

Session : Cadastres et représentations des villes (XVIII-XIXe siècle)

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**The Ensenada Cadastre,
a documentary on the urban structure
of cities in the Castile of the Old Regime
(1749-1757)**

The *Dictionary of the Castilian Language*, known as the *Dictionary of Authorities*, published between 1726 and 1739, gives two meanings for the word “city” [“ciudad”]. The first is “Population of people together living in one place, subject to laws and government, and enjoying certain privileges and exemptions that the Crown has seen fit to grant depending on their services”. This meaning would be equivalent to what in Rome was known as *civitas*. The second meaning defines city as “the walls, towers and other buildings of which it is composed”, in other words, the material precinct where it is located and where its population lives, *urbs* in Latin. Castilian towns meeting these two definitions were Toledo, León, Seville or Burgos, which were also “heads” or capitals of kingdoms. Thus, Burgos referred to itself as *caput Castellae*, head of Castile. Other relevant towns were Salamanca, Valladolid, Granada, Cuenca or Murcia. Madrid, however, despite being the seat of the Court and capital of the Castilian crown, was not ranked as a city but as the inferior “villa”. Originally, “villa” was a term that, in Roman usage, applied to manors or country estates from which farmlands were managed, but over time it came to apply to populations which, although not ranked as cities, nevertheless enjoyed self-jurisdiction by virtue of royal grant. Thus, Madrid is known as Villa of Madrid, evolving to “Villa and Court” after King Felipe II (1556-1598) established permanent residence there in the 16th century.

In the middle of the 18th century, the lands under the Crown of Castile had 6.5 million inhabitants, congregated in 1.7 million households (formerly, “hearths”) ruled by the same number of heads of household, or family heads, representing an average of 3.8 inhabitants per household. The Castilian population of the time was spread over approximately 14,750 towns of various types (cities, villas, villages, ...) representing an average of 445 inhabitants per town. Dispersal was high and only 20 towns exceeded 15,000 inhabitants: Madrid (125,000), Seville (75,000), Murcia (55,000), Granada, Málaga, Córdoba, Cádiz, Écija, Jerez, Lorca, Cartagena, Antequera, Jaén, Valladolid, Santiago, Toledo, Puerto de

Santa María, Lucena, Badajoz and Osuna (15,200). Some historically relevant cities had smaller populations, such as Salamanca (14,500), Segovia, Burgos, Cáceres, Zamora, Toro, Mérida, Alcalá de Henares or Medina del Campo (4,000).

In 1749, in the reign of Fernando VI (1746-1759), a Decree dated October 10th set in motion a major cadastral verification of all the territories under the Crown of Castile. This verification is known as the Ensenada Cadastre, after its organiser and driving force, the Marquis of Ensenada, Zenón de Somodevilla (1702-1781), Minister of Finance (1743-1754). The Cadastre aimed to take a universal census of people and properties, from which nothing or no-one would be exempt, to know the *consistency of the lands and properties comprehended in all [his Majesty's] realms*. The Decree placed emphasis on the concept of universality, allowing no exceptions, establishing that *the estates owned by the clergy, both secular and regular, must also be examined, to include all yields and revenues without exception*. Up until then the properties of the privileged classes (aristocracy and clergy) had been excused from verification and also from a large part of taxation.

Cadastral verifications were carried out between March 1750 and August 1757, the latter the date of completion of the most complex verification, that of the Villa of Madrid. At the top of the organisation was an executive committee, the Royal Single Tax Board, consisting of eight members chosen from the top ranks of the Administration. The reference to a “single tax” stemmed from the express aim of the Cadastre to verify the properties and revenues of each subject and then proceed to establish an annual single tax on individual wealth, at the same time abolishing a huge collection of taxes known as “provincial taxes”.

The second level of the organisation was occupied by the Quartermasters, the title given to the maximum authority in each of the 22 administrative provinces comprising Castile in 1725. These senior public officials, appointed directly by the King, were mostly from the nobility or the military, and would in general prove to have an extraordinary capability for organisation and management in the years they dedicated to directing cadastral verifications in their respective provinces. Depending on the number and size of the towns under their responsibility, the Quartermasters submitted their proposals to the Royal Board for the creation of the necessary number of cadastral teams, each led by a Judge-Deputy, who was assisted by a royal scribe (notary) to publicly certify the veracity of cadastral documents. More than a thousand of these teams were formed. The province of Burgos, for example, with 1,849 towns, established 120 cadastral teams. In general, the cadastre in each town was carried out by a single team, although towns with larger populations were verified by several teams, normally one per parish. To name an example, in Granada “*for a faster, easier and clearer operation*”, the verification was split up into the 23 parishes comprising the city. The same was the case in Salamanca where, in addition to 28 parishes, several judge-deputies were assigned to verify certain associations: the Halls of Residence

