

ROBLEDO DE CHAVELA AND THE ROYAL PALACE STAIRCASE



JUST ONE ORDINARY MORNING IN ROBLEDO DE CHAVELA...

DID YOU GET IT?

GET WHAT?

...THAT MARBLE FROM ROBLEDO DE CHAVELA WAS USED TO BUILD THE ROYAL PALACE STAIRCASE IN MADRID

WHAT?!



REALLY?

YES, YES, THE MAIN STAIRCASE

WOW



...IT EVEN SHOWED UP ON TV, LIKE BIG NEWS:
"NATIONAL HERITAGE CONFIRMS THAT THE MARBLE FROM THE QUARRIES OF ROBLEDO DE CHAVELA WAS CHOSEN BY KING CHARLES III IN 1763 TO BUILD THE STEPS OF THE MAIN STAIRCASE OF THE ROYAL PALACE OF MADRID"

- JUNE 2022 -

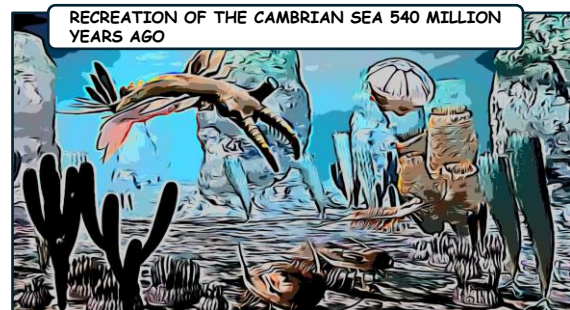
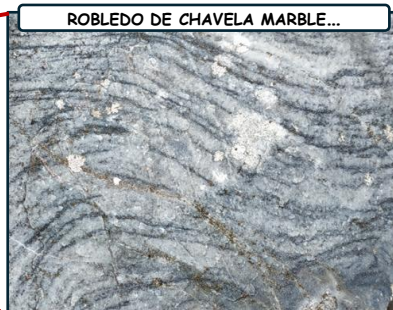
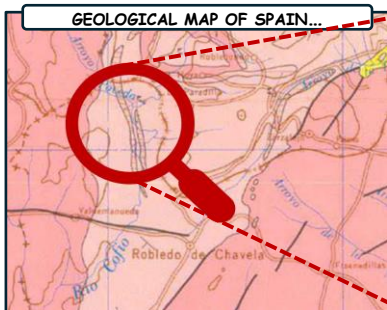


BUT... WHO FOUND OUT? HOW DID IT ALL COME ABOUT?

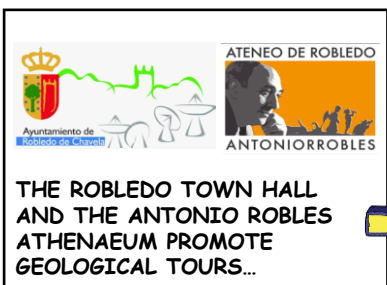
ELEVEN YEARS AGO, THE TAJO RIVER AUTHORITY TOOK DOWN THE DAM AT ROBLEDO DE CHAVELA BECAUSE IT WAS IN BAD SHAPE. WHEN THE RESERVOIR DRAINED, A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT TYPE OF ROCK APPEARED—NOTHING LIKE THE USUAL GRANITE AND GNEISS THAT SHAPE ROBLEDO'S LANDSCAPE. FOR A GEOLOGIST, IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE TO MISS...



CONFIRMED ON SPAIN'S GEOLOGICAL MAP!! ROBLEDO DE CHAVELA IS HOME TO MARBLE THAT'S 540 MILLION YEARS OLD. BACK IN THE CAMBRIAN PERIOD, LIFE EXISTED ONLY IN THE OCEANS... AND THEN IT EXPLODED, GIVING RISE TO ALL THE MAJOR ANIMAL GROUPS!



THE DISCOVERY WAS PERFECT FOR GUIDED GEOLOGY TOURS, HELPING TO EXPLAIN HOW OUR PLANET WORKS—AND HOW A MARINE ROCK CAN APPEAR RIGHT NEXT TO GRANITE AND GNEISS.



THE RESEARCH ON ROBLEDOS DE CHAVELA'S MARBLE KEPT GOING—AND LED TO A COMPLETELY UNEXPECTED DISCOVERY...



