

# THE ROYAL MACHINE OF PUPPETS

Seville, 1631

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The almost chaotic desire to frequent comedies at the end of the 16th century became, in the Sevillian society of the first third of the 17th century, an amusement suitable for all palates and all periods: not only at an economic level because the variety of possibilities to access a theatrical show were more and more numerous, but because the 'show' was permanent, that is, it ran for most of the year. Very few days –in the dog days of summer– Sevillians were left without any kind of amusement: either the comedies or the puppet theatre that –normally– took place during Lent, a period when theatrical performances were prohibited<sup>1</sup>.

If we allude to those many possibilities of public spaces available to attend the performances in this city, it is because we are facing an exceptional situation: none of the great Spanish cities had three *corrales* open to the public at the same time: the one of *Doña Elvira*, *El Coliseo*, and *La Montería*, all three under the 'baton' of the same lessor: Diego Almonacid who, direct or indirectly, exploited each one of them.

*Doña Elvira* was born in the last few years of the 16th century (1577) and was still alive during the first third of the 17th century, though ruinous. In 1617, people were already talking about the theatre closing, but a misfortune caused by a fire in 1620, which devastated *El Coliseo*, prevented its doors from being closed until 1632<sup>2</sup>.

The construction of *El Coliseo* was conducted by Juan de Oviedo y de la Bandera, master builder of the city, who drew the plans and supervised the works. It was finished by the end of 1607. Its first structure was very weak, nothing superior to the primitive theatres built at the end of the previous century. There were two floors of covered galleries, containing 42 chambers and the great balcony, which was located in front of the stage, called "cazuela", reserved for the female public. The courtyard *per se* was the only open-air space, with barely 12 benches. Most of the public who frequented this area had to stand during the show<sup>3</sup>.

The third of our *corrales* that offered its shows to the public was the *Corral de la Montería*, which opened its doors due to a genuine desire of the Count-Duke of Olivares. He stated, in 1619: "Que sería posible que su Majestad viniese por aquí [Sevilla]" [...], and so he wanted that "se hiciese un Coliseo donde se representasen comedias y las pudiesen ver su Majestad y Altezas por unas vidrieras desde los cuartos reales"<sup>4</sup>. It is unknown whether they could be seen from there or not, but it is true that about that time the project was not carried out, among others because on this occasion the King did not come and when he did it was in 1624, unexpectedly, not allowing the time to build any *corral*. Not many years passed until, by the Crown, this happy idea came into being: in 1626 *La Montería* opened its doors, becoming the third Sevillian public space where people could spend their leisure time<sup>5</sup>. The life of this *corral* lasted, same as *El Coliseo*, until 1679, year when performances were prohibited in Seville (Bolaños, 2011a, pp. 383-417).

1 It is thus confirmed by the contracts between the 'authors of the royal machine' and the lessors of the *corrales*. A good example of it is the one signed, in 1659, between Joseph Ochoa "pintor y autor de la máquina real de guemeos [sic, in another document: Pyrenees; "midgets" in both cases, according to Cornejo, 2016, p. 32] y vezino de la Ciudad de Valencia" and "Juan Bautista Belarde y Gerónimo de Montalbo, arrendadores de los Corrales de Comedias desta Quorte" (painter and author of the royal machine of "guemeos" [sic, in another document: Pyrenees; "midgets" in both cases, according to Cornejo, 2016, p. 32] and citizen of the City of Valencia and Juan Bautista Belarde and Gerónimo de Montalbo, lessors of the *Corrales de Comedias* of this Court). He must start working in Madrid "el primer Domingo de Quaresma que viene deste año en vno de los dos Corrales con toda la máquina que traygo y continuar en ello hasta el Domingo de Ramos, que es quando tengo de dar fin con toda la Fiesta" (the first Sunday of Lent of this year to come in one of the two *corrales* with all the machinery I bring and keep on doing so until Palm Sunday, when all celebration must end) (Agulló, 2011, pp. 45-46). It is obvious that his show is offered during the entire Lent.

2 See <http://www.juntadeandalucia.es/cultura/rutasteatro/> for an account of the history of this *corral*.

3 Apart from the webpage referred to in the previous footnote, see Bolaños, 2008, vol. II, pp. 291-340 and 2009, pp. 279-306 for further information about the life of this *corral*.

4 That it was possible that His Majesty would come around here [Seville] [...], and so he wanted that a Coliseum were built, where comedies were to be performed and His Majesty and Your Royal Highnesses could see them through the stained glasses on their royal chambers. General Archive of Simancas, *Casa Real, Obras y Bosques*, leg. 303, ff. 787r-788r, July 29th, 1619.

5 From a theoretical point of view, the history of this *corral* has been recorded by: Reyes, 2006, pp. 19-60; Bolaños, 2011b, pp. 291-370. For the virtual reconstruction of the building, its stage area and its scenic machinery, see: Bolaños-Palacios-Reyes-Ruesga, 2012; Reyes-Palacios, 2015; Bolaños-Reyes-Palacios-Ruesga, 2016a, 2016b and 2017. The set of results obtained so far by this Research Group can be seen in <http://investigacionteatrosiglodeoro.com>

This theatrical activity of *corrales*, regular and quotidian, must be completed with the extraordinary, though still regular, activity generated each year by the feast of Corpus Christi, which turned the streets and squares where the procession ran along into an open theatrical space to celebrate the Sacrament honourably and with the greatest ostentation possible. In addition to the arrangement, awning and embellishment of those streets and squares, the performance of *autos*



1. Virtual reconstruction of the inside of the Corral de La Montería

(religious plays) on carriages, dances and other shows tinged with theatricality constituted a fundamental component of the festivity, whose organisation was the responsibility of the City –of the City Hall-, assigning very substantial sums of money to it, so as to compete with other villages and cities to achieve the greatest glory possible. In 1631, the feast of Corpus Christi took place on June 19th, although the City started preparing much earlier –on February 17th– the organisation, whose development can be followed almost day by day in the documentation preserved (Reyes, 2001, pp. 115-142). As usual, on this year the four *autos sacramentales* on eight carriages were entrusted to two accredited comedy authors: Bartolomé Romero and José Salazar, who performed in *corrales* before and after the feast of Corpus Christi.

