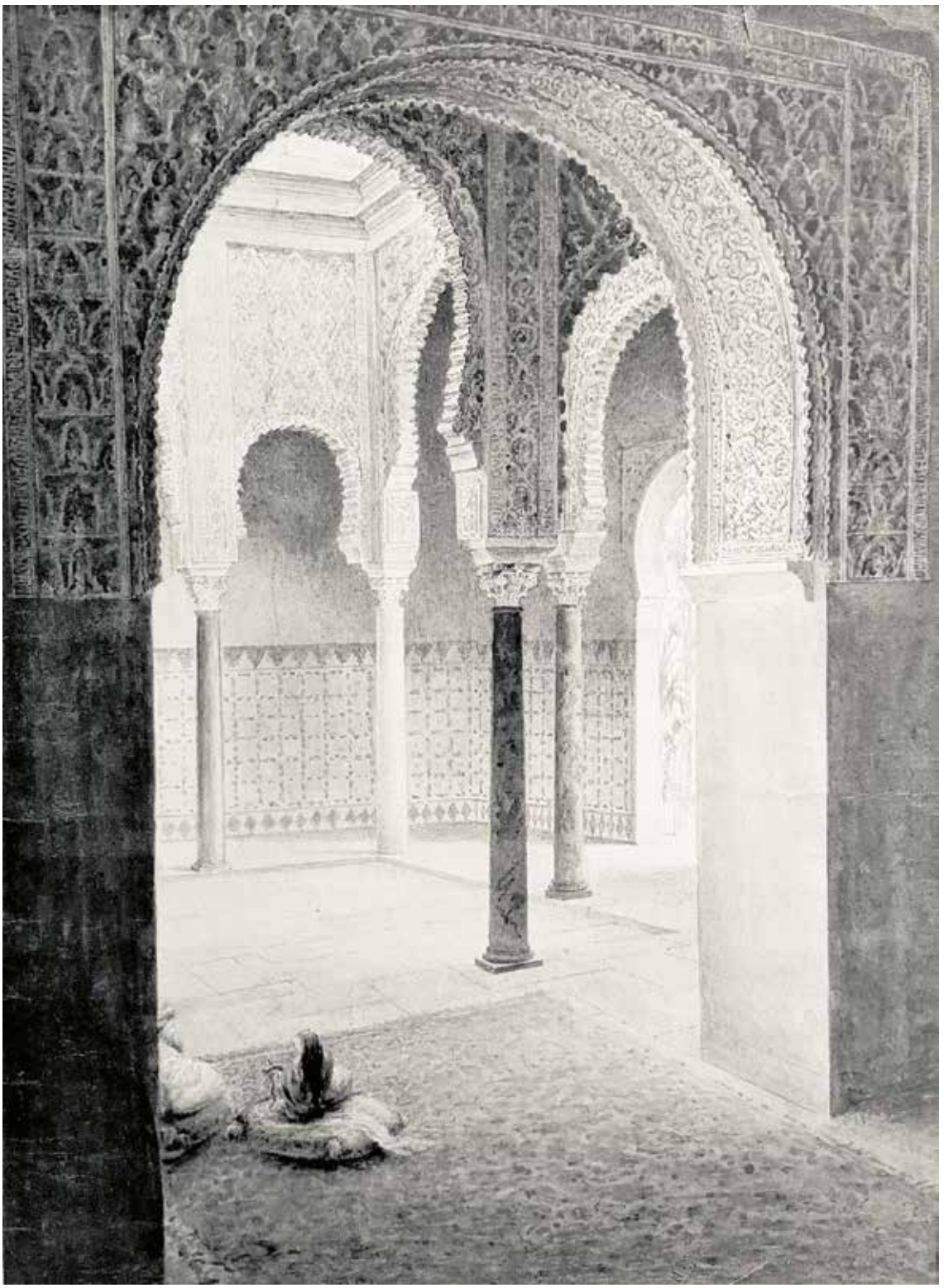

Fig. 233. Nathaniel Armstrong Wells, *Entrance to the Patio de las Muñecas, Alcázar, Seville*, c. 1841, pencil, watercolour and ink on paper, 278 × 205 mm. London, Tate Gallery, X84486

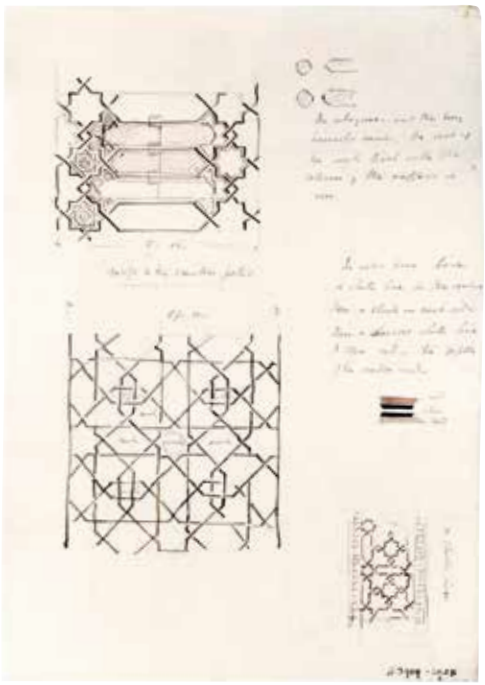

Fig. 277. James William Wild, *Details of Artesonado, Gallery of the Patio de las Muñecas, Alcázar*, c. 1847, pen, ink, pencil and watercolour on paper, 249 × 178 mm. London, Victoria & Albert Museum, E.3919–1938

