

EPHEMERAL ARCHITECTURES FOR CELEBRATING HAPPINESS: SYMBOLIC AND PERSUASIVE VALUES OF AN ARCHETYPAL EXAMPLE

ARQUITECTURAS EFÍMERAS PARA CELEBRAR LA FELICIDAD: VALORES SIMBÓLICOS Y PERSUASIVOS DE UN EJEMPLO ARQUETÍPICO

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Abstract

After more than half a century of war, the announcement of the end of the Third Carlist War resulted in a veritable explosion of happiness and collective euphoria in Spain at the end of the 19th century. On 20 March 1876, Alfonso XII, nicknamed "The Peacemaker", made his triumphal entry into Madrid. The press of the time described the event as one of the happiest in the history of Spain. The aim of this paper is two fold: to contextualize and analyze the importance of the festivities and ephemeral decorations as a reflection of the social happiness of the moment and to analyze the symbolic and persuasive values of one of the ephemeral architectures erected for the occasion. As a final result, we demonstrate how ephemeral architecture and festivals were a source of happiness in the battered Spanish society of the last third of the 19th century, generating social welfare and happiness through art and the nationalist exaltation of the monarchy

Keywords: Happiness; Collective euphoria; Festivities; Ephemeral decorations; Ephemeral architectures; Peace; National identity.

Resumen

Tras más de medio siglo de conflictos bélicos, el anuncio del final de la Tercera Guerra Carlista supuso una verdadera explosión de felicidad y euforia colectiva en la España finisecular. El 20 de marzo de 1876 se produjo la entrada triunfal de Alfonso XII, apodado "el Pacificador", en Madrid. La prensa de la época describe el acontecimiento como uno de los eventos más felices de la historia de España. El objetivo del presente trabajo es doble, por un lado, se pretende contextualizar y analizar la importancia que tuvieron las fiestas y decoraciones efímeras como reflejo de la felicidad social del momento, y por otro, analizar los valores simbólicos y persuasivos de una de las arquitecturas efímeras que se levantaron para la ocasión. Como resultado final se pretende evidenciar como las arquitecturas efímeras y las fiestas, fueron un potenciador de la felicidad en la maltrecha sociedad española del último tercio del siglo XIX, generando bienestar y felicidad a través del arte y de la exaltación nacionalista de la monarquía.

Palabras clave: Felicidad; Euforia colectiva; Fiestas; Decoraciones efímeras; Arquitecturas efímeras; Paz; Identidad nacional.

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1. Introduction

The entry of Alfonso XII into Madrid on 20 March 1876 was not only a nationalist exaltation of the monarchy (Fernández-Sirven and Gutierrez Lloret, 2015; San Narciso 2017; Lario 2003; Andreu-Miralles, 2017; Fernández-Sirvent y Gutiérrez Lloret, 2022; Mira Abab, 2016) in whom the values of the fatherland and the state were embodied, but also entailed the consolidation of his figure as the central axis of national politics (La Parra López 2011; Mansel, 2012). Although the restoration of the House of Bourbon on 29 December 1874 returned the throne to the Bourbons, some momentous event was needed to show that the choice had been the right one, thus dispelling any doubts about the restoration of the royal lineage (Cuesta García de Leonardo, 1995). The events came in little more than a year. On 27 February 1876 it was announced that the Third Carlist War had ended thanks to the decisive role of the king and the northern army. In this way, Alfonso XII, nicknamed “The Peacemaker”, cleared away any reticence (Fernández-Sirvent, 2010). Thus, Alfonso XII, nicknamed “The Peacemaker”, dispelled any doubts about his installation on the throne and the wisdom of his choice (Fernández-Sirvent, 2014; 2016). Regarding the importance of this event, beyond the military cause, Fernández-Sirvent has pointed out that “on 28 February 1876, Alfonso XII and his armies entered Pamplona, while the pretender Carlos de Borbón went into exile, and on 2 March they entered Estella, thus bringing the war to a close: the ‘soldier king’ had been ‘crowned’ for the second time, on this occasion in the symbolic and legitimising sense of the expression” (Fernández-Sirvent, 2010, p. 56).

The above situation (Luengo Sánchez, 2013: 13) must be understood in the context of what Van Osta defined in 2006 as “stage monarchies”, a phenomenon that occurred in most European kingdoms between 1870 and 1914 (Osta, 2006)¹ and through which the monarchy and the reigning monarch became the basis of the nationalism of the states, instrumentalising all kinds of rites, ceremonies and representations in the service of the monarch (Ordiña Gil, 2021), under the idea of the personification of the nation in his person (Peiro, 2022). This phenomenon can be found in countries such as England, where the configuration of the ideology of national identity was circumscribed to the monarchy. In this sense, Fernández-Sirvent points out (Fernández-Sirvent, 2010; 2011a; 2011b; 2014) that in relation to the nationalist exaltation that the inauguration of the monument to Alfonso XII in the Buen Retiro Park in Madrid entailed, it is worth noted that

The promoters of this campaign used the popularity enjoyed by the late king to forge in the collective imagination a white legend around Alfonso XII, the Peacemaker - and by extension, what his reign meant for a “return to normality” - which was not difficult since much of this work had already been done with some success during his brief reign (Fernández-Sirvent, 2019, p. 96).

1 For a contextualisation of the phenomenon of Court Studies in Spain, see: (Rivero Rodríguez, 2012); (Vázquez Gestal, 2003). San Narciso Martín, for his part, carries out an in-depth bibliographical review of court studies relating to the 19th century, including both European and Spanish festivities and ceremonials. (San Narciso Martín, 2014). As propulsive studies for the approach to nineteenth-century festivities, see: (Ozouf, 1976); (Palmer, 1997); (Waquet, 1981).

Fig. 1. Federico de Madrazo y Kuntz. Alfonso XII. 1886. Oil on canvas. Madrid.



