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WATERBORNE BATTLES

NAUMACHIAE AND OTHER AQUATIC SHOWS IN EARLY MODERN SPAIN

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Waterborne battles

Naumachiae and other aquatic shows in Early Modern Spain

Jesús F. Pascual Molina

In Latin, the word *naumachia* referred to both mock naval battles and the venues built for them. These performances originated in Imperial Rome, were waterborne festivities that staged historical battles on lakes, rivers and even in buildings filled with water (fig. 83). *Naumachiae* were a symbol of power, magnificence and an opportunity for remembering historical events—mainly military victories— as a kind of propaganda, and were sometimes associated with celebrating great triumphs of the emperors, as well as being an expensive form of entertainment. During the Middle Ages, the *naumachiae* almost disappeared, and there are very few references to this kind of spectacle. However the Renaissance period saw a renewal of these festivals all around Europe, not only following the Roman model but also connected with chivalric games or even theatrical performances. In fact, ‘the performance and reenactment of sea battles in ceremonial entries and festivals of the period was recurrent; indeed, famous naumachias were staged in European festivals’¹. As in other mock battles and combats such as jousts and tournaments, in those performances, the entertainment and the symbolic meaning—mainly political and religious—were more important than the combat itself.

However, these waterborne celebrations have been described as infrequent in Spain², affirming that they ‘played only a minor role in festivals on the Iberian Peninsula in Renaissance and Early Modern periods’, and that all kinds of waterborne festivals were ‘all but missing’³, as were images or references in festival books. Also, the performances on the water that included theatrical plays, concerts or aquatic rides, were more typical of the Baroque courts, and away from the warlike sense of a *naumachia*, although they could relate to it on some level.

But it is necessary to reconsider the presence of naval battles and simulations in the history of courtly and civic festivals in Spain. In fact, the combat simulations were frequent in the festive culture of the Middle Ages, and aquatic battles are a variation of them, not always mixed with the Roman tradition of the *naumachia*. But not only there were significant examples of splendid *naumachiae*. In Spain, mock naval battles—on water, or dry land, simulating aquatic combats—related to the

1 Laura Fernández González, ‘Negotiating terms: King Philip I of Portugal and the ceremonial entry of 1581 into Lisbon’, in Fernando Checa Cremades and Ead. (eds.), *Festival Culture in the World of the Spanish Habsburgs*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2015, p. 94. An interesting compilation of studies with essays on waterborne festivities, including some about Spain and American viceroyalties, in Inmaculada Rodríguez Moya (ed.), *El rey festivo. Palacios, jardines, mares y ríos como escenarios cortesanos (siglos XVI-XIX)*, Valencia, Universitat de València, 2019.

2 As different authors affirm, like: Bartolomé Bennassar, *Valladolid en el Siglo de Oro*, Valladolid, Ámbito, 1989, p. 440; Rafael Ramos Sosa, ‘Fiestas sevillanas del siglo XVI: diversiones aristocráticas y regocijos populares’, *Laboratorio de Arte*, 7, 1994, p. 46; Víctor Mínguez, Pablo González Tornel and Inmaculada Rodríguez Moya, *La fiesta barroca. El reino de Valencia (1599-1802)*, Castellón, Universitat Jaume I, coll. “Triunfos barrocos”, 2010, p. 128.

3 David Sánchez Cano, ‘Naumachiae at the Buen Retiro in Madrid’, in Margaret Shewring (ed.), *Waterborne Pageants and Festivities in the Renaissance. Essays in Honour of J. R. Mulryne* [2013], London/New York, Routledge, coll. “European Festival Studies, 1450-1700”, 2016, p. 313.

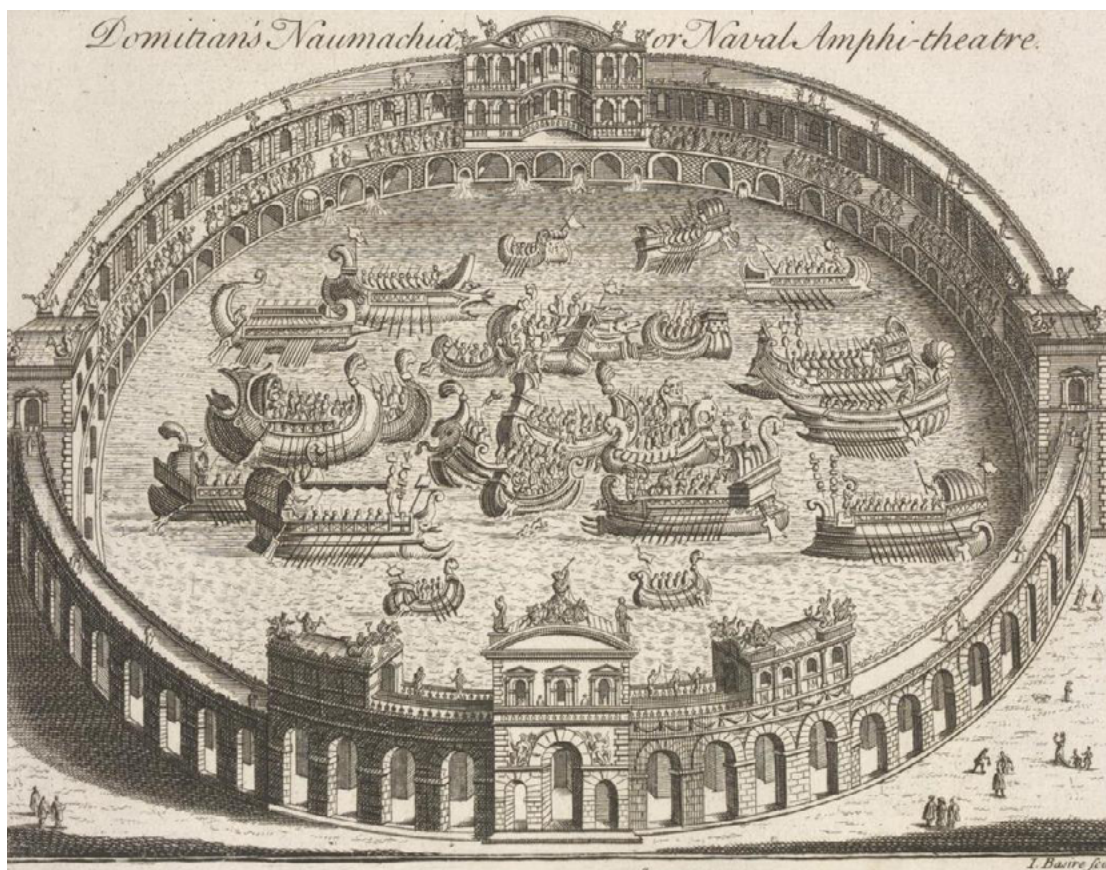


Fig. 83 : John James Basire, *Domitian's Naumachia or Naval Amphitheatre*, 18th century, engraving, 27,8 x 21,6 cm, London, Victoria and Albert Museum (Harry R. Beard Collection, given by Isobel Beard), S.211-2009

tradition of the fight against the Moors, with chivalry romances or with victories in the Mediterranean Sea, and at the same time, they were a symbol of power and grandeur. So, it is possible to talk about a recurring presence of waterborne battles in Renaissance and Baroque Spain, with its own characteristics, elements and meaning.

