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## Identity construction of the European medium sized city through the monasticism repercussions in Écija

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**Abstract.** The monasticism appeared during the dawn of Christianity has made a major contribution to Europe's culture and identity. The spread of Christian faith throughout the continent was achieved not only through a new morality and religion but also through art and convent architecture. The Middle Ages were the peak of this monastic production. Orders such as Cistercians or Dominicans would appear mainly in France and Italy spreading their rules and ways of life to the whole continent. It is a phenomenon that transcends borders, kingdoms and geographical elements, bringing together many people under the same identity. The flag of the Latin cross waved in the European Middle Ages. However, the reality in southern Iberian Peninsula was different. Al-Andalus stood as a bastion of Islam in Europe long before the appearance of the Ottoman Empire. At the end of the Middle Ages, the Kingdom of Castile began to occupy territories held by the Muslim Kingdom of Granada. The need to Christianise the new conquered lands would call a multitude of monastic orders settled in Europe to focus their attention on the new Kingdom of Seville. The main cities such as Seville, Cordoba, etc. would be the most coveted for the new foundations. Nevertheless, Écija is located in the Guadalquivir river valley in a difficult position on the border with the Kingdom of Granada. In the 14<sup>th</sup> Century, Écija had close to 10,000 inhabitants, which, at the time, was a large number. A city which was an attraction point for Christian Communities, which according to their origin, 31% came from Italy, 22% from France, 37% from Spain and 10% from Jerusalem. The study of Écija shows the crossing of continental relationships through monasticism. How could the influence of Christianity manage to cover an entire continent to the most remote place? We could find the keys to understand the urban construction of western monasticism through the main average conventual cities in Andalusia.



## 1. Introduction

Monasticism has played a fundamental role within the Christian religion since its appearance in the West. The term monasticism refers to monk, the denomination of religious men who belonged to a religious order and lived in a monastery, and whose Greek origin "*monachos*" is translated as "unique, alone" [1]. Initially, monks developed a hermit life, hence their terminology, although later they would began a community life and prayer, giving rise to the beginning of orders. Centuries later, orders would be regulated under specific rules giving rise to foundations by different monks throughout the Christian world. The different religious orders that have shaped Western monasticism have led to a particular kind of life, dedicated to God, giving rise to several marvellous complexes and buildings. Even today we can contemplate the importance that these world retreat movements had in times like the Middle Ages, especially through the churches and monasteries that still illuminate our urban and rural landscapes [2]. Such monastic complexes cannot be understood without a prior understanding of the development of monastic orders.

In the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century AD, Christianity became the official state religion of the Roman Empire. From this period, it became a dominant force in the shaping of the civilizations of the Western world up to the present day [3]. Within Christian ecclesiastical history, there are several important events, which are necessary for its understanding. In first place, it is important to highlight the first division of Christianity produced in the Eastern Schism, during the 11<sup>th</sup> Century. This fact caused a fragmentation among Christians, who were then divided into Catholicism, in the West, and Orthodox Christianity, in the East [4]. Although both parts continued to be Christian, the monastic development that took place in the eastern part is totally foreign to the western part, in addition to a greater production in Western Europe. The second one, is the Great Schism or Avignon Schism produced between the years 1378 and 1417, in which three bishops came to dispute the papacy. As a result of the internal division produced, in 1413 the Council of Constance took place, what resulted in the internal disputes. All of this had an enormous impact on the formation of the different monastic and mendicant orders, with the appearance of new foundations or reforms in existing orders [5] [6]. Finally, the Protestant Reformation was a new great division, this time within the Catholic Church. It was carried out by Luther in the territories of present-day Germany during the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. Lutheran doctrine opposed Catholic authorship, not recognizing the Pope or the ecclesiastical structure [7]. The conversion of Catholics to Protestants caused a multitude of conflicts among Christians, and was used as an argument in numerous wars. Therefore, monastic production took place gradually from the Middle Ages until the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, when the ecclesiastic disentanglements appeared.

