Re-foundational Syncretism between Christianity and Islam: the Cartographies of the Grenadian Sacromonte, XVI and XVII centuries

The discovery of the renowned Lead Books and a series of supposed martyr’s relics in a hill outside the walls of Granada in the last years of the XVII century was the last attempt of the morisco elite to ensure their permanence in the recently Christianized city. These findings, totally invented by this Islamic minority sector, did not give the expected result, but they served the Christian community to reformulate the image of their city, signifying it within the new counter-reformist context. From these facts, a series of cartographic etchings were made that tried to eloquently manifest the Christian excellence of the city. The aim of this paper is to articulate an original analytic description of five of these drawings. It will be possible to recognize that the composition and graphic coding strategies that were used in the making of the maps made them an optimal instrument for expressing the renewed sacred dimension of the city and its territory.

Keywords:
Granada; Islam; etching; underground; extramural
1. PRELIMINARY

Between the XVI and XVII centuries Granada underwent one of the most important sociocultural changes in its history. The dream of maintaining the glorious aura that guaranteed the symbolic conquest of Christianity from Islam in 1492 had been frustrated, and in the early years of the XVI century, the city began to normalize its prominence within the Spanish urban context. At this time, a series of supposed martyr’s relics and the renowned Lead Books of Granada were discovered in several caves excavated in a hill outside the city walls, which, due to the findings, becomes the Sacromonte of Granada. Even though they were in fact false sites, totally invented by the subordinate morisco elite with the intention of guaranteeing their permanence in the new Christian urban scene, they offered the Counter-Reformist church an opportunity to re-found Granada, to make it a true cradle of Christianity in Spain, by establishing historical links with a mythical Christian past. To this end, they were written a series of encomiastic works about the city, that redefined its own urban and religious history. These literary works were accompanied by some etchings among which were several cartographic representations that described the new sacralized territory, where the underground environment and the open spaces located outside the city would be the protagonists. The aim of this paper is to articulate an analytic description of five of the above-mentioned cartographic etchings, which were made by several authors in the years of transition between the XVI and XVII centuries: the cover of Historia eclesiástica de Granada written by Justino Antolínez de Burgos (1611/1996), “Plataforma” of Granada, “Plataforma” of Granada to the Sacromonte de Valparaíso, Description of the Sacromonte de Valparaíso and Description of the caverns of the Sacromonte of Granada in which they found the relics and the books of the saints. They will be framed in

Fig. 1 - Turpiana uninhabitable tower, Granada (Spain), XVI-XVII centuries, etching by Alberto Fernández, 277 x 191 mm, copperplate etching, Sacromonte Abbey Museum

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their historical context, described in their technical dimension and mainly analyzed in their figurative and compositional dimension, emphasizing the underlying symbolic message that structures the drawings. Previously, this series of maps has been partially described as part of historiographic discourses in publications linked to the History of Cartography or the Modern History of Granada, the most significant examples of which can be found in Calatrava & Ruiz (2005) and Harris (2006). Their study as artistic and technical expressions originate with the research of Manuel Gómez Moreno (1900), continued much later mainly by Antonio Moreno Garrido (1976) [1]. However, there is no exclusive description of the etchings as proposed here, understood as a single cartographic set and analyzed from the perspective of Graphic Expression. This new point of view will be supported by a new analytical methodology, in which the description of the role played by the graphic voids - the undrawn areas of the plates - will be central, considering the significance of the vacuous space as the main means of expression of the strong symbolism of the drawings.

This paper is structured in different sections that allow to address the problem from the general to the particular. We begin with the necessary description of the events that originated the process of sacred reformulation of the city. We then describe the historical context of the etchings and undertake their individual analysis, ending with a brief epilogue as a conclusion.

2. THE FACTS

The events began on Saturday 19th March 1588, when some workers who were demolishing the minaret of the Great Mosque of Granada discovered a mysterious lead box in the rubble (fig.1). Until then, the tower had served as the bell tower of the unfinished cathedral and was demolished because it was located right where the main nave was to be built. The box had remained hidden in the walls of the minaret and when it was demolished, it came to light. It was immediately placed at the disposal of the ecclesiastical authorities and inside it, among other strange objects, a parchment signed by Saint Cecilio, the mythical bishop of Granada, was discovered. The event caused a great stir in the city, since the reliable proof of the bishop’s real existence had been found and the hope of finding his remains was opened.

