

DAVID RHEAD
JOSÉ ANTONIO MARÍN URIBE

Sketches of Valencia



DAVID RHEAD
JOSÉ ANTONIO MARÍN URIBE

Sketches of Valencia

Título: Sketches of Valencia

© David Rhead
José Antonio Marín Uribe

© 2019, Editorial Universitat Politècnica de València
Venta: www.lalibreria.upv.es
Ref.: 0821_10_01_01

© Dibujo de portada: Alberto Sales Tendero, detalle reja
Jardín del Palacio de la Generalitat

Diseño y realización: Estudio David Cercós

Imprime: Byprint Percom, S.L.

ISBN: 978-84-9048-756-3
Impreso bajo demanda

La Editorial UPV autoriza la reproducción, traducción y difusión parcial de la presente publicación con fines científicos, educativos y de investigación que no sean comerciales ni de lucro, siempre que se identifique y se reconozca debidamente a la Editorial UPV, la publicación y los autores. La autorización para reproducir, difundir o traducir el presente estudio, o compilar o crear obras derivadas del mismo en cualquier forma, con fines comerciales/lucrativos o sin ánimo de lucro, deberá solicitarse por escrito al correo edicion@editorial.upv.es.

Impreso en España



Editorial
Universitat Politècnica
de València

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all our friends in Valencia for their help, advice, knowledge and support. Thanks to Will McCarthy for getting us started. A special mention to John Murphy and Amparo Sales Tendero who made some great suggestions and helped with proof-reading (although any errors you might find are entirely our own). Thanks to Alberto Sales Tendero for the cover drawing and to Cristina Pérez Guillot. Director of the Centro de Lenguas at the UPV.

Index

INTRODUCTION

1. THE FOUNDATIONS

Roman Valentia 014

2. IN THE STREET

City of bats 020

Valencian streets. Who was Doctor Collado? 024

Valencian statues 028

Screaming from the balcony 033

3. CATHEDRALS TO COMMERCE

The Lonja 040

Mercado Central. Soul of the City 045

4. THE CATHEDRAL AND ITS SURROUNDINGS

The Cathedral 052

El Miguelete. Tower of Song 056

El Tribunal de les Aigües 060

Holy Grail 065

5. THE BORGIAS

Borgias 070

Baroque Treasures in the heart of the Carmen 075

6. MODERNIST VALENCIA

Cánovas. A monument to Itself	080
Exhibition 1909. It's all been done	084
Post Office	088
Station to station	091

7. THE RIVER TURIA

"La Riada"	098
A river runs through it	103
Bioparc. A better home for Rómulo	107

8. THE BEACH AND THE PORT

The other side of the tracks	112
Bringing the seaside closer	118
Valencia and the port	123

9. MOORS AND CHRISTIANS

Muslim Valencia	128
Jaume I	133
Russafa. A Garden of Delights	138

10. THE GOLDEN AGE

Ausias March	144
The white knight	147
Isabel de Villena	151

11. LUISES AND VICENTES

Two men called Luis	156
Vicentes	160

12. TWO VALENCIAN ARTISTS

Vicente Blasco Ibáñez.	
Blood, Sand, Bluster, Bravado and Brilliance	166
Joaquín Sorolla	171

13. TWO VALENCIAN TRAGEDIES

Expulsion of the moriscos	176
The refugios and the bombing of Valencia	181

14. BON PROFIT

Xe! Quina paella mes bona!	188
What valencians drink	193
Queremos turrón, turrón, turrón!	197

15. FIESTAS

Corpus Christi	202
All the fun of the fair	206
Mascletá	210
San Juan	214

16. THE SPORT

Sport of a king	220
-----------------	-----

INTRODUCTION

The chapters in this book started life as articles for Valencia 24-7 magazine, edited by our good friend Will McCarthy. We were looking to write a few pieces about the city of Valencia and its history and culture and we ended up writing an article almost every month for nearly 13 years. For this book, we have chosen a few of those articles in the hope that they will work well together.

The idea was not to write a tourist guide, but to come up with something that people who live in the city might find interesting. Some insider knowledge they could use to impress visitors. A way for expats and foreign students to pick up a few stories and bits of information about where they are living and for locals to practise their English and find out a bit about the city at the same time.

José Antonio Marín Uribe is a true “insider”. He is a born and bred Valencian, baptised in the parish church of San Valero y San Vicente Mártir in Ruzafa and has lived in the city all his life. He has always taken an interest in the history of the city and its traditions and idiosyncrasies. Like me, he is also not averse to poking fun at these traditions whenever the opportunity arises.

