“Magical guide to the Community of Madrid”

A magical route through the region, proposed by **Clara Tahoces**



Knocker located on Plaza de la Marina Española, Madrid

Comunidad de Madrid



Magical guide to the Community of Madrid

The mysteries and legends of the Community of Madrid are largely unknown.

The villages of the Community have a plethora of secrete spots replete with stories worthy of being told round the fireplace on a winter night. These stories must be rescued so they do not sink into oblivion, so that this past – falling somewhere between myth and history – does not get lost by the relentless passage of time.

Some may think they are merely things of the past, or that it is impossible for there to be characters well into the 21st century, such as those who allegedly appeared in Cubas de la Sagra or in Navalagamella. Many Madrilenians will not know that the region has incorrupt bodies that are worshipped once a year – like that of San Diego of Alcalá – or that a powerful and feared king, King Philip II, left traces of relics and ancient superstitions around his sanctuary in San Lorenzo de El Escorial. Others will find it hard to imagine that in the heart of the sierra of Madrid, our ancestors once built altars that they dedicated to the gods, and that the region has endless secrets calling out to be unveiled.

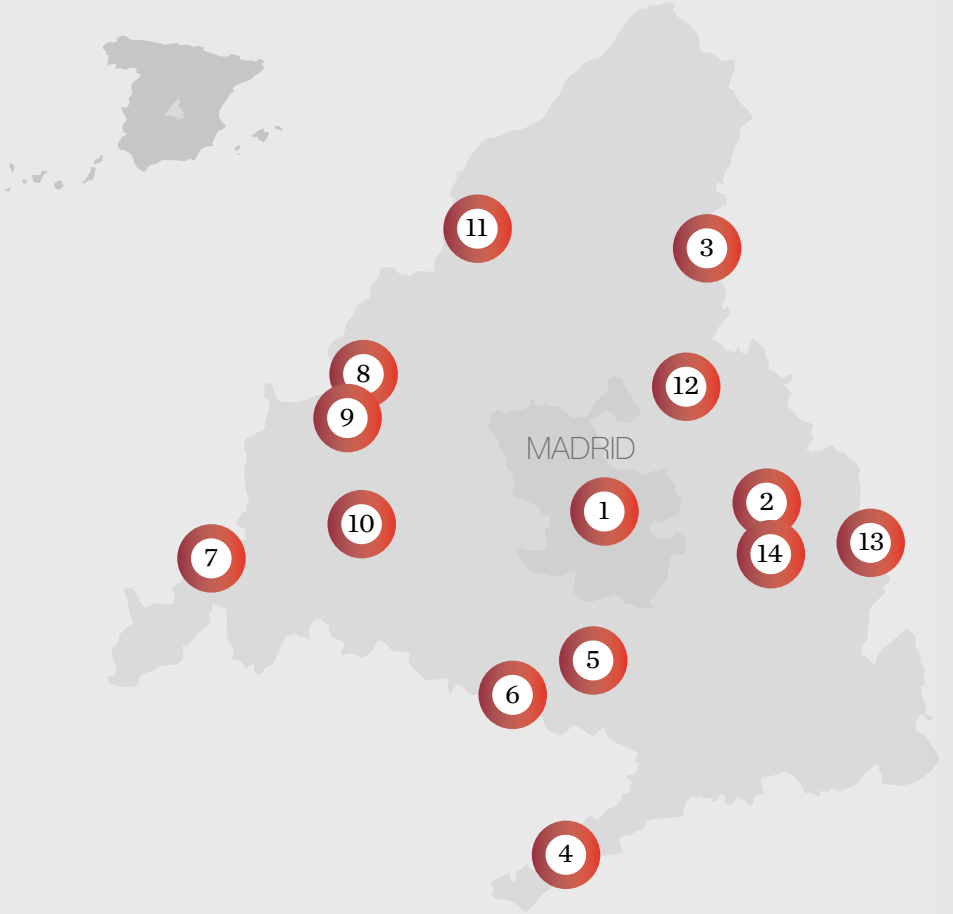
And that is the purpose of this guide: to reveal everything that has been secreted away, far from our eyes.

So, we invite you to journey through the towns of the Community of Madrid through these words, and we hope that you will be astonished and surprised with these uncanny and mythical legends and stories.

The wonders of the gardens in Capricho Park in Alameda de Osuna, in the Barajas district
The incorrupt body of San Diego in Alcalá de Henares, the enigma of the “Templar” castle in Santorcaz, the mysteries of water in the Royal City of Aranjuez, The intrigues of the tower in Pinto, used to imprison illustrious characters in its day, The strange apparitions in Cubas de la Sagra, The secret histories of the castle in San Martín de Valdeiglesias, The Royal Monastery of San Lorenzo de El Escorial and its relics, The ancient Vetton altar, known as the Seat of Philip II, The “angel” of Navalagamella. An enthralling visit to the monastery of Santa María de El Paular in Rascafría, The mystery of the Virgin of the Storks in Fuente el Saz de Jarama, The pillory in Pezuela de las Torres, The other “Holy Shroud” in Torres de la Alameda

We truly hope you enjoy taking this journey through myths, secrets and mysteries with us. We will cast our eyes back into the past with another vision and guide you so you won’t miss out on the essence of this region, which still has amazing things to be revealed and discovered.





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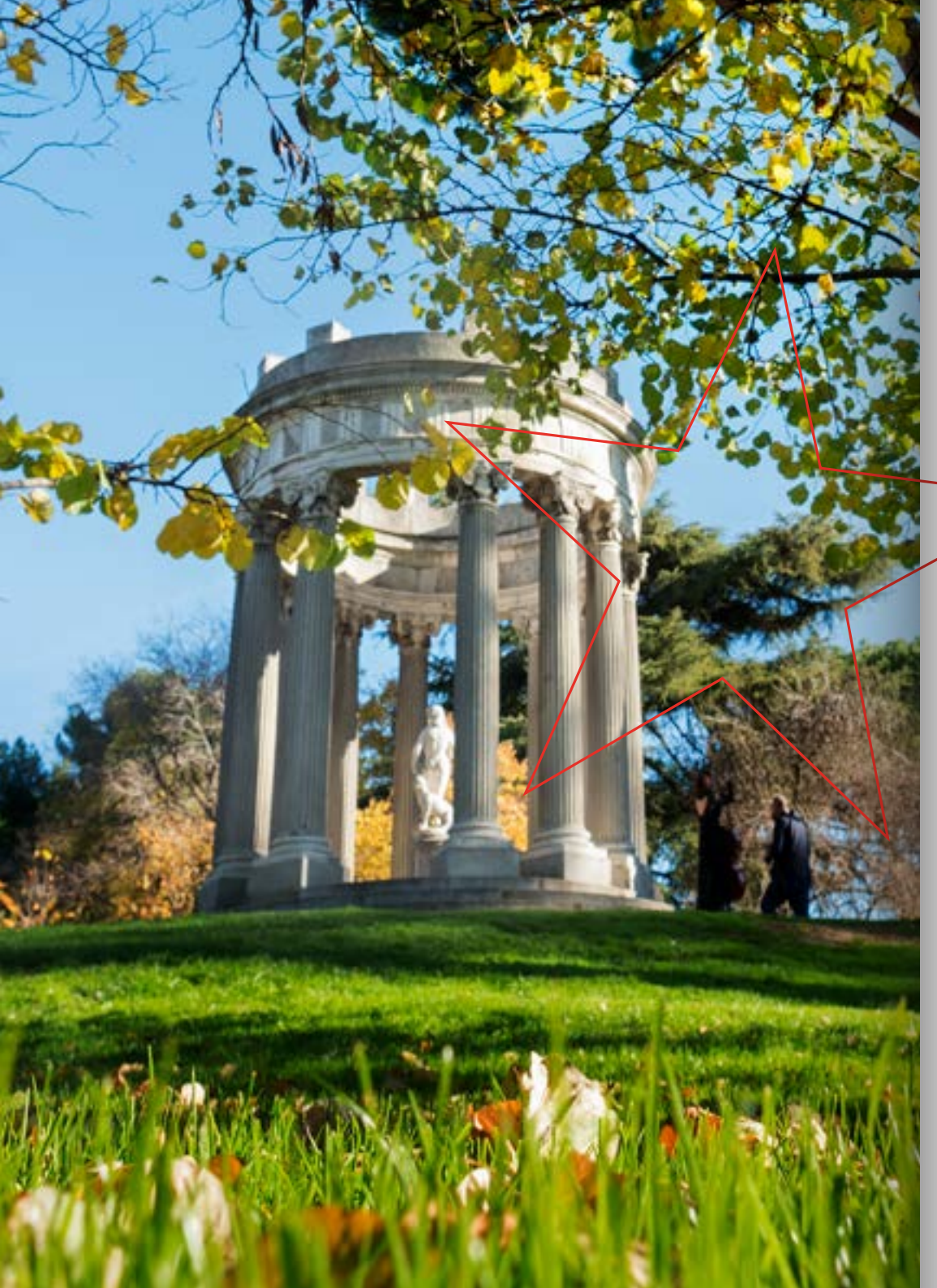
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Capricho Park in Alameda de Osuna, Madrid

The secret garden of Capricho Park in Alameda de Osuna

Esoterism during the Enlightenment

Art and landscaping, the known passions of the enigmatic Duchess

The crafting and design of this garden, located in Alameda de Osuna, in the Barajas district, was ordered in 1783 by the ninth Duchess of Osuna, María Josefa de la Soledad Alfonso-Pimentel Téllez-Girón (1752-1834).

