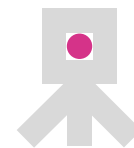


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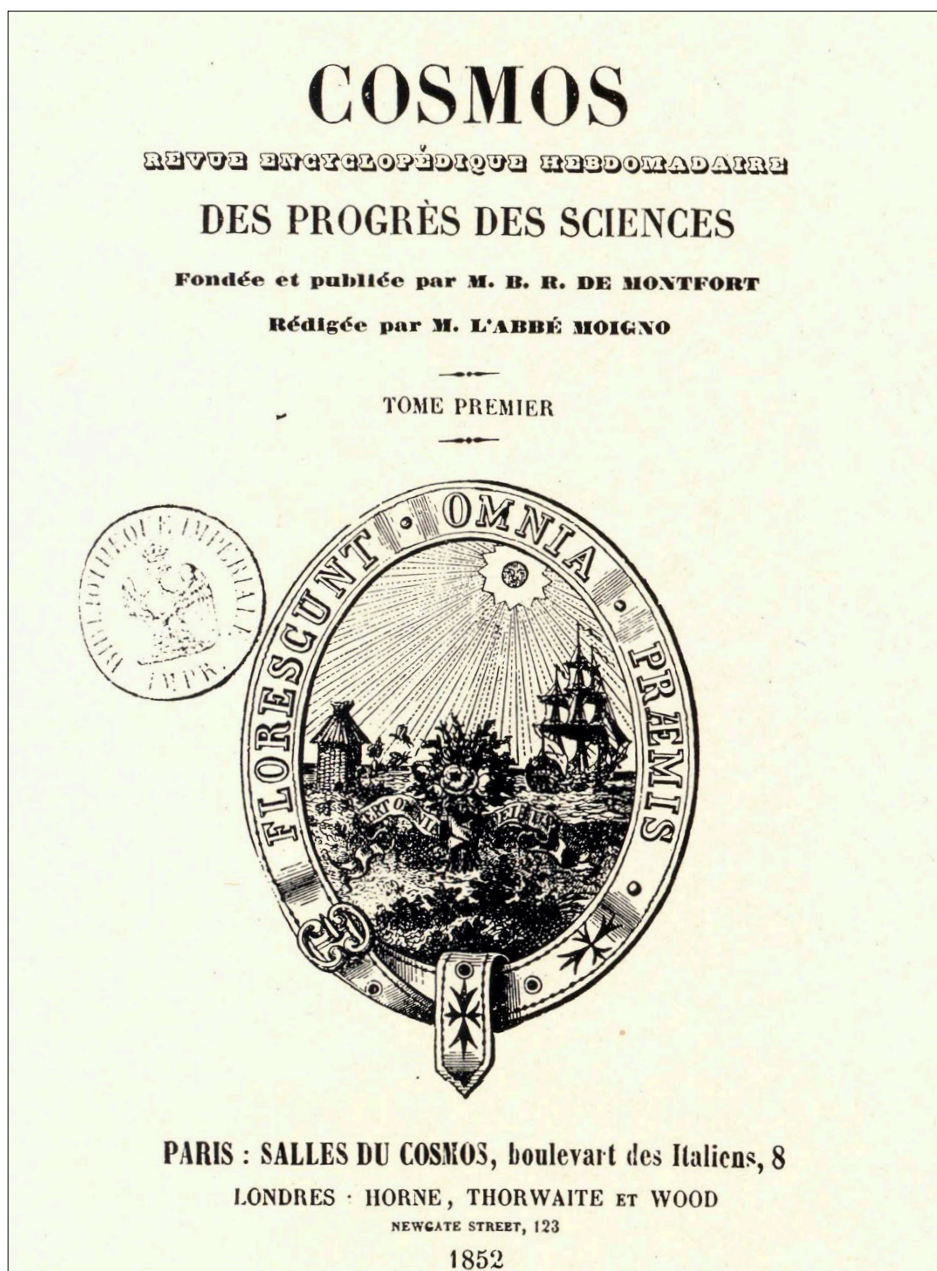
José Huguet Chanzá

**Benito Monfort: *La Lumière, Cosmos*
and the Casino of Biarritz**

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Front page of the magazine *Cosmos*, 1852, published by Benito Monfort, as a continuation of *La Lumière*, with the emblem of the Royal Society Amigos del País of Valencia.

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Benito Monfort: *La Lumière, Cosmos* and the Casino of Biarritz

José Huguet Chanzá Benito Monfort (Valencia, Spain 1800–Biarritz, France 1871) was the founder of the Société Héliographique (Heliographic Society), the journals *La Lumière* and *Cosmos*, and the Biarritz Casino.

The magazine *Las Bellas Artes*, which dealt with all of the arts including photography, was published in Valencia in the years 1854 and 1855. When publication was resumed on 1 March 1858, its director, M. Pascual Pérez Rodríguez, Valencia's first professional photographer, wrote the following:

“When we welcome a section on photography to the bosom of the fine arts, we do so in the conviction that this is well deserved and not simply granted out of courtesy, but as being absolutely legitimate, as it has achieved this place through its importance and greatness.” He then continued: “This gigantic step taken by photography is due to the magical momentum that gave it a hand and creative drive six years ago (...) and, thanks to the first exhibition of its beauty, made its altars and admirers around them tremble. And this universal admiration, as well as the enormous consequences resulting from it, is the work of a man from Valencia because the name of M. Benito Monfort, his journal ‘La Lumière’ and his organisation ‘Le Cosmos’ will, from now on, justly be linked to the progress of photography that he has promoted and stimulated with such unfailing zeal...”

The first reaction to this news was one of perplexity: what a story! A Valencian who published a journal and created a circle devoted to the progress of photography... and, that, in Paris!

Moreover, the name of Benito Monfort was associated with a famous eighteenth-century printer from Valencia who died in the year 1785. His son and successor, Benito, met the same fate three years later and his grandson, Manuel Monfort Roda, passed away in 1822. The saga of the Monforts as printers came to an end at that time. The printing house was handed over to the Rius family when Manuel's daughters married José and Gabriel Rius. That is to say: in 1851, no Monforts were involved in the printing business and, as it seems, the Monfort in Paris had no connection to them.

The next step takes us to Paris. The Société Héliographique was established there in January 1851 and operated until 1853 when it disappeared before being reborn in the same year as the Société Française de Photographie (French Society for Photography). Unfortunately, no information and no trace of the earlier organisation can be found in the records of the latter.

The following episode is somewhat more satisfying. It was possible for us to read both the journal *La Lumière* and the magazine *Cosmos*, in the Bibliothèque Nationale. The statues of the Société Héliographique were published in the first issue of *La Lumière* from 9 February 1851 and there was a certain Monsieur Monfort among the founding members. In the following numbers, one finds – on several occasions – articles dealing with the techniques needed to improve the backgrounds and skies in portraits, of a process for regrouping portraits taken at different times, etc... all signed by Monfort. The notes by Ziegler, Arnoux and others on the subject of photographic processes and exhibitions were to be sent to M. de Monfort who took part in the majority of the commissions formed to experiment or verify new methods. In this way – together with Bayard, Ziegler, Mestral and Renard – on 9 April 1851, it was shown that, with an exposure of one hour and treatment with gallic acid for ten minutes, one could produce negatives with the light of an oil lamp alone, for the first time. A few days before, at the meeting of the Société Héliographique, a study of the viability of Blanquart-Evrard's photographic printing had been made. With Monfort's support, the experiment took place and it was possible to demonstrate that printing could work without sunlight.

We find the first indication that Monfort was not French in *La Lumière* from 17 August 1851. When dealing with foreign heliographic publications, it stated that there were two in New York and that the first would soon be published in London while France – the country that had given birth to the discovery – would be outpaced “if the munificence of M. de Monfort had not provided the means for popularising heliography and accelerating its progress...” And that one should show recognition to “the benevolent man who had brought together, around himself and science, the most skilled photographers and who had established a literary circle where they could collect their observations and from where they could divulge them to the outside world. This idea corresponds totally with the love of science. M. de Monfort is not one of our compatriots; but great spirits belong to all countries.”