As can be observed in the portrait of this enthusiastic theatrical activity in the Seville of 1631, now we would like to draw attention, to further complete it, to the presence of another type of show of which there is still not much data: puppet theatre<sup>6</sup>, considered by some as a second-class show (it is true that the lessors of *corrales* were aware that the collection was lower than the one obtained thanks to comedy performances), but the truth is they met a social need in light of the prohibition of the most popular show.

## The royal machine in 1631

The year 1631 was an important one in the history of puppet theatre which employed the royal machine for the presentation of their various activities; at least that is what can be inferred from the reports that, dating mainly to Lent (that year, from March 5th to April 12th), have come to our notice. Even though none of them made any reference to its activity in Madrid, they did to the one in Valencia and, especially, in Seville<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> Although experts on Golden Age theatre have not yet found much data about this activity, we are convinced that it was more usual than it might seem at a first glance. In every city where there was a *corral de comedias* and documents are preserved, references to it appear. As an example, we can offer this first indication: in Cádiz, in 1616, doctor Toquero signed the transfer of ownership of this *corral* with the Brothers of St. John of God and about the preservation of the chamber of water/fruit, he says: "...para que en ningún acontecimiento del mundo se puedan proveer las personas que entraren a oír las dichas comedias, ber títeres, retablos, bolatines u otras cosas de entretenimiento, de agua, fruta, colaciones ni otra ninguna cosa de comer ni beuer de otra parte que del dicho aposento del agua y frutas y presisamente lo hayan de comprar de allí [...]" (...so that under no circumstances whatsoever, can the people who come in to listen to those comedies, watch puppet shows, tableaux, *volatines* or other entertainments, stock up on water, fruit, collations or any other food or drink from anywhere but that chamber of water and fruits and they necessarily must buy them there [...]) (Provincial Historical Archive of Cádiz, Notary Juan de Castro, Ca-310, ff. 828r-842r). Only a few years later, in 1623, in a not so relevant village as it is San Millán, a reference to "Francisco Gonçalvez, maestro de títeres" (master puppeteer), who performed for 10 days, can be found (Agulló, 2011, p. 34). With these examples we want to point out that it was in all of our *corrales* and in any part of Spain that this type of performance was present.

<sup>7</sup> No information is recorded that year about Madrid in J. E. Varey (1957), who provides a great amount of data about puppet theatre in the Court.

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It was known that in the *Corral de la Olivera*, in Valencia, there were “titiris” (puppet shows) from March 12th to 30th<sup>8</sup>. Whereas in the *Corral de La Montería* in Seville there are reports of “volatines” during March—term that frequently encompassed puppetry together with acrobatic activities<sup>9</sup>; and in such *corral*, on March 30th, the company of Valentín Colomer “autor de la máquina de los títeres por su Magd”<sup>10</sup> was authorised to perform with it<sup>11</sup>. Moreover, it has been recently published that Colomer, the next day after getting his license to perform with his machine in *La Montería*, hired Grenadian Juan Garrido as a ‘dulzaina’ player for one year as well as to help in “todo lo que se le mandare”<sup>12</sup>. There are still further reports, and important ones, of that year. But... what was the royal machine of puppets?



2. Royal machine with lowered curtain

professional theatre companies which, annually licensed in the name of the king [...] or their corresponding viceroys, via the Council of Castile, were allowed to perform in existing commercial venues – generally the *corrales de comedias* or “theatrical courtyards” – throughout the Spanish monarch’s territories (Castile, Aragon, Portugal for a few decades, the viceroyal-ties of New Spain, of Río de Plata, etc.) at least from 1634 to the beginning of the 19th century. The repertory consisted of the same hagiographic pieces and magic comedies played by the actors, as was the structure of the shows: a prologue, a three-act play, dances and *entremeses*, almost always ending with a parody of a bullfight – all this accompanied by music. The *máquina real* companies took advantage of the periods when actors were forbidden to play (above all during Lent) when the puppets performed in the big cities with much success. The troupes consisted of a *maestro maquinista* (chief machinist or puppet operator), various other machinists and apprentices, between five and ten in total, normally Spaniards. Their shows were frequently shared with other professionals (acrobats and tightrope walkers, for example)...

In the *World Encyclopedia of Puppetry Arts (WEPA)* a summary of its history and characteristics can be found (Cornejo 2017a):

Puppet theatre of the Spanish Baroque period. This was the name (literally, “royal machine”) of the

Most of what was known about the royal machine until fairly recently had to be looked up in the abundant and rich documentation first exposed in the works of John E. Varey (1954, 1957, 1972, and 1995). However, moving through the documentary labyrinth gathered in these publications was difficult, among other reasons, because of the absence of a guide to diminish the problem –which Varey left unresolved– of the technique or techniques of the royal machine of puppets itself.

8 “A 12 de març jague titiris en la Casa de la Comedia...” (On March 12th a puppet show takes place in the *Casa de la Comedia*...) (CLM, 1630-1), in Varey, 1953, p. 249.

9 “1631 [...] En Marzo estaba en el corral de La Montería una compañía de volatines, cuyo cobrador mató en la puerta de entrada a José Santamaría, sargento de la compañía de D. Juan de Esquivel” (1631 [...] On March the *Corral de La Montería* held a company of *volatines*, whose collector killed José Santamaría, sergeant of the company of Mr. Juan de Esquivel, at the main entrance) (Sánchez-Arjona, 1898, p. 271).

10 Author of the machine of puppets by His Majesty.

11 Archive of the *Real Alcázar* of Seville, Box 280, file No. 30.

12 Everything that was asked of him.

Historical Protocol Archive of Seville (AHPS), Document VIII, March 31st, 1631, leg. 5538, ff. 128r-129v, in Bolaños, 2017, pp. 24-25.



Even though in his first works a young Varey tried to clarify this complex matter by envisioning the predominant methods of the 20th century applied to past times:

distingo tres tipos importantes de representaciones de títeres de aquellas épocas [1211-1760], a saber: teatrillos de marionetas, teatrillos de títeres de mano y teatrillo mecánico o retablo,<sup>13</sup>

where he calls 'marionettes' to the "títeres suspendidos de hilos y manejados con ellos"; and "a los manipulados por los dedos del artista, 'fantoques', 'títeres de mano' o 'títeres de guante'"<sup>14</sup> (Varey, 1954, 215). Actually, these techniques would not manage to develop as we know them nowadays until the end of the 19th century.

