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University of Louisville

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Interpreting *San Cecilio*:
Ritual and Discourse in a
Granadan Celebration

By

Martha Mary Popescu

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for Graduation summa cum laude
and
for Graduation with Honors from the Department of Anthropology

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Abstract

The *romería de San Cecilio* is an annual, local short pilgrimage and celebration of the patron saint of Granada, a city in Andalusia, Spain. The *romería* takes place at the Abbey of Sacromonte, a monastery built on top of the site where San Cecilio's remains were found as part of the famous discoveries of the Lead Books of Granada in the late sixteenth century. These books were ultimately declared to be Islamic forgeries, yet the *romería* persists today as a *granadino*, or Granadan, tradition. Consisting of both a Mass at the Abbey as well as a popular celebration, the *romería* is attended by a variety of groups, including the municipal government, the clergy of the city, locals, and tourists. In this thesis, I use publicly available documents (including videos) to describe these groups' perspectives on the contemporary *romería*, and also criticisms of those perspectives. To contextualize these perspectives and criticisms more fully, I draw upon the history of the *romería*'s beginnings in sixteenth and seventeenth century Granada, the era immediately following the embattled transfer of power of Islamic Granada to the Catholic Monarchs in the late fifteenth century. I analyze these multiple discourses through sociocultural theories: theories of ritual and pilgrimage developed by Victor and Edith Turner, John Eade, and Michael Sallnow, and theories of confluence. I round out my analysis by comparing the understanding offered by these theories with the only contemporary analysis of San Cecilio's *romería*, demonstrating how the obscurity of this analysis belies its usefulness. Ultimately, I show how the *romería* functions as a complex site in the (re)production of *granadino* identity: the differing perspectives and interpretations I analyze do not vitiate the *romería*, but rather invigorate it.

Lay Summary

The *romería de San Cecilio* is an annual, local short pilgrimage and celebration of the patron saint of Granada, a city in Andalusia, Spain. The *romería* takes place at the Abbey of Sacromonte, a monastery built on top of the site where San Cecilio's remains were found as part of the famous discoveries of the Lead Books of Granada in the late sixteenth century. These books were ultimately declared to be Islamic forgeries, yet the *romería* persists today as a *granadino*, or Granadan, tradition. Consisting of both a Mass at the Abbey and as a popular celebration, the *romería* is attended by a variety of groups, including the municipal government, the clergy of the city, locals, and tourists. In this thesis, I use publicly available documents to describe the groups' differing perspectives on the *romería*, and also criticisms of those perspectives. To contextualize these perspectives and criticisms more fully, I draw upon the history of the *romería*'s beginnings in sixteenth and seventeenth century Granada, the era immediately following the embattled transfer of power of Islamic Granada to the Catholic Monarchs in the late fifteenth century. I treat the differing perspectives as multiple discourses, and argue how sociocultural theories of discourse, ritual, pilgrimage, and tourism help make full sense of them. In doing so I bring in the only contemporary analysis of San Cecilio's *romería*, demonstrating how the obscurity of this analysis belies its usefulness. Ultimately, I show how the *romería* functions in a complex way to reproduce *granadino* identity: the differing perspectives and interpretations I analyze do not vitiate the *romería*, but rather invigorate it.

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I. Introduction

In this thesis I provide an analysis of the significance of the *romería de San Cecilio*, the annual pilgrimage and celebration of the patron saint of Granada, a city in the Andalusian autonomous community of Spain. San Cecilio is known as the first bishop of Granada; he was the founder of its archdiocese in the first century A.D., when the city was under Roman control and known as Ilíberis. He was a disciple of Saint James the Greater and one of the Seven Apostolic Men sent by Saints Peter and Paul to evangelize Spain. According to the widely accepted narrative, he and several other Christians were sentenced to death by the emperor Nero and immolated in the caves of Sacromonte, a hill just outside of the city center then known as the *Monte Valparaíso*. Sixteen centuries later, his relics were discovered in the late sixteenth century along with the regionally famous lead books of Sacromonte in 1595-1599. These “books” are a set of twenty-two lead discs inscribed in a cryptic text, the contents of which deal with a variety of theological, hagiographical, and liturgical topics. The Catholic people of the city, excited by the news of the discoveries, began to make the journey to Sacromonte from the city center to venerate the “sacred mountain” and visit the caves where the lead books and the remains of the martyrs were found; the pilgrimage was officialized by the municipal government and clergy soon after. Construction on the Abbey of Sacromonte, where the celebrations of the *romería* take place today, began in 1609 to commemorate the site where San Cecilio and his followers were supposedly martyred.

After a long period of debate over their veracity that began in the decades following their discovery, the Lead Books were declared Islamic forgeries by the Vatican in 1682. Nevertheless, the effects of the Sacromontane discoveries can be seen in the celebration of the *romería de San Cecilio* to this day—over 420 years since its initial inception. The contemporary pilgrimage does

not just consist of the trek up the hill to visit the sacred caves, but now also consists of a solemn Mass at the Abbey of Sacromonte, performances of traditional song and dance, and a distribution of broad beans, salted bread, and cod sponsored by the city government. These aspects of the celebration are characteristic of a *romería*, defined by the Dictionary of the Spanish Language as “a popular celebration with food, dancing, etc. that is celebrated in the countryside near a heritage or sanctuary on a religious holiday of the place” (Real Academia Española 2014). Crowds of people typically swarm the Sacromontane hill for the celebration, enjoying the view, picnicking on the hillside, and mingling with one another. News reports of the pre-pandemic celebration have reported over a thousand people in attendance (Argüelles 2020, para. 1; Europa Press 2012, para. 1; Olivencia Granada 2014, para. 1).¹

San Cecilio is the oldest one of three Catholic figureheads of the city, sharing the authority of patronage with *Nuestra Señora de las Angustias* (Our Lady of Sorrows), the city’s Marian figure made patroness in 1887, and San Juan de Dios, a soldier-turned-hospital worker known for founding a hospitaller brotherhood in Granada. *Nuestra Señora de las Angustias* is arguably the most popular patron in the city out of the three—the entire month of September is dedicated to her veneration, and over 80,000 people attended her procession in 2021 (Trigueros and Medina 2022, para. 5). Although San Juan de Dios enjoys a feast day that is usually accompanied by a procession as well, his celebration is far less covered by news outlets and seems to be less popular than the celebration of San Cecilio, perhaps due to his relatively recent naming as co-patron in 1940.

¹ “Fiesta popular que con meriendas, bailes, etc., se celebra en el campo inmediato a alguna ermita o santuario el día de la festividad religiosa del lugar.”

Despite the impressive size difference between the *romería de San Cecilio* and the celebration of *Nuestra Señora* or other larger religious celebrations in the city such as the *Corpus Christi* festival or the renowned Easter-week *Semana Santa*, the *romería de San Cecilio* still holds significance in the city—there is a reason San Cecilio is remembered as Granada’s patron, and one cannot deny the role he and his celebration played in a crucial era of the city’s history. In this way, he means something different than *Nuestra Señora*. Unlike *Nuestra Señora*, San Cecilio is explicitly understood to be physically connected to Granada’s sacred history through the narrative of his martyrdom. I was captivated by this sense of connection during a visit in early November of 2022 to the Abbey of Sacromonte, an experience that would inspire my work on this project. Before my visit, I had little to no knowledge of the historical significance of the site—I had initially planned my visit as an exploratory venture to familiarize myself with the religious-historical landmarks of the city as part of my research on the city’s popular religious customs. As I walked through the sacred caves of the martyrs, examined the Lead Books on display, and surveyed the city from the Abbey’s perch upon the hill, I felt a pull to understand this lesser known, less spectacular aspect of the city’s religious history.

The facets of this history, discussed with extreme brevity above, can be explicitly and implicitly seen in nearly every piece of the *romería*’s contemporary documentation. Thus, questions emerge: how do different contemporary perspectives (religious, clerical, popular, political, and critical) interact with the *romería* and its history in its own way? Furthermore, how do these perspectives help us understand the multiple layers of meaning-making, done by various groups in multiple sites, that occur as a part and result of the *romería*?

I will answer these questions through a three-pronged presentation. In the first part of this thesis, I draw upon a variety of sources describing the various aspects of the contemporary

romería, beginning with the contemporary celebration to demonstrate its different aspects that call for later historical interpretation. First, I will look at sources that include a variety of perspectives on the *romería*, including local news reports, including print sources, online articles, TV specials, and video interviews. These will be analyzed as artifacts representative of *granadino* meaning making in relation to the celebration.² The sources referenced in this project are mostly contained within the last decade based on availability and accessibility. These sources will not only allow us to characterize the *romería*'s acts, but also let us gain insight into how different groups of the *romería* are defined. I will then move on to sources that complicate these interpretations, those that focus on the *romería* and related topics but do not explicitly occur within the celebration itself, and thus differ from the previous sources. Some opinionated articles and blog posts criticize the participants of the *romería* (the civilian participants, the clergy, and representatives of the municipal government) for their veneration of a false history or their inability/unwillingness to understand the history as false.

