Traces to remember Places to inspire

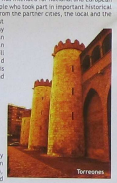
U.R.M.E. Urban Remembrance and Memory of Europe

Inspired by the itinerary followed by many of Joyce's readers and fans, U.R.M.E finally became an interesting guide and map about the good old Europe. The idea of cultural significance is stronger than one might think. Strong enough as to transform a city and to maintain an urban memory. And that precise urban memory gives the place its specific difference, its genius loci. After Joyce wrote Ulysses, Dublin was a completely rediscovered city, becoming a pilgrimage place for most of Joyce's readers - on the 16th of June every year, celebrating the Bloomsday, they follow exactly the itinerary of the famous character Leopold Bloom across Dublin and make stops at the already well known Davy Byrnes Pub on Duke Street, or at Ormond Hotel. Surely, the main purpose was to revive the atmosphere of the novel. U.R.M.E enlarged this idea of cultural revival, showing interest not only in literature, but in every form of art that constructs the cultural memory and identity of a place.

U.R.M.E involved south-Europe areas (Greece, Spain, France and Italy) and a big part of East-Europe (Romania, Hungary and Poland). Every partner city proved to be a challenge for the curious and enthusiastic researchers. Their literary itineraries were, metaphorically speaking, a stage in reconstruction every building, street, bridge, café, object was like a piece in a big puzzle scene that had to be rediscovered and valorized. Also, many documents have been read for the final papers: fragments of novels that take part in city areas, correspondence between artists, travel journals, memoirs, archives about literary trends, newspaper clippings, photographs, documentaries, movies. Discovering the literary value of a city, with a map of the literary route of the city in his hand, can be an exciting game for both the tourist and the inhabitant or that occasion. The researchers' errors were transformed into maps with urban literary routes, and into a published anthology of final essays.

The project encouraged interdisciplinary research based on creativity and cooperation in a mobility system. Surely, the multidisciplinary studies that re-created the cultural atmosphere at different moments in their historical development are only a small part of a bigger future aim: that of challenging every tourist to take interest in urban anthropology, to realize that every European city has a cultural heritage that implies a historical development.

In the end, the project involved and was intended for National and European citizens (researchers, students, people who took part in important historical movements etc): the communities from the partner cities, the locals and the national authorities. One of the most important aims of the project is to lay the grounds for a future European network of Centres for Urban Research and Creativity that will enable the continuation and extending of the co-operation on this concept in other European cities and its diffusion in the social sphere.


Torreones

Text by Monica TAKÁCS

Pasts Present

There are at least two reasons why these passages from the Civilization and its Discontents worth attention, as we are to wander the past and present culture of the marvelous city of Saragossa. Not just single buildings, but the structure of the city, and, what is more, various cultural traces of the Roman past can be found here, playing a major role in the cityscape and the self-image of the town. And on the other hand Freud stresses the correlation of building and decay, and the paradoxical interpenetration of material endurance and psychic preservation. This aspect may help us in understanding the all too complex processes of transmission between past and present. Now let's take a short walk among the representative cultural and material remains of the capital of Aragón in the hope of getting an insight into the present strategies as people of Saragossa reckon with their past.

There is no doubt that Saragossa inherited immense cultural material from the Roman past. This heritage determines not only the later artistic and literary culture, but the urban space and everyday life, too, up to the present. A question not too often raised, but not to be forgotten: how, through what habits, objects and texts, institutions and media and in what spatial or textual context are these pasts re-presented in the present cultural discourse. Let's visit the origins or at least the remains of them: of Saragossa to be able to raise the above question in a more specific context.

As the Romans entered the valley of the Ebro, decades of fight have come, till the defeat of the Celtiberian resistance. Augustus strove not only to keep the captured territories, but to increase his authority in the already tamed and pacified regions of Spain. The main aim was to settle the retired soldiers, as the emperor established Caesaraugusta on the site of the indigenous town of Salduba mentioned in the Natural History of Pliny the Elder. The date of the founding is not certain, but surely between 19 and 12 B. C. Not only the fact that this is the only Case Augustus gave his whole name to a city marks its uniqueness, but that it names the present city, too, as Saragossa is derived from Caesaraugusta.