of San Bartolomé, Arzobispo, Cuenca and Oviedo, Junior colleges, Royal Military Academies, the Military Orders of Alcántara, Calatrava and San Juan, Señoras de Sanctispiritu, the College de la Vega, The Royal House of San Antón, the Royal Chapel of San Marcos, convents, orphanages, the Hospitals of Our Lady of Succour and Santa María la Blanca, the chapter table of the Cathedral, and lastly, the city's own properties and privileges. In Madrid, 22 teams were assigned to the verification, to which 7 more would be added to verify housing and draw up scale plans of 557 blocks and 7,553 buildings, erected on 11,450 sites, covering a total area of 75 million square feet, a little over 700 hectares. The main group of verification teams were organised by parish (Madrid had only 13 parishes, some as large as the entire city of Salamanca), while the additional team proceeded to systematically measure and verify block by block, based on the excellent map of the capital drawn up by Texeira in 1656. These additional verifiers did not actually belong to the Ensenada Cadastre organisation, but rather to a parallel structure formed specifically to allow the Villa and Court to conduct a second verification – also cadastral in nature – aimed at obtaining information on a tax levied exclusively on houses in Madrid, known as the “Lodging Prerogative”. The result of this parallel verification is the document known as the General Survey of Madrid.

The 1749 Decree ordering the Ensenada Cadastre established precisely what had to be verified and how. As mentioned previously, the concept of universality implied application to the entire population, without exception; the same can be said of *what* came under verification: *everything* had to be verified. Pierre Vilar summed up the spirit and aims of the Ensenada Cadastre beautifully: *to verify everything of everyone*. “C’est un vieux rêve. Qui n’a désiré ‘tout savoir?’”, Vilar added. Everything, that is, individuals with their name, civil status, age, family, profession, address, ...; rustic real estate, indicating its owner, area, location, shape, quality, use, crop rotation, boundaries, ...; livestock, indicating species, age, use, grazing location, ...; active and passive mortgages or ground rents; privileges of any and all types; description and appraisal of income deriving from trade, the liberal professions and crafts; and of course, urban real estate, identified by area and street by the inspector, with the name of the owner, and of the lessee as appropriate, size (height, width and depth) in Castillian varas (1 vara = 83.3 cm.), number of floors, and the rooms on each floor; if the property included a courtyard, garden or orchard, if it featured a wine cellar or a granary, etc., these were also annotated.

One of the characteristics of the Ensenada Cadastre that makes it so extremely reliable is that verification of property as described above began with the written [property] statement signed by each head of household or those owning goods or earning an income; but the key factor is that these data were not registered in the Cadastral ledgers until they were verified – or *inspected*, to use the Cadastre's own definition – one by one. Verification of land was performed by “experts” assigned by the villages or towns

themselves, in conjunction with “royal experts” appointed by the judge-deputy. The original plan was to use professional surveyors in addition to these experts, to conduct a survey of each parcel of land. It quickly became clear that surveyors were few in number, making it impossible to measure and draw the 20 million plots registered. Consideration was also given to the excessive amount of time that this work would require, as well as its high cost. Subsequently, the King decreed that surveyors should only be used in cases showing evidence of fraud or of complaints lodged by an interested party.

Houses were also measured and described, although not surveyed. Measuring was entrusted to the “alarifes”, whose profession is described in the afore-mentioned *Dictionary of Authorities* as: “*The Master publicly recognised and authorised to inspect, appraise or direct the works pertaining to Architecture, today generally referring only to the Master Builder*”. The name originates from the Arabic *al-Arif*, ‘the inspector’. In the cities, house measurements and inspections were assigned both to master builders and architects, if the latter were available. For the tax purposes of the Cadastre, each house also had to be appraised to establish its lease value – either the real amount paid by the lessee, or an estimate when occupied by the owner or lying vacant. As an example, let us see the description of a house located in Griñón, near Madrid: “*A house on the Square, 18 varas wide and 45 deep, its interior consisting of reception hall, alcove, two rooms, two granaries, wine cellar, straw loft, porch, kitchen, stables, vats, poultry run and well. It borders on the mentioned Square and calle Convento and its rental value is 1800 reales de vellón*”. This was a large house, 682 sq.m. at ground level. Its height is not given, but it probably featured the ground floor plus two additional floors, these possibly smaller in size, based on the reference to granaries (top floor) and wine vats (possibly in a cellar). It was in fact standard to annotate the three dimensions, even for properties as tiny as the house in the small village of Cortiguera, in the province of Burgos, owned by Andrés de Huydobro: “*a house on Castellana, 8 varas high, 6 wide and 10 deep, bordering on the property of Santiago Varone on one side and on calle Real on the other. It rents for 6 reales de vellón.*”