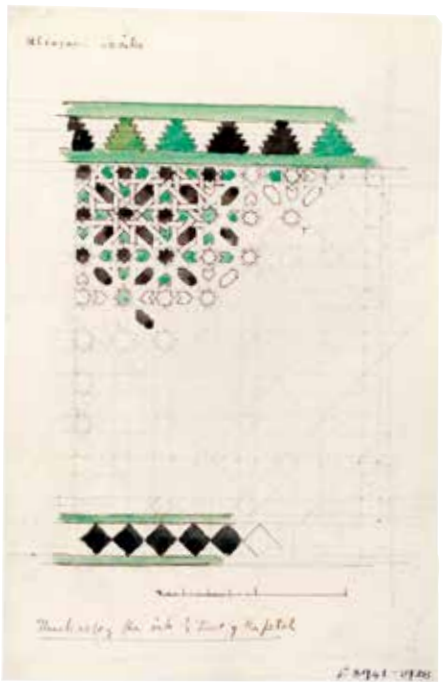

Fig. 278. James William Wild, *Azulejos, Patio de las Muñecas, Alcázar*, c. 1847, pencil and watercolour on paper, 185 × 120 mm. London, Victoria & Albert Museum, E.3941–1938

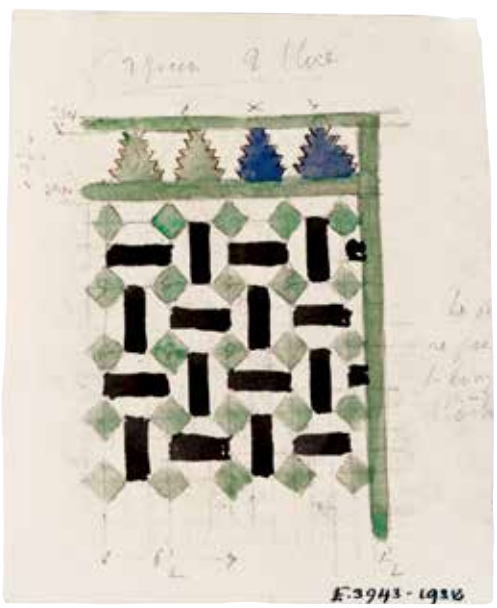

Fig. 279. James William Wild, *Azulejos, Patio de las Muñecas, Alcázar*, c. 1847, pencil and watercolour on paper, 106 × 86 mm. London, Victoria & Albert Museum, E.3943–1938

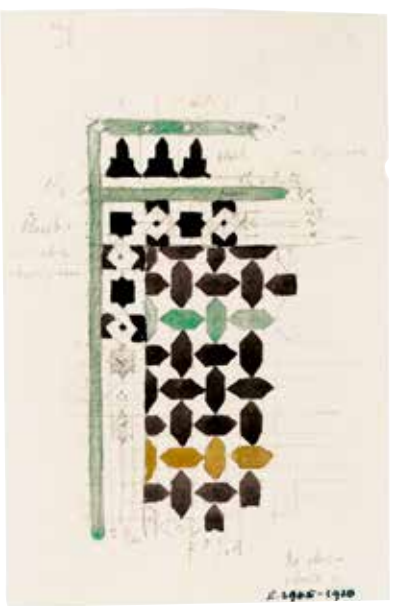

Fig. 280. James William Wild, *Azulejos, Jamb between Patio de las Muñecas and Sala de los Pasos Perdidos, Alcázar*, c. 1847, pencil and watercolour on paper, 183 × 119 mm. London, Victoria & Albert Museum, E.3945–1938

Fig. 314. Edward Angelo Goodall, *Plaza de San Francisco, Seville*, 1854, pencil and watercolour on paper, 477 × 349 mm. Private collection

Conclusions

Edward Clarke presciently wrote from Madrid in 1760 or 1761 that 'the accounts which we have of Spain, may be reduced to *three* sorts; the *Romance*, the *Obsolete*, and the *Modern*'.[1] Some of the published accounts of the writers in the catalogue section of this book quickly became unquestionably *obsolete*: reputations of writers – *curiosos impertinentes* – like Henry David Inglis were dismissed in their lifetime for their inability to distinguish the real Spain from the one contrived in their minds that they came to Spain to find. As the intervening centuries have separated the sincere from the *splenetic*, the travelogues whose validity has endured and that are of real interest to the historian can be considered *modern* in their scientific objectivity. There were many publications that remained useful to travellers for many years after their publication, like Richard Twiss's for its bibliography, but none more so than Richard Ford's revolutionary handbook, which enjoyed many revisions over many decades. Other writers, professional ones like Isabella Romer, were painfully aware of their readers' appetite for novelty in the expanding market for travel literature in the early Victorian period. All forms of travel literature, from the earliest 'letters from' to the later Romantic travelogues, were in themselves literary constructions, and their form provided the expected topographical or narrative coherence desired by readers of the time. Deconstructing their travels in Spain has shown the travellers' clear commitment to knowing the country through the number of visits and the extensive tours made, but all too often these experiences were concertinaed into a single tour presented for publication. It is unfortunate that in constructing their travel narrative, writers scarcely refer to earlier impressions of what they saw and any sense of elapsed time is lost, and it is only the occasional descriptions of recent restorations or adaptations of buildings that contribute a sense of the progression of time.

As a counterweight to the known texts, the archival material represents significant other previously unknown and complementary narratives. Whether looking for work, finishing an education, or gaining knowledge of Spanish art or architecture, a greater diversity of gender, age, economic background, and heritage is represented. What is more, the archival material has retained its relevance and resisted becoming obsolete in the same way as the published material primarily due to its authenticity, which can be seen to result from the more personal nature of a traveller's motive for visiting Seville, and their purpose for writing the

[1] Clarke 1763, p. III.

This book was printed in 2025,
250 years after Henry Swinburne first visited Spain
on his groundbreaking sketching tour of the country.