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The bones of our ancestors. The end of burials in churches in the late 18th century

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Summary. In an attempt to improve the quality of life of their subjects, the monarchs of the late 18th century in many countries of Europe actively promoted the end of the burial within the churches. In most European countries, the burial in cemeteries, which should be located outside of urban areas, was promoted. In Spain, the measures for that purpose found an unusual resistance because they damaged the interests of privileged groups and confronted entrenched beliefs. [Contrib Sci 11(1):85-94 (2015)]

Introduction

The search for the remains of Miguel de Cervantes (1547–1616) in the crypt of the convent of the barefoot Trinitarians, in Madrid, throughout several months in 2015 revealed a common feature of Spanish society before the French revolution: burials in churches located in urban areas. Cemeteries established on the outskirts of a town are relatively recent, dating to the 19th century. Although the rules of the catholic church clearly prohibited burials inside churches, over the years, due to custom and tradition, churches became actual cemeteries. Wealthy people were buried in their family pantheons—located in the vaulted basements of chapels—or in the assigned places if they were members of a brotherhood or guild. Everyone else was buried in a grave somewhere be-

low the church—away from the high altar, which was the most prized location—or, in some cases, in the cemetery that surrounded the church.

The growth of large cities accelerated the problem of space in churches, commonly located in the heart of the cities. Small attached cemeteries were eventually used only by those who could not afford another kind of grave, losing their status of sacred places and, ultimately, becoming dumping grounds. In Barcelona, the “*corralet*” (little yard) of the Hospital de la Santa Creu (Hospital of the Holy Cross), located adjacent to the building which is now the Royal Academy of Medicine of Catalonia, was the common grave for hundreds of unclaimed deads. The premises, located around the Hospital, is a place nowadays of high-concentration of health-related buildings. Almost next one to each other there are: the gothic hospital

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(from early 15th century), the baroque Convalescence Home (Casa de Convalecencia, built in mid 17th century), and the neoclassic Royal School of Surgeons (late 18th century). Those magnificent buildings are now the library of Catalonia (formerly, the Hospital, the largest one), the headquarters of the Institute for Catalan Studies (formerly, the Convalescence House), and the Royal Academy of Medicine of Catalonia (formerly, the Royal School of Surgeons) (Fig. 1).

The first cemeteries were small and malodorous places. Now and then, heavy rains exposed the human remains. Besides, they were located in the middle of densely populated urban areas, where street vendors set up their stalls and children played. Sometimes, their grounds served as dance floors and meeting places. Other burial sites were in remote areas, such as the “*carneros*” (charnel ground). These were used as ossuaries but also to bury the victims of major epidemics. Burials in churches and parishes were shallow and many corpses were not buried in coffins, which until the 18th century were considered a luxury. This allowed the periodic removal of ancient remains, “*mondas*”, to make room for new burials. It is well known that in a careless—as usual—removal made in the parochial church of San Sebastián de los Reyes, near Madrid, the remains of Lope de Vega (1562–1635) disappeared. Indeed, the list of illustrious masters of arts and letters everywhere in Spain, whose remains have also disappeared, is a long one.

The removal of remains from churches was extremely unpleasant and was conducted when attendance was low and preferably in the winter. Also, during the removals, the church could not be used. The frequency and extent of these operations were subjected to regulations. However, especially inside the churches, despite rules governing the excessive movement of gravestones, the high mortality and population growth made any specific precautions useless. Thus, church grounds were frequently dug out to allow new burials, gravestones fit poorly in the earth, and the stench was often unbearable, which discouraged the faithful from attending religious services.

Burials in cemeteries, an abandoned ancient practice

By the mid 18th century, these practices were standard in all Europe, but the overcrowding of towns, which were enclosed by walls, the saturation of church burial sites, and a marked increase by town governments to improve hygiene were new. Rulers sought to improve the living conditions of their citizens

with voluntarism, characteristic of an 18th century faith in the goodness of reason and the virtue of the fight against ignorance and superstition.