Varey makes an allusion to the functioning of the puppets of the royal machine: "figuras contrahechas movidas por alambres"<sup>15</sup>, which he, however, likens to the 'marionettes', insinuating that they were moved by strings (1957, 178). More cautious, with time, he will avoid going into technological hypotheses at the same time that he will end up admitting "que en España solían manejarse los títeres por alambres más que por hilos"<sup>16</sup> (1972, 28).

The few scholars who have dealt with Varey's texts have interpreted them, with regard to the technical issues, in different ways. For Sentaurens (1984, 586) the machine used thread marionettes; Jurkowski does not address the issue when dealing with the machine (1996, 163-66) and Lloret talks about "marionetas que iban sostenidas por un alambre que se clavaba en la cabeza, siendo los hilos los que gobernaban las acciones de brazos y piernas"<sup>17</sup>(1999, 23).

In 2006, Cornejo considered analysing every known documentation up to that moment and, based on that as well as on the study on the illustrations of the episode of *Master Peter's puppet show* and *don Quixote* produced from the 17th to the 19th century, suggesting a hypothesis for the technical reconstruction of the royal machine. The result was an article published in the recently launched journal *Fantoche* (Cornejo, 2006), which has served as the starting point for new scholarly works about the machine and as motivation for the recreation of this type of puppet show by the company of Cuenca, *Máquina Real*, directed by Jesús Caballero.<sup>18</sup>

The entry on the WEPA, based on this article, explains in these terms the technical functioning of the royal machine by the mid-18th century (Cornejo 2017a):

On the stage area of each *corral de comedias* a wooden structure was erected (about 6.7 by 3.8 metres in size) covered by curtains – this was the *máquina* – which housed a stage in the Italian style (at least from 1737), with its front cloth, wings and side cloths painted in perspective, and one or more back cloths. Some of the puppeteers, hidden behind the backcloth, performed with puppets with an iron rod to the head, while others seem to have been rod puppets operated from beneath the stage, all of them richly costumed. The settings for the saints' and magic plays, with their depictions of heaven and hell, apparitions, seascapes and pyrotechnics, necessitated a large variety of stage machinery for the optical illusions and spectacular scenes always so well received by the public; in addition there were measures taken for security's sake, such as the network of threads forming a mesh screen that covered the stage opening to prevent any flames escaping into the auditorium.

13 I distinguish three important kinds of puppet performances from those times [1211-760], namely: marionette theatres, hand puppet theatres and mechanical theatre or tableau.

14 Puppets suspended by strings and operated by them; and to the ones manipulated by the fingers of the artist, 'puppets', 'hand puppets' or 'glove puppets'.

15 Hunchbacked figures moved by wires.

16 That in Spain puppets used to be manipulated by wires instead of strings.

17 Marionettes that were held by a wire stuck on their head, with the strings being the ones controlling the movements of their arms and legs.

18 See the publications by Cornejo (2010, 2012, 2015, 2016, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c), as well as the ones resulted from the Symposium *La máquina real y el teatro de títeres de repertorio en Europa y América* (San Sebastián, 2016). The company *Máquina Real* has premiered, with its puppets, the comedies *El esclavo del demonio* (The Devil's Slave), by Mira de Amescua (2009), and *Lo fingido verdadero* (Pretending Made True), by Lope de Vega (2010).

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The success enjoyed by these puppet performances was such that a number of the plays – *El esclavo del demonio* (The Slave of the Devil), *San Antonio Abad*, *Santa María Egipciaca* (Saint Mary the Egyptian) – were regularly performed for decades.

The recent knowledge of new documentation from the year 1631, with notable contributions regarding several technical aspects and the functioning of the machine in its early stages, invites us to rethink about its functioning and to conclude some aspects about which we can now provide some data<sup>19</sup>. But, above all, this article aims at presenting the virtual elevation of a royal machine on the stage of the recently reproduced *Corral de La Montería*, in order to show, thus, the Sevillian theatrical reality that, as happened in the rest of Spain at that time, had the machine of puppets among its rich manifestations (Bolaños-De los Reyes-Palacios-Ruesga, 2016b).

## How was the royal machine of puppets in 1631?

Firstly, we must state that neither in the purchase documentation of this year, on the part of machinist Mighel Llobregat to Juan de Soto and Pedro Antonio de Fortesa, nor in the



3. Bare structure of the royal machine

subsequent one in 1634 between machinist Valentín Colomer and the comedy author Francisco López, also in Seville (Cornejo, 2006, p. 17, according to documents found by Piedad Bolaños), is the supporting structure of the machine mentioned among the equipment sold. Therefore, it can be inferred that the royal machine companies, not even in these first years of existence, had and carried with them their own 'teatrillo' (puppet stages) —as would be called nowadays— to be installed on the stage where they were to perform. Such supporting structure of the scene and, when applicable, of the puppeteers is known to have been built in each occasion and place, being adapted to the corresponding stage area and funded by each *corral* business; it is thus documented in Madrid, in 1656, where "el arrendamiento le ha de dar [al maquinista Francisco de los Reyes] el corral desocupado y madera para hazer enzima del teatro el tablado para los títeres"<sup>20</sup> (David-Varey, 2003, p. 425). In the preserved expense claims of the Madrilenian *corrales* (dating back to the 18th century), the

highest expenditure always corresponds to the construction of the "theatro para la máquina"<sup>21</sup> by the stage-hand (Varey, 1957, pp. 294, 302 and 305).

<sup>19</sup> We are referring to a purchase acceptance document of a royal machine which was sold by Valencian machinist Miguel Llobregat to Juan de Soto, from Alcalá de Henares, and Pedro Antonio de Fortesa, Majorcan, which, though signed in Seville on April 4th, 1631 (untraceable), was completed with a detailed inventory in Ayamonte (Municipal Archive of Ayamonte, AN, Diego González' clerk office, 1631, leg. 111). If these documents are considered here, it is because the inventory section was released, although lacking an examination and including gaps and transcription errors, by González (1997). Despite the fact that some of the data related to technical elements and functioning that appear in the inventory will be discerned in the present work, both the complete document and a second obligation contract between the members of the company are under analysis in all its freshness and will shortly be published.

<sup>20</sup> The leasing agreement must provide [machinist Francisco de los Reyes] with the vacant *corral* and wood to build the deck for the puppets on the theatre.

<sup>21</sup> Stage for the machine.

