

Building Territories and Landscapes: the Royal Site of Aranjuez

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Abstract

Lands depending on the Royal Site of Aranjuez have undergone several transformations throughout the last five centuries. Their particular geographic features together with the traces related to the historic uses in the service of the King's leisure –but also to a secular agriculture, livestock and hunting exploitation– were shown in an interesting set of maps, plans, paintings and drawings. Ancient cartography still permits to locate the main geographic landmarks, and also the constructions built throughout the territories and the centuries, paying a special attention to the neighboring town and its development. In turn, pictures and drawings depict some particular performances that were supported by a set of more or less ephemeral buildings and traces. An exhaustive fieldwork permitted us to check their state of preservation, and to analyze the lasting remains of historic uses and forms.

Keywords: Royal Sites, Spain, ancient cartography, drawings, 15th-20th Centuries.

Introduction

To get a deep knowledge of a historic building needs an intensive documentation effort and an exhaustive fieldwork. On this basis, the adequate hypotheses about its evolution throughout the centuries can be envisaged and checked.

Similarly, a previous documentation work becomes essential in order to recover the historical memory of a territory or a landscape. Any kind of historic written sources, as well as ancient graphic and cartographic documents, can provide valuable information on the main built landmarks and geographic features and their evolution. In this respect, when we refer to the built heritage, we include crops, infrastructures, and other constructions that merit particular attention because of their qualities or characteristics.

On the other hand, the distinction between territory and landscape corresponds to two conceptual approaches.

The construction of the territory is proposed from an objective perspective that studies both the natural and man induced geographic phenomena, that are described and analyzed from a scientific point of view. In turn, landscape is the way a territory is perceived and experienced by an observer, which establishes some aesthetic, emotional, moral, scientific and cultural relationships with it [Chías 2015; 2018].

As a consequence, our researches seek to know in depth, to enhance the value, and to disseminate cultural heritage from a wide scope including the architectural, urban and land scales.

To this end, it is indispensable to study the construction of both the territory and the landscape [Chías, Abad 2012; 2014] or, according to Nicolás Ortega Cantero, “the historic geography of the landscape” [Ortega Cantero 2004].

The place

The qualities that characterize Aranjuez as a unique place, are the result of a singular geographical environment that has been wisely used since the Roman era.

The Royal Site is placed in the fertile plain where the rivers Tajo and Jarama meet. But its development, “far from resulting of a free spontaneous land tenure, and of the transformation of the cultivable floodplain, reflects a guiding will and a rational planning” [Terán 1949] (fig. 1). Although the name Tajo denotes the quality of the river to intrude into high river banks, Aranjuez represents an exception because it has took advantage traditionally of the river water to irrigate the fertile plain. Therefore, the valley starts widening and adopts an asymmetrical profile [1] from the south of Colmenar de Oreja, where the riverbanks are covered with vegetation and there is a thick network of irrigation channels.

In this area, historic orchards and gardens abound, but they were secularly subjected to the changing meanders and the floodings that altered periodically the landscape.

Fig. 1. A. de Navas, General plan of the properties of the Spanish Crown in Aranjuez, 1811. Archivo Cartográfico de Estudios Geográficos, Madrid.



On the other hand, the river Tajo tends to move towards the South and to erode the left margin, digging almost vertical slopes, and carving four terraces that reach 100 m above the river level (fig. 2).

Although human action has played a crucial role in the transformation of these landscapes, the old groves and the gallery forests that once covered this area can still be seen. They once were the main attraction of the Royal Site, and were used for hunting by the successive Kings of Spain.

The history

The plains of the rivers Tajo and Jarama were well populated from the Roman era onwards, even throughout the Early Middle Ages when these territories were under Arabic domination.

Between the 11th and the 12th centuries, they were the border region between the territories dominated respectively by the Christians and the Muslims.

But at the end of the 12th century, war moved closer to Sierra Morena and started the repopulation of these lands. As a consequence, an interesting set of small villages settled in the area. Some of them like *Aurelia*, *Aranzuel* and *Alpajés* have reached our days (and are actually known as Oreja, Aranjuez and Alpajés), while other as *Gulpjares* or *Villafranca* disappeared. All of them were located by the riverside, and took advantage of its waters by constructing dams, water saws, water-powered mills, canals and irrigation ditches, etc., that were still in use not such a long time ago.

