The Form of Race: Architecture, Epistemology, and National Identity in Fernando Chueca Goitia’s

Invariantes castizos de la arquitectura española (1947)¹

Matilde Mateo

In several interviews, the architectural historian Fernando Chueca Goitia lamented with some chagrin that none of his numerous books had been more popular than a short essay he had written on a whim and in haste when he was young.² That celebrated work was Invariantes castizos de la arquitectura española, published in book form in Madrid in 1947, and later reprinted in 1971, 1979 and 1981.³ The words in the title had been carefully chosen by Chueca, and although they provided an accurate description of the contents of the book, it was not easy to figure out what it was about, other than that it dealt with Spanish architecture. The main enigma lay in the phrase invariantes castizos, a pedantic expression, as Chueca admitted later in his life, which combined two discipline-specific terms, invariantes, from mathematics, and castizos, from

¹ I first heard about the Invariantes castizos de la arquitectura española from Pepe Blanco Labrador in one of many memorable dinners with him and Paco Pérez Rodríguez. I wish to dedicate this article to them.


³ Fernando Chueca Goitia, Invariantes de la arquitectura Española (1st. edition. Buenos Aires, Madrid: Bossat, 1947); Invariantes castizos de la arquitectura española; Invariantes en la arquitectura hispanoamericana; Manifiesto de la Alhambra (Madrid: Seminarios y Ediciones, 1971). This latter title was reprinted by the original publisher, Dossat, in 1979 and 1981 and translated into Japanese in 1991. The first part of this essay, which contains most of Chueca’s theoretical arguments, was also reprinted in Julián Marias et.al., Fernando Chueca Goitia Medalla de Oro de la Arquitectura 1998 (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Arquitectos de España, 2000). All further references to Invariantes castizos de la arquitectura española are from the first edition in 1947.
philosophy.\(^4\) Neither of them had a simple definition, nor had they been previously related to architecture or to each other.\(^5\) They do not easily translate into English either, but for the sake of providing some necessary clues I will translate the title of Chueca’s book as *Racial Constants of Spanish Architecture*. It then becomes clear that this is a book as much about architecture as about race.

Chueca’s ideas about race and architecture were neither complex nor original, and in fact he oversimplified them. But the way he articulated their relationship was quite unique and self-contained. Of great interest is that it differed from more popular views current in his time, such as those that proposed that a given race was embodied by specific historical styles or types of buildings, or that certain architectural features expressed specific psychological, physical or cultural traits of a given race.\(^6\) My main focus will thus be how he defined the *interaction* between race and architecture, as well as the historiographical methodology that he developed as a result. The attention paid to his conceptualizations of race and architecture will be limited to what is necessary to understand his theory. Likewise, the discussion of how his notions of race and architecture related to ideas in his own time will be deemphasized in favor of an inquiry into the nature of the dialogue that he established between them.

It should be clarified from the outset that Chueca approached history from philosophy, and that he considered architecture as a symbolic form and race as national spirit and identity (*Volkgeist*). Also, in *Invariantes* he was not just a historian but above all a theoretician, and a very ambitious and provocative one at that. His arguments were put forward in a dense manifesto in the introduction and first part of the book, while their validity was illustrated, in the second part, by the application of his theory to selected examples of Spanish architecture. The historical narrative was thus overshadowed by his efforts to establish a radically new way of understanding how architecture and national identity related to each other. As we shall see, for him, that relationship was


\(^5\) As we shall see later, the term ‘castizo’ had been applied to architecture before, but with a very different meaning from the one intended by Chueca.

\(^6\) For a contemporaneous attack on the prevalence of search for racial constants in art that portrayed nations in a superior way due to their culture, politics and personality see Meyer Schapiro, “Race, Nationality and Art,” *Art Front* 2, no.4, (1936): 10–12.