Scores of gardeners, landscapers and architects took part in its creation, including Pablo Boutelou, Jean Baptiste Mulot, Pedro Prevost and Ángel María Tadey. It is a true open-air museum that only opens on weekends and holidays. There is a large car park near the garden, which makes access quick and easy, and it is located next to the entrance of El Capricho metro stop, on Line 5.

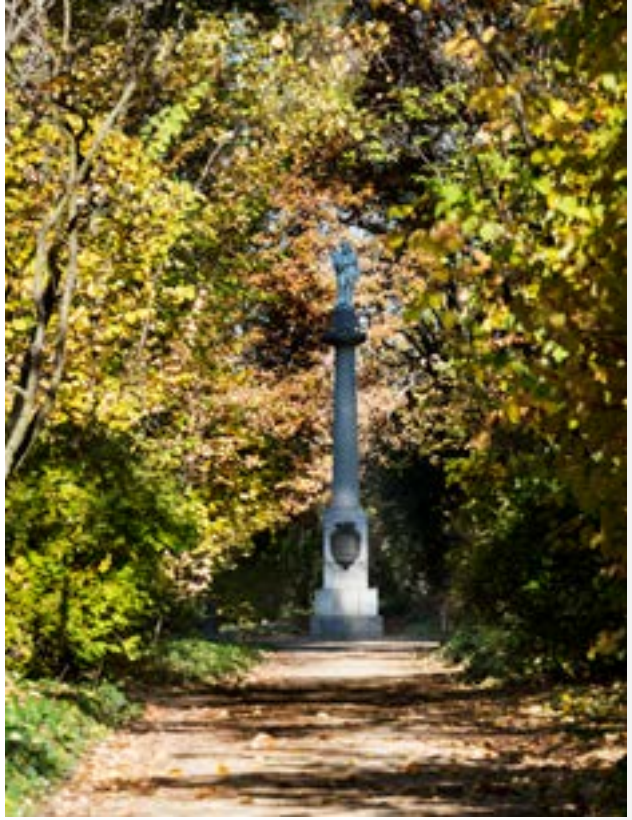
The garden of El Capricho is undeniably one of the most magical sites in the Spanish capital. It hides several features scattered throughout the grounds, which have extensive symbols linked to Freemasonry and initiation rites. If you have the chance to take a stroll through the garden, you'll realize that nothing there is as simple or innocent as it seems. People believe this is because of the ninth Duchess of Osuna's esoteric interests.

Some examples of this symbology can be found in the Hermitage, the Duck Pond, the Exedra, the Beehive, the Dome of Bacchus, the Ballroom, the Wheel of Saturn, the Ruin or Gunner's Home, the House of the Old Woman, the Labyrinth and even in the palace itself of the Duke and Duchess, from whose walls hung six enigmatic paintings Francisco de Goya (1746-1828) was



Capricho Park in Alameda de Osuna, Madrid

commissioned to create, called "Witchcraft." They are a collection of small canvases (all of the same size, 42 x 30 centimeters), framed following a pattern, and depicting witches, demons, phantoms and even the male goat.



Capricho Park in Alameda de Osuna, Madrid

Enigmatic paintings

At present, these paintings are under the custody of several museums in the capital, including the Lázaro Galdiano Museum and the Prado Museum, and others outside of Spain, such as the National Gallery in London (United Kingdom). The paintings in the series are: *Witches' Sabbath, The Spell, Witches' Flight, The Stone Guest, The Devil's Lamp, and The Witches' Kitchen.*

Doña María Josefa is believed to be the person who commissioned Goya to create these paintings for her private chambers at her summer palace, although the true reason why she wanted to have this series of dark paintings in her possession is unknown.



Capricho Park in Alameda de Osuna, Madrid

Although the walls of El Capricho palace were adorned with some 20 paintings by Goya, these – due to their special characteristics – are the most enigmatic and mysterious. For some of her biographers, the Duchess of Osuna was a great enthusiast of occult and mysterious affairs.

The garden of El Capricho kept growing after the Duchess's death in 1834, as her heirs, mainly her grandsons, continued to annex new lands and build new and intriguing features, which can be visited totally free of charge.

Capricho Park



Alcala´s Magisterial Cathedral, Alcalá de Henares

Saint Didacus of Alcala

The commitment with healthcare of a traveller saint

The incorrupt body can be visited on November 13 each year



Entrance of the Alcalá´s Magisterial Cathedral, Alcalá de Henares



Inside view of the Alcalá´s Magisterial Cathedral, Alcalá de Henares

Little more than 40 kilometers from Madrid, in Alcalá de Henares, you can find the incorrupt body of Saint Didacus, or San Diego of Alcala. Specifically, it is in the Alcalá de Henares Cathedral.

Saint Didacus was from Seville. He was born on 14 November 1400 in San Nicolás del Puerto. He realized his religious calling at a very young age and he travelled to different convents, such as the one in Arruzafa. He also visited other places, including the Canary Islands, Cadiz, Castile, France and Italy. He went to this last country during a pilgrimage to Rome, inspired by the jubilee year in 1450. It was there that the plague was unleashed, leading him to devote his time to caring for the ill.

An interesting trivia fact is that the homonymous city in the state of California (United States) was named after San Diego.



Inside view of the Alcalá´s Magisterial Cathedral, Alcalá de Henares



Tomb of the Apostle Santiago inside the Acalá´s Magisterial Cathedral, Alcalá de Henares

13 November: key date

Although there are not year-round viewings, you can see him once a year, on 13 November, when you can visit the cathedral for this purpose.

The day selected to exhibit the body of this Franciscan friar is the date of his death. According to his biographers, he predicted when he would die, giving the exact date. His incorrupt remains are kept in a golden coffer in a chapel inside this cathedral.

Saint Didacus was famous for performing miracles, especially cures among the poor. After his death, his fame continued to increase among powerful people and leaders, such as Henry IV, who claims he healed his arm. Another of his devote and loyal defenders was the King of Black, Phillip II, who ordered his remains brought to him, so that – as he believed – they could intercede in curing his son, Prince Charles, who had struck his head when he fell down a staircase (in the Archbishop's Palace of Alcalá in 1562). So, according to pious tradition, when they placed the remains in the bed next to the prince, he was miraculously healed.

Diverse miracles

Among the miracles attributed to him, there is one that was essential to Saint Didacus's canonization in 1588 by Pope Sixtus VI, which led to his later representation in illustrations and paintings with roses in his hands. The miracle is related to a practice the saint commonly conducted when he was still a friar: he kept food from the convents in which he lived to give to the poor. Some speak of bread, while others say it was a mutton leg. In any case, his colleagues realized his petty, albeit well-meant, thefts. Defending himself when he was interrogated about what was concealed in his tunic, Fray Diego said he was just carrying flowers. Those questioning him opened the tunic and – according to devotees' stories – there were indeed a bunch of roses there.

After his voyage to Italy, he reached port in a convent in Tendilla (Guadalajara) and, later, in 1456, moved to Alcalá de Henares, where he would live for seven years, until he died in the convent of Santa María de Jesús. He worked there as a porter, gardener and tending the crops. The convent was demolished in the 19th century.

Saint Didacus is highly venerated both in Spain and in other places, like in the Americas, in Mexico and California.

As an odd trivia fact, the Conceptionist nuns from the convent of Santa Úrsula, also in Alcalá de Henares, watch over a relic from the saint: one of his hands – also incorrupt – and the original headstone from his tomb.

Tourism in Alcalá de Henares



Torremocha Castle, Santorcaz

The Templar castle in Santorcaz

Templar references in the region of Madrid

The story of the jail that looked at the starry firmament

The town of Santorcaz, some 40 kilometers from the capital in the eastern region of the Community of Madrid, is extremely special due to its past. According to authors like Juan G. Atienza, one of the most renowned Templar specialists in Spain, this castle was a Templar enclave. The town was founded by Saint Torquatus (and thus the name).

As Atienza details in his book, *The Knights Templar in the Golden Age of Spain,* published by Martínez Roca (1995), "it had five towers, one of which was extremely tall. Cisneros was locked up there for six years. The most academic of accounts continue to deny it belonged to the Templars, due to the lack of contemporary documents that can prove the tradition."

A peculiar church

The castle has unfortunately disappeared. What does remain standing and is open to visitors is the attached church, also rebuilt, but one replete with several curious features. They include a square apse converted into a chapel, which is accessed via a concealed door in the high altar, where you can see, as Atienza explains "a whole series of small cells that were once used to store relics." Many of these relics are on a list, on which the large majority are pieces of saints with dubious customs and beliefs.



Artistic representation of a saint at the Santorcaz Church



Santorcaz Church

Atienza also explains that there is a roof structure that, despite not being on the old castle today, was once part of it. The roof is about 15 meters wide, was painted in the Middle Ages, and is now in the neighboring town of Alcalá de Henares. In the 13th century, the painting on the structure possibly represented "a celestial map with all the constellations known at that time, whose original appearance has been conserved due to the odd layout of the stars, cut out of metal. Of course – adds Atienza in the aforesaid book – no-one knows if it was crafted by the Templars but, it does prove that the castle's original inhabitants were interested in astronomy, perhaps even its builders."