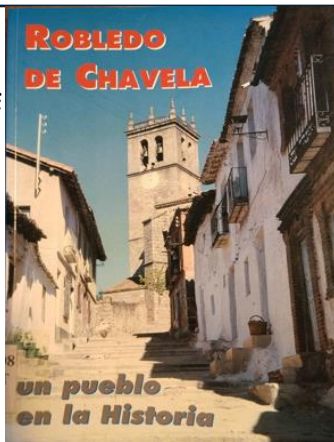
MEMBERS OF THE ANTONIO ROBLES ATHENAEUM REVIEWED SEVERAL PUBLICATIONS ABOUT THE HISTORY OF ROBLEDOS MARBLES



THE BOOK *ROBLEDOS DE CHAVELA*, A TOWN IN HISTORY MAKES IT CLEAR: THE STEPS OF THE ROYAL PALACE STAIRCASE

WERE MADE WITH GRAY MARBLE FROM ROBLEDOS DE CHAVELA'S QUARRIES. IT'S THOROUGHLY DOCUMENTED, THROUGH RESEARCH BY A PROFESSOR AT THE UNIVERSITY OF VALLADOLID AND COPIES OF ORIGINAL DOCUMENTS FROM THE ROYAL PALACE ARCHIVES IN MADRID.

I THINK IT MAKES IT PERFECTLY CLEAR.



WAIT! IT IS NOT SO CLEAR... IN THE BOOK FROM NATIONAL HERITAGE, IT

SAYS THAT THE MARBLES OF THE MAIN STAIRCASE COME FROM A TOWN IN TOLEDO—SAN PABLO, OR URDA, ACCORDING TO OTHER DOCUMENTS.

AND AT NO POINT IS ROBLEDOS DE CHAVELA MENTIONED.

STRANGE, ISN'T IT?

EL PALACIO REAL DE MADRID



IT WOULD BE A GOOD IDEA TO GO TO THE UNIVERSITY OF VALLADOLID TO DO SOME RESEARCH



THE ATHENAEUM, DIGGING INTO ARCHIVES IN VALLADOLID...



CAREFUL REVIEW OF THE DOCUMENTS AND RESEARCH BY PROFESSOR FCO. JAVIER PLAZA SANTIAGO LEAVES NO ROOM FOR

DOUBT: THE GRAY MARBLE USED FOR THE STEPS OF THE ROYAL PALACE'S MAIN STAIRCASE COMES FROM ROBLEDOS DE CHAVELA'S QUARRIES.



WHAT SHALL WE DO NOW?

WE NEED OFFICIAL CONFIRMATION



LET'S EMAIL NATIONAL HERITAGE TO GET OFFICIAL CONFIRMATION



IN JUNE 2022, NATIONAL HERITAGE REPLIED TO THE ANTONIO ROBLES ATHENAEUM'S EMAIL:



Dear Sirs, the marble used was from Robledo. That decision was made in 1763, after a period of hesitation, because initially—in 1761—Sabatini and the king had planned to use white marble from Urda. The final decision, which also depended on whether each step could be made from a single piece, as the king wanted, was not made until 1764, and the staircase wasn't completed until 1767.





FROM THAT MOMENT, NATIONAL HERITAGE, THE ROBLEDO DE CHAVELA TOWN HALL, AND THE ANTONIO ROBLES ATHENAEUM BEGAN WORKING CLOSELY TOGETHER...

EL MUESTRARIO DE ROCAS ORNAMENTALES DEL PALACIO REAL DE MADRID



...WHICH IN SEPTEMBER 2025 LED TO THE PUBLICATION OF A BOOK, THE COLLECTION OF ORNAMENTAL ROCKS OF THE ROYAL PALACE OF MADRID SPONSORED BY THE ROBLEDO DE CHAVELA TOWN HALL. THE MARBLES AND QUARRIES OF ROBLEDO DE CHAVELA FEATURE PROMINENTLY THROUGHOUT THE BOOK.

PAGE 43 NOTES...

