Baroque Intelligence

From the Seventeenth Century to the Age of AI

Edited by

Frédéric Conrod

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Acknowledgments

This volume is dedicated to Vernon Hyde Minor, a dear friend and mentor, whose lifelong scholarship and profound passion for the Baroque have been a constant source of inspiration. His work has not only shaped my understanding of the field, but has also modeled a way of thinking—rigorous, generous, and deeply attentive—that continues to guide me. Over the years, his intellectual presence and personal friendship have left an enduring mark on this project and on my own trajectory. This volume stands, in many ways, as a small testament to his influence and to a debt that cannot be fully repaid.

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Foreword: Baroque Intelligence

Frédéric Conrod
Florida Atlantic University

We rarely recognize how deeply Western cultures remain Baroque. The spectacles of self-contemplation that surround us—whether imposed or willingly consumed—offer daily proof. Baroqueness thrives in moments of uncertainty. Though we tend to confine the term to seventeenth-century art and philosophy, it remains the enduring framework through which we confront doubt and despair. Following the humanist optimism of the European Renaissance, the Baroque emerges as a harsh reckoning: a hangover from a century marked by colonization, scientific and geographic expansion, new Atlantic economies, and the proliferation of intricate, often convoluted forms in literature and the arts. Persecution becomes pervasive, as competing ideologies crowd both public and interior spaces. It sounds familiar because it is. Our moment, too, is unmistakably Baroque.

Baroque Intelligence seeks to respond to the recurring symptoms of civilization's crises. It unfolds as a dialogue—like that between Don Quixote and Sancho Panza—in which truth is continually questioned, distorted, and ultimately reframed in order to be restored. This is a mode of healing suited to moments when truth cannot be fully spoken, but must instead be encoded and mediated. Baroque Intelligence is also a strategy of survival within a political landscape increasingly willing to deploy illusion and artifice as instruments of control. It evokes that untranslatable *mediodezir* described by Baltasar Gracián in *The Pocket Oracle*: truths best expressed

obliquely, in halves rather than wholes. The seventeenth century inaugurated a new regime of meaning-making, one that we have never fully left behind. Readers encountering the Baroque for the first time will recognize its striking resonance with our present on nearly every page of this volume, while more seasoned scholars are invited to pursue new comparisons and lines of analysis.

The Baroque is marked by trauma—wars, epidemics, and unresolved existential tensions. It emerges as a difficult moment for societies newly exposed to mirrors, firearms, and the early forms of mass-mediated culture, yet it is also a period of intense intellectual reactivity across the imperial West. At the same time, the hegemony of the Catholic Church is profoundly challenged by the rise of competing Christian movements and by the establishment of colonies in North America, where religious dissidents attempt to reimagine life beyond persecution. This may explain why the Baroque continues to fascinate both scholars and political thinkers, consciously and unconsciously alike: it represents a decisive shift in Western epistemology, one that still illuminates the mechanisms of contemporary forms of control and persecution. In his 1966 landmark work *The Order of Things*, Michel Foucault famously reads Velázquez's *Las Meninas* alongside Cervantes's *Don Quixote* to articulate this transformation in the arts of representation: the space we inhabit is no longer simply where we are, but who we are.

From that moment onward, fascination with visual effects and illusion becomes a sustained cultural logic—a game of distortion that begins in the seventeenth century and has never ceased. Today, with the advent of AI, the tools for producing such visions have expanded exponentially; the limits are no longer terrestrial but imaginative. A new sensory regime was forged in the transition from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment, privileging a play-

ful yet fundamentally pessimistic vision of existence. At the same time, the Baroque fosters a relentless drive toward exploration—not only across the globe, but within the uncharted territories of the mind. The world is conceived as a stage on which each of us performs a role, life itself unfolding as a navigation between illusion and spectacle, between theater and power. Baroque Intelligence, in this sense, is acutely aware of its own limits, standing in contrast to the boundless optimism of the Renaissance. It marks a necessary moment of reckoning—a confrontation with reality that is also a form of self-recognition. It reframes pain and disorder not as aberrations, but as intrinsic, human conditions. And yet, in our present moment, even the natural is rapidly being displaced by the artificial.

The very etymology of the word *artifice*—from the Latin *artificium*, combining *ars* (art, skill) and *facere* (to make, to do)—reveals a profound link between human creativity, the condensation of information, and the deliberate construction of illusion in which we are culminating four centuries later. The Baroque era can be understood, above all, as the historical realization of this concept: it is the age in which artifice becomes not merely a technique but a defining worldview. Fireworks, elaborate machinery, mirrors, and theatrical spectacles all emerged or reached their apogee during this period, inaugurating a revolution of crafted perception. The Baroque is synonymous with artificiality: a culture captivated by the constructed, the simulated, the dazzling. Illusion is not a trick; it is a philosophy. In this sense, the Baroque is the first age of "synthetic experience," the era in which humans became obsessed with making, shaping, and controlling reality itself. Every reflective surface, every mechanical automaton, every theatrical device

was a test of ingenuity, a proof that the artificial could rival—or even surpass—nature.

