

Casa de Medrano

El día 19 de Septiembre de 1970 se firmó la escritura de adquisición por el Ayuntamiento de esta cueva de Medrano ante el notario D. José Anillo García Nolasco y siendo Alcalde D. Gerardo Serrano Parra.

Cervantes' Prison

In that dark confinement, in that anguished lime trunk, Cervantes' prolific mind conceived his very vast, sad, and almost always joyful idea of his Don Quixote.

Oficina de Turismo

Arganzuela de Alfoz

Origin of a Tradition

Medrano's House Cultural Centre's façade belongs to the modern and functional architecture but it has undeniable features from La Mancha traditional architecture. The House hardly reveals the treasure it shelters: a humble and rustic cave that tradition identifies as the prison where Miguel de Cervantes conceived and started to give birth to his immortal Don Quixote of La Mancha. This old tradition dates from Cervantes' days, who in spite of his will of "having no desire to call to mind" the Place of La Mancha of his main character, he indirectly nourished this tradition through mentions of his own version transferred in the prologue:



And what, then, could this sterile, ill tilled wit of mine beget but the story of a dry, shrivelled, whimsical offspring, full of thoughts of all sorts and such as never came into any other imagination- just what might be begotten in a prison, where every misery is lodged and every doleful sound makes its dwelling.



The mention that Argamasilla Academics made was crucial, since their sonnets and epitaphs conclude the first part of *The Quixote*. Not late did this identification succeed among Cervantes contemporaries. In fact, the anonymous writer hidden behind the pen name of Alonso Fernández de Avellaneda dedicates in 1614 his apocryphal Quixote "to the mayor, town councillors and noblemen from Argamasilla of La Mancha, gentleman Don Quixote of La Mancha's cheerful native land. This writer explicitly places his main character in Argamasilla:

The Wise Alisolán, a modern and truthful historian at the same time, states that (...), among certain annals of the history, he came across the third ingenuity written in Arabic that the gentleman Don Quixote of La Mancha made about the place of Argamasilla.



Curiously, in the second part of *The Quixote* (1615) Cervantes strongly denies and disapproves various matters about Avellaneda's Quixote, although he never disapproves this reference.

There is another deed that may close the relation between Quixote and Argamasilla. In Argamasilla's parish church of San Juan Bautista there is an offered painting dated in 1601, whose legend addresses the mental illness of a gentleman from the village:

Our Lady appeared before this knight, who had a serious disease, neglected by the doctors the night before Saint Matthew in MDCI, commending himself to this Lady and promising her a silver lamp and calling her day and night because of a big harm in his brain due to a great coldness filled up in his inside.



Unknown are the reasons for Cervantes' stay and imprisonment in Argamasilla. Cervantes' biographers acknowledge that there is a void the previous years of Quixote's appearance (1600-1603). According to popular tradition, Cervantes would have come to Argamasilla as a tax collector and he would have been imprisoned for fiscal reasons or maybe it was to do with women. Whatever reason would be, he would have met the insane nobleman Rodrigo de Pacheco in Argamasilla and Cervantes would have taken him as his first "outline" of Don Quixote.

History about the House

It is known that, at the beginning of the 17th Century, the House belonged to the influential Medrano family. In 1862, it was purchased by the Infante Gabriel de Borbón, prior of Saint Joan's order, with the purpose of cultural activities. A year later, the editor Manuel Rivadeneyra availed himself of the opportunity to move part of his press to the House, and then he edits his noted *Quixote* (1863), with a preface by J.E. Hartzenbusch, who strongly confirms the prison in Argamasilla as being Cervantes' prison.



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After the Infante's death in 1875, the house goes to the widow princess Ma Cristina de Borbón, who sells the property to private individuals. In 1905, the house suffered a devastating fire and it was left almost in ruins. One-storey construction with a corridor in the shape of an L is rebuilt over the ruins, occupying a small part of the plot and leaving the entrance of the cave in a free area. This was the House visited in 1905, date of the third centenary of *The Quixote*, by notable men of letters like Azorín, who placed on record in his book *La ruta de Don Quijote* (Don Quixote's Route), that he visited the House:



What is there in the environment of this town that has made, the birth and development of this strange, beloved and painful figure possible, exactly here? Why has Argamasilla, and not any other town of La Mancha, been fortunate of being the cradle of the most illustrious and greatest knight errant?



Rubén Darío also publishes a full bibliographical sketch about Argamasilla in the newspaper *La Nación* (The Nation), in Buenos Aires on 9 May 1905.

More recently, on 12 March 1968, the painter from Valdepeñas Gregorio Prieto chooses Medrano's House to be the scene for the creation and signing of the charter of his Foundation. Due to his respect for this place, he donated 17 of his works to the town of Argamasilla de Alba (the collection is permanently shown in the Gregorio Prieto's Art Gallery). In 1970, the House goes to town ownership and it is declared a Listed Building.

Considering the deterioration of the building, a restoration is designed in 1990. The actual appearance is due to this restoration.

In 2005, year of the fourth centenary of the *First Part of The Quixote*, the House was visited by numerous famous names from the world of culture, especially the member of the Royal Academy of the Spanish Language and winner of the Cervantes Prize, Mario Vargas Llosa, who asserted that:

It seems obvious that Argamasilla de Alba is the "place of La Mancha" he does not want to call to mind. There, in the church, there is a painting by Rodrigo de Pacheco, an important figure in the town whose inspiration might have created the Quixote.

The new building was inaugurated on 23 April 1994, a date in remembrance of Cervantes' death.





Appearance of the house before the 1905 fire.



Ayuntamiento de
Argamasilla de Alba



Castilla - La Mancha



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Tourist office

Casa de Medrano C/ Cervantes, 7 - 13710 Argamasilla de Alba

Tel. (+34) 926 52 23 93 Tel/Fax 926 52 32 34

e-mail: turismo@argamasilladealba.es

web: <http://www.ayto-argamasilladealba.es/>

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