At the end of 1851, Monfort handed his journal over to Alexis Gaudin after which the weekly journal was only published bi-monthly. Its new proprietor explained this action in the following way: “It was with great regret that I learned that the journal *La Lumière* was about to stop being issued. This interesting publication, created at great expense by a friend of science, the most zealous, the most devoted and most selfless champion of photography, has already provided such great services to this art as not support it in difficult days...” He explained that his aim was not to make a financial operation but, first and foremost, to save a publication, which was invaluable to the art of photography on paper at the

expense of the daguerreotype process used by 19 out of 20 active practitioners in the field. He specified that he would continue to publish the minutes of the meetings of the Société Héliographique etc.

The initial period was definitely difficult for Alexis Gaudin: the subscribers had to be re-funded for previous differences, it was repeatedly asked that letters sent be stamped or that they would be automatically refused, the receipts show that subscription renewals also had to be sent in stamped letters, etc... Obviously, Monfort had handed over all of his rights and obligations and, even though he maintained that his operation was non-speculative, Gaudin probably did have sufficient capital at his disposal to continue with the operation seeing that he found himself faced with the problem of reimbursing the subscribers and even paying for correspondence. It is therefore not at all surprising that, a few months later, when Monfort published a more ambitious magazine, he attacked him severely for presenting it as the successor to *La Lumière* in his programme: “‘Cosmos’, the first number of which we are publishing today, is going to replace and continue with the journal ‘La Lumière’, founded and managed by M. de Monfort in the period from 19 February to 29 October 1851. Its founder is the same person and ‘Cosmos’ will always remain the journal created by M. de Monfort although the editorship has been placed in other hands and its scope widened...” On 15 May 1852, from the pages of *La Lumière*, Gaudin accused Monfort of not having met his obligations vis-à-vis the former subscribers and, on account of this, owed him 420 francs. He also accused him of having created his new journal to give it to his former subscribers as compensation. This notion does not appear logical if one considers Monfort’s obvious financial power and his recognised generosity. Some months beforehand, the same Gaudin had described him as “the most selfless protector of photography.”

One detail: a subscription to erect a monument to Niépce and Daguerre was announced in *La Lumière* on 12 July 1851. The first name on the list of donors was that of M. de Monfort, founder of the Société Héliographique, who had pledged 300 francs, followed by Baron de Gros and Comte Olympe d’Aguado – each with 100 francs – as founding members, Puech, a manufacturer of chemical products (40 francs), the optician Chevalier (10 francs)... In total, 910 francs were collected. Alexis Gaudin does not appear on this list. It seems clear that Monfort enjoyed a comfortable financial position and, if he had 300 francs at his disposal for a monument, why would he have risked alienating his former subscribers to save 420 francs? We should stress another detail: Monfort appears as a founder while the others are listed as “founding members”. But Gaudin went as far as a personal attack: “Mr. Montfort was unable to resort to his general excuse: his ignorance of French laws.” That conforms to our research.

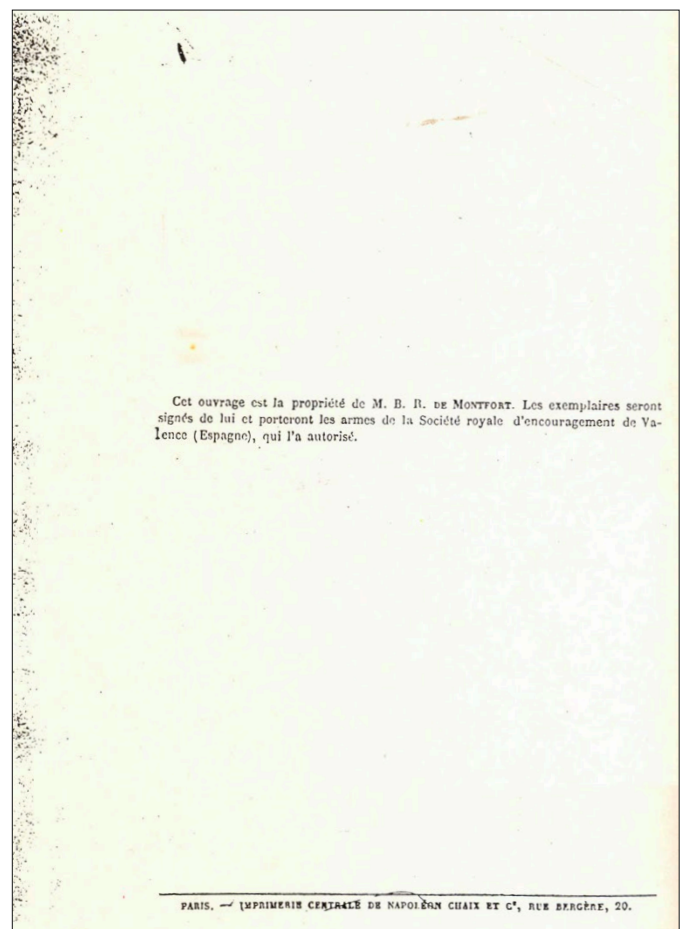
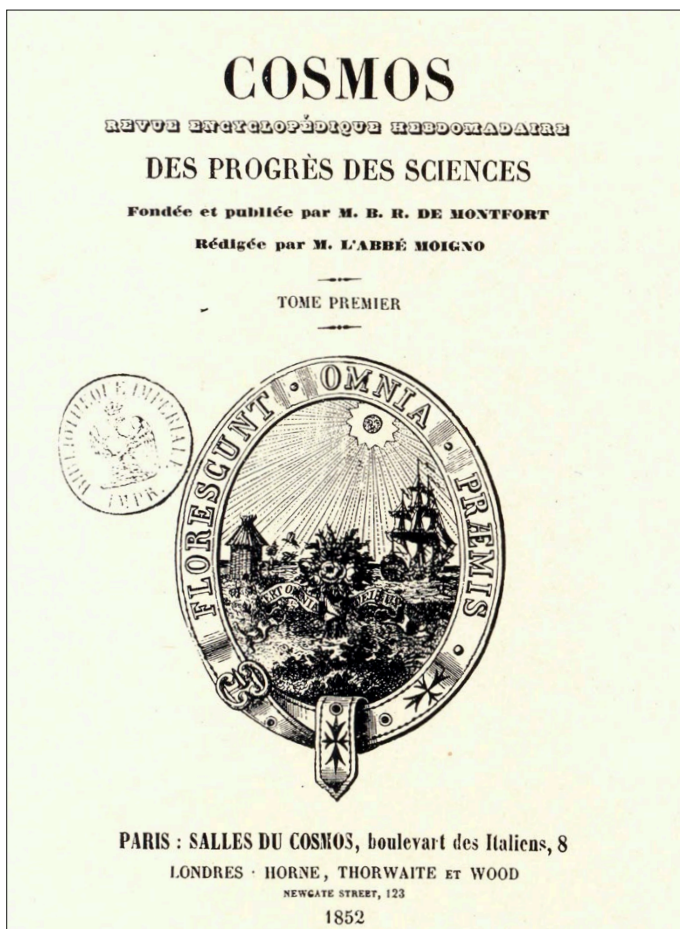


Figure 1 a & b
Front and first page of the magazine *Cosmos*, 1852, published by Benito Monfort, as a continuation of *La Lumière*, with the emblem of the Royal Society Amigos del País of Valencia.

We have already seen that Monfort was not French. But was he Spanish and, what is more, Valencian as Pascual Pérez claims?

Let us take a closer look at *Cosmos*: it was first published on 1 May 1852 and, on the front page, stated: founded and published by M.B.R. de Monfort and edited by Abbé Moigno, which was normal at a time when those responsible for a publication, regardless of the kind, had to be French and this also justifies that we found no trace at all in the archives of a publication under the name of Monfort (fig. 1).

Figure 2
Emblem of the Royal Society Amigos del País of Valencia.