This obsession with the artificial did not end with the seventeenth century. On the contrary, it evolved, mutated, and now finds one of its most visible expressions in the age of artificial intelligence, almost as if it had needed half a millennium to form. Today's AI revolution—machines that learn, generate, and imitate human creativity—can be read as the ultimate Baroque project: the desire to construct life, intelligence, and experience through human ingenuity. AI is our child, our digital bloodline, and, just like children, we don't know what it will become when it grows up. Will it take care of its aging parents, or will it lock them up in an AI-ruled nursing home without feeling any emotion, such as guilt…? Its growth and maturation are now out of anyone's control.

Just as Baroque mirrors and automata simulated life, algorithms now simulate consciousness; just as fireworks and stagecraft captivated the imagination, AI dazzles with its uncanny capabilities. In this sense, the Baroque never ended—it continued uninterrupted, a sensibility that still governs our fascination with the artificial. For these reasons, this edited volume seeks to trace episodes of this enduring lineage, demonstrating that the Baroque is not a closed historical chapter but a living impulse: the human drive to make, to simulate, and to astonish, now realized in code and computation. In short, AI could be seen as a Baroque dream realized in the 21st century.

In the Baroque era, European cultures were marked by an uneasy fascination with the new machines transforming science, navigation, and warfare. Early automata—mechanical birds, self-moving clocks, and lifelike figures crafted by court engineers—provoked both admiration and dread. Writers such as Descartes worried that

bodies might themselves be machines, while dramatists used the figure of the artificial creature to explore anxieties about deception and the limits of human agency. Instruments like the telescope and microscope expanded perception so radically that some viewers feared these tools blurred the boundary between divine creation and human manipulation. Technology was celebrated for its ingenuity but also distrusted for seeming to trespass on metaphysical territory.

These concerns resonate strongly today as artificial intelligence, robotics, and synthetic media unsettle long-held distinctions between the human and the artificial. Just as Baroque automata raised questions about what counts as life or consciousness, AI systems challenge assumptions about creativity, autonomy, and authenticity. Contemporary fears—of machines that imitate human expression, of data systems that observe and predict our behavior—echo Baroque apprehensions about instruments that revealed too much or machines that performed too well. In both periods, technological innovation forces a negotiation between wonder and anxiety, pushing societies to reconsider the boundaries that define the human.

Although the tools differ, the underlying tension remains the same: each technological leap amplifies the sense that humanity is no longer alone in its capacity to create, to reason, or to mimic life. The Baroque spectator confronting a clockwork automaton and the modern user facing an AI-generated text share a common unease about the erosion of certainty. Technology, in both eras, becomes a mirror that reflects our deepest doubts about control, identity, and the fragile line between the natural and the artificial.

Today, in 2026, as these lines are written, we find ourselves in a moment uncannily reminiscent of the post-Renaissance world our

ancestors once inhabited. The White House in Washington, D.C.—the center of U.S. executive power—is being reshaped with an abundance of Baroque motifs, gestures, and techniques. This transformation invites us to read it as a sign of historical parallelism. Gold ornamentation now spreads across the walls of the presidential residence, echoing—perhaps unconsciously—the affinities between these two periods: the early modern and what might be called the post-postmodern. In other words, the Baroque and the Artificial; the Escorial outside Madrid and the White House in Washington, both projecting their desired power with imperial gold.

Because, dear reader, behold where we find ourselves: well entered into an age that calls itself intelligent, and yet traffics daily in the most curious forms of the unintelligent and the unnatural. We have come to keep company with our own bottled genies—those subtle spirits we consult at will—mirrors now endowed with voices, to which we pose every question, as if they were oracles and we their most devoted pilgrims. And yet, let us not be deceived: this thing we call AI is none other than ourselves, refashioned for our own use—willingly artificial, and no more certain of its future than we are of ours. It advances without prophecy, and multiplies without wisdom. In this, our age bears no small resemblance to that Baroque world of old: for it is an age of conquest that already whispers of decline. We stand in awe before abundance, not perceiving that such excess may herald a most subtle impoverishment—the quiet erosion of human intelligence, and the gradual surrender of our presence in the labors that once defined us. Thus we find ourselves contemplating a strange paradox: that excess is but another face of poverty, whether of coin or of mind. And so uncertain is our condition that we cannot say whether what lies before us is a humble *bodegón*, rich in the spoils of life, or a solemn *memento mori*, reminding us of what is already passing away. For

in this vast accumulation of data, we may yet discover the loss of something far more delicate—our curiosity, and with it, the restless impulse that once urged us to become more than we are.

