

## THE ROYAL ROAD FROM SEVILLE AND CADIZ TO MADRID

*Cahn Alicia Leonor / Argentina*

Researcher at the FADU-UBA

Associate member of the ICOMOS Scientific Committee of Cultural Itineraries

---

### General specifications and aims

The Spanish Royal Intercontinental Land and Sea Route of the Carrera de Indias and Galeón de Manila continued by navigable river and land routes from Seville and Cadiz.

The network of “Royal Routes” aimed at linking the Court of Madrid to the rest of the peninsula, favouring the communication of Madrid rather than the communication among the provinces or regions. This was part of the monarchy’s political strategy over the specific economic interest of the country.<sup>1</sup> Within the road strategy, the Court included the communication with Cadiz,<sup>2</sup> and excluded the one with Toledo and Valladolid. The communication with Madrid over the provinces or the regions was privileged.

Along network of roads the economic and political interests travelled from the central authorities –through orders and information- to the regional and ultramarine ones. Thus, the communication between the Court and the trade centres like Cadiz and Seville could run smoothly.

The commerce with the American colonies would be established first from Seville and then with Cadiz, through a bridge between European goods to America and colonial goods to Europe. Seville (in the mid 16<sup>th</sup> century): distribution and connection centre between the Indies traffic and the Andalusian agriculture and the Castilian textile industry. (17<sup>th</sup> century): Seville and Cadiz would practically become “clearing houses between the Spanish empire and Europe” (Ringrose, D.), maintaining relations between these ports and supplying the fleets.

Until the 18<sup>th</sup> century the communication routes were not a key problem for the policy of the government central organs, where the resolutions and solutions were subject to the limitations of local order. The maintenance and opening of routes was made by regional workers, under the supervision of masters of corporate formation, with local and municipal economic support, and from the neighbours

---

<sup>1</sup> Ringrose, D., *The means of transport and the economic standstill of Spain (1750-1850)*, Madrid, 1972.

<sup>2</sup> The other destinations were Irún, Barcelona, Cartagena, Badajoz and La Coruña

themselves. The building with private support was accompanied by the payment of toll charges. This system continued until the first decades of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, until in the middle of the century, the Crown regarded the road system as important for its territorial strategy. That is why, in order to increase its efficiency, the Crown incorporated such road system into the realm of its jurisdiction.

In 1761 Carlos (Charles) III ordered to put the radial network of roads centred in Madrid in good condition for its use. The Postal Regulation of 1720 was adjusted to the centralised and radial criteria of the road network. One of its axes, the route Madrid-Seville-Cadiz, had public or private post stations along the itinerary. The plan consisted in arriving as soon as possible at the main centre of commercial activity with the colonies. When Seville was no longer of commercial importance, this destination was eliminated.

The Royal Road to Andalusia, which would then link definitely Seville, Cadiz with Madrid, was established during the reign of Carlos (Charles) III and still exists with slight variation in some sections.

### Old itineraries – Transport

Before the existence of the Royal Roads, communication was carried out through other routes, taking advantage of the layout of old roman wide roads, cattle trails, cart roads, post road, etc..

The wagon roads joined Madrid with important cities of the peninsula and the bridle paths (Roads Guide 1788). The cart roads went through Andújar, Córdoba and Écija. The pack roads passed through Ciudad Real (Royal City) and Seville. The post routes converging on Madrid would become the support of the road network. They covered a total of 106 leagues with 27 post stations. According to Uriol Salcedo, they would go across the cities of Andújar, Córdoba, Écija, Jerez and Port of Santa María. Three leagues from Valdepeñas would be the start of Sierra Morena and a new road.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> In which people should pay 3 *reales* per each wheel pair and 4 quarters per loose horse and 2 per person.