To provide more context to these interpretations, I must draw as clear a picture as I can of the history of the *romería*. This I will do with the help of the work of A. Katie Harris, David Coleman, and Elizabeth Drayson. Coleman and Harris' work deals with the early Modern period of the city, more specifically the century that preceded the Sacromontane discoveries; Drayson focuses specifically on the Lead Books themselves. By examining the history put forth by the authors in these texts, we may more fully identify the way the *romería*'s history is relevant to the different contemporary meanings of the *romería*.

For us to make sense of the varying interpretations and histories of the *romería*, it is crucial to turn to the theoretical toolbox provided by the field of pilgrimage studies in

² *Granadino* is Spanish for "Granadan," referring to someone or something from/related to the city.

anthropology. The idea of pilgrimage as “a realm for competing discourses,” a concept discussed by Michael Sallnow and John Eade (1991) in the introduction of their edited volume *Contesting the Sacred: The Anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage*, is used by many of the scholars referenced in this thesis in relation to contemporary discussions of pilgrimage (S. Coleman 2002; Badone and Roseman 2004; Di Giovine 2011; Wheeler 1999). Eade and Sallnow’s take on pilgrimage provides a basis for analysis, building upon and revising previous theories of religion and pilgrimage built by scholars such as Emile Durkheim and Victor and Edith Turner. Durkheim and the Turner’s ideas of pilgrimage have been criticized as too functionalist, unable to address the complexities of, and conflicts in, real-world examples. It will be useful to contextualize the *romería* within Eade and Sallnow’s theory of competing discourses, as well as the work of some of their successors. This analysis, combined with the contemporary historical examination, will help us begin to understand San Cecilio’s celebration as more than just a celebration of the city’s patron saint, but as a site of multiple layers of discourse and experience related to Granada’s historical religious-cultural character.

It is important to note here that this view of religious practice as multi-faceted is in part influenced by María Cátedra’s work on the contemporary celebration of the Virgin of Sonsoles in Ávila, Spain. In her chapter “The City and the Countryside,” Cátedra examines the complex relations within and between various social groups and symbols: the clergy, rural and urban religious brotherhoods, the people of Ávila, and the city’s other patroness, Saint Teresa, via the ritual veneration of the Virgin of Sonsoles. These relations reproduce a striking symbolic contrast between the city of Ávila and its countryside: striking because the contrast is drawn to be encompassed, on a cyclical basis, by the identity of Ávila city. Cátedra’s work prompted me to look for similar relationships between groups, symbols, and places in the contemporary

celebration of Granada's patron saint(s), leading me to the *romería de San Cecilio* and its relation to *granadino* identity. In this thesis, I follow Cátedra in offering "a vision of how an important symbol of identity is situated in physical space and over time" (2008, 196). For Cátedra, that physical space is both urban and rural. As will be seen in the pages that follow, the physical space of San Cecilio's Granada is more localized to the site of his martyrdom and celebration. I begin with a description of the contemporary celebration of the *romería*.

I. The *romería* today

In this section, I will detail the sequential acts of the *romería* to roughly define its four major stakeholders. The first three of these are the church, the city government, and the people, who are involved in the two acts of the *romería*: the official act and the popular act. Each stakeholder brings their own interpretations for the *romería* and its history. The interpretations can be hard to consolidate and define, as they do not exist in isolation, but often overlap, blending stakeholders and the different parts of the *romería*. These interpretations include understandings of the *romería* as a reflection of the city's Christian heritage, *granadino* character, and touristic appeal. I then progress into describing a fourth outside stakeholder, the critics, who contest and complicate the interpretations of the other stakeholders, usually referring explicitly to a non-sacred historical context; these critics are politically and academically invested in advancing their interpretations of the *romería*. Thus, I develop a multi-faceted view of the contemporary *romería*.

Chronologically, the first part of the *romería* is its "official" act. It has an explicitly civic-religious character, which is expressed by the presence and participation of municipal authorities in the Mass in the chapel of the Abbey of Sacromonte as well as the ritual of the floral offerings

in the Abbey's caves. The Abbey is the central location in and around which the celebrations of the *romería* take place. Originally built in the early seventeenth century as both a commemoration of San Cecilio's martyrdom and as one of the first private universities in Spain offering courses in theology and law, it is now today a museum, the parish church for its neighborhood, and home of the *romería*. Located on the hill of Sacromonte, the Abbey of Sacromonte is a large complex consisting of a main chapel and many smaller ones, an extensive library, multiple courtyards, a cemetery, and a system of underground caves—just to name a few key spaces one can visit upon touring. Through the first, official act of the *romería* in the Abbey's chapel, the clergy and the municipality physically interact with San Cecilio's remains and place of death in the roles of authority of a historically informed relationship.

The municipal authorities participate in the *romería* in the form of a delegation. This delegation departs around 11 AM on the morning of February's first Sunday, arriving at the Abbey before the beginning of the Mass (Vallejo 2023, para. 2). Traditionally, two Sacromontane commissioners make up part of this delegation, along with the current mayor of the city. These commissioners have the special role of welcoming pilgrims, participants, and the other members of the delegation, consisting of various other civil and military authorities to the chapel, for Mass. The Sacromontane commissioners are usually members of the city council. *Maceros* (designated city employees) are also present as part of the delegation; with ceremonial maces they escort the authorities into the chapel for Mass. Before the Mass is held, the municipal band performs a variety of songs representative of Granada, Andalusia, and Spain just outside of the Abbey. Then, after authorities and citizens alike file into the chapel, the Mass begins.

It is led by the archbishop of the city, accompanied by the *cabildo colegial*, or collegiate chapter, of the Abbey of Sacromonte. This chapter consists of the Abbey priest and other clergy

members. The *cabildo* names two Sacromontane commissioners on the part of the Abbey, complementing the municipal commissioners. The municipal government plays a large role in the execution of Mass alongside the clergy; the Sacromontane commissioners perform readings from the scripture and lead the congregation in prayer and are accompanied by other officials such as the representatives from the Foundation of the Abbey of Sacromonte—the organization responsible for maintaining, renovating, and promoting the Abbey as a cultural landmark for the city.

The Mass contains two interesting ritual elements led by the municipal representation. One of which is the traditional offering “with which the city of Granada honors San Cecilio” (TG7 Granada 2017, 55:50).³ An offering of a single red rose and a small silver box to the relics of San Cecilio is physically handed to the Archbishop by the Sacromontane commissioner. The color of the rose symbolizes the martyrdom of San Cecilio (TG7 Granada 2017, 56:18), although in other years the rose is white, symbolizing the purity of the Virgin Mary (Aguilar 2020, para. 5; TG7 Granada 2023, 9:59; 2022, 28:54; 2018, 13:04). The silver box, the other part of the offering, is engraved with the phrase “Granada honra [honors] San Cecilio” and the current year (TG7 Granada 2017, 56:30). The silver box contains stacte, a type of myrrh or incense. The archbishop traditionally places the offerings on the table of the reliquary, an ornate urn, that holds the ashes of the martyred saint.

There is one more ritual element specific to this Mass—the kissing of the reliquary. During the Mass of 2017, the reliquary can be seen to the right of the altar, standing upon a table covered with a red cloth and surrounded by four candles (TG7 Granada 2017). After the completion of the Eucharist, the reliquary is removed from its place of presentation and placed in

³ “...con la cual la ciudad de Granada honra San Cecilio.”

the middle, right in front of the altar, by a member of the *cabildo*, who wears a cloth around his shoulders that covers his hands while he handles the reliquary. The candles are placed alongside the reliquary by different members of the *cabildo*. After a short invocation by the archbishop and a *cabildo* commissioner, the relics are made open to public veneration. The archbishop descends from the altar to take the reliquary with his bare hands and presents it to the *cabildo*, followed by the mayor, other civil and military authorities, and the acolytes, to kiss. The *maceros* are the last authorities to kiss the reliquary. The archbishop then transfers the reliquary back to its table, where the people who wish to are welcome to come up and kiss it as well. Thus ends the morning Mass.

After the Mass, there is another floral offering by the current mayor, accompanied by the Sacromontane municipal commissioners and the archbishop, in the cave where San Cecilio was supposedly martyred. The cave is part of a cavern system beneath the abbey; the system is accessed through the abbey via stairs outside of the chapel area. The offering consists of a bouquet of flowers placed at the foot of a bust of San Cecilio. After this, an invocation of San Cecilio led by the archbishop ends the official act of the *romería*.

