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Public Space After the Ecclesiastical Disentailments in Cordova

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Abstract. Cordova undergoes a major transformation in its city planning in the 19th century, after more than 500 years, as a result of one of the most relevant economic and social processes in the history of Spain: the ecclesiastical disentailment. The city, on its almost 225 hectares, had 32 conventual complexes within its walls. They were, talking about size, really important Christian buildings, built in a city with an intricate and twisted street layout, inherited from the Islamic population who inhabited the city for 5 centuries. Changes experienced affected significantly the urban morphology. Thus, the research goes deeply into that process. After studying the 46 monasteries that existed in Cordova at the end of the Modern Age and their following evolution, we focus on some of the most important public spaces, derived from that transformation, that exist in the historic center of the Cordova, in order to understand the origin of the city's current configuration. After analysing all the convents, we distinguish two situations: on the one hand we have the ones that maintain their original use, on the other hand those that have lost it. Of this second group, some of them are preserved adopting different functions while others disappear. Those are the ones that are of special interest to us, as they have led to the appearance of some of the most emblematic public spaces in Cordova within the walls. A study of these urban changes has been carried out, methodologically relying on documentary research, historical layout and bibliographic. Therefore, we have been able to conclude that, of the 37 convents in the city center (5 of them bordering the outside of the wall), 26 lost their original use, of which 10 caused important changes in the plot, such as the opening of new avenues, squares or even neighbourhoods. The impact of these changes and how they had an essential influence on a key process of redefining the city throughout the 19th and 20th centuries will be highlighted.

1. Introduction

Cordova, after its Christian conquest in 1236 by Ferdinand III the Saint, modified its urban landscape of mosques and minarets, and saw its outline populated with churches, convents, towers and steeples that showed the world the political and religious change. Over the next six centuries, the Christian city experienced the emergence of numerous convents and religious orders, a process that was drastically interrupted after the ecclesiastical disentailment.

Nowadays, there is a lot of information about the importance of monasteries in Cordova: their old influence on society, the richness of their architectural, historical and artistic heritage or the conventual activities that have taken place there. However, if we talk about the urban aspect, there is still a need to investigate and, above all, to record and reflect these changes through comprehensive work on urban mapping. It is noticeable the absence, for example, of planimetric studies that show the keys to evolution and the processes that take place, something that is essential to understand the relevance of all these changes since the end of the Old Regime. This research analyses the fate of those convents that, after the forced abandonment of religious life and its subsequent disappearance or modification, gave rise to the creation of public spaces of great importance in the city.



2. The ecclesiastical disentailment

The urban history of the 19th century in Spain, and in Cordova in particular [1], is closely linked to the successive confiscations that took place at that time. According to the RAE (Royal Spanish Academy) concise definition of this term, disentailment consists of "the action of putting the goods of *mortmain* on sale, by means of legal provisions". Although it was at the end of the 18th century that first measures of this kind were recorded, with the Jesuits, for example, it was during the eighteenth century that the most important actions were taken to sell the goods previously owned by the clergy.

This whole disentailment process had important consequences on several levels. The economic impact is obvious, since the intention was to amortize or extinguish the public debt existing at that time. In addition, this was a way of trying to ensure that the properties of the so-called "mortmain" (the goods that belonged to the Church, and until then could not be sold or transferred) could be transferred to owners who worked them (stimulating trade and agriculture in the area) and thus creating a possible rural bourgeois class.

However, time showed that the disentailment did not achieve its intended objectives. The serious public debt problem continued to exist (although it was alleviated somewhat). It contributed to a shift towards a bourgeois society, as there was a purchase of property by new owners who, in many cases, made money by speculating on these alienated assets. However, it is also true that these confiscations led to an increase in existing estates, as there were lots of auctioned land that could only be bought by people who already had big fortunes. Even today, there is still some debate about the conclusions and assessment of the disentailment and if what was initially intended was really achieved.