A few years later, in February 1595, a treasure hunter who was following the indications of a notebook describing the existence of a gold mine, arrived in Granada with the purpose of finding it. Instead of the mine he found some subterranean caves located on a hill outside the city, where he discovered a lead tablet that indicated that this place hid the remains of Christian martyrs. The news reached the ears of the Archbishop of Granada, Don Pedro de Castro, who ordered a detailed exploration of the caves discovered (fig. 2). After some time, the excavation bore fruit: the humans remains were gradually found, together with some mysterious lead books engraved with...
indecipherable drawings and written in Latin and strange Arabic characters. These were the famous Lead Books, which allegedly contained testimonies of the Virgin, Saint Peter and the Apostle James (fig. 3). The excavation concludes when the remains of Saint Cecilio are finally found. By virtue of these discoveries, the arid hill is transformed into Sacromonte and the Abbey that bears its name is founded there [2].

The origin of the complex web of these discoveries must be sought in an attempt to re-found the city that would allow Christianity and Islam to live together in harmony. This syncretic refounding was promoted by the morisco elite of Granada, who by means of a historical falsification sought to ensure their presence in the newly Christianized city. In reality, both the relics of the martyrs and the testimonies written in the lead books were false. Totally invented by the morisco minority, they were offered to be discovered by the Christian population. Synthetically, by means of this strategy, these former Muslims tried to demonstrate that Saint Cecilio, the mythical first bishop who preached the gospel in the lands of Granada before the Islamic domination, was of Arab origin and, therefore, belonged to the same respectable "race". This was an attempt to prove that the old and the new Christians had a common origin and therefore could live together in mutual understanding. Despite the sophistication of the invention, the moriscos did not see their permanence guaranteed - their definitive expulsion took place in 1609. However, the Christian population benefited the most: the local church recovered the remains of its mythical bishop, thus becoming the true cradle of Christianity in Spain. On the other hand, the series of texts that Saint Cecilio hypothetically wrote in the lead books coincided with the Counter-Reformist ideal of the time, elevating the church of Granada as a possible main bastion of defence of the Christian values established in the Council of Trent [3].

3. THE ETCHINGS

In this context of urban image reformulation, they were made at the end of the XVI and beginning of the XVII centuries the series of etchings that are the object of study in this article. Some of these works were originally conceived as drawings on paper to serve as a graphic support for a series of documents that were intended to inform - both the official board of inquiry into the authenticity of the relics and various state entities and even the Vatican itself - of the recent events. The architect and master builder of the cathedral, Ambrosio de Vico [4] was in charge of these first drawings. He was chosen by the Archbishop of Granada to coordinate the underground exploration work and the reforms to consolidate the caves to guarantee the stability necessary for the excavations. Vico was the ideal person to carry out the task of graphically reproducing both the morphology of the caves and the territory outside the walls where they were located. From the series of drawings of this first phase, commissioned to the architect in 1596 and later engraved by the local silversmith Alberto Fernández [5], this study has selected the aforementioned "Plataforma" of Granada to the Sacromonte de Valparaíso, Description of the Sacromonte de Valparaíso and Description of the caverns of the Sacromonte of Granada (fig. 5, 6 and 7) [6].

The growing general interest in the Sacromonte, apart from being the cause of the etching of the drawings, was also the reason for the writing of a series of encomiastic chronicles which were conceived with the intention of legitimizing the discoveries and, based on their veracity, re-
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4. FROM THE HEART OF THE CITY TO THE EXTRA-MURAL TERRITORIES