These territories were formerly owned by the Grand Masters of the Order of Santiago (fig. 3). King Fernando el Católico was the last one, and accordingly, the estates became a property of the Crown known as the *Real Heredamiento* of Aranjuez.

Since then, there was a decline in the habitation patterns due to the prohibition on building new houses, what significantly reduced the number of villages. Similarly, land uses changed into meadows, while livestock farming and grasslands were leveraged and some areas were reserved for market crops and fruit orchards, as the *Huertas de Picotajo* at the confluence of the rivers.

Throughout the 16th century, the first Kings of the House of Habsburg (Emperor Charles and King Philip II) fenced and extended the Royal Woods buying many neighbo-

ring estates. The last one started to build the new palace beside the Grand Masters' old residence, by applying the architectural concept of the Italian villa in the countryside [Bonet 1987] (fig. 3).

Philip II also extended the dry farming plots, renovated the Jardín de la Isla, and built new irrigation systems, gardens and orchards, which were accessed through long tree-lined streets.

The last Habsburg Kings increased the agricultural crops, but the definitive impulse to the Royal Site was given by the Bourbon Kings in the 18th century.

King Philip V continued the works of construction of the Royal Palace according to the traces drawn at the 16th century, and his son King Ferdinand VI promoted the development of the population centre following the guidelines proposed in architect Santiago Bonavia's urban plan.

Bonavia defined in 1750 a scenographic project based on the highest respect for the existing tree-lined streets, and proposed an asymmetrical plan with a trident of streets to the East, whose perspectives converged in the Royal Palace. The grid of the blocks of the new town should fit into the trident [Sancho 1995] (fig. 4) [2].

Bonavia also designed a new urban space, the square of San Antonio, that was set in parallel to the existing Plaza de las Parejas (square of the Couples), but now with a public character (fig. 5).

A new urban expansion to the south was designed by architect Jaime Marquet in 1759, that included a wide market square or Plaza de Abastos.

King Charles III built most of the urban infrastructures between 1760 and 1786, that included a new hospital, a theatre, a slaughterhouse, and a graveyard, among other

Fig. 2. Spanish Anonymous Painter, View of Aranjuez from the top of the road to Ocaña, 19th century. Biblioteca Nacional de España, Madrid.



buildings. Simultaneously a set of new private palaces was built according to the "Urban policy of Aranjuez" enacted in 1764.

As a consequence, the town constantly maintained the high quality of its construction, together with an homogeneous design that ended in "the most pleasant, bright and beautiful town that one can imagine" [Álvarez de Quindós 1804].

At the beginning of the 19th century, Aranjuez was the most regular and tidy among the Spanish Sites [Chueca 1958], as it was a successful example of a courtesan town of the Enlightenment, with a late Baroque urban frame and numerous service buildings with a functional character (fig. 6).

Queen Isabella II reigned between 1840 and 1868, coinciding with the last period of splendor in Aranjuez, when new palaces were built by the Royal Family and by the old and the new aristocracies. A new railway connected Madrid with Aranjuez, but the railway station was placed to the west, near the Royal Palace, what damaged an important area of the tree-lined streets in Picotajo.

The Law promulgated in July, 5th 1869 allowed the sale of a significant part of the royal properties, and started a period of dismemberment of the original estates that once conformed the *Real Heredamiento*. Many plots passed onto private hands, while the Crown kept the Palace and the adjacent service buildings, the gardens of the

Parterre, la Isla and the Prince, with the House of the Labrador and the Doce Calles area. They all are currently a part of the Patrimonio Nacional, and since 1982 the tree-lined streets and all the rural real estates that still belonged to this public institution, were integrated into the properties of Spanish State.

Among the consequences of the privatization process, the changes in the land uses must be stressed, together with an important transformation of the landscapes.