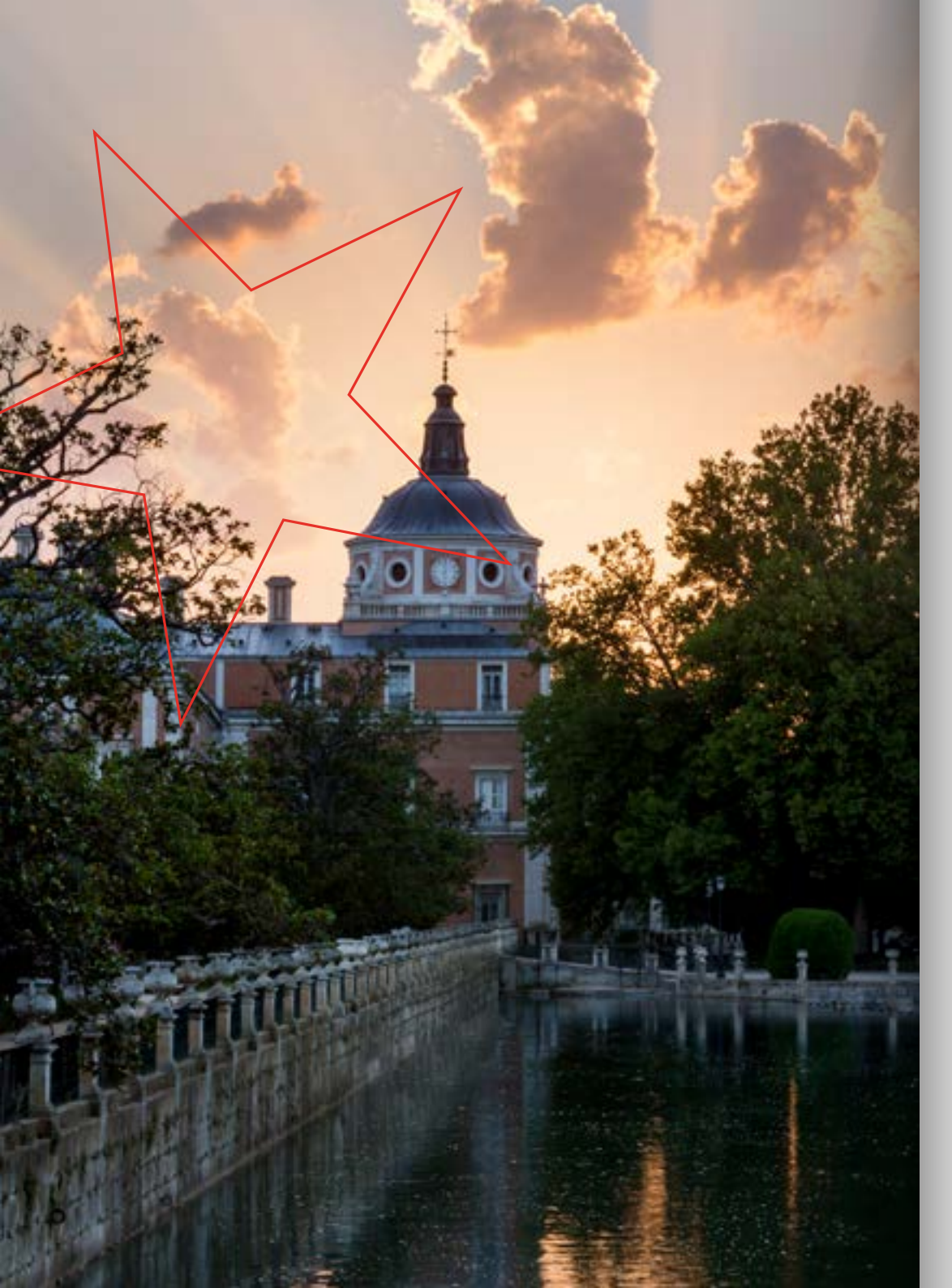
Inside view of the Santorcaz Church

Site of captivity

The Castle of Torremocha, as it is also known, did not only hold Cardinal Cisneros as a prisoner. Francis I of France, Rodrigo Calderón and Juan de Luna were also there, and the most famous of them all: Ana de Mendoza y de la Cerda, the famous princess of Eboli, who was first in the Tower of Pinto and was later moved to this castle. During her time at Santorcaz, she occupied the highest tower of the castle, although she was at least allowed visits from her children. Later, she got ill and was moved to Pastrana (Guadalajara), where she was only released for one hour a day to take the sun. She died there.

If it is a castle with Templar origins – as many authors claim – it would be the only one in the Community of Madrid affiliated with the Templars.

Tourism in Santorcaz



Royal Palace of Aranjuez

The Royal City of Aranjuez

A Bible repleted of esoteric symbols

The mysteries of water in the Royal Palace and its surroundings



Gardens of the Prince, Aranjuez



Royal Longboat Museum, Aranjuez

The Royal City of Aranjuez is one of the most visited tourist destinations in the Community of Madrid. It is no surprise, as it is exceptionally beautiful, which led to its declaration as World Heritage by UNESCO in 2001.

The Royal City of Aranjuez is made up of a series of landscaped parks and forests surrounding the Royal Palace of Aranjuez, located in this town little more than 40 kilometers away, in the southernmost area of the Community of Madrid. The most unusual feature is that each of the gardens showcases a different style, defined by the era and the tastes of each of the monarchs who ordered their creation.

It is well worth travelling there on the Strawberry Train, a historic train that has been running since 1984, a joint initiative between the Railway Museum of Madrid, the Aranjuez City Council and National Heritage.

Many gardens in one

Among the many gardens of Aranjuez, the Prince's Garden is a definite highlight, whose design was ordered by Charles IV when he was still the Prince of Asturias. It is the largest garden and is characterized by its astonishing diversity of plants and trees. Within its grounds, you will find the Royal Longboat Museum and the Real Casa del Labrador (Royal House of the Farm Laborer). The garden was designed by Frenchman Esteban Boutelou, although some features are the work of architect Juan de Villanueva (the dome, the Chinese pavilion and the wrought-iron fence). There are many lovely fountains, such as those dedicated to Narcissus, Apollo and Neptune, replete with symbology.

Casa del Labrador: the royal house was designed by Juan de Villanueva at the end of the 18th century, built over an old farm laborer's home. Works were finished during the reign of Charles IV. Highlights inside include the porcelain from the Royal Factory of Buen Retiro, the ballroom, the platinum cabinet and the billiard room.

The Royal Longboat Museum (Museo de Falúas Reales, where falúas are recreational riverboats) is next to the Royal Pier. The museum conserves a collection of boats once used to navigate the Tagus River. From among the sizeable collection, the most eye-catching is a gondola Charles II the Bewitched (1661-1700) ordered to be brought back from Naples in 1683.

The Garden of the Island was baptized with this name due to its location, which is on an island formed as the Tagus winds through Aranjuez. It is a paradigm for Spanish Renaissance gardens, whose construction was ordered by Philip II (1527-1598), the King in Black, as he was also known. The Garden of the Island is quite hermetic

and represents Philip II's first attempt to create a modern equivalent of the large Renaissance engineering works.

The island is a refuge of green, with numerous trees and several stone and marble fountains, replete with mythological figures and series. Meriting mention are the fountains of the Chemist, Apollo, Hercules, Venus, Diana and Bacchus. All characters with great symbolism attached to them.

The Cascade of the Castanets is also noteworthy, thus called due to the sound of the water as it tinkles over the holes in the structure.

The Parterre Garden was designed by Esteban Boutelou (senior gardener of Aranjuez since 1716). His fountains date back to the era of Ferdinand VII.

Tourism in Aranjuez
National Heritage in Aranjuez

Symbology in the fountains

There are three distinguished fountains in the garden: one dedicated to Hercules, one to Ceres and the last to the Nereids. Not far from there is what is known as the Statue Garden, thus named because it has a dozen busts of Roman emperors and Classic figures.

The King's Garden was originally created to be gazed upon from the bedrooms of the palace to design a type of private garden.

Isabel II's Garden is known as the Garden of the Little Princess, also created so that it could be viewed from the palace. When Isabel II (1830-1904) rose to the throne, a bronze statue was put up to commemorate this important date.

Construction commenced on the Palace of Aranjuez at the end of the 15th century and started to be called the Royal City a century later, when work on the gardens



Harpies Font in the Island Garden, Aranjuez



Neptune Fountain in the Isla Garden, Aranjuez

commenced. It would then become the favorite place for the monarchs to spend the summer. It is important to stress that the palace design was by Juan de Herrera, who also designed the Monastery of San Lorenzo de El Escorial, who felt great curiosity about esoteric matters. The design of the enigmatic Garden of the Island is also his work.

The present-day palace was finished in the 18th century, under the reign of Charles III (1716-1788). Its interior design reveals the tastes and sensitivities of each of the monarchs who lived there. Among other invaluable pieces, there is a significant collection of clocks.

Visiting the gardens is highly recommended, with a magical and lovely play of lights, colors and water. For scholars of esoterism, the Aranjuez gardens follow a specific structure in which nothing is coincidental. Normally, these types of symbolic messages are hidden in architecture, statues and fountains, although only initiates in these mysteries are able to spot the underlying meanings.



The tower of Pinto

The Tower of Pinto

Singular prisons for “blue-blood” conspirators

Intrigues within de Pinto´s Tower, a place where distinguished characters where imprisoned

The Tower of Pinto (also known as the Tower of Eboli, as the homonymous princess was imprisoned there) is located in Pinto, about 20 kilometers from the capital. The tower is undeniably the town's most iconic landmark.