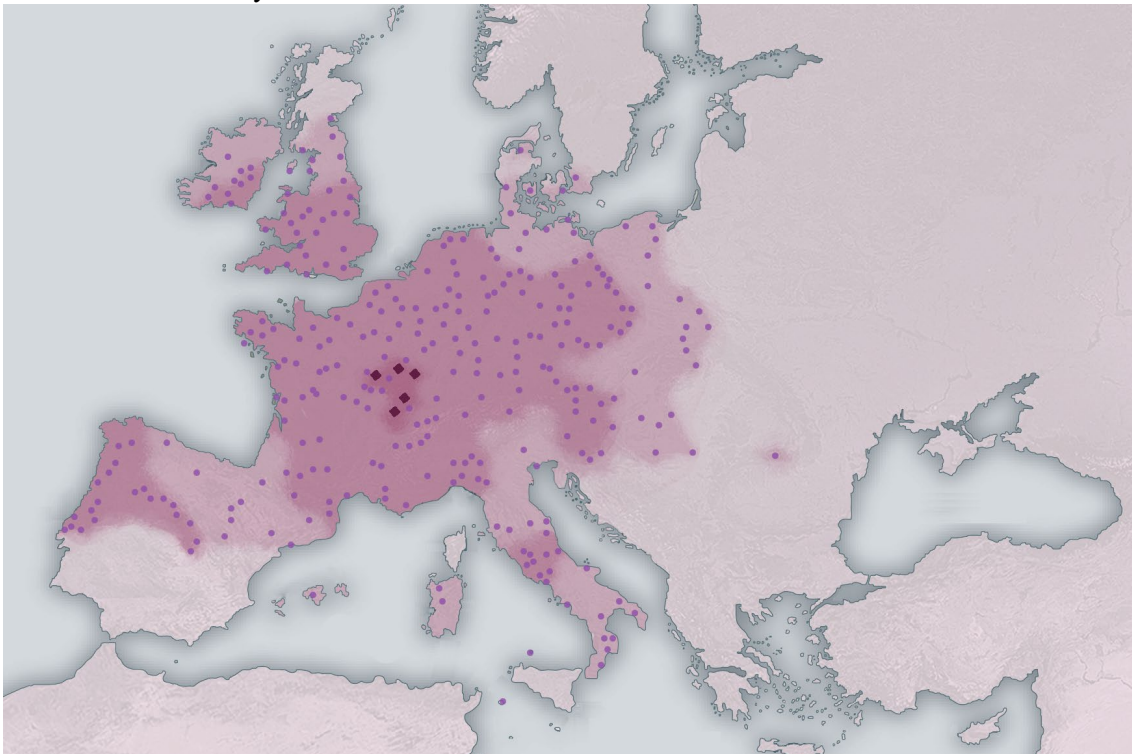
After a brief socio-political context, monasticism can be understood within the Western Catholic Christian Church. Between different events and councils, the different religious orders began their development. The type of Christian derivation and the different reforms on the monastic and mendicant orders led to a certain conventual structure, which finds direct links in the European panorama. A panorama composed of a unique typology that has configured the nexus of union and identity of Europe.

## 2. Monasticism in Europe

Due to the division of Christianity produced during the Eastern Schism, Western Europe became the place where the major monastic production was developed. Although the Middle Ages were a turbulent period, strained by a multitude of socio-political events and of constant confrontation between different kingdoms, it was the seed of the monastic sphere. This area

would generate a common European identity, since the first foundation; each religious order would have a progressive expansion to the whole continent.

In France was the beginning of the first orders that carried out the monastic development in a European level. The Cistercians appeared in the 11<sup>st</sup> century, located in the centre of the Gallic region, with an influence of 0,8% of the European territory. But in the 12<sup>th</sup> century the order occupied a 42% of all the lands in the continent. In only one hundred years they were established from Scotland to southern Italy (Figure 1) [8]. According to the monastic rule, the development of conventual spaces answer a series of characteristics and particular properties, being able to vary its typology or its situation in cities. Attending to the particular order of Cister, it is found that all the monasteries are located next to small streams in the valleys, but never in the mountains, nor on the banks of lakes or large rivers, and neither by the sea or on an island [9]. To identify a certain order's typology, it must be identified a clear relationship between different monastic buildings located in different geographical points that respond to the same architectural keys.



**Figure 1.** Expansion of Cistercians in Europe (12th Century). The dark spots represent the branches of Cîteaux, the origin of its foundation in France [2]

The conventual enclosure is not just an area used for praying, with no contact with the reality of the outside world. On the contrary, it has a high level of importance articulating the territory through its location in the different ways of communication between cities. This allowed enclosure's use as a refuge within the roads, hence the development of a multitude of inns in them. The "Camino de Santiago" or "Way of Saint James" shows the use of the monastic architectural piece as an articulator of the territory in order to support the pilgrim (Figure 2). The way connected the centre of Europa having the main road a total of 3.214 km. A high number for those times where transport were not enough developed. In addition thanks to this pilgrim way the main European cities were connected faster. Convents and monasteries are key to understand the articulation of the territory in Europe, as well as the creation of links between different countries. Moreover, in the European landscape can be found monasteries that also create cities. A clear example is Mont-Saint Michel, where the imprint and the mark that this

typology of religious buildings had an influence on the European continent is obvious. According to Merian, in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century the importance of a city was given by its monasteries, convents and parishes [10].