Source: Museo del Prado:

The end of the Third Carlist War was the right moment for the monarchy to make a careful public presentation of the king (San Narciso Martín, 2014). To do so, it took the necessary time. Not in vain, the event had to be one of the most important historical events that the people had seen and one of those that would last longest in the memory (Ravina, et al, 2021), and the king's entry into Madrid was to take place on 20 March 1876 (Perrin-Saminadayar, 2006). Here they learned from the mistakes of the previous year, where the lack of time and economic resources (Ravina, et al, 2019) conditioned the festivities held on the occasion of the king's entry after his enthronement (Cuesta Marina, 2000). Moreover, in 1876, the economic situation was much healthier than the previous (*La Ilustración Española y Americana*, 15 March 1876) year. In this regard, Cuesta Marina mentions for the events of 1875 that,

It was the lack of time, together with the fact that the exact date of the king's arrival in Madrid was unknown. Added to this was a bureaucratic difficulty: due to its recent formation, the City Council had to appoint the new members of all the commissions, which were finally constituted on 11 January. Finally, the biggest obstacle was financial. After the six turbulent years of the Revolutionary Sexenio, the municipal coffers throughout the country had very limited funds, so the Government prohibited the Town Councils and Provincial Councils from using these funds for the organisation of these royal festivities. The Provincial Councils and Town Councils therefore decided to restrict their role as organisers of the festivities; they were responsible for drawing up the programme of events, as well as organising parades and military and official festivities, they would simply

decorate their official buildings and dedicate part of their funds to charity (...) The Government of the Nation, through the person of the Marquis of Molins, entrusted the Madrid nobility with the leading role in the organisation of the festivities (Cuesta Marina, 2000, pp. 360-361).

In relation to the royal entrances, Escalera Pérez notes that “the kings of all ages have been received by decorated cities and innumerable spectacles whose sole purpose was not only to entertain them, but to exalt their glory and the greatness of the monarch” (Escalera Pérez, 2022, p.40).

For the occasion, although the three public holidays were declared throughout the kingdom, Madrid (Villacorta Baños, 1985; 1993; 1997; 2004), as the capital of the country and seat of the Court (Álvaro-Osorio 1991; Vázquez Gestal, 2003; 2005), became the epicentre of the fiesta and of the nationalist exaltation of the monarchy (Corbin, 1994). For such a great event, the different institutions of the city, both public and private, organised an extensive programme of events that included concerts, bullfights, theatrical performances, parades, receptions, etc. Unlike the previous year, with the entry of the monarch on the occasion of the Restoration, where the burden of decorations and activities fell on the nobility, in 1876, it was the Municipal Corporation that orchestrated the official events and the king's entry itself.

Of all the decorations and architecture erected for those days, this research will focus on the arch erected in Alcalá Street by the Ladies of the Association for the Relief of the Wounded in Campaign [fig. 1]. Our aim is to analyse the symbolic, persuasive and iconographic roles (Fernández-Sirvent, 2010; 2011a; 2011b; 2014; 2015; 2019) that were given to such a great work.

2. Methodology, sources and delimitation of the object of study

For the configuration of the work, a research methodology has been applied at different levels. The starting point was an extensive and specialised bibliographical survey which allowed us to develop the theoretical framework and establish the state of the art of royal festivals and entries in the 19th century. The research was meticulous about the festivals and royal entries of Isabella II, Alfonso XII and Alfonso XIII (San Narciso, 2014). The bibliographic analysis has also made us aware of the lack of detailed references to the grandiose festivities that took place in Madrid, and the rest of Spain, on the occasion of the end of the Third Carlist War and the solemn entry of the King on 20 March 1876 and the three public holidays decreed (Rivero, 2012).

Once the phenomenon had been contextualised in the bibliography, we searched for and analysed historical sources. The Archivo General de Palacio and the Archivo Histórico de la Villa de Madrid were consulted. The Town Council's minute books emptied in the latter, and the Secretariat and Accountant's Office funds consult.

Subsequently, the *Gaceta de Madrid* was analysed, one of the primary sources that we have been able to consult, as it offers many information and details.

One of the most extensive parts of the search for information that we have carried out has been the complete emptying of 13 newspapers of the period (La Correspondencia, *Boletín del Comercio*, *Diario de la Familia de Avisos*, *La Ilustración Española y Americana*, *El Globo*, *El pabellón*, *La Idea*, *Diario Oficial de Avisos de Madrid*, *La Época*, *El Imparcial*, *La Iberia*, *El pueblo Español*, *El Solfeo*). It is clear that

many of them merely reproduce literally or in a more abbreviated form what it says in other newspapers. However, the overall view of the press analysed offers essential details that may seem irrelevant but which, when checked against each other, are essential for drawing up historical knowledge. Regarding the importance of the press as a historical source for dealing with nineteenth-century festivals, Escalera Pérez mentions that “if the “Relaciones” immortalised the ephemeral in past centuries, in the nineteenth century the press was added to give an account of these events, a medium that coexisted with the local or official chronicles that described the royal events” (Escalera Pérez, 2011, p. 83).

3. Results. Festivals and ephemeral decorations as happiness enhancers in late nineteenth century Spain.

The first reference by the Madrid municipal council (San Narciso, 2014) to the need to start organising the festivities can be found in the ordinary session of 21 February 1816, when

Mr. Hernández stated that he was rising to take the initiative on a matter of relative importance, and that he believed that the Town Council would unanimously approve the proposal that was going to be made.

He added that we were at a time when the nation was celebrating with jubilation and rejoicing the triumphs of the army in the northern provinces, which presaged the conclusion of the war that was annihilating the life of this country into the not too distant future. That the event was of immense importance, as everyone had recognised, and the neighbourhood of the capital had demonstrated it by lighting up and hanging on the news, with a spontaneity of which there was no example in history².