An engraving, in the middle of the page, attracts our attention: it is an interpretation – puzzling for a Valencian – of the emblem of the Real Academia de Amigos del País de Valencia (fig. 2). But, on the second page, any doubts are wiped away when we discover the following text: “This work is the property of M. B.R. de Montfort [sic!]. The examples will be signed by him and bear the arms of the Société d’encouragement de Valence (Royal Society of Encouragement) in Valencia (Spain) that has granted its authorisation.” It is necessary to indicate here that what the French call a “Société d’encouragement” is the equivalent of a “Sociedad Económica” (Economic Society) in Spain. Looking further at the list of collaborators, we discover M. Benito de Monfort (his complete name in Spanish) as the author of articles on the coating of printed collodion, on the transformation of negative proofs to positives, etc... This corroborates with his activity in the field of photography.

After having finished this research, complementary information began to appear in Valencia. The “Sociedad Económica de Amigos del País” has kept its book of records. When consulting the year 1851, the minutes of 5 November include a communiqué from M. Pascual Pérez, Professor of Heliography in the town, “informing that M. Benito Monfort, who has resided in Paris for several years, was the founder of the Société Héliographique and the journal on heliography *La Lumière* and had sent a copy to the society. The undersigned secretary confirms having received all the numbers.” This encouraged the Sociedad to gather to discuss this donation and, finally, it was proposed to “name Don Benito Monfort, founder of the Société Héliographique Française and resident of Paris as a corresponding member.” The assembly of the society ratified this on 12 November.

Here, we digress to point toward the role taken by the *Real Sociedad Económica* in supporting and promoting photography, which was still in its infancy. It should not be forgotten that it was to the *Sociedad* that the pharmacist Juan José Vilar presented the first Valencian daguerreotypes on 26 February 1840 and that, a few weeks later on 1 April, the *Sociedad* promised the title of member emeritus and the sum of 2000 reales as a prize “to the person who discovers and makes known the means of fixing the colours of nature on the copies made with the apparatuses of Mr. Daguerre or other more perfect ones” and also, on 1 May 1843, promised a silver medal “to the person who discovers and makes known the means for engraving, to perfection, by whatever method, the images made by daguerreotypes.” It would be necessary to wait 20 years for the solution of these problems and this gives an indication of Sociedad’s capacity for foresight.

But, other information also provides us with confirmation: the following text could be read in the *Diario Mercantil* in Valencia on 5 April:

“Several numbers of a journal that was recently published in Paris and which, under the name of *La Lumière*, is the organ of an artistic society known as the Société Héliographique, to which the major artists of this capital city hastened to subscribe, have reached us (...) That which attracts our attention and flatters – to say the least – our national and regional pride is precisely that the initiator and promoter of the idea is a Valencian, D. Benito Monfort, who has lived in Paris for several years and is a great admirer of the fine arts. As an enthusiast for photography, of which he is one of leading and finest connoisseurs, he was not satisfied with merely financing the journal and put his magnificent home at the disposal of the offices of the Société. He did not shrink back from making any sacrifice for the enterprise. His efforts have only borne fruit since London and New York have now seen societies of the same kind

as the Héliographique open up in their bosom and other towns in German, Italy and other kingdoms in North Europe are rising to respond to the call of this so peaceful movement with the establishment of associations of this kind. We wish prosperity to all of them and send our most sincere congratulations to M. de Montfort.”

And then, further on, in the *Diario Mercantil* of 1 September, we can find:

“We cannot let this opportunity pass by to praise D. Benito Monfort, a Valencian residing in Paris, who has been the first to have the idea to publish a scientific journal devoted mainly to the progress of heliography that, under the title of *La Lumière*, is well-known throughout Europe. The fame of our compatriot Don Benito Monfort is made even more flattering seeing that it reflects, to a large extent, on the soil he was born on.”

But, what do the books on the history of photography have to say about M. Benito de Monfort? They all concentrate on his personality as the creator of the Société Héliographique and the journal *La Lumière*, not only as one of the founders but – above all – as the organiser and promoter who knew how to bring the most eminent personalities in France together in a society and who housed this society and journal in his own home in Paris. As H. Gernsheim writes in *The Origins of Photography*¹ when he quotes the words of Roger Fenton: “The Société Photographique was founded in January 1851 by Colonel B.R. de Montfort (sic). The seat of the Société Héliographique was located in the house of Colonel de Montfort at 15, rue de l’Arcade in one of the most elegant sections of Paris. A suite of four or five rooms, as well as a large terrace, were set aside for research and experiments undertaken by the members and the new processes were published in *La Lumière*.”

Fenton’s mistake of giving Monfort the title of “Colonel”, which was taken up by several historians, is strange seeing that he never had any connection to the army.

In his *Histoire de la Photographie*,² Raymond Lécuyer mentions an elite circle of men who “at the instigation of B.R. de Monfort established the Société Héliographique in 1851” and continues: “one of the first steps taken by the society was to create, upon the request of Mr. Monfort, a journal that resulted in the publication of *La Lumière*.”

In *Regards sur la Photographie en France au XIX siècle*,³ J. Naef confirms that: “the principal sponsor of the Société Héliographique, who also happens to be its founder and president B.R. De Monfort has “*nothing is more beautiful than the truth, but it needs to be chosen*” as his motto.

1. Helmut Gernsheim, *The Origins of Photography*, London 1982.

2. Raymond Lécuyer, *Histoire de la photographie*, Paris 1945.

3. Weston J. Naef, *Regards sur la photographie en France au XIX siècle*, Paris, 1980.

However, those who provide us with more complete information are Eugenia Parry Janis and André Jammes, the authors of *The Art of French Calotype*⁴ in which one finds a great deal of information on the formation and importance of the Société Héliographique and *La Lumière*.

They recount:

“The offices and meeting rooms were established in an elegant quarter of Paris at 15, rue de l’Arcade. An invitation to the inauguration of the headquarters was celebrated with a major exhibition of “wonderful and very successful” photographs as announced in the press in January 1851.”

They make mention of the visit of the great English photographer Roger Fenton before the constitution of the society in London that presents us with a description that could be translated as follows:

“Currently, the offices take up a part of the house of its president, Colonel de Monfort. A group of apartments comprising four or five rooms – clearly on the top floor of the house and opening onto a large terrace with excellent light – is reserved for the society. One room is fully equipped with walls, commodes, cabinets etc... and choice prints of the art, most of them on metal. Another one is set up as a laboratory with one corner blocked by yellow curtains to protect from the light... Mr. Puech has opened a shop-laboratory exclusively dedicated to the preparation and sale of photographic material on the ground floor.”

Roger Fenton visited de Monfort’s home before establishing the *London Photographic Society* with the aim of becoming acquainted with the world’s first photographic society and using it as a model for the one being planned in London.

Parry and Jammes note that, in order to study the beginnings of photography, the only sources of information available are the articles published in the newspapers, magazines and journals of the period. They add:

“The most valuable of these journals, *La Lumière*, was exclusively devoted to photography and is absolutely essential to anybody studying French photography of the age; it was a weekly that reflected – with perfection and great force – on the details of photographic activity in the years between 1850 and 1860.”

4. André Jammes, Eugenia Parry Janis, ‘The Shadows’, in: *The Art of French Calotype*, Princeton 1982, 40–51.

They continue:

“One has obtained valuable information to complement that found in the Art Journal, an English publication, as well as Cosmos, a French scientific journal founded by Colonel Benito de Monfort, who gave rooms in his own home to the Société Héliographique, and Abbé François-Napoléon Marie Moigno, who edited the journal after 1852.”⁵

As we can see, all the historians agree in stressing the importance of the Société created under the aegis of de Monfort, as well as of *La Lumière*. In the first number of the journal, J. Ziegler described the formation and origins of the Société Héliographique. He tells how, around 1830, a society of artists was formed that met for dinner in a pleasant, friendly environment on the tenth of each month. Among the artists and intellectuals, we find: Delacroix, Dumas, Victor Hugo, Prosper Mérimée and many others. They then decided to organise themselves and draw up statutes that were enthusiastically approved, attractively printed and sent to all the members. The organising committee presented itself at the agreed-on place and time on the tenth of the following month and nobody came, not a single member. The all-too-perfect statutes had ruined the charm of having dinner with friends.