The problem of insalubrious burials in churches had become obvious. In mid 18th-century Europe, the need to construct cemeteries outside urban centers, in open areas, was considered. Corpses were to be buried as had been done in the early days of the Christian era, before a biased interpretation of the protection of the martyrs above that of the deceased provoked the migration of the deceased into religious sites. What some historians have defined as cohabitation between the living and the dead [1], reached its peak during the last third of the 18th century, to do after the way backwards toward cemeteries away from the town center. This process, which altered ancestral uses, caused great controversy and involved all sectors of the population [2]. In addition to the public’s resistance to change—the issue affected deeply held religious beliefs about the salvation of the soul—it damaged the economic interests of thousands of parishes and, at least in Spain, was eventually identified with political trends that would make the 19th century a battlefield where liberals and conservatives fought.

In Spain, the measures adopted by the government were implemented slowly; it took more than 70 years from the royal decree of Carlos III (1716–1788; king of Spain between 1759 and 1788) until the opening of municipal cemeteries in all the main villages and towns. The regulations, aimed at improving public health and human welfare, encountered many difficulties as well as passive resistance and intense religious controversy. In fact, the 18th century history of cemeteries is an example of the limitations and contradictions of Spain’s age of enlightenment.

Public hygiene as a principle of urban health

Although the pathogens causing major infectious diseases would not be identified until the end of the 19th century, in the late 17th century the role of water pollution in the transmission of diseases was already recognized. Based on empirical findings, French and British scientists and physician became the first advocates of a health policy of far-reaching effects. The 18th century’s hygienism, while supported by the ancient theory of the corruption of air, was based on new methods for the observation of nature. The idea that the atmosphere and the environment determined human health was corroborated by measurements with new instruments



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Fig. 1. (A) Former Hospital of the St. Cross, built ca. 1403, currently the library of Catalonia. (B) Convalescence house, built ca. 1650, currently the Institute for Catalan Studies. (C) The Royal College of Surgery, ca. 1763, currently the Royal Academy of Medicine of Catalonia. (D) Former location of part of the “corralet”, the burial place of unclaimed corpses. (Photographs by R. Duro.)

and the development of basic sciences such as chemistry. The environmentalist vision tended, therefore, to combat environmental putrefaction. The writers and physicians who were at the forefront of this movement, including the Scottish physician John Arbuthnot (1667–1735), author of the widely disseminated treatise *An Essay Concerning the Effects of Air on Human Bodies* (1733), did not know how to cure epidemic diseases that decimated the population but he knew how to prevent them [3]. To clean up the environment became the target of rulers, as part of and together with an enlightened minority.

The prevention of epidemics was a constant concern in 18th century policies since all governments shared the theory that a strong state was a state populated by numerous and healthy individuals who would work the land, colonize other countries, and supply the armies. Cities were of par-

ticular concern, since there the conditions for the development of diseases occurred: the infection of the atmosphere. Scholars from Barcelona identified them in the 1784’s document entitled *Dictamen de la Academia Medico-Practica de la Ciudad de Barcelona dado al mui Ilustre Aiuntamiento de la misma, sobre la frecuencia de las muertes repentinas y apoplegias que en ella acontecen* (Opinion of the Academy Medical-Practical of Barcelona reported to the Most Illustrious Municipality of the city, on the frequency of sudden deaths and apoplexy that occur in it). The report stated that diseases were caused by the coexistence of humans and animals, rotting excrements, primitive outdoor open sewers, the stink of latrines, manure heaps, and, above all, urban cemeteries.

Bad odours were a feature of 18th century life. They emanated from poisonous fumes, stagnant water, decomposed



<http://vrcultura.uv.es/cultura/colecciones/ficha.asp?ID=UV000085>

Fig. 2. Portrait of Josep Climent i Avinent (1706–1781). (Main hall of the University of Valencia. Attributed to José Vergara.)

organic waste, and the effluents produced by gilders, apothecaries, and tanners in the practice of their trades. To protect themselves, pedestrians wrapped themselves in capes, a garment that later in the same century would play a great role in the Esquilache riots (March, 1766). The olfactory boundary determined a change of mindset that served to separate the world of the living from that of the dead.

Tradition and modernity: living near vs. far from the dead

Among the elite, which included learned nobles, civil officers, magistrates, professionals, priests, and members of a new middle class, there was no doubt about both the harmful

practice of burials inside churches and the need to change funeral customs. Throughout Europe, governments undertook the task of building cemeteries on the outskirts of villages and towns. In France, burials in churches were banned in 1776; in Sardinia, in 1777; in Austria, in 1783. Periodicals such as the *Mercurio histórico y político* and the *Gazeta de Madrid* gave full accounts of these measures. These two publications were instruments of the government of José Moñino y Redondo (1728–1808), the first count of Floridablanca, and they aimed to create a climate of opinion. These periodicals, read by high society, the administration and the clergy [4], highlighted the most tragic aspects of the problem: sudden deaths while opening graves and serious diseases in children attending catechism classes.