Images of Aranjuez: plans and drawings

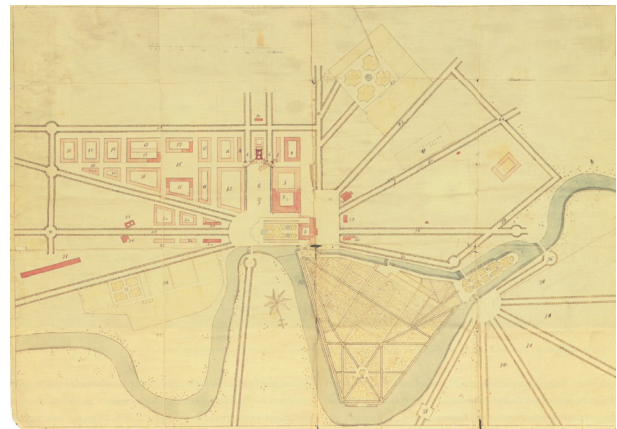
All the process steps in the construction of the territories and the landscapes of Aranjuez were captured by numerous graphic documents. They show the most important objective characteristics of the territory and its main features and landmarks, but also the subjective qualities of the public spaces and the landscapes, that frequently appear on the background of the activities of the court (fig. 7), and sometimes are protagonists in art works like those by painter Santiago Rusiñol (fig. 8).

Regardless of the drawing or painting technique used [3], both the drawings and the engravings of Aranjuez can be classified as: 1/ cartography: maps and plans produced at a territorial scales; 2/ urban plans; 3/ architectural and decoration plans; and 4/ perspectives. Due to the particular

Fig. 3. Michel-Ange Houasse, *The Palace of Aranjuez and the ria from the Jardín de la Isla*, c. 1720. Patrimonio Nacional.



Fig. 4. S. Bonavia, *Urban planning of the new population centre at the Royal Site of Aranjuez*, 1750. Archivo del Palacio Real, Madrid.



targets of our study, we have not taken into account other abstract expressions or non-figurative art works.

The main differentiation to be done between the cartographic documents relates to the scale, that introduces a primary categorization of maps and plans, depending if they consider the Earth curvature. A secondary grouping relates to reliability and accuracy of maps, that defines another conceptual milestone from the application of the scientific cartography produced since the beginning of the 19th century.

The oldest maps correspond to the kingdom of the first Habsburg Kings throughout the 16th and 17th centuries, which coincided with the golden era of the printed cartography in the Low Countries, which then belonged to the Spanish Crown.

Among the early maps depicting the territories of Aranjuez, the printed map by Abraham Ortelius included in his atlas *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* (1584) must be highlighted. It shows in a simple effective way a section of the river Tajo within Colmenar de Oreja and Toledo, as well as the quaternary terraces flanking it (fig. 9). Likewise, among the most reliable maps from the perspective of the topology is the *Toletum Hispanici Orbis Urbs*, that was drawn and printed by I.F. Leonardo and L.M. Portocarrero in 1681 [4]. Among the later maps drawn on a larger scale, the set drawn by Santiago Loup during the Peninsular War (1808-1814) was carefully surveyed and detailed, and shows and interesting display of toponyms and place names.

The production of urban plans began in the 18th century when the town was designed and built. At this time correspond the urban projects that were successively proposed by the architects Santiago Bonavía (fig. 4), Jaime Marquet and Domingo de Aguirre (fig. 6).

Another set of urban plans depicts some particular areas that were then being developed as the Real Cortijo de San Isidro, Sotomayor, or the Campo Flamenco (Flemish Field), among other, drawn by engineer José de Hermsilla, Leonardo de Vargas, Charles de Witte, Vicente Fornells and Bonavía. Among them, the set of plans showing the flood damages and the changes in the courses of the rivers Jarama and Tajo is particularly interesting. The oldest one is a simple sketch dated 1586 (fig. 10) that describes in detail the dams, the irrigation canals and other industries that were located by the riverside and took advantage of the water stream.

The collection of accurate urban plans drawn in the 19th century by the Junta General de Estadística from 1870

Fig. 5. A. Joli, *The square of San Antonio in Aranjuez*, c. 1757. Private collection.

