

The Role of Cultural Institutions and Events in the Marketing of Cities and Regions

Edited by
Tomasz Domański



Xosé A. Neira Cruz PhD

University of Santiago de Compostela
Santiago de Compostela, Spain

Solar de Tejada, a Medieval Nobility Institution proposed as a Heritage of Cultural Interest in Spain

Last February 2015 the Autonomous Government of La Rioja (Spain) decided to start the process for declaring a peculiar and unique medieval institution in Europe as Bien de Interés Cultural (BIC), Heritage of Cultural Interest. This declaration guarantees special public protection to material or intangible contents related with art, culture and civilization, preserving its conservation as a sign of identity and developing a network of future synergies in order to diffuse and disseminate the object or idea, which deserves it. The particularity of this case is related with the nature of the institution selected by the Government of La Rioja as a new BIC for and from this Region: a case of medieval privilege equivalent to that of a nobility title (and listed among the rest of titles existing in Spain in the *Guía Oficial de Grandezas y Títulos del Reino*, edited by the Ministry of Justice of Spain) with at least more than five hundred years of history and intended to highlight the merits of a social group, the Tejada's descendants, and their social relevance in Sierra de Cameros, a natural area in the border of La Rioja with the former Kingdoms of Navarra and Aragón. More than 400 hectares of forests, a cottage with a prominent coat of arms, a genealogical archive — unique in its nature in Europe — constitute the property accumulated from the moment this royal privilege was granted until today. An indivisible joint ownership, perhaps the remains of the medieval *behetrías* (medieval lordships where members could elect their lord, following the definition given by CORONIMAS & PASCUAL), where every member of the Solar, called *señores diviseros*, is an owner but he/she cannot decide over his/her property without the agreement of the rest of the owners.

But what is the reason behind the importance of this institution and its declaration, going beyond its origin as a Heritage of Cultural Interest and a sign of public recognition by the entire region, which forms part of its roots as a community and social group?

For understanding the Solar de Tejada we need to explain in detail the nature of this institution and its evolution in time.

Although tradition links Tejada with the wars against Arab domination in the time of the Reconquest, pointing to the legendary Battle of Clavijo (844) as the beginning of this family line of people — supposedly the descendents of the hero Sancho de Tejada and his 13 sons — the reality is perhaps more practical and less poetic as legends would like it to be. The fact is historians consider Clavijo a legend created, *inter alia*, to encourage people to fight against the Muslims in a sort of holy war, where the Divine support was represented by supernatural intervention of the apostle Saint James, who supposedly helped the Christian army as a miraculous commander riding a white horse. The myth of a magic leader on a white horse is frequent in other cultures in the Middle Ages, and, in this very case, it was not just useful for supporting the Christian excitement and the faith in the final success, but also to consolidate Saint James as a religious point of reference in Spanish kingdoms as well as to develop the economic and commercial network related with the establishment of the Way to Santiago, the Camino, still today so important as economic and cultural phenomenon. In Clavijo the Castillian monarchy found a perfect excuse for constituting the so called *Voto a Santiago*, a kind of tax charged over the Castillian and later Spanish towns in order to uphold the devotion to the national patron saint, which served not only to sponsor the development of Compostela as a religious and monumental capital, but also to ensure new inputs to public and royal coffers in the period of continuous conflicts.

Appealing to the memory of Clavijo and the Tejada's family, king Henry IV of Castile gave great favours — and here is when the documented history of the Solar really starts — to groups of oligarchs from Cameros. The royal privilege itself dates back to 1460 when the king conceded the coat of arms — sign of noble status — described in great details to them together with other not so very concrete benefits as descendants of the common ancestor, the above mentioned Sancho de Tejada, lord of Montes Cadines (in the hills of Cameros) because of the supposed concession made by king Ramiro II in the time of the Clavijo Battle.

This privilege has got some interesting and innovative particularities. Not only because it consecrates the indivisible nature of the domain of Tejada, but especially because of the equality between male and female descendants established by the mode of reception of this privilege, which is transmitted exclusively by *ius sanguinis*, the right of blood. Still today the ca. 2,000 members of the Solar de Tejada, residing not only in Spain but in many countries around the world, are lords, chevaliers and owners of Tejada because they can document their being descendents of persons registered in the old books of this institution, preserved in an ancient safe in the house of the Solar, which can be opened using different keys guarded by different persons from different villages in the Cameros district at the same time. The recognition of women as heirs was not unusual in Castile, where women could inherit titles, real estate and even the royal throne in absence of a male heir (it was not the same, for instance, in the kingdom of Aragón), but the Solar de Tejada is the first nobility institution, which defends equality between men and women in the succession of titles and noble privileges, a right now preserved in Spain but just from 2006 in the case of the succession of a royal benefit. Five hundred years before in Cameros hills a group of families (mainly occupied with farming and ranching) were respecting female right universally recognised in modern times.

Why did king Henry IV of Castile decide to give these people this special and rare privilege? Again, behind the legend (absolutely re-posessed by the king in order to confirm, e.g., the discussed Vote to Santiago) there are perhaps the practicalities of the historical moment and political strategies. Cameros, as a wedge between Castile, Aragón and

Navarra, was especially interesting for the monarch, in order to preserve an eventual support in the future fights against the East bordering kingdoms. The same reason — and the wish to confirm his questioned rights as an heir of Navarra — lies probably in fast confirmation of the same privilege (given in Vega de Granada on 8th July 1491) by the King Ferdinand of Aragón as well as by his wife, Queen Isabella of Castile, the Catholic monarchs, the couple who were the founding fathers of the Constitution of the modern Kingdom of Spain. Their grandson and successor, Emperor Charles V, King Charles I of Spain, continued the tradition started by his predecessors, in a royal transmission supported by the Bourbon dynasty from King Ferdinand VI (1749) until King Juan Carlos I (1981), who renovated the Tejada's privilege, in a similar form as their royal ancestors. Even short experiences of the Republic in Spain respected or even confirmed the Solar de Tejada, which happened in 1869, as well as during the General Franco's dictatorship (1957).