This session of the Town Council was particularly important (Prado Higuera, 1999; 2012; 2019), as it not only urged the municipal corporation to take the reins of the matter and start working on the planning and management of the events, but it was also the moment when several budget proposals were presented, which were finally declined due to the lack of clarifying reports from the commissions for festivities and shows, “agreeing to the immediate meeting of the Budget and Festivities Commissions to study the matter and propose as a result whatever was offered and seemed appropriate”³. Just two days later, on 23 February, the session continued on the 21st, now with the reports of both committees on the table⁴. Having heard the reports of both commissions, it was approved the

The Committee proposes that you agree to the inclusion of this item in the extraordinary budget and authorise the Shows Commission, under the chairmanship of the Honourable Mr⁵.

After the final approval of the budget on 23 February, it was not until 6 March 1876 that the Marquis of Perijáa read the programme of activities proposed by the festivities

2 *Minute Book*, session of 21 February 1876, Archivo de la Villa de Madrid (AVM), p. 151-154.

3 *Minute book*, session of 21 February 1876, (AHM) pp. 151-154.

4 *Minute book*, continuation of the session of 21 February 1876. 23 February 1876, (AVM), pp. 162-163.

5 *Minutes book*, continuation of the session of 21 February 1876. On 23 February 1876, (AVM), pp. 162-163.

commission⁶. It is interesting to note that although this commission reported to the town council on 6 March, the poster announcing the events was dated 29 February 1876⁷. With regard to the programme of festivities, the layout of the events was reflected in the minutes of the Town Council itself⁸, the poster, the *Gaceta de Madrid* and in several newspapers. In summary, these were the main events that took place during the three days of festivities: the king arrived in the capital on 19 March, settled in the Amaniél camp and spent the day before the big day with his soldiers. During the course of the 19th, a massive campaign mass [fig. 2] was held in the meadow of Amaniél (*Madrid Gazette*, 15 March 1876. Parte Oficial). For the rest of the day, a visit to the camp was an obligatory destination for locals and foreigners alike. It should be borne in mind that, from this point onwards, the officially scheduled events were intermingled with the multitude of activities that took place throughout the 20th and the following days. The press at the time reported on how complicated it was to give an account of everything that was going on in the city (*Diario de las Familias de Aviso y Noticias de Madrid*, 21 March 1876). At 10 a.m. on 20 March, the 26,000 men who followed Alfonso XII began to take up their posts. An hour later, the parade began (*Madrid Gazette*, 15 March 1876. Parte Oficial). At around 12 noon, a Te Deum was held in the Basilica of Atocha. The procession disbanded at 4:30 p.m., when the King retired to rest at the Palacio de Oriente (*Diario de las Familias de Aviso y Noticias de Madrid*, 21 March 1876). In the evening, as mentioned in the programme of festivities, there was fireworks display and a private party in the garden of the Plaza de Oriente (*El Imparcial*, 19 March 1876). A day later, the official reception by the monarch at the Royal Palace in Madrid for the commissions from all corners of the kingdom took place. On the 22nd, a bullfight was held (*Madrid Gazette*, 15 March 1876. Unofficial part. Interior). Finally, among other events, on the evening of the 23rd, Manuel María Santana, owner of the newspaper *La correspondencia de España*, held an important reception with the most important members of Madrid society at the Palacio de Abrantes.

Figure 2. Jean Laurent. Mass at the Amaniél camp. 19 de marzo 1876.



Photograph. Source: Archivo Ruiz Vernacci, D.G. Bellas Artes

- 6 *Minute book*, secret session of 6 March 1876, (AVM), p. 200.
- 7 Programme of events, 1876, (AVM), Public entertainments (Volumes XVIII-XXI), Secretariat, Royal celebrations (1832-1894) XX.
- 8 Programa de actos, 1876, Archivo Histórico de la Villa de Madrid (AHVM), Diversiones públicas (Tomos XVIII-XXI), Secretaría, Festejos reales (1832-1894) XX.

4. Alcalá street and its surroundings, epicentres of collective happiness

There were several points along the route taken by the royal procession that stood out for their importance. One of them was the area around the street⁹ and Puerta de Alcalá, which were also highlighted by the ephemeral arch erected for the occasion. Of the decorated buildings, the Ministry of Finance was particularly important, which “threw up an infinity of flowers and poetry from all its balconies, all originals by the distinguished poets who have official positions there, the crossing of Calle Peligros and Calle Sevilla was majestic, and in the Presidency, where the government, the entire diplomatic corps and a multitude of ladies of our aristocracy were located, the enthusiasm bordered on frenzy” (*Diario de las Familias de Aviso y Noticias de Madrid*, 21 March 1876).

Although overshadowed by the ephemeral arch erected in Calle Alcalá, the Puerta de Alcalá [fig. 3] was one of the most outstanding monuments among those decorated for the festivities. The monument was illuminated by gas in the following way: “the columns covered laterally, as well as the cornices, with lines of lights: on the central arch the sign *A S. M. el rey Alfonso XII*; on the right-hand arch *Al ejército*, the coats of arms, weapons and trophies that crown the arch are also covered with streams of lights”, “From calle de Alcalá de Henares, the monument was illuminated with gas”, “From calle de Alcalá de Henares to calle de Alcalá de Henares, the columns and the cornices were illuminated with lines of lights”. (*El Imparcial*, 19 March 1876). From the Calle de Alcalá the majestic monument offered such a dazzling effect that it would be difficult to explain” (*Diario de las Familias de Aviso y Noticias de Madrid*, 21 March 1876).

We have data on the price of the machine that was installed to illuminate the Puerta de Alcalá and the cost of maintenance. The devices entailed an investment of 40,000 reales, at a cost of 4,000 reales for each night they were lit. The documentation of the time does not clarify who paid for these expenses, whether it was the municipal corporation or another institution (*Diario de las Familias de Aviso y Noticias de Madrid*, 18 March 1876).

