

1808  
1809

Los Sitios  
de Zaragoza

# El Pilar cathedral in the Sieges

The Cathedral-Basilica of Our Lady of Pilar already had its current floor plan in the period of the Sieges, although it did not have the existing towers, domes and façade.

Its value as a symbol was very important, since it inspired the Zaragoza defenders. The French were aware of this fact since their artillery gunners bombarded the temple with special attention.



Exterior view of Our Lady of Pilar Cathedral, taken from the left side of the Ebro River. Charles Clifford. Approx. 1860. Archivo Municipal de Zaragoza, 4-1\_01067.

A huge crowd of people came to the temple seeking refuge, above all, children and the elderly, which unfortunately caused severe health problems due to the filth and overcrowding. Palafox ordered to remove the beds or other nearby places and to disinfect the temple.

“The same thing happened in the second siege as in the first. Later when the bombardments began, so many people fled to the Holy Pilar Church that there was no corner or quarters which were not full of people, everyone trusting in protection and consolation amidst the severe anguish which they suffered” (Ramón Cadena)

During the first siege, the church was not hit by too many projectiles since several buildings existed between it and the line of fire. This was not the case in the second siege, where it suffered bombardments from the artillery batteries in the Arrabal zone. The impacts of the artillery in the outer walls of the Basilica, which face the river, are still visible today.

## THE CRYPT

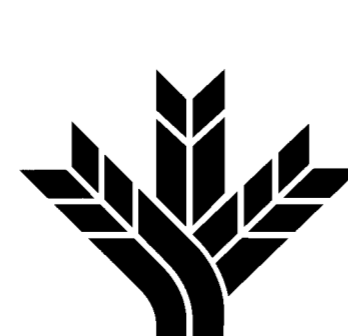
In the crypt located under the “Virgen del Pilar” chapel, numerous famous celebrities of the city have been buried, among them, General Palafox and Antonio Sangenís. García Mercadal, even in 1948 reproached such ingratitude: “Zaragoza itself, which owes so much to Palafox, still has not decided to claim his ashes after a century of having been able to celebrate the Centennial of the Sieges without doing so, without even on such a solemn occasion, dedicating a monument to Palafox, since there were even monuments for the living at that time. They left the most renowned dead person in his forgotten grave (José García Mercadal. *Palafox, Duque de Zaragoza (1775-1847)*. Ed. Gran Capitán, Madrid, 1948).



Excelentísimo Señor Don José Palafox y Melci.



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CAJA RURAL  
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Diverse premises of the Basilica such as the chapter house, the sacristy or the archive room were used to care for the sick and wounded during the sieges, which were converted into a genuine hospital. They even made gunpowder and ammunition in the sacristy.