4.1. Plataforma de Vico

The three maps of Ambrosio de Vico that we comment below were not created with the vocation of being a “scientific” reproduction of the city and its surroundings, but with the desire to be the means of propaganda that is capable of spreading its sacred image. The way of understanding the city in a Counter-Reformist perspective, implies that its representation is not oriented to faithfully portray the urban form as the habitat of men, but to show the city as the scenario of the divine [8]. In the famous “Plataforma” de Vico, the only detailed cartographic image of Granada until the last years of the XVIII century, the city is represented in detail, divided by walls, ditches and rivers - the Darro, which crosses the urban centre, the Beiro, partly already buried, and the Genil, outside the walls - and organised internally by the religious institutions. The city is proposed to be built by means of a new ritual and sacred topography, opposed to the real image of the Islamic city. In this sense, it is remarkable that the map represents the inescapable palatial city of the Alhambra - although the imperial Palace of Charles V is given more prominence than the Nasrid palaces themselves - and the various sections of the Muslim wall, but the real urban layout of the Albaycin, the true Islamic heart of the city, is not intentionally drawn: its typical tortuous and narrow streets have been replaced in the representation of the new Christianized city by linear...
traces, with the aim of eliminating any vestige of its Islamic past. Instead, the real urban protagonists are the churches, monasteries, convents and hospitals. Among them stands out the highest symbol of Catholicism in the city, the Cathedral, intentionally positioned in the middle of the representation. Christian Granada still extended very little beyond the walls of the Nasrid city: except for the area that grew towards the Vega, most of the urban fabric was still concentrated inside the walls, which were largely intact. The cathedral under construction, with its main body still empty - in which some years before the signs of the existence of the martyr’s relics of Saint Cecilio had been found - appears metaphorically as the visible head of a compact organism. A true symbolic center in the heart of the city. One aspect of the map that reflects the conception of the city as a defined nucleus with respect to the spaces that surround it is the proliferation of isolated crosses located outside the walled city. This is a Counter-Reformist appropriation of the periphery that indicates the subsistence of the archaic conception of exterior spaces as evil places, refuges for demons and monstrous creatures, generators of the anguish that the walled city dissolves [9]. The map also represents in these exterior spaces the underground dungeons of the Cerro de los Mártires. According to popular tradition, these Arab dungeons - in reality, it seems, cereal silos occasionally used as prisons - were the scene of the martyrdom of Christians during the Islamic rule of the city [10]. Their inclusion in the portrait of the Counter-Reformist city is therefore entirely intentional, as their presence indicates that it is set in a space whose entrails, since ancient times, have been exercised through Christian martyrdom. These elements mark a territory outside the walls characterized by a dual landscape: while the lower area of the etching shows an environment shaped by the agricultural plots of the Vega, the upper area intensifies the desolation and emptiness of the mountains that extend beyond the walls and that, outside the margins of the map, correspond to the slopes of the Sacromonte.

4.2. “Plataforma” of Granada to the Sacromonte de Valparaíso

The map represents the territory between the extreme East of Granada and the Sacromonte. This intermediate space is structured according to two pilgrimage paths that start from the city - one along the Darro river and, the other, through the hills - towards the place of the discoveries. The road towards Guadix, the one that accompanies the river, becomes the axis that divides the representation into two horizontal strips: the lower one, belonging to the profane and shaped by the orchards and the cármenes that the river irrigates; the upper and more extensive one, which belongs to the sacred sphere. In it, the two focal points of sacredness appear at the ends of the map. The city, on the left, limited by its outermost wall and represented by its churches and monasteries that seem to float in an empty space. On the right, the Sacromonte, marked as a sacred space by the large number of devotional crosses. Between it and the city there is the empty land of the bare hills, crossed by a procession of pilgrims, drawn out of scale, who leave a trace behind them: a real umbilical cord that joins the two distant sacred poles.
4.3. Description of the Sacromonte de Valparaíso

The drawing undertakes a closer representation of the Sacromonte. It is equally divided between the profane, below, and the sacred, above, which dominates most of the composition. Again, in front of the defined morphology of the orchards linked to the river, the sacred space, in this case framed by two big ravines, appears associated to the undefined. In it, the interior of the caves is already delimited and they are crowned by a forest of devotional crosses that seems to extend upwards, outside the limits of the drawing. The composition, perhaps unconscious, reflects the impulse to represent the Sacromonte as a true cosmic axis, where the underworld of the caves is put in direct communication with the celestial space, by means of the verticality of the crosses.

4.4. Description of the caverns of the Sacromonte of Granada in which they found the relics and the books of the saints

The last map in the series defines in detail the interior of the caves and their immediate surroundings. The drawing is structured in two areas, differentiated by a vertical strip that indicates a change of slope between the virtual plane under which the caves are located, and, on the right, the adjacent ravine where the land inside the caves was thrown, which is crossed by a small watercourse. The subterranean spaces are defined by a thick perimeter line and filled with a point pattern that differentiate them from the surface where they are inserted. It is worth noting that this pattern is the same that defines the watercourse of the ravine. Therefore, the underground and the aquatic elements are represented with the same abstract materiality. On the other hand, the exterior spaces are regularly marked with small bushes that indicate their superficial character and suggest the idea of being in front of an undifferentiated, homogeneous space. However, the places represented take on a precise meaning through the use of a series of letters and small crosses located at the different points where both the lead books and sheets as well as the martyr’s relics were found.
5. FROM THE PERIPHERY TO THE COSMOS