What the inventory does tell us is that all the objects linked to the purchased machine were enclosed in "seis arcas" (six chests); a considerable number compared with other companies that only carried two of them (Varey 1957, pp. 176 and 314). Their content begins with the list and description of everything that was necessary to arrange the stage where puppet theatre was performed:

Primeramente, los castillos con el aparato de la máquina, palos nesarios y demás adornos della, con su baya de lienzo pintada con diferentes figuras y países al olio.<sup>22</sup>

The inclusion of the word 'castles' before the 'paraphernalia, sticks, ornaments and fence' of the machine leads to the consideration of them as fixed components of the stage, instead of as a particular scenography for a specific type of comedy. This idea is reinforced by the enumeration, further on in the text, of "dos cortinas de jerguilla verde para las puertas de los castillos por do salen las figuras"<sup>23</sup>, which denotes that there were two castles and that it was reasonable for them to have been placed on opposite sides of the stage: propitious places for the entry and exit of the puppets on scene, independently of the technique employed. Words such as 'castillo', 'castillejo' or 'castelet' (all of them with the meaning of 'castle'), have been used at different times and places to refer to the *teatrillo* of puppet theatre and, also, to

4. Bare structure of the royal machine  
Front View



the scaffolding and wooden structures in the form of a tower. 'Paraphernalia' must be understood as the decoration and ornaments of the machine; which, in the case of the setting, would at least include a lighthouse painted on the background that functioned as a complement to the 'castles'<sup>24</sup>. And 'fence' as the fabric division and wooden supports that cover and decorate the lower part of the royal machine and hide the puppeteers who perform from beneath.<sup>25</sup>

22 First of all, the castles with the machine's paraphernalia, necessary sticks and other ornaments, together with a fence made of oil paintings of different figures and countries on a canvas.

23 Two green *jerguilla* (thin fabric made of silk or, more commonly, wool) curtains for the doors of the castles through which the figures leave the scene.

24 Covarrubias, 1611, '*aparato*' (paraphernalia): "el ornato y sumptuosidad del señor, y de su casa" (the ornaments and sumptuousness of a lord and his house).

25 Covarrubias, 1611, '*valla*' (fence): "La tela, o pértiga afirmada en tierra con algunos pies, cuya altura viene a dar a los pechos de el



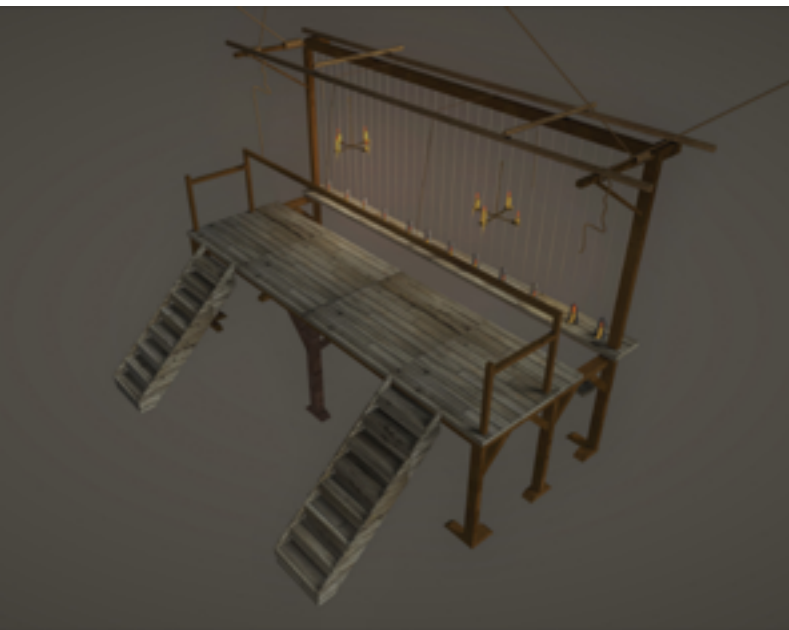
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The inventory does not mention 'wings', 'drop-scenes' or 'perspective backdrops', words that do appear in some descriptions of the royal machine of the 18th century (Varey, 1957, pp. 177 and 291) and that, when they do, it clearly indicates that we are dealing with a small Italian style theatre, generally used for puppet theatre in Spain whereas it was still a minority for comedies performed with flesh and blood actors. In 1631, even though there are no references about these defining elements of the Italian style stage,

6. Front view of the complete royal machine because they did not exist, we do find the two side "castles" symmetrically placed for the entry and exit of the puppets next to the decorated background and, also, "dos cortinas de yladillo de seda verde y naranjado"<sup>26</sup> to close the stage area as it was done in Italy and the Madrilenian Court. The contrast between the stage view of the royal machine of puppets –kept in a space sealed all around– must have drawn the attention of an audience used to the stage of *corrales* –open and surrounded by public on three of its sides.

The existence of the aforementioned "two curtains" can be interpreted in two different ways: first, as the two being placed at each side of the proscenium arch to either cover or reveal the stage with symmetrical lateral movements; and second, as one curtain covering the entire proscenium arch and that may be lifted as a Roman curtain, whereas the other remains unfolded



7. Illumination of candlestick holders, footlights and wired network

and fixed on the stage, only covering the high part of it so as to hide the puppeteers who perform from behind. This second formula is portrayed in some illustrations of *don Quixote*, in the episode of *Master Peter's puppet show* (Cornejo, 2006).

There were also "catorze varas de lienzo basto"<sup>27</sup> (11,7 m) with no specification as to whether they comprised one or several pieces; these large pieces of fabric could be used to seal the sides of the machine and, in those cases when the second curtain was not employed, to cover, as a drop-scene, the puppeteers who moved the figures from the back of the stage.

Regarding the illumination of the machine, there is an allusion to the existence of "seis candeleros o alcayatas para poner luses

hombre: ella divide los torneantes en el torneo de a pie, peleando uno de la una parte, y el otro de la otra" (fabric, or pole secured to the ground with a slight elevation, whose height reaches the men's chests: it separates the duellists in a standing tournament, so that each of

them fought from one of its sides).