5. Ephemeral architecture to celebrate the peace and happiness of the spanish people. The arch of calle Alcalá

Consultation of the historical press has provided us with interesting data on the promoters of the project and its designer, information that was hitherto unknown. Of the large number of newspapers consulted, only three include a description of the arch in Calle Alcalá¹⁰. To these must be added a small note that appeared in *La Gaceta de Madrid* on 19 March, in the Parte no Oficial (unofficial part). Of these four documents, only two newspapers (*Diario de las Familias de Aviso y Noticias de Madrid*, 20 March 1876 and *La Ilustración Española y Americana*, 30 March 1876) and *La Gaceta de*

9 “At the moment when the troops began to pass through Calle de Alcalá, the hangings of the second floor, no. 22, were set on fire”. *Diario de las Familias de Aviso y Noticias de Madrid*, 21 March 1876.

10 These are: *El Imparcial*, 19 March 1876; *Diario de las Familias de Aviso y Noticias de Madrid*, 20 March 1876 and *La Ilustración Española y Americana*, 30 March 1876. Of the four descriptions preserved, the one in the *Diario de las Familias* is the most extensive, although the other three help to complete the symbolic-iconographic reality of the arch.

Madrid mention the name of the promoters of the ephemeral architecture. The day before the king's entry, on 19 March, *La Gaceta de Madrid* reported that the arch in Calle Alcalá had been completed and that it had been "erected by the ladies of the Asociación para Socorro de los Heridos en Campaña" (Association for the Relief of the Wounded in Campaign¹¹). The other two newspapers, likewise, provided the information, but made no further clarification on the matter¹².

If we begin with the cost of the work, thanks to the Report published by the Ladies' Association of Madrid for the year 1876, we know that the "arches and other festivities that have taken place, both to celebrate the proclamation and coming of His Majesty the King and his entry into Madrid with the army after making peace, have cost 125,625 reales and 48 cents", which is equivalent to 31,406.37 pesetas between the two arches and the two arches (*Memoria de la Asociación de Señoras... 1876*, p. 20) which is equivalent to 31,406.37 pesetas between the two arches. The exact price of the arch erected by the municipal corporation in Calle Mayor, next to the Plaza de la Villa, was 17,500 pesetas¹³. The structure of the 1876 arch is practically identical to that of the 1875 arch, which meant that the base of the former could be reused for the latter, investing a greater amount of money in the decorative programme. It should be remembered that the Town Hall arch lacked gas decoration, while the arch in Calle Alcalá had a large set of electric lights.

The arch in Calle Alcalá, promoted by the Ladies of the Association for the Relief of the Wounded in Campaign, according to the press of the time, was designed¹⁴ one of the leading architects of fin-de-siècle Madrid, Francisco de Cubas y Gonzáles-Montes (1826-1899), Marquis of Cubas¹⁵, the so-called 'official architect' of Madrid's aristocracy" (Navascués Palacio, 1973). Of the four sources that speak specifically about the Alcalá arch, only two of them give details of the designer of the complex. The first, *El Imparcial*, which in its edition of 19 March 1876 mentions that "This arch is built under the direction of the architect Mr. Cubas" (*El Imparcial*, 19 March 1876). And the second, on Monday 20 March in the *Diario de las Familias de Aviso y Noticias*

11 *La Gaceta de Madrid*, 19 March 1876- Unofficial part. Interior. The Asociación para Socorro de los Heridos en Campaña was the "Sección Central de Señoras" in Madrid of the International Red Cross. See: *Memoria de los actos de la Sección Central de Señoras de la Cruz-Roja en Madrid desde su creación hasta el fin de la Guerra Civil*. Pamplona: Imprenta de Joaquín Lorda, 1879. In the 1876 report, it is specified that "The Association created for the relief of the wounded in the campaign has been dissolved after the civil war has ended happily, and the needs and reasons for its existence have ceased". (Anónimo, 1876: 5).

12 On the promoters, see: (Pasquale, 1891: 424). The quotation refers to the Spanish section of the International Red Cross.

13 "The arch of the Plaza de la Villa does not cost 5,000 duros, as has been said, but 3,500". *Diario de las familias de Avisos y Noticias de Madrid* in its newsreel of Saturday 18 March 1876. The total budget of the Municipal Corporation was 100,000 pesetas. Archivo de la Villa de Madrid. Libro de actas, session of 21 February 1876, pp. 162-163.

14 This Association paid for the arch that was erected in the same place on 14 January 1875. The work was directed by the Marquis of Cubas and "seconded by the quantity surveyor Lucas Martín" (*El Imparcial*, 15 February 1875). According to the press of the time, the Marquis of Cubas would once again design for the Association the arch through which the King would pass on his entry into Madrid on 20 March 1876. The structural similarity between the two pieces leads us to think that for the 1876 arch the structure of the previous year was reused, with the iconographic programme of the twelve Alfonso's on top of it.

15 It is a title of nobility owned by the Vatican, which was assigned to Francisco de Cubas on 30 April 1886.

de Madrid, which praises the choice of the Marquis of Cubas as the designer of the complex,

Having made this brief description, it only remains for us to state that, in our opinion, apart from the beautiful proportions that everyone applauds and the exquisite taste that has presided in its ornamentation, this monument has very notable aesthetic characteristics, which would be enough to accredit a professor, if the architect Mr. Cubas, who conceived and directed it, had not already established his reputation on a solid base (Diario de las Familias de Aviso y Noticias de Madrid, 20 March 1876).

The figure of the Marquis of Cubas must be understood, in the context of 19th-century Spanish architecture, as an outstanding chronicler of the ways of doing and thinking in the years of the reign of Isabella II and his son Alfonso XII. Navascués mentions that “many were the architects who worked in Madrid during the last century. However, few were as significant as Francisco de Cubas y González-Montes” (Navascués, 1972).