2.1 The case of Cordova

The city of Cordoba is of special interest in terms of conventual architecture due to its importance at a national level. According to the data provided by F. Simón Segura[2], the province of Cordova was in fifth place in terms of the goods owned by the clergy and fourth in terms of the regular clergy alone. Therefore, there were a large number of convents in the province, most of them located in the capital, which is the area covered by this work. Taking into account the different sources on which we have based ourselves to identify the monastical complexes present in the city at the beginning of the 19th century, there were a total of 44, 5 of which are not visible in the plans of the time because they were located far from the urban centre.

As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, successive confiscations have led to a series of major changes affecting various areas, such as society and politics, economy and urban planning. It is the latter which is the main object of interest for us, as it is a field that has been studied to a lesser extent until now, so it can enlighten us in terms of the formation of the city and its morphology as we know it today.

The entrance of the French army in the early nineteenth century meant the occupation in the city of several convents and monasteries, which came to fulfil military functions as barracks for troops or stables to house the mounts of soldiers. Proof of this can be found in the 1811 plan of the Baron of Karvinski, popularly known as the "Plan of the French", where the presence of these monastic buildings is marked in many of the blocks that housed the convent complexes with the description "*Exconvento*", thus indicating the change of use they had undergone at the time.

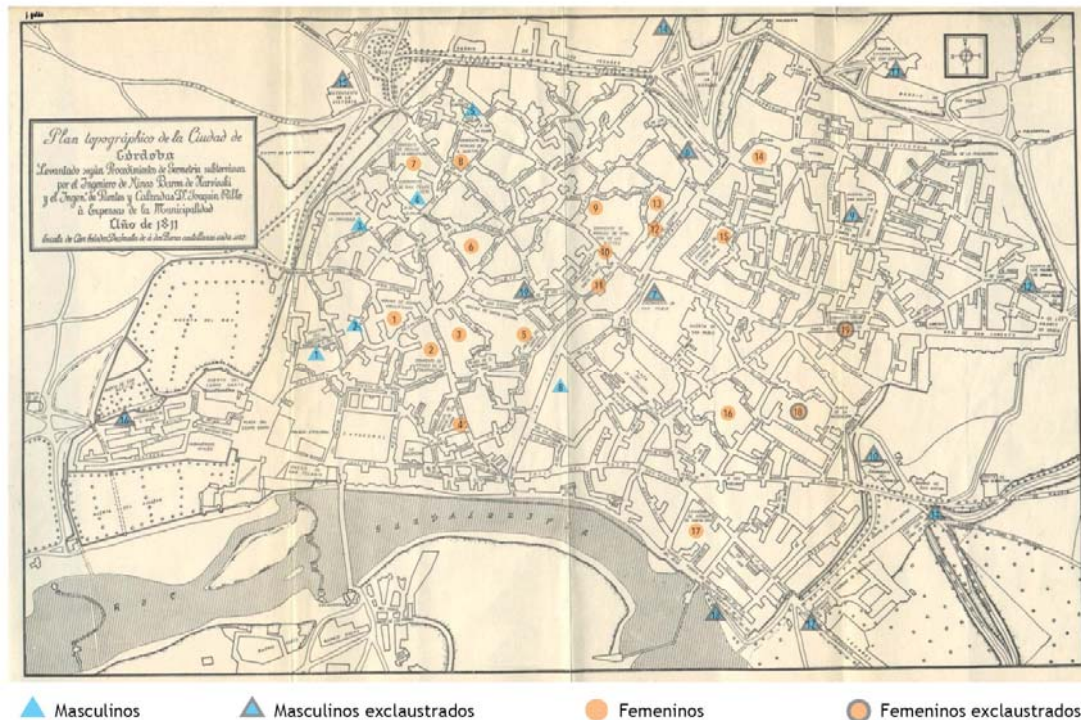


Figure 1. Location of the conventual complexes on the 1811 plan of Cordova. Made by the authors [3]

After the subsequent evacuation of the French army, the vast majority of monastic groups once again welcomed the corresponding religious’ orders. The arrival in power of the liberals, and the reasons given in the initial section of this paper, drove successive disentailments, with those carried out by politicians Juan Álvarez Mendizábal and Pascual Madoz being the most important and influential, and the ones that would mean the exlaustration and alienation of a large part of the goods of religious orders.