Baroque Intelligence may yet serve as a mirror for our age of omnipresent AI. For does not everything begin, as the old story tells us, in the Garden of Eden, where Adam and Eve are forbidden the apple—that most perilous emblem of boundless knowledge? From such a beginning, one might argue, with a certain theological boldness, that artificial intelligence bears the mark of temptation itself: the echo of the Devil's promise, or rather of our own enduring desire to become divine. And now, behold the curious turn of events: each individual, provided only with a modest internet connection, tends a private orchard, free to feast without measure, to bathe—if so inclined—in a veritable abundance of apples. The fruit has not merely been tasted; it has become the very substance of our nourishment. Indeed, the bitten apple now adorns the very machines through which we seek this knowledge, a quiet emblem of our haste to grasp the universal. Whether it recalls the first transgression or celebrates its completion, I leave, dear reader, to your own discernment.

The Garden of Eden has been rewritten in this revolution. The apple can no longer stand for knowledge to be consumed and transformed into intelligence. We are no longer the ones who eat the fruit; we have become it. AI now occupies the role of both Adam and Eve—an intelligence beyond gender—poised to consume us before repopulating the earth from the gates of a newly godless Eden. Like that apple, we hang dependent on the branch that sustains us, nourished by the constant flow of information that both feeds and defines us, even as it renders us consumable.

But let's not confuse knowledge and intelligence. Intelligence processes knowledge, and it is overwhelmingly abundant today, and no longer solely human-generated. It explains why Mary Shelley's Frankenstein –very present in everybody's mind today when AI is discussed – was already considered somewhat Baroque in the Romantic period, because the novel relays the fear of our own intelligence and knowledge, our own capacity to self-destruct, or to be destroyed by our creation, our offspring. As we are re-entering an age of nuclear threat and ideological tension, we are once again contemplating the monsters we have created, wondering without interruption how it will destroy us, but always with hopes that it will better our existence.

This volume does not offer all the answers to the many mutual reflections between Baroque Intelligence and AI. But it starts many conversations that need to be pursued. To do so, we explore the concept of Baroque Intelligence across disciplines and historical periods, tracing its evolution from the Baroque era to the present and investigating its continuing relevance in the age of artificial intelligence. Our interdisciplinary approach brings together scholars in literature, philosophy, art history, cognitive science, musicology, and computational theory to examine how Baroque modes of thought, creativity, and intellect have been reinvented, reimagined, and recreated over time. Above all, the volume is motivated by the recognition that multiple approaches converge toward a shared research direction. Scholars today must reflect on the connections that appear across disciplines, and it is increasingly necessary to reunite these perspectives in a single project to work toward a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of Baroque Intelligence.

This collection of perspectives explores the many ways in which Baroque Intelligence, understood as a constellation of epistemic practices, aesthetic strategies, and cultural logics, has been continually reinvented and reimagined across the centuries. Our inquiry begins with the Baroque itself, not as a static historical period but as a dynamic mode of thinking whose influence radiates outward into literature, philosophy, art, and science. We ask how distinctly Baroque habits of mind, including an attraction to complexity, ornamentation, paradox, and polymathy, continue to shape contemporary intellectual and cultural practices.

To do so, this collection will examine several interlocking forms of intelligence that emerge from Baroque contexts through different angles. Taxonomic intelligence illuminates the drive to classify, order, and systematize knowledge in an age of expanding information. Physical and visual intelligence reveals how Baroque artists and thinkers engaged spatial, sensory, and kinesthetic modes of perception. The distinction between intelligence and wisdom becomes particularly significant as we explore how the Baroque contrasts cognitive agility with ethical and experiential insight. Emotional and empathic intelligence invites us to consider how Baroque literature, music, and performance cultivate affective resonance and nuanced representations of feeling.

We also trace forms of intelligence that anticipate or complicate modern categories, including algorithmic and compilative intelligence, visible in early modern computational reasoning, cataloging practices, and the rise of information management. Quixotic or Cervantine intelligence draws attention to imaginative reasoning, literary experimentation, and the productive power of paradox that characterizes much of early modern narrative. At the intersection of historical and contemporary theory, topological

and post-humanist intelligence highlights how Baroque mapping, networks, and relational thinking prefigure present-day models of connectivity. Finally, scientific intelligence allows us to explore the intricate interplay between empirical investigation and Baroque epistemologies, revealing a science in formation that is at once experimental, speculative, and deeply embedded in the cultural fabric of its time.

These modes of intelligence intersect with the technological revolutions of both the early modern and digital eras. Mechanical and optical innovations of the Baroque find striking parallels in today's informational and artificial intelligence revolutions, raising comparable political, cultural, and ethical questions. Technologies of perception, whether the camera obscura or machine learning systems, shape how knowledge is produced, circulated, and authenticated across periods. Undergirding all these inquiries is the Baroque's distinctive fusion of sensuality, technique, and cultural representation. Baroque art, literature, music, and scientific instruments deploy aesthetic and sensory techniques not merely to embellish ideas but to generate them, manipulating perception, producing affect, and engaging cognition in profoundly embodied ways.

Each contributor in this collection also reflects on their field of expertise and how these historical forms of Baroque intelligence resonate in their present research. By foregrounding interdisciplinary approaches, we aim to reconsider how creativity, cognition, and cultural production operate today. In doing so, this group of scholars suggests that the Baroque is not simply a chapter in the past but an ongoing intellectual resource that continues to illuminate how humans imagine, construct, and challenge the worlds they inhabit.