Aljafería

Among the factories that made the assuming of Latin culture possible and that still structure the present urban space and cultural memory, one has to mention the walls, the Forum, the baths and the theater. But from a historical point of view and this is the first place means a history of economy here, the river port is of decisive importance. Being the main redistribution centre of the Ebro valley, the weight of the port and the city increased. (It is possible to actually see the remains of the harbor that the Romans built on the Ebro River in the Roman Port Museum.) A symbolic manifestation of this role is that the forum of Caesaraugusta is placed near the river instead of being located by the crossing of the main roads, where fora can usually be found.

As the Hungarian traveler tries to follow, or at least to survey, the traces of the Roman past in the present Saragossa, a parallel offers itself between Caesaraugusta and Aquincum. A Celtic settlement named Ak-ink ("Ample Water") gave place to Aquincum, as the Romans established here a military camp at the border of the province Pannonia at the end of the 1st century AD. A city gradually grew around the fortress and after a central reorganization it became the seat of Pannonia Inferior. Acquiring the status of a municipium and later one of a colony, Aquincum developed into an urban center with two amphitheaters, water conduct, central heating, thermal bath, etc. The ruins were discovered by chance by a wine-grower in 1778. Despite of the obvious similarities (the closeness of the river Ebro and Danube, the vivid public life, the structure and architecture of a typical Roman city) Aquincum for many reasons doesn't play such an active part in the cultural and everyday life of Budapest as Caesaraugusta in Saragossa.

Murallas Romanas

Until now we focused on the most durable material transmitting past to the present: the stones. But there are also other, perhaps weaker materials at least of the same importance for the cultural history, materials whose function is to archive at best verbal messages although sometimes they convey just letters. From a contemporary viewpoint one would surely mention paper (or digital display we use nowadays!), parchment, papyrus or some other soft materials suitable for verbal archives. But both as a trace of the Celtic language in the Iberian Peninsula, and as a memento of the Celtic-Latin coexistence, the Botorrita Bronze deserves attention. Discovered in the early 1970's, the first bronze tablet, considered being the most important text in the Celtic continental world, bears a Celtic writing that cannot be fully translated, but the subject seems to be a contract of land possession.

Although it may seem weird that an undecipherable inscription was the most important trace of the past, the bulk of the communication process as provocation always triggers concentrated efforts to make readable the unreadable. Lacking the ability to partake in this task, we shall attend to texts in whose case the focus of observation shifts from the object of the concrete copy to the endless process of interpretation. The clearest profile speaking to us from the Roman past of Saragossa through the numerous centuries is the one of Martial. Our knowledge of this profile is derived almost entirely from his works, and Martial often expresses nostalgia for his hometown throughout his epigrams. The city of Calatayud founded by Muslims is located near the ancient city of Augusta Bilbilis, where Martial grew up. The master of epigrams who represents the atmosphere of everyday life in ancient Rome; from the public baths to the theater, from illness to love and sexuality, exerted immense influence on the literature of the antiquity and later on as like. Just to pick two different examples; Janus Pannonius, the Hungarian humanist and poet expressing his reverence called himself "the monkey of Martial", whereas in the case of Spanish poets like Baltasar de Alcázar or Francisco de Quevedo literary history identifies notable influence of the Roman poet.

San Francisco square

II. The Christian Saragossa scene of legends

If we started at the dumb stones, to finally reach speaking texts of the Roman past, now let's go the other way around, letting the early Christian texts speak to us about the distant past: Aurelius Prudentius Clemens, the successful public man who was born in the province of Tarraconensis (probably in Caesaraugusta) in 348, is widely known for giving classical literary form to Christian doctrines. His poetry's content originated from early Christian authors, such as Tertullian and St. Ambrose, and from the Bible, while he used the old classical forms with ample skill. His most influential poetic achievements is the introduction of a completely alien form (Psychomachia, "Contest/Battle of Souls"). But for our present assignment, the Peristephanon ("Crowns of Martyrdom"), is of primary importance, in it being found poems on Spanish and Roman martyrs. This work strives for founding a Christian lyrical poetry independent of liturgical uses. In the fourth poem (Hymnus in Honorem Decem et Octo Martyrum Caesaraugustanorum), Prudentius tells the story of how St. Engratia and the "numberless saints" "gained their crowns". According to the tradition, the Roman governor Dacian, in order to select and liquidate the faithful, promised them liberty to practice their religion if they gather outside the city. As they assembled, they were put to the edge of the sword and their corpses were burned. For making impossible the veneration, the ashes were blended with those of criminals. But a rain-shower separated the ashes of the martyrs, and these (called "holy masses" or las santas masas) were placed into the crypt of the church dedicated to St. Engratia (Santa Engracia), where they are still preserved.