By consulting the sales records kept in the Provincial Historical Archive of Cordova [4], it has been possible to find out all the sales made in auction of the goods previously belonging to the confiscated convents. Thus, it is possible to better understand the fate of the properties of the monasteries and some of the conventual buildings (those that were bought by private individuals). However, those that were used for other public functions are not included in these registers, due to the different procedures to which this type of assignment was subject.

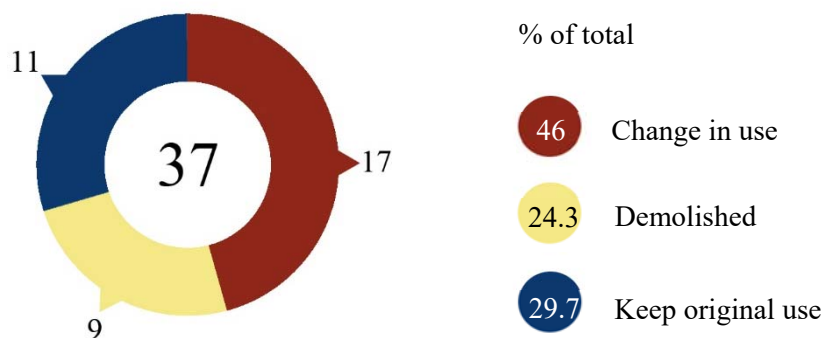


Figure 2. Graph showing the fate of the convents of Cordoba after the confiscation of the 19th century. Made by the authors [3].

2.2 Consequences for urban planning

Changes that occur because of the disentanglement are numerous and of great importance. In addition to the palpable changes at an economic and social level, it had a great impact on urban planning.

"Cities not only developed with their urban planning aspect in the layout of their streets or the construction of public buildings, but also in the rhythm of their own lives" [5].

The cities, with their winding alleys and decrepit buildings, changed as a result of the disappearance of those great conventual masses and the greater mobility of urban property. These are the cases, for example, of the Convent of San Martín, today Paseo Gran Capitán (1851), of the convent of La Concepción, which generated the creation of a new alignment, with the opening of Calle Duque de Fernán Núñez (1887) or the Convent of Santos Mártires (1858), whose demolition meant the appearance of the Ronda de los Mártires, a new avenue parallel to the river.

Buildings that were partially or completely kept, either retained their religious use (or still do today, as is the case with some women's convents) or adopted new functions, public or private. Those that were completely demolished led to the opening of new streets, changes in the urban layout, widening and opening of wide public spaces. These are the cases we have analyzed for this paper, and whose creation we have written about.

3. Public Spaces

As we have already mentioned in the abstract, out of 37 convents in the city, 26 have lost their original use. Of these, we can state with certainty that there are 10 that created changes in the urban plot, based on the analysis of historical documentation and plans, together with other indicators that are of interest to us, such as the toponymy of streets and squares. We consider necessary to make a distinction of the type of public space that appears as a result of the demolition of the convent complex that existed previously in each case, since this classification allows us to show the results in a clearer way and helps us to establish later conclusions.

We will distinguish, therefore, three kinds of public spaces: streets, squares and avenues. We will show each of the cases, focusing especially on historical plans and the originated space, but not on the architecture of the monastery that was previously there, as it is not the object of the study. However, it is necessary to point out that each of the subsections is indicated with the name of the convent, since its demolition could have caused the appearance of more than one public space in that place, as will be seen in some cases of the ones shown.

3.1 Streets

3.1.1 San Pedro el Real (San Francisco): calles San Francisco, Del Llano, Madrid, Tierra Andaluza, Medina Azahara

It was one of the first convents founded in the city, in the thirteenth century, in the Collación (administrative district of the city that belonged to a specific church) of San Nicolás de la Ajerquía, near the southwestern part of the city. It gradually grew in size, becoming one of the most remarkable buildings in Cordova, until it finally became seized. After adopting different uses throughout the 19th century, most of the complex was finally demolished and only the church (still open to worship under the name of San Francisco) and the eastern and southern wings of the main cloister, inserted in the urban space, have survived.