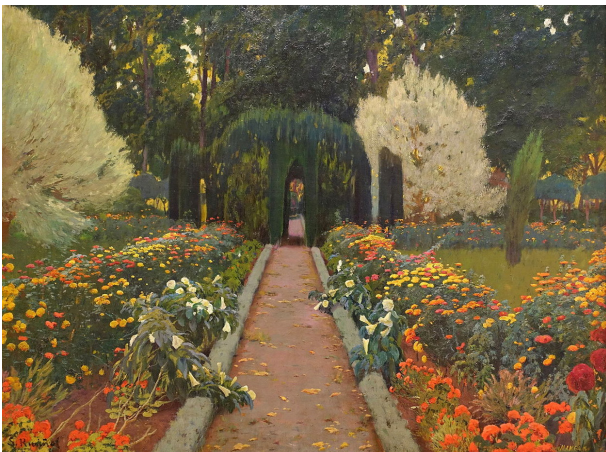
Fig. 6. D. de Aguirre, *Topography of the Royal Site of Aranjuez*, 1775. Biblioteca Nacional de España, Madrid.



Fig. 7. F. Battaglioli, *Fernando VI and Bárbara de Braganza in the gardens of Aranjuez*, 1756. Museo del Prado, Madrid.

Fig. 8. S. Rusiñol, *Gardens in Aranjuez: Glorieta II*, 1907. Museo Nacional de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid.

Fig. 9. A. Ortelius, *Carpetaniae partis descr.*, in *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum*, 1582. Biblioteca Nacional de España, Madrid.



onwards, as a part of the project *Topografía Catastral de España* (fig. 11) [Urteaga, Camarero 2014], together with the local maps produced on the occasion of the sale of the Royal properties, are significant examples of the scientific cartography of the time. Among these, the map surveyed by Roque León del Rivero in 1869 and the printed map included in Almazán's work [Almazán y Duque 1870] must be stressed.

The cadastral watercolour map titled *Plano catastral del Término de Aranjuez* drawn in 1912 by Juan L. de Chicheri and Salvador Aspiazu is particularly interesting due to the detailed crops and vegetation.

The set of architectural plans that still survive correspond essentially to the different stages in the construction of the Royal Palace. Only one is dated back to the 16th century, which is an ink sketch describing a garden and a fountain [5]. In the first half of the seventeenth century, architect Juan Gómez de Mora produced a copy of the original plans by Juan Bautista de Toledo when King Philip IV tried to complete the construction of the Palace [6].

But until the 18th century it could not be finished, and on this occasion some other architects designed successive enlargements of the building, as those by Pedro Caro Idrogo between 1728 and 1731 [7], by Esteban Marchand in 1732-1733, by Leandro Bachelieu, and finally by Francisco Sabatini, who designed the west aisles between 1771 and 1774.

The interior decoration was arranged by Santiago Bonavía and Giovanni Battista Galluzzi. The first one was the au-



thor of the impressive imperial staircase of the Palace, built between 1735 and 1746, whose drawings still show his disagreement with governor Samaniego [8]. Several solutions were proposed to other singular buildings as the Church of San Antonio (fig. 12) and the "houses owned by His Majesty", as shown in the corresponding architectural plans. But there are few graphic documents related to the private constructions around 1786.

The last group of images is composed by the perspectives that were drawn or painted from the 16th century onwards. It's a large group that can also be sorted by the artist's intentions.

The oldest view was drawn by gentleman Jehan Lhermite, who was a preceptor of the prince Philip and spent the last years in the life of King Philip II at the Spanish Court. His manuscript drawings [9] show in detail the buildings

Fig. 10. Anonymous, Drawing that depicts the riverside of the Tajo near the forest of Sotomayor, 1568. Archivo General de Simancas, Valladolid.