What is the secret of Tejada for remaining an untouchable institution from the Middle Ages to the 21st century, surviving the Old Regime and the suppression of lordships established by the Spanish Constitution of 1812 and applied in practice since 1837?

It is quite difficult to understand how such a long tradition could survive until the 21st century, preserving its nature of a German law institution, as a medieval relic, and escaping processes of *Desamortización*, expropriations that took place in Spain from 18th century onwards, which constituted, as TOMAS Y VALIENTE said an “apropiación por parte del Estado y por decisión unilateral suya de bienes inmuebles pertenecientes a «manos muertas»; venta de los mismos y asignación del importe obtenido con las ventas a la amortización de los títulos de la deuda”¹. Even if *Desamortización* specifically targeted the real estate owned by the Church, also lands in the hands of nobility corporations were affected by the process. Behind the territorial integrity of Tejada's heritage, as well as behind the continuity of the Solar in preserving their status, there was the ability of its members to defend — using available legal instruments and appealing to their royal privileges even in courts — the continuity of tradition, which reveals, on the other hand, an unexpected coexistence, within the same institution, of people from different social and economical layers: from impoverished ranchers of Sierra de Cameros (who lost their main source of income when the trade in wool declined) until some Grandes de España, the most relevant nobility distinction in Spain. Genealogical transmission — indispensable key for becoming a member of the Solar — allows this capillarity of relations and unexpected connections. For instance, Queen Fabiola of the Belgians was a member of Tejada, and Queen Máxima of the Netherlands could be too, because she is a descendent of the Solar, as the future Dutch queen, crown princess Catharina Amalia, princess of Orange, would be as well, as she studied at SAMPEDRO ESCOLAR². Still now, in their annual meetings in the cottage of the Solar, celebrated each first Sunday of October, the same social cohabitation is a sign of understanding the Tejada's spirit.

On the other hand, Tejada is also a seed of international links from and for La Rioja. The Diaspora developed by the families from Cameros, who disseminated the Solar in 22 countries in the world and, of course, in all the Spanish regions. Proud of their origin, descendents of the Solar used to include the patronymic “de Tejada” in their surname, also to underline the connection to the Solar was in the past a way of social promotion and access to positions/honours or corporations. For instance, members from the Lerdo de Tejada family were important in the History of Mexico, as well as Matute de Tejada,

¹ Tomás y Valiente, 1972, p. 44.

² Sampedro Escolar, 2010, pp. 38–39.

Castillo de Tejada, García de Tejada, Martínez de Tejada, Rubio de Tejada, Sáenz de Tejada, Romero de Tejada, Torres de Tejada, etc. were in other countries as Argentina, Chile, Peru or Portugal. Because of the female transmission, other surnames not originally from Cameros are linked to Tejada now. Currently, the Mayor of the Solar de Tejada (elected by the members for representing them) is a Chilean entrepreneur Guillermo García Hernández. So, through Tejada, and following the pioneer spirit defended by a lot of people from La Rioja, this Autonomous region of Spain found another way of its international representation stemming from their medieval roots.

Because of the exceptional dimension of this institution, the Government of La Rioja, represented by its General Directorate of Culture, decided in February 2015 to start the process of officially declaring the Solar de Tejada as BIC, founding the decision on the intangible importance of cultural heritage. This institution is as an identity trademark for La Rioja, as it is underlined in the *Boletín Oficial del Estado*: “peculiaridad identitaria honorífica e inmaterial digna de ser protegida por los poderes públicos, como recuerdo de la idiosincrasia de la sierra del Camero Viejo en el que se produjo la singularidad de que el reconocimiento de la transmisión de tales derechos se produjera tanto por línea de varón — que era lo habitual — como también por línea de mujer, caso excepcional que convierte al Señorío de Tejada en una reliquia extraordinaria”³.

Future as a source of culture and cultural activities for Solar has come to this ancient and unusual institution, which for centuries has preserved the memory of the family and, at the same time, the value of the relationship between the land and succession as a reference for common identity of the social group they belong to.

³ *Boletín Oficial del Estado*, nº 31, 05/02/2015: 9774

References

- Boletín Oficial del Estado*, nº 31, 05/02/2015, sec. III, pp. 9766–9774.
- COROMINAS, Joan & PASCUAL, José Antonio (1984–1991). *Diccionario crítico etimológico castellano e hispánico*. Madrid: Editorial Gredos.
- Guía Oficial de Grandezas y Títulos del Reino* (2011). Madrid: Ministerio de Justicia, Gobierno de España.
- Hernández Lázaro, J.F. (1996). *Ser de Tejada. Significados del valor actual de la Nobleza*. Logroño: Ediciones La Prensa del Rioja.
- Saenz Matienzo, R. (2010). *Antropología histórica de los señores de Tejada y Valdeosera (Las familias más viejas de Europa)*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Dunken.
- Sampedro Escolar, J.L. (2010). *El linaje de Tejada. Un señorío superviviente en el siglo XXI*. Madrid: Ática Comunicación.
- Tomas Y Valiente, F. (1972). *El marco político de la desamortización en España*. Barcelona: Ariel.



University of
LODZ



Culture



This project has been funded with support from the European Commission.
This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission
cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made
of the information contained therein.



www.wydawnictwo.uni.lodz.pl
e-mail: ksiegarnia@uni.lodz.pl
tel. (42) 665 58 63