Several members of this society took part in the Société Héliographique and Ziegler hoped that the experience made with the first society could be avoided in the new enterprise. This explains why the regulations of the Société Héliographique were summed up in 18 brief and clear articles. The meetings took place at the home of M. de Monfort at 15, rue de l'Arcade on the first and third Friday of each month and the salons were opened at 7.30pm. There were no membership fees (Art. 2). The object of the meetings was:

- (1) The two-way flow of information on works
- (2) The voluntary exchange of works and processes
- (3) The completely voluntary disclosure of the discoveries (Art. 3)

The meeting of the Société Héliographique was, in principle, nothing more than a friendly *gathering* where those present could choose the people they wanted to chat with. The members were *invited*. Most of the time, the meetings took on a general character but, on those occasions when the communications presented were of interest to all present, the president of the committee, assisted by a secretary, took his chair in the office, rang a bell and

5. Jammes, Parry Janis (reference 4), introduction, 133.

silence was observed during the communication and the observations made resulting from it. Immediately thereafter, the chatting began anew (Art. 15).

“The Société Héliographique functioned so effortlessly that it appeared to have no administration and no organisation. In a group where well-being reigned supreme, who could even dream of having an administrator? Unless it would be to thank him... The opinion of the Société Héliographique was that the members or guests should hardly need to be bothered by a committee to watch over their well-being and progress.”⁶

This executive committee included Baron de Gros (President), Bayard, Becquerel, Delessert, Durieux, Mestral, de Monfort, Laborde, Niépce de Saint-Victor and Ziegler. Aguado, Baldus, Chevalier, Delacroix, Le Gray, Le Secq, Lerebours, Puech, Wey and Vigier were just some of the members. All of the pioneers of French photography were brought together by the hospitality of Monfort. When “other obligations made it impossible for Baron de Gros to take part in the meetings, Ziegler or Laborde (the vice-presidents) took the chair and, sometimes, Vigier, Monfort, etc.

One of the first propositions triggered the production of an album in which all of the members of the Société Héliographique were invited to present their works, signed and dated, as a sign for the future of the progress of photography which was still in its infancy in France. A commission was set up and Monfort was one of its members; it was stipulated that, in the case of dissolution, the album was to be deposited in the Bibliothèque National (unfortunately, it never showed up there):

We read in *La Lumière* from 27 April that M. de Monfort had made the Société a gift of the album in which the works of the members, some of which have only recently been received, will be collected. Thanks to the journal, it is possible to follow the work of the Société and its interest in collaborating in the establishment of a photographic printing press in France, etc. *La Lumière*, as the first journal in Europe devoted to photography, enjoyed a very wide distribution. It could be found throughout France: in Bayonne, Bordeaux, Le Havre, Lyon, Marseille, Nancy, Périgueux, Strasbourg, Tournai, Valenciennes; in Switzerland; Berne and Neufchâtel; in Russia: Moscow and Saint Petersburg; in London; and in Madrid; Barcelona and – quite clearly – Valencia in Spain.

In *Regards sur la Photographie en France au XIX siècle*, which was mentioned previously, Naef stresses the importance of the Société:

6. *La Lumière*, no. 1 1851.

“The establishment of the Société Héliographique in early 1851 took place in parallel to that of an organisation subsidised by the government with the aim of photographing the major French monuments. The latter had an oddly familiar name: La Mission Héliographique (...) In 1851, the commission decided to nominate five persons to go around to the towns in the provinces to take photographs. The five were Edouard-Denis Baldus, Hippolyte Bayard, Henri Le Secq, Gustave Le Gray and O. Mestral (...) This list of photographers gives an indication of the influence exerted by members of the Société Héliographique (...) The Mission Héliographique is to be thanked for France overtaking Great Britain in the field of photography.”⁷

We feel that the role of Benito de Monfort – both as a catalyst of information and ambitions and driving force behind the Société Héliographique and its journal *La Lumière* – is quite clear. However, the reasons behind his decision to give it up and create a much more ambitious journal, *Cosmos*, are less transparent. In fact, this was not simply a magazine but – at the same time – a centre for meetings at 8, boulevard des Italiens. He intended to open the salons to the public so that intellectuals and artists would be able to look through the scientific magazines from around the world that were available to researchers there. His aim was to enlarge what he had created in his home to include all of the sciences – and that, on a large scale. In the preface to the first volume of *Cosmos*, covering the period from 1 May to 1 November 1852, he summed up the six months and his disheartenment:

“In our great love for the progress of science, we rented – for 18 years and at great cost – a large, new building that is perfectly suited for our purpose; we furnished the rooms with great luxury; a large number of members of the Institute and scholars encouraged us in the creation of our work; they were absolutely honourable and eminently useful. Our work was beautiful; actually, too beautiful: it has not been understood! The Minister of Police authorised our meetings. It would not have been like this anywhere else: the most humiliating administrative tardiness that ended in a formal refusal to grant authorisation wounded and discouraged us; alas, the salons of the *Cosmos* are going to be used for the prosaic, commercial purpose they were originally intended for. As some kind of consolation, we at least have the expressions of despondent sympathy that all of the enlightened men of the capital felt when they learned of the hindrances placed in the way of the realisation of our magnificent project.”

One should not be astonished at the reaction of the police at the time of the transition from the Second Republic to the Empire. It had to come to this conclusion seeing that we find the following listing for 8, boulevard des Italiens in the 1853 Firmin-Didot directory: Monfort

7. Jammes, Parry Janis 1982, (reference 4), 55.

junior (Baron de) – taking the “B” of Benito to mean Baron – director of the Cosmos photo gallery, specialised in portraits, reproduction of paintings and works of art. Commission agent. Everything connected with photography, the arts and sciences. Special factory for chemical products.” And, later, it specifies: “Cosmos Photographic Salon (exhibition hall, instrument depot, supply of material, collection of stereoscopes, commission centre, studio for the production of images, laboratory, meeting centre.” The new thing here is that Monfort has a son following in his footsteps. However, we note that father and son were not sharing the same home as one lived on rue de l’Arcade and the other on the boulevard des Italiens.⁸

Historians have found no reasons that explain the disappearance of the Société Héliographique nor of the establishment, shortly thereafter, of the Société Française de Photographie. What we note is that, in 1855, Monfort moved to 177, Faubourg Poissonnière leaving the spacious abode where he gave “four or five rooms to the Société” and probably needed to give them sufficient notice to move out of the premises. Deprived of Monfort’s assistance and hospitality, without headquarters and offices, the members did not want to give up France’s primacy among photographic societies and had to look for a new place in order to continue the work initiated by Monfort. It seems clear that Monfort’s change of residence played a determining role in the end of the Société Héliographique and birth of the Société Française de Photographie – in which Monfort continued to be a member – that was officially founded on 15 November 1854, “on the ashes of the former” as Parry and Jammes put it.⁹

The links between Gaudin’s *La Lumière* and *Cosmos* reflect on the quarrels between editors and photographers that were particularly frequent at the time and that Parry and Jammes tell us about in their book. The two professions did not stop attacking each other regardless of whether it was over the Brewster-Dubosq stereoscope, copied by Quintet or not, according to one or the other, or the faults in various photographic processes. The polemics between Le Gray, supported by *La Lumière*, and Abbé Moigno – the first in favour of photographs on paper and the second defending glass – is just one example.

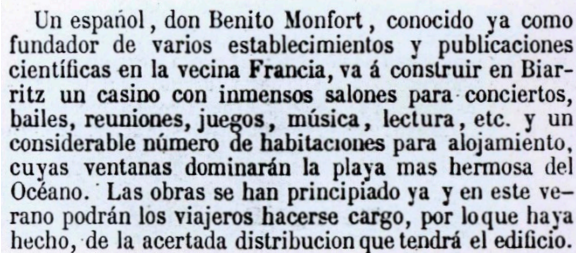
Who was Benito de Monfort?