26 Two green and orange silk ferret curtains.

27 Fourteen *varas* (unit of length approximately equivalent to one yard) of rough canvas.

quando se representa de noche"<sup>28</sup>. It seemed that it was not always necessary to turn on the lights, with the resulting savings for the company. Nevertheless, in the winter evenings and in the covered *corrales*, these must have been essential for the optimum visibility of the scene. Even in some cases we know that the windows of the establishment were covered to achieve complete darkness and to increase the effect of the artificial light (Varey, 1957, p. 178). Apart from the lights for the illumination, there was another kind of 'fires' that, although not recorded in the inventory of 1631, does appear in the letter of obligation signed, also on May 15th, between the machine owners, Juan de Soto and Pedro Antonio Fortesa, and Valencian Jacinto Armunia, by which he committed himself to "hazer los fuegos"<sup>29</sup> in exchange for being paid *two reales* a day, along with the corresponding ones for his ration and performance. This "make the fires" refers to the use of gunpowder to achieve certain special effects –such as explosions, shots, clouds of smoke, battles, mouths of hell, etc.– necessary in the saints and magic comedies and, especially, siege or military ones; the three of them present in the repertoire of the machine inventoried in 1631, including a comedy of *La Conquista de Valencia* (The Conquest of Valencia), in which it is assumed that Armunia would have displayed all of his pyrotechnic skills. And, in spite of not appearing in these documents, it has to be recalled that the royal machine made general use, as fire protection and security, of a network of vertical threads as a grille to prevent the fire effects produced on stage from spreading outside of it (Cornejo, 2006, pp. 27-28).

Each of the performed comedies could need, apart from the common elements necessary for the functioning of the machine, structures and special rigging systems. In the case of the comedy referred to in the inventory as "*comedia de San Juan*", "una armadura para poner un púlpito"<sup>30</sup> was needed; that is, a simple and detachable structure to be set on the stage<sup>31</sup>. Besides, "una tramoya hecha de plomo con una bota y brocal de alambre para las tramoyas de san Juan y Cristo"<sup>32</sup>. It is difficult to venture its functioning beyond the fact that the lead must have been used as weight or counterweight. However, if the rigging system was meant for the scene of the baptism of Christ by St. John the Baptist (something we can only presume), it seems reasonable that the wineskin –similar to the actual wineskin used to store wine– served to contain and, in due course, to let out through the rigging system the baptismal water. In the *Comedia famosa de San Juan Bautista* (Madrid: printing house of Juan Sanz, s. a.), by Cristóbal de Monroy (1612-1649), the action is described as follows: "Chirimías llegan a una entrada, donde ay agua, decienden Ángeles cantando, con fuentes, conchas, y tohallas, y Christo se ponga, San Juan le bautiza."<sup>33</sup>

In the cited "*comedia de Morgana*" (comedy of Morgan), a magic comedy, there were four rigging systems, the first two for demonic monsters: "una tramoya de un dragón y otra de una sierpe"<sup>34</sup>; apart from another one with ropes and linen for a magical 'flight': "una manga de lienso para el vuelo en la comedia de Morgana con sus cuerdas de cáñamo"<sup>35</sup>. And a fourth one for some spectacular effect suffered by one of the comedy's gentlemen: "una figura de un galán vestido de damasco berde con sus alamares de plata fina pa la comedia de Morgana con una tramoya"<sup>36</sup>.

A generic mechanism is also mentioned: "una tramoya hecha con sus garruchas"<sup>37</sup>, useful, with its pulleys for the raisings and descents of any figure in the comedies that required it, which was nearly all of them. However, there are also rigging systems specifically created for a particular

28 Six candlestick holders or spikes to place lights when performing at night.

29 Make the fires.

30 St. John's comedy; a framework to place the pulpit.

31 Covarrubias, 1611, '*armar*' (assemble): "...y también se dize armadura, como la de la cama, que se arma y se desarma, con sus goznes y tornillos" (...and also called framework, as the one of a bed, which is assembled and disassembled, with its hinges and screws).

32 A rigging system made of lead with a wineskin and a wire stopper for the rigging systems of St. John and Christ.

33 Chirimías (musical instrument of the family of oboes) arrive at an entrance with water, singing Angels descend, with fountains, shells, and towels, and as Christ stands, St. John baptises him.

34 A rigging system for a dragon and another one for a serpent.

35 A linen cloth for the flight at the comedy of Morgan with its hemp ropes.

36 A figure of a gentleman in green damask with decorative fastenings made of fine silver for the comedy of Morgan with a rigging system.

37 A rigging system with its pulleys.



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8. Side view with puppets and puppeteers

character, for example: “la figura del Arliquin con su tramoya”<sup>38</sup>; where it can be assumed that the character from the *commedia dell’arte* played a leading role in some acrobatic or spectacular act, something common in the *volatines* shows in the 17th and 18th century, or, in any case, participated in some *entremés* (interlude), since having the Harlequin as a comedy character was not habitual. It also appears: “vna figura de vn trompeta con su tramoya”<sup>39</sup>, of which no information is known about the comedy it might have appeared in nor the reason why it was necessary for it to be equipped with a scenic mechanism. Finally, there was also a rigging system for a Virgin Mary on a column: “una colonia (sic) azul para la tramoya de la birgen”<sup>40</sup>, who had to miraculously appear on stage.

Puppets are cited on the

document under the name of ‘figures’, and in the royal machine sold by Miguel Llobregat there were, according to the inventory, a total of 138 figures. Out of these, five were bulls, 19 horses, 11 “figuras de manga con sus cabezas de madera”<sup>41</sup>, (that is, the puppets that would be called nowadays ‘glove puppets’) and the rest, 103 full-body dolls—that normally were between 60 and 75 cm tall—adapted to be handled, some, from beneath with sticks and plinths, and, some others, from above with rods secured to the head. The total number could reach more than 150 if the mounts of the “cinco armados” and the “four moros de a caballo”<sup>42</sup> were not counted in the corresponding entry for the isolated horses, or if the “seis gitanos y gitanas para una danza”<sup>43</sup> were actually six gypsy men and six gypsy women.

