

TRAVELOGUE

On a sunny spring Sunday in Spain, travelling out of Madrid by train accompanied by Senora Etelvina Ramirez, a senior Spanish Advocate, a person hugely interested in almost any subject under the sun and an incorrigible culture vulture, we got off at Alcala de Henares, only 35 kilometers from northeast of the capital.

My particular interest to visit Alcala was to see the Universidad Complutense, one of the oldest Universities of the world, founded in 1293 by King Sancho 1V of Castile. As I briefly strayed away from my companion, I almost stumbled on to a modest old house where a number of people were queuing up at the front door to get in and I too joined them. This is the house where Miguel de Cervantes: playwright, soldier, poet and novelist who created "Don Quixote de la Mancha" was born, in 1547.

Walking inside the house from room to room, one cannot escape the feeling that it is being preserved in the same fashion as Cervantes' literary contemporary William Shakespeare's house is preserved in Stratford-upon-Avon. Unlike Shakespeare who was born in Stratford-upon-Avon and lived there for 52 years until death, Miguel de Cervantes was born in Alcala but moved on with his parents.

Cervantes joined the Spanish army when he was young and had weird experience as a prisoner in Turkish prison when he was injured and captured. On his return to Spain, he wrote his first novel 'La Galatea' which was published in 1585 and he was credited with writing the first modern European novel. Cervantes then tried his hand writing plays as theatre was quite popular and chance to earn a living was brighter. Unfortunately, only two of his plays have survived. Then he produced his masterpiece, Don Quixote.

CERVANTES LOST AND FOUND AFTER 400 YEARS

SHAMSUL ALAM

He succeeded in creating a unique novel of multiple dimensions. The book is a big parody of knights, heroes and chivalry. And throughout the book, though Don Quixote is a big buffoon, he rides forth to defend the oppressed, right the wrongs and bring justice to the world. The book had major influence on The Three Musketeers by Alexandre Dumas and The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn by Mark Twain.

Let me now come to the story behind the title of this piece which made headlines in the media in Europe recently. Miguel de Cervantes died aged 69 in 1616, the same year as William Shakespeare. It is believed that he asked to be buried within the ground of

Trinitarians Convent in Madrid which paid a ransom to release him from slavery after he was captured by the Moorish pirates and held prisoner for five years in Algiers, but the exact location of his remains had been lost over the centuries.

casket bearing the novelist's initials MC which is no conclusive proof of identity. Mass spectrometry tests have enabled the research team to analyse the bone composition and determine the age at which the body perished.

Investigators also believe that the injuries Cervantes suffered when he served as a soldier may help to confirm the identification. Cervantes died 400 hundred years ago. Some may ask does it matter whose old bones are in the crypt.



USING GROUND - PENETRATING RADAR IN THE CRYPT OF THE CONVENT, THE INVESTIGATORS CLAIM TO HAVE FOUND BONES BELIEVED TO BELONG TO THE FATHER OF MODERN NOVEL.

There are others who will say - it does matter. There is money to be made from the old bones. Madrid city Council, which is financing the project hope that finding the bones of Cervantes will boost tourism. Miguel de Cervantes died poor, bankrupt and almost unknown but left behind one of the world's greatest masterpieces and his old bones may soon become a source of wealth for his people, post mortem. ■

Very recently, using ground - penetrating radar in the crypt of the convent, the investigators claim to have found bones believed to belong to the father of modern novel. The bones were said to be in poor condition found in a

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PEARLS OF WISDOM

"Clouds come floating into my life, no longer to carry rain or usher storm, but to add colour to my sunset sky."
RABINDRANATH TAGORE

"I dream of painting and then I paint my dream."
VINCENT VAN GOGH

"The revolution is not an apple that falls when it is ripe. You have to make it fall."
CHE GUEVARA