**Figure 2.** The Road of Santiago and its connections in Europe, 13th Century [11]

Like the first French order in expansion, the new mendicant orders of the Friars Minor (Franciscans) and Preachers (Dominicans) developed a wide expansion occupying, almost the entirety of the Catholic regions in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century. Approximately a 53% of Europa in the first century since their first foundation. [12, 13]. From an overall point of view, it can be observed how a religious order, like the Dominicans with a foundation in Toulouse, came to established themselves throughout the European territory. They created a common identity, through the use of a concrete architectural typology, the conventual enclosure, which is a key piece for the common understanding not only of a particular city, but also of the urban scene of Europe. The communities with foundations in the Iberian Peninsula seek the urban core with the greatest relevance and geographical strategy [14]. The border situation with the Kingdom of Granada, a Muslim territory, meant that the Dominican community was one of the first founding orders of the conventual buildings in the cities, such as Seville and Écija [15].

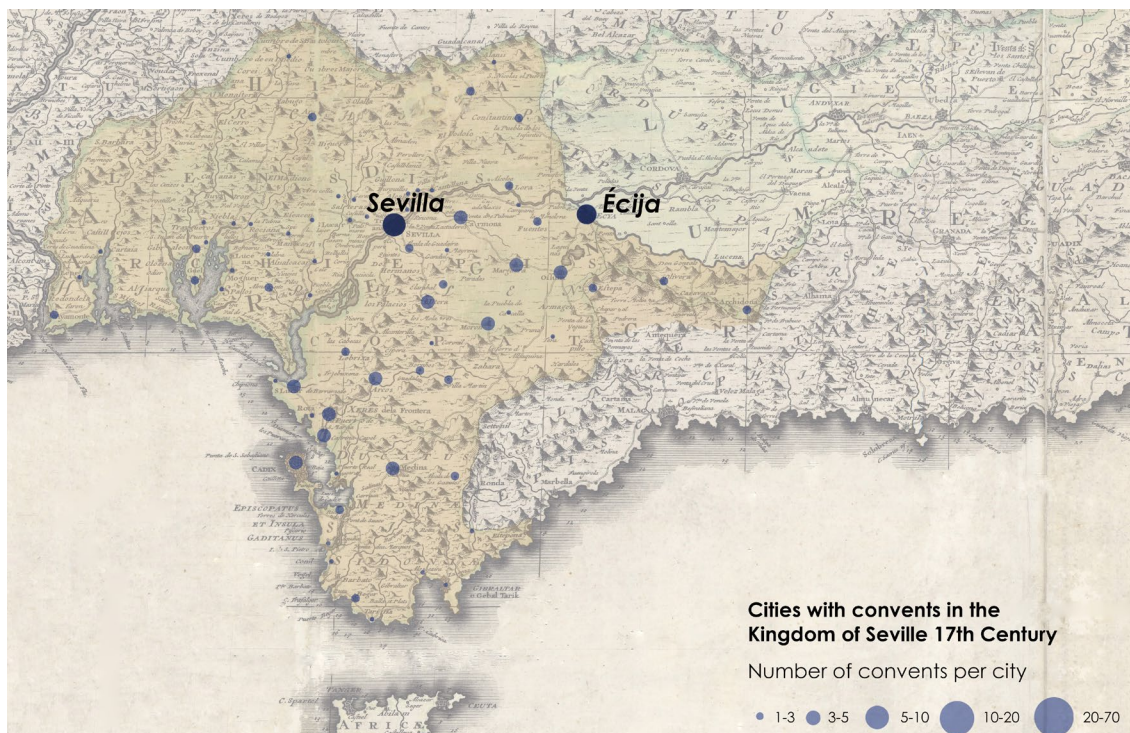
### 3. Foundations in the Kingdom of Seville