For his ephemeral architecture, he opted for a classicist tendency¹⁶. The question of the style of the arch is of great interest, firstly, because the designer sought to create a work totally different in appearance to the arch erected by the Town Hall in Calle Mayor [fig. 4], which was designed in the Mudejar style¹⁷. Secondly, Cubas’s design is part of the architect’s Italianate phase (Navascués, 1973), (Prieto González, 2007). In this sense, Navascués mentions that

The abundant work of the architect Cubas has two well-defined aspects which correspond to two different aesthetics and two different periods. On the one hand, his architecture assimilates the Italianate and tardo neoclassical style learned from Pascual and Colomer and, on the other hand, his religious buildings translate clearly neo-Gothic forms that are equally reminiscent of the English Gothic revival and Viollet-le-Duc-style neo-medievalism (Navascués, 1972).

The same author mentions that the Italianate and late-Classical phase of the Marquis of Cubas (Navascués, 1972, p. 2) corresponds to the reign of Isabel II, while the Neo-Gothic phase coincides with the restoration of Alfonso XII. It should be noted that in the early years of the reign of Alfonso XII the Italianate style in Cubas’s work was in full force. It is not in vain that in 1875 another of his most important works, the Museo Antropológico (National Museum of Anthropology), with a markedly classical tendency, was inaugurated, as was the palace of Fuente Nueva, owned by Benito Arenzana, in 1876, and in the same year he designed the arch of Calle de Alcalá.

5.1. Electricity and lights to make us happier. An ephemeral arch advanced for its time

The sun was jealous of the night and denied the day its golden rays and warmth. But Madrid lit up all its suns in mockery of the day. The stone monuments were illuminated: the electric light lowered the eyes of those who dared to look from face to face; its rays, projecting over the crowded people, made fantastic effects of light and colour, determined whimsical silhouettes. If we lacked the desired sunlight, which illuminates the freckles and does not have the gallantry to conceal any defect, on the other hand, in the mysterious artificial light all the women seemed

16 *El Imparcial*, 19 March 1876 and *La Ilustración Española y Americana*, 30 March 1876 specifically mention that the arch is in the Renaissance style.

17 *La Gaceta de Madrid* 18 March 1876. Unofficial part. Interior and *Diario de las familias de Avisos y Noticias de Madrid*, 18 March 1876. Several period images have been preserved.

beautiful and the men graceful. Oh, triumph of the gas! In its glow, the Councils' house looked as if it had just been made (La Ilustración Española y Americana, 22 March 1876).

In this graphic way, *La Ilustración Española y Americana* defined the important role played by the illuminations in the decorations erected in Madrid to mark the end of the Third Carlist War. In relation to the ephemeral architecture that is the subject of this study, we have several reports: the first, from the day of the king's entry, mentions that "such a magnificent arch will be illuminated by two electric lights, one placed in the Ministry of Finance and the other in the presidency of the Council of Ministers" (*Diario de las Familias de Aviso y Noticias de Madrid*, 20 March 1876). The second is from the following day, when it says that "An electric light will be placed on the facade of the same ministry, whose reflections will illuminate the magnificent triumphal arch paid for by the Ladies' Association" (*Diario de las Familias de Avisos y Noticias de Madrid*, 21 March 1876).

The allusion to the illumination of the Puerta de Alcalá arch, although *at first sight* it seems anecdotal, if we analyse it in depth, was a relevant event, (Arroyo, 2002) for the time for several reasons. Firstly, there were only seven buildings in Madrid¹⁸ that were decorated with electricity-based lighting, and one of them was precisely our ephemeral arch. The buildings illuminated and decorated with electricity were the Natural History Building (*El Imparcial*, 19 March 1876); the Ministry of War (*Diario de las Familias de Avisos y Noticias de Madrid*, 18 March 1876). the Ministry of Public Works, which featured electricity decorations on both the fence (*Diario de las Familias de Avisos y Noticias de Madrid*, 19 March 1876) and the façade (*La Gaceta de Madrid*. 19 March 1876- Unofficial part. Inside); the Ministry of Finance (*Diario de las Familias de Avisos y Noticias de Madrid*, 21 March 1876); the Palace of the Presidency (*Diario de las Familias de Avisos y Noticias de Madrid*, 21 March 1876); the Arch of Calle Alcalá (*Diario de las Familias de Avisos y Noticias de Madrid*, 20 March 1876); and the San Gil Barracks (*El Imparcial*, 19 March 1876). Secondly, it is worth remembering that the arch erected by the municipal corporation in Calle Mayor next to the Plaza de la Villa lacked lighting, so the arch in Calle Alcalá must have attracted a great deal of attention from the locals and thousands of foreigners who came to the capital. Thirdly, and quite importantly, the use of electricity in the capital at that time was a rarity. Although the first electric light, by means of a photovoltaic arc, was installed in Madrid in the Plaza de Armas de Palacio in 1852 (García de la Infanta, 1986; 1987), the reality was that from this date until the 1980s, illuminations and decorations based on electricity were minimal, and almost always related to events related to the Crown. It was not until 1878 that the first attempt was made to use electricity for public lighting, in this case for the wedding of Alfonso XII and María de las Mercedes, but it was not until well into the following decade that there were new attempts to use electricity for lighting in the city (Cayón García, 2017; Fernández Paradas y Rodríguez Martín, 2017). Fourthly, it should be borne in mind that the Crown and the various Spanish monarchs and regents of the 19th century took control of and used gas and electricity for public lighting throughout the 19th century. It was a good way of showing that the monarchs were modern and that they wanted modern cities (García Delgado, 1992), on a par with the main cities of Europe. From Ferdinand VII to Alfonso XIII, there was no royal event or important celebration where gas or electric lighting did not play a prominent role (Fàbregas, 1993).

18 There were 19 buildings that were decorated with gas. In total, 8 buildings belonging to official bodies (3 of which were ministries), 1 public monument, 1 museum and 1 theatre, 5 palaces, 1 embassy, 1 café and 1 commercial establishment.

