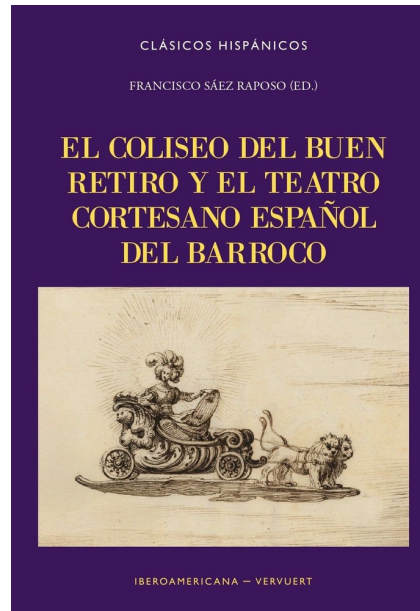


Sáez Raposo, Francisco, ed.. *El Coliseo del Buen Retiro y el teatro cortesano español del Barroco*. Madrid/Frankfurt: Iberoamericana/Vervuert, 2026. ISBN 978-84-9192-585-9. 362 pgs.

Reviewed by: Antonio Cortijo Ocaña
University of California, Santa Barbara



This work represents a milestone in Hispanic studies, as it is the first monographic volume dedicated exclusively to the architectural and functional history of the Coliseo del Buen Retiro, the most significant court theater of the Spanish Golden Age.

For decades, the Coliseo del Buen Retiro was treated by theater historians as a "well-known" but paradoxically under-studied space. As Francisco Sáez Raposo notes in his prologue, scholars often mentioned the Coliseo as a footnote to specific stage productions or as a symbol of the Count-Duke of Olivares' cultural politics, yet it lacked a rigorous, dedicated study that synthesized its architectural reality with its socio-political impact. This volume, born from the FITECO research project, finally provides that foundation, moving beyond "fantasies and elucubrations" to offer a scientifically grounded analysis of the space.

One of the most significant contributions of the book is Juan Ruesga Navarro's architectural hypothesis. Lacking original 17th-century plans, Ruesga utilizes the 1712 survey by René Carlier to virtually "rebuild" the theater. A major finding is the correction of the "oval" myth. While many previous scholars assumed the Coliseo followed the oval pattern of the Italian *Teatro all'Antica* or Seville's *Corral de la Montería*, Ruesga proves the Coliseo was actually a longitudinal "U" shape. This discovery has profound implications for how we understand Baroque spectatorship: the layout created a hybrid space that functioned as a cross between a traditional Spanish *corral* and an Italianate court salon. Some of the key architectural data from Ruesga's analysis are:

- Width of the patio: 10.40 meters.
- Proscenium width: 10.30 meters.
- Maximum length: 37.00 meters.

- Aesthetics: Simple brick and timber construction, relying on internal "ephemeral" decoration rather than permanent stone grandeur.

The volume excels at placing the theater within the "soft power" strategies of the Spanish Monarchy. Marcella Trambaioli explores the 1640 inauguration with Rojas Zorrilla's *Los bandos de Verona*. Her analysis reveals how the text was "courtly-ized" (*cortesización*)—adapted with specific stage directions and character types (like the *gracioso* Guardainfante) to flatter the royal audience while maintaining the excitement of a public comedy.

Similarly, Carmen Sanz Ayán investigates the theater during the regency of Mariana of Austria. She demonstrates that the choice of mythological themes was never neutral; these plays served as sophisticated political tools to manage factional conflicts within the court and project an image of stability to foreign ambassadors during a period of perceived political decline.

Several chapters delve into the "polyphonic" nature of the performances:

- Delia Gavela García examines *Pico y Canente* (1656), questioning whether the text was subservient to the machinery (*tramoya*). She argues for a "symbiosis" where the spoken word and the visual spectacle (such as the use of *play-back* and lighting effects) were inseparable.
- Natalia Fernández Rodríguez offers a fascinating study on gestuality in Solís's *Euridice y Orfeo*. She links the actor's movements to the *fisiognomía dinámica* of Baroque painting, suggesting that the "living image" on stage was a culmination of the era's obsession with the limits between art and life.
- Jesús Gómez highlights how Calderón de la Barca specifically redesigned the *gracioso* (comic relief) for the Coliseo, creating "mythological graciosos" that differed significantly from those found in the public *corrales*.

The second half of the volume, "The Coliseo in the Spanish Theater Context," broadens the lens. Mercedes Simal López and Javier Rubiera provide essential taxonomies of the various performance spaces within the Buen Retiro and the Alcázar, helping readers navigate the "labyrinth" of salons, *saloncetes*, and open-air stages.

The volume also underscores the Coliseo's uniqueness in Europe. Unlike the English *Banqueting House* or the Austrian *Schönbrunn* gardens, which were palace rooms or parks adapted for theater, the Coliseo was a purpose-built structure designed by the Florentine Cosimo Lotti. Furthermore, it was a "mixed" theater: it hosted the royal family but also opened to the paying public, a unique socio-economic model that allowed courtly tastes to filter down to the common citizen.

El Coliseo del Buen Retiro is more than an architectural history; it is an interdisciplinary study of a "total work of art." By combining CAD-based virtual reconstructions with meticulous philological and archival research, the authors have successfully resurrected a vanished building. For the modern scholar, this volume provides the definitive toolkit for understanding how the Spanish Baroque theater operated as a machine of wonder, a school of politics, and a pinnacle of European stagecraft. As Sáez Raposo promises in his prologue, this is not the end of the journey, but the beginning of a new era of "virtual recreation" and critical editions that will bring these 17th-century "multimedia" festivals back to life for the 21st century.

En los próximos meses irán apareciendo las respectivas ediciones críticas de un total de siete fiestas teatrales que se estrenaron allí, en el Coliseo, acometidas desde un punto de vista global y coherente, esto es, prestando atención a cada uno de los componentes (teatrales, musicales y escenográficos) con los que se diseñaron en forma de espectáculo polifónico.

Nuestro objetivo es ofrecer la edición de la fiesta completa en los casos en los que se conservan las piezas breves que acompañaron a la comedia que vertebraba el espectáculo para, de este modo, entenderlo en toda su dimensión, pues era diseñado como un todo unitario conducente a causar un efecto epatante en el auditorio.

In sum, it is a long-term macro-project in which Francisco Sáez Raposo and the group of scholars under his coordination will have studied and (re)created the three most important theatrical spaces of Spain's Golden Age: the Salón Dorado of the Real Alcázar, the Coliseo, and the Salón de Reinos.