Waterborne chivalric performances in the sixteenth century

With the introduction of the Flemish tradition with Philip the Fair (king of Castile in 1506) and later with Charles V (who arrived in Spain in 1517), the number and magnificence of chivalric hastiludes in Spain increased. One of the most common themes in tournaments and passages of arms—especially in the second quarter of the sixteenth century—was the novel *Amadís de Gaula*, by Garci Rodríguez de Montalvo, first published in Spain in 1508.

King Philip II showed a great appreciation for this romance of chivalry. Not only was this book, along other chivalric stories among his favourite readings when he was young, despite being disregarded by his teachers⁴, but its episodes were imitated in the tournaments that took place during his youth. When Philip travelled to England in 1554 to marry Queen Mary Tudor, courtiers were delighted to visit the land that served as the setting for their readings⁵.

4 For the library of the king, cf. José Luis Gonzalo Sánchez-Molero, *La «Librería rica» de Felipe II. Estudio y catalogación*, El Escorial, Real Colegio Universitario Escorial-María Cristina, 1998. A study on the education of Prince Philip in José Luis Gonzalo Sánchez-Molero, *Felipe II. La educación de un «felicísimo príncipe» (1527-1545)*, Madrid, CSIC-Polifemo, 2013. The success and survival of *Amadís* in José Manuel Lucía Megías, 'Amadís de Gaula: un héroe para el siglo XXI', *Tirant*, 11, 2008, p. 99-118.

5 Jesús F. Pascual Molina, '«Porque vean y sepan cuánto es el poder y grandeza de nuestro Príncipe y Señor». Imagen y poder en el viaje de Felipe II a Inglaterra y su matrimonio con María Tudor', *Reales Sitios*, 197, 2013, p. 6-25.

Amadís and other novels were the sources of inspiration for the stories that served as the combats' background, as well as models for the ephemeral architectures and scenography. In Valladolid, in 1527, when Emperor Charles V ordered the celebrations for the birth of his heir, some structures were built in Saint Paul's square and the tournaments were inspired by *Amadís*⁶. Later, in 1544, the same place became the setting for remarkable combats, where the participants entered the lists with the so-called *invenciones*, chariots with allegories and different representations, with exotic animals (such as camels), and horses disguised as fantastic animals such as unicorns. The *invención* presented by Luis Cortés, son of the Marquis del Valle, was inspired by Urganda, an enchantress who was the protector of Amadís de Gaula, and her snake-shaped ship⁷. The most astonishing tournaments in which prince Philip participated during his youth were those held at the palace of Binche, organised by his aunt Mary of Hungary in 1549. These combats were a turning point in the chivalric hastiludes during the sixteenth century and marked the transformation of this sport into a theatrical performance – the *tournois à thème* as some authors call them⁸ –, where the most important idea, beyond the military and sporting aspects, was to present the ideal of the prince and his virtues, as well as a representation of the political ties of the elites⁹. Prince Philip was one of the contestants and used the name of Beltenebros, the same that Amadís used when his lover Oriana rejected him. *The Adventure of the Enchanted Sword*, with the scenography of a castle and a final prize of a sword¹⁰, was not only like some episodes of *Amadís*, but also followed a plot similar to one story of the novel *Las sergas de Esplandián*, one of its sequels, as well as other narrations from the Arthurian cycle. In the decade of 1570, there were still tournaments that took inspiration from *Amadís*, such as happened in Burgos in 1570¹¹, and in Zamora in 1573¹².

Some aquatic combats had close ties to the *Amadís* novel and other epic romances. In Valladolid in 1544, during the celebrations of the marriage of prince Philip with the princess Mary of Portugal, the surroundings of the river Pisuerga became the setting for combats, including an aquatic fight deemed unsuccessful because of the accidental sinking of a boat. In the same way, waterborne tournaments took place in Guadalajara in 1546, possibly also inspired by *Amadís*¹³.

Sometimes combats between fleets were simulated, closer to a stage play than to a real fight, continuing with the transformation of the chivalric hastiludes around the middle of the sixteenth century. In Burgos in 1570, when Queen Anna of Austria entered the city, there was a mock *naumachia*, inspired by an episode of the *Amadís de Gaula* novel¹⁴. The chronicler said that it was celebrated with: '*tan grande triunfo y apariencia que se pudieran muy bien comparar a aquellas Naumaquias o juegos navales que los emperadores Romanos en el tiempo passado celebraron, con*

6 For the tournaments celebrated in 1527, see *Id.*, *Fiesta y poder. La Corte en Valladolid (1502-1559)*, Valladolid, Universidad de Valladolid, 2013, p. 164-184.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 238-239.

8 Roy Strong, *Art and power. Renaissance festivals, 1450-1650* [1973], Woodbridge, Boydell Press, 1984, p. 50.

9 J. F. Pascual Molina, 'Magnificencia y poder en los festejos caballerescos de la primera mitad del siglo xvi', in I. Rodríguez Moya and V. Mínguez (dirs.), *Visiones de un imperio en fiesta*, Madrid, Fundación Carlos de Amberes, coll. "Serie Leo Belgicus", 2016, p. 136-142. On the idea of the heir based on the symbols taken from the chivalric Romances, see Alberto Del Río Nogueras, 'Motivos folclóricos y espectáculo caballeresco: el príncipe Felipe en las fiestas de Binche en 1549', *Revista de poética medieval*, 26, 2012, p. 285-302.

10 J. F. Pascual Molina, 'Magnificencia y poder...', art. cit., p. 134-135.

11 Pilar Varela Ledo (ed.), *Relación verdadera del recibimiento que la ciudad de Burgos hizo a la Reina doña Anna de Austria en 1570*, A Coruña, SIELAE, 2016, p. 183-187.

12 Pedro M. Cátedra García, '*Jardín de Amor*'. *Torneo de invención del siglo xvi*, Salamanca, Smyr y Mundus Libri, coll. "Publicaciones del SEMYR", 2005.