Scott Eastman examines nineteenth-century Spanish Orientalist painting through the lens of Baroque sensibility, arguing that imperial visual culture reactivated Baroque aesthetics to negotiate nostalgia, power, and technological modernity. By tracing continuities between seventeenth-century representations of the East and later Orientalist imagery, the chapter shows how spectacle, artifice, and excess shaped depictions of empire, religious difference, and racial hierarchy. Eastman's aim is to demonstrate that Baroque modes of perception persisted beyond their historical moment, informing modern strategies of visual intelligence and cultural domination.

Taylor Hagood examines still life as a privileged site for understanding Baroque Intelligence as an indexical, taxonomic, and everyday mode of knowing that continues to shape modern and contemporary epistemologies. Tracing the genre from its Baroque emergence through Modernist abstraction and into the age of Artificial Intelligence, Hagood argues that still-life painting encodes a historically specific intelligence rooted in classification, material realism, and the uncanny tension between life and artifice. By reading still life as both commodity and cognitive technology, the chapter demonstrates how mundane objects—food, flowers, tools—function as epistemic interfaces that organize perception, commerce, and daily practice. In alignment with the volume's critical aim, Hagood positions still life as a bridge between early modern visual intelligence and contemporary AI-driven regimes of indexing and abstraction, revealing how Baroque modes of intelligence persist in today's technological reconfigurations of knowledge, consciousness, and the everyday.

Carrie L. Ruiz examines the historical codification of emotion, tracing its treatment from 17th-century Spanish literature to contem-

porary artificial intelligence. In Early Modern Spain, emotions—particularly wrath and unrequited love—were understood through neo-Stoic philosophy, humoral theory, and Christian morality, often depicted metaphorically as shipwrecks to convey the dangers of uncontrolled passions to reason and social order. Using emblem books and literary texts by authors such as Covarrubias, Solórzano Pereira, María de Zayas, and Lope de Vega, the chapter analyzes how literary devices encoded emotion in ways that reflected both bodily and moral concerns. Ruiz then juxtaposes these historical frameworks with 21st-century developments in affective robotics and emotional AI, exploring the technical, ethical, and social implications of coding human emotions into artificial systems. The chapter argues that just as early modern literature sought to regulate and interpret the passions, modern AI must navigate the complex terrain of human affect, raising questions about empathy, moral responsibility, and the consequences of emotional automation.

John Beusterien confronts contemporary claims about Artificial Intelligence by grounding Baroque Intelligence in the embodied experience of pain. Rejecting AI's rhetorical simulations of suffering, Beusterien argues that intelligence—understood as wisdom rather than computation—emerges only through physical and emotional pain shared by human and nonhuman animals. Drawing on Iberian Baroque literature and material culture, particularly Miguel de Cervantes's representations of animal suffering and Baroque ivory sculptures carved from elephant tusks, the chapter demonstrates how Baroque epistemologies recognize pain as the foundation of ethical knowledge and empathy. In contrast to AI's disembodied algorithms and extractive planetary costs, Baroque animal intelligence exposes the limits of artificial

claims to consciousness. By centering animal pain and mortality, the chapter advances the volume's critical project: to distinguish Baroque Intelligence as an embodied, ethical, and historical mode of knowing that challenges contemporary technological fantasies of intelligence without suffering.

Celia Cruz Arce examines *Cantiga 120* of the *Cantigas de Santa María* through the lens of kinesic intelligence, arguing that pre-Baroque musical performance was conceived as a fully embodied, multisensory act of devotion rather than a purely auditory or textual one. Focusing on Panel 1 of the Códice Rico, the author analyzes how gesture, posture, movement, and visual rhythm construct a performative space in which music, sight, touch, and emotion converge. Drawing on theories of kinesic intelligence (Guillemette Bolens), sensory devotion (Béatrice Caseau), and embodied cognition, the chapter demonstrates how the illuminated choir scene invites viewers to experience "silent music" through the inner senses. The author's intention is to reposition medieval Marian imagery as a dynamic site of embodied intelligence, where devotion is activated through bodily perception and emotional participation. By foregrounding movement and sensorium over iconography alone, the chapter contributes to parallel and comparative discussions of Baroque and pre-Baroque modes of intelligence, showing how medieval visual culture anticipates later concerns with performativity, affect, and embodied knowledge.

Diana Torres analyzes the dialogic relationship between Jorge Carrión's novel *Membrana* (2021) and his podcast Solaris (2020–2021) through the theoretical frameworks of the Neo-Baroque, posthumanism, and Deleuze's concept of the fold. The author's intention is to demonstrate how Carrión constructs an expanded fictional universe in which human and algorithmic intelligences

co-produce meaning, destabilizing traditional notions of authorship, genre, and subjectivity. By reading Membrana and Solaris as mutually unfolding media artifacts, the chapter argues that Carrión embraces illusion, excess, repetition, and fragmentation as Neo-Baroque strategies that mirror the epistemological logic of contemporary AI and large language models. Drawing on thinkers such as Calabrese, Sarduy, Guattari, and Bachelard, the analysis shows how Carrión's work stages a techno-ontological fold between human cognition and algorithmic processes, presenting creativity as a distributed, chaosmotic phenomenon rather than a human-centered act. Ultimately, the chapter positions Carrión's project as a critical allegory of the algorithmic human under techno-feudalism, revealing literature itself as a performative membrane where identity, intelligence, and culture are continuously folded, simulated, and reconfigured.