Teatro romano

The Basilica of Our Lady of the Pillar

As we proceeded from history to literary text and to religious legend, now let's make a further step to the material manifestation of the past and in this case, faith.

The church of St. Engratia was built (15th-16th century) on the spot where the victims of Dacian were martyred. It was destroyed in the Spanish War of Independence, only the crypt and the doorway being left; but it was rebuilt at the end of the 19th century and now it serves as a parish church. In the crypt there are the two sarcophagi from the middle of the 4th century, the wonderful "Receptio Animae" containing the "santas masas" with a continuous relief on all sides, and the "Trilogia Petrina" used recently as an altar.

Cathedral

No one will understand the Christian past present in Spain without learning the legend of St. James the Great, the patron Saint of Spain. And no one will understand the meaning of the word "Pilar" in Saragossa without learning this old miraculous story. According to the ancient tradition, St. James the Elder, son of Zebedee, preached the gospel in Spain after leaving the Holy Land. And, what is more, after his martyrdom at the hands of Herod Agrippa I, his disciples carried his body by sea to Spain, where they landed on the coast of Galicia, and took it for burial at Santiago de Compostela as summarized in the Historia Compostelana, the 12th century Spanish Gesta. Regardless of the doubts concerning the "historical" feasibility of the presence of St. James in Spain, this story grounded one of the most famous Christian pilgrimages up to the present day. But for Saragossa, another scene of legend recalls attention. The Blessed Virgin, as one can read in the Roman Breviary, appeared in flesh to St. James as he prayed by the bank of the Ebro, encouraging him to proceed to evangelizing Spain. She appeared upon a pillar and that pillar is one of the most significant symbols of Saragossa today.

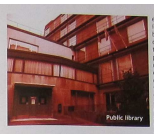
Among the countless occurrences of this symbol, let's select three, perhaps the most distinct ones. "El Pilar" is venerated not only within the present-Basilica of Our Lady of the Pilar (Nuestra Señora del Pilar), but it is believed to have originated in a chapel built by St. James himself, so the Apostle is supposed to be the founder of the church of Saragossa and so this diocese may be one of the oldest in Spain. The history and present state of the Basilica represent the meandering surviving of the Pilar-tradition and Christian faith itself, as each of the past ages left traces on its edifice.

The first small chapel was built to retain the pillar. After the Reconquest of Saragossa in the 12th century, a Romanesque style church was built that was damaged by fire some three hundred years later. The reconstruction began in the Mudéjar-Gothic style, and from 1681 on, it was rebuilt in Baroque manner, while the present edifice with the noteworthy eleven cupolas and four towers was designed in the 18th century.

The second way, as the el Pilar-tradition lives on in the present culture, is the major festival of Saragossa, the feast of Our Lady of the Pilar ("Las Fiestas del Pilar"), celebrating the first apparition of Mary to the Hispanic people on the 12th of October. The date curiously coincides with the Columbus Day ("Día de la Hispanidad"), the discovery of the New World. "El Pilar" lasts for nine days with all kinds of acts lasting from the Pregón, the opening speech, to the final fireworks over the Ebro. There are music and dance, exhibitions and bull festival all for amusement and remembering the past represented by the festival itself.

The third, some may say weird, representation of Our Lady of the Pilar we touch upon here is one of the souvenir or memorabilia trade. As one can see in Picture 9, thousands of small objects are produced and sold for tourists and faithful alike. The phenomena let itself analyzed from a number of viewpoints, from an economical one (the influence of the tourist branch on art and culture); from a technological one (the possibility of cheap mass production and its effects); from a cultural one (kitsch, copy and imitation and the side-effect on the original) etc., but regardless of these inquiries, streets are full of religious and blasphemé objects all sold as a souvenir. I've bought a dozen!

Torreón


Public library

This short account of some of the main legends, scenes and rituals of the Christian past present in the culture of Saragossa is more than incomplete. We should have mentioned at least St. Vincent and St. Valeria and taken a short walk at the La Seo Cathedral, too. If we did so, it could have been a great apropos to proceed to the third main bunch of the past we are to emphasize in Saragossa: the Mudéjar tradition.