After what we have shown up to here, we know that he was an important person, a Valencian who had moved to Paris in 1851, and a sponsor of culture – especially photography, to which he devoted a large section of his wealth. Moreover, during the meeting of the Société Héliographique on 13 June 1851, when the colour photography process of Mr. Hill from America was presented, Mr. de Monfort explained that he would soon be able to provide precise details because he had an agent in New York who he had commissioned to get more

8. Directory by Librairie de Firmin-Didot et Cie, 1853, 881, 1096, 1014, 1247–1249. 9. Jammes, Parry Janis 1982 [reference 4], 39.

information that he counted on receiving without much delay. We have searched through the directories of Paris from the period and found him listed from 1851 to 1854 in the Firmin-Didot at 15, rue de l'Arcade, as a person of independent means; and in Bottin as a property owner. These were the most active years for the Société Héliographique and its journals. In 1855, the Firmin-Didot shows that Benito de Monfort had moved his residence to 177, Faubourg Poissonnière where he could still be found in 1856 while he was no longer listed in the Bottin.

We reviewed various numbers of the newspapers *Le courier de Paris* and *L'observateur parisien* published between 1851 and 1852 at the Bibliothèque National in Paris and other archives without any results. In *Le Palais de cristal*, dedicated to the London World Exposition, mention is made of the meeting of the Société Héliographique held on 13 June 1851 we have referred to previously. In the CARAN research centre of the Archives de France, dossier BB 29/587 dealing with the *Cosmos*, makes no mention of Monfort as owner or as manager. As we have already indicated, these were difficult years (freedom of the press was done away with on 17 February 1852) and, even in a journal that considered itself non-political, a French citizen had to officially figure as the responsible person.



Un español, don Benito Monfort, conocido ya como fundador de varios establecimientos y publicaciones científicas en la vecina Francia, va á construir en Biarritz un casino con inmensos salones para conciertos, bailes, reuniones, juegos, música, lectura, etc. y un considerable número de habitaciones para alojamiento, cuyas ventanas dominarán la playa mas hermosa del Océano. Las obras se han principiado ya y en este verano podrán los viajeros hacerse cargo, por lo que haya hecho, de la acertada distribucion que tendrá el edificio.

Figure 3
News about Biarritz Casino building,
El Museo Universal, 13 march 1857.

This is where what could only be the first phase of our research came to an end and then a few years later, while reading *El Museo universal* of 13 March 1857, the following small news item attracted our attention (fig. 3):

“A Spaniard, Don Benito Monfort, who is already known as the founder of a number of establishments and scientific publications in France, is building a casino with enormous salons for concerts, balls, meetings, gaming, music, readings, etc. in Biarritz...And a large number of rooms whose windows overlook the most beautiful beach on the ocean. Work has begun already and, in this very summer, tourists will be able to testify to the perfect layout of the premises.”

A new surprise! Monfort had disappeared but we find him again in Biarritz and – what is more – in charge of a gigantic project. It has nothing to do with his activities in Paris. We reviewed the *Messenger de Bayonne* in the library in that city and found the news we were looking for in the newspaper dated 29 January 1857:

“We have two pleasant pieces of news to report: a decision on the casino in Biarritz has finally been made and, a no less pleasant aspect, it will be built and managed by M. de Monfort.

There is no necessity to say anything about the founder of this establishment, which will be a new source of prosperity for Biarritz; M. de Monfort has been among us for six months and was welcomed as he deserved to be; he is known to all and sundry as a man of the world, as distinguished as he is knowledgeable. The least of his titles is that he is justly famous as a composer and performer in Paris, London, Madrid and all the cities in the United States – as far as San Francisco – where his musical works are admired with good reason and where all of the halls applauded him after hearing him play.

M. de Monfort who, in spite of his youth, has travelled the two worlds has an intellect that is both sharp and profound, as well as knowledge that is varied and real. We do not think that we would be the target of his just reproaches for saying aloud what everybody thinks about him; we will be indiscrete and go as far as to inform that the subtle and intellectual narrator that one loves to listen to also holds a degree in law and is a doctor of sciences and founded one of the best scientific journals *Cosmos* in Paris. He managed the publication for two years and this now continues under the guidance of Abbé Moigno who is following in the footsteps of M. de Monfort. One is fully justified in congratulating oneself on seeing the establishment and direction of the casino in Biarritz placed in such capable hands. One could rightly state that good luck of this kind – of having come across a man uniting a considerable wealth of knowledge and an intelligence that is even more valuable and rare than monetary wealth to organise this establishment – is quite exceptional.”¹⁰

Monfort junior obviously made a strong impression on Biarritz society as the effusive praise of the journalist shows. However, he mixes the merits of father and son when he writes “doctor of sciences”, which would hardly seem likely at his age, and certainly when he mentions his work devoted to science at the *Salon Cosmos*. But, in any case, the father entrusted his son with the start of contracting and work. The newspaper makes it possible for us to follow the developments on the beach at Biarritz. Therefore, we know that part of the construction was finished on 17 July 1858; “The opening of the Café-Restaurant-Ice-Cream Parlour in the Casino will take place next Sunday 18 July... This establishment is equipped so intelligently and enjoys an absolutely exceptional location...” On 22 July, it is the inauguration of the Bains Napoléon, at the spot where the fishermen used to put together the old bathing cabins at the start of the season and disassemble them in October. The programme lists a benediction, a mass with an altar set up on the beach, two water sports games and – starting at 9pm – fireworks, followed by a gala ball. This makes it possible for us to follow the progress work had made.

10. *Messageur de Bayonne*, 29 January 1857.

On 23 July 1858, we read:

“The splendid establishment created by M. de Monfort will be opened around the first days of the month of August. In only a few more days, the Biarritz Casino will be able to offer the numerous international tourists who are starting to converge on this location all of the entertainment they desire. Our readers can read the regulations drawn up by the intelligent director of the establishment below.”

The regulations were approved on 22 June 1858 and are composed of 12 articles detailing the constituent parts of the building and interior regulations.

We also perused *La Gazette de Biarritz* where we discovered some information on construction of the casino after July 1858 (the day the restaurant- ice cream parlour was opened)¹¹ in the newspapers of 22 July, 1 and 8 August, 19 September, etc... we will mention them later.

Biarritz was a small town that lived from fishing and agriculture. Spaniards began arriving at the time of the Carlist Wars (1833–1840). Some of them were Carlists and the fishermen started to set up bathing cabins on the beach in summer. In 1848, Isabelle II, accompanied by the Countess of Teba and her family, came to spend the summer here. Her daughter, Eugénie, a regular visitor to Biarritz, almost drowned here in 1850 but was rescued by some fishermen. Biarritz did not enjoy the fame of Dieppe or Boulogne¹² and, in 1851, only had 2048 inhabitants.

Figure 4

Casino Bellevue in 1862, reproduced from:
Monique et Francis Rousseau,
Biarritz-Promenades <<http://www.biarritz.ovh.org/quartiers/Bellevue.html>> (05.06.2016).



The *Petite histoire de Biarritz, des origines à nos jours* provides interesting information on the early days of tourism in Biarritz when it tells how Napoléon III invited the Countess of Teba to Fontainebleau where he asked for the hand of her daughter, Eugénie de Montijo, in marriage. Eugénie, who became Empress of France on 29 January 1853, was a regular visitor to Biarritz and had no difficulty in convincing Napoléon to spend the summer of 1854 on the Atlantic and to build the “Villa Eugenia”. Work began in September 1854 and an army of 200 workers completed construction on 28 July 1855. This event attracted a large number of visitors and created the necessity for a casino to satisfy them seeing that “the most important thing is to be able to offer the appropriate entertainment to cater to the hedonism of this society.”¹³ (Fig. 4):

In his book, *Biarritz. Le Casino Bellevue*, François Ceccaldi provides us with information on the golden age of the casinos, particularly in Biarritz and the one in that city owned by Monfort.

11. *La Gazette de Biarritz*, 17 July 1858.

12. Michel Fabre, *Petite histoire de Biarritz: des origines à nos jours*, Biarritz 2007.

13. Fabre 2007 [reference 12].

He notes that, in 1855, it was recommendable to book in advance for summer and noted four pensions but no hotel: however, the municipality wanted to construct a casino but did not see itself in the position of being able to realise a project of this kind. It looked for assistance from the private sector and found it in the person of Isaac Strauss, the conductor of Empress Eugénie's orchestra, who was in charge of balls and concerts in Vichy. He presented himself in Biarritz on 21 September 1856 and gave details of the casino project he intended to establish on the place de la Floire, the main square in the city. However, the municipality was not willing to sacrifice the square for a casino and informed him of this on 18 October 1856 with the suggestion that he look for a site on the seaside.