Its exact construction date is unknown, although the years 1359 and 1360 are tossed round, when Peter I the Cruel, King of Castile, ceded the lordship of Pinto to Íñigo López de Orozco. Whatever the case, it seems certain that the tower was already raised in 1382, as there are records that King John I visited it this year. John I may not have visited otherwise.

Prison for the eminent

The Tower of Pinto is 16.5 meters long by 10 meters wide. It is built from white stone. Due to its location, it rose some 30 meters over the ground in its era. It is catalogued as an example of defensive and military architecture.

Over the course of the 16th and 17th centuries, the Tower of Pinto was employed by the Crown as a prison for the famous and illustrious. This practice was common in the 16th century, when castles were no longer frequented much by their owners. Thus, their owners frequently made them available to the royal justiciary as jails for the nobility. Buildings such as the Tower of Pinto had a perfect design to prevent escape.

It was a common practice to allocate properties in the vicinity of the Court to be used as prisons. Thus, the jails were close enough to the Court so that the prisoners could appear for trial and, in parallel, far enough away to prevent the prisoners from contacting possible supporters or allies.



Inside view of the Tower of Pinto

Possibly the most famous noblewoman who spent time there was Ana Hurtado de Mendoza y de la Cerda, the Princess of Eboli (1540-1592). Everything recounted about the Princess of Eboli lies somewhere in the middle between history, legend and myth.

On 28 July 1579, when he was 39 years old, Philip II ordered her to be arrested and escorted to the tower, where she spent six months of tough imprisonment. She was accused of several courtesan intrigues and of becoming an ally of Antonio Pérez, the king's secretary, accusations that were later dismissed.



Inside view of the Tower of Pinto

A quite unsuitable place

Her precarious state of health and the poor conditions at the prison advised her transfer and she was taken to the Castle of Santorcaz (Madrid), and later to her palace in Pastrana (Guadalajara), where she died on 12 February 1592.

The Princess of Eboli is a fascinating character and there are numerous legends referring to the one-eyed princess and her skills at cajoling and trickery. She is also known as *La Tuerta* (One-Eyed) because of the patch that covered her right eye. Among the theories about what happened to her eye, the most widely accepted is that she lost it as a little girl, after she was wounded by the tip of a foil wielded by a page. However, there is no iron-clad truth known, and there are also speculations that she could have been wall-eyed.

Other illustrious people who were also imprisoned there include Antonio Pérez, who spent two months in 1589 in the tower. Antonio Pérez was officially accused of disclosing state secrets to the Flanders rebels and to Isabel of England, and of pitting Philip II against his brother John of Austria.

However, some speculate that deep down Antonio Pérez may have been involved in planning the murder of Juan de Escobedo, John of Austria's secretary, meaning his involvement would have been approved of by the king.

Pérez ended up fleeing to Aragón, seeking protection under his exemptions and privileges, so the king then decided to imprison his wife and children in the tower. They remained there until the death of Philip II in 1599.

Another eminent person who was imprisoned in the Tower of Pinto was the Duke of Nochera, now under the reign of Philip IV, who ended his days in the tower. In 1808, Manuel Godoy, a favorite of Charles IV, also spent time imprisoned in the tower.

The building has undergone several reforms over the course of its long history, where major works include those executed in the 17th and 20th centuries.

It is privately owned, although it is open for visits on specific days and times.

Tourism in Pinto



Church of St. Andrés,
Cubas de la Sagra

Apparitions in Cubas de la Sagra

Strange happenings ocurred in the southwest of Madrid

The story of the apparition of the Virgin to the child Inés

Only 37 kilometers from Madrid is the town of Cubas de la Sagra, in the southwest of the Community. It is home to the monastery and church of Santa María de la Cruz y la Santa Juana, which was rebuilt after the Spanish Civil War. It was also plundered during the Peninsular War.

However, for our concerns its history started in the 15th century, specifically in 1449, when the Virgin Mary allegedly appeared several times to a girl named Inés Martínez Sánchez.

These appearances occurred over a 17-day period, where she glimpsed this enigmatic figure a total of six times in the outskirts of Cubas de la Sagra.

A radiant woman

Todo daba comienzo el 3 de marzo de 1449, cuando la niña Inés, de doce años, que vivía cerca de Cubas de la Sagra, se adentró en el campo con un grupo de gorrinos. En el transcurso de la jornada, hubo un momento en el que le pareció ver una figura reluciente que se movía entre los matorrales. Instintivamente dio un paso atrás y se escondió detrás de una vid a la espera de que –fuera quien fuese– se marchara. Pero la figura no lo hizo. Y se dejó ver de nuevo.

Entonces la niña comprobó desde lejos que se trataba de una mujer de pequeñas dimensiones, de un tamaño similar al suyo, por lo que decidió salir a su encuentro. Ambas entablaron conversación y la mujer se presentó como la Virgen Santa María. Asimismo, le transmitió un



Artistic representation of the Virgin together with the child Inés, Cubas de la Sagra

mensaje que debía comunicar en el pueblo. Según sus palabras: “E te mando que digas a todas las gentes que se confiesen e aderecen sus ánimas, que sepan que ha de venir gran pestilencia del dolor costado e de piedras roñas envueltas en sangre, de lo cual morirá mucha gente” (sic).

La figura desapareció dejando a la niña anonadada. Regresó a su casa y se lo contó a su madre, pero esta no solo no le dio crédito alguno, sino que la reprendió por llegar más tarde de lo acostumbrado. La niña también se lo comentó en el pueblo, pero tampoco la creyeron e incluso algunas personas exigieron pruebas de cuanto decía.



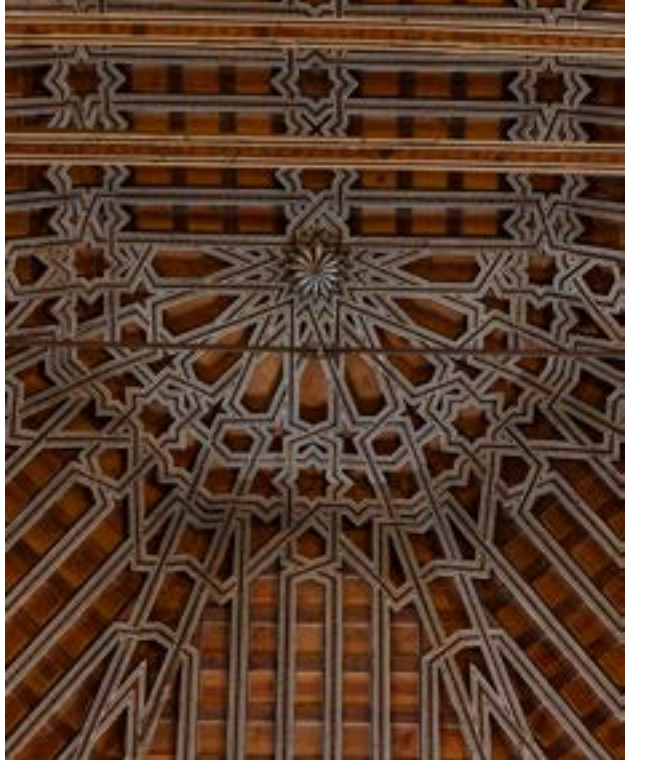
Monastery of Santa María de la Cruz, Cubas de la Sagra

More than a vision

Later, Inés had another vision of this odd person. According to the girl's description, the woman had a shining face, as if she were radiating light. This time, she took the girl's hand and squeezed her fingers together to form a symbol, so that her arm felt like it was dead.

That is when the neighbors in Cubas de la Sagra gave the girl's words credence and built a wooden cross to erect in the same place where the alleged apparition had occurred. That second, the cross started to levitate and the Virgin Mary – according, again, to believers' stories – appeared before all the people present, although only Inés could see her.

According to the girl, the Virgin asked her to build a church right at that spot, next to the cross, which should be called Santa María de la Cruz (Holy Mary of the Cross). She also said that Inés's parents should take the girl to Santa María de Guadalupe to heal her arm.