The Empire way consisted of the old roads of Portugal, Toledo, Cadiz, up to the Atocha square in Madrid. The cast of the Roman network remained since the Muslim intervention in the roads was confined to certain transformation and repair work. The concept of road was changed to “way”, which would be replaced by the concept of “place” and “time”. This means that the “destination” expected to reach and the “time” taken for it had acquired importance.<sup>4</sup>

The goods transport was carried out by carts and horses. Madrid was reached by land on donkeys and mules.<sup>5</sup> This section of the Guadalquivir river was done by ferry boat, from Cadiz to the Port of Santa Maria.

The progress in the usage of carts through the roads, as well as the post service on wagons and stagecoach during the 18<sup>th</sup> century<sup>6</sup> was mainly limited to the transport of passengers; however, the transport of goods continued with the traditional customs and usage until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Bibliographic background – 15th to 18th century – Changes in courses**

The Catholic Kings would establish the network of roads and the transport services, when in 1497 the boards of Justice and Council (*Justicias y Concejos*) were ordered to keep their roads in good condition so that people could travel freely along them.<sup>7</sup> References to the way chosen by King Ferdinand (Fernando) are made when he established the court of Seville in 1478. The most direct: the right border of the Guadalquivir river and through La Mancha. It was cited that when it was needed to reach Cordoba quickly, they followed the way through Toledo and Ciudad Real.

---

<sup>4</sup> The courses North-South were privileged (mainly the ones that took through the watershed of Alberche, Guadarrama, Manzanares and Jarama), especially the courses connected to the new centres of Cordoba and particularly Toledo, with a wide communication system between these two cities, and with sales or “manzil” along its path, whose toponymy can still be seen at present.

<sup>5</sup> That is the reason why the sale price of goods and merchandise was increased. From 1750 to 1850, the loading capacity would be estimated in approximately 40 arrobas for carts and 10 for horses (*The transport system in Spain 1750-1850*, Vol.I, p. 77)

<sup>6</sup> From the Middle Ages to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the local gentlemen or town-council would be in charge of the maintenance of the roads. The result would reveal the local interest and the consequent disregard for the Roman roads exterior to their domain.

<sup>7</sup> *Revised Spanish Legal Code*, Book VII, title 35.

**Fernando Colón** (1517 and 1523)<sup>8</sup> points out that most of the section from Cordoba to Seville was along the right border of the Guadalquivir and that it was gone across through different types of bridges: in Cordoba and Palma del Río, through pontoon bridges in Seville; by small boats in Almodóvar del Río, Palma del Río, Lora del Río and Tocina; and on foot, on horse or coach in Posadas and Palma.<sup>9</sup> During the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries it was necessary, in order to go from Seville to Córdoba, to go past Carmona and Écija along the N-IV, through Huentes (Andalusia Fountains) and through Guadalcázar.<sup>10</sup> Córdoba-Toledo is located to the west on the N-420, whereas between Ciudad Real and Toledo its similar to the present. Through the rivers: In the first section, the road runs parallel to the Guadalquivir river, and after a league and a half one reaches Alcolea (“that has a good bridge”), without it being necessary to cross the river, then one continues towards Adamur (nowadays, Adamúz), Madrid and Aranjuez, crossing on foot or by coach the Guadalmellato. Between Ciudad Real and “Hernand Caballero” (nowadays, Fernán Caballero), the river Guadiana can be crossed through a bridge. Near Peralvillo, the river Guadiana splits into three different branches. The plain topography of the place made it possible to build several bridges. The section Toledo to Madrid coincides with the N-401 (12 leagues of length), through Olías (2 leagues), through Cabañas (1 league), through Yuncos (2 leagues), through Yllescas (nowadays, Illescas) (1 league), through Umanijos (2 leagues), through Parla (1/2 league) and through Xetafe (nowadays, Getafe) (1 and ½ league).