In Spain, physicians such as Francisco Bruno Fernández, who was also a priest, were convinced of the risk related to burials. Bruno Fernández authored the 1783's *Disertacion fisico-legal de los sitios, y parages, que se deven destinar para las sepulturas* (Physical-legal dissertation on the sites and places designated for burials). The mathematician Benito Bails (1730–1797) also contributed to disseminating these ideas [5]. Antonio Ponz (1725–1792), who devoted the fifth volume of his *Viage de España* (Journey around Spain) [12] to Madrid, paused in his description of the city to consider the matter of burial practices and offered hygienic and historical arguments supporting the construction of cemeteries [6].

The edict of Paris banning burials in churches raised large protests. The highest ecclesiastical hierarchy, headed by the Archbishop of Toulouse, Étienne Charles de Loménie de Brienne (1727–1794), highlighting “the dignity of the temples, the interest of the people and the glory of the church” directed a campaign against priests opposed to the edict. The measure to forbid burials in churches was approved in the royal decree of Paris of 1776. In Spain, special attention was paid to these events. Reformers were aware of the consequences of such a radical change to society’s values. Promoters of the measure continuously insisted on linking it with tradition, arguing that, the rule sought to restore the burial customs of the early christians, who had adopted the Roman custom to bury their dead outside urban areas.

A part of the Spanish high clergy agreed with the government reform plans. They sincerely believed in the need for a more authentic religiosity, connected with that of early christianity and away from formalities that, in the case of burial practices, had reached dramatic baroque excesses (huge burial mounds, multifarious funeral corteges, psalmodies). Several prelates associated with Valencia’s enlightenment

took the first steps. In 1773, the bishop of Barcelona, Josep Climent (1706–1781) (Fig. 2) acquired, at his own expense, land on the outskirts of the city, next to the beach of Mar Bella, and, in September 1775, he consecrated the first cemetery conceived as such. He justified the measure by “the horror of seeing the bones of your ancestors removed from the churches and deposited in filthy places, at risk of being walked on and even eaten by beasts” [14].

The initiative was fraught with difficulties. Climent was confronted by Ambrosio de Funes Villalpando Abarca de Bolea (1720–1780), Count of Ricla and captain general of Catalonia, and was driven out a few days later. Thus, that first cemetery, known as Climent’s cemetery, or the Mar Bella cemetery, had an ephemeral existence. Moreover, despite having been officially publicized before the release of the *real cedula* (royal decree) of 1787, an overwhelming majority of locals were reluctant to be buried far from their living loved ones.

Prominent citizens, including illustrious physician Francisco Salvá y Campillo (1751–1828), publicly expressed their desire to be buried in distant cemeteries. Climent’s Cemetery served too as the burial place of unclaimed corpses and, in autumn 1802, received the remains that had been removed from the ancient cemetery of Santa Maria del Mar, whose proximity to the royal palace threatened to disturb Carlos IV and his court during their visit to Barcelona. That cemetery languished until 1813 when, during the French occupation, was seriously damaged due to its location close to the city walls.

Several years later, the bishop Pau Sitjar (1747–1831) expanded the premises by adding neighboring lands. However, it was the epidemic of yellow fever in 1821—which resulted in 6,000 deaths—that converted Climent’s cemetery into the general cemetery of Barcelona, renamed the eastern cemetery, because at that time urban cemeteries were closed (Fig. 3).

Climent was not the only one whose initiatives preceded official ones. In 1780, confronted with a serious outbreak of malaria, the military physician Mauricio Echandi (1732–1785) requested that a cemetery be constructed in Algeciras. The bishop of Orihuela, José Tormo (1721–1790), in 1782 wrote to the count of Floridablanca, the chief minister of King Carlos III, on the inevitable need for burial sites outside the town. Fierce debates took place in both the scientific and medical environments of several cities, especially Seville, Madrid, and Barcelona. Supporters of the ending of burials in urban areas argued with those who proposed maintaining the practice, albeit with some changes, such as digging deeper graves and covering them with a layer of lime.