As for me, David Rhead, I came to live in this city as a complete outsider and found my home here. I tried to write about the city from the outside looking in, from the point of view of the curious visitor, but also as a resident and a member of this community. Part of Valencian culture is their enormous (sometimes justified) civic pride, so, mainly just to annoy them, I tried to add a bit of clarity and friendly cynicism to my already established appreciation of this city.

On the odd occasion that these articles work well, it is when we have managed to blend these two views of the city, the playfully proud Valencian and the sceptical pale-skinned *guiiri*.

The articles which appear here have been edited, updated and bundled together in some sort of order, but they were not written as a single continuous narrative and are not meant to be read as such. It is not, by any means, a comprehensive guide to the city, with the most glaring omission being *Las Fallas*, we decided that you can't explain *Fallas* in a single chapter and you probably know all about it anyway. They are certainly not (by any stretch of the imagination) the definitive works on any of the subjects we tackle, they are merely sketches of different aspects of the life and history of our city, Valencia.

1

—

THE FOUNDATIONS

Roman Valentia

It was the Romans who started it all. Before them Valencia was just a swampy island on the river Turia. The early history of the city was always pretty sketchy but the excavation of the Almoina site behind the Plaza de la Virgen Basílica in 1985 changed all this, giving us information about the city's beginnings and painting a clearer picture of Roman Valencia.

The city was founded in the year 138 BC as a kind of retirement home for old soldiers. Victorious Roman Consul, Décimo Junio Bruto Galáico, wanted to reward the veterans from his successful campaigns in Lusitania. He founded Valentia Edetanorum "the city of the valiant" and gave each of them a plot of land on an island in the river Turia (or Tyris as it was known to the local Iberians).

To get a picture of how the land lay on the site of the city 2,000 years ago, what is now the city centre was surrounded by the river, which followed the course of today's riverbed park on one side, and, on the other, a second branch of the Turia which forked off at more or less the modern site of the Puente de las Artes, flowing through Bolsería, and the Plaza del Mercado, where it formed a small lake, through the Ayuntamiento and down Calle Barcas and Pintor Sorolla towards Plaza Tetuán and the Glorieta where it flowed back into the main river at what is now the Puente del Real.

Unlike its more established neighbours like Sagunto, Llíria or Xàtiva, which had been around for centuries, Valencia was a purely Roman construction on what had been previously agricultural land. This fell in with Roman policy of making a clean break with the Iberians, Greeks and Phoenicians who had founded and controlled the other cities and Valencia, the true Roman city, was given increasing importance in the region at the expense of its neighbours.

But just when things were going so well, death, disaster and destruction were just around the corner. Not for the last time in its history, the city of Valencia backed the losing side in a civil war and suffered the reprisals. In the first century BC, General Quintus Setorius stood against the regime in Rome and attempted to set up an independent Roman republic in Hispania, but, after his assassination, his forces were crushed by Pompey. Pompey's revenge was brutal. In 75 BC the city of Valencia was destroyed by Pompey's forces. The Almoina excavation uncovered weapons used in the battle in which thousands died and 14 skeletons were found showing symptoms of horrible torture, some with limbs amputated and others that had been impaled alive. These were prisoners who had been publically executed in order to terrorise what was left of the population and to stand as an example to other cities.

The city lay abandoned for more than fifty years but with the power of the Caesars restored in Rome, Emperor Augustus rebuilt the city in around 20 BC, increasing its size and importance, establishing the first

great city of Valencia. A grand Forum was built on the site of what is now the Basílica and a huge Circus, the size of three football pitches and with a capacity for more than 10,000 people, was erected stretching down from where the Comisiones Obreros building stands today in Plaza de Nápoles y Sicilia, crossing Calle de la Paz all the way to the Plaza del Patriarca. The City prospered and became the most important Roman metropolis in the region.

Roman Valencia was a walled city with four gates at the Cardinal points and a bridge where the Puente de la Trinidad (the one that goes across to Calle Alboraya) stands today. One gate in the Plaza de la Reina (more or less directly under Finnegans), one in Calle Salvador (remains of which will soon be on display in a basement next to the church) another in Calle Caballeros and a fourth in Calle Avellanas (remains of which can be seen at number 14, through a specially built window at street level).