If we consider that this information was obtained on all the houses in each and every city and village of Castile, we will begin to understand its incalculable value as a source of documentation, further enhanced by the existence of a quantitative, and occasionally a graphic panorama of the town as a whole. This panoramic (view, drawing) exists thanks to an additional Cadastral procedure performed in every town: a *Questionnaire*, containing 40 standard questions and completed by every verified town, resulting in what are known as the *General Answers* of the Ensenada Cadastre. Several questions are directly relevant in this respect, although the remainder also provide very interesting information on urban history. The direct questions we refer to are “*21. Number of Inhabitants in the Town, and their number in Manor Houses or Farms*”, and “*22. Number of Houses in the Town, of*

which how many are uninhabitable, and how many ruined: and if they pertain to an estate, explain for each one any ground duties they pay to the Owner, and the amount of these". To give an idea of the potential of these questions, let us take a look at the answers provided by the city of Granada. *"To question 21 they said that this Neighbourhood consists of thirteen thousand six hundred and fifty inhabitants, more or less, including up to three hundred, or thereabouts, in country houses, farming plains, villas, farms, and the hamlet of Fargue".* And *"to 22 they answered that in this Town there must be around 9,900 habitable houses, more or less, including the Royal Fortress of the Alambra, the towers of its wall and the castles named Vivataubín the one and Torres Bermejas the other, each with their rooms; 300 caves more or less, 20 derelict houses, including the one known as the Emperor's House in the Royal Fortress of the Alambra; and 231 houses in ruins or near to it. The owners of many of these pay some taxes to the towns Royal Treasury, and other perpetual duties to different private individuals, which they are unable to describe in reliable detail, and thus refer us to the lists of their respective owners and administrators"*.

The wealth of information provided by these two documentary sources would have achieved its *summum* if it had been accompanied by a survey map of each city and village. Unfortunately, this never materialised, for the same reasons that prevented the surveyal of rural land mentioned previously. Nevertheless, in the case of towns for which an approximately contemporaneous map exists – or even an earlier representation – the possibilities of creating a new map based on Cadastral information are enormous. This has in fact already been achieved by several investigators, such as A. Ferrer, who produced the map of Alhama (Granada), J.M. Corral of Vinuesa (Soria), or R. Herr of Las Navas de Santisteban del Puerto (Jaén).

In ending this brief overview, we should explain that Ensenada's cadastral verifications were registered using several types of documents:

- Firstly, in the *General Answers* provided by every town to the standard *Questionnaire*, featuring 40 questions. They are preserved in full in the Simancas General Archive, and represent a true photograph of the land and people in almost 15,000 towns that formed the Crown of Castile.

- Secondly, the so-called *Memorials* or statements of each head of household and holders of properties and income. These constitutes the prime source. They are extraordinarily valuable from the perspective of taxation, society and demography. Degree of preservation varies.

- Thirdly, the *Property Ledgers*, drawn up by the cadastral authorities. They contain data household-by-household and acre-by-acre of all individuals owning property in each town. This is the key document for urban and rural studies.

- Fourthly, the *Family Ledgers*, listing all inhabitants regardless of whether or not they owned property. These are essential to source the demographic aspects of urban analysis

(population size, structure by gender and by age, structure of the active population ...). These three types of document are normally on deposit in the Provincial Historical Archives.

The Ensenada Cadastre generated many other types of documentation, collected in over 80,000 volumes and files, which are impossible to describe here due to lack of space; for this same reason the present text is unannotated.¹ In conclusion, we can say that the Ensenada Cadastre is a prime source of information on urban history, in its dual perspective of *urbs* and *civitas*.

¹ Interested researchers can obtain complete information in C. CAMARERO Y I. DURÁN (dir.) (2002): *El Catastro de Ensenada, magna averiguación fiscal para el engrandecimiento de los reinos y alivio de los vasallos*. Madrid, Dirección General de Catastro, Ministerio de Hacienda (Spanish/English bilingual edition), and in the classic work of A. MATILLA TASCÓN (1947): *El Catastro de la Ensenada*. Madrid, Servicio de Estudios de la Inspección General del Ministerio de Hacienda.