We can see in the Mass and the floral offering not only the explicitly Christian part of the tradition, but the role that the municipal government plays in the facilitation of this ritual. In this act, the clergy and the municipal government also acknowledge and ally their powers as leaders of the city. Expression of the municipal government's elite status is communicated by the roles it plays in assisting the clergy in the Mass as well as its role in the offering, through the physical acts of offerings as well as their integration into the liturgy. Those not participating in the rites but still considered authority figures take up the first rows of the pews in the chapel and are the first ones to venerate the reliquary. These acts are meant to be seen by the people—not only

those in attendance, but through media as well. In 2017, one can notice many photos being taken of the exchange of the offerings between the Sacromontane commissaries and the archbishop (TG7 Granada 2017, 56:47). The archdiocese published to their website many of these photos of municipal and clerical authorities together, featuring candids during the liturgical acts as well as later posed photos (Archidiócesis de Granada 2017a; 2017b).

Although the clergy and the municipal government function together in the production of the morning Mass, they each bring their own understanding of the *romería*'s importance to the city. The most robust sources providing insight into these unique perspectives are TV specials produced by the municipal TV channel TG7 Granada, many of which are published to YouTube. Important figures usually interviewed include the mayor, the archbishop, the Sacromontane commissioners, and other members of the city council. During these interviews, these figures are traditionally asked about their thoughts on the significance of the celebration, both generally and specific to that year. Although responses vary year to year, common themes emerge from each party. Crucial is that both interpret the *romería* as inherently *granadino*, but in different ways. Not surprisingly, but worthy of note: the themes of the municipal government's responses tend to lean more secular, connecting *granadino* identity with the importance of the city's cultural tradition, while the clergy takes a more religious slant, asserting the *romería*'s role in affirming the narrative of the city as fundamentally Christian.

I will begin with the municipal government's interpretation as represented by a quote from Mayor Francisco "Paco" Cuenca in his 2019 interview at the *romería*: "Granada, it is as it is, it has its own identity and we have to feel very proud of that identity" (TG7 Granada 2019, 17:46).⁴ During this interview, Cuenca refers to the "identity" of Granada in relation to the

⁴ "Granada, es como es, tiene su propia identidad y nos tenemos que sentir muy orgullosos de esa identidad."

romería in many ways. The *romería* not only connects the thousands of *granadinos* in attendance to the city's patron, but also to each other and to the historically iconic site of the Abbey of Sacromonte and its museum, which in 2018 was undergoing renovations with the support of the city's Ministry of Culture. The Abbey's renovations were a favorite topic for Mayor Cuenca in 2018; he referred to the Abbey as a "true gem" of the city four times during the interview (TG7 Granada 2018, 20:38, 20:57, 21:10, 21:30).

Mayor Cuenca, in his assertion of the *romería*'s role in *granadino* identity, follows in the footsteps of his municipal predecessors over three decades earlier. José Miguel Castillo Higuera, a Socialist city council member of the 80's, is credited with reviving the *romería* and other religious festivals in the name of preserving and uplifting *granadino* traditions (Cardenas 2021; Muñoz 2022). Here, we can see the *romería* also functions as a site for the municipal government to advertise their initiatives to the public, as well as promote the city's touristic appeal that draws in many outsiders. Other political parties also use the *romería* to advertise their own values and commitment to preserving and sustaining *granadino* identity. For example, the conservative party VOX publishes videos on their YouTube channel of their representatives, who often participate as Sacromontane commissaries, attending the *romería* (VOX Granada 2023).⁵ Although not stated in the video referenced here, VOX's advertised involvement in the *romería* might implicitly stand in opposition to the involvement of Mayor Cuenca, who represents the Spanish Socialist Worker's Party (PSOE). This being said, it is possible that the

⁵ This is not a new feature of the *romería* in the past decade. In 2000, representatives and supporters of the center-left regionalist party the *Partido Andalucista* (Andalusian Party) sponsored a hot air balloon to be available at the *romería*. They also handed out bottles of olive oil inscribed with the party slogan "stand up for what is yours" (*defiende lo tuyo*) (Giron 2000, para. 3).

city's interpretation of the *romería* changes in some ways, and in multiple competing ways, depending on which parties are in power during and are present at the *romería*.

Another significant talking point is the distribution of broad beans, cod, and salted bread (*habas, bacalao y salaíllas*) sponsored by the city government during the more democratic part of the *romería* that takes place on the esplanade. The amount of food distributed is a popular statistic touted by municipal officials and subsequently news headlines. In recent years it has often been made up of 4,500 *salaíllas*, 1,000 kilograms of beans and 150 to 180 kilograms of cod (Pérez 2023; Rodríguez 2019; Ruíz 2018; TG7 Granada 2020, 19:40). During the 2022 celebration, the distribution of these traditional foods was suspended due to COVID-19 safety regulations. The suspended distribution constituted the subject of many news reports about the *romería* from that year, with one headline reading: “The *romería* of San Cecilio returns, but without beans or *salaíllas*” (Gabinete 2022).⁶ By involving itself with the sponsorship of a key aspect of the *romería*, its food, as well as through its participation in the “official” act of the Mass and ritual offerings, the municipal government traverses the boundary between sacred and secular in the *romería* festivities.

For the clergy, the *romería* is a way for *granadinos* to engage in the narrative of a city fundamentally based in a Christian tradition. This is reflected not only in the ritual symbolic actions of the Mass described earlier, but also in the interviews given by the archbishop to TG7 Granada, the homilies delivered during the Mass, and the annual news articles about the *romería* published on the archdiocese of Granada's own website. The church is also more likely to explicitly engage with the religious-historical context of the *romería* than is the municipal

⁶ “Vuelve la *romería* de San Cecilio, aunque sin habas ni *salaíllas*.”

government. I include here an excerpt from the homily given by then-Archbishop Don Francisco Javier Martínez Fernández in 2017:

“Every year, the day of San Cecilio is an occasion to give thanks for the tradition of which we are children, for the Christian tradition, that [exists] independently of all the legends—which have their explanation in their historical moment and which have their context, [and] which do not imply any scandal—that gave rise to the Lead Books, and to the origin, if you will, of the Abbey. What is certain is that there was a need at that time to generate a unity around the Christian faith, and with a memory, that the Christian origins here had been very ancient, I repeat independently of all the legends contained in the leaden books, it is obvious that in the Council of Elvira, which is the first council of the Church of which the written and signed minutes are preserved, 80 bishops participated. This was the capital of a large region, some of them coming from the south of France, and it had not yet been the Peace of Constantine, that is to say that the Church was still in a period of semi-clandestinity, which indicates a very, very ancient presence in our territory.” (TG7 Granada 2017, 38:17)⁷

In later pages I discuss the “legends” contained in the Lead Books of Sacromonte, there giving more context to the history Martínez Fernández is alluding to here. Even without a deep understanding of sixteenth century *granadino* history, however, one can sense the firmness with which the Archbishop is affirming the validity of the city’s Christian roots in the face of something that seems to contradict this claim; he further supports this affirmation of Christian heritage by referencing the Council of Elvira, a meeting of bishops that took place in the city in the early fourth century. Other allusions to the city’s “Christian roots” are mentioned by the

⁷ “Todos los años, el día de San Cecilio es una ocasión para dar gracias por la tradición de la que somos hijos, por la tradición cristiana, que [existe] independientemente de todas las leyendas—que tienen su explicación en su momento histórico y que tienen su contexto, [y] que no suponen ningún escándalo—que dieron lugar a los libros plúmbeos, y al origen, si queréis, de la Abadía. Lo cierto es que había una necesidad en aquel momento de generar una unidad en torno a la fe cristiana, y con una memoria de que los orígenes cristianos aquí habían sido muy antiguos. Repito, independientemente de todas las leyendas que contienen los libros plúmbeos, es obvio que en el Concilio de Elvira, que es el primer concilio de la Iglesia del que se conservan las actas escritas y firmadas, participaron 80 obispos. Esto era la capital de una gran región, algunos de ellos venidos del sur de Francia, y todavía no había sido la Paz de Constantino, es decir que la Iglesia estaba todavía en un periodo de semiclandestinidad, lo cual indica una presencia muy, muy antigua en nuestro territorio.”

archbishop in many interviews given to TG7 Granada (2023, 18:57; 2022, 33:30; 2018, 16:01; 2015, 21:32). In another homily given by Martínez in 2022, he referred to the city being “united around the memory of our Christian origins represented in the figure of San Cecilio” (Martínez Fernández 2022, para. 6).⁸

Here I conclude temporarily our discussion of the *romería*’s “official act,” and move into a description and analysis of its “popular act.” After the morning Mass and floral offering are concluded, the *romería* settles into its traditional, popular character with a spatial transition. The center of the celebration is the esplanade, a field less than half a mile downhill from the Abbey. Figure 1 reflects the location of the esplanade in relation to the abbey, with the Abbey labeled and the esplanade marked by a red star:



Figure 1. Satellite view of the Abbey of Sacromonte in relation to esplanade. (Google Maps 2023)

⁸ “...estamos unidos en torno a la memoria de nuestros orígenes cristianos representados en la figura de San Cecilio.”