At the same time, the municipality received an offer from Benito-Raimund de Monfort who had been in Biarritz since summer and of whom was said:

“M. de Monfort, welcomed and celebrated for the pleasant qualities that distinguish him, is almost one of our compatriots and we can only say that, in the close-to-four months that he has lived with us, he has become a friend of everybody who sympathy, business, chance or even antagonism has led to cross his path. Let us add that he has assumed a splendid position in the community of Biarritz. He first of all bought property for more than one hundred thousand francs in the centre of town. This was an excellent way to win the right of the city and was of a kind that could only be have been exercised by an artist, a man of spirit and heart, enjoying a large fortune.”¹⁴

This impressive praise in favour of the young Monfort, acting for his father, was decisive at the moment when the initial negotiations were underway with the municipal council. They took place in January 1857 and came into effect in the following year, 1858. On this occasion, *L'Illustration* was able to predict that “the day is not far off when not only elegant France, but also aristocratic Europe, will have an annual rendezvous in Biarritz.”¹⁵ In their book, *Biarritz promenades*, Monique and Francis Rousseau provide us with a great deal of information on the life of Monfort and the casino that we were unaware of:

“The history of the casino begins on 8 November 1856 when the Ardoins sold buildings and property to Benito Raimundo de Monfort, represented by his son. Mayor Duprat, one year later, completed this by ceding communal property (...) On 11 November 1856, three days after the sale of the mattress factory, Monfort acquired a building site on place Fourio (Sainte-Eugénie). That shows that, at the time, the final choice of the location for the casino had still not been settled.

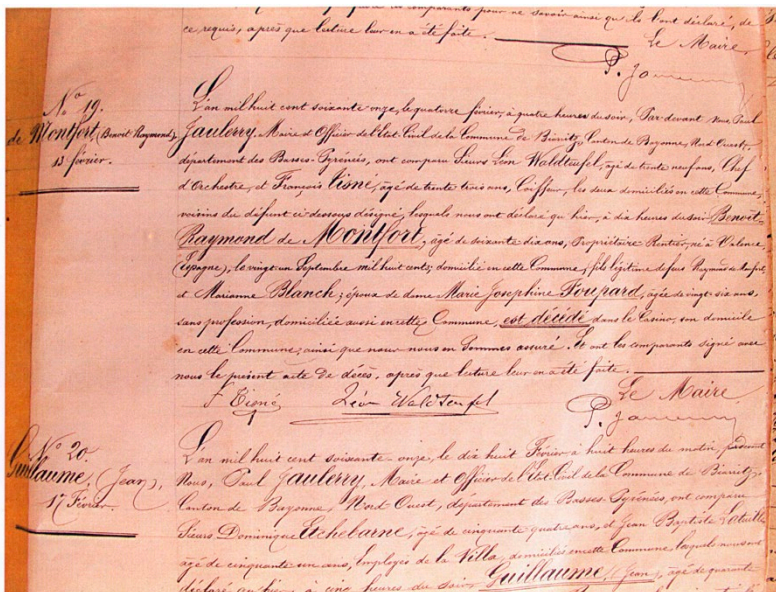
14. François Ceccaldi, *Biarritz. Le Casino Bellevue l'âge d'or des casinos*, Bordeaux 2000, 55.

15. *L'Illustration*, 11 September 1858.

M. de Monfort was a Knight of the Orders of Charles III and Saint Ferdinand and Commander of the Order of Isabel the Catholic. Born in Valencia in Spain on 21 September 1800, he was married three times; the first was with Maria Cabervies, who died in Valencia in 1834 and with whom he had a daughter, Dolores. The second Madame de Monfort had passed away in Brussels shortly before her widower moved to Biarritz. The third union took place in Paris with Marie-Joséphine Poupart, who was 16 at the time and Monfort 61. The Biarritz newspapers reported many times on a Monfort son who was a musician, composer and poet and bore the same first names as his father (...). This son mysteriously disappeared. When his father died he was not included among his heirs and there is not a word about his existence.

The Monfort case is not unique in the city. Many businessmen, whose past lives were somewhat obscure, arrived in Biarritz with their heads full of amazing plans and, most important, well-lined pockets. They invested their capital in the city that welcomed them – them and their money – with great enthusiasm. And when, after some years of lavish spending the fortune dwindled, the admiration also dulled and doubts set in. The adventure sometimes came to an end in a silence best forgotten and sometimes resulted in disaster and bankruptcy. In December 1859, when the casino was hardly above the ground, he put it on sale, without success.”

Figure 5
Death certificate of Benito R. Monfort.
Biarritz' Town hall (cemetery).



This is followed by a description of the casino and, “In 1856, Monfort junior presented ‘the photo studio of the casino’, saying that it was abreast of ‘the progress made in the art of Niépce and Daguerre’, where ‘portrait cards, portraits on porcelain, etc.’ were produced.

M. de Monfort senior passed away on 13 February 1871 (fig. 5). There was still no allusion to his son. The only mentions in the various notarial records are of his young widow, who soon married a merchant, and his daughter Dolores, who had married Bernardo Rolando in Valencia in 1859. She did not accept the testament of her father subject to an inventory and contested certain clauses in particular the bequest to the hospital in Valencia.”¹⁶

16. Monique and Francis Rousseau, *Biarritz promenades*, Biarritz 2002, 60.

We have copied this long text to pay homage to Rousseau who provided us with so much essential information that we needed to continue our research in Valencia; and, going beyond the information gathered in the press on the subject of Monfort junior, which appears somewhat exaggerated, but which also indicates the opening of a photographic studio, the Rousseaus paint a perfect picture of the kind of personalities who, exactly the same as Monfort, undertook – with enthusiasm – a project that turned out to be beyond their possibilities and ended up a bitter failure. This is something that could have been prophesied almost from the very beginning seeing that Monfort, as will be shown later, tried to sell the casino soon after it had been finished. He had to complete and maintain it at the cost of numerous mortgages that could not be cleared at the time of his death.

We found the court claim made by Dolores Monfort against the handwritten testament of her father Benito Monfort, dated 24 May 1871, in which he divided his legacy mainly between his wife Marie Poupard and the Valencia General Hospital, without mentioning his daughter, in the hospital's archives. In this testament, he also mentioned his second wife Margarita Abella, who had died some years before, and granted an endowment of 20,000 francs to his wife Marie Poupard. His daughter Dolores claimed that the said endowment was only a disguised settlement and demanded her part of the inventory of Monfort's immovable assets in Biarritz and Paris. Her complaint was not followed up and, in the end, Monfort's assets proved to be insufficient to cover his debts.¹⁷

One detail attracted our attention: the attribution of honorary titles to Monfort that we were unaware of. We consulted the Ministry of Culture that confirmed that Monfort had been a Knight of the Order of Isabelle the Catholic since 1844; furthermore, the Presidency of the Government sent us a copy of his nomination as a Knight of the Order of Carlos III dated 30 May 1855. However, the Ministry of Defence informed us that Monfort had no military history which led us to believe that the attribution of "Colonel" he was invested with by Fenton was a mistake. While his nomination in 1855 was probably due to his activities in Paris, we can find no explanation for that of 1844. In *Le Messager de Bayonne* in 1859, we discover that the notary Saubot-Damborgez announced the VOLUNTARY SALE of the Casino de Biarritz and this provides us with a new description:

"This establishment, one of the most beautiful in Europe on account of its admirable location, on the shore of the OCEAN, opposite the VILLA EUGÉNIE, and above the BAINS NAPOLÉON, covers an area of 5000 square metres.

17. Archivo Diputación Provincial de Valencia, Fondo Hospital, VI-3, caja 180, legajo 946.

AVIS DIVERS.

ÉTUDE DE M.^e SAUBOT-DAMBORGEZ,
NOTAIRE A BAYONNE.