NO. 1, ROBLEDO: AN EXAMPLE OF A QUARRY

THE COLLECTION, ARRANGED AS SABATINI INTENDED, STARTS WITH ROBLEDO DE CHAVELA—THE QUARRY THAT PROVIDED THE STEPS FOR THE MAIN STAIRCASE, THE MOST FAMOUS INTERIOR BY THIS ARCHITECT IN THE PALACE.

NUMBER 1?

SAMPLE COLLECTION?

WHAT DOES ALL THIS MEAN?

LET'S GO STEP BY STEP...

...THE KING CHOSE WHICH ORNAMENTAL STONE TO USE FOR BUILDING EACH PART OF THE PALACE.



...TO MAKE THINGS EASIER, THE PALACE ARCHITECTS CREATED A SERIES OF DISPLAY CASES SHOWCASING SPAIN'S MOST SPECTACULAR ORNAMENTAL STONES—THAT IS, A KIND OF SAMPLE COLLECTION.



EACH CASE CONSISTED OF 40 SMALL SAMPLES MADE FROM DIFFERENT POLISHED STONES.

THERE WERE A TOTAL OF 8 CASES, WHICH NATIONAL HERITAGE HAS BEAUTIFULLY RESTORED AND RECENTLY DISPLAYED IN AN EXHIBITION CALLED "HIS MAJESTY CHOOSES".



CAN YOU GUESS WHICH IS SAMPLE NO. 1 IN CASE NO. 1 AS WELL?



EXACTLY! SAMPLE NO. 1 IN CASE NO. 1 IS MARBLE FROM ROBLEDO DE CHAVELA!

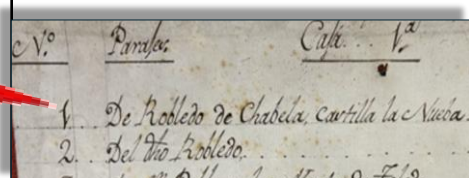


CASE NO. 1 OF THE SHOWCASE, DESIGNED BY SACHETTI AND SABATINI

67- Cas. e. PATRIMONIO NACIONAL, inv. 10199584



SAMPLE NO. 1. FROM THE BOOK, PAGE 104, FIGURE 67



SAMPLE NO. 1: INSCRIPTION INSIDE THE LID OF CASE OR BOX NO. 1.



DETAIL OF THE MAIN STAIRCASE STEPS AT THE ROYAL PALACE OF MADRID, MADE FROM GRAY BANDED MARBLE FROM ROBLEDO DE CHAVELA (P. 57, FIG. 24, FROM THE BOOK COLLECTION OF ORNAMENTAL ROCKS OF THE ROYAL PALACE OF MADRID)



FERNANDO CASADO, MAYOR OF ROBLEDO DE CHAVELA, AND CARMEN GARCÍA, LOCAL DEVELOPMENT OFFICER AT THE TOWN HALL, VISITED THE HARD-STONE RESTORATION WORKSHOP WITH PEPA PARRA,

ONE OF THE PROJECT LEADERS RESPONSIBLE FOR RESTORING THE EIGHT ORNAMENTAL STONE CASES. THESE CASES WERE ALSO USED AS A REFERENCE FOR CHOOSING THE DECORATION THROUGHOUT THE OTHER ROYAL SITES.

A LARGE GROUP OF RESTORERS FROM THE VARIOUS RESTORATION WORKSHOPS OF NATIONAL HERITAGE, TOGETHER WITH THE HEAD GARDENER OF EL ESCORIAL, CAME TO ROBLEDO TO TAKE PART IN THE GEOLOGICAL VISIT—TO SEE THE MARBLES, THE



QUARRIES, AND THE LIME KILN.

THE LIME KILN? THAT'S NEW...



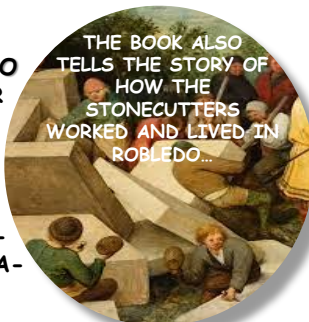
THAT'S ALSO THE NAME GIVEN TO A KILN USED TO MAKE LIME.



MARBLE WAS ALSO USED TO MAKE QUICKLIME UP UNTIL THE 1970s.