The city government sets up a bar for the distribution of traditional food as well as a stage, emblazoned with the municipal government's logo, for the performances by regional dance groups—often including a group sponsored by the municipal government. One famous traditional performance during the *romería* is *la Reja*, a *granadino* song and dance routine named after the style of metal grille that traditionally adorns the windows of the Albaicín neighborhood. Other dances traditionally performed include different variations of flamenco, demonstrating the *granadino* connection to this historically Andalusian style of dance. As they enjoy the dances, food, and fresh air, people picnic on the esplanade with family and friends, forming the popular image of the *romería* celebration. During the popular act, the Abbey keeps its doors open until the early evening for those who would like to pay an individual visit to the sacred caves.⁹

The TG7 Granada interviews with the people who participate in the popular act show how they interpret the history of the *romería* not in terms of the Lead Books, but in terms of the continuity provided by the city's tradition. The *romería* is widely understood by participants as a *granadino* tradition, with participants interviewed by TG7 Granada during the popular act frequently identifying themselves and the participants of the *romería* as *granadino* and mentioning their annually recurring participation in the tradition celebration (TG7 Granada 2023, 26:25; 2022, 42:15; 2020, 22:25, 25:02; 2019, 26:33). One mother, in a special from another network, cites the reason she brings her children to the *romería* to be so that they can be connected to their *granadino* heritage, expressed in connection to the popular symbols of this act, such as the *habas*, *salaillas*, and *bacalao*; the traditional performances, and the figure of San

⁹ The opening of the caves to visitors is featured in schedules of the *romería* (Vallejo 2023, para. 3), but no sources include interviews or descriptions of visitors.

Cecilio as the city's patron (Virgen de las Angustias TV 2020, 8:35). Connections to being from the nearby neighborhoods of Sacromonte are also made by some visitors (TG7 Granada 2019, 26:50). The exclamations of “*viva San Cecilio!*” by the people attending the *romería* can be heard throughout many of TG7 Granada's specials, solidifying San Cecilio's presence in the popular act (TG7 Granada 2023, 27:40; 2019, 27:30; 2018, 23:38). Neither municipal authorities nor the clergy seem to participate in such exclamations, indicating a small, yet notable, difference in engagement with the *romería* and San Cecilio as its symbol.

Romeros (pilgrims) are not just *granadinos*, but tourists, visitors, and foreign residents of the city as well. TG7 Granada features interviews with many participants from outside of the city, including people from other parts of Spain (Madrid, Valencia), Europe (Scotland, Poland, Slovakia), Southeast Asia (China, Korea, and Japan), and Latin America (Mexico, Peru) (TG7 Granada 2023, 22:21; 2022, 45:53; 2019, 22:10; 2018, 24:46; 2015, 10:30; Virgen de las Angustias TV 2020, 9:48, 11:04). These participants are identified by themselves and sometimes the interviewer as not being from the area, framing their participation in the celebration as an outsider participating in a *granadino* tradition. These outsiders, especially tourists and visitors, often express that they are in Granada for other reasons than to attend the *romería*, such as vacation or study abroad, but participate due to curiosity about local happenings and/or happenstance. The Scottish couple, when asked about what they knew about San Cecilio, connect their participation in the *romería* to their knowledge of the Lead Books, alluding to a tourist presence that exists due to the history of the *romería* as well (Virgen de las Angustias TV 2020, 10:38).

While some outsiders express their interest in the cultural or traditional *granadino* aspects of the *romería*, some seem to be there solely to enjoy the celebration as it is. One TG7 Granada

interview features a bachelorette party, with a young woman from Madrid dressed in an inflatable turkey costume accompanied by a group of friends with hats shaped like turkeys.¹⁰ When asked if she knew who San Cecilio was or why the *romería* was being celebrated, she was not able to answer the question, deferring to her friends (“I understand that my friends would know—the girls/turkeys—for they are very smart”) (TG7 2022, 46:06).¹¹ Standing out as the most extravagant example from the television specials, these participants’ presence at the *romería* demonstrates the breadth of the types of meaning outsiders assign to the celebration. It is not just a cultural tradition or religious celebration for the people of the city, but celebration simply in of itself—some outsider participants in the popular tradition are simply not bringing historical interpretations to their experience of the *romería*, differentiating them from locals who understand the *romería* as an annual tradition. This in some way reflects the sentiments of an organizer of the celebration, who refers to the celebration of the present-day *romería* as a remembrance of its religious, traditionally understood pilgrimage origins (Bidini 2018, 19:06).

Finally, the *romería* is not just a site of congeniality among *granadinos*, the clergy, the municipal government, and all who choose to attend it; the celebration and its participants are subject to criticism as well. These criticisms, here proposed mainly by the members of the state and the university as well as people critical of the state, are fundamentally rooted in a historical narrative of the *romería* as founded upon falsehoods. For example, an article about the origins of the *romería* appears on a Spanish Laicism website with the addition of a photo of Mayor Paco

¹⁰ These participants’ costumes are based on a pun in Spanish. “*Pavo*” is Spanish for turkey. A “*pava*” is both a female turkey and Spanish slang for a young woman.

¹¹ “Entiendo que mis amigas lo sabrían—las pavas—es que son muy sabías.”

Cuenca kissing the reliquary of San Cecilio,¹² accompanied by the caption “the current mayor of Granada, Francisco Cuenca of the PSOE, venerating the false relics of San Cecilio from the hands of the Archbishop of Granada during the acts of 2017”; the other addition to the article by the website accuses the mayor and municipal councilors of upholding the “invented reality” of San Cecilio as an “inexistent martyr” through their participation in the *romería* (Laicismo 2018, para. 1).¹³ For another critic, a professor at the University of Zaragoza, the upholding of the falseness of the relics and the lead books by the clergy and the city government, represented in part by their participation in the *romería*, is an act so condemnable that the municipal authorities should not only cease their support of the Abbey of Sacromonte, but go so far as to close it down (Molina 2012, 73).

Although it has not seemed to affect the *romería*’s religious function, the religious role of San Cecilio as the city’s patron saint seems to be a site of intra-religious conflict as well. Since 2010, the pilgrimage has been preceded by a procession of the saint’s image through the neighborhood of Realejo, home of the Church of San Cecilio, on the first Saturday of the month. The religious brotherhood (*cofradía*) of the *Hermandad de los Favores* based in the church is responsible for organizing the procession; most processions in the city and the region are organized by *cofradías*. The procession did not take place in 2021 or 2022 due to the pandemic (Asociación de Vecinos Realejo, San Matías, Santa Ana y Barrio de la Virgen 2021; Vallejo 2022). In 2023, the procession was declared canceled until further notice, with sources from the

¹² Laicism (English for *laicismo*) is an ideological movement promoting the secularization of the state; it expressly condones any participation of members of the state in religious functions.

¹³ “El actual alcalde de Granada, Francisco Cuenca del PSOE, venerando las falsas reliquias de San Cecilio de manos del arzobispo de Granada durante los actos de 2017. Alcaldes y concejales acuden cada año a la misa oficial que se celebra en honor de este santo de leyenda y visitan la cuevas de su inexistente martirio, manteniendo, desde una institución pública, una realidad inventada.”

church of San Cecilio citing lack of financial support for the procession in comparison to that given to the *romería*, frequent occurrences of bad weather, and lack of “data that shows us a path of virtue [of San Cecilio] that would set an example for a Christian” even if he is the patron and the first bishop of the city (Martínez 2023, para. 2).¹⁴ This decision was apparently made by church leadership, and the brotherhood who organized the procession was not involved in the decision, perhaps indicating more layers of underlying conflict (Martínez 2023, para. 3). Here, we see an interesting implicit tension between the *romería* and the procession, as well as the clergy and another religious organization (made up of common people), manifest in a debate over what San Cecilio represents to Christians. This tension reaffirms the perspective of the *romería* as not just for Christians by juxtaposing it against the more overtly religious procession.

The municipal government, the clergy, and the patron saint himself are not the only aspects of the *romería* to come under fire—the *habas* and *salaíllas* are not safe either. In his 2014 article on the *romería* written for the Andalusian contemporary culture magazine *secretOlivo*, Jose Luis Serrano Moreno uses the topic of the *romería* to criticize *granadino* columnists and commentators for superficially casting aside the significance of the *romería*.¹⁵ His argument is pithily summarized in this quote:

“‘Now you are back to the past again,’ the commentator on duty who has read this far will think. ‘But if the important thing is the distribution of *salaíllas*, man.’ Well, alright, dear Granadan commentator, for you the bean, but for me all this that I’m telling you has something to do with the AVE, per capita income and the motorway to Motril. For me, with all due respect to clumsy hegemonic political realism, the past has something to do with the present and with the

¹⁴ “Se argumenta para ello el frío reinante en Granada en esos días de primeros de febrero y que a pesar ‘de que es el Patrón de Granada y el primer obispo en el episcopologio de la Diócesis, no hay más datos que nos muestran un camino de virtudes que sean ejemplo para el cristiano.’”