VENTE VOLONTAIRE

Au plus offrant et dernier enchérisseur,
En l'étude et par le ministère de M.^e SAUBOT
DAMBORGEZ, notaire à Bayonne,
DU

CASINO

DE BIARRITZ,

Situé à BIARRITZ (Basses-Pyrénées).
L'Adjudication aura lieu le SAMEDI 24 SEP-
TEMBRE 1859, à dix heures du matin.

Désignation.

Cet établissement, l'un des plus beaux
de l'Europe par son admirable situation,
au bord de l'Océan, vis-à-vis la VILLA
EUGÉNIE, et au-dessus des BAINS NA-
POLEON, occupe une superficie de 5,000
mètres carrés.

Bâti depuis moins de trois ans, il offre
un ensemble de constructions aussi re-
marquables par leur solidité que par leur
élégance.

Elles comprennent une série de vastes
Salons de Conversation de Lecture et de

Jeux, communiquant, d'un côté avec une
immense terrasse (63 mètres de long),
qui domine la mer, et de l'autre avec une
Salle de Spectacle, pouvant aussi servir
de Salle de Bal ou de Concert.

La salle de concert de Bruxelles lui a
servi de modèle.

Le CASINO est encore disposé pour lo-
ger très confortablement plus de 100 per-
sonnes, qui trouvent dans ses dépendan-
ces, restaurant, table d'hôte, café et sa-
lons particuliers.

Au-dessous des terrasses, on a ménagé
un grand nombre de boutiques avec de-
vantures.

Indépendamment du corps principal
de l'immeuble, il existe au-devant de l'en-
trée du Casino, et sur la place publique,
une belle maison à deux étages, dont le
rez-de-chaussée est occupé par le sieur
Dulom, qui y tient depuis plusieurs an-
nées le restaurant de l'Océan.

Au-dessous de cette maison se trouve
une autre maison très commode, cou-
verte par une terrasse, et dominant la
plage.

À l'entrée, au couchant, est la maison
pour logement du concierge et des em-
ployés.

Diverses autres bâtisses, et de vastes
caves, servant de dégagements et de dé-
charges, complètent les dépendances de
l'établissement.

Toutes ces constructions couvrent une
superficie de 4,500 mètres environ.

Mise à Prix : CINQ CENT MILLE
FRANCS 500,000 Fr.

L'adjudicataire du Casino sera tenu,
en outre, de se charger, à dire d'experts,
de tout le mobilier de l'établissement, et
d'en payer le prix avant l'entrée en jouis-
sance.

Il sera donné de grandes facilités pour
le paiement d'une partie du prix de l'im-
meuble.

On traitera de gré à gré jusqu'au jour
de l'adjudication.

S'ADRESSER :

Pour visiter l'établissement, AU CON-
CIERGE DU CASINO ;
Et pour les renseignements, A M.^e SAU-
BOT-DAMBORGEZ, notaire à Bayonne,
dépositaire du cahier des charges.

A VENDRE

Excellent et beau coupé de Paris.
S'adresser chez M. Champagnac,
carrossier.

EMPLOI offert avec fixe de 1,500 fr.
par an et remises, pour représenter une
maison de l'étranger dans le département.
(Echantillons ou dépôt de ses articles.)
Ecrire franco aux lettres B X M, poste
restante, à Genève (Suisse).

Figure 6
Advertisement about the voluntary sale of the
Biarritz Casino, *Le Messager Bayonne*,
13 September 1859.

Built less than three years ago, it has an ensemble of buildings that are notable for both their soundness and their elegance.

They include a series of spacious conversation, reading and gaming salons, adjoining an enormous terrace (63 metres in length) that towers over the sea on one side and a performance hall, which can also be used for balls or concerts, on the other. It was modelled on the concert hall in Brussels.

The CASINO is configured to comfortably accommodate more than 100 persons who will find a restaurant, table d'hôte, café and private salons in its annexes. A large number of boutiques with large windows have been established underneath the terraces. Independent of the main building of the property, there is a charming two-storey house in front of the entrance to the Casino and on the town square. The ground floor is occupied by Mr Dulom, who has run the *Restaurant de l'Océan* for several years. There is another very comfortable house below this one; it is covered by a terrace and stands above the beach (fig. 6). At the entrance, to the west, is the house where the concierge and employees live. Various other buildings and enormous cellars used for cleaning and waste collection complete the annexes of the establishment.

All of these buildings cover an area of around 4500 metres.

Price: FIVE HUNDRED THOUSAND FRANCS..... 500,000 Fr¹⁸

But, there were no takers and Monfort was forced to carry on.

18. *Messager de Bayonne*, 13 September 1859.

Through her publisher, we were able to contact Madame Monique Rousseau who made information on the act, performed before the notary Maître Saubot-Damborgez on 15 October 1863 when Benito Monfort underwrote four notes of 1000, 2000, 3000 francs, redeemable on 30 September 1864 at the Casino de Biarritz and which were endorsed on that day in Bayonne under the mortgage guarantee of all of the land and buildings that made up the Casino de Biarritz, to the order of his son, landowner in Lower Louisiana, available to us. It was observed that, at the time of purchase, Monfort was the widower of Margarita Teresa Abella, who had died in Brussels on 29 August 1855, and had married Marie Poupard in 1863. She also informed us that, in the study made by Maître Magnelli on 19 May 1865, Monfort and his wife Marie Poupard mortgaged their property against a loan of 20,000 francs. In other documents from 1875 and 1876 concerning the estate, made before Maître Duhalde, we discover that his daughter was the sole heir and that she had married Bernardo Rolando in Valencia on 23 February 1859. In the death certificate number 19 of 1871, the registry office in Biarritz mentions that he left a widow, Marie-Joséphine Poupard, who was 26 years of age.

Figure 7
Mayer & Pierson, *Napoleon III*,
Paris 1860s, carte de visite.
National Portrait Gallery, London.

Figure 8
Mayer & Pierson, *Empress Eugénie*,
Paris 1860s, carte de visite.
The Patrick Montgomery Collection.



All of these pieces of information were valuable for our research as they revealed the full extent of the enormous financial difficulties facing Monfort in his old age. Various works made it possible for us to contrast the information on Biarritz and Monfort: in general, they repeat the praise and details already revealed. However, through the *Histoire et anecdotes du Casino de Biarritz*, we learn that, in 1863, Monfort junior conducted a polka he had composed himself in the rotunda confirming some of the plaudits. It concludes: “Now, Biarritz can claim

to rival other famous spas, thanks to the intelligent imitative of Raimundo-Benito de Monfort, a Mogul poet and dilettante.”¹⁹

And, in *Aux origins du tourisme dans le pays de l'Ardour*, we read:

“M. de Montfort (sic), founder and shareholder in a Société héliographique – whose aim is to promote and propagate the art of photography – has opened a photo studio in the centre of this mundane town. He is a specialist and makes portrait cards, on cardboard or porcelain, in full, half and third-size formats, as well as twin portraits.”

Between 1858 and 1871, Monfort had the privilege of welcoming kings and guests from throughout Europe. In addition to Napoléon III and Eugénie (figs. 7 & 8), who moved their court

19. Alexandre de la Cerdà, *Histoire et anecdotes du Casino de Biarritz*, Biarritz 1997, 19.

during the three summer months to Biarritz for 14 years (1855 to 1868) and, in 1865, gave a dinner for 36 guests in honour of Isabel II, personalities such as Prosper Mérimée, King Wilhelm II of Württemberg in 1857, the kings of Portugal, the first Belgian king Leopold in 1859, the Princes of Oldenburg and Monaco, etc... can be found among the members of the aristocracy and high society who visited Biarritz and made it the most renowned holiday resort in Europe.²⁰ After the defeat at the Battle of Sedan in 1870, Monfort organised festivities to benefit wounded soldiers and allowed the casino to be used as a French-Spanish hospital as proof of his solidarity with the country that had welcomed him so warmly.