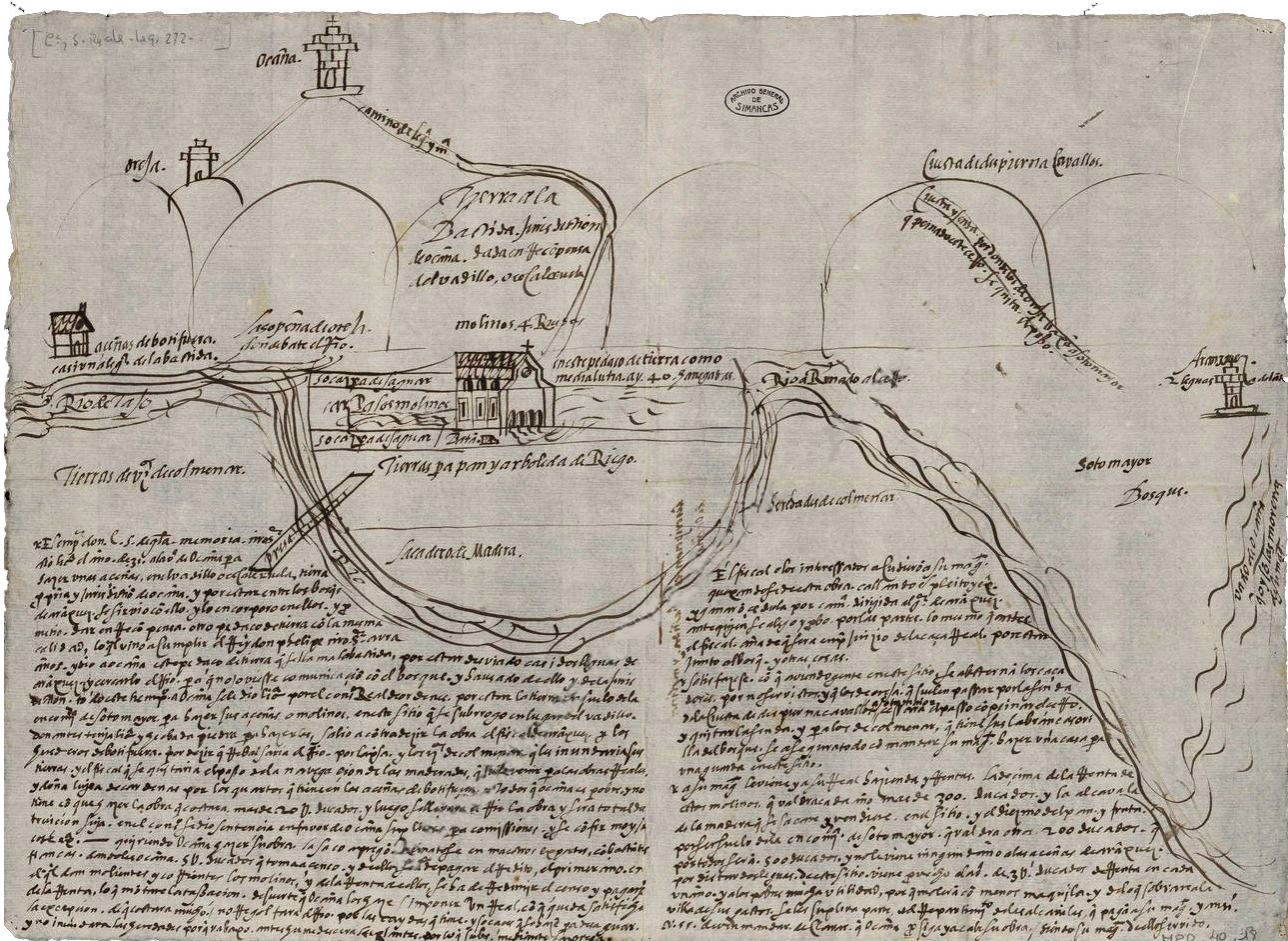