13 Braden Frieder, *Chivalry and the Perfect Prince. Tournaments, Art and Armor at the Spanish Habsburg Court*, Kirksville (Missouri), Truman State University Press, coll. "Sixteenth Century essays and studies", 2008, p. 45-47.

14 P. Varela Ledo (ed.), *Relación verdadera...*, op. cit., p. 183-187.

*gastos tan excesivos como ingeniosos*¹⁵, comparing it to the Roman ones, because of their cost and inventiveness. Later, when the queen entered Madrid, a *naumachia* was performed in a pond outside the city in the Campo de San Jerónimo¹⁶.

Naval mock battles and other aquatic entertainments in civic festivals

When examining the public festivals celebrated in Spain during the Early Modern Age, waterborne entertainments were frequent. The traditional *naumachia* was a combat between two enemy fleets. Rather than real combat, what can be found in documents is the presence of mock battles, close to a theatrical play, used as an amusement in special events like royal visits, and usually followed by gun salutes and fireworks¹⁷. Most of these battles followed the outline of the traditional Christians' and Moors' combats or the assault of a fortress from galleys and usually culminating in the burning of the structures. It was frequent that this kind of performance was accompanied by other festivities.

Tordesillas, a small city near Valladolid in whose royal palace Queen Joanna I was confined for forty-six years (1509-1555), hosted a court festival in 1548 during Prince Philip II's stay. A waterborne combat took place on the river Duero¹⁸. According to documents, the show included not only a kind of tournament—because of the chronology, it could be similar to those celebrated in the decade of 1540, based on the *Amadís*—, but also artillery shooting, shaping what seems to have been a *naumachia*, with the participation of three big boats transformed into warships and numerous smaller barges.

During his trip to Tarazona, where the courts of Aragon were summoned, King Philip II stayed in Valladolid for two months in the summer of 1592. The city council offered wonderful festivities including a *naumachia* on the river Pisuerga¹⁹. The show began with a greased pole, offering a prize of a cage full of rabbits, pigeons and ducks, for the person who reached the top. This was followed by the fight itself, wherein thirty boats with contestants dressed as warriors took part, with wooden swords and shields. A reward of ten ducats was offered for the knight who knocked down the most enemies. When the mock combat ended, there was a battle staged between the god Neptune and a marine snake, with the god Glaucus and a personification of the river Pisuerga. These figures, placed on four boats, were made of wicker, clothing, and *papier mâché*. The battle was represented by shots and fireworks. When the performance finished, the King and his courtiers left on their galleys and returned to the palace. This courtly festival was accompanied by other popular games and entertainments, including waterborne fights, and in the Plaza Mayor there was a fireworks show with a scenography of two galleys assaulting a castle²⁰.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 185.

16 On the description of the celebrations of 1570 in Madrid, see Juan López de Hoyos, *Real aparato y sumptuoso recibimiento con que Madrid (como casa y morada de su M.) recibió a la Serenissima Reyna D. Ana de Austria*, Madrid, Juan Gracían, 1572. There is a facsimile edition in Madrid, Abaco, 1976; and a critical edition in Isabel Velázquez Soriano, Consuelo Gómez López, Antonio Espigares Pinilla, and Ana Jiménez Garnica, *La relación de la entrada triunfal de Ana de Austria en Madrid de Juan López de Hoyos*, Madrid, Archivo Epigráfico de Historia, Universidad Complutense, 2007; for the *naumachia*, see p. 27-28 and 111-112.

17 For fireworks in Spain, see John E. Varey, 'Les spectacles pyrotechniques en Espagne (xvi^e-xvii^e siècles)', in Jean Jacquot and Élie Konigson (eds.), *Les Fêtes de la Renaissance III*, Paris, Éditions du CNRS, coll. "Le Chœur des Muses", 1975, p. 619-633.

18 Miguel Ángel Zalama, *Vida cotidiana y arte en el palacio de la reina Juana I en Tordesillas* [2000; second edition, corrected and augmented, 2003], Valladolid, Universidad de Valladolid, coll. "Estudios y documentos", 2007, p. 213-215.

19 Javier Castán Lanaspá, 'Fiestas que ofreció la villa de Valladolid a Felipe II en el año de 1592', *Boletín del Seminario de Estudios de Arte y Arqueología*, LXII, 1996, p. 387-394.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 393.

In Seville in 1599, there was a simulated fight on the river Guadalquivir to commemorate the visit of the Marchioness of Denia, Catalina de la Cerda, wife of the Duke of Lerma, the King's favourite²¹. The mock battle confronted sixteen galleys: ships from Sicily under the orders of Pedro de Leiva against others from Portugal led by the Marquis of Santa Cruz. A chronicle says: '*las galeras empezaron a escaramucear con otras, tirándose muchos tiros de pólvora, y a la noche hicieron una galana invención*'²². Later, in the same city in 1605, during the celebrations to commemorate the birth of Prince Philip—future Philip IV—, among other entertainments there was a reenactment of a naval battle and an assault on a castle organised by French and Flemish communities, probably merchants²³.

Uncommon during the sixteenth century, aquatic entertainments were frequent in Valladolid when the Court was present in the seventeenth century. Philip III moved the capital from Madrid to Valladolid and stayed in the city from 1601 to 1606. When the King entered the city in July 1600, one of the entertainments was a waterborne tournament on the river Pisuerga, where two teams tried to knock each other down with weapons made of wood²⁴. There were two galleys and many smaller boats, with musicians and fireworks on board. Later, during the visit of Philip IV to the city in 1660, four galleys were built that assaulted a castle placed in the middle of the river Pisuerga. The battle ended with a fireworks show²⁵. These festivities included a waterborne bullfight. That was not the last time that the city council of Valladolid organised a mock battle on the river Pisuerga: in 1679, King Charles II planned a visit to the city—in the end, the King didn't make the trip, but the celebrations still took place—, and different festivities were prepared including the assault on a castle by four galleys. In an apotheosis, both castle and ships were consumed by flames in a display of fireworks²⁶. The long-awaited visit of the King took place in 1690 when he chose the city as the setting of his second wedding. Among other entertainments, the assault of a castle on the river was performed again²⁷.

In Barcelona in 1658, to celebrate the birth of Prince Philip Prospero (who was born in 1657 and died in 1661)²⁸, there were festival lights, fireworks and other entertainments including '*simulacros navales*'²⁹, which refers to naval mock battles.