**Pedro Juan Villuga** (1545)<sup>11</sup> describes the road from Toledo to Córdoba and from Toledo to Madrid. This was as a consequent of the settlement of the Court in Madrid as of 1561. The course from Toledo to Andalusia does not bear any coincidence with the current highway. It coincides up to Malagón and then it splits towards Córdoba-Seville; and through Almagro and el Viso to Granada or Málaga. In the itinerary between Ciudad Real and Córdoba, roadsides inns (*ventas*) were built, and there are references which say that some of them still exist in their original place, except that transformed. Ventas de Guadalerza or Juan de Dios (Royal Way from Toledo to Córdoba, km 127.5 of the N-401) and Venta de Darazután or Venta de Enmedio (old royal way from Toledo to Córdoba).

---

<sup>8</sup> *Geographical Description of Spain*

<sup>9</sup> Ministry of Public Works, Transport and the Environment. Little Institute of Transport and Communication Studies. *The Road of Andalusia. Historical Itineraries between the Plateau and the Guadalquivir Valley*. Madrid 1993

<sup>10</sup> Ministry of Public Works, Transport and the Environment. Little Institute of Transport and Communication Studies. (Op. cit.)

<sup>11</sup> Oldest Spanish Roads Guide

**Alonso de Meneses** (1576) adds the communication roads Madrid-Rome and Valladolid-Madrid. In the section from Toledo to Córdoba, he modifies the information about the number of *ventas*. Along the 17<sup>th</sup> century the roads adjust to the itineraries followed by the post service.

The **historical-geographical relations of the Spanish peoples** (1575-1580) confirm the course of the royal way to Andalusia through Getafe, Illescas, Yuncos, Cabañas, Olías, Toledo, Orgaz, Los Yébenes, Fernáncaballero, Caracuel, Almodóvar del Campo, the road recollecting by Ferdinand Columbus at the beginning of the century. The old road can still be perfectly followed today from the crossing of the N-401 and the stream of the Guvias and Orgaz. Occasionally, people would use the itinerary similar to N-IV crossing Sierra Morena through the Port of Muradal.<sup>12</sup>

**Ottavio Cotogno**<sup>13</sup>, whose work was translated by Pedro Ponton in 1727, confirms the two itineraries between Madrid and Andalusia. The route from Seville to Toledo “through the post” went round the Guadalquivir. The traveller’s itinerary coincided with the latter in the section Madrid-Córdoba, but from here it separates from the river to go through Guadalcazar, Écija, Fuentes de Andalucía and Carmona, course similar to but not the same as the N-IV.

**José Matías Escribano** (1758) distinguishes between the wagon roads or bridle paths, the way of crossing a river (small boat, bridge or ford of a river), places to stop for the night or to eat, including the ones of Madrid, where muleteers, calash drives and coach drivers would stop. In 1760, the author specifies the wagon road to Cádiz, where the road is shifted to the east in relation to the abovementioned, and which has the characteristics that would be defined in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. From Seville there were two ways of access, by land or partly through the navigable section of the Guadalquivir to Sanlúcar de Barrameda, and then by land up to the Pot of Santa María. Together with these wagon roads, Escribano identifies two bridle paths: the old royal way through Ciudad Real, called “shorter bridle path to Andalucía”, “which coincides in some parts with the post road”<sup>14</sup>; and another bridle path up to Ciudad Real also coinciding with the latter. In 1767 the road to Madrid and Aranjuez, the new road that connects directly with Valdemoro and the so-called “old

road” present good condition. The last section of the wheel road went through the Venta y Puente de la Alcantarilla, Las Cabezas de San Juan, the Venta de la Vizcaína, Jerez de la Frontera and Port of Santa María, where it was possible to travel to Cadiz by boat, apart from the two previous ways (1760). Together with this there was a “bridle path called de la Plata” that coincided with the former. In 1775 the strait of Sierra Morena with the new villages appears on record. Along the new road people had to pay “3 reales per each pair of wheels, 4 quarters per loose horse and 2 quarters per person”. In 1788, this is not different on the wagon road, but it is on the bridle path between Caracuel and Córdoba.

**Bernardo Espinalt y García** (1785, 1794 and 1804)<sup>15</sup> identifies the path with the course of the N-IV. However, in the itinerary of 1804, **the passage through Seville is cancelled**, and the course taken is through Mairena and Alcalá de Guadaíra. The post service diverts two leagues to go to Seville, then to Alcalá and from there to Cádiz.