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Fig. 3. Eastern Cemetery of Barcelona. Angel by Federico Fabiani (1835–1914), Italian sculptor born in Alexandria. (Source: Enfo/Wikipedia Commons. Creative Commons 3.0)

The *real cedula* (royal decree) of 1787

Among academics, it is widely agreed that the end of burials inside the churches or around them (*ad sanctos*) was brought about by the Pasajes epidemic, which led to several official measures. At the end of 1780, in Pasajes de San Juan, located near the basc city of San Sebastian, a serious epidemic occurred that was attributed to the stink emanating from the many corpses buried in the church. People from that area still remembered the plague that, in the late 16th century, halved the population. King Carlos III, “moved by the fatherly love for all his subjects” [13], commissioned Floridablanca—the powerful chief minister—to request the *consejo de Castilla* (council of Castille), through its governor Pedro Rodríguez de Campomanes y Pérez (1723–1802), first count of Campomanes, to adopt a position on whether burials should be

banned in churches. Floridablanca, driven by the French experience, tried to involve in the request as many leading religious and scientific figures as possible. The council therefore requested reports from the archbishops and bishops of the kingdom as well as from major institutions [3], including the Royal Academy of History, where Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos (1744–1811) brilliantly intervened, and the Royal Academy of Medicine.

During the years between the beginning of the consultation and the publication of the royal decree of 1787, opinions, reports, and communications were released. The voluminous file of documents contains the replies of the bishops of all dioceses in the country and is an exceptional record of both the social reality of the 18th century and the attitudes of the prelates. Its content reveals, above all, the practical difficulty of undertaking a change of such magnitude. More than half of the consulted bishops openly manifested their support of the measure, but a significant minority was reluctant to ban the practice of burials in churches; a further eight out of the 55 reports were ambiguous, recognizing that although it was a undoubtedly harmful practice, the barriers to its eradication would be insurmountable.

Documentation from other countries, including the ordinance of empress Maria Theresa of Austria (1717–1780), was collected. José Nicolás de Azara (1730–1804), ambassador of Spain in Rome, close to pope Pius VI (1717–1799), wrote about the conditions of cemeteries in Rome. In addition, news about the constructions of new cemeteries around Milan, Modena, and Venice arrived and was carefully followed by king Carlos III, who before inheriting the crown of Spain had been the king of Naples and was thus deeply interested in the events in a country he knew very well. His interest in the construction of cemeteries was made obvious by the fact that, before the council reached its final conclusions and faced with the proposal to construct a cemetery in the royal site of San Ildefonso, Segovia, Carlos III himself chose the site and offered to finance the cemetery's construction. The cemetery was blessed on July 8, 1785, but like Climent's cemetery in Barcelona, it was abandoned shortly thereafter. The resistance of the population had worsened into repugnancy, an attitude that would be overcome only many years later due to the difficult circumstances in the country. Another cemetery was built in El Pardo, Madrid, but it had a similar ending.

The promulgation of the *real cedula* of the 3rd of April, 1787, the restoration of cemeteries, was the first regulation to address burials since the *Siete Partidas* (Seven-Part Code) of king Alfonso X of Castille (1221–1284). The drafting of the Carlos III's decree took six years and involved long discus-

sions. However, the council of Castille, despite the favorable opinions of the three magistrates, ruled against it. Nonetheless, the opinion of the king in favor of the change, prevailed. The decree was comprehensive but also vague in its conclusions. The reform would be implemented gradually and would start in the most populated areas. Cemeteries would be built in well-aired sites, away from houses and on the outskirts of the cities, where already existing hermitages could be used as chapels. The cost of the construction of the cemeteries would be covered by the church, with a percentage coming from the tithes and the rest, if necessary, provided by public funds. The uncertainty in the financing of the reform was one of the reasons for its failure. There were exceptions to the rules, with burial inside the church allowed for people with proof of their exceptional virtue. Moreover, as it was necessary to guarantee vested rights, burial in churches would be allowed for those who had owned a grave there before the date of the decree's promulgation. Of course, these exceptions became a convenient loophole for those who opposed the measure.