5.1 Cover of Antolínez de Burgos’ Historia Eclesiástica de Granada

As it is the introductory image to the mythical sacred history of the city reformulated from the discoveries, this last drawing synthesizes the themes analyzed in the previous ones. It is intended to represent the universal dimension of the discoveries of the Granada underground. The etching takes the form of a frontispiece flanked by three angels holding a console table showing the title and author of the encomiastic work. A fourth angel crowns the central space, looking at the spatial representation that interests us, limited by an irregular six-sided polygonal frame with the legend “MONS SACER ILLIPULITANUS”. On both sides of the polygon appear the figures of the Apostle Santiago (on the right) and of Saint Cecilio (on the left). The lower part of the composition, in the form of a bench or pedestal, contains a console table between two coats of arms of Archbishop Pedro de Castro, with this inscription: “DIVIS IACOBO ET CAELICIO/ Hispании tutellaribus, hanc Sacri Illipuliani/monitis primariae eorum sededis effigiem dicavit”.

The middle of the image portrays the new sacred geography of Granada, in which the city itself is not the main object of the representation: synthesised in a series of churches inscribed in a protective wall, it appears intentionally displaced from the center of the painting and labelled with “Illipula”, the supposed name that the city received in its Ibero-Roman origins, presumably a Roman settlement near Valparaíso. The focal point coincides with the caverns - crowned by the Arabic word “gar al-nata” (Granada) written in Solomonic characters - from which mysterious rays emerge, divided into two beams and accompanied by the inscription “Hinc orta sedentibus in tenebris”. One of the beams goes to the city and the other to the globe, strategically rotated to show “Hispani” in close relation to the New World. The caves, therefore, are presented as a focus of Christianity that radiates sacredness towards the city and the rest of the known world.

An interesting aspect of the etching is that it clearly reveals the nature of the spaces in which the lead books and martyr’s relics were discovered. While the city and the globe are perfectly defined through figurative representation, on the other hand, both the surroundings outside the walls where the caves are located and the caves themselves are necessarily coded with much more abstract forms: the hills of the Sacromonte, as a “mass” of irregular contours that limit a blank space, suggesting emptiness. It is relevant to point out how this non-drawn surface, by virtue of the disappearance of its limits, merges with the lower part of the painting in which a form without scale and formally undefined, but of a fluid nature (water, clouds?) is represented. On the other hand, the caves are materialised by means of a line that defines an irregular contour whose internal surface is filled with the same external “white”. Between the two forms that share the same empty essence - the caves and the Sacromonte- the black hole from which the sacred rays radiate is clearly delimited. The spaces outside the walls and inside the caves are therefore conceived as spaces of the indefinite: the surface of the mountains shares with the underground the same condition of emptiness and they can only be recognized as different entities by virtue of the existence of a limit between them, which in turn is a passage: the doorway to the underworld.
6. EPILOGUE

The syncretism between Islam and Christianity intentionally fostered by the discoveries of the Lead Books and the martyr’s relics at the end of the XVI century is already totally frustrated in the maps that represent the city a few years later, in favour of the reformulation of its image under an exclusively Christian perspective. To this end, the engravers, apart from prioritizing the representation of urban morphology of Christian origin as against Islamic layout, use a series of compositional and graphic coding strategies that are responsible for providing the new sacred symbolism to the city and its territory.

The extramural spaces are represented using large surfaces of the colour that serves as a background in the drawings, the neutral support on which the line is drawn and with it, the shape. The condition of external, non-urban spaces is therefore established by their limits: the presence of the sections of wall and the rough topographical contours. When vegetation and ground unevenness are depicted, they are evenly distributed over the background, indicating a homogeneous materiality, in contrast to the variety of dense patterns used in the cultivation areas. On the other hand, no special attention is paid to the real dimension of the spaces represented in relation to the dimensions of the elements that appear in them. This fact is justified if we consider that the ultimate intention of the representation of the territory was not to make a faithful portrait of its topography, but to highlight its sacred dimension: the manipulation of the scalar relations between the different elements is therefore put at the service of the sacred expressiveness of the spaces. In this sense, in the last etching the limits of the Sacromonte are blurred to extend it in the infinity of waters or sky. In the series of cartographic etchings, the natural size of the crosses (fig. 6) and of the pilgrims who...
cross the mountains (fig. 5) is increased in order to put them in relation to the heavenly: the territory outside the walls thus becomes the support of processional axes - heavenly roads on earth - and by virtue of the forest of crosses that crowns the Sacromonte, it becomes a true cosmic axis.