On the land that occupied most of its surface, a series of streets were laid out that have been forming part of the district called San Francisco-Ribera.

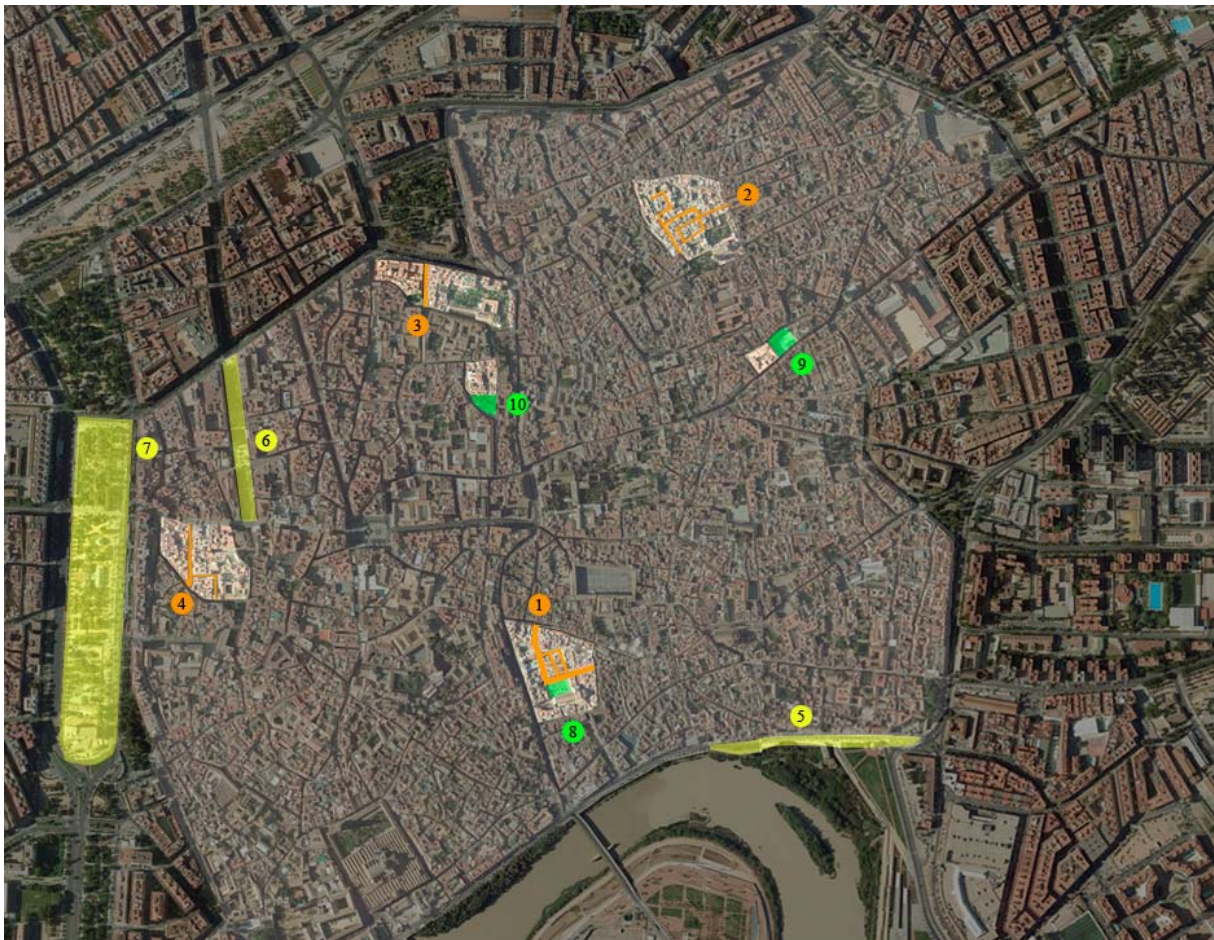


Figure 3. Aerial image of the current historic center of Cordoba, where the blocks of the old convents and the public spaces that emerged as a result of their demolition are marked. Made by the authors.