With regard to the technique used to perform on the machine, it is very interesting that the inventory records: “tres dosenas de palos para llebar las figuras con sus tornillos de hierro”<sup>44</sup>, that is, a total of 36 *varas*, which, as is known due to this document, were detachable thanks to “sus tornillos de hierro” and allowed to bring out to the stage a more than sufficient number of figures to perform any comedy. It can also be fathomed from the inventory that some figures meant to do dances and to parade must have been operated by a group of people, for instance, via collective plinths that easily allowed the execution of the desired movements. The abundance of bulls, horses, dances, carriages or the big procession of *La Conquista de*

38 The figure of the Harlequin with its rigging system.

39 A figure of a trumpeter with its rigging system.

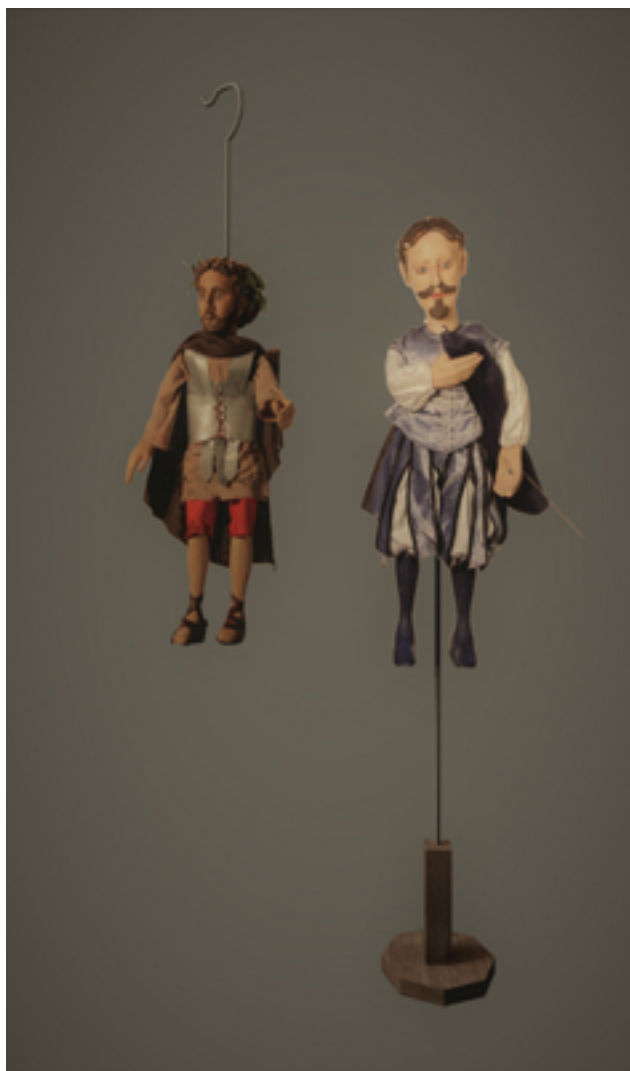
40 A blue column for the rigging system for the Virgin Mary.

41 Cloth figures with their wooden heads.

42 Five armed men; four mounted Moors.

43 Six gypsy men and women for a dance.

44 Three dozen rods to carry the figures with their iron screws.



9. Puppets with ,rods to the head' and ,rod puppets'



10. Puppeteers with puppets with ,rods to the head' and ,rod puppets'

*Valencia*, together with the presence of “las puertas de los castillos por do salen las figuras”<sup>45</sup>, invite us to envision this machine of 1631 with a highly predominant presence of plinth figures against the ones manipulated with the rod secured to the head.

The citation of “honse figuras de manga con sus cabezas de madera”<sup>46</sup> in the inventory, is specially interesting because it documents at a very early date the existence and use of what is known nowadays as ‘glove puppets’ and, until recently, under popular names such as ‘*crisobitas*’. It is true that the use of the word ‘*títere*’ (puppet) is recorded since the early 16th century, but this generic term does not presuppose the technique of the doll. The use of the term “*figuras de manga*”, however, exactly describes the technical essence of the glove puppet (hollow cloth body and wooden head) that was unknown to date, as far as we know, in the sphere of our Golden Age centuries. The question that arises is: did these puppets, of quite different mechanics and expressions, participate in the comedies performed with the machine? or did they, perhaps, only do so in their own scenes, as interludes, undoubtedly relaxed and jocular? The second option seems more likely, but the data known so far is insufficient and it is wise to wait for more findings to shed light on this matter.

After the ‘cloth’ puppets, it reads “ocho botargas”<sup>47</sup>, which means deformed and masked figures, dressed in coloured remnants; which is a sign of the existence in the repertoire of

45 The doors of the castles through which the figures leave the scene.

46 Eleven cloth figures with their wooden heads.

47 Eight motleys.

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the company of that other Golden Age genre, brief, grotesque and musical, known as farce comedy.<sup>48</sup>

Let us continue with the list of figures:

sinco toros  
dose caballos grandes y seis chicos con sus sillas y frenos y demás jaeses  
seis gitanos y gitanas para una danza  
seis gigantes para otra danza en la procesión que se hace en la conquista de balensia con sus bestidos de telillas de colores<sup>49</sup>

Diverse groups of figures representing the civil and religious Valencian society also belong to such procession of *La Conquista de Valencia*. The civil courtship must have been opened by:

dos figuras de maseros con ropas de estameña colorada y sus masas de oja de lata para delante de los jurados<sup>50</sup>

Jurors that are not recorded in the figure inventory, unlike their four apparels. Whereas the section that corresponds to the First Estate is plentifully represented:

veinte figuras vestidas de frayles de diferentes religiones para la procesión en la conquista de balensia  
dos pelegrinos bestidos de picote  
dos sacristanes  
dos diáconos con sus ropas de raso berde  
un clérigo con su capa de cola de damasco berde con su pasamano de oro fino alrededor  
quatro clérigos  
dos canónigos con sus musetas blancas para la dicha procesión  
dos obispos con bestidos de raso morado y sus roquetes  
dos cardenales con bestidos de tafetán de color de nácar y sus roquetes<sup>51</sup>

To the warlike section of the piece about *La Conquista de Valencia*, it must have belonged, at least:

seis figuras de moros de a pie con diferentes bestidos  
quatro moros de a caballo  
un rey moro  
seis [soldados] armados de a pie y sinco de a caballo  
una figura de un rey con bestido de tafetán leonado y guarnesido y pasamano de oro falso y dos capas ynperiales, la una de raso leonado con su forro de tafetán azul y la otra de buretillo blanco<sup>52</sup>

In relation to:

la figura de la Birgen con su vestido de tafetán blanco para la conquista de Balensia<sup>53</sup>  
it could be either the figure that appeared on the blue column at some point in the performance on the rigging system previously mentioned or an image that participated in the procession.