With Ferdinand VII we find the first examples of the use of gas in connection with celebrations related to the Crown (Simón Palmer, 1984). To celebrate the birth of their second daughter, the birth of his second daughter, on 30 January 1832, several gas illuminations were set up in different parts of Madrid (Simón Palmer, 2011).

The following year, on the occasion of the swearing-in of Isabella II as heir to the House of Bourbon, the area around the Royal Palace was illuminated with gas. Years later, in 1875, coinciding with the restoration of the Bourbons (Espada Burgos, 1981) to the throne, an event of singular transcendence in the history of illuminations took place, (García de la Infanta, 1987) as electricity began to coexist with gas in public and private festive spaces. In that year, we have evidence of two spaces illuminated with electric light: one in the Ministry of the Interior, where “an electric light turned on in the clock turret directed bright rays of lightning to the Puerta del Sol fountain, and another in Calle Alcalá, next to Calle Peligros, where a large electric arc was installed for the relief of the wounded in the campaign” (Guerrero Fernández, 2009). This situation continued until the first decades of the 20th century, when gas and electric lighting was used in public celebrations of the Crown (Guerrero Fernández, 2009).

5.2. The kings who brought happiness to Spain: iconography and symbolic values reflected in the arch of Alcalá Street

Once we have analysed the setting, the promoters, the author, and the importance of electricity in the ensemble, it is necessary to approach the symbolic universe¹⁹ and the complex royal iconography developed in the arch²⁰. Of the four chronicles we have preserved relating to the arch, the most extensive and detailed is that of the *Diario de las Familias de Aviso y Noticias de Madrid*, in its edition of 20 March 1876, that is, the day of the king's entry into the Court. Not only does it describe the arch in detail, but it also identifies and locates exactly each and every one of the iconographic elements arranged along the two fronts of the ensemble, giving a good account of the royal message that was intended [fig. 5]. The description in *El Imparcial* of 19 March, although shorter than the previous one, reflects the information in a more cursory manner, without going into the identification of the figures in any depth. At the end of March 1876, *La Ilustración Española y Americana*, specifically on 30 March, included a brief review of the arch in its news items. It was a brief commentary, but very important, as it was the only publication to illustrate the text with an engraving.

From the point of view of measurements, the *Diario de las Familias de Aviso y Noticias de Madrid*, 20 March, gives the following data: “This monument is forty-seven feet wide in front by more than seventy feet high and its depth is nine feet; the arch in the centre is twenty-two feet wide, and from the pavement to the keystone it measures thirty-four feet; the statues have a height of nine and a half feet”. For its part, *El Imparcial*, 19 March, says that “it is in the Renaissance style, presenting a total mass of 18 metres, 18.5 metres high, and 2.50 metres deep, with the break being 6 metres wide and more than 9 metres high up to the keystone” (*El Imparcial*, 19 March 1876). Finally, *La Ilustración Española y Americana*, on 30 March 1876, states that the arch measures 12 metres wide and 18.50 metres high, by two metres deep. Due to the richness of the

19 For further information on the construction of the symbolic image of Alfonso XII, see: (Fernández-Sirvent, 2015). These authors provide important documentation on the constitutional image of Alfonso XII. For his part, Fernández-Sirvent has published several works on the image and legitimisation of the reign of Alfonso XII, see: (Fernández-Sirvent, 2010, 2011a, 2011b, 2014, 2015, 2019).

20 Azanza López has analysed the symbolic culture of the 19th century. (Azanza López, 2011a, 2011b, 2002, 2011, 2013).

description offered by the *Diario de las Familias de Aviso y Noticias de Madrid*, in its edition of 20 March, we have reproduced the newspaper's description in full:

It rests on two strong abutments, in which four niches have been built to house four colossal statues representing the four Cardinal Virtues. It begins with a sturdy plinth of cushioned ashlar masonry on which 16 columns rest, supporting the cornice. The attic is finished by semicircular pediments, the two in the centre are crowned by four fames supported by the coat of arms of Spain and the royal crown, the other six are finished with ornaments in the same style and 16 candelabras separate these pediments. Of the four statues representing the cardinal virtues, the two facing the Puerta del Sol symbolise Fortitude and Justice, while those of Prudence and Temperance are on the façade facing the Puerta de Alcalá.

In the space between the niches and the collar of the capitals, four medallions surrounded by ornaments have been placed, representing the one above the Fortress, Don Alfonso III, the Great; above Justice, D. Alfonso IV, the Monk; above Prudence, D. Fernando IV, the Placed; and above Temperance, D. Alfonso VI the Brave. In the spandrels of the arch are D. Fernando and D.^a Isabel I on the facade facing the Puerta del Sol, and Felipe V and Carlos III on the opposite facade. In the space between the columns, whose fleurons are formed with fleur-de-lis, laurel wreaths have been depicted and in the squares between the columns on the sides, ornaments of the best taste, as well as on the inside of the arch and on the plinth, with the coats of arms of Castile and León surrounded by attributes. The soffit of the arch is encased with strong fleurons and the archivolt, and the spaces of the spandrels are decorated with ornamentation. The cornice, composed of architrave, frieze, and cornice, is carved and in the centre of the frieze, on each of the facades respectively, the busts of Pelayo and Recaredo are surrounded by ornamentation. The attic is raised on a plinth and in the central part of the entablature is the commemorative inscription: To King Alfonso XII, peacemaker of Spain, the ladies of the Association for the relief of the wounded and disabled of the army.

In the spaces between the pilasters placed plumb with the columns are the busts of Alfonso I, the Catholic, and Alfonso II, the Chaste, on the façade facing the Puerta del Sol; and Alfonso V, the Noble, Alfonso VIII, the Navas, on the one facing the Puerta de Alcalá; those of Alfonso IX and Alfonso XI are respectively on the sides facing the streets of Seville and Peligros, between the coats of arms of the ancient kingdoms. The circular pediment on the façade facing the Puerta del Sol has Spain between Peace and Concord on its pediment, and on the one on the opposite façade is D. Alfonso X, the Wise, between Science and Legislation, ending, as we have said, with Famas, coats of arms and crowns; the small semicircular pediments, which correspond to the space between the columns, have the figures of Alfonso XII in the centre²¹.