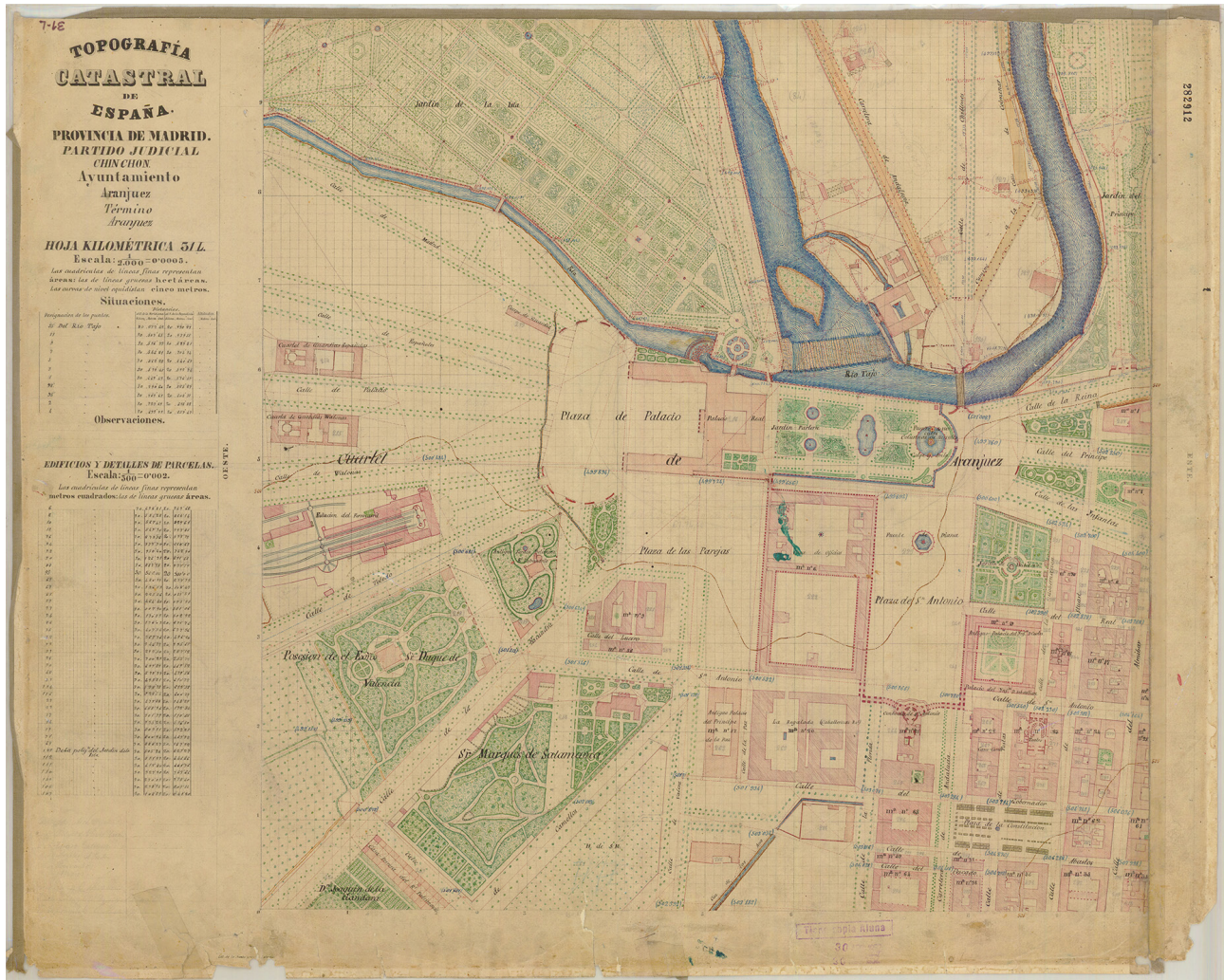