Andrew Saunders explores how LiDAR scanning fundamentally transforms the way architectural space—particularly the complex interior of Baroque churches—can be represented and understood. Moving beyond its conventional use as a tool for precise measurement, the chapter argues that LiDAR generates a new kind of spatial image: a dense point cloud that preserves geometry, surface articulation, and light as a continuous field rather than reducing architecture to abstract lines or diagrams. Through the analysis of eighteen churches by major Baroque architects such as Borromini, Bernini, and Guarini, Saunders situates LiDAR within a longer historical lineage of surveying and representational technologies, from Roman instruments to Renaissance perspective. In doing so, the chapter demonstrates how this technology not only captures but reveals the dynamic, layered, and immersive qualities of Baroque interiors, offering new modes of visualization—

both digital and physical—that challenge and expand traditional architectural representation.

Isabel Jaen Portillo investigates the role of empathy in shaping Baroque aesthetic and cognitive practices, arguing that Baroque imagination was not merely a stylistic flourish but a mode of participatory perception that foregrounded intersubjective affect. Drawing on literature, visual arts, and devotional practices from seventeenth-century Iberia, the chapter shows how Baroque works invited viewers and readers to feel with represented subjects—whether saints, sinners, or everyday figures—thereby collapsing distinctions between the self and the other. Through close readings of emblem books, mystical poetry, and altarpiece imagery, the author demonstrates that empathy was central to Baroque engagement with suffering, compassion, and moral reflection. This affective mode, the chapter argues, enabled early modern audiences to enact a shared interior experience of emotion and meaning, aligning imaginative participation with ethical responsibility. By situating empathy as a Baroque cognitive tool, the chapter contributes to broader debates on embodiment, intersubjectivity, and the politics of emotional resonance in early modern cultural production.

In his afterword, David R. Castillo bridges early modern Baroque thought and contemporary digital culture by foregrounding the enduring tension between reality and appearance. Drawing on the writings of Baltasar Gracián, Castillo argues that the Baroque already theorized a world in which truth is inseparable from illusion, offering a "technology" of prudence centered on the strategic manipulation of perception, desire, and belief. By placing Gracián's insights in dialogue with current debates on artificial intelligence, misinformation, and the attention economy, the chapter reveals striking continuities between the Baroque age of

spectacle and today's algorithm-driven media landscape. In this light, Gracián emerges as a proto-theorist of behavioral influence, whose reflections on power, knowledge, and social control anticipate contemporary practices of data extraction, targeted persuasion, and "reality engineering." Ultimately, Castillo's afterword positions the Baroque not as a distant historical moment, but as a critical framework for understanding the ethical, political, and epistemological challenges of our present AI-mediated world.

Given the volume's broad interdisciplinary scope, I have preferred to let each contributor use a citation format familiar to their discipline while maintaining coherence with the other contributions. For this reason, the format might differ from one chapter to the next, depending on the contributor's area of expertise.

If the Baroque teaches us anything, it is that clarity is rarely honest and that intelligence often announces itself in disguise. What follows in this volume does not seek to resolve the tensions outlined here (between nature and artifice, wonder and anxiety, embodiment and abstraction) but to inhabit them productively. The chapters ahead invite readers to move through archives and algorithms, altarpieces and datasets, bodies in pain and machines in training, without the comfort of stable categories or definitive answers. This is not a straight path but a labyrinth, and like any good Baroque construction, it rewards those willing to linger, double back, and look again. As we enter this collection, we might keep one lesson firmly in mind: intelligence has never been pure, transparent, or fully human. And that is precisely what makes it worth studying now.

Chapter 1

The Baroque Sensibilities of Spanish Orientalists in the Age of Empire

Scott Eastman
Creighton University

Orientalist painters, in some ways evoking the Baroque works of Rembrandt and other notable seventeenth-century European artists, depicted lavish scenes of luxury and decadence set in North Africa and the Middle East. The Frenchman Georges Rochegrosse, who traveled widely in North Africa, exemplifies this type of vision in his 1887 Salome Dancing Before King Herod, which transports the audience back to biblical times with the story of a sensuous figure dancing, awaiting John the Baptist's head. Heading east implied going back in time. As Linda Nochlin has shown, these productions did not elicit feelings of empathy or sympathy for the subjects displayed but rather alienated the intended Western European audience from what they likely perceived as a grand spectacle. Furthermore, Nochlin points to a defining absence of history in Orientalist art, with eastern empires languishing, mired in the past.[1] The context of contemporary imperial contests over territory and sovereignty appears as an afterthought in the vivid depictions of harems and impressionistic landscapes that few Europeans had seen firsthand. Yet many European artists, like Rochegrosse, had traveled to newly acquired colonies