Despite its ancient grandeur, not much was known for certain about Roman Valencia until the 1980s when work started on the Almoína dig right in the heart of the City behind the Cathedral. This unlocked many of the secrets of Valentia including the destruction by Pompey and its subsequent rebuilding. You can visit the site of the excavation at the Almoína Archeological Museum in Plaza Décimo Junio Bruto (from the Plaza de la Virgen, just go under the arch between the Cathedral and the Basílica). It's like travelling back in time as you go down the steps under the square. You can walk along the Roman streets towards what was the Roman Forum

where you can see remains of its columns, porticoes and capitals. There are parts of a temple and grain store and there are even remains of the cold water and hot water baths and the changing rooms which date back to the original Republican Valentia and were constructed as far back as 120 BCE.

If you are looking for other evidence of the Romans around the city, some ancient Roman plaques dating back from the first and second centuries BCE have been used to decorate the Plaza de la Virgen façade of the Basilica (more or less at floor level). You can also see parts of the circus in the church of San Juan del Hospital and in the basement of the Caro Hotel at 14, Calle del Almirante. There are also numerous artefacts and ceramics in the various museums around Valencia particularly in the Museo de la Ciudad and the Centro Cultural de la Beneficencia.

The ancient Roman city was of course rebuilt and built over again by the Goths, Visigoths, Muslims, Christians, Borgias, Carlists, Republicans, Francoists, Bautista Soler and Rita Barberá, but it was the Romans who founded Valencia and it was their name for it that stuck.

2

—

IN THE
STREET

City of bats

since November 2015, a spectacular giant orange bat has been looking down over Avenida de Aragón from the Grada de la Mar façade of the Mestalla stadium. The 90 metre-long *murciélago* was put up just in time for the visit of Barcelona (and, more pertinently, a rare visit from the owner from Singapore) complete with 70.800 sequins which flicker and shine out across the Avenida Aragón. But what is this thing with this city and its bats?

You can find bats everywhere in Valencia. The symbolic version on the city's crests, badges and municipal hardware or in the sculptured stone work of the main train station; and the real living animal in the cracks and crevices of the city's buildings or flapping about in the early evening twilight. There are four times as many Patudo bats in one cave in El Montgó mountain in Jávea than in the whole of France, and there are 22 different species throughout the Valencian Community but, for some reason, they have always had a bit of a bad press.

That other Valencian city perennial, the dove, is the symbol of peace and the Holy Spirit while the bat has always been associated with witches, devils and the dark side of life. Small children and old ladies happily chase around and feed the disease-carrying pigeons in the Plaza de la Virgen, but it would be hard to imagine them doing the same for a swarm of our winged mouse-like

friends. The pigeons get all the grub while the animal which, as we will see, really provides a meaningful service to Valencia and has been its cultural icon for the last seven centuries has to hide away in the nooks and crannies of the city.

People are suspicious of bats; they only come out at night, and even then it's probably just to cavort with the prince of darkness. We know they are around but where are they hiding during the day? Probably closer to you than you think. In many ways, the way we perceive them is similar to the increasingly evident drunken stag and hen parties at closing time in Calle Caballeros; their haphazard flight is anything but graceful, they don't look like they know where they're going and might clumsily flap into us at any moment. They're given to making demonic screeching noises and, to be fair, they are pretty ugly. But let's forget our anti-bat prejudices and stick to the facts.

It's true that they only usually come out at night but that's probably to avoid all the old ladies and small children in the Plaza de la Virgen. Bats are extraordinarily skilful navigators; the screeching noises are part of their advanced sonar system which allows them to measure distances and perceive obstacles in total darkness. It is said that a bat can detect something the size of a human hair from 20 metres and, in fact, contrary to popular belief, many species have excellent eyesight. As for the ugly jibe, beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Most humans probably wouldn't do too well in a bat beauty contest.

But we still haven't mentioned the best thing about bats, their voracious appetite for mosquitoes. This

is their true gift to the city. Considering Valencia was built on a swamp and is slap bang next to the huge mosquito breeding ground that is the Albufera lake and the surrounding rice fields, without the minuscule caped crusaders we'd really be in trouble. Bats eat two thirds of the mosquitoes that enter the city, so if you've ever had an itchy, sleepless summer night, constantly woken by that horrible buzzing in your ear, remember, things could be so much worse.

It is said that the Moors domesticated bats as a sort of medieval version of *Raid matamosquitos* but it was the conquering Christians who made the bat the symbol of the city. As with all things related with bats the origins of this are obscure. One legend has it that on the morning of the Christian conquest of Valencia back in 1238 a large bat settled on the conquering King Don Jaime I's tent which he took to be a good omen for victory. Another says that during the battle a bat attracted by the dragon on the King's crown intercepted a Moorish arrow which was bound for his heart. A third tells of how the Moorish king kept a large bat which was considered by all to be the guardian of the city. When the Christians captured and killed the Sultan's pet, Valencia soon fell into their hands.