III. The Mudéjar Saragossa

The symbiosis of techniques and architectural styles resulting from the Jewish, Muslim and Christian cultures coexisting, gave rise to the Mudéjar style in Spain in the 12th century, parallel to the changes that came with the Reconquista. Mudéjar is the name given to the Moors or Muslims, who remained in the Christian territory after the Reconquista, but were not converted to Christianity. Their skills as builders, as craftsmen, were praised, and they reinterpreted Western styles as Romanesque, Gothic or Renaissance, mixing Arab and Christian architectural styles with elaborate geometric patterns mainly using bricks and tiles as primary construction tool. Saragossa preserves outstanding examples of the Mudéjar art form such as the Castle of Aljafería, the Cathedral of La Seo and other churches. For the present day, this blending of styles and cultures gives us a special aesthetic flavor (it's worth attention that the Mudéjar style as a form is used just since the last decades of the 19th century). The fact that after the 17th century, when the last Spanish Muslims had been expelled from the peninsula, the style lived on as to the present day, displays its strength and importance.

If we are to trace the Moorish influence and its aftermath in Saragossa, we are to choose the Castle of Aljafería since on this marvelous building every layer of time, from the 9th century on, lets itself observed.

Torreón

The oldest construction of the Aljafería is called the Troubadour Tower which dates back to the end of the 9th century. (The tower gained this name from The Troubadour, this romantic drama written by Antonio García Gutiérrez that became famous worldwide as a libretto for Giuseppe Verdi's opera). The fortified palace was built during the second half of the eleventh century, under the command of al-Muqtadir, representing the cultural importance of the court (the palace was named after the son of al-Muqtadir). Thought as a peak of Moorish art, it predates the Alhambra in Granada and Alcázar in Sevilla. After the capture of Saragossa in 1118, the Aljafería became the residence of the Christian kings of the Kingdom of Aragón. From this time on, it became the main point of dissemination and influence of the Mudéjar art in Aragón. A palace was erected on the top of the Muslim structure at the end of the 15th century, combining medieval artistic inheritance with Renaissance. In the 17th century, it was fortified with immense walls and bastions and this military architectural policy went on in the 18th and 19th century. In 1987, the palace regained the active political function it had for centuries, housing the Regional Assembly of Aragón.

There remained some parts from the original palace of al-Muqtadir, e. g. the reception lounge; this is evoked as the Golden Lounge, Salón Dorado in the historical novel of the medievalist José Luis Corral Lafuente (1957-): El Salón Dorado. Some chapters of the novel take place in medieval Saragossa, and what is of special interest for us tracing the actual and imaginary presence of the past, is that the novel pictures buildings and city areas that once existed, but disappeared, being only archeologically or historically recorded (e.g. the La Blanca mosque where the Cathedral La Seo stands today).

And now we accomplished our short and truly erratic wandering through the distant pasts and their survival in the city of Saragossa. Our major stations, the Romans, the Christian and the Moorish traditions afforded us the opportunity to be able to watch our own cultural and personal position in time and space in a wider context. Without drawing an edifying conclusion, one insight may be conceived. Festivals, traditionalist artistic movements, Post-Modern museums, restaurants imitating old moths, and all kind of functional conjunctions of the past serve as transmitters between the past and present culture. Without this everyday interpenetration, the past even if properly conserved won't help inhabiting future.

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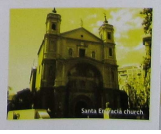
Santa Engracia church

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Urban Literary Routes in Saragossa
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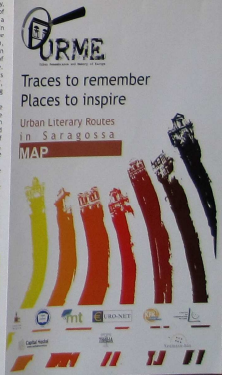

Saragossa 2007

Urban Remembrance and Memory of Europe

ROUTE 1: THE ROMAN SARAGOSSA

1. Roman walls - Cesaraugusta avenue; protected a 3 km - long perimeter and were along Echegaray y Caballero street, Coso and the perimeter and were along Echegaray y Caballero street, Coso and the Cesar Augusto avenue. The city had four gates opened in the wall, located at the end of so-called streets: at the access to the Stone Bridge, in the north; next to the church of La Magdalena, in the east; just off The north; next to the church of La Magdalena, in the east; just off The Principal Theatre, in the south and at the end of Manifestación Street in the west. The remains of the third century wall, built up of cylindrical cubes of stone blocks can be admired next to the tower of Zuda and close to the church of la Magdalena, both by the river Ebro.