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- 21 Nicolás Tenorio y Cerero, *Noticia de las fiestas en honor de la marquesa de Denia hechas por la ciudad de Sevilla en el año de 1599*, Sevilla, Imprenta C. de Torres, 1896; José Martín Jiménez, 'Visita de la marquesa de Denia a Sevilla', *Archivo hispalense*, 14, 1945, p. 373-377; R. Ramos Sosa, 'Fiestas sevillanas...', art. cit., p. 46. This author affirms that this is the only known example of this entertainment in the city.
 - 22 Francisco de Ariño, *Sucesos de Sevilla de 1592 a 1604*, Sevilla, Imprenta de Rafael Tarascó y Lassa, coll. "Sociedad de bibiofilos andaluces", 1873, p. 112.
 - 23 Jenaro Alenda y Mira, *Relaciones de solemnidades y fiestas públicas de España*, Madrid, Sucesores de Rivadeneyra, 1903, t. I, p. 142-143.
 - 24 Antonio Cabeza Rodríguez, Margarita Torremocha Hernández and Ricardo Martín De La Guardia, 'Fiesta y política en Valladolid. La entrada de Felipe III en el año 1600', *Investigaciones históricas. Época moderna y contemporánea*, 16, 1996, p. 81.
 - 25 María Antonia Fernández del Hoyo, 'Fiestas en Valladolid a la venida de Felipe IV en 1660', *Boletín de Seminario de Estudios de Arte y Arqueología*, LIX, 1993, p. 382.
 - 26 Concepción Ferrero Maeso, 'Visita frustrada de Carlos II a Valladolid en 1679', in *Valladolid. Historia de una ciudad. Congreso internacional*, t. I, *La ciudad y el Arte. Valladolid Villa (Época Medieval)*, Valladolid, Ayuntamiento de Valladolid, coll. "Colección I+A", 1999, p. 91-92.
 - 27 Lourdes Amigo Vázquez, 'Fiesta y poder. Los casamientos de Carlos II y Mariana de Neoburgo en Valladolid (1690)', in María José Pérez Álvarez and Alfredo Martín García (eds.), *Campo y campesinos en la España Moderna. Culturas políticas en el mundo hispano*, León, Fundación Española de Historia Moderna, 2012, p. 1837-1850.
 - 28 For the celebrations to commemorate the birth of the prince, see I. Rodríguez Moya, 'La esperanza de la monarquía. Fiestas en el imperio hispánico por Felipe Próspero', in *Ead. and V. Mínguez (dirs.), Visiones de un imperio en fiesta*, op. cit., p. 93-119.
 - 29 J. Alenda y Mira, *Relaciones...*, op. cit., p. 341.

Apart from these examples, closer to the chivalric and courtly entertainments, but also with a theatrical component, there was a tradition of other aquatic performances with a more popular character, such as fishing competitions, rowing races, boat in which participants tried to pull their opponents into the water, or *cucañas* or greased poles. One of the most singular performances was bullfighting on the rivers, as happened in Valladolid in 1660³⁰, in 1679³¹ and in 1690³². The show began with the *despeño* (throwing over a cliff) of bulls from the palace to the river through a ramp. Later, the bullfighters attacked the animals from rowboats, driving them to the riverbank to continue the fight there³³. This entertainment, usually defined as a '*bizarría*', was repeated in different cities during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, such as Lerma, Cuenca, Madrid, Zamora, and Pamplona³⁴.

Aquatic combats as a political allegory

As in the Roman world, *naumachiae* had a political meaning, serving as an evocation of the sovereign's victories and as a symbol of his power. They 'were dynamic visual dramatizations to reinforce the might of the ruling powers and the central part that the war played in early modern society'³⁵. In addition, in Spain, these performances acquired a particular meaning.

The Iberian Peninsula had a long history of confrontation between Christian Kingdoms and Islamic forces. War ended in 1492, but the memory of the conflict remained in different ways, such as festivities and celebrations, where the combats of Christians and Moors were a central theme. These performances took different forms, including *naumachiae*³⁶. Even today, the tradition of mock battles continues, having evolved into the *Moros y Cristianos*—Christians and Moors—festivals, which are specially prevalent in the Levant region.

There are little data on these entertainments in Spain during the Middle Ages. It's known that a representation of a battle between galleys took place in Valencia in 1274, when the King Alphonse X of Castile visited the city³⁷. A similar event was planned in 1373, on the entry of the Duke of Gerona,

30 M. A. Fernández del Hoyo, 'Fiestas en Valladolid...', art. cit., p. 381-382.

31 C. Ferrero Maeso, 'Visita frustrada...', art. cit., p. 91.

32 L. Amigo Vázquez, 'Fiesta y poder...', art. cit., p. 1846.

33 In one of the copies of the *Historia de la muy noble y muy leal ciudad de Valladolid* by Juan Antolínez de Burgos, there is a drawing by Ventura Pérez that shows this entertainment. About the drawings and the manuscript, see Juan José Martín González, 'Dibujos de monumentos antiguos vallisoletanos', *Boletín del Seminario de Estudios de Arte y Arqueología*, XIX, 1952-1953, p. 23-47, and more recently, Eloísa Wattenberg García, 'Los dibujos de Ventura Pérez en la *Historia de Valladolid* de Antolínez de Burgos', in *Ead., Valladolid 1738*, exh. cat., Valladolid, Ayuntamiento de Valladolid, 2016, p. 25-57. The drawing on p. 72.

34 On events in Lerma, see Juan Albarellos, *Efemérides Burgalesas*, Burgos, Imprenta del Diario de Burgos, 1919, p. 207-208. About the festivities in Pamplona, see Ignacio Baleztena, 'Del viejo Pamplona. De las fiestas con que la ciudad de Pamplona solemnizó el feliz nacimiento del serenísimo príncipe de Asturias don Luis de Borbón-Anjou', *Príncipe de Viana*, 17, 1944, p. 437-439. A source for a relation of different *despeños* is José María de Cossío, *Los toros. Tratado técnico e histórico*, Madrid, Espasa-Calpe, 1943, I, p. 761-763.

35 L. Fernández González, 'Negotiating terms...', art. cit., p. 94.

36 On the topic of the fights of Christians and Moors in the context of festivities, see María Soledad Carrasco Urgoiti, 'Aspectos folclóricos y literarios de la fiesta de moros y cristianos en España', *PMLA*, vol. 78, n° 5, 1963, p. 476-491, and *Ead.*, 'La fiesta de moros y cristianos y la cuestión morisca en la España de los Austrias', in Joaquín Álvarez Barrientos, and Antonio Cea Gutiérrez (coords.), *Actas de las jornadas sobre teatro popular en España*, Madrid, CSIC, coll. "Biblioteca de dialectología y tradiciones populares", 1987, p. 65-84.