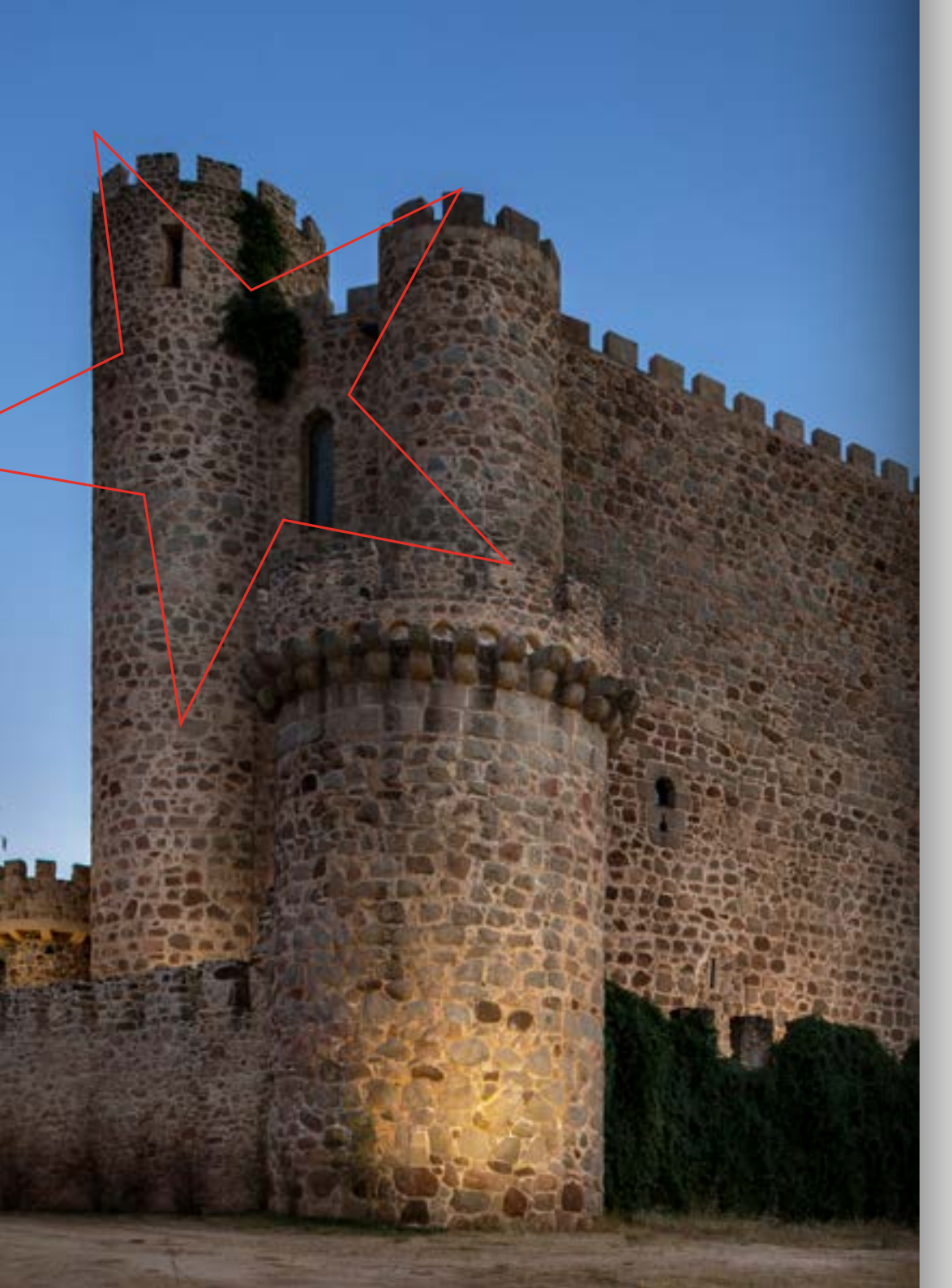


Coffered ceiling at the St. Andrés Church, Cubas de la Sagra

The neighbors listened to the girl and built a convent there that, today, is popularly known as the Convent of Santa Juana, although its official name is Santa María de la Cruz, as the small apparition had allegedly asked.

Inés later entered the convent and, supposedly, performed several miracles throughout her life, with the help of a Gothic wooden Christ that was kept there. In 1496, Juana Vázquez Gutiérrez entered the convent, better known as "Saint Juana." However, Juana was never declared a beatus or a saint.

Tourism in Cubas de la Sagra



The castle in San Martín de Valdeiglesias

Legends about incantations, ghosts and mysterious deaths

Secret stories in fortresses and monasteries

Coracera Castle, San Martín de Valdeiglesias

The town of San Martín de Valdeiglesias is little more than 70 kilometers from the city of Madrid, and very near the San Juan Reservoir. It is the capital of the Sierra Oeste and is located in the southwest corner of the Community. And it is right at this spot where a mysterious medieval castle was built: the Castle of San Martín de Valdeiglesias, also known as Coracera Castle (where *coraza* means protection or cuirass). Some historians uphold that the name is due to the fact that it was built as a fort and defensive protection. And from *coraza*, its name shifted to Coracera.

This municipality, along with others in this region, belonged to the Constable of Castile, Don Álvaro de Luna (1390-1453), a court favorite of King John II of Castile (1405-1454), and grand master of the Order of Santiago (or St James of the Sword). The Castilian nobleman also obtained the neighboring Monastery of Valdeiglesias (in Pelayos de la Presa) in 1434, after buying it from the monks living there for 30,000 maravedis.

Legends of magic and witchcraft

Different legends are recounted about Don Álvaro de Luna related to magic and witchcraft. It is true that he was a royal court favorite who exercised great power over his lord, John II. This was so extreme that he would end up being accused of having cast a spell on him and practically sequestering him. For this reason, Don Álvaro de Luna ended up being beheaded in the main square of Valladolid. After his death, the villa of San Martín de Valdeiglesias was inherited by his widow.

There are also legends surrounding the death of Álvaro de Luna. The most popular tale is that, years before his execution, he went to a sorceress to have his fortune read.



Santa María la Real of Valdeiglesias Monastery, Pelayos de la Presa

She told him he would die in *cadalso* (meaning gallows), which the constable interpreted as meaning he shouldn't go to the town of Cadalso de los Vidrios, near San Martín de Valdeiglesias, where he had a sumptuous summer palace, as he would meet his death there. However, the warning of the sorceress came to naught, as she had been referring to the gallows, and not the town.

The most representative landmark in San Martín de Valdeiglesias is undoubtedly its castle, which rises from the highest part of the town. It dominated and loomed over the entire area at a glance. Built from granite, the middle section is rectangular and is surrounded by an outer wall. The grounds are home to two separate towers. The Tower of Homage rises prominently in the middle of the main façade.

Its overall silhouette is harmonious and svelte, and had been used as a defensive fortress since time immemorial. However, it did have other uses, as it was a meeting point for armies, a recreational property and a perfect enclave for hosting parties. Its construction dates back to the 15th century and its first owner was the aforesaid Constable of Castile.

Tourism in San Martín de Valdeiglesias
Tourism in Pelayos de la Presa



Coracera Castle, San Martín de Valdeiglesias



Church of San Martín de Tours, San Martín de Valdeiglesias

Changing hands

After the execution of Álvaro de Luna, the castle passed into the hands of his widow. And after her death, the Catholic Monarchs granted it to Gonzalo Chacón (1429-1507), who was the son of the bailiff of the constable, who had earned merits over his years of service. After his death, the castle was next owned by the Dukes of the Infantado, and it thus changed hands successively. Then, in the 20th century – 1970s – it fell into the hands of a mysterious person, an afficionado of esoterism, who had extravagant customs. Among others, he lived surrounded by large felines, ending up with two lions and one tiger. One of the lionesses is even buried on the grounds.

Numerous Spanish horror films have been filmed in the castle, such as The Mark of the Wolfman, *The Devil's Possessed and Fangs of the Living Dead*, to name just a few.

There are several people linked to the world of film who, due to these shoots, ended up taking a deep interest in this character, an enthusiast of the Ouija Board and other paranormal activities.

At a later time, the owner suddenly appeared dead under strange circumstances, and the castle gained fame as being haunted, as many different people experienced strange sensations while inside the edifice.



The Royal Monastery of San Lorenzo de El Escorial

The Royal Site designed by architects interesed on astrology and alchemy

The gates of hell

The Royal Monastery of San Lorenzo de El Escorial

On the Sierra of Guadarrama, about 57 kilometers from the Spanish capital, is the ostentatious Royal Monastery of San Lorenzo de El Escorial. Some 35,000 square meters bear witness to the existence of one of the most magical, esoteric and interesting sites in the Community of Madrid.

To start, legend claims that King Philip II (1527-1598) hid its location, fully aware of what he was doing. The official history recounts that, in theory, the enormous edifice was built in 1557 to commemorate the decisive victory at the Battle of Saint Quentin. However, apparently, Philip II had been fantasizing and planning the project for quite some time. To this end, he surrounded himself with geographers, astrologists and architects who were learned in holy architecture, such as the enigmatic Juan de Herrera (1530-1597), an unusual character who collected talismans and was also interested in spells and divinations. Herrera was fully immersed in the world of alchemy and was in contact with other alchemists of his day to elucidate whether or not the men the monarch wanted to hire were worthy.

A center of knowledge

Philip II was driven to convert this place into one of the greatest centers of knowledge of his day. One proof of this is the majestic library that houses all types of wonders among its books.

Another person who would be involved in creating the monastery, at least with regard to the library, was Benito Arias Montano (1527-1598), who was a member of a secret Christian society named *Familia Caritatis* (Family of Love). Other well-known people were in contact with this



View of the Royal Monastery of San Lorenzo de El Escorial from Mount Abantos

same order, including John Dee, the court astronomer of Queen Elizabeth I.

It would be Montano himself who suggested the building of two parallel libraries: one for public use and another private one, which would hold the most valuable and secret of all copies.

At present, the library has some 45,000 books, the majority from the 16th and 17th centuries. Many of the volumes kept in this library are about esoterism, as well as hermeticism, theology and natural sciences, among many other topics. The books, as you can see, are turned around, meaning that their spines are not visible. This system was used to ventilate their pages, but also to hide their titles from indiscreet eyes.



The monks garden, Royal Monastery of San Lorenzo de El Escorial



Fresco paintings by Luca Giordano in the vault of the Basilica, Royal Monastery of San Lorenzo de El Escorial



The Library of the Royal Site of San Lorenzo de El Escorial

Philip II was quite odd, contradictory in many aspects, and tremendously superstitious. He did not allow the magical arts to be practiced, although he took a serious interest in these matters. To this end, he ordered many astrologists to create his horoscope, with the aim of profiting from the favorable traits they told him about himself. His official horoscope – although not the only one – also called Prognosticon, was read by Matías Haco Sumbergense, and is conserved in the parallel library described above.