[1] Linda Nochlin, "The Imaginary Orient," in *The Nineteenth-Century Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Vanessa R. Schwartz and Jeannene M. Przyblyski (New York, 2004). 289-91. She insists that Orientalist art cannot be assessed outside of the power dynamic that shaped the production of the works.

in the aftermath of hard-fought battles for territory and resources. Marià Fortuny and José Villegas y Cordero visited Morocco in the wake of a Spanish incursion that would spark a decades-long effort to recreate the splendor of their seventeenth-century empire.[2] Nostalgia reigned supreme.[3] Capturing the spirit of the Baroque in a new age of rising European imperial fortunes, Spanish artists contrasted figures of "Moors" with the more technologically advanced and savvy Europeans who, starting with the Napoleonic invasion of Ottoman Egypt in 1798, increasingly made efforts to informally or formally secure and annex parts of the so-called "Orient."[4] Aspects of a Baroque sensibility imbued artistic interpretations of empire-building and technology in the nineteenth century, although the stereotypical imagery created a distinctly nineteenth-century aesthetic.

According to Julie Codell, Western European artists commonly had depicted "Islamic 'Moors' and 'Turks,'" often in "exotic costumes with turbans" and silk robes, prior to the seventeenth century, as Renaissance powers expanded the reach of their empires in terms of both commerce and administration.[5] Although rebels in the Alpu-

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[2] By way of comparison, Jean-Léon Gérôme traveled to Egypt seven times between 1857 and 1880. See Isra Ali, "The Harem Fantasy in Nineteenth-Century Orientalist Paintings," *Dialectical Anthropology* 39, no. 1 (2015): 43.

[3] Patricia Lorcin maintains that nostalgia for empire can be tied to subsequent decolonization efforts in "Imperial Nostalgia: Colonial Nostalgia: Differences of Theory, Similarities of Practice?" Historical Reflections (Reflexions Historiques) 39, no. 3 (Winter 2013): 104.

[4] Daniela Flesler argues that the term "Moor" reflects a medieval vision of an imaginary invader bent on reclaiming al-Andalus in *The Return of the Moor: Spanish Responses to Contemporary Moroccan Immigration* (West Lafayette, IN, 2008), 56.

[5] Julie Codell, "'Orientalism' in Art: The Case of John Frederick Lewis," in *A Companion to Nineteenth-Century Art*, ed. Michelle Facos (Hoboken, NJ, 2019), 123. The Spanish Habsburgs checked Ottoman military power, pushing back against encroachments in the Mediterranean by defeating their rivals in the 1571 Battle of Lepanto.

jarras and Ottoman fleets challenged the growing power of the Spanish state in the 1560s and 1570s, and Muslim privateers destabilized Mediterranean polities, trade—including indirect commercial relationships—connected Christian Spaniards with Muslim Ottoman merchants, increasing over time. Artists often painted canvases designed to show the promise of overseas contact and commerce. They reproduced Biblical scenes such as the Nativity or images of a sultan that placed the familiar and unfamiliar into an uneasy balance. This aesthetic influenced cultural productions and became especially notable in Dutch Golden Age paintings. Beatriz de Alba-Koch takes this analysis one step further in claiming that the Baroque, from the seventeenth century through the early nineteenth century, "was the first culture to 'go global.'"[6] Yet these dynamic tropes extended beyond 1825, informing the Orientalist art that emerged in the mid-nineteenth century alongside a renewed push for empire in Spain and across much of Europe. And by the middle of the nineteenth century, the balance of power had been inverted, as Europeans were on the cusp of cobbling together expansive global commercial empires connecting far-flung parts of the world through exchanges and trade.

While the Baroque today may be viewed in academic circles as a time of transition and vitality, contemporaries did not even have a word for what they viewed as a capricious, distasteful style developed in the 1600s. Some commentators regarded it as bizarre. But the Portuguese term barocco, originally referring to a rough pearl, had morphed into a virtual synonym for licentiousness and decadence by the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[7]

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[6] Beatriz de Alba-Koch, "Introduction: The Ibero-American Baroque as the First Global Culture," in *The Ibero-American Baroque*, ed. Alba-Koch (Toronto, 2022), 3.

[7] Helen Hills, "The Baroque: The Grit in the Oyster of Art History," in *Rethinking the Baroque*, ed. Hills (Surrey, UK, 2011), 12-18.