The underground space is represented in two different ways with respect to the external spaces. The first one, responding to a more conceptual vision (fig. 8), appears sharing the empty surface of the territory. The element through which both natures are differentiated, the underground and the surface, is a simple contour line, which acts as a threshold between them. The second strategy used is evident when the caverns are visualized on a closer scale (fig. 6 and 7). The contour line then appears thicker, defining in more detail the unevenness of the terrain, in contrast to the homogeneity of the spaces that extend into and out of it. The interior is now filled by a dense and uniform pattern of points, which is also used to define watercourses.

Under this shared codification, the underground appears related to the virtuality of the aquatic. The extramural and underground spaces in the maps of Counter-Reformation Granada are represented in an ambiguous way. This indetermination has its origin in the always difficult task of giving a specific shape to what does not have one. If the city shows itself to be perfectly defined through its architectural forms, governed by the image of the new symbolic center that is the cathedral and surrounded by walls, the land outside the walls and its underground areas share the emptiness of the undefined: a pure indetermination that is, therefore, pure potential, a possibility of urban form. It was not by chance that it was in these spaces of the Counter-Reformist city that the seeds were planted, in the form of martyr’s relics and enigmatic lead books, which served to extend the city into the territory. By means of the underground discoveries, a link was established between the sacred heart of the city and the new axis mundi of the Sacromonte, materialized in the new processional paths that joined them, opened in the emptiness of the shapeless space.
that justified it are detailed in (Gómez-Moreno, 1992, p. 146). The biographical profile of Alberto Fernández, who inaugurated the engraving work in Granada, is detailed in (Moreno, 1976, p. 52).

[6] This series of engravings was executed to serve as a graphic complement to Relación breve de las reliquias… (Relación, 1608).

[7] Details about the commissioning of the drawings are described in (Moreno, 1976, p. 44-45). Biographies of the authors can be consulted in the same publication (p. 56 et seq)

[8] The New Rome designed by Sixtus V (1585-1590) provides the model to follow: the ideal plan of this new city dispenses with the habitat of men to show the only important thing, the new rectilinear avenues that order the pros-ecional flows of the great masses of pilgrims, connecting the main basilicas, symbols of the triumph of the Faith (Calatrava, 2005, p. 49)

[9] This is a medieval conception of the spaces outside the city that lasts until the XVII century. Even at this date, the dominant cosmology emphasizes that the land that man inhabits is still stained by human sin. If the seas and oceans are considered vestiges of the Universal Flood, the mountains and open spaces hold the remains of it. For this reason, Catholicism strives to exorcise the peripheries of cities by installing oratories and crosses, and the roads that cross the dangerous open regions between cities are marked with religious signs that protect the traveller (Spicer, 2006)

[10] This popular belief was previously represented by Joris Hoefnagel in one of his famous three views of Granada made between 1563 and 1565, recorded by Franz Hogenberg and published in Georg Braun’s Civitates Orbis Terrarum. We refer specifically to the View of the City from the East (Braun & Hogenberg, 1575-1618).

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Relación breve de las reliquias, que se hallaron en la ciudad de Granada en una torre antíquissima, y en las cavernas del monte Illipulitano de Valparaíso cerca de la ciudad: sacado del proceso, y averiguaciones, que cerca dello se hizieron (1608). Granada: Sebastián de Mena’s Widow.


 NOTE

[1] It is also necessary to mention the excellent exhibition held in 2011 on the engravings, on the occasion of the IV Centenary of the foundation of the Sacromonte Abbey in Granada. The exhibition catalogue summarizes the historiographic and artistic studies carried out on them to date (Pérez, 2011). The symbolic nature of the underground and extramural spaces represented in these engravings has been studied in the author’s doctoral thesis (García, 2012).

[2] Since the discoveries, the Sacromonte (formerly known as Valparaíso), was the scene of processions of guilds and confraternities coming from Granada and other cities, which climbed the hills carrying wooden crosses: in a few weeks this territory became a thick forest of devotional crosses. In Granada, and in 1608 the same archbishop founded the Sacromonte Collegiate Church, known as “The Abbey”, which would become a prestigious academic and religious institution. See Martínez (2008).

[3] For further information on the complex phenomenon of frustrated syncretism that resulted from the discovery of the Lead Books and the martyr’s relics, see Barrios & García-Arenal (2006 and 2008).

[4] José Manuel Gómez-Moreno (1992) carried out a complete study on the figure of Ambrosio de Vico, which describes both his activities as an architect and as a draftsman.

[5] The exact date of the commission and the circumstances