### **General itineraries Madrid-Seville-Cádiz**

The route from Madrid to Seville (15<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> century): it consisted of 4 sections –Madrid, Toledo, Ciudad Real, Córdoba and Seville.

The route from Madrid to Cádiz: through Toledo, Ciudad Real, Córdoba, Seville and Jerez.

The usual way to enter Cádiz from the Pot of Santa María was by sea. The whole course covered approximately 14 days.<sup>16</sup> This was one of the first roads to be transformed into a highway. Just in 1785 it was possible to start the course of coach posts and thus reach Cádiz in four or five days.<sup>17</sup>

The main road of Andalusia started at the Venta de los Palacios to Santa Cruz and it had five stops before reaching Toledo.<sup>18</sup>

### **Process and stages**

The Royal Road from Seville, Cádiz and Madrid had to go through a central plateau of an average height of 700m in

<sup>12</sup> Relations of Ocaña\*, Tembleque, Santa Cruz de Mudela and el Viso del Marqués. Ministry of Public Works, Transport and the Environment. Little Institute of Transport and Communication Studies (Op. cit.)\* From Almodóvar del Campo to Adamúz there is a distance of approx. 125 km, marked with several *ventas* in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>13</sup> *Guide of post itineraries*.

<sup>14</sup> MPSP, p. 120

<sup>15</sup> Guide of posts and crossroads of Spain.

<sup>16</sup> Aranjuez, Tembleque, Villarta, Manzanares, Venta de las Virtudes; after Valpeñas, Santa Elena, Bailén, Villa del Río, Córdoba, Écija, Marchena, Cabezas de San Juan, Jerez de la Frontera and Cádiz.

<sup>17</sup> Before this, it took from 15 to 20 days.

<sup>18</sup> The maintenance of the road was done with the 1% surplus of the silver coming from the Indies (art.45° of the 1778 Regulations).

the northern sub plateau, and 600m in the southern one, and the Sierra Morena. The topographic characteristics presents continuous elevations and reduced height from the plains of La Mancha, and a mountain range from Andalusia. It is a landscape cut through by rivers, with an irregular topography in which the contrasts of lights and shadows and its consequent landscape richness are intensified.

From Madrid to the South, there were two ways that went round Sierra Morena. One through Extremadura<sup>19</sup> and another through Castilla la Mancha<sup>20</sup>, used in accordance with the main criteria: the speed in travelling. The latter took less time. Both ways faced the same problem: go across the watershed of the rivers Guadiana and Guadalquivir in the south half of the peninsula. The particular characteristics of both rivers have historically conditioned communication and settling. The Guadiana, owing to its wide river-bed with marshy banks and subject to the risk of swelling, determined the building of long bridges and far-away villages. On the contrary, the Guadalquivir, which offered fertility on its banks, permitted the settling of numerous villages.

This continued until 1789 approx., when the road along the natural mountain path of Despeñaperros, overcoming the biggest obstacle of crossing the Sierra Morena.

The first Spanish Roads Plan of 1761 was in agreement with the radial scheme of the Post Regulations of 1720 and it registered horse posts and relay horses<sup>21</sup>. The road of Andalusia (18<sup>th</sup> century) ,in its initial course, took into account the wagon traffic.