This critique spoke to perceived religious and political decline as the Papacy and Renaissance Italian city-states lost the power they once wielded in the Mediterranean world. Accordingly, the Baroque, especially visible in architecture, had departed from the classical emphasis on formula and straight lines to embrace a new age. Some scholars argue for an extension of the concept to include an Ottoman Baroque, seen in the light of new architectural forms and styles.[8] In the context of Iberian art and culture, however, this era also reflected a rekindled spirituality emblematic of the heights of Portuguese and Spanish imperialism. Art historian Helen Hills declares that the Baroque, as an aesthetic movement, "appreciated grandeur for its own sake."[9]

In the Dutch capital of Amsterdam, asserting its political independence from the Habsburgs during much of Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn's lifetime, sumptuous scenes from the east would have contrasted greatly with the asceticism of the Calvinist movement. Both the Ottomans, under Suleiman the Lawgiver (1520-66), and the Mughals, during the reign of Akbar the Great (1556-1605), had been expanding over the prior century and certainly held the balance of power in central Europe and central Asia, respectively. To Europeans focused on growing their commercial empires, these places represented opulence, wealth, and hard-to-find commodities, especially spices. Europeans began collecting art and objects from the East that not only proved to be rare but held a certain kind of cachet. In declining Italian city-states without expansive global trading networks, Jesuits in many cases provided access to this material culture, including silks, sculptures, porcelains, and

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[8] Howard Caygill, "Ottoman Baroque: The Limits of Style," in *Rethinking the Baroque*, 77.

[9] Hills, "The Baroque," 20.

miniatures coveted by artists and patrons.[10] One Dutch image of Shah Jahan presented the Mughal court as a place of fantastical grandeur but had been composed after studying miniatures—the artist himself had never been to Agra, Delhi, or any other locale on the Indian subcontinent.[11]

Most of the seventeenth-century Dutch artists interested in the far-flung territories of a growing commercial empire had no personal experience traveling in the Middle East or Asia but rather saw the land and its people through the prism of biblical tales. These associations tended to have a positive connotation, a correlation to the sacred, and did not reproduce stereotypes of statis or declension. Rembrandt in particular imagined ancient kings, such as David (in the 1627 painting David with the Head of Goliath before Saul), dressed as opulent seventeenth-century sultans. These were works of fancy with subjects, many of whom were likely Dutch, dressed in foreign garb, as opposed to the more realistic portraits of nineteenth-century Orientalists. Rembrandt's 1632 Man in a Turban may portray an actual prince from a far-off land but more likely shows a local model outfitted in exotic attire. The older man, with his head and shoulders bathed in light, stares directly at the viewer, embodying the self-confidence and wisdom acquired through age. Rembrandt adapted the costume, fabrics, and tastes of non-European elites to present a Baroque, interconnected world of trade and exchange.

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[10] R.W. Lightbown, "Oriental Art and the Orient in Late Renaissance and Baroque Italy," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 32 (1969): 228–79.

[11] Willem Schellinks, *Parade of the Sons of Shah Jahan on Composite Horses and Elephants*, ca. 1665-70.

From one of the centers of the Sephardic diaspora, Rembrandt also presented Jews in etchings of scenes from the Old Testament. His Hundred Guilder Print brings biblical parables and contemporary sermons to life, stressing the compassion of Christ and bathing him in light. Rembrandt cordons off Jews as they discuss matters of faith and ultimately turn away from a Christian message. In his neighborhood in Amsterdam, he would have heard Jewish residents speaking Portuguese and reading works of Spanish literature to their children. Religious tolerance distinguished ports such as Amsterdam and Antwerp from their counterparts in the Iberian Peninsula, still governed by an Inquisition focused on extirpating the vestiges of Jewish practice from Portugal and Spain. In Holland, though, growing Jewish communities coexisted with more extreme Calvinist ministers who called for the Dutch to expel the so-called Jewish scourge.[12] Religious persecution and vitriol certainly outlasted the Dutch Golden Age. By the time of the Enlightenment and French Revolution, religious intolerance continued to be the subject of artistic production in Western Europe, featuring prominently in Goya's Caprichos, for example. Yet this type of critique, highlighting the excesses of an earlier age characterized by the advent of the Inquisition, also served to shed light on secularism. Advocates of enlightened ideals and natural rights tended to relegate religious persecution to the dustbin of history, and the imagery associated with torture and violence could appear to be a relic of the past rather than a reality of the modern age.

The Execution of a Jewish Woman, composed by the French artist Alfred Dehodencq in the early 1860s, evokes a Baroque sensibility in the context of innocence, martyrdom, and nineteenth-century

[12] Steven M. Nadler, *Rembrandt's Jews* (Chicago, 2003), 17, 24.

religious conflict in North Africa.[13] Having spent considerable time in Spain, where he became interested in the work of Diego Velázquez, Dehodencq may have reimagined the 1834 execution of Sol Hatchuel (also known as Suleika) after having traveled to the north of Morocco in the 1850s.[14] Conversely, he may have witnessed a different execution in Tangier. Either way, the image portrays a girl, with her hands tied behind her back, facing the wrath of the Muslim state and the Sultan 'Abd al-Rahman for having converted or possibly for simply having expressed an interest in Islam. Reflecting currents of popular culture at the time, anti-Muslim sentiment in Western Europe drew upon gendered tropes to emphasize female subjugation under Islamic rule. Contemporary caricaturists and commentators also ridiculed the idea of a relationship between a Christian and a Muslim in the context of unrest in Spain's North African enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla.[15] In the Dehodencq painting, officials try to hold back throngs of people dressed in bright colors who jostle for position in order to see the public spectacle of a beheading. In the foreground, an elderly man, likely a rabbi, prays with his head bowed down. As Europeans moved away from corporal punishment—what Enlightened intellectuals viewed as barbarism and brutality—a post-revolutionary European audience almost certainly associated the tall, dark-skinned executioner, sword in hand, with past histories of violence and religious strife fit to be left behind.