The passive resistance to burial outside the church

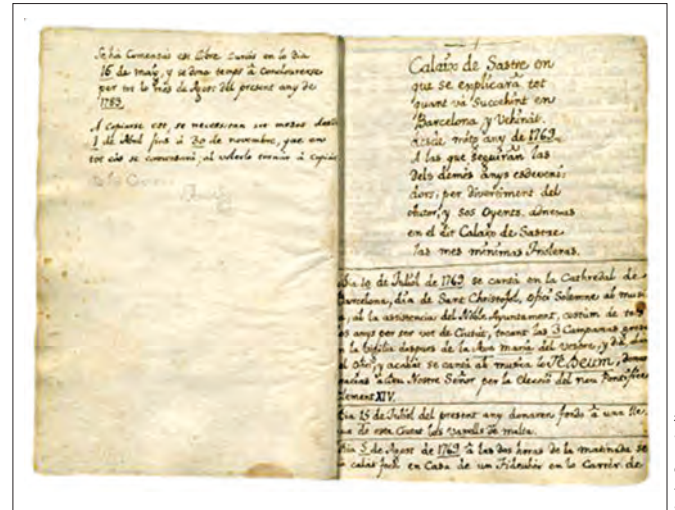
Eighteenth-century society was a sacralized one, in which death was present at all times. Because life was uncertain and its passing was fraught with dangers of all kinds, Christians were always preparing for the afterlife, which would be eternal. A good death was the goal, and those who were seriously ill preferred a good confessor over a good physician because after the confession, and as death occurred, the soul would be judged. Anything helpful in predisposing the supreme judge in favor of the deceased was, therefore, desirable, which meant a high demand for immediate intercessions and masses for the souls of those who had just died. This explains the preference for burial in churches, where daily communion was celebrated and, during the time of Carlos III, prayers for the souls in purgatory were one of the most popular devotions. Neither the granting by the Pope of a plenary indulgence for the altars of chapels in the cemeteries nor the pastoral by cardinal Lorenzana (1722–1804), the first ecclesiastical authority in the country, that those buried in cemeteries would also be resurrected in the final judgment had little effect on the population. Removing the deceased from nearby grounds was perceived as an act of profound wickedness.

In 1802, Rafael Amat de Cortada y Sentjust (1746–1819),

the fifth baron de Maldá [5] (Fig. 4), wrote on behalf of the great conservative mass. He complained about the abandonment of the dead, exiled in cemeteries, and criticized the opinions of modern physicians. He pointed to the irreligion of the times, that is, the secularization of ideas, which, together with the disappearance of graves, blurred the concept of death. Conservative arguments included the political explanation, indeed xenophobic, claiming that the ideas of the French philosophers had led to the revolutionary catastrophe and had ultimately brought about the change in funeral customs. In the ideological polarization of the 19th century, the proposal for the construction of cemeteries was a constant in all progressive governments.

Another very important point was not lost on enlightened reformers: in a class society, as was the Spanish one in the 18th century and would be until well into the 19th century, social recognition was of great value, such that burial acquired paramount importance. Inside churches and convents, the faithful could see the pantheons and chapels of the local notables. The information engraved on the stones could be appreciated by all and testified to family continuity. It has also been pointed out that a burial in the church was possible for the new rich, who while not reaching the rank of the founders and members of leading families could pay for access to eternal life as well as social prominence [10]. Their numbers rose throughout the years of economic prosperity during the reign of Carlos III. Although they could not be compared with those who were socially above them, they were able to distinguish themselves from the less well off, who were buried without distinction. In the churches, they acquired a relevance that they would never have had in the cemetery.

Within an episcopate largely docile to the will of the crown and acting almost as an agent thereof, the opinions of the clergy on the reform of church burials were far from unanimous. Most members believed in the undisputed value of the suffrages for the souls of those who were buried in the temples. The physical presence of the deceased was also a pedagogical argument of great significance for the living, who should always think of the afterlife. Moreover, the reform had serious economic consequences for the clergy, who were traditionally subject to significant imbalances in income. The construction of cemeteries by the church implied disbursements that most priests could not afford. The bishops, who saw their tithes reduced, had to pay for the cemeteries, while the priests would be devoid of direct payments for services in the church itself such as alms, masses, offerings, and responses, all of which supplemented their salaries



Arxiu Casa Ardiaca

Fig. 4. First pages of the manuscript of *Calaix de sastre*, a work by Rafael Amat de Cortada y Sentjust (1746–1819), the fifth baron de Maldá.

but which would disappear when burials were moved to cemeteries. It is not surprising therefore that the lower clergy had little interest in a change in burials that directly threatened theirs and their parishes' income.