37 Ramon Muntaner, *Les quatre grans cròniques: crònica de Ramon Muntaner*, ed. Ferrán Soldevilla, Jordi Bruguera, Maria Teresa Ferrer I Mallol, Barcelona, Institut d'Estudis Catalans, coll. "Memories de la Seccio Historico-Arqueologica", 2011, p. 58-59.

when a naval battle was to be staged on the river. However, in the end, it was not performed³⁸. This suggests that such waterborne spectacles were known in Spain, often linked to episodes of the *Reconquista*, or attacks by Barbary pirates.

When the 'Turkish Menace' threatened Christian Europe, these representations of real battles persisted. In 1533, during the festivities celebrating Charles V's arrival in Barcelona, the city of Toledo staged grand celebrations³⁹. Among them was a battle in Zocodover Square, featuring a castle defended by Turks and attacked by Christian troops. On another day, the gardeners' guild performed a mock battle on the river, with half of the participants were dressed as Moors and the

other half as Christians, accompanied by musicians and firing artillery. The 'Moors' were ultimately defeated and fled, taking refuge in the *Peña del rey moro* (the Rock of the Moor King), a location on the riverbank opposite the city⁴⁰.

The ongoing conflict against the Moors and Turks in the Mediterranean during the reign of Philip II imbued the *naumachia* with a renewed symbolism of power, often serving as a metaphor for victories, particularly the battle of Lepanto⁴¹. In 1570, when Anna of Austria entered Madrid, an entertainment staged on a pond outside the city depicted a Christian fleet storming a castle held by Moors and Turks. This spectacle '*Representava una muy formada fortaleza y en la artillería y disposición parecía a Argel*' [represented a well-formed fortress that, in terms of its artillery and structure, resembled Algiers], symbolising the King's power in the Mediterranean and the war against the infidels⁴². In 1571, the Plaza Mayor of Castellón hosted a reenactment of the Battle of Lepanto, featuring chariots decorated as galleys (fig. 84)⁴³. A similar event took place in Valencia in 1585, when Philip II visited the city. The decorations of the royal entry referred the city's history and the King's victories over the Moors. A theatrical representation of Lepanto was staged in front of the church of Saint Mary Magdalene⁴⁴, where a set



Fig. 84 : Chariots as ornamented ships, engraving, from Tomás Serrano, *Fiestas seculares...*, 1762, part 3 part, book 2, p. 345, Orihuela, Biblioteca Pública del Estado en Orihuela (© Madrid, Ministerio de Cultura, Subdirección General de Coordinación Bibliotecaria)

38 Salvador Carreres Zacarés, *Ensayo de una bibliografía de libros de fiestas celebradas en Valencia y su antiguo Reino*, Valencia, Hijo de F. Vives Mora, 1925, vol. 1, p. 37.

39 As described in a letter published in J. Alenda y Mira, *Relaciones...*, *op. cit.*, p. 31-32.

40 *Ibid.*, p. 32.

41 On celebrations of the victory at Lepanto and its representations in Europe, see Marie-Claude Canova-Green, 'Lepanto Revisited: Water fights and the Turkish Threat in Early Modern Europe (1571-1656)', in Margaret Shewring (éd.), *Waterborne Pageants and Festivities in the Renaissance. Essays in Honour of J. R. Mulryne*, Farnham/Burlington, Ashgate, coll. « European Festival Studies : 1450-1700 », 2013, p. 177-198. A great study on the battle and its artistic and cultural impact in Víctor Mínguez, *Infierno y gloria en el mar. Los Habsburgo y el imaginario artístico de Lepanto (1430-1700)*, Castellón, Universitat Jaume I, 2018.

42 See *supra*, note 16.

43 Beatriz Lores Mestre, *Fiesta y arte efímero en el Castellón del Setecientos*, Castellón, Universitat Jaume I/Diputación de Castellón, coll. "Biblioteca de les Aules", 1999, p. 148.

44 Enrique Cock, *Relación del viaje hecho por Felipe II en 1585, a Zaragoza, Barcelona y Valencia*, ed. Alfredo Morel Fatio

designed with galleys recreated the battle so realistically that a contemporary chronicle stated: '*que verdaderament parexia que corrien per la mer*' [it truly seemed as if they were sailing the sea]⁴⁵. Additionally, the conquest of the Peñón de Vélez de la Gomera was also represented, featuring a model of the rock and six galleys operated as marionettes⁴⁶.

On the same voyage, the King went to Tortosa. Numerous rowboats took part in the reception, as the King himself entered the city by boat, making the river one of the central settings of the festivities⁴⁷. At the end of December 1585, a mock battle was staged on the river Ebro: while the Moors defended a tower constructed on the riverbank, the Christians attacked it by land and water, using artillery. By the end of the spectacle, the Christians emerged victorious, the castle was burnt and the Moors were captured and presented to the King in front of the palace⁴⁸. The city's past, having been captured from the Moors during the Reconquista, clearly influenced the performances.

During the reign of Philip III, the conflict against the Moors persisted, and so too did its representation. In 1599, during the king's visit to Saragossa, two aquatic entertainments were staged⁴⁹. First,

*ubo una justa de varcos en el río que fue de ver; y en una isleta que ay en él se puso una compañía de soldados, y los de las varcas que representaron moros pelearon con los otros y anduvieron un rato desta manera", and later "a la noche uvo comedia en palacio y en acabando se pusieron en la dicha isleta una compañía de soldados christianos a defenderla, y vinieron por el río seis varcas con soldados moros y con muchas luminarias en las gavias y entenas y acometieron la isla, y los de dentro se defendieron muy bien, aunque al cabo rendieron la isla*⁵⁰.

A key figure in these performances was Francisco de Sandoval y Rojas, who became the Marquis of Denia in 1574 and later the Duke of Lerma in 1599. Sandoval added new significance to waterborne spectacles. As viceroy of Valencia between 1595 and 1597, he received the King in his city of Denia in 1599 and organised a *justa naval* along the coast⁵¹. In this spectacle, a castle held by Moors was assaulted by Christians from both land and sea. The Moors lost the fortress and fled by ship⁵². The city council of Alicante collaborated in organising the event, as it was common for local festivities to include mock assaults of the city's castle from the sea, often involving the guilds of

and Antonio Rodríguez Villa, Madrid, Aribau y Compañía, 1876, p. 231.