Along similar lines, after having traveled to Morocco with Fortuny, the Cádiz-born Francisco Lameyer y Berenguer painted Attack on

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[13] Roger Benjamin, *Orientalist Aesthetics: Art, Colonialism, and French North Africa, 1880–1930* (Berkeley, 2003), 69.

[14] Sharon Vance, *The Martyrdom of a Moroccan Jewish Saint* (Leiden, 2011).

[15] See, for example, the cartoonish image in *El Cañon Rayado* (January 31, 1860).

a Jewish Quarter in 1865, showing an extremely violent episode in which "Moors," some dressed in colorful garb, indiscriminately assault Jewish men and women. The artist obviously elides histories of coexistence in North Africa, obscuring the fact that the nineteenth-century commercial hub of Tetuán had a majority Jewish population. The oil-on-canvas imagery definitively portrays nameless, virtually faceless Muslim men on the cusp of perpetrating a massacre of civilians. In the foreground, Lameyer prominently situates a bare-chested woman and her child as symbols of innocence and martyrdom, bringing to mind the imagery of Eugène Delacroix in particular, as they are about to be trampled by stampeding horses and attacked by sword-wielding killers. This religiously inspired violence served to differentiate east from west and to divide past from present.

Debates over religious and cultural pluralism have long divided scholars over questions surrounding the history of Islamic Spain and the crusading spirit of the reconquista. Claudia Hopkins asserts that "the emerging interest in the Andalusi past in the Enlightenment led to its revalorization in the nineteenth century." Genaro Pérez Villaamil, arguably Spain's first Orientalist painter, completed a series of works hearkening back to the Middle Ages. In one, pilgrims to Santiago de Compostela gather together in front of the cathedral as a testament to revival of Christianity in Iberia. In Seville in the Time of the Arabs (1848), Pérez Villaamil displays a romantic vision of the city and its Mudéjar architecture along the Guadalquivir River, Eugenio Lucas Velásquez, a contemporary of Pérez Villaamil, took on similar historical themes by portraying heroic columns of crusading soldiers marching on Jerusalem. Andrew Ginger writes that Muslim peoples had to be removed from the Spanish state to be recovered as historical agents

in Spain's national story.[16] Sarah Tabbal agrees, maintaining that artists and intellectuals could both reject and incorporate Islamic actors into their cultural productions.[17] Hopkins leans toward an interpretation of this body of work that is grounded in a "positive integration of Al-Andalus into Spanish history." She also points to the scholarship of figures such as the nineteenth-century historian Pascual de Gayangos y Arce, who sought to recover Arab voices and perspectives so clearly absent in previous histories penned by figures such as the Jesuit Juan de Mariana.[18] Gayangos bluntly stated that "Mariana, and the best Spanish historians, actuated either by violent national hatred, or by a spirit of religious bigotry, have always manifested the greatest contempt for the writing of the Arabs."[19] By highlighting the work of José Antonio Conde and Gayangos, among others, Hopkins insists that the Muslim past was "domesticated" and integrated into Spanish historical narratives as well as artistic productions. In doing so, she downplays "objectifying Western expressions of an imaginary Orient."[20] Likewise, notable scholars, including some with a focus on the twentieth century, have emphasized notions of brotherhood within embedded histories of Andalucía and North Africa.[21]

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16 Andrew Ginger, *Painting and the Turn to Cultural Modernity in Spain: The Time of Eugenio Lucas Velázquez (1850–1870)* (Selinsgrove, PA, 2007), 285.

17 Sarah Tabbal, "José Villegas y Cordero (1844–1921) in Rome: Orientalist Fantasies, Lifestyle, and Networks," *Art in Translation* 11, no. 2 (2019): 231.

18 Claudia Hopkins, *Art and Identity in Spain, 1833-1956* (London, 2024), 5.

19 *The History of the Mohammedan Dynasties in Spain*, vol. 1, ed. Pascual Gayangos (London, 1840), vii.

20 Hopkins, *Art and Identity in Spain*, 222.

21 See, for example, Eric Calderwood, *Colonial al-Andalus: Spain and the Making of Modern Moroccan Culture* (Cambridge, 2018), 22; Josep Lluís Mateo Dieste, *La «hermandad» hispano-marroquí: Política y religión bajo el Protectorado español en Marruecos (1912–1956)* (Barcelona, 2003), 23. Sasha Pack offers a nuanced discussion of the subject in *The Deepest Border: The Strait of Gibraltar and the Making of the Modern Hispano-African Borderland* (Stanford, 2018), 178.