Unlike the rest of Europe, much of the Iberian Peninsula was governed by the Islamic faith. As they were not Christian territories, conventual production was almost inexistent in the Kingdom of Seville until the 13<sup>th</sup> Century. From the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa, in 1212, between the Christian and Muslim armies, together with the subsequent victory over the Almohad Caliph, the process of conquest and the decline of the Muslim presence in Andalusia began. In this context, *the kings of Castile used the monastic and convent foundations as part of the Guadalquivir Valley's process of conquest and repopulation. . They are Urbemas of a high semiotic value used to Christianize and Castilianize the spaces retrieved from Islam. Therefore,*



*the royal foundations were made with a clear political purpose, which undoubtedly joins their religious value* [16]. The proximity of the unfaithful enemy favoured, on one hand, the appearance of military orders as a response to danger, and on the other hand, the expansion of mendicant orders, as they became looking for new places to evangelize and face the heretics. [17] The different settlements that took place were not random, but the result of a concrete situation in relation between city and territory (Figure 3). The search for the wealth of the city was connected to the objective of being able to obtain a high level of alms and income. At the same time, the size of the population guaranteed a growing number of parishioners. The city of Seville was the first point of attraction for the monastic foundational development because of both the importance of the city and its imminent political and commercial development, acting during the discovery of America as the port of Europe [18]. Therefore the foundational process in the territories occupied by the Muslims of ancient Al-Andalus began in the city of Seville. The orders due to the expansionism brought by these orders from Europe, added to their accommodation in cities collaborated in the war and the religious orders that had accompanied Fernandine's hosts in the conquest of the city [19]. In Écija the arrival of religious communities was so fast. The convents of San Pablo (founded by Dominicans in 1248) and San Francisco (created by the Franciscans in 1249); were the first founded. It starts monasticism in Écija.

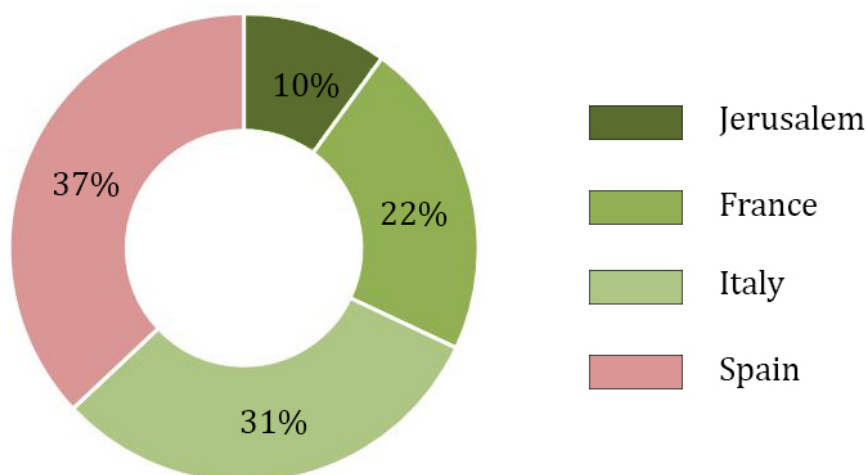
**Figure 3.** Cities with conventual spaces in the Kingdom of Seville. Base plan: "Regna



Hispaniarum atque Portugalliae", Valk, G. 1706 [20]

Between the 13th and 17th century there was a large conventual production spread throughout the territory of Seville. Of the 367 convents, 81 were located in the 155 municipalities of the region, which means an average of 2.4 convents per municipality of the kingdom and 4.6 per municipality in which there is a convent [20]. According to the data shown in the table, the number of convents grew exponentially during the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, with a clear reduction in subsequent centuries. The high number of convent buildings in the Kingdom and the different socio-political situations of the country were the determining factors for the decrease in monastic production.

Although there was a homogeneous number of municipalities with conventual buildings, the number of conventual buildings was not homogeneous. In the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, Seville stood out from other cities with a high number of convents in approximately 70 buildings. After Seville, the city of Écija stood out, the second as for the number in the Kingdom, 21 in total [21] [22] [23]. As Miura Andrades assures about Écija: *in the chronological parenthesis of 1383 and 1510, a total of ten convents or monasteries were founded. At the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, this is a high number for a population like the Ecijan, especially compared to other populations of equal rank (such as Carmona, with only six foundations or Jerez with as many other houses). We can, therefore, consider Écija as the second most important city, in terms of religious orders, of the archbishopric of Seville at the beginning of Modernity, being surpassed only by the number of convents and monasteries of the Andalusian capital* [24]. The city stands out not only in terms of the number of convents, but also in terms of the diversity of origin of the different religious orders. Several orders came to the city from distant regions, with 37% coming from Spain [25], 31% from Italy, 22% from France and 10% from Jerusalem. (Figure 4) The graph shows a total of 63% of foreign origin in relation to the own country. It is clear that not only the importance of the city is noted, as it receives these orders, but also the motivations it generates for orders from Europe to Jerusalem to choose Écija as a place of implantation for their community.