45 Salvador Carreres Zacares, *Libre de memories de diversos sucesos e fets memorables e de coses senyalades de la ciutat e regne de Valencia (1308-1644)*, Valencia, Acció Bibliogràfica Valenciana, 1935, p. 973. A new modern edition of the *Llibre de memories* in Vicent Josep Escartí and Josep Ribera Ribera, *Llibre de memories de la Ciutat de València (1308-1644)*, Valencia, Ayuntamiento de Valencia, 2019.

46 E. Cock, *Relación...*, *op. cit.*, p. 230.

47 *Ibid.*, p. 184-189.

48 J. Alenda y Mira, *Relaciones...*, *op. cit.*, p. 32. E. Cock, *Relación...*, *op. cit.*, p. 186-187.

49 Written sources in J. Alenda y Mira, *Relaciones...*, *op. cit.*, p. 128-129.

50 'There was a joust of boats on the river that was worth seeing; and on an islet in the river, a company of soldiers was stationed, and those in the boats who represented Moors fought with the others and continued in this manner for a while'. Later, 'at night, there was a comedy in the palace, and when it ended, a company of Christian soldiers was stationed on the islet to defend it, and six boats with Moorish soldiers and many lights on the masts and yards came up the river and attacked the islet, and those inside defended it very well, although in the end, they surrendered the islet' See Teresa Ferrer Valls, *Nobleza y espectáculo teatral (1535-1622). Estudio y documentos*, Valencia, UNED/ Universidad de Valencia/Universidad de Sevilla, coll. "Coleccio Oberta. Textos teatrales hispanicos del siglo XVI", 1993, p. 210-211.

51 Documental sources for the festivities of Denia in J. Alenda y Mira, *Relaciones...*, *op. cit.*, p. 120-121.

52 T. Ferrer Valls, 'El duque de Lerma y la corte virreinal en Valencia: fiestas, literatura y promoción social. *El Prado de Valencia* de Gaspar Mercader', *Quaderns de Filologia. Estudis Literaris*, 5, 2000, p. 266. Lope de Vega, *Fiestas de Denia*, ed. Maria Grazia Profeti and historical notes by Bernardo José García García, Florence, Alinea, coll. "Secoli d'oro", 2004, p. 168-169.



Fig. 85 : Louis Meunier, *Veu du grand estang du Retire*, engraving, c. 1665-1668, from *Différentes vues des Jardins et Palais de Plaisance des rois d'Espagne*, Paris, Bonnard, Paris, BnF, Arsenal, EST-1315

fishermen and sailors⁵³. The entertainments in Denia served as more than a tribute to the King and a celebration of his victories and power; they were also a strategic means for Sandoval to advance at court and glorify his family's status. Later, in his city of Lerma, Sandoval—a great patron of the theatre—organised various performances for the amusement of the court, using them to keep the King's favour.

What took place during the reign of Philip IV was different. The most significant and well-documented example, and perhaps the only true *naumachia* as an artificial structure designed for naval battles, was the *estanque grande*—a large artificial lake—of the the Buen Retiro Palace in Madrid (fig. 85)⁵⁴. This site hosted the grandest *naumachiae* in Spain during the seventeenth century, along with other aquatic celebrations⁵⁵. The structure was built following a Roman model in an attempt to imitate antiquity. This connection to Roman tradition, and the implicit comparison of the King with the Caesars, was echoed in a series of paintings that adorned the palace, depicting episodes from Roman history. Giovanni Lanfranco painted at least six paintings for the Buen Retiro as part of a larger series on Roman history⁵⁶. One of these paintings portrays a *naumachia*, directly linked to those staged on the palace's lake. The series reinforced the King's association with Rome and his admiration for it, while the celebrations themselves linked his reign to the grandeur of ancient Rome.

As a point of interest, the *estanque grande* of the Buen Retiro, still allows the people of Madrid to sail on this small 'sea' today. The lake and gardens remain private for the monarchy until the second half of the nineteenth century. Although they had been gradually opened to the public since the reign of Charles III, who was the first monarch to grant *madrileños* access to the gardens, Queen Isabel II ultimately permitted the public to sail on the lake.

53 Francisco Figueras Pacheco, 'Alicante en las fiestas reales de Denia de 1599', *Saitabi. Revista de la Facultad de Geografía e Historia*, 19, 1946, p. 31-35.

54 Jonathan Brown and John H. Elliott, *A Palace for a King. The Buen Retiro and the Court of Philip IV* [1980], New Haven/London, Yale University Press, 2003.

55 D. Sánchez Cano, 'Naumachiae...', art. cit., p. 313-328.

56 Andrés Úbeda de Los Cobos, *El Palacio del Rey Planeta. Felipe IV y el Buen Retiro*, exh. cat., Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado, 2005, p. 169-170 and 206-209.

This is the only case in which a *naumachia* can be considered a physical structure. However, there are other sites whose construction can be linked to mock battles and aquatic entertainments. The estate *El Bosque*, a property of the Zúñiga family in Béjar (Salamanca)⁵⁷, contains a sixteenth-century pond that has been imagined as a venue for *naumachiae*⁵⁸. There is no evidence to confirm this use—although the pond was used for navigation—and it is generally believed to have served as a fish hatchery and a breeding ground for birds, as well as water reservoir for irrigation and fountains⁵⁹. These have been associated with the villa of Diego de Ulloa in San Miguel de Grox, near Toro (Zamora), which featured a pond surrounded by columns, an harbour, and a fountain⁶⁰. Likewise, Fernando Álvarez de Toledo, Duke of Alba (who died in 1582), transformed an estate in Abadía (Cáceres), on the banks of the river Ambroz, into a villa with splendid gardens filled with fountains, sculptures and references to classical and mythological themes⁶¹. It has been speculated that the hydraulic system at Abadía may have been used for *naumachiae*, but there is no evidence to support this claim, and it is more likely to have been designed for water displays and fountains. These artificial lakes may not have served as settings for *naumachiae*, but they nonetheless exemplify how water and its control functioned as potent symbols of power.

In the eighteenth century, further examples of waterborne mock battles can be found. Occasional *naumachiae* were staged as demonstrations of magnificence, while the traditional theme of battles between Christians and Moors persisted particularly in coastal cities. Such events took place in Toledo in 1723⁶², Peñíscola in 1746⁶³, Mahón in 1784, Palma in 1789, Puerto de Santa María in 1789 and Mahón again in 1812⁶⁴. Additionally, the concept of defending the faith, as intertwined with the monarchy, was present in some of these performances. In 1789, during the celebrations for the proclamation of Charles IV in Castellón, a simulated naval battle was staged in the Plaza Mayor. A fortress was constructed for the occasion, and actual ships from the port were brought in to enact the assault on Torreblanca and the recovery of the monstrosity, in reference to a local legend⁶⁵.