21 *Diario de las Familias de Avisos y Noticias de Madrid*, 20 March 1876.

Fig. 3. Jean Laurent. Arch of Calle Alcalá. 1876



Photograph. Source: San Fernando Royal Academy of Fine Arts Museum).

Before analysing the iconographic programme developed on the faces of the arch, it is necessary to contextualise, from the point of view of the symbolic values attributed to Alfonso XII, the commemorative inscription on the ensemble, which reads as follows: *To King Alfonso XII, peacemaker of Spain, the ladies of the Association for the relief of the wounded and disabled of the army.* It is worth mentioning that between 1874 and 1877 the image of the king was based on three basic pillars: a Catholic king, a constitutional king, and a soldier. With regard to the latter, Alfonso XII received military training at the British Sandhurst Academy, one of the most prestigious institutions of the time. This training gave him “sufficient authority to keep the generalate under his subordination with the clear aim of putting an end to the scourge of military pronouncements” (Fernández-Sirvent, 2014: 112). Fernández-Sirvent mentions that, after the restoration of the Monarchy and the end of the Third Carlist War, the image of the military king was complemented by other values such as charity and the capacity for conciliation. Specifically, after the victory in the Third Carlist War, the inscriptions placed on the ephemeral architectures “clearly sought the transmutation of a legitimising image of ‘soldier king’ to an even more popular and favourable one: that of ‘peacemaker of the monarchy’” (Fernández-Sirvent, 2014). The question of the idea of Alfonso XII as “peacemaker” was a recurring theme in various architectural

and decorative ephemera created to mark the end of the Third Carlist War²² and the monarch's entry into Madrid on 20 December 1876. Among the monuments that alluded to this issue, we can mention the following. The following inscription was placed in Madrid City Hall: "To H.M. King Alfonso XII the Peacemaker" (*El Imparcial*, 19 March 1876). For its part, the Civil Government mentioned "Viva el rey D. Alfonso XII" ("Long live King Alfonso XII") (*Diario de las Familias de Aviso y Noticias*, 18 March 1876). After the King's arrival at the Colegio de San Carlos, the dean, Mr. Calleja, offered the monarch a silver crown with the following inscription: "To H.M. the King, peacemaker of Spain, the Faculty of Medicine" (*Diario de las Familias de Aviso y Noticias de Madrid*, 21 March 1876). On the arch of Calle D. Pedro, an inscription was placed reading "Barrio de Don Pedro, a los Pacificadores" (*Diario de las Familias de Aviso y Noticias de Madrid*, 21 March 1876). The following inscription was placed on the house of Rafael Cabezas: "Long live the constitutional king, supreme chief of the army, peacemaker of Spain, Alfonso XII" (*Diario de las Familias de Aviso y Noticias de Madrid*, 21 March 1876). Finally, in the palace of Mr. Indo, the slogan "Alfonso XII the peacemaker" was placed (*El Imparcial*, 19 March 1876).

With regard to the iconographic programme described above, it is interesting to note Escalera Pérez's reflection on the relations that monarchs establish with those who preceded them: "it is common, as in other periods, for monarchs to compare themselves with their ancestors, assimilating their virtues and equating their heroic deeds" (Escalera Pérez, 2011). Related to this question of equating the monarch with his predecessors, it was a common resource in festivals and ephemeral decorations. Along these lines, García Bernal points out that:

The obelisk erected in Seville for the proclamation of Ferdinand VI in 1746 is a continuation of this historicist tradition, reinvented by the Bourbons on the basis of new values of administrative efficiency and civic probity. The drawing is by Pedro Tortolero and connects the life of the new hero with the ancient deeds of the Castilian kings. A similar approach can be found in the homage paid by the city of Jaén to the sixth of the Fernandos (García Bernal, 2007).

The Alcalá Street arch was configured on the basis of an iconographic programme that placed Alfonso XII²³ as the heir to the greatness of the kings who bore his name and others who had a singular transcendence in the history of the kingdoms of Spain,

22 On the question of the configuration of the Peacemaker myth in the person of Alfonso XII, Fernández-Sirvent has shown that the king, shortly before the end of the Third Carlist War, on an intermediate trip to the capital, on his way through Logroño "visited the elderly General Espartero, Duke of Victory, Prince of Vergara and former regent of the kingdom (...). The idea was to represent a kind of "passing of the baton", since it was the veteran "peacemaker" Baldomero Espartero who signed the Vergara Agreement (1839), which put an end to the first of the Carlist wars". (Fernández-Sirvent, 2010: 55).

23 Bravo Nieto makes an important reflection on the name chosen by Isabella II for her son, Alfonso XII. The symbols during this period in many other respects are not ingenious, and the very name of the queen's first son, Alfonso, is not unrelated to the Catholic queen's brother who did not reign". The idea of the "Alfonsos", although it was not fully developed, was already present in the arch which the Ladies of the Association had erected the year before on the occasion of the restoration of Alfonso XII, where an inscription was placed which read: "All the Alfonsos have been, either wise legislators or exalted captains, to our august sovereign Alfonso XII". *El Imparcial*, 15 February 1875. (Bravo Nieto, 2012: 363). The brother of Isabella the Catholic disputed the Crown against his brother Henry IV, under the name of Alfonso XII, a title that would fall to our monarch in the 19th century. Just as Alfonso the Innocent claimed to be the legitimate heir to the Crown of Castile, the 19th century Alfonso XII claimed his role as the true monarch of Spain, making the old territorial question his own.

emphasising the comparison of the old kingdoms of Spain with the new kingdoms. The iconographic programme is carefully designed so that the data presented offer a clear and precise idea and fit together, even including historical corrections to delimit the idea that is to be offered. Up to 18 kings are represented throughout the collection: Alfonso I, Alfonso I, Alfonso III, Alfonso IV, Alfonso V, Alfonso VI, Alfonso VIII, Alfonso IX, Alfonso X, Alfonso XI and Alfonso XII; Ferdinand IV; the Catholic Monarchs; Philip V and Charles III; and Pelayo and Recadero. In the development of the programme, both the kings present and those absent are of interest.