The monarch himself selected the land on which the monastery would be built, located in a privileged setting within the municipal limits of San Lorenzo de El Escorial.

The laying of the first stone of the monastery took place on 23 April 1563 in a section in the middle of the façade, right below the place where the refectory for the monks would later be built, concretely where the prior would sit. Philip II was present for the ceremony of laying the first stone of the church, which occurred on 20 August 1563.

Symbology is highly present in the decoration and design of the monastery. Astrological, astronomic and religious symbols can be found in many of its scores of rooms. One of the most visible is in the dining room, divided by a line that served to tell time by the midday sun, with the signs of the zodiac marking the months of the year. Among the astronomical symbols, the “armillary sphere” by Antonio Santucci merits mention, held aloft by four sphinxes. There is also an abundance of religious symbols, primarily relics, with calculations placing the total number inside the building at some 7000. Curiously, some of them are inside the three balls crowning the building, topped with three crosses, as lightning conductors. One assumes that the relics should shield the monastery from any lightning bolts that could strike.



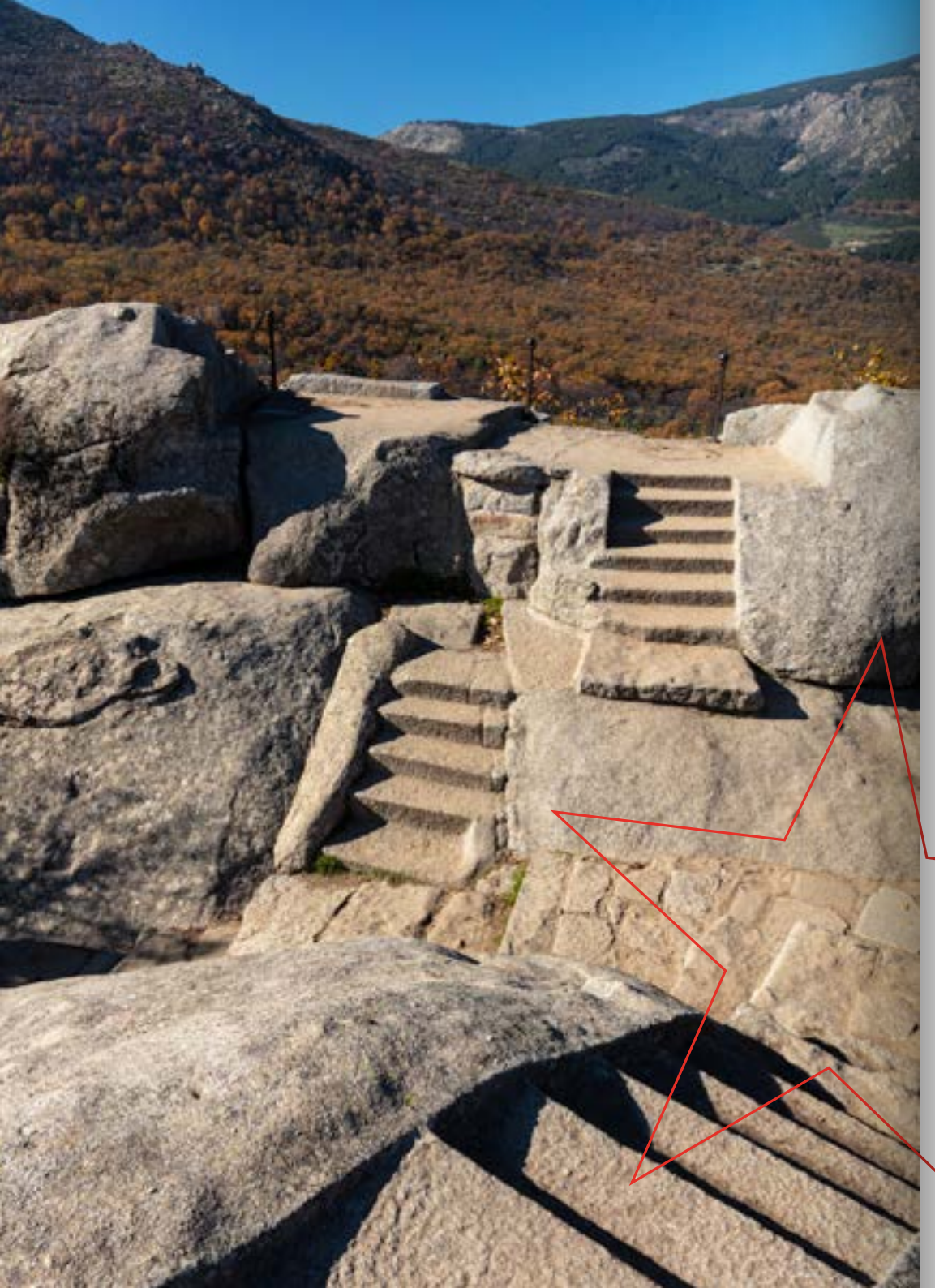
Facade of the Royal Monastery of San Lorenzo de El Escorial

Colección de reliquias

Philip II was a huge collector of relics. And we are not speaking only of those inside the balls topping the building, but about any religious object he could get his hands on. The monarch wanted every gift he was presented with related to the saints, although at times he was tricked and swindled, as some of the relics he collected are known to be false. He ended up owning relics from all the saints except three: Saint John the Evangelist, Saint James the Great and Saint John.

According to the sinister legends that enshroud the enclave, the Monastery of El Escorial is one of the mythical “mouths of hell.” Indeed, some attribute telluric properties to the edifice and believe that the true reason he selected the land was to build a type of replica of Solomon’s Temple and, allegedly, block this entrance to Hell.

Tourism in San Lorenzo de El Escorial
Royal Monastery of San Lorenzo de El Escorial



The Seat of Philip II

The Seat of Philip II

The King´s Throne located in an ancient Vetton altar

A bucolic viewpoint from where the King observed the building works of the new monastery



Surroundings of the Seat of Philip II, San Lorenzo de El Escorial



The Seat of Philip II, San Lorenzo de El Escorial

Sculpted into a huge granite rock, the Seat of Philip II rises as a privileged spot from which to gaze down upon the magnificence of the El Escorial Monastery.

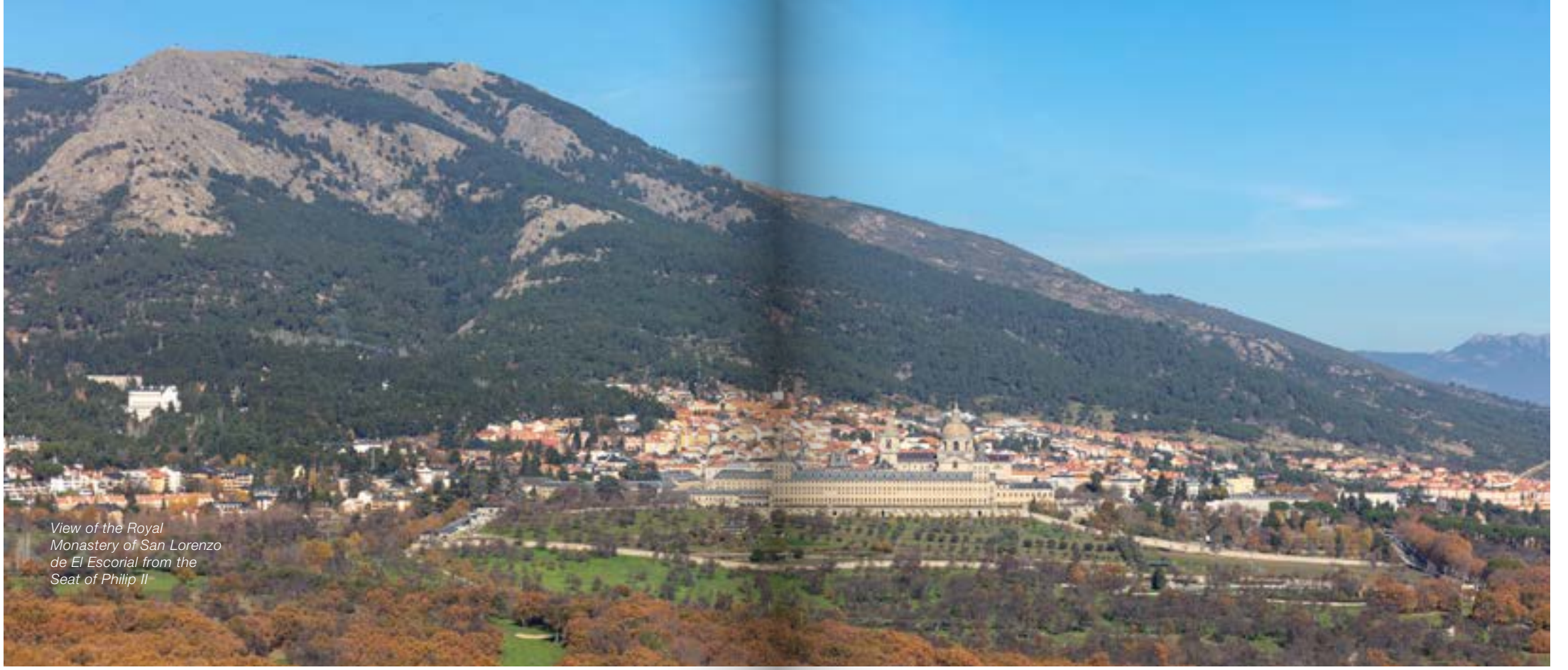
According to tradition, King Philip II (1527-1598) regularly visited this viewpoint to watch the works being executed on the monastery. La Herrería forest spreads out from the base of the seat, a natural area with great diversity and scenic beauty, especially in the autumn.