¹⁵ Serrano Moreno (1960 - 2016) was a *granadino* writer, professor of law, and member of the Andalusian parliament as president of the Spanish left-wing populist party *Podemos*.

future, and that on the Camino del Monte there's more than just bean husks" (Serrano Moreno 2014, para. 4).¹⁶

In this quote, we see Serrano Moreno reflect in a caustic way on the previously discussed perspectives on the popular acts. He accuses them of treating the celebration as one-dimensional and devoid of controversy. For Serrano Moreno, the controversy is an integral part of the celebration as well as a critical reflection on *granadino* society and culture. After this quote, Serrano Moreno launches into a history of the *romería*, namely the Sacromontane discoveries, implying that the history is part of the controversy as well (2014, para. 5-8). While Serrano Moreno seems unconcerned with analyzing the *romería* in depth, instead using it as a basis for a critical political piece, he is still contributing to a layer of critical discourse surrounding the *romería* and its meanings in relation to its history. We can see how Serrano Moreno, and the other perspectives I have discussed thus far, use differing interpretations of history in order to construct meaning around the *romería*. Our understanding of this process will not be complete unless we have a grasp of the history surrounding the beginnings of the *romería* ourselves. Through a thorough examination of the historical context of the *romería's* beginnings, we may begin to connect these perspectives to a history informed by similar layers of differing perspectives.

II. The history of the *romería*

¹⁶ “‘Ya está usted otra vez a vueltas con el pasado’ pensará el tertuliano de turno que haya leído hasta aquí. ‘Pero lo importante es el reparto de salaíllas, hombre.’ Pues vale, estimado comentarista granadino, para usted la haba, pero para mí que todo esto que les cuento tiene algo que ver con el AVE, la renta per cápita y la autovía a Motril. Para mí, con todo el respeto debido al torpe realismo político hegemónico, que el pasado tiene algo que ver con el presente y con el futuro, y que en el camino del Monte hay algo más que cáscaras de habas.”

While we may cite the discovery of San Cecilio's relics on *Monte Valparaíso* a little over 420 years ago as the catalyst for the contemporary pilgrimage, the significance of this event can only be fully understood alongside an examination of the city's early modern history from 1492 to 1600. The period is covered by David Coleman in his book *Creating Christian Granada* as well as by Katie Harris in *From Muslim to Christian Granada*. In this section, Coleman and Harris help provide a background to the beginnings of the *romería*. Elizabeth Drayson 2016's *The Lead Books of Granada* contributes to the period portrait I paint in relation to the Sacromontane discoveries as well.

For about 800 years, what is now known as Granada was ruled by a variety of different Muslim powers. after the Umayyad conquest of the Iberian Peninsula of 713 A.D. From 1230 until its fall in 1492, the city was ruled by the Nasrid dynasty. The Nasrids maintained the longest-lasting Muslim dynasty in Iberia as well as the last stronghold of the Al-Andalus kingdom (which, at one point, had encompassed almost all the Iberian Peninsula). During this time, the city enjoyed considerable cultural and economic prosperity; many of the city's iconic sites, including the Alhambra (the city's famed palace and fortress complex), the Generalife (the Nasrids' summer palace and country estate), and the Corral de Carbón (a commercial warehouse and inn), were built during this period. The city was religiously diverse, populated by immigrant Spanish Catholic Christians, Arab Jews, Arab Muslims, and Arabized Christians, although whether there existed harmony between these groups (termed *convivencia*) has long proved a controversial topic to scholars (Coleman 2013, 12). The Muslim rule of Granada under the Nasrids ended on January 2nd, 1492, when Muhammad XII, known in Europe as Boabdil, surrendered the city to the Catholic Monarchs Isabella I of Castile and Ferdinand II of Aragon in the last battle of the *Reconquista*, or the nearly eight century-long conflict between Christian

military campaigns and the Muslim rule of the Iberian Peninsula. It is worth noting here that the term *Reconquista* does represent an ideological interpretation of Christian expansionism and is used widely by the far-right in Spanish politics (The Bridge Initiative 2021). The date of Granada's embattled transfer of power continues to be controversially celebrated in the city, with the holiday bearing the name "*el Día de la Toma*" or "the Day of the Taking."

At the time the city came under Catholic rule, the Muslim population was not immediately persecuted. In fact, the treaty signed between Muhammad XII and the Catholic Monarchs guaranteed Muslims' freedom to practice their religion and continue living under their legal code (Harris 2007, 10). This did not last long, and the Muslim presence in the city over the next century proved to be tumultuous. In 1499, defying the agreements set out by the Treaty, Cardinal Francisco Ximénez de Cisneros began a campaign to convert Muslims en masse to Christianity under threat of imprisonment or torture (Coleman 2013, 14) and other modes of religious-cultural suppression, including burning Arabic manuscripts and books in the Plaza Bib-Rambla in 1501 (Drayson 2016, 45). These measures incited a famous rebellion in the Muslim-inhabited Alpujarras region outside of the city, which saw a violent rejection of Catholic rule (Harris 2007, 24); in response to this rebellion, the Crown mandated that Muslims, like the Jewish population of the city seven years earlier, convert to Christianity or be expelled from the kingdom of Castile.

Muslims who converted to Christianity in this era were known as *moriscos*. Throughout the sixteenth century, *moriscos* would continually face suppression, including bans on the use of the Arabic language and a variety of cultural traditions, destruction and appropriation of religious sites, and another round of expulsions in 1569 and 1570 which saw the depletion of most of the city's *morisco* population (Coleman 2013, 195). Even in the face of such persecution, many of

the city's *moriscos* secretly maintained adherence to their faith and cultural traditions, practicing them in secret while harboring resentment towards Christians (Coleman 2013, 52-53; Drayson 2016, 42-43, 48-49). The city remained "multicultural and multiethnic" (Harris 2007, 28), retaining "much of its pre-conquest physiognomy and character" (Coleman 2013, 9).

With this background in mind, we can begin to focus more closely on the beginnings of the *romería*, which are inextricably linked to what Drayson refers to as "a mystery as compelling as the occult lore that cloaks the lost Jewish Menorah and the Turin Shroud" (2016, 1). We must begin in 1588, in the center of urban Granada, with the destruction of the city's minaret. The Torre Turpiana, as it was known, was being demolished to make room for the construction of a nave for the city's recently built cathedral (Coleman 2013, 256; Drayson 2016, 3). During the destruction of the cathedral, workers came upon a small lead box that contained a number of curiosities— "a small panel bearing an image of the Virgin Mary, a fragment of linen, a small piece of bone, a folded parchment and some blackish-blue sand, all covered with a piece of linen cloth to protect them" (Drayson 2016, 3). The parchment described the origin of the box's contents in a mixture of Latin, Arabic, and Castilian: the bone was of St. Stephen, the first martyr, and the linen was used by the Virgin Mary to dry her tears at Christ's crucifixion. The parchment also contained a translation of St. John the Divine's prophecy of the end of the world from Latin to Castilian by San Cecilio himself (centuries before Castilian had developed), who had ordered his disciple Patricius to hide the lead box and its contents in a safe place away from the "Moors" (Drayson 2016, 11; Harris 2007, 2). This was the first mention of San Cecilio outside of indexes of Spanish bishops, presumably that of the 10th/11th century *Glosas Emilianenses* (Coleman 2013, 200). The city's Catholic population embraced these discoveries, while the Catholic clergy remained skeptical (Drayson 2016, 14; Harris 2007, 3).

The Torre Turpiana finds primed the city to accept what would become the basis for the future pilgrims' ascent up the sacred mountain. In 1595, treasure hunters searching for gold supposedly hidden by the Visigoth King Roderic not long before 711 CE (the movement of Muslims into Iberia) unearthed in a cave a sheet of lead with strange writing. The sheet was translated from its "*hispano-bética*"¹⁷ script, to Castilian by a Jesuit priest, told of the martyrdom of a Christian named Mesitón on the Sacromonte in the first century (Drayson 2016, 17). Two other sheets found in the coming month spoke of similar fates that befell Saint James' (Santiago's) disciples Hesiquio, Tesifon, and four of their followers. The second sheet described a nearby book of lead written by Tesifon, along with his ashes and those of two of his followers (Drayson 2016, 17; Harris 2007, 4). Tesifon's Lead Book was then discovered, the first of many to come. It was written in what seemed to be mystical Solomonic characters that resembled the ancient Hebrew in the Biblical king's book of spells *The Key of Solomon*. The script was proved to be a modified version of Arabic (Drayson 2016, 25). Tesifon's book prompted celebrations throughout the city (Drayson 2016, 5, 18). Shortly after, a young girl found the second Lead Book and was awarded a considerable amount of money for it by Archbishop Don Pedro de Castro—30,000 maravedis, or around 9,000 dollars (Drayson 2016, 18). Finally, a fourth and final lead sheet was discovered by another young girl soon after. The inscription of the plaque reads as follows: "in the second year of the reign of Nero, on the first day of February,¹⁸ San Cecilio suffered martyrdom in this Ilipulitan place, a disciple of Saint James the Apostle, a man gifted with letters, languages and holiness. His disciples Septenario and Patricio suffered with

¹⁷ Drayson defines "*hispano-bética*" as "Hispano-Andalusian," referring to the vernacular Latin used in the region during its Roman rule (2016, 17).