Streets



Avenues



Squares

Legend:

1. San Pedro el Real (San Francisco): calles San Francisco, Del Llano, Madrid, Tierra Andaluza, Medina Azahara.
2. San Agustín: calles San Isidoro, Ángel María de Barcia, Almorávides.
3. Santo Ángel (Capuchinos): prolongación de calle Torres Cabrera
4. La Concepción: calle Duque de Fernán Núñez
5. Santos Mártires: Ronda de los Mártires
6. San Martín: Paseo de San Martín, posterior Avenida del Gran Capitán
7. Ntra. Sra. De las Huertas: Paseo de la Victoria
8. San Pedro el Real: Plaza de la Tierra Andaluza
9. Sta. María de Gracia: Plaza del Poeta Juan Barnier
10. Las Dueñas: Plaza del Cardenal Toledo

3.1.2 San Agustín: calles San Isidoro, Ángel María de Barcia, Almorávides

King Ferdinand III the Saint also founded the monastery that gave rise to this series of public spaces in the 13th century. We are referring to a curious case, since, in spite of having been occupied by the French

during the invasion of 1808, later secularized and having a big area demolished, it ended up recovering its conventual use, being occupied by an order different from the one that originally lodged.

Its extension was substantially reduced and, as with the former convent of San Pedro el Real, the disappearance of a large part of its land led to the creation of a series of streets near the church, known as the Barrio de San Agustín which in turn became part of the official neighbourhood of San Lorenzo, which belongs to the city centre district.

3.1.3 Santo Ángel (Capuchinos): prolongación de calle Torres Cabrera

We are referring in this case to the only convent founded in the city by the Capuchin order, built next to the wall in its northern area. Its foundation already implied the origin of one of the most emblematic squares in the capital of Cordova, Plaza de Capuchinos (popularly known as the Plaza del Cristo de los Faroles because of the crucifix that was erected there in the late eighteenth century). Of the original complex, only the church, the original orchard and the cloister are preserved. This meant that its block was divided by the extension of Calle de Conde Torres Cabrera, which was connected with Plaza de Colón.

3.1.4 La Concepción: calle Duque de Fernán Núñez

This example is of great interest, especially with regard to the process of disentanglement that it suffers. It is remembered as one of the greatest real estate speculations derived from the secularization of a convent.

Monastery inhabited by the Cistercian order, after the confiscation passed into the hands of its former patron, the Duke of Fernán Núñez. Its demolition began in 1887, and the plot occupied by the building was divided into several plots that were later sold. The nobleman made a strategic decision: he ceded part of the plot to the Town Hall. Therefore, a street was opened in its half (which received the name of Duque de Fernán Núñez Street), which not only improved road communication, but also allowed for a better division of plots (as can be seen in the following picture), what meant that many of them were bought by the incipient bourgeois class of the time.