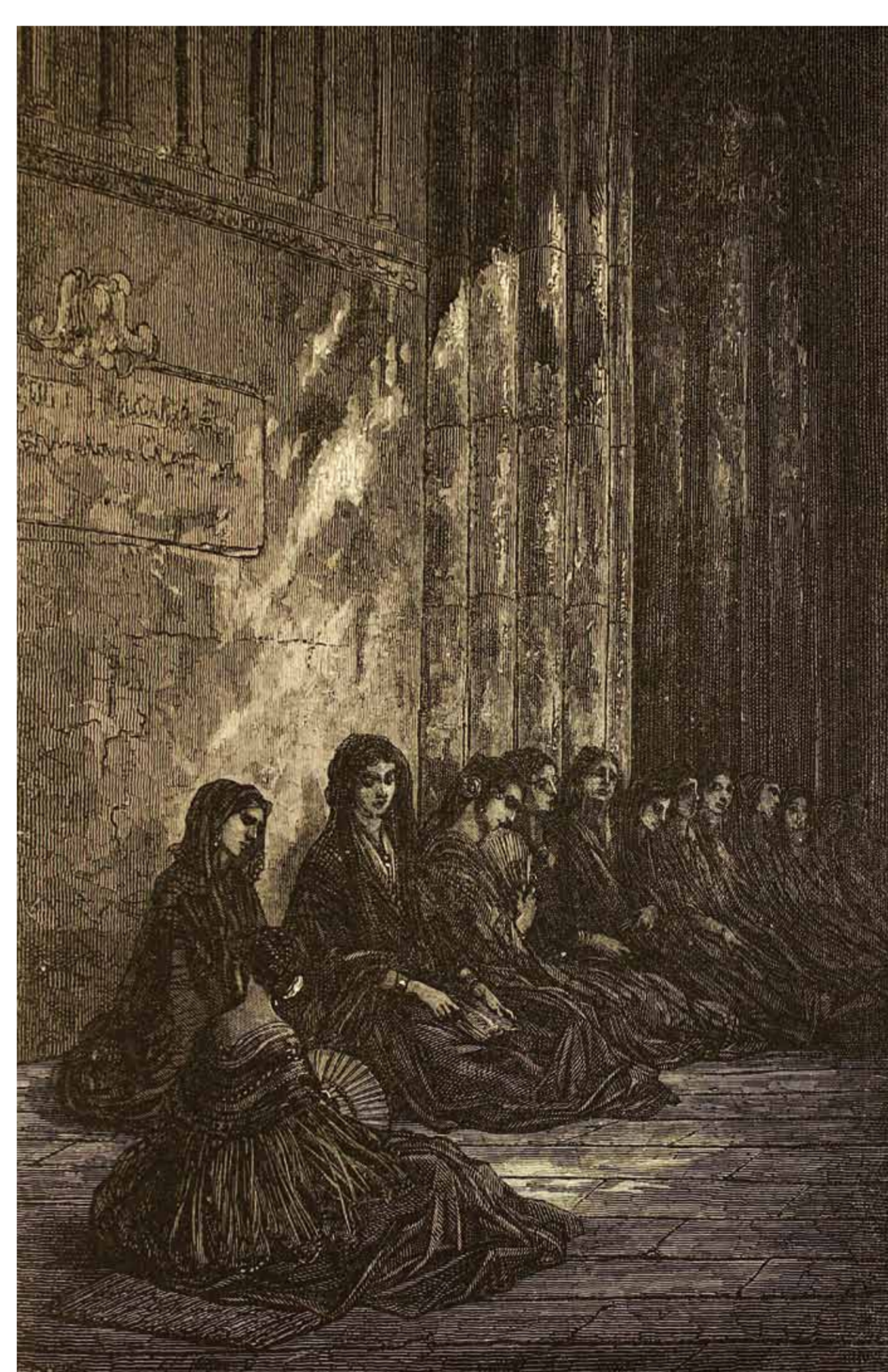
Siege et prise de Saragosse. (José Pasqual de Quinto y de los Ríos, *Los Sitios de Zaragoza*, 1808-1809).

## ANTONIO SANGENÍS Y TORRES

(Albelda, 1767-Zaragoza, 1809) Lieutenant of the Prince Regiment (1789), engineer assistant (1790), captain (1794), brigadier sergeant major (1805). In 1804, he was assigned to the Royal Academy of Engineers of Alcalá de Henares as a fortification professor. He made curious extracts from the most substantial contents of the *Las Reflexiones Militares (Military Reflections)* by the Marquis of Santa Cruz de Marcenado and the *Tratado de Artillería (Treatise of Artillery)* by Tomás de Morla; he wrote different memoirs about professional matters and a *Tratado de Fortificación de Campaña (Treatise of Campaign Fortification)*.

After 2 May, a group of cadets and officers sought refuge in Zaragoza; others went to Valencia. On 15 June 1808, he had been taken to prison as a suspect by his fellow citizens after watching him survey the gates and the ring road of the city. He was released by an order from Calvo on the morning of 16 June.

Rudorff tells it like this: “An experienced second lieutenant from Engineers, Mr. Antonio de Sangenís, was exploring the town outskirts, to plan the new defence works at the time in which he was captured by an excited mob, who accused him of treason and espionage”. He was at the two sieges; he was the organiser and Chief of the Sappers Battalion (combat engineers). He was a member of the Defence Board and the Fortification Board. He was killed on 12 January 1809, when he was struck by a cannonball in Palafox’s upper artillery battery or the one at the oil mill. He was 42 years old.



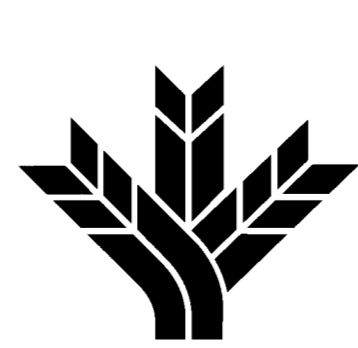
Eglise de Notre Dame del Pilar de Saragosse. Gustavo Doré.



Basilica of Our Lady of Pilar which faces the Ebro riverbank, which shows the shell impacts from the French cannons.



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