Despite the efforts of bishops who published pastoral letters seeking to accomplish the new rules, most of the population viewed the measures with intense aversion. There were few violent reactions but the resistance was strong enough so that, during the reign of Carlos IV (1748–1819, king of Spain from 1788 to 1808), the royal order of April 1799 reiterated the ban and ordered the burial of people of all kinds in the cemeteries. To escape the banning, the interest in burial in the churches of religious communities, less dependent on governmental authority, redoubled. In imitation of the royal family itself, the upper classes and those who could afford it traditionally chose to be buried in the convents of regulars, most likely because of the lack of exemplary priests. The neglect of the authorities joined the inaction of parishioners and clergy. From the issuance of the 1787 decree until the early 19th century, not a single cemetery was constructed.

The first cemeteries

In 1800 there was an outbreak in Cadix of an until then hardly known contagious disease, yellow fever, which caused vomiting, bleeding, and other symptoms. It spread throughout Andalusia in 1801, ravaged Malaga and Alcoi in 1803, and reached Alicante in 1804. Due to the high mortality caused by yellow fever, Carlos IV again entrusted the council of Cas-



Fig. 5. Portrait of Felipe Monlau (1808–1871), impulsor of the Health Act, (*ley de sanidad*) from 28 November 1855. (Source: www.bancodeimagenesmedicina.es)

till with the immediate action to build cemeteries. The circular order of April 1804 essentially reiterated the contents of the failed decree of 1787. This time, the rules were more specific and the construction of cemeteries was assigned to officials able to build them, who were requested to enclose the cemeteries within walls and to ensure a capacity for a three-year period of functioning. The rules also defined that a section would be set aside for the graves of *parvulos* (infants) and another one for those of priests. Vanities were also considered because, as in the churches, distinctions between graves could be made. Cemeteries were built in areas that had suffered from the epidemic, although in Alcoy, one of the main phocus, there was no cemetery until 1812. In Madrid, the cemetery of Fuencarral was not immediately put into service.

Manuel Godoy (1767–1851), chief minister of Spain (1792–1797 and 1801–1808), wrote in his memoirs, published in 1838 under the title *Cuenta dada de su vida política por don Manuel de Godoy, Príncipe de la Paz; memorias críti-*

cas y apologéticas para la historia del reinado del Señor Don Carlos IV de Borbon (the English version was entitled “Memoirs of Don Manuel Godoy, Prince of the Peace”), that he had eliminated “the old error that established the reasons for misunderstood piety” [9]. But he was overly optimistic because, as would happen again and again, laws were enacted only in response to an emergency. Once the outbreak was overcome and mortality returned to normal levels, the cemeteries were abandoned and burial in churches continued. The orders were reiterated but exemptions continued, such as that of 1806, which allowed bishops and archbishops to be buried in churches, and that of 1818, establishing special cemeteries for professed religious women. Although the ennoblement of the grave was guaranteed in the common cemetery, the desire for a more distinguished destination among the dead persisted. Thus, the cemeteries for sacramental association appeared in Madrid; those cemeteries were for members of certain brotherhoods and more luxurious burials were allowed there. The first one was that of San Isidro in Madrid, in 1811, built at the other side of the Manzanares, the small river that limits the city in its north-west territory.

During the liberal triennium (1820–1823), and as would continue to happen under progressive governments, an advanced health code was prepared. It again mandated that, in the case of death from infectious diseases, burial had to be in cemeteries far from urban areas. But this effort failed and the restoration of absolutism by Fernando VII (1784–1833; king of Spain, with interruptions, between 1808 and 1833) did away with subsequent initiatives. However, the efforts of William Mark (1782–1839), British consul in Malaga, led to the authorization by Fernando VII of the first protestant cemetery in Spain, in 1831. The first person to be buried there was Robert Boyd (1805–1831), a young Englishman executed by a firing squad for his role in the conspiracy led by the army general José María Torrijos y Uriarte (1791–1831) against Fernando VII, on the 2nd of December of that year.