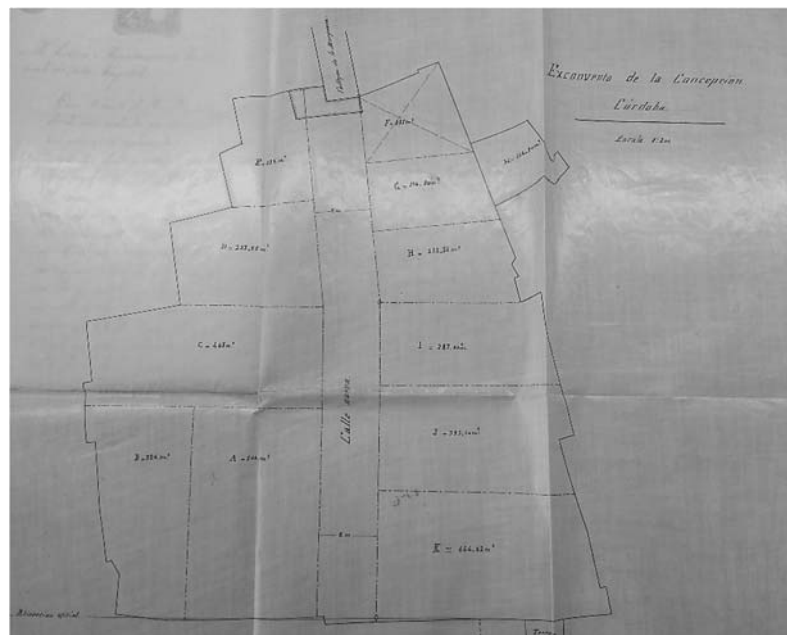


Figure 4. Plots and opening of a new street on the site of the former convent of La Concepción, 1890. AHMC [6].

3.2 Avenues

3.2.1 Santos Mártires: Ronda de los Mártires

Initially founded by the Cistercian monks in 1392, it was abandoned in 1527, and later the Dominicans settled in 1531. With the exlaustration of 1836, the convent was suppressed and sold.

After having housed a timber store, it was finally bought by the Town Hall, which proceeded to demolish it to create the Ronda de los Mártires, parallel to the river. On its site, the Hermitage of Santos Mártires was built between 1880 and 1881 and restored in 2007.

3.2.2 Ntra. Sra. De las Huertas: Paseo de la Victoria

The Minimal Franciscans arrived in Cordova in 1509, founding a convent on the site designated by Bishop Don Juan Daza in the Santuario de las Huertas, just outside the wall on the western side. The convent complex had an area of 9,000 sticks and a large orchard.

In 1836 it was sold to a private individual, and in 1867 it was acquired by the Town Hall for the extension of the fair site, turning its garden into a nursery. Later on, the Paseo de la Victoria would appear on its land, creating a promenade and gardens that still today constitute one of the green areas in the centre of the city.

3.2.3 San Martín: Paseo de San Martín, posterior Avenida del Gran Capitán

The Convent of San Martín was located in what is now the intersection between Avda. del Gran Capitán and Calle Concepción, in the old Collación of San Nicolás de la Villa. After its demolition, a process of urban transformation set in motion that became one of the most important that the city has undergone, due to the subsequent relevance of the changes that will take place at the urban and social level.

Founded in 1635 and suppressed in 1835, it was acquired by the Town Hall, which demolished it with the aim of creating a salon promenade on its site under the name of Paseo de San Martín. It had the shape of a cross, with four gardens, fences and long iron-backed seats.

In 1859, under the direction of the architect Pedro Nolasco Meléndez, work began on the Paseo de Gran Capitán, an extremely important operation that involved the opening of an avenue towards the Ronda de los Tejares and the railway station. In this way, a new commercial and bourgeois centre was established in Cordoba, which has now reached the present time.