¹⁸ The date included in the plaque is the basis of the date of the feast day for San Cecilio.

him. Their ashes are in the caves of this sacred mountain. In their memory they are venerated." (Medina 1998, 356).¹⁹ This plaque provided the crucial basis for what would come to be known as the *romería de San Cecilio*. The plaque also contained a reference to the prophecy of St. John that San Cecilio had translated, connecting the Sacromonte findings to the earlier Torre Turpiana finds (Harris 2007, 5; Medina 1998, 356).

Between nineteen and twenty-two lead books were found on the Sacromonte hill in total between the years of 1595 and 1599 (Coleman 2013, 201; Drayson 2016, 18; Harris 2007, 29). Pilgrims had been ascending the hill alongside relic-seekers during the time of excavation (Drayson 2016, 17), but it was the news of San Cecilio's martyrdom and the discovery of his relics that catalyzed the pilgrimage in earnest, with pilgrims making the journey to the sacred caves barefoot, on their knees, weeping, and kissing the rocks of the hill (Harris 2007, 5). Pilgrims of diverse backgrounds, including the city's ethnic minorities and pilgrims from nearby towns, began to erect crosses on the hillside in devotion (Drayson 2016, 5). An estimated 1,200 crosses were erected on Sacromonte during this period, although as of 2020 only six remain (Gómez 2020, para. 4).²⁰ Pilgrims were not always allowed to venerate the martyrs at the caves like they are today—Harris describes how Archbishop Castro reluctantly shut down veneration for a period, at the bequest of King Philip III, only to have authorities stationed at the site overwhelmed by the number of pilgrims that kept arriving (2007, 6).

¹⁹ "En el año segundo del Imperio de Nerón, a primero de Febrero, padeció martirio en este lugar illipulitano san Cecilio, discípulo de Santiago Apóstol, varón dotado en letras, lenguas y santidad... Setentrio y Patricio... padecieron con él. El polvo de los cuales está en las cavernas de este sagrado Monte. En memoria de los cuales se venere."

²⁰ Famed Spanish poet Luis Góngora immortalized the cross-laden mountain in his poem "Al Monte Sacro de Granada," featured in one of the appendices in Harris' book (2007, 259).

Many miraculous healings were reported at the site of the discoveries, as well as answers to prayers petitioned to San Cecilio during near-death experiences (Drayson 2016, 96; Harris 2007, 6). Harris attributes this enthusiasm to “a reconfiguration of Granada’s sacred geography” from the city center to the Sacromonte as a result of the discoveries, which re-defined a previously unremarkable hill in the local tradition to a site sanctified by the physical presence and death of a saint (2007, 112-114). Harris and Drayson both note that this process is most likely related to previous *morisco* understandings of the site as sacred, with similar legends of holy figures being burned and buried, purported healing powers of the site, and supernatural light sightings (Harris 2007, 114-117; Drayson 2016, 96).

Outside of the popular veneration of the discoveries undertaken by individuals and groups traveling to the Sacromonte, the “official” beginnings of the *romería*—that is, the involvement and sponsorship of the clergy and the municipal government—are contextualized by conflict between and within these two groups. In 1600, Archbishop Castro declared both the Sacromonte findings and the Torre Turpiana finds to be authentic (Drayson 2016, 143; Harris 2007, 7); in 1609, he laid the first stone of what was to become the Abbey of Sacromonte, built upon the site where the discoveries were made over a decade earlier (Drayson 2016, 128; Harris 2007, 42). The Archbishop was a vehement supporter of the relics, castigating the city council for not visiting the sacred caves in the five years since the first Sacromontane discovery and for not fundraising for a celebration, perhaps due to the city’s prior efforts in financially and encouraging devotion to San Gregorio de Bética, who was considered the city’s patron before the craze prompted by the discoveries (Coleman 2013, 207-8; Harris 2007, 129).²¹ Some clergy

²¹ Harris notes that in fact, the city council did send emissaries to the Archbishop requesting to be authenticated in the authentication of the relics and resolved to petition the King for festivity funding (2007, 130).

members were also not eager to promote the festival: cathedral chapter meeting notes from around this time refer to the sponsorship festivities so long as there was funding from the archbishop; such coolness perhaps resulted from the Archbishop's prior rejection of the cathedral's right to house the Sacromontane discoveries, and from the cathedral's promotion of the Torre Turpiana finds for popular veneration (Coleman 2013, 207; Drayson 2016, 126; Harris 2007, 129). In fact, the ecclesiastical leadership of the city did not elevate the celebration of San Cecilio to a feast day until 1646 and vied for possession of the Torre Turpiana lead box in conflict with the *cabildo* of the Abbey of Sacromonte (Harris 2007, 133).

Although the city council might have initially been slow in officially taking up San Cecilio as the patron of the city, it eventually took on a role as the main promoter of his veneration through the sponsorship of the saint's Sacromontane festival. Harris cites the first festival day of San Cecilio as taking place in 1601 in the city cathedral, with the transfer of the celebration to Sacromonte initiated by a proposal of sponsorship by the city council to the Abbey of Sacromonte in 1611, (2007, 130). This is the first instance of a solemn Mass and veneration of the relics taking place as part of the pilgrimage on February 1st. This Mass occurred in a very similar manner to today, with the participation of the city council in the rites (Harris 2007, 131). Harris also alludes to the city council's role in the now-popular narrative of their vow to officialize the *romería* due to San Cecilio's help in abating the outbreak of plague that had recently rocked the city (2007, 130).²² San Cecilio's help in stopping the plague remains a key feature of the narrative today. By the 1620's, the clergy of the cathedral had largely abandoned

²² Although not part of the contemporary *romería*, San Cecilio has been petitioned to help end another bout of sickness in the city recently—in March 2020, the relics of San Cecilio featured in a Eucharist led by the *cabildo* of the Abbey to pray for strength in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic (ArchdioceseGranada 2020).

the celebration due to its persistent presence in the Sacromonte, leaving it to be managed by the city council, the Archbishop, and the Abbey (Coleman 2013, 208; Harris 2007, 131).

The municipal government and the Archbishop alike had a vested interest in capitalizing on the popular religious fervor stoked by the Sacromontane discoveries. Archbishop Castro stood to gain in the way of bolstering confidence and support of his office, both contemporarily and through a connection with a holy predecessor, although Coleman notes his skepticism in the early years of the discoveries prior to the verification and defense of the discoveries as indicative of belief just as much as self-interest (2013, 207-9). Harris also points to Castro's personal piety and fervent devotion to promoting Catholicism in the city and region at large as part of his involvement and support of the discoveries (2007, 131-34). The city council, on the other hand, saw its alignment with the cult of San Cecilio as a way to engage with the city's understanding of San Cecilio as a symbol of its Christian heritage, "[allying] itself with the symbol and guarantor of Granada's communal continuity" (Harris 2007, 131, 135). Regardless of the possible differences in motives for extending support to the discoveries, both the Archbishop (and, by extension, the *cabildo* of Sacromonte) and the city council were the first advocates for retaining the lead books. They petitioned for their return after they were sent to the Vatican for examination in 1642 amidst rising controversy surrounding their veracity (Harris 2007, 142; Drayson 2016, 142). The Lead Books were declared heretical Muslim forgeries by the Vatican in 1682, and not returned to the Abbey until the year 2000, over three hundred years later (Harris 2007, 142).²³ This return was commemorated by a physical transfer of the artifacts between a cardinal and the then-Archbishop at the Vatican, a later commemoration at the Abbey, and a

²³ Cátedra (2008) notes an interaction with the Vatican as well in her work, referencing a 1526 papal bull that addressed the religious brotherhoods' rights to control the sanctuary of the Virgin of Sonsoles (183).

subsequent exposition of the artifacts at the city's Cathedral (Drayson 2016, 1). Interestingly, San Cecilio's relics were not sent along with the books for authentication and are considered authentic by the church to this day; celebrations of the annual pilgrimage even after the initial condemnation by the Vatican continued well into the seventeenth century (Harris 2007, 136).