Moreover, in order to be used in those comedies that required them, there appear:

ocho figuras de damas, la una que servía de reyna vestida de tafetán leonado con guarnisión de oro falso = otra pajisa = otra de colorado = sinco de negro de tersiopelo raso con guarnisión de oro y plata falsa  
dos figuras de viudas con sus mantos de seda

48 Terreros 1786-1793, '*botarga*' (motley): "el que lleva el vestido de botarga en las mojiangas, y comedias" (the one in a motley apparel in farce comedies, and comedies).

49 Five bulls; twelve big horses and six small ones with their saddles and bits and further harnesses; six gypsy men and women for a dance; six giants for another dance in the procession of the conquest of Valencia with their apparels of coloured remnants.

50 Two figures of macebearers with red serge apparels and their tin maces to be set before the jurors.

51 Twenty figures dressed as friars from different religions for the procession in the conquest of Valencia; two pilgrims dressed in *picote* (a coarse fabric made of goat hair); two sacristans; two deacons with their green satin clothes; a clergyman with his green damask train cloak with a fine gold rim around; four clergymen; two canons with their white mozzettas for such procession; two bishops with purple satin apparels and their rochets; two cardinals with their taffeta apparels in mother-of-pearl colour and their rochets.

52 Six figures of standing Moors with different apparels; four mounted Moors; a Moorish king; six armed standing [soldiers] and five mounted ones; a figure of a king with a tawny taffeta apparel with a trimming and fake gold rim and two imperial cloaks, one of tawny satin with its blue taffeta lining and the other one of white *buretillo* (fabric made of wool or silk).

53 The figure of the Virgin Mary with her white taffeta apparel for the conquest of Valencia.



vna figura de vn viejo vestido de negro con sus calzas atacadas<sup>54</sup>

It is quite likely that it was part of the comedy of St. John: “la figura de Cristo con su vestido de tafetán morado”<sup>55</sup>. Among the figures cited in the inventory, some provide data about other plays from the company's repertoire. This is the case with:

una figura de un fraile desnudo para la comedia de los mártires del Japón

las figuras de Simón Mago y Simón Pedro

la figura de San Jorge, todo dorado con su morrión, peto y espaldar, y su caballo blanco<sup>56</sup>

Furthermore, it also appears:

la figura de un viejo para los entremeses<sup>57</sup>

Together with the Harlequin ones, the one of the gentleman from the comedy of Morgan and the figure of the trumpeter that were previously mentioned when analysing the rigging systems.

An aspect that stands out is the importance given to the wardrobe description in this inventory. Its typological variety, the diversity in the quality of the fabrics recorded and the brightness and richness of their colours and ornamentation played a key role among the charms of the royal machine show, as was already known (Varey, 1957, 299, 301 and 315). Its in-depth analysis is worth a proper study that we leave for another occasion, together with the one of the inventoried stage props (carriages, flags, swords, canopy, chairs, cushions, etc.).

The inventory list also contributes to the addition of a soundtrack to the royal machine of puppets of 1631. In this regard, the presence of three very characteristic musical instruments of the theatrical activity helps. For the warlike and military scenes: “una caja de guerra con sus baquetas” and “una trompeta”; and for dances and popular festive celebrations: “unas sonajas”<sup>58</sup>.

To which another activity of our already mentioned Jacinto de Armunia should be added: the one

as a *dulzaina* player. Armunia, for the five *reales* that he earned for his ‘performance’, must have played the *dulzaina* “dentro de la máquina” (his own *dulzaina*, we assume, since it is not recorded in the inventory), but also “a la puerta de la comedia o corral” and “por las calles”<sup>59</sup>; his role was quite relevant, because apart from adding music to the show, it served as a method to lure in people by the *corral* door as well as to advertise it on the streets. In this case, as in the one of Grenadian *dulzaina* player Juan Garrido, who was hired by machinist Valentín Colomer, also in 1631, the musicians were part of the company<sup>60</sup>. This was not the situation during the second half of the 18th century in the Madrilenian theatres,



11. General view of the royal machine from the chambers

54 Eight figures of ladies, one that served as a queen dressed in tawny taffeta with a fake gold trimming = a straw-coloured one = one in red = five in black smooth velvet with gold and fake silver trimming; two figures of widows with their silk cloaks; a figure of an old man dressed in black with his *calzas atacadas* (type of footwear that covered legs and thighs and was attached to the waist with laces).

55 The figure of Christ with his purple taffeta apparel.

56 A figure of a naked friar for the comedy of the martyrs of Japan; the figures of Simon the Sorcerer and Simon Peter; the figure of Saint George, all in golden clothes with his morion, breast and backplates, and his white horse.

57 The figure of an old man for the *entremeses*.

58 A snare drum with its drumstick; a trumpet; some zills.

59 Inside the machine; by the comedy or *corral* door; on the streets.

60 AHPs, Document VIII, March 31st, 1631, leg. 5538, ff. 128r-129v, in Bolaños, 2017, pp. 24-25.

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when the municipal authority provided royal machine companies with a small orchestra, composed by three or four violins, one oboe and one double bass (Varey, 1972, 52).

The analysis of the documents cannot be concluded without discussing the findings about the repertoire of the royal machine that appear scattered all over them. Unfortunately, the comedies that were part of the transaction are not recorded in the inventory, though they are



referred to in the introduction of the first Ayamontino document: "...vna máquina real de títeres con todos los bestidos, ar-cas, figuras, títulos, y comedias..."<sup>61</sup>. Yet, there is enough data to get a certain idea about its repertoire and the way the shows were offered.

Among the comedies that were performed, it is fathomed that there were three of the so-called 'saints comedies': first, "comedia de san Juan", second, "comedia de los mártires del Japón" and the third one

12. General view of the royal machine from the cazuela

in which the "figuras de Simón el Mago y Simón Pedro"<sup>62</sup> appear. The repertoire also included a magic comedy: the "comedia de Morgana" (comedy of Morgan). A spectacular

comedy considering what is known about its rigging systems for a "dragón", for a "sierpe" and for a "galán vestido de damasco verde con sus alambres de plata"<sup>63</sup>, in addition to the "manga de lienzo para el vuelo [...] con sus cuerdas de cáñamo"<sup>64</sup> and a probable scene of the game of "cañas" (rods). This information is particularly interesting because there are no findings whatsoever in our Golden Age literature about a drama piece under this name, nor having the famous sorceress as the leading role.<sup>65</sup> The last play cited –and the best documented– is referred to in four occasions as "la conquista de Valencia", and can be classified as a typical 'siege' comedy, in which Christians conquer the city against the Moors and celebrate it with a big parade.