The Plan of New Villages of Sierra Morena (1767) gathered the performance of a joint plan of new-urbanisation projects, the systematic repair of the road of Andalusia, and the supply of infrastructure for travellers. The opening of Despeñaperros (1779-1883) consisted in linking Valdepeñas with Andújar by crossing the Sierra Morena.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century did not bring any changes of major importance since such had been carried out in the previous century. The activities on the road Madrid-Cádiz were few, focusing mainly on repair tasks, conservation of the existent and completion of sections already outlined. In 1830 the Town Hall of Cádiz was in charge of the communication section with the royal road. Upon the creation of the

Ministry of Economic Development, the communication routes were catalogued<sup>22</sup>, such criteria being modified with the passing of time. In the Memories of 1856, the outline corresponds to the one from the 18<sup>th</sup> century<sup>23</sup>, in the Memories of 1870-72 some sections were transferred to from the State to the Provincial Committees.<sup>24</sup> As from 1911 the State would assume responsibility for the roads built by it.<sup>25</sup> In 1926, once the National Circuit of Special Foundations has been settled, the definite course is carried out, which course goes past Seville, with sections classified into 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, or 3<sup>rd</sup> order.<sup>26</sup> In 1940 the classification of the roads was modified<sup>27</sup>, by specifying the type of materials to be used in order to face the damage of the Civil War. In 1950 the Modernisation Plan of Spanish Roads was passed. In its first stage, 1951-1955, it deals with those roads that are essential for their intensity of use, by widening them. Thus, the R-IV is included from Madrid to Cádiz passing through Córdoba and Seville, leaving the roads of medium and reduced traffic for second and third subsequent stages. In 1960 the General Plan of Roads was passed, which would structure the national communication roads, foreseen in 1962 and 1977. This plan, called National Basis Itinerary Network (Blue Network), included the road from Madrid to Cádiz. In 1984, the General Management of Roads drafted

<sup>22</sup> Initially, as general, transversal, provincial and local roads; in 1857 they were reclassified as: a) of public service, subdivided into other categories, and b) of private service. In 1877 they were organised according to the origin of the funds financing their building. In 1939, as national, regional or local, widening the implementation mechanisms for new partial and local projects and competence for their performance. Ministry of Public Works, Transport and the Environment. Little Institute of Transport and Communication Studies.

<sup>23</sup> 121,50 leagues, 677.,119 km, 15 tollhouses ( 8 rented, with a production of 819.127 *reales* of copper coins (*vellón*); 7 in administration, producing 513.801 *reales* of copper coins. Data supplied by the Ministry of Public Works, Transport and the Environment. Little Institute of Transport and Communication Studies(Op.cit.).

<sup>24</sup> Madrid, Aranjuez ( 49 km ); Manzanares to Venta de Cárdenas: 73 km ( Royal City ); Andújar to Córdoba:81 km ( Jaén and Córdoba ); Utrera to San Fernando: 109 km ( Seville and Cádiz ). Data supplied by Op. it.

<sup>25</sup> According to “urgent” or “necessary” categories. Ministry of Public Works, Transport and the Environment. Little Institute of Transport and Communication Studies.

<sup>26</sup> “Of 1<sup>st</sup> order -from Madrid to Carmona-, of 2<sup>nd</sup> order -between Seville and Carmona-, of 3<sup>rd</sup> order -between Seville and the Station of the Alcantarillas, km. 570-, and 1<sup>st</sup> order section from Las Alcantarillas to Cádiz”. Ministry of Public Works, Transport and the Environment. Little Institute of Transport and Communication Studies. Op. cit.

<sup>27</sup> Replaced by National, Regional and Local road, establishing ranges of communication, widths, bends, permitted speeds on each one, among other specifications.

<sup>19</sup> Towards the west following the Tajo Valley, crossing the Sierra of Guadalupe , Extremadura lands; the Sierra Morena went across it through the westernest section.

<sup>20</sup> It went across the hills of Toledo, La Mancha, and the Sierra Morena went over it through the Pots of Niefla, Muradal and Rey.

<sup>21</sup> Rodríguez de Campomanes, P. Posts Guide (1761)

a new General Plan, which was ratified in 1986. In 1984, the road becomes a highway and the double lane of Despeñaperros is concluded, thus the two ways (go and return) were made independent.<sup>28</sup> The highway N-IV was finished between 1984-1992.

### **Final words**

---

This work is in the process of development, and it is expected that in the future it will include tangible and intangible material elements of each of the towns and cities that have given substance to the itinerary.