Arguably the most gripping aspect of the story of the Lead Books is the fact that they are forgeries, reflecting how the beginnings of an over 400-year-old tradition still performed today are seen by some to be fundamentally based on a hoax accepted by both the municipal government and the Catholic church. Drayson proposes two prime suspects in the forgeries of Sacromonte—Alonso de Castillo and Miguel Luna. Both men were educated *moriscos* actually involved in the initial translations of the Lead Books into Castilian after their initial discoveries and were both proponents of their authenticity. Harris suggests that there might have been clerical involvement in the forgeries, seeing as they sought to encourage the veneration of a saint not promoted by the city's secular elite at the time and supported Spain's claim to St. James' gospel; she proposes *morisco* priest Francisco López Tamarid as a possible suspect as well (2007, 156). Some scholars regard the Sacromontane discoveries as a last-ditch effort on the part of the *morisco* population of the city to secure a place in *granadino* society, redefining and combining theological concepts of Islam and Christianity (ranging from the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary to the fact that San Cecilio and his colleagues were actually Arabs that evangelized Spain) to push back against the rising popular and legal hostility against *moriscos* in the city that had presented itself over the last couple of decades at the time of their appearance (Drayson 2016, 239-41). Others regard Luna and de Castillo, among the suspects of the falsifications, as opportunists riding on the cultural milieu of the time (Drayson 2016, 238).

Regardless of who might have participated in the forgeries of the Lead Books, they are emblematic of early modern Granada's culture and persist today as the basis for the city's continued annual pilgrimage, whether acknowledged by the contemporary *romería's* authorities and participants or not. The origins in the *romería* are fundamentally based in both conflicting and shared interests within and between Muslims and Christians, the city government, the clergy, and the people of Granada. While the contemporary discussion lacks crucial insight into the Muslim perspectives on the *romería* due to lack of representation in the media, the complex historical interaction between different religious beliefs and cultures is still embodied and developing in the physical and cultural character of the city. This can be seen ranging from the annual commemoration of the Catholic-ordained 1499 burning of Islamic texts in the Plaza Bib-Rambla (Granada Hoy 2022) to controversial historically rooted celebrations that have become a platform for political debate, such as *Día de la Toma* (Machin-Autenrieth and Almeroth-Williams 2019). Furthermore, we can clearly trace back trends in discourses produced by city's clerical and gubernatorial authorities: conflicts within and between the two authorities seems to have found a sort of resolution in the civic-religious character of the contemporary *romería*. We also see the shifting attitudes of ordinary citizens in terms of the earlier *romería's* descriptions as compared to how it is portrayed by sources in the contemporary discussion. The *romería* has developed from a past as a pious celebration to one that with a complex set of differing interests is not necessarily focused on veneration. Keeping these characterizations and processes in mind, in the next section I turn to theory to help us interpret them more fully.

III. Theoretical Interpretation

We now arrive at the point where we consider how best to interpret the relationships among the multiple meanings present in the *romería* now and historically. In this section, I argue that we can draw usefully on theories developed in the anthropological study of pilgrimage. This field opened up after the publication of *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* by Victor and Edith Turner. In this section, I look at the Turners' theory of *communitas* as well as the theory of competing discourses worked up by John Eade and Michael Sallnow (1991) as an alternative to the Turnerian approach. I then look at how Eade and Sallnow's ideas are developed further by succeeding scholars and reflect on Ramón Manzanares' analysis of the *romería*. This obscure analysis makes a strong contribution to my interpretation and perhaps to ritual theory more generally due to its localized focus. By articulating these perspectives in this section, I demonstrate the usefulness and relevance of interpreting the *romería* as a multilayered ritual.

By turning to theory, we can begin to understand how and why a saint and their celebration can come to represent a city. Emile Durkheim laid the groundwork for an answer with his theory of collective effervescence: according to the theory, religious ritual produces an effervescent, shared, feeling of sacredness for a society. It is separated from profane, or non-sacred, society, and yet, through repeated rituals, represents the society to itself. The ritual effervescence is, in effect, a crucial, tangible experience of community at the base of society. Roy Rappaport specifies, along neo-Durkheimian lines, that: "ritual [is the] social act basic to humanity" (1999, 31). In their book *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, Victor and Edith Turner improve on Durkheim by specifying this process in terms of phases, especially regarding the ritual of pilgrimage. By building upon Durkheim and upon Arnold van Gennep's tripartite model of ritual, Turner and Turner introduced the idea of *communitas*. *Communitas* is a step in the tripartite ritual process: a refined version of collective effervescence, which allows

participants a sense of true equality with one another, against the “profane” social divisions characterizing everyday life. *Communitas* is then a “social anti-structure” that profoundly informs the sacred nature of pilgrimage (Turner & Turner, 1978, 250). Durkheim and the Turners help us speak to the way that San Cecilio becomes Granada’s patron saint, and sustains this status, through the repeated enactment of the *romería*.

But, as we will see, we cannot interpret the *romería* simply on the basis of *communitas*—Eade and Sallnow made this clear. They accuse the Turnerian approach of being a structuralist argument cloaked in anti-structuralist rhetoric that ascribes *communitas* to pilgrimage as a whole. According to Eade and Sallnow, *communitas* provides a limited, essentialist view of how pilgrimage functions within a culture without taking into account social or historical contexts. Furthermore, Eade and Sallnow argue that the existence of *communitas* as pilgrimage’s sole defining feature has been widely disproved by a variety of ethnographic studies (1991, 4). *Communitas* does not exist on its own but is a “particular discourse *about* pilgrimage rather than an empirical description *of* it, one which might well compete or coexist with other alternative discourses” (Eade and Sallnow, 1991, 5). In diminishing *communitas* to just one part of the equation, Eade and Sallnow build upon an argument that pilgrims are not the only ones that act on a pilgrimage site to construct its meaning, but are accompanied by other stakeholders such as officials and locals, who all bring a variety of historical, political, religious, economic, and cultural meanings to the pilgrimage, thereby creating an arena for “competing religious and secular discourses, for both the official co-optation and the non-official recovery of religious meanings, for conflicts between orthodoxies, sects, and confessional groups, for drives towards consensus and *communitas*, *and* for counter-movements towards separateness and division” (1991, 2).

The introduction of competing discourses theory, otherwise known as contestation, is widely understood to be a theoretical turning point in the anthropology of pilgrimage (Badone and Roseman, 5; Di Giovine 2011, 248; S. Coleman 2002, 4).²⁴ Here, I want to briefly address certain contributions to the perspective first developed by Eade and Sallnow. These I find useful for achieving a deeper understanding of the *romería de San Cecilio*. One way that pilgrimage has been recontextualized has been through a call for synthesizing the Turners and Eade/Sallnow to move away from ultimately fruitless efforts at defining essential characteristics of “pilgrimage” and to instead approach pilgrimages as fields of rich, variant analysis unbounded by adherence to dogmatic principles (S. Coleman 2002). Bonnie Wheeler (1999) adds to the conversation with her theory of “confluence,” where competing discourses not only co-exist but also move together through space and time. Eade and Coleman 2013 (2004) add “movement” to the coordinates of the “person-place-text” triad first developed by Eade and Sallnow (1991) as points of reference for identifying the competing interpretations of a sacred center, where meanings reside in reference to a sacred/mythic person, sacred geography, holy texts, and/or performative, embodied, semantic and metaphoric action (2004, 16-17). In his model of “the field of touristic production,” Di Giovani (2011) reflects Wheeler’s sense of time in his emphasis on how pilgrimage’s variable meanings at different points geographically and temporally are continuously communicated and translated into the future—contributing to a confluence of pilgrimage and tourism. Maria Cátedra, to whom I nodded in the introduction, does this in “The City and The Countryside,” without seeming to know of the authors I cite here, writes: “the

²⁴ Although Eade and Sallnow are rightly credited for naming and popularizing the theory of competing discourses, it was an acknowledged phenomenon far earlier. In his 1913 study on the Alpine cult of St. Besse, French anthropologist Robert Hertz identifies multiple points of competition—physically violent, hagiographical, spatial, and political—between the five villages who journey to the shrine of the Saint (Hertz 2009).

pilgrimages to Sonsoles and the celebration of this icon not only stimulate a movement of peoples, groups, and communities but above all play a role in the development of significations, powers, ideals, weaknesses, and worlds in conflict” (2008, 200). This is not an exhaustive list of the theoretical work that has been done outside of Eade and Sallnow’s seminal work, but a very small perspective into the ever-shifting and growing field into ideas that might refine our own understanding of the *romería de San Cecilio* in a theoretical context.

I would now like to contextualize these approaches with the only analytical work published specifically on the *romería de San Cecilio*, “Granada sube al Monte” (Granada climbs the mountain) published in 1992 in the University of Granada’s anthropological magazine *Gazeta de Antropología*. This obscure article is authored by Ramón Mantilla Manzanares of the Asociación Granadina de Antropología. This work is not only significant due to its uniqueness as the only academic work on the *romería de San Cecilio* that proceeds towards analysis, but it also highlights key concepts relating to the previously discussed theoretical frameworks of pilgrimage, most of all to Eade and Sallnow’s theory of competing discourses and Wheeler’s theory of confluence.