Both the typology of comedies as well as the proportion that exists among them correspond to what is known about the repertoires staged by the royal machine in the 17th century (Cornejo, 2016c, pp. 46-52). Moreover, the documentation also confirms the formula followed by the show of the royal machine, which was no different from the one followed by the actor companies: performance of a comedy divided into three acts, preceded by a *loa* (prologue) and separated by *entremeses*, dances, farce comedies or other festive pieces. Even though the documentation from 1631 does not mention the *loa*, it does mention, direct or indirectly, the *entremeses*, dances, farce comedies, and bullfighting or *volatines* shows.

61 ...a royal machine of puppets with all the apparels, chests, figures, titles, and comedies...

62 Comedy of St. John; comedy of the martyrs of Japan; figures of Simon the Sorcerer and Simon Peter.

63 Dragon; serpent; gentleman in green damask with decorative fastenings made of silver.

64 A linen cloth for the flight [...] with its hemp ropes.

65 The character of the sorceress, fay or Fata Morgana is part of the medieval Arthurian legends, where she appears as King Arthur's half-sister. She appears in a famous episode of the chivalric novel *Tirant lo Blanch*, by Joan Martorell (1490); but, above all, she is known for being part of the chivalric adventures of *Orlando furioso*, by Ludovico Ariosto (in consecutive versions by the author between 1516 and 1532).

This can be concluded with the assertion that the rich documentation here presented about the royal machine of puppets confirms much of what was known about the royal machine of 1631, but based on documents from the 18th century. Some innovations, such as the use of the 'castles', the rods with screws to carry the figures, the presence of 'cloth' figures, the actors-*dulzaina* players, etc. shed light on aspects that were unknown to date about the functioning, the technique and the aesthetics of the royal machine. These aspects, supported by studies previously carried out by this Research Group, currently allow a visual representation of one of those machines that existed in the Seville of 1631, within the framework of a virtual recreation of the *Corral de La Montería*.

## The royal machine and the stage frame from the 17th century onwards. Ideas and thoughts.

When having a look at the first images of the royal machine virtually reconstructed from the analysed descriptions and documents, and placed in the stage of the *Corral de La Montería*, whose virtual model has been meticulously drawn, ideas fly trying to envision the possible sensations of the audience of the Seville of 1631 when attending one of those performances.

The first idea that emerges is that, to gaze at the royal machine, the audience had to go to the *Corrales de Comedias*, that is, to the theatre buildings where the repertoire of the Spanish Golden Age was successfully performed. It was, thus, and in modern words, a theatre audience. They knew about the performance, date, time and place thanks to the pertinent advertisements and they paid for a ticket to enjoy the show. And what is more, for an enthusiastic audience addicted to comedies as the one in the 17th century, it allowed them, during Lent, to keep on enjoying their favourite entertainment.

The second idea that comes to mind, when having a look at the recreated images of the royal machine, has to do with the effect it would cause in the audience the size and formalization of the artefact placed on the



stage of the *corrales de comedias* and, in particular, on the stage of the *Corral de La Montería* of Seville, one of the

13. General view of the royal machine from the courtyard stands

paradigmatic examples of the typical theatre architecture of the Spanish Golden Age. The scenic artefact, which would practically take up the totality of the *corral's* stage, exceeds in dimensions and resources the tableaux of the puppet shows that were successfully performed on streets and squares, inns and yards. The size and detail of the puppets, figures and apparel, and the variety of sets, props and stage effects in the stage area immediately suggest a new and different relationship between the type of show and the audience, a very different one from that of the comedies in the *corrales* and of the aforementioned tableaux. That is because the lines of vision of the audience in the different parts of the *corral* (courtyard, *cazuela* and chambers), due to the proscenium arch, were very different



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from the more open ones of the *corrales*, although the artefact were brought forward to the front limit of the stage to enjoy what the royal machine had to show. The members of the audience that were naturally favoured were the ones placed in front of the artefact. These front positions enabled, as well, a better enjoyment of all kinds of effects, ultimately, of the “stage magic” the theatre had always sought and even more during the Baroque period.

The third idea emerges from the consideration of Seville's history, especially at the end of the 16th century and beginning of the 17th century. Seville, as is known, was the leading port for all connections with the West Indies. It was, therefore, the city where all possible innovations gathered, not only from the Spanish Court, but also from European countries such as France and, certainly, from Italy, since the latter had permanent commercial relations with Seville since the 14th century, when merchants from both Plasencia and Genova successfully traded with Seville. It is plausible, hence, to believe that the Seville of 1631 kept up to date on the innovations introduced in the Italian and European theatre. The historical moment we can call *the Golden Age of theatre* –which covers from the mid-16th century with the birth of Lope de Vega (1562) and Shakespeare (1564) until well into the 17th century with the death of Calderón de la Barca (1680)– is the period when the first and crucial steps are taken towards the configuration of the theatre building as an Italian style theatre. It is likewise the moment of greatest accumulation and distribution of any kind of ideas and goods in Seville, from Europe to the West Indies and vice versa. These were also the years of the presence of Italian architect and theatrical designer Cosme Lotti in Spain (1626), who doubtlessly knew about the findings of Gian Batista Aleotti in Parma about the invention of the stage wings (1611) and the construction of the *Teatro Farnese* (1618), considered as the first Italian style theatre, since it had a completely formalised stage frame to enable the perfect appreciation of the perspective effect provided by the wings. That great innovation attracts all European Courts. In London the first Italian style stage is built in 1631 and in Paris in 1645. Cosme Lotti himself built in Madrid the *Coliseo del Buen Retiro* (1640), the first theatre in Spain where all these scenic innovations could be found.

These coincidences lead us to consider the possibility of the royal machine as a kind of metatheatre, of sample for the audience of the possibilities of the modern stage area, still inside a *corral* and, in the future, as an Italian style theatre building of its own that opens the door to multiple possibilities that, as is known, took place already in the 18th century. For all of us, this hazardous hypothesis presents itself as a research path to be followed as we progress in the study on the theatre building in the Spain of that time.



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