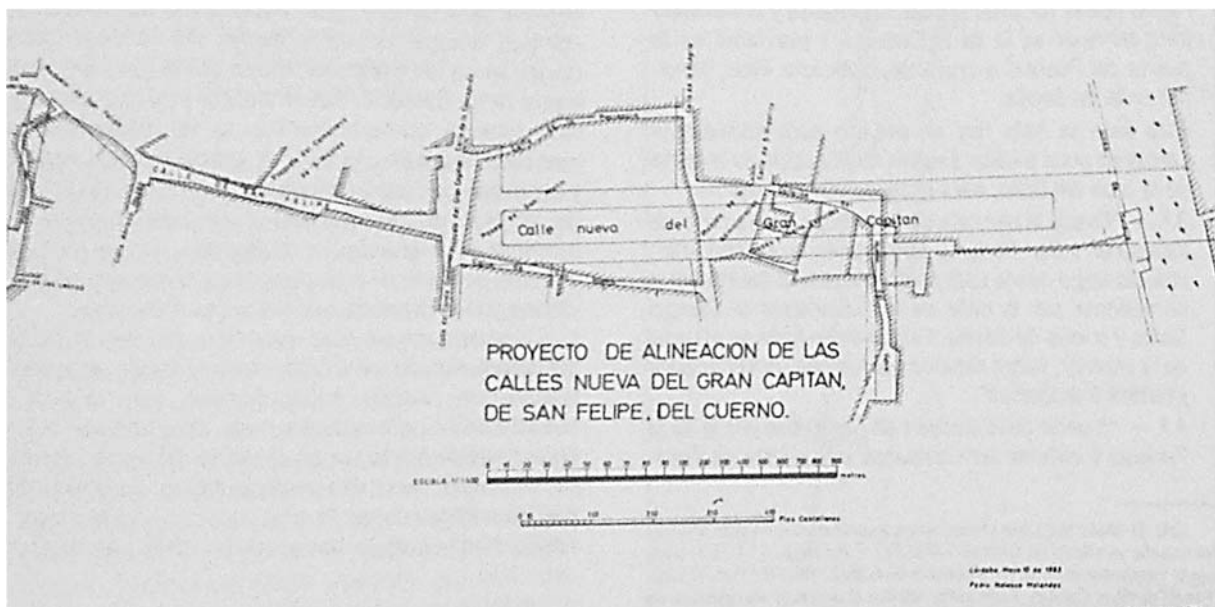


Figure 5. Plan of the alignment project for the new Avda. del Gran Capitán and adjacent streets in 1859. Picture from the book “Córdoba en el siglo XIX. Modernización de una trama histórica” [7].

3.3 Squares

3.3.1 *San Pedro el Real (San Francisco): Plaza de la Tierra Andaluza*

In the aforementioned convent of San Pedro el Real, after its disentanglement, in addition to the emergence of various streets that made up a whole new area of the neighborhood, a new square was also created. This is the Plaza de la Tierra Andaluza, which is a unique example of public space mixed with conventual architecture, as the remains of the cloister in it are preserved and even become part of celebrations and traditions characteristic of the city such as Cruces de Mayo.



Figure 6. Plaza de la Tierra Andaluza, decorated for the festival of Cruces de Mayo. The remains of the cloister can be seen. Photography made by the authors.

3.3.2 *Las Dueñas: Plaza del Cardenal Toledo*

Monastery founded in 1370 that was expanding its extension over the years, in 1868 was suppressed to be used for a brief period as barracks. The following year it was demolished on the initiative of the municipal architect, with the aim of forming a square on its site that will provide light, ventilation and sanitation to the neighborhood.

In the last years of the 19th century, several interventions were carried out in order to correctly prepare the square and provide it with vegetation, as well as to align and widen the adjacent streets.

3.3.3 *Sta. María de Gracia: Plaza del Poeta Juan Barnier*

The former convent of Santa Maria de Gracia was founded in the 15th century. It suffered a series of vicissitudes throughout his life, such as a fire and the collapse of the choir loft in 1642 or the suppression of the monastery and its use as a barracks during the French occupation.

Throughout the twentieth century there was a gradual deterioration of the building, which caused that from 1947 began a process in which the Municipality tried to sell the property, culminating in its demolition in 1974. On the space it leaves was opened the current Plaza del Poeta Juan Bernier, where the jambs of what must have been the main door of the convent are still preserved.

4. Conclusions

Firstly, we would like to point out that this work is part of a wider investigation, in which we approach each of the monastic buildings individually, paying attention to their context and transformation after the disentailment measures, and analysing their subsequent situation. In this way, we not only obtain a series of conclusions concerning the urban layout, but also the buildings themselves, their subsequent change of use and the remains that have been preserved to the present day.

With regard to public space, the subject of this paper, we can conclude that most of the new streets, avenues and squares were created as a result of a demand from the population and the administration of the time, which saw them as necessary with the aim of providing the city with new spaces according to the new society that was emerging at the end of the 19th century. Thus, factors such as the arrival of the railway (which led to the opening, for example, of Avda. de Gran Capitán), the influence of the European capitals, the demolition of the walls and the scarcity of green areas were fundamental in this renovation process.

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