Throughout the article, Manzanares alludes to the different discourses present in the *romería*. Following in line with the popular division of the *romería*’s events, Manzanares divides the festival into the “official” and “popular” acts (1992, para. 2).²⁵ Manzanares identifies the authority and symbols of the “official” act as a legitimizing force for a historically-based celebration: “observing the ceremonial [act] and the symbols...it can be said that it is a communal

²⁵ “Esta fiesta tiene dos momentos diferentes: el acto oficial ceremonial y los actos festivos populares...”

celebration of clear legitimate nuance, with a historical background” (1992, para. 3).²⁶

Additionally, he refers to the municipal government taking place in both the official and the popular act in a capacity of authority, characterizing their transmutable role of power in both parts of the celebration (1992, para. 2, 4).

With that being said, Manzanares indicates a difference between the institutions and ordinary citizens through further differentiation of the official act from the popular act with the assertion that many people attending the popular acts of the pilgrimage do not attend the official act for various reasons, including the capacity of the chapel, the distance between the esplanade and the chapel, and personal reasons (1992, para. 4).²⁷ This is an interpretation of meaning I did not identify in my own assessment of the contemporary *romería*, perhaps because news outlets are not inclined to report on the lack of participation in one aspect of the celebration versus the other. This is corroborated by the video news reports, however, in the amount of people seen in the chapel during the official act versus on the esplanade during the popular act—the popular act is much more populated. Manzanares also makes a distinction within the participants of in-group and out-group participants by referring to “pilgrims” and “curious people” who attend the *romería*, validating the perception of variable discourses existing within the participants in the popular act as well as affirming the role of outsiders in contributing to the touristic production of the *romería* (1992, para. 13).²⁸

²⁶ “Observando el ceremonial y los símbolos...se puede decir que se trata de una fiesta comunal de claro matiz legitimador, con fondo histórico.”

²⁷ “Un gran número de asistentes a la *romería* permanece ajeno al acto oficial por muy diversos motivos (capacidad del templo, distancia entre el santuario y la explanada, motivos personales...).”

²⁸ “En la actualidad, la *romería* de san Cecilio parece gozar de buena salud por el número considerable de romeros y curiosos que acuden a ella.”

Manzanares also alludes to Wheeler's idea of confluence in his article in the way that he connects the *romería* and its discourses to its history. For Manzanares, the *romería* is not only symbolically interpreted as a way for the municipal government and the religious authorities to reaffirm the power they hold as institutions contemporarily, but to reaffirm as well the narrative of a city whose heritage is based in its transformation from Muslim to Christian—symbolized by San Cecilio's liberation of the city from the epidemic in the early 1600's (1992, para. 3).²⁹

Manzanares asserts that the clergy's and the city government's collaboration and shared goal in reaffirming their power is based in the role they played in the *romería*'s beginnings, which has since characterized the official act, and which has also prompted widespread criticism (1992, para. 13).³⁰ Wheeler's understanding of competing discourses flowing together through space and time is evident in Manzanares' assessment of the *romería*. The archbishop, the Abbey, and the municipal government, each representing their own values and interests, have endured as institutions throughout four centuries to engage together in the *romería* to this day, alongside the variable understandings brought to the *romería* by pilgrims and other visitors. Manzanares is also attuned in the previous quote to criticisms of the *romería* and its stakeholders that we have seen and interpreted in previous sections, lending us a tentative view that popular criticism has been a part of popular discourse case for a large part of the *romería*'s contemporary revival—at least during Manzanares' time as well.

²⁹ “San Cecilio libra de la peste, como el poder político libra del enemigo, que actualizado en la fiesta de hoy quiere decir, reafirmación de las instituciones, sancionadas por la bendición del patrono y reconocimiento de éstas de las creencias y tradiciones de la ciudad.”

³⁰ “No faltan voces cualificadas que ponen en cuestión el carácter tradicional y popular de esta fiesta, excesivamente oficializada en su ritual. Sin embargo, opino que esto fue así desde sus orígenes...”

At the end of the article, Manzanares calls for a “a more universal approach” to an analysis of the origins of the *romería*, so that it would open the *romería* up to “new ways of meaning and expression, as a festival of encounter and tolerance in a city like Granada, where different religions and thoughts coexisted for centuries” (1992, para. 13).³¹ Manzanares here is arguing for a change in the way that the *romería* is seen—instead of viewing the *romería* as a re-enactment that props up the city’s history of Christendom in relation to the Sacromontane discoveries, he suggests an interpretation of the *romería* as a celebration of the city’s history of diversity and cultural syncretism, especially relating to the *morisco* attempts to create what Manzanares calls a “tolerant and universalist cultural alternative, born in dependency and resistance,” which was ultimately co-opted into “a cultural project based on political and ideological unity and in the purity of race” (1992, para. 7).³² In the tradition of Eade and Sallnow, I disagree with Manzanares’ anthropological call to cast aside the meaning assigned to the *romería* as a celebration of the city’s Christian heritage, although I do acknowledge his perspective as a stakeholder in the conversation surrounding the *romería de San Cecilio*. I argue we must include both Manzanares’ interpretation and the interpretation he rejects to gain a full understanding of the *romería*. The Christian heritage symbolized by the *romería* makes up a key part of the discourse of the clergy, shown in the rituals of official acts and articulated by the archbishop himself. This interpretation is a key part of some of the criticism of the *romería* as well, something Manzanares himself indicates as well as contributes to in the article—for his and

³¹ “Un acercamiento más universalista a esos orígenes permitiría abrir la *romería* a nuevas vías de significación y expresión, como fiesta de encuentro y tolerancia en una ciudad como Granada, en la que convivieron religiones y pensamientos diferentes durante siglos.”

³² “De esta manera, frente a una alternativa cultural tolerante y universalista, nacida en la dependencia y la resistencia, como la que se desprende de la potencialidad de dichas reliquias y escritos en plomo, se opone un proyecto cultural basado en la unidad política e ideológica y en la pureza de raza.”

others' criticism of the *romería*'s meaning would not exist without something to criticize in the first place.

IV. Conclusion

This thesis has attempted to delineate and describe the multiple players and layers of history, religion, secularism, celebration, and criticism that characterize the *romería de San Cecilio* as a multifaceted ritual. These aspects form part of an ongoing and ever-developing process through which meanings are produced in and around the *romería*. As I have shown, this process cannot be removed from the idea of a multi-dimensional *granadino* identity, an identity that is tied to the enactment of the *romería*. It is a ritual connected to the physical site of Sacromonte and San Cecilio, who exists as a historical, physical, and spiritual part of that site as well. To draw on Durkheim and the Turners once again briefly, we have seen the entanglement of the sacred with the everyday in the *romería*, and how its ritual is key to producing the sacred *from* the everyday. Eade and Sallnow have helped us see how the stakeholders of the *romería*, including the Church, the municipal government, participants, and critics (as I have identified them), are inextricably involved in this process. We can trace their presence in the contemporary celebration back to their presence in *romería*'s beginnings. Yet we can also trace their interaction and conflict through the controversy and legend of the Lead Books. These were vital in producing the variable meanings of the *romería* at the time. By framing the whole San Cecilio phenomenon with theories of contestation and confluence, we can grasp how the *romería* reworks and (re)produces various layers of meaning through ritual enactment that takes place in Granada as well as at various scales beyond Granada.

I venture that the analysis put forth by this work is applicable to religious rituals both of and outside Granada, although future work must be contextualized by the rituals' own characteristics; I once again echo Eade and Sallnow—"there is no such thing as 'pilgrimage,' but only 'pilgrimages,'" referring to the specificities that make each celebration and ritual unique (1991, 3). Additionally, this work adds the *romería* to the wider discussion surrounding the historical and cultural impact of the Sacromontane discoveries and connects them to today's understanding of *granadino* society and identity. I do not argue that I have addressed the full extent of the different discourses of the *romería*. Future work on this project would entail the addition of ethnographic fieldwork, a larger endeavor consisting of informal, structured, and semi-structured interviews; participant observation, and a variety of other ethnographic methodologies that would bring us closer to individual perspectives on the *romería*. I expect this future work to introduce needed specific perspectives that are lacking in this project—especially those registering the city's contemporary Muslim and Roma populations, both of which have an important cultural and historical presence in Sacromonte, yet who are left unmentioned in the sources referenced. I expect future work to also include comparative analyses of the veneration of San Cecilio and of the city's other patron saints, following in the footsteps of María Cátedra's work in Ávila. Including these perspectives and layers in analysis would contribute to a richer understanding not only of the *romería*'s significance to Granada, but also to the role of popular Catholicism in the city and region as a whole.

In this thesis, I have shown how the *romería de San Cecilio* is about far more than just the city's martyred patron saint, the municipal government and the clergy, the history of the Lead Books, or the people's bean husks. In fact, it is the combination of these aspects, and others, each

of which continuously moves against and with one another through space and time to keep the celebration and *granadino* identity alive.

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