2. The River Port Square - Roman texts enhance the significance of the river Ebro, both from a logistic and commercial viewpoint. In Roman times, the river could be sailed from Dertosa (Tortosa), where there was a mixed sea and river port, up to Vernia (today's Lugroño), and along its banks there was an intense commercial activity that brought about the creation of river ports in different towns. Among them, the one in Cesaraugusta was the main distribution centre in the valley for goods produced inland (wheat, iron, furs, linen, etc) and coming from the seaside (wine, salt preserved foods, ceramics, marble, jewelry, etc.).

3. The Forum - In the heart of a Roman city: it is the main meeting point and the political, administrative, financial, trading and religious centre. The usual location of the forum was at the crossing of the two main roads in the city, cardo maximus and decumanus maximus. However, this place was shifted towards the river in Cesaraugusta, joining this way the important river port facilities that the city held. The area where all these monuments were erected still plays the same roles as in Roman times: religious in the Basilica of El Pilar and the Cathedral of La Seo del Salvador (under which the ruins of the Roman temple and the main Muslim mosque have been unearthed); political and administrative in the city hall, the law courts and home office; and economic in the shopping area around it.

4. The Public Thermal Baths - The Thermal baths were located in the city centre of Cesaraugusta, in the space between the Forum and the Theatre. Only the ruins of some latrines for 20 people are preserved (still in use at the end of the 1st century A.D.). In the middle of the first century, these were demolished to build a roofed swimming-pool where people could have a swim outdoors. The swimming-pool (of which only 9.7 meters are preserved out of the estimated 15.8 meters long) has a rectangular shape. However, the only short side kept today is finished by a rounded apse.

5. The Theatre House - was undoubtedly the most monumental and popular building in Cesaraugusta. The austerity that one can still see in its walls and grounds is a faithful witness of its past grandeur, but not of the extentatious richness its governors decorated it with. Nowadays, the archaeological works have fortunately recovered material proof of this magnificently beautiful architecture, coherent, yet neat and fragmentary of sculptures that show how careful and indulgent they were with the building in its glorious times.

6. The Crypt of Santa Engracia - Prudentius, poet from the 4th century Saragossa and the first poet in Christian history, described the imperial persecutions in Hispania in his work Peristefanos or Sobre las coronas (About the Crowns), adapting the complex Latin metrics to a very different theme, that of the new rising religion. The Jerominous monastery of Santa Engracia was built in the 15th and 16th centuries on an ancient Christian Roman necropolis, where two marble sarcophagi were found (today in the crypt): the one of the Receptio Animae (Souls Welcome) and the Trilogia Petrina (Peter's Trilogy).

ROUTE 2: THE ARABIC ROUTE. ISLAMIC FOOTPRINT

1. Aljafería - was built in the 11th century, during the time of king Al-Muqtadir. It was to become the residence of the Moorish kings until the Christian conquering. Today's art historians associated it with the Alhambra palace and the mosque from Cordoba, regarding the three monuments as the most significant achievements of the Moors in Spain. The name of the palace appears for the first time in a document before 1100, of the poet Al-'Nazmi ar-Saraqusti. Does it is mentioned by Ibn Idari Tornotor. The name comes from a play of the romantic Spanish writer Antonio García Gutiérrez, published in 1836. In 1853, the play became the libretto of Verdi's opera The Troubadour, and in José Luis Garci Lafuente's novel the tower has the role of astronomic observer.

2. Zuda Tower - from a magnificent Arabic palace from the end of the 12th century, today still resists a tower with a beautiful name. Zuda. It was built on the ruins of the Roman wall with stones from the Roman period. After the Reconquista, it became a residence for Christian kings, starting with Alfonso I el Batallador and until Jaime I.

3. The Town under the Town - Today, a walk on Paises Independencia does not awake any memories from the Muslim times. Nevertheless, a landmark with bronze incrustations reminds the passer-by that under the asphalt of the street and under the nearby buildings lie the ruins of a district from the times of Arabic Saragossa.

4. The Big Mosque from Saraqusta al Balda - Hacen ben Abdallah an Sorian, a disciple of one of the people close to Mohamed, built in the 8th century the big mosque from Saragossa. It not have been one of the oldest and most important from Al-Andalusia. In October 4th, 1121 the mosque became a Christian church and was modified according to the demands of the Christian cult. Many years after, in 1999, when the Cathedral La Seo was restored, in its construction were found parts of the white mosque of the Moors who lived here in the 10th century.

Urban literary route no. 1
Urban literary route no. 2
Urban literary route no. 3
Urban literary route no. 4
PLAZA DE ESPAÑA
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