Fig. 11. Topografía Catastral de España, Aranjuez, Hoja Kilométrica 31L. Instituto Geográfico Nacional, Madrid.



and the environment, but also the activities performed in daily life.

Only fifty years later, Pier Maria Baldi provided a set of illustration of the journey of Cosme the Medicis through Spain and Portugal [10]. He made a stop at Aranjuez, and drew the unfinished Royal Palace built by King Philip II beside the old Casa Maestral.

Two anonymous oil paintings preserved respectively in the Prado Museum and in the Monastery of El Escorial, show two bird's eye views of the Royal Site as it was built by King Philip II, and an ideal perspective of the project by Juan Bautista de Toledo. But while the first one depicts the building embedded into a fascinating countryside, the second one focuses in the Palace.

The perspectives painted throughout the 18th century show essentially the splendor of the court at the Royal Site, that was transformed into an huge theatrical scenery for the display of the powerful Spanish Monarchy. They were painted mostly by Italian artists like Carlo Broschi Farinelli, Francesco Battaglioli, and Antonio Joli, but also by important Spanish painters like Luis Paret, Isidro González Velázquez and Domingo de Aguirre, and outstanding engravers like Manuel Salvador Carmona, Juan Minguet, Manuel Alegre, Joaquín Ballester, Francisco Muntaner and Fernando Selma among other, at the dawn of the 19th century. These artists produced the interesting collection of etchings that show Aranjuez from the point of view of a walker by 1775.

The paintings by Michel-Ange Houasse are specially interesting among the eighteenth century perspectives, because of his color palette that is «full of qualities and rich in suggestions», [Luna 1974] according to Luna and because they show the everyday environment that enabled the life in the Palace.

Another essential collection of charming views of the Royal Sites was painted by Fernando Brambilla between 1821 and 1833, that shortly thereafter was lithographed and widely diffused. Although his main purpose was to enhance the image of the vile absolutist King Ferdinand VII, his points of view were usually unrealistic and the perspectives lack of a rigorous structure, according to his communicative intent.

More recently, the views of the gardens of Aranjuez by Santiago Rusiñol (fig. 8) provide the solitary vision of a nature submitted to the man's will by means of a rigorous symmetric composition, in contrast with a wild background [Martín Bourgon 2019].

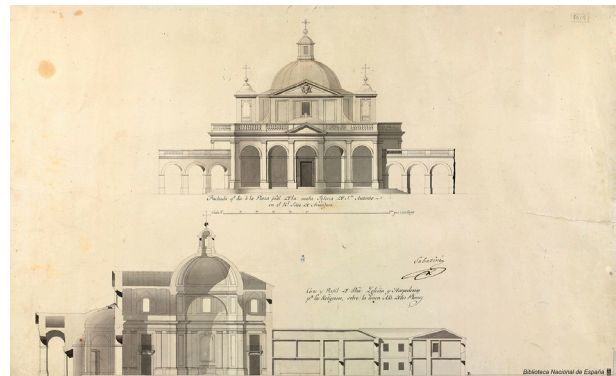
Conclusions

Re-construct the development of a place means to identify the natural landmarks, to know how, when and why men built his artifices and buildings, the way he took profit of the available resources, and how the landscapes were conformed.

To this end it become essential to develop an exhaustive documentary search where the graphic documents proved to be particularly useful due to their ability to describe the geographic features, but also to their capacity to express and suggest the qualities of environments and atmospheres.

The indispensable fieldwork must be developed focusing at various scales, and allows us to verify or correct what images and texts convey. In essence, these researches allow us to recover the memory of the territory and the landscape of an «enchanted place», according to the experience of Mme. D'Aulnoy in 1668.

Fig. 12. F. Sabatini, Project of the new Church of San Antonio, 1772. Biblioteca Nacional de España, Madrid.



Notes

[1] The right border has a gentler slope than the left one, due to the general incline of the Central Plateau to the South.

[2] Bonavia's plan faces south.

[3] Among the collection of maps and drawings that is still preserved, there are oil paintings and drawings produced using many different techniques, but also engravings, that were particularly abundant from the 18th century onwards.

[4] There are some copies in the Biblioteca Nacional de España and the Centro Cartográfico y de Estudios Geográficos del Ministerio de Defensa, both in Madrid.

[5] Archivo General de Simancas, MPD y D47,059, *Sketch of a fountain*

for the garden in Aranjuez.

[6] There is a collection in the Biblioteca Nacional de España dated 1636, and another one in the Vatican Library that is a manuscript copy of the original 16th century plans.

[7] Plans are preserved at the Centro Cartográfico y de Estudios Geográficos del Ministerio de Defensa in Madrid.

[8] Archivo del Palacio Real de Madrid, nr. 1187 y 1188.

[9] Jehan Lhermite (1602-1622), *Le Passetemps*. Bibliothèque royale de Belgique, Bruxelles, *Manuscripti historici* n. 17.

[10] Biblioteca Laurenziana, Firenze, Med. Pal. 123.

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