Vetton altar

However, despite the name and accompanying legend, its past function may have had a much more symbolic and mystical nature, as it was actually built by the Vettons who inhabited the region as a sacrificial altar. This is believed due to the similarity it has to other constructions scattered throughout the area, such as those at the sanctuaries of Ulaca and Panóias.

Studies by historian and epigrapher Alicia Canto seem to endorse the claim. Canto put forth the theory in 1999. And then later discoveries, such as the anthropomorphic figure next to the monument and several smaller altars near the “seat,” would all corroborate this.

Moreover, there are no references to the “Seat” of Philip II in a single document from the 16th and 17th centuries that could attest to the fact that this site – not very close to the monastery – was used for the claimed purpose. The legend actually arose based on a painting by Luis Álvarez Catalá, dated in 1889, in which King Philip II is depicted at this summit, supervising the building works at the Monastery of El Escorial.



View of the Royal Monastery of San Lorenzo de El Escorial from the Seat of Philip II

Who were the Vettons?

So, then, who were these mysterious Vettons, the true creators of the seat? They were a Celtic people who occupied western Spain and Portugal until the arrival of the Romans. In fact, the landscape around Herrería, where the supposed monarch's seat is found, is an area populated with oaks (a sacred tree to the Celts), abundant water in which it is quite easy to find hallucinogenic mushrooms (imbibed by the Vettons before practicing their divination arts). Thus, to scholars like Alicia Canto, the seat could actually be a sacrificial altar, possibly of animals, dedicated to some type of Celtic god, similar to the Roman's Mars.

Tourism in the Seat of Philip II



Chapel of St. Michael the Archangel, Navalagamella

The angel in Navalagamella

Consequences deriving of not paying attention to the divine plan

Consequences of reneging on the designs of Providence



Surroundings of the Chapel of St. Michael the Archangel, Navalagamella

Near Navalagamella, a little more than 60 kilometers from Madrid, on the road linking this town and Fresnedillas, is a 15th-century hermitage dedicated to Saint Michael. The hermitage had to be restored after being damaged in the Spanish Civil War.

The interesting fact about it is the reason why it was built, as it took place after an episode that occurred in 1455. Everything happened one afternoon, when Miguel Sánchez, a local shepherd, featured in a strange meeting with an entity that said his name was Saint Michael. The odd figure asked the shepherd to warn the townspeople and to raise a chapel on that spot. He also told him to create a brotherhood to worship him.



Facade of the Chapel of St. Michael Archangel, Navalagamella

A sign on a tree

The shepherd responded that his requests were impossible, because nobody in the town would believe him. Saint Michael agreed to leave him proof that would convince his neighbors: he touched a tree and his handprint remained imprinted in it. Then he told him not to be afraid, as he would ensure that they believed him. However, the shepherd was still not totally convinced, perhaps fearing ridicule, so when he went home, to a settlement named Los Degollados, he preferred not to speak of the meeting and disobeyed the supposed archangel.



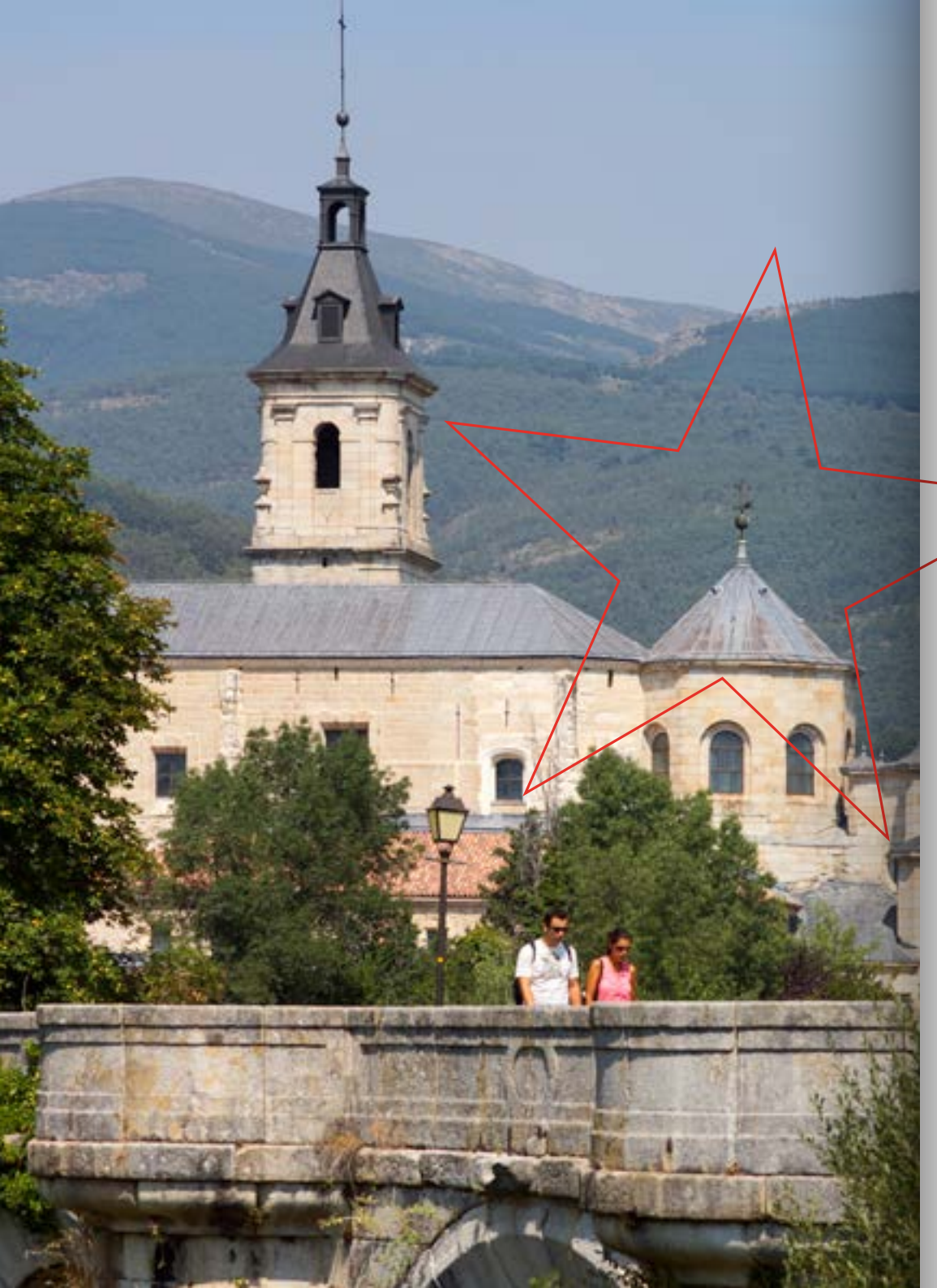
Chapel of St. Michael the Archangel, Navalagamella

According to the legends and tales surrounding many of these encounters, when the people seeing these visions did not heed the celestial petitions, there were consequences, and that is exactly what happened. One morning, when the shepherd went to stand up, he realized he could not walk. His boss, named Pedro García de Ayuso, tried to help him by massaging the affected limbs with medicinal plants, but this did not do anything. When the shepherd saw that not only was his affliction not improving, but was getting worse, he decided to talk, and recount what had happened to him several days earlier. According to the chronicle of the events, his boss had to carry him in his arms, carrying him to the ecclesiastical authorities so that he could give his testimony. Then the shepherd pointed to the place where the apparition had appeared and everyone could see the handprint the enigmatic being had left.

However hard his tale was to believe, they did pay attention to him and built a hermitage on the site, after which the shepherd healed.

In February 1520, many years after encounter, an official investigation was conducted about the event, and a copy is still kept in the municipal archives of Navalagamella. But by that time the tree had been splintered and hacked at by the faithful, as they all wanted to have a splinter or chip from the tree to worship and keep close to them.

Tourism in Navalagamella



Monastery of Santa María de El Paular,Rascafría

Rascafría and the Monastery of Santa María de El Paular

Evil alliances and other mysteries within a Carthusian convent

The enthralling history of an impatient architect

Rascafría is almost 100 kilometers from Madrid, in the Lozoya Valley, in the northwest region of the community. And the Monastery of Santa María de El Paular is three kilometers outside the municipality, the oldest Carthusian monastery in Castile. It dates back to 1390.

It seems that the building works were not moving along quickly enough during its construction. This was so until architect Juan Guas (1430-1496) was hired in 1475. After that point, everything started running much more quickly and smoothly. This circumstance engendered a legend featuring Satan and Guas himself.

Pact with the Devil

According to legend, Guas was desperate about how slow the works were proceeding. When he realized that building wouldn't be completed by the agreed date, which would entail paying a large sum of money as a penalty, he decided to make a pact with the Devil. The latter didn't put up a fight and appeared before him, making him sign a document with his own blood.

Then, everything was done extremely fast, quite unbelievably quickly, which everyone couldn't help noticing. When Guas saw that they would finish by the deadline, he calmed down, realized his mistake and the possible consequences his deal with the Devil could have. He then tried to retract the agreement, shouting



Monastery of Santa María de El Paular, Rascafría

into the winds that the Devil had tricked him, taking advantage of his weakness, and claiming he never would have signed the pact under normal conditions.