The real reason for the adoption of the bat as a Valencian icon however, was probably Don Jaime's connections with the rather shadowy and mysterious order of Templar knights who brought the king up as an orphan after his father's death and were instrumental in helping him to victory in Valencia. The bat was a key symbol of this enigmatic order, so our poor pointy-eared

pest controller was taken by Don Jaime as a symbol of the city in their honour.

So it came to be that the bat now appears on the City's crest and every manhole cover, streetlight, bin wagon and bus stop. It was the symbol of the Spook factory, the disco at the centre of the burgeoning Eighties Valencia techno scene and is the emblem for *las Fallas* and Valencian cultural Clubs such as *Lo Rat Penat*.

It is also, of course, the symbol of the city's two football teams and is displayed on the burgee of the city's yacht club. Both Valencia CF and Levante UD have worn the bat on their shirts with pride from the outset. In an attempt to reduce their enormous debt and make the club more marketable worldwide (especially in Asia) Valencia CF has recently gone through a bit of an image makeover and it has, of course, looked to its longstanding symbol to help enhance the brand (hence our big orange friend on Avenida Aragón).

This has not gone unnoticed by the Batman people at DC comics, who claim they have the sole rights to the outstretched wing "flittermouse" and a legal claim has been filed against the club. Two things spring to mind; Don Jaime got there first (by about 700 years) and Valencia CF have been using the bat as a symbol since the club was founded in 1919. Batman first started dressing up in cape and tights twenty years later in May 1939 for issue 27 of DC comics.

So, learn to love the bat. Your life would be worse without them and it has been the symbol of this city way back since the original "Dark Knights".

Valencian streets

Who was Doctor Collado?

Wandering round some of Valencia's main streets and Squares you might get the impression that Valencians don't exactly stretch themselves when it comes to thinking up street names. There's a round square which is called, er, Round square (Plaza Redonda), the avenue that goes to the port is ingeniously named the Port Avenue and the avenue that heads west from the centre is called, you guessed it, West Avenue. The Central Market is in Plaza del Mercado and, best of all, Valencia's emblematic main square, home to the *Mascletà* and the City's ornate City Council building, has been given the dazzlingly inspirational name of, wait for it, City Council square. Now that's just laziness.

As you go into the Barrio del Carmen things don't get much better, guess what you can find in Plaza del Árbol and Plaza de la Cruz. In this part of town they just went round naming the streets after the different trades of the people who lived there. The gentlemen lived in Calle Caballeros, the tanners in Calle Zurradores and the Shearers in Calle Tundidores. Sheep Shearers that is, not dour Geordie footballers. (Imagine a whole street of Alan Shearers, the mind boggles). The weavers lived in Calle Tejedores, the rope makers in Calle Sogueros, the bag makers in Bolsería and

so it goes on. This medieval practice has now gone out of fashion. Which is just as well really, these days, I suppose, it would be all Calle Repartidores de Pizza and Plaza Monitores de Aerobic.

But other parts of Valencia showed a bit more imagination. In the areas of the nineteenth century expansion of the city the street names reflect the social class of the folk who lived there. The posh part of town around Colón and the Gran Vía is all fat cat nineteenth Century businessmen and aristos, not known for being shy when it came to naming streets after themselves; Cirilio Amorós, Marqués del Turia, Conde Altea and Félix Pizcueta mixed in with the conquistadors they idolized like Pizarro and Hernán Cortés. The working class Grao area has more fittingly nineteenth Century proletariat street names like Industry Street, Progress Street, Wood (Calle Maderas), Iron (Hierros) and Sawmill (Serrería) Streets. Rickets and Tuberculosis Street were just round the corner. On the other side of the city, the streets of the Nineteenth Century middle class area of Ruzafa were named after ex-colonies (Cuba, Puerto Rico and Filipinas), places that they wished were ex-colonies (Gibraltar), and places you might like to go on holiday (Dénia, Cádiz, Alicante and Castellón).

Monarchs, of course, also get a mention but Valencia seems to have something against Kings of Spain. The Aragón kings are well represented (Alfonso el Magnánimo, Pedro el Grande and Fernando el Católico) but there's not one Borbón (unless you count the Juan Carlos I Marina) and only two Austrians (Don Juan and

Para seguir leyendo haga click aquí