Two of the last *naumachiae* in the classical sense to take place in Spain were those held in Valencia and Málaga. The first occurred in 1755 to commemorate the third centenary of the canonisation of Saint Vicente Ferrer, as an attempt to find an impressive spectacle to replace bullfighting, which was not permitted at the time (fig. 86)⁶⁶. On this occasion, a group of Muslim pirate ships attacked

57 Urbano Domínguez Garrido, *El bosque de Béjar. Propiedad y usos a lo largo de la historia*, Béjar, Centro de Estudios Bejaranos, 2001.

58 Olga Fraile Martín, 'Naumaquia, teatro y poesía y otras sorpresas. Propuesta de velada nocturna en El Bosque de Béjar', in U. Domínguez Garrido and José Muñoz Domínguez (coords.), *El Bosque de Béjar y las Villas de Recreo en el Renacimiento*, Actas de las III Jornadas de Estudio, Grupo Cultural San Gil, Béjar, 1999, p. 167-184; J. Muñoz Domínguez, Juan Félix Sánchez Sancho, José Carlos Sanz Belloso, 'El estanque de la villa renacentista El Bosque de Béjar, una presa holandesa en Castilla', in Santiago Huerta, Rafael Marín, Rafael Soler, Arturo Zaragoza (eds.), *Actas del Sexto Congreso Nacional de Historia de la Construcción*, Madrid, Instituto Juan de Herrera, coll. "Textos sobre teoría e historia de las construcciones", 2009, p. 958.

59 J. Muñoz Domínguez, 'El estanque mayor de El Bosque de Béjar, arte e ingeniería en el siglo XVI', *Revista de estudios bejaranos*, 5, 2001, p. 11-34; *Id.*, J. F. Sánchez Sancho, J. C. Sanz Belloso, 'El estanque...', art. cit., p. 958.

60 J. Muñoz Domínguez, 'El estanque mayor...', art. cit., p. 11-34. About the villa of Diego de Ulloa, see Luis Vasallo Toranzo, *Arquitectura en Toro (1500-1650)*, Zamora, Instituto de Estudios Zamoranos Florián de Ocampo, 1994, p. 253-261.

61 Alfonso Jiménez Martín and María del Mar Lozano Bartolozzi, 'Jardín de Abadía. Cáceres', *Periferia. Revista de Arquitectura*, 2, 1984, p. 62-89; Pedro Navascués Palacio, 'La Abadía de Cáceres: espejo literario de un jardín', *Anuario del Departamento de Historia y Teoría del Arte*, V, 1993, p. 71-90.

62 J. Alenda y Mira, *Relaciones...*, op. cit., p. 516.

63 B. Lores Mestre, 'Las fiestas de Proclamación del rey Fernando VI en Peñíscola (1746)', *Boletín de estudios del Maestrazgo*, 49-50, 1995, p. 23-43.

64 J. Alenda y Mira, *Relaciones...*, op. cit., p. 111, 143, 144 and 183.

65 B. Lores Mestre, *Fiesta y arte efímero...*, op. cit. p. 146.

66 V. Mínguez, 'La naumaquia del Turia de 1755: un hito en el espectáculo barroco valenciano', *Millars*, 12, 1988, p. 55-69;



Fig. 86 : *Naumachia in Valencia, 1755*, engraving, from Carlos Francia from T. Serrano, *Fiestas seculares...*, 1762, Orihuela, Biblioteca Pública del Estado en Orihuela
(© Madrid, Ministerio de Cultura, Subdirección General de Coordinación Bibliotecaria)

and captured several Christian fishing vessels when Saint Vicente Ferrer miraculously appeared, aiding the Christians in their fight against the enemy and freeing the captives. This *naumachia* was not only a remarkable display of grandeur orchestrated by the city council but also carried a strong religious significance, making it an ideal tribute to the saint and all that he represented. A recreation of this battle was staged in 1846 to celebrate the wedding of Queen Isabel II, featuring another mock combat between Christians and Moors⁶⁷. The significance of the 1755 celebration was considerable: not only was it imitated almost a century later, but in 1796, the authorities in Valencia considered replicating it for the beatification of Patriarch Ribera, although in the end it was not carried out⁶⁸. In Málaga, in 1789, a *naumachia* was organised in the city's port to celebrate the proclamation of Charles IV⁶⁹. Led by the sailors' guild, the performance involved eighteen ships, seven galleys and two gunboats in each fleet. The spectacle concluded with a Christian victory, with all the Moors captured and taken in chains to the Convent of Carmen. On this occasion, the *naumachia* combined the traditional festive theme of Christian-Moorish battles with the political symbolism of victory and, of course, the sense of magnificence associated with the proclamation of the new monarch. It also contributed to the prestige of the event's organisers. These elements represent the essential characteristics of a *naumachia*, even at such a late date as the end of the eighteenth century.

The *naumachiae* of Valencia and Málaga, which persisted into the late eighteenth century and even the first half of the nineteenth century, demonstrate the enduring presence of a festive spectacle rooted in the Roman world but which had acquired a distinct identity in medieval and early Modern Spain.

***Naumachiae* as theatre and in theatre: transformation into a Baroque show**

Mock naval battles were closer to theatre than to real combat. By the mid-sixteenth century—the celebrations at Binche in 1549 marked a turning point—jousts and tournaments had become dramatized performances, far removed from the military exercises that had originally defined

Susana Ferrer Martí, 'Las naumaquias valencianas: juegos acuáticos en el Turia (1755-1846)', in Alberto Romero Ferrer (coord.), *Juego, estas y transgresión, 1750-1850. VI Encuentro de la Ilustración al Romanticismo*, Cádiz, Universidad de Cádiz, 1995, p. 105-111; Teresa Sorolla Romero and V. Mínguez, 'Tan digno de verse, como nunca visto. La naumaquia del Turia un siglo después', in I. Rodríguez Moya (ed.), *El rey festivo...*, op. cit., p. 135-152.

67 Vicente Boix, *Relación de las fiestas reales con que la ciudad de Valencia solemnizó el enlace de S.M. la reina D^a Isabel II*, Valencia, Jaime Martínez, 1846.

68 V. Mínguez, P. González Tornel, I. Rodríguez Moya, *La fiesta barroca...*, op. cit., p. 129.

69 Cristóbal Montoro García, 'Málaga festeja la proclamación de Carlos IV', *Jábega*, 4, 1973, p. 41-42.

them. Similarly, in the early seventeenth century, with the development of courtly theatre, plays often drew inspiration from chivalric culture. As Baroque aesthetics emerged and the art of theatrical scenography advanced, *naumachiae* became a spectacular dramatic resource within theatre productions. The connection between theatre and *naumachiae* becomes even clearer when examining the presence of ships and naval battles in Baroque plays.