Cholera epidemics and the liberal regime

In the 1830s, yet another frightening disease emerged: cholera. It was carried by the troops that had invaded Poland and advanced inexorably towards southern Europe. Harbors were controlled and quarantine lines were established to confront the arrival of the disease. However, these measures did not prevent the epidemic from reaching Spain through Vigo (a large port in northwestern Spain). In 1833, coinciding



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Fig. 6. The Barcelona Montjuïc cemetery today, viewed from the sea shore. (Photo by Emily Prachthausser CC BY 2.0 via Wikimedia Commons)

with the difficult circumstances of the start of the first carlist war following the death of Fernando VII, cholera spread across the country. It was a previously unknown disease that replaced scourges such as malaria and smallpox and caused extreme panic due to its virulence. Poor diet, a lack of hygiene and safe water, and hesitation to implement measures ensuring prevention of the disease and allowing its treatment were the breeding grounds for cholera's contagiousness among the masses. After the death of Fernando VII, on the 29th September 1833, the queen regent María Cristina (1806–1878) gained the support of the Liberals to maintain the rights of her daughter Isabel II (1830–1904) and the country entered a period of modernization. The first outbreak of cholera was followed by the royal order of June 1833, implemented by mayors and city councils: In the towns and villages that had cemeteries, all the deceased were to be buried there, regardless of the cause of death. Towns and villages without cemeteries had to report their situation to the government. To solve the chronic problem of financing, the Order included the possibility of using municipal funds to construct cemeteries, although the church would remain responsible for their custody.

The liberal political system is identified with efforts to improve hygiene. One of the most prominent advocates was the spokesman and propagandist Felipe Monlau (1808–1871)

[6], one of the impulsors of the Health Act (*ley de sanidad*) from 28 November 1855 (Fig. 5). As proposed many years earlier by 18th century physicians and scientists, the aim of a health policy was to move the population away from areas where the air was full of “miasma”. Orders and regulations coincided with outbreaks of cholera and not only addressed the need for extramural burial [14]. In the interest of public health, both burials and the transfers of corpses were regulated, and corpore insepulto funerals were banned. Beginning with the war of 1808 and throughout the 19th century, the Spanish church had lost much of its manpower as well as its economic power. In addition, with increasing secularization, the administration gradually assumed competences previously performed by the church. At the beginning of the progressive biennial (1855–1857) there was a resurgence of cholera, which led to the appearance of civil cemeteries and an increase in funeral-related materials. These advances, however, were not sufficient for the needs of the population, since, as acknowledged by the Royal Order of June 1833, there were still 2,655 villages in Spain without a cemetery.

The fear of cholera was more effective than legislation and during the second half of the 19th century the country intensified its efforts to construct cemeteries, which were then managed by the municipalities. The cemetery arose as a new urban typology, reflecting the tastes and artistic forms

of their times. In contrast to the austerity and asceticism of the first cemeteries in the 19th century, with their spartan doric columns and reliefs with skulls, the empire style emphasized ornamental details such as laurel crowns and Egyptian motifs with beetles and sphinxes [11]. Since then, both historicism and modernism have prevailed in Spanish cemeteries. Even more than during burials in churches, the space available in cemeteries has enabled vanities and fantasies in stone, showing that death does not make us all equal. To prevent such displays of wealth, regulations require that the decoration of pantheons be reviewed by the ecclesiastical authority so that it does not contain elements inconsistent with christian doctrine. The concept of a cemetery has also changed, such that, following the French model, a cemetery is perceived as a garden of melancholy and a bittersweet place to remember those who have left us. In Barcelona, this model inspired the design of the extant cemetery of Montjuïc (built in 1882). This large cemetery, which occupies great part of the south-east slope of the hill (Mont-Juif, “the mountain of the Jews”), is one of the first and placid views that sea travellers have of Barcelona, when their ship is going to enter the port, in most cases without knowing what they are seeing (Fig. 6).

Cholera in Spain left a trail of 800,000 dead. The last outbreak took place in 1884. A year before, Robert Koch (1843–1910) had discovered the “*Bacillus virgula*” (currently *Vibrio cholerae*) and the disease began to be treated with the cholera vaccine and by monitoring the water supply. Yet, even in the late 19th century there were still burials in churches because either there was still no cemetery or the cemetery had been abandoned, in some places due to rural exodus.

The old aspiration of the enlightenment that gave rise to the decree of king Carlos III in 1787 had to wait almost a century before it would be fully implemented. During that time, the interests and attitudes among the privileged groups powerfully conflicted with those of the supporters of a change in the dangerous and unhealthy funerary prac-

tices. The number of laws enacted testifies to the resistance and obstacles that the initiative to discontinue the use of churches as burial sites had to overcome. They reflect the difficult transition of the Spanish society to the contemporary world. ■

Competing interests. None declared.

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