According to legend, the Prince of Darkness took quick action, petrifying the men who were arriving with the final load of stone blocks, at Puerto del Reventón, thus ensuring that the works would not be completed on time.



Inside view of the Monastery of Santa María de El Paular, Rascafría

The “Devil’s Cart”

This legend led to the emergence of the place name for the rock-strewn landscape found on the road between Rascafría and the passage of Reventón, which is popularly known as the Devil’s Cart.

The real cause that explains how quickly works on the monastery advanced was the arrival of worksite manager Juan Ruesga – brought by Guas – and a large team of master quarry workers, including Gil de Hontañón. And the spectacular craggy rocks strewn throughout the area are the outcome of thousands of years of glacial erosion.



Monastery of Santa María de El Paular, Rascafría

If you do decide to visit the monastery, don’t forget to look at the original floor, which is covered with animal bones embedded into the stone.

Tourism in Rascafría
Monastery of Santa María de El Paular



Chapel of the Virgin of la Ciguiñuela, Fuente el Saz de Jarama

Fuente el Saz and the Virgin of Storks

The Virgin who desired to belong to Fuente El Saz de Jarama

The enigma of the Statue that changed of weight



The Town Square:
Fuente el Saz de Jarama

Fuente el Saz de Jarama is 29 kilometers from Madrid, in the northeast part of the Community. It was once called Fuente del Sauce (Willow Spring), owing to its crystalline waters and the many willow trees in the surrounding area.

Its patron saint is the Virgin of the Storks. The hermitage lies some three kilometers from the town. The saint's name originated in a somewhat mysterious legend: she was discovered by a shepherd between two storks. The event occurred at a site called Soto de Alcañices, where the hermitage would later be built.

However, the land where the sculpture was discovered and where the villagers built the hermitage was part of the town of Algete. But – and here is where the mystery begins – the Virgin allegedly did not agree.



San Pedro Martir Church,
Fuente el Saz de Jarama



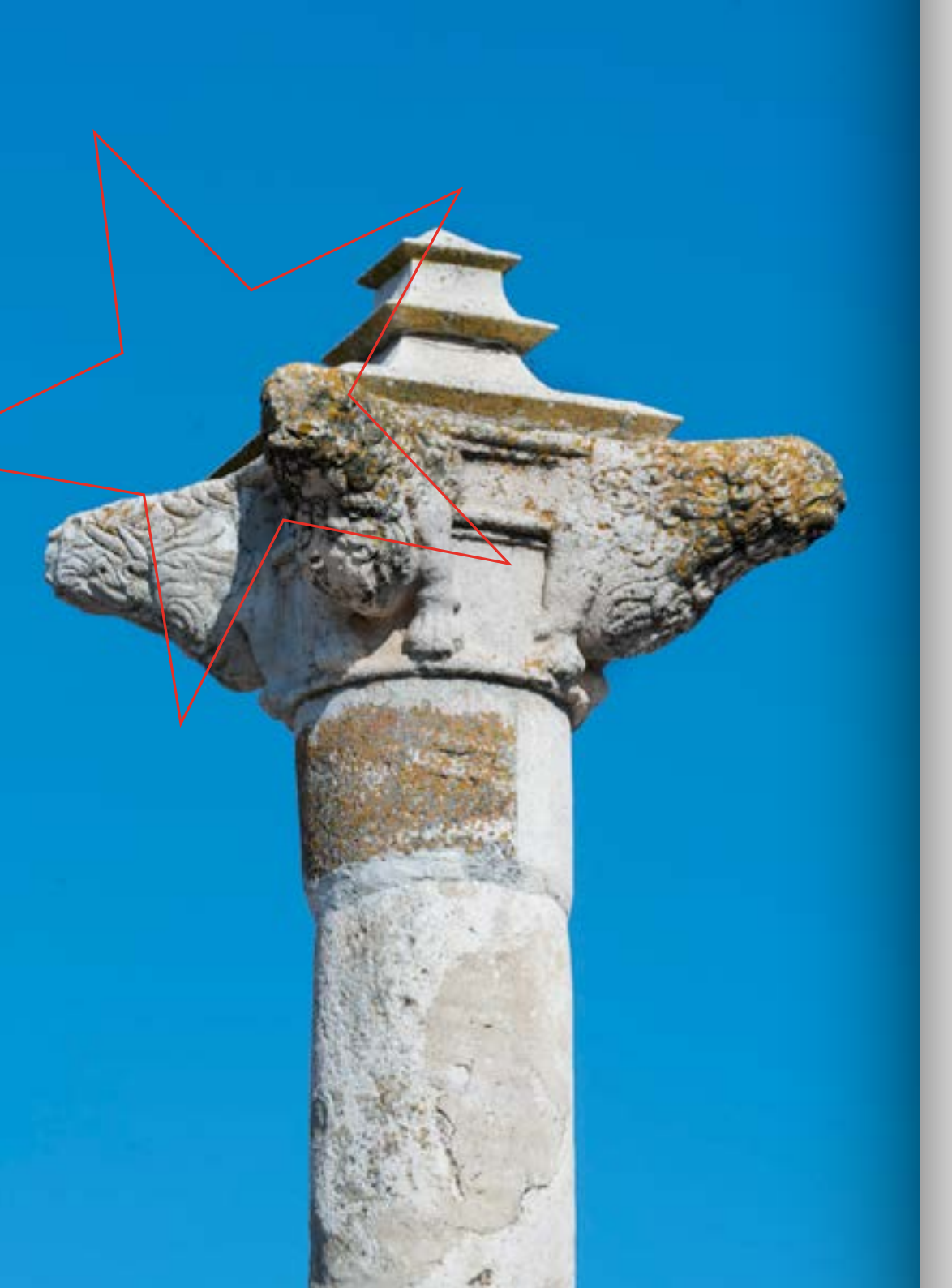
Virgin of La Ciguiñuela,
Fuente el Saz de Jarama

A tough move

When the townspeople of Fuente el Saz de Jarama started to move her, as they approached Algete bearing the sculpture, it became heavier and heavier, to such a point that the men carrying her were forced to return to Fuente el Saz. When they crossed into the lands of their municipality, the statue once again had its normal weight.

According to the legend of devotees, they supposedly tried three times and could not move it. In the end, they ended up returning with the statue to Fuente el Saz de Jarama.

Tourism in Fuente el Saz de Jarama



The Pillory in Pezuela de las Torres

In the times when execution was a social event...

Legends of tortures that were seen as a show

Detail photo of The Pillory, Pezuela de las Torres



Church of La Asunción de Nuestra Señora, Pezuela de las Torres

A little more than 45 kilometers from Madrid, near Guadalajara, is Pezuela de las Torres and its pillory. The pillory was an instrument of torture, a wooden or metal structure generally erected in main squares, in which criminals or the accused were placed for public ridicule, or to exhibit a person's head after execution.

Only three pillories remain in the Community of Madrid.



The pillory, Pezuela de las Torres

Sinister history

The pillory is located in its homonymous square – Plaza de la Picota – in the town square. Its history dates back to 1554, when Pezuela had a mere 180 residents. The Council collected 1.5 million maravedis to pass on to King Charles I in exchange for having jurisdiction. In light of this legal independence, the Council ordered the pillory to be built, which still stands today. It is seven meters high and topped with four lions.



Church of La Asunción de Nuestra Señora, Torres de la Alameda

The “Holy Shroud” in Torres de la Alameda

The relic that has stood the test of time and misfortune

The other Holy´s Shroud located in Torres de la Alameda



The Sun Square, Torres de la Alameda

The municipality of Torres de la Alameda is a bit more than 37 kilometers from Madrid, very close to Alcalá de Henares, along with its Renaissance-era church of Asunción de Nuestra Señora (dating back to the 16th century). The church has a tower with a spiral staircase and a Gothic vault in the sacristy. However, the most interesting feature you can see in this religious edifice is a reproduction of the Holy Shroud. Next to it is a plaque that reads: “This is the true portrait of the Most Holy Shroud, taken from the original in Turin and which it touched on 3 May of the year 1650.” It is therefore a relic by contact.

Tourism in Torres de la Alameda

Real-size copy

The Shroud is a real-size copy that was once in the private home of the nieces of one of the former priests: Higinio Peñalver. However, in 1995 they decided its rightful place was in the church, along with all its supporting documentation. It is normally placed in a safe, although it is exhibited on Good Friday, when the faithful have the chance to see it.

The fame of this copy is due to the fact that the Shroud has been saved scores of times from disappearing forever, after wars and fires mainly.

About the author Clara Tahoces

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Clara Tahoces was born in Madrid. She has been dedicated to the research of myths, legends, and other mysterious matters. Nowadays she works as news editor at the TV show “Cuarto Milenio (Cuatro)”. Furthermore, she has been the editor-in-chief of the magazine “Más allá de la Ciencia”, besides being part of the team in charge of the production of the radio programme called “Milenio 3 (Cadena Ser)”.

She has a degree in Graphopsychology and Graphological disciplines, and she is also the author of 14 books. Among her essays it can be find “Guide of a haunted Spain” and “Guide of Magical Madrid”. The “Guide of Magical Madrid” explores the legends and myths that have taken place in the region of Madrid.

Tahoces has also entered the in the field of novel, writing titles as “Gothika” -that recieved the Minotauro Prize in 2007- or “The Garden of witches”, set in the Capricho Garden in Madrid (2020).

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Year of publication 2021



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