Undoubtedly, the road Madrid-Seville- Cadiz, due to its strategic role within the Spanish Royal Intercontinental Land and Sea Route, contains extremely important material evidence that proves the existence of a continuous cultural presence and landscapes that have been subject to a changing process. The overlapping of the route system with the old roads, different types of paths, bridges, roadsides inns (*ventas*) and all the infrastructure of which tangible testimony remains, evidence the quantity and diversity of spatial and time references that are still present.

### **Resume**

The Spanish Royal Intercontinental Land and Sea Route of the Carrera de Indias and Galeón de Manila continues by navigable river and land routes from Seville and Cadiz. Of the alternative land routes leading to the interior of the peninsula, I will discuss the one specifically connecting Madrid, Seville and Cadiz. These have played key roles as centers of control, distribution and concentration of goods in commercial exchange between Spain, America and the Philippines. Among the inland distribution routes to the major cities of the peninsula, the one linking Madrid with Seville and Cadiz is particularly notable, unquestionably the product of the leading role of the capital as the most important political and administrative center of the empire, with a central location within the territory and serving as a hub for communications, among other relevant aspects. The cultural route of this inland road has different sections, which are linked to original path of the Roman roads, livestock trails, wagon roads, relay stations, etc., whose superimposition of activities has strengthened this cultural route. Within this network of roads for the transport of goods, passengers, etc., it is also of interest to identify the path of the Royal Road with its modifications, the major cities and/or supply points registered in historic topographical features and the current status of their remains.

---

<sup>28</sup> It consists of the section between Ventas de Cárdenas to Santa Elena, 17 km; two tunnels of 140 and 500 metres respectively, 2 km of structures, 665 walls of reinforced concrete, among others.

### **Bibliography**

1. Comunidad De Madrid. Conserjería De Obras Publicas, Urbanismo Y Transportes. Dirección General De Carreteras. Los caminos de la comunidad de Madrid de la antigüedad a los orígenes de la red radial. Madrid, 2000.
2. Congreso nacional, Madrid en el contexto de lo hispánico desde la época de los descubrimientos. Departamento de Historia del Arte. Facultad de Geografía e Historia. UCM. T.1.
3. De Alzola y Minondo Pablo. *Historia de las obras públicas en España*. Col. Ciencias Humanidades e ingeniería nº11. Colegio de Ingenieros de Caminos, Canales y Puertos. España, 2001.
4. Dirección General De Urbanismo. Consejería De Política Territorial. *Los planes de ordenación urbana de Madrid*. Madrid, 1990.
5. Menéndez Pidal, Gonzalo, *España en sus caminos*. Caja Madrid, Madrid. 1992
6. Ministerio De Obras Publicas, Transporte Y ,Medio Ambiente. 1º Congreso Internacional De Comunicaciones. Las comunicaciones entre Europa y América 1500-1993. Madrazo Madrazo, Santos. Las redes de transporte en la España del antiguo régimen, p.39-45. Jurado Sánchez José. La red postal de Andalucía. P.85-95.
7. Ringrose David, Madrid y la economía española 1560-1850, ciudad, corte y país en el antiguo régimen; Alianza, Madrid, 1985.
8. Uriol Salcedo José. Historia de los caminos de España. Colegio de Ingenieros de Caminos Canales y Puertos. Col. Ciencias Humanidades e Ingeniería nº 33. V.1. Madrid 1990.
9. Ministerio De Obras Públicas, Transportes Y Medio Ambiente. Instituto De Estudios Del Transporte Y Las Comunicaciones. El Camino de Andalucía. Itinerarios Históricos entre la Meseta y el Valle del Guadalquivir. Madrid 1993

## THE ROYAL ROAD FROM SEVILLE AND CADIZ TO MADRID

*Cahn Alicia Leonor / Argentina*

Researcher at the FADU-UBA

Associate member of the ICOMOS Scientific Committee of Cultural Itineraries

---

### ITINERARY FROM MADRID TO SEVILLE , 15<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> CENTURY