Fig. 4. Mariano de la Roca Delgado. Alfonso II el Casto. 1852. Oil on canvas



Source: Museo del Prado.

Throughout the royal programme, there is a total comparison of the kings of the ancient kingdoms of Spain with the kings of the modern kingdoms, in addition to the territorial question, which is a constant. The story begins with Recadero y Pelayo (Torre Fazio, 2012), who began the so-called Reconquista, listing all the Alfonsoes, except Alfonso VII (Martínez Plaza, 2020). These monarchs played a decisive role in the extension of Christian territory over Muslim territory. The Alfonsos link up with the Catholic Monarchs, through whom the Hispanic Monarchy arose, extending the story to Philip V of Bourbon, under whose reign the Nueva Planta Decrees were promulgated, by means of which the former kingdoms were unified.

There is not a single allusion to the kings of the Spanish house of Austria in the entire collection. The Catholic Monarchs are mentioned, and then skip directly to Philip V and Charles III of Bourbon. From the latter king, another leap is made to Alfonso XII (Reyero, 2015), omitting the rest of the monarchs of the House of Bourbon and the nineteenth-century foreigners. The reigns of Ferdinand VII and Isabella II (Bravo Nieto, 2012), (Fernández-Sirvent, 2014) were turbulent, and they were two monarchs who provoked discontent among the population. The fact that the mother had been dethroned justified her own absence.

We have mentioned above that in the enumeration of the twelve Alfonsos in the arch, Alfonso VII is omitted, who was replaced by Ferdinand IV of Castile. We believe that this “historical correction” was made to balance the data presented on the arch. Throughout the architecture we find represented three kings of Asturias (Alfonso I, II and III), four kings of León (Alfonso, IV, V, VI and IX), three kings of Castile (Fernando IV, Alfonso, VIII and XI) and one King of Castile and León, Alfonso X. Alfonso VII, who was also king of León and Castile, was replaced by Ferdinand IV, who was only king of Castile. We think that the replacement of Alfonso VII by Ferdinand IV was done so that in the iconographic programme there would only be one king of Castile and León, Alfonso X the Wise, whose image was placed in a prominent place in the arch, on the pediment facing the Puerta de Alcalá, just behind the pediment facing the Puerta del Sol, and which represented the coat of arms of Spain, once again promoting the relationship between the new and old kingdoms. Alfonso X appears between Science and Legislation, two themes that were important during the reign of Alfonso XII, who, according to the arch, resembled his medieval namesake. This idea is reinforced by the express appearance of the coats of arms of the old kingdoms, that of Castilla and León on the inside of the arch, and the coat of arms of Spain itself, located on the side facing the Puerta del Sol.

6. Conclusions

In this text we have analysed the symbolism and iconography used to decorate one of the most important architectural structures erected to mark the end of the Third Carlist War and the entry of Alfonso XII and his army into Madrid on 20 March 1876. In relation to this monument, we have two images, a photograph, and a lithograph, as well as four descriptions, one of which is very exhaustive, that was published by the *Diario de las Familias de Avisos y Noticias de Madrid*, on Monday 20th March 1876. The preserved image, in which the different decorative and iconographic elements of the arch can be seen, was taken by the photographer Jean Laurent, who has bequeathed us a multitude of images that allow us to analyse in greater detail ephemeral architectures erected at different times.

Regarding the iconographic program, we have not only been able to locate the location of the motifs and identify them, but we have also contextualised the symbolic message that was intended to be conveyed by the piece as a whole. It is an iconographic programme that connects Alfonso XII with 17 Spanish monarchs. Within the message, the territorial issue is discussed, from Pelayo, who initiated the so-called Reconquest, to the Catholic Monarchs, through whom the birth of the Hispanic Monarchy took place, up to Philip V, who created the current Kingdom of Spain, which ended with Alfonso XII, the heir to the whole tradition and who also had to face the territorial issue. It is also interesting to note the omission of all the kings of the House of Austria, and the Bourbons between Alfonso XII and Charles IV, as well as the foreign monarchs. We have also been able to note that the idea of the “twelve Alfonsos”, although not fully developed, was already announced in one of the inscriptions located in the arch that the Association itself erected on the occasion of the restoration of the king in 1875. The corpus of the historical press consulted has also enabled us to find out who the promoters of the project were, the Ladies of the Association for the Relief of the Wounded in Campaign, and who its designer was, the architect Francisco de Cubas, who designed it in its creative Italianate phase, demonstrating the full validity of this style in the author’s work during the early years of the reign of Alfonso XII. The same author was also commissioned to design the

commemorative arch that the Ladies of the Association had erected a year earlier. Thanks to the documentation kept in the Red Cross Documentation Centre, we have been able to find out the cost of the two arches erected by the Ladies' Association in 1875 and 1876, which has enabled us to compare it with the price of the arch of the municipal corporation located in Calle Mayor.

With regard to the arch of the “twelve alfonsos”, we have also been able to demonstrate the importance of the fact that it was illuminated with electric light, as it was one of the seven architectural spaces illuminated with electricity in the whole of Madrid on those special days. This has led us to demonstrate the crown's instrumentalisation of the use of gas and electricity in the configuration of the festive space.

Finally, thanks to archival documentation, we have been able to reconstruct the programme of events developed by the Municipal Council for the occasion, which has allowed us to know the budget invested in the festivities.

Author contribution:

Conceptualization, methodology, formal analysis, investigation, resources, data curation, writing - original draft preparation; writing – review and editing: Antonio Rafael Fernández-Paradas and Nuria Rodríguez-Martín.

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