**Figure 4.** Percentages of the origin of the different orders in Écija

The Ecijan foundational process never finished in the city itself, but always had an external environment in which it exerted its influence. The most prominent one was the Dominicans of Ecija. These generated a certain devotion in towns such as Palma del Rio, in the north of the city, where they moved to. According to the minutes of the provincial chapters held between 1489 and 1506 [26], the influence of the Dominicans did not stop in Palma but extended from its provincial surroundings to cities such as Granada or Jerez. The feminine branch of the order also played an important role from the convent of Santa Florentina, reaching a convent foundation in Palma. For their part, it is known that the order of minimums left in 1512 to found the convent of La Victoria in Seville. [27]

#### 4. Disentailment of ecclesiastical properties

The confiscations carried out on the 19<sup>th</sup> century were one of the most determinant events for monasticism and the Spanish Church, and had an enormous repercussion. This process is key to understand today's monastic reality. The suppression, acquisition and sale of a multitude of

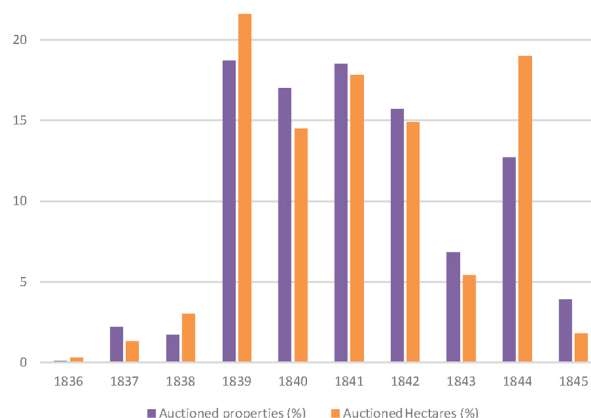
ecclesiastical properties completely changed the panorama and situation of the Spanish Church [28].

Due to the poor situation of the Spanish State and the need to increase public finances, the disentailment process took place. Between 1834 and 1855, the disentailments of Mendizábal and Madoz [29] [30] were applied. The expropriations took the names of two political men who made this process. The Spanish history has taken the surnames of Juan de Dios Álvarez Mendizábal and Pascual Madoz e Ibáñez to refer to the disentailment process in Spain. During this period, there was a massive sale of properties belonging to the Church, in favour of the early bourgeoisie. This transference of property generated a new urban development period in cities [31]. The opening of the streets, large avenues and squares begins, confronting new planning ideals with the urban morphology of the medieval city. The disentailment process would favour the morphological change of cities as well as causing the loss of a multitude of monastic buildings, demolished to free important locations in the intramural zones of the cities. In the case of Andalusia and specifically in the Sevillian case, the assets of the large owners were increased [32]. Despite the fact that the initial idea of the disentailment process was aimed at resolving, on one hand, the state fiscal problem and, on the other hand, the distribution of assets - which were concentrated in a minority of the population - it was not entirely effective. The idea was to share out properties between people. However they have not enough money to build the new properties which were sold by high prices by the Spanish State. As the nobility and the Church could not buy again the bourgeoisie played the main role. The result of the disentailment processes was the loss of innumerable ecclesiastical heritage, among which the conventual buildings stood out.

The Kingdom of Seville was an outstanding example of disentailment in Spain. As can be seen in the graph, an important number of properties and hectares were auctioned (Figure 5). The church lost almost 20% of its properties in 5 years. Also noteworthy is the difference between 1838 and 1839 where 1.7% / 3% is directly sold 7 times more until 18,7% / 21,6%. If the amounts are added together, we can approximately observe that more than 50% of the church properties were sold only in the Kingdom of Seville. The case of Écija does not escape from the disentailment process which marked a before and an after. In this context, *the urban disentailment during the Mendizábal stage placed Écija among the cities that would bring more urban estates to the market, surpassing provinces such as Avila, Asturias, Cantabria, Huelva and Soria, and very close to others as the Canary Islands or Almeria* [33]. The Church lost not only farms and lands, but also of their most precious assets, the convents. The greatness of the ecclesiastical buildings owned by the city did not go unnoticed. Most of its conventual structure was threatened and detached from the city, and magnificent and sumptuous cloisters were lost. In fact, most of the temples were not sold and maintained their religious use. Actually, they stand today and act as a reminder of the conventual power that the city once had [34].