Theatrical performances incorporating *naumachiae*, or attempting to imitate them, can be traced to the first quarter of the seventeenth century. In Lerma, Lope de Vega staged various plays between 1610 to 1640 that included naval battle scenes. The first of these was *El premio de la hermosura*, performed in 1614, which bore similarities to the events in Denia and Valencia in 1599, unsurprising, as Lope had been a direct witness to those spectacles. The production featured a ship on the river Arlanza, with scenic elements such as mountains, caves, temples, palaces, and castles⁷⁰. Lerma was once again the setting in 1617 for *El caballero del Sol* by Luis Vélez de Guevara, a play 'imitando acción de libro de cavallerías' [imitating the stories of chivalric novels], in which a galley appeared in multiple scenes⁷¹. Lope had previously introduced a *naumachia*, in his Roman pastoral *La Arcadia* (1598), drawing inspiration from the one depicted in *Diana enamorada* (1564) by Gaspar Gil Polo⁷².

In the pond of the Buen Retiro palace in the 1630s, Calderón de la Barca staged two plays 'en teatro que navegase' [on a waterborne theatre] and 'a imitación de aquellas naumaquias de los Romanos' [as an imitation of Roman *naumachiae*]⁷³. The first of these was likely *El mayor encanto amor*, performed in 1635. The king and his courtiers were to attend the play aboard a *gondola*, with plans to dine on the boats. However, a summer storm forced the performance to be postponed. At the same location, Calderón staged *El Faetonte* for the first time in 1639⁷⁴. The artificial lake thus served as setting for both mock battles and theatre productions. One of the scenographers involved in these plays was the Italian engineer Cosimo Lotti⁷⁵, who worked for King Philip IV and contributed lavish stage designs that enhanced the grandeur and pageantry of the performances at Buen Retiro.

Over time, aquatic performances lost their military character while becoming increasingly theatrical, evolving into Baroque spectacles. The waterborne court festivities of the eighteenth century, such as those organised by Farinelli in Aranjuez for Ferdinand VI and his wife, Barbara of Portugal, aligned with similar European traditions, combining fireworks, music, and elaborated pageantry⁷⁶. In Aranjuez, in 1752, Carlo Broschi Farinelli orchestrated various entertainments for the royal couple, including the so-called *Escuadra del Tajo*, a fleet of fifteen ships used for excursions along the canals of the Palace of Aranjuez, as well as for hunting and fishing⁷⁷. These boat tours

70 Rafael Maestre, *Escenotecnia del Barroco: el error de Gomar y Bayuca*, Murcia, Universidad de Murcia, coll. "Colección Maior", 1988, p. 96-97.

71 Pedro de Herrera, *Translación del Santísimo Sacramento a la iglesia colegial de San Pedro de la villa de Lerma*, Madrid, Juan de la Cuesta, 1618, 29rº-33vº. On the festivities of 1617, see Manuel Cornejo, 'Lope de Vega y las fiestas de Lerma de 1617', *Mélanges de la Casa de Velázquez*, 37/1, 2007, p. 179-198.

72 Juan Bautista Avallé-Arce, *La novela pastoril Española* [1959], Madrid, Istmo, coll. "Biblioteca de estudios críticos. Literatura", 1974, p. 161 and 200.

73 Pedro Calderón de la Barca, *Comedias de don Pedro Calderón de la Barca*, ed. Juan Eugenio Hartzenbusch, Madrid, M. Rivadeneyra, coll. "Biblioteca de autores españoles", 1851, t. I, p. 385-386.

74 R. Maestre, *Escenotecnia...*, *op. cit.*, p. 119. See also *Comedias...*, *op. cit.*, t. IV, p. 675.

75 Gloria Martínez Leiva, 'En torno a Cosme Lotti: nuevas aportaciones documentales', *Madrid*, 3, 2000, p. 322-354.

76 V. Mínguez, 'Ríos y mares festivos. Naumaquias y espectáculos acuáticos en las cortes mediterráneas', in Rosario Camacho Martínez, Eduardo Asenjo Rubio, Belén Calderón Roca (coords.), *Fiestas y mecenazgo en las relaciones culturales del Mediterráneo en la Edad Moderna*, Málaga, Universidad de Málaga, 2012, p. 163-184.

77 Consolación Morales Borrero, 'La escuadra del Tajo. Un manuscrito de Farinelli', *Reales Sitios*, 11, 1967, p. 32-43; *Ead.*, *Fiestas reales en el reinado de Fernando VI*, Madrid, Patrimonio Nacional, 1987. See also V. Mínguez, I. Rodríguez Moya, J. Chiva and P. González Tornel, *La fiesta barroca. La corte del rey (1555-1808)*, Castellón, Universitat Jaume I,

featured fireworks and musical performances by both Farinelli and the king himself. These festivities were likely the most significant waterborne celebrations in eighteenth-century Spain, comparable to those held at other European courts.

Conclusions

Not all waterborne mock battles merit the term *naumachia* in the classical sense. In many cases, they were mere simulations or even spectacles reduced to fireworks displays. Nevertheless, the inclusion of mock battles—particularly aquatic ones—in sixteenth and seventeenth-century Spanish festivities was a recurring phenomenon, with some remarkable examples leaving an impact that extended into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The simulation of combat between Christians and Moors followed a tradition dating back to the Middle Ages and the *Reconquista*, a tradition that persists even today, particularly in the Levant. This historical continuity lends these performances a distinctive political and religious dimension. Furthermore, the grandeur of such spectacles was often employed as a political tool, serving as a form of propaganda for the entourage of Philip III—most notably in the performances orchestrated by the Duke of Lerma as a means of gaining influence at Court—and for Philip IV, whose Buen Retiro Palace incorporated various elements designed to draw comparisons between the King and the Roman emperors.

These simulated battles possessed a strong theatrical component, which became even more pronounced in the Baroque period. By then, *naumachiae* were not merely a scenography device but had evolved into popular form of courtly entertainment. They gradually shed their military character, transforming into leisurely water rides or elaborated waterborne concerts.

Although often described as rare in Spain, aquatic mock battles were, in fact, a recurrent feature of Early Modern Spanish festivities. It is essential to reassess their characteristics and significance, examining known examples in relation to the distinctive cultural context of Renaissance and Baroque Spain to ensure a more accurate and nuanced understanding of their role.