THE MAYOR OF ROBLEDO DE CHAVELA, FERNANDO CASADO, TOGETHER WITH THE MAIN AUTHOR OF THE BOOK, JOSÉ LUIS SANCHO, ON THE STAIRS OF THE ROYAL PALACE CELEBRATING THE BOOK'S LAUNCH.



I WANT TO KNOW MORE!

WHERE CAN I GET THE BOOK?



BUT... HOW DID THE HISTORICAL EVENTS UNFOLD?
HOW DID MARBLE FROM ROBLEDO DE CHAVELA END UP IN THE ROYAL PALACE?
THIS IS HOW IT MAY HAVE HAPPENED...
(BASED ON "REAL" EVENTS)

MADRID,
IN THE YEAR OF OUR LORD 1761...



KING CHARLES III PLANS TO MOVE
INTO THE ROYAL PALACE, ALSO
KNOWN AS THE "NEW PALACE".

BUT THE KING WANTS TO CHANGE A FEW THINGS,
SO HE CALLS HIS ARCHITECT, SACHETTI...



SACHETTI, I DON'T LIKE THESE
STAIRS. LET'S CHANGE THEM
FOR SOME NEW ONES!

GLUPS!

OF COURSE, YOUR
MAJESTY! I WILL
SHOW YOU A BRAND
-NEW DESIGN

THE NEW DESIGN...



BUT THE NEW DESIGN THAT SACHETTI
PRESENTS IS FAR FROM MAKING THE KING
HAPPY, SO THE KING DECIDES TO CHOOSE A
NEW ROYAL ARCHITECT.

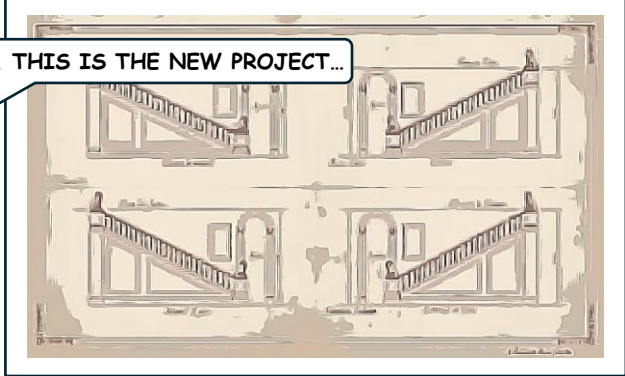


CALL
SABATINI!



GREAT!
GO AHEAD.

YOUR MAJESTY, THIS IS THE NEW PROJECT...



THE KING APPROVES THE PLAN, AND THE BUILDING OF
THE NEW STAIRCASE BEGINS. IT WILL HAVE 104
STEPS AND WILL TAKE SEVERAL YEARS TO COMPLETE.

SABATINI SHOWS CHARLES III A SELECTION OF DECORATIVE STONES SO THE KING CAN CHOOSE
THE STONE FOR THE STAIRCASE, BUT A PROBLEM COMES UP...



YOUR MAJESTY,
PLEASE CHOOSE.

I PREFER THE
WHITE MARBLE
FROM URDA,
TOLEDO.



GENTLEMEN, THIS MARBLE WON'T DO. IT ARRIVES
AT THE PALACE BROKEN FROM TOLEDO...

BUT WE COULD CUT SMALLER
PIECES, TILES...

IT'S NOT POSSIBLE. THE KING
WANTS EACH STEP TO BE MADE
FROM ONE SINGLE PIECE OF MARBLE.

WHICH LENGTH ARE WE
TALKING ABOUT?

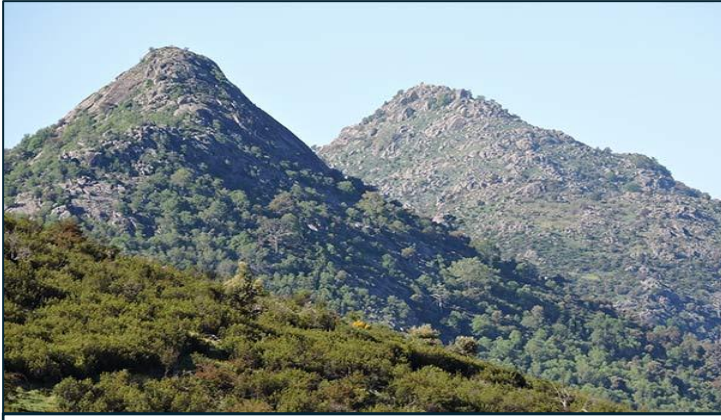
5 METRES!