Year	Auctioned properties (%)	Auctioned Hectares (%)
1836	0,08	0,3
1837	2,2	1,3
1838	1,7	3
1839	18,7	21,6
1840	17	14,5
1841	18,5	17,8
1842	15,7	14,9
1843	6,8	5,4
1844	12,7	19
1845	3,9	1,8



**Figure 5.** Table and graph about the number of auctioned properties in the Kingdom of Seville between 1835 and 1845 [31]

The disentailment process was crucial for the life of the Ecijan monasticism. The numbers show 5 convents disappeared and 10 affected by the disentailments. Only 6 have completely survived until today. Expressed as percentage, the 28% of the monastic buildings survived compared to 72% affected. In Écija the effect was much greater than the 50% estimated for the whole of the Kingdom of Seville. Those processes of expropriation brought as result in numerous times the partial or total loss of the building. Nevertheless, if we carefully study its evolution and plot in the urban parcel, we can observe how the imprint marked by conventual architecture still survives.

## 5. Results and discussions

It has been discussed the importance of the European influence that Écija has had in relation to the religious orders. They decided to establish themselves in this city. One of the reasons for the choice this *civitas* [35] was its high economic situation. The second one was that was a place for the expansion of the Christian faith, main mission of religious communities. The main result is the existence of 63% of religious orders outside Spain in Écija. This figure represents a high number of foundations for the city in contrast to the others cites that belong to the Kingdom of Seville. However, the great development of the city and the large conventual heritage will later mean a greater loss. The confiscations arrived in the city, selling all kinds of ecclesiastical properties. A transformation process took place that would end with the sale of 72% of the convents in Écija. Being a convent core, the number of monastic spaces grew exponentially. A substantial sale is obvious due to the innumerable properties that the Church had acquired in the city. The rise and fall of monasticism in Écija are closely linked.



**Figure 6.** Temples of the Order of Dominicans. From the left to the right, Écija, Salamanca, Krakow

## 6. Conclusions

Europe has been the cradle of the Christian religion, which has generated an interesting typology around the type of monastic life, which got to structure and unites regions that were confronted with each other. In spite of the existing differences between the branches that appeared in Christianity, the conventual typology is understood as something that surpasses the limits of the strictly political-religious as a symptom of a common identity. The conventual element is therefore a key and articulating piece that forms a European landscape and identity in relation to other continents and people of the terrestrial sphere. When we speak of monasticism, we think of Europe as a whole, where we have observed how foundations are extrapolated to the entire continent, occupying even the most distant regions (Figure 6).

The Iberian Peninsula is a particular example within the European territory, as it underwent a change of religion and culture due to the Muslim occupation. Unlike other Eastern Orthodox or Muslim regions, Hispania was completely converted to Catholicism, being a clear objective for its Christianization. The religious orders made numerous foundations, especially in the south zone, which was mostly occupied by the Muslims. Within the Kingdom of Seville the city of Écija stands out, owning a wide monastic patrimony reaching a total of 21 convents. By means of the data provided, the undeniable European influence as well as the conformation of the urban fabric of the city and of a rich conventual patrimony typical of a multitude of European urban scenarios is made clear. Located on the border with the Kingdom of Granada, it had a privileged position in the territory that allowed rapid economic and social developments. Added to the expansion of religious orders in Europe, the city became the ideal place for new foundations from distant European regions. The importance of the city denotes the fact that it became the second largest in number of convents in the Kingdom of Seville, proving the monastic importance. Due to its importance, the projection in other foundations was immediate to other cities of Andalusia, including Seville.

Despite its high level of religious heritage, the city was not free from the disentanglement processes. This implied the disappearance of several buildings, as well as the loss of a large part of the convent structure. Unlike other cities, the conventual transformations in Écija meant changes in the use of the building. The same surface changed many times from a religious to a residential use. There are only a couple of cases with changes to school use, although these are not common. The city follows his growing absorbing the old spaces left by the convents. No

free spaces remained, all space originated by the disentanglement of a convent was quickly occupied and built. As a result, a compact city appears. However, the religious fervour of the population did allow the conservation of most of the temples that today keep their religious use. In spite of the expropriations made to the church, the trace left by the monasticism continues transmitting an important transcendence on the city, like the legacy of the Ecijan monastic heritage.

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