THIS IS A BIG PROBLEM.
WE NEED TO FIND A
STRONGER MARBLE NEARER
TO THE PALACE...

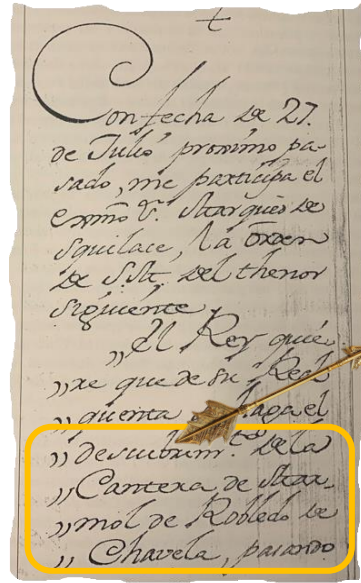


PALACE MATTERS TAKE
TIME...

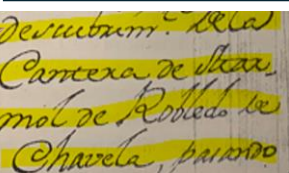
TOO BAD...



THE KING SENDS THE "SCAPELLINOS," THAT IS, MASTER STONEMASONS FROM ROME, TO EXPLORE THE GUADARRAMA MOUNTAINS IN SEARCH OF A STRONGER MARBLE THAT WON'T BREAK ON THE WAY TO MADRID... AND THEY FIND IT!



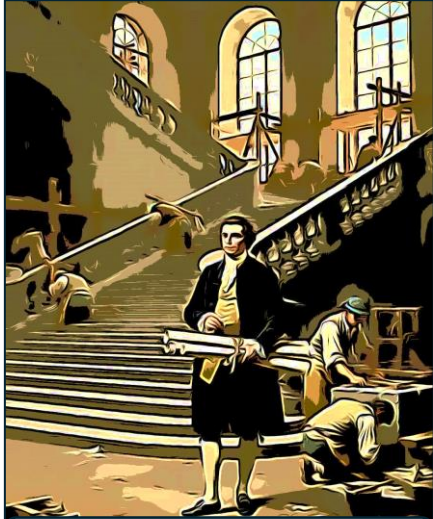
HANDWRITTEN LETTER FROM THE ARCHIVES OF THE ROYAL PALACE OF MADRID MENTIONING THE DISCOVERY OF THE QUARRIES IN ROBLEDO DE CHAVELA IN 1763.



THE FULL TEXT READS...

"(Dated July 27th, I was informed by the Most Excellent Marquis of Esquilache of His Majesty's order as follows:

The King wishes that the discovery of the Robledo de Chavela marble quarry be carried out, sending one of the scapellinos who came from Rome to the said town; and that, once it is confirmed that the steps for the staircase of the New Palace can be made from a single piece, the proposals presented shall be accepted..."



SABATINI HAD THE PERFECT MARBLE AT LAST!

EXTRACTING SUCH HUGE MARBLE BLOCKS WAS HARD AND COMPLEX. ABOUT 200 MEN HAD TO BE SENT TO WORK IN THE QUARRIES...



AND ABOUT 60 MORE TO FIX THE ROADS. IT WAS EVEN NECESSARY TO BUILD A NEW BRIDGE OVER THE GUADARRAMA RIVER TO MAKE SURE THE MARBLE COULD BE TRANSPORTED.

AND BAKE ABOUT 2,000 LOAVES OF BREAD EACH WEEK TO FEED EVERYONE!

THESE GRAND IMPERIAL STAIRS HAVE A GENTLE SLOPE AND STEPS MADE FOR EASY CLIMBING.

THIS IS HOW CHARLES III WANTED IT.



THEY WERE, AND STILL ARE, VERY MUCH ADMIRERD, ESPECIALLY FOR THEIR 104 STEPS, EACH MADE FROM A SINGLE PIECE OF MARBLE... AND LET'S NOT FORGET: IT'S THE MARBLE FROM ROBLEDO DE CHAVELA!