However, all of this was insufficient to save the casino leading us to the conclusion that the project far exceeded Monfort's estimates since he tried to recoup the capital he had invested as soon as work had been completed and that this was then further complicated with mortgages and loans on the property that, over the years up to his death, exceeded the value of the casino. This brings the history of this Valencian – a prophet in his field – who, being unsatisfied with being a famous man in his home town, desired to achieve greatness and finally left his name in books on photography, to an end.

The information we obtained in Biarritz led us to take a closer look at the Monfort family tree. We must start with Benito Monfort Besades (1716–1785) from Valencia who was one of the most important printers of all time and the founder of the printing plant bearing his name. Married to Rosa Asensi, they had three sons: Manuel, Benito and Raimundo Monfort Asensi. Six other children were born in a second marriage.²¹ Manuel Monfort Asensi (1736–1806), who was a famous engraver and treasurer of the Royal Library in Madrid, was married but had no children. As the oldest child, he inherited the printing plant with the obligation to pay a significant annuity to his brother Raimundo. As he was unable to deal with that, he nominated his brother Benito (1740–1788) as administrator. Benito was married to Cecila Roda; he was the second printer in the family but only ran the business for three years before his premature death. He was succeeded by his son Manuel Monfort Roda (1770–1822), the third printer, who inherited the enterprise with the obligation to provide his uncle Raimundo Monfort Asensi, during his lifetime, and his children five hundred libras yearly in monthly payments. When Manuel Monfort Roda died, the children of his brother Ramon, Benito-Raimundo, Ramona and Remedio Monfort Blanch, processed for the estate of their uncle. His widow, Catalina Rius Sanchiz, was obliged to take charge of the printing plant. When she died, José Rius Benet, the husband of Catalina Monfort Rius, daughter of the deceased person, took over the business while the other daughter married Gabriel Rius Benet, who was also a printer. As this shows, the two sisters married their cousins, brothers

20. Pierre Laborde, *Biarritz, huit siècles d'histoire*, Biarritz 1964, 67.

21. Here, we would like to thank the great researcher Elvira Mas for the investigations she carried out in the archives of various parishes and censuses that made it possible for us to complete the Monfort family tree.

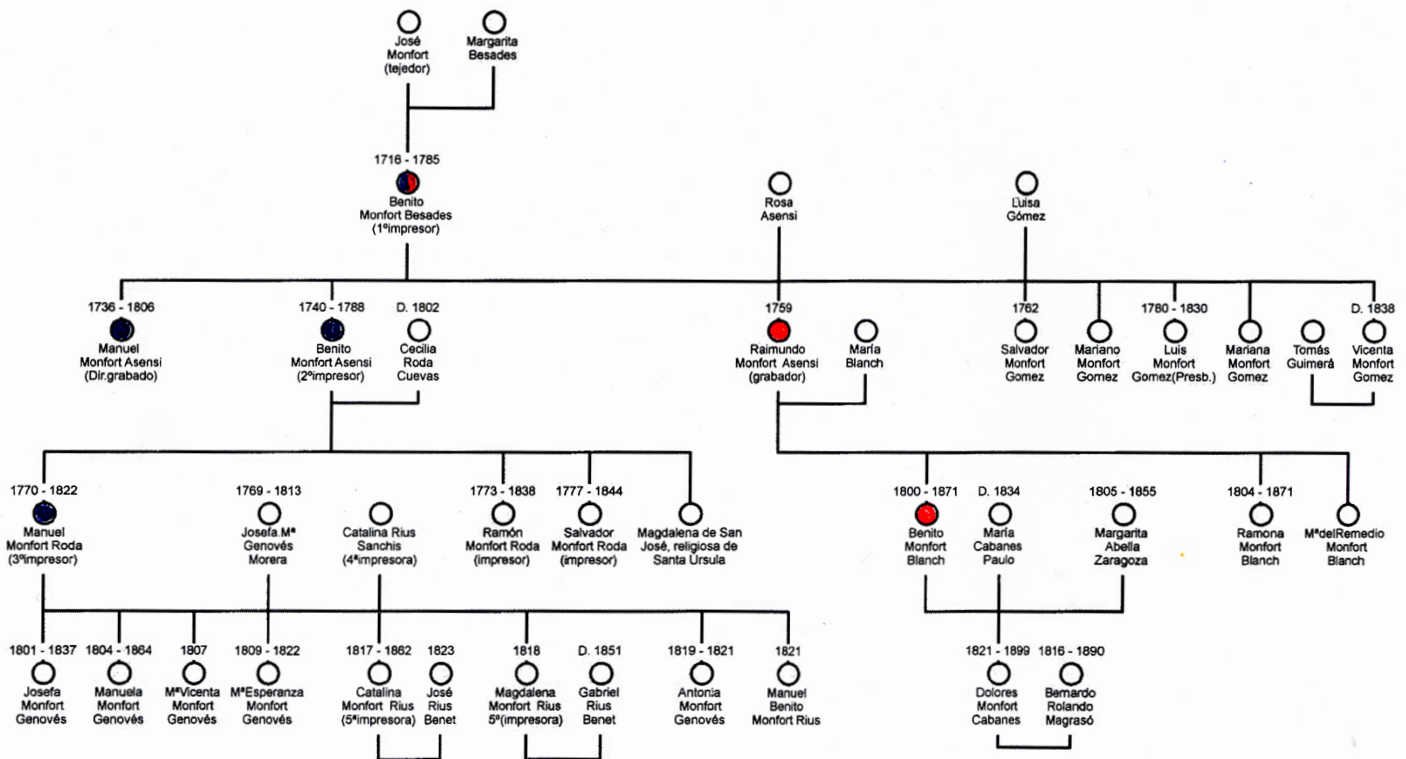


Figure 9
Family Tree of Benito Monfort.

among themselves and both printers. Unfortunately, they did not get on well and decided to split the printing operation which ultimately ended in both disappearing. It is possible to verify all of this information in the public records on the said printing plant and that is what prompted us to leave this branch of the Monfort family tree aside – as well as the Parisian line (fig. 9).

The only one remaining was that of Raimundo Monfort Asensi (1745–1806), the third son of the founder of the printing plant who never took part in its management. We discovered that, when he was 25 years of age, his father handed over the inheritance of his mother and an additional 1000 libras in the presence of the notary Maître Antonio Cort.²² There was just one son and he married Mariana Blanch: three children – Benito Monfort Blanch (1800–1871) and two daughters – were the fruit of this union. In this way, we come to the person who studied to be an engraver in Valencia and, on 15 April 1820, married Maria Cabanes Paulo, who presented him with two daughters Dolores (in 1821) and Francisca (in 1822). We have seen that, when his uncle Manuel Monfort Roda passed away in 1822, his sister and he processed for the inheritance: in this way, they recovered their arrears in 1824–1825; in 1826 they allowed an annuity of 19 reales a day to each of the three brothers, and, in 1828, Benito-Raimundo was given the house at 6, rue Palomar and a plot of land by notarial deed. His wife died in 1834. On 1 September, in the act of transaction ceded by Vicenta Monfort Genovés (daughter of Manuel Monfort Roda and Josefa Maria Genovés Morera in her first marriage), it is stipulated that, lacking any address since 1835, his part was to be divided among the joint heirs who would respectively assume their responsibility in the case of any legitimate

22. One "libra" was the equivalent of 20 "sueldos", and one "sueldo" was the weekly wage of a worker. This shows that 1,000 "libras" was a large fortune equal to 20,000 weekly salaries. Likewise, the 520 "libras" that Manuel Monfort Roda had to pay annually to the other branch of the family for having inherited the printing operation represents the significant sum of 10,400 "sueldos". This gives us an idea of the economic strength of the Monfort printing enterprise.

reclamation. When he showed up again in 1841, he received 16,671 reales in high-quality gold and silver, corresponding to the annuity and arrears, and left Bernard Ronaldo Magroso, who was to marry his daughter on 23 February 1859, as administrator of his property.²³ All of this leads to some questions: where was he between 1835 and 1841? And, after 1841? We believe that the answer is: in Paris.

We note that he surfaced in Paris in 1851, able to speak and write perfect French, surrounded by the great figures of the age, with one son bearing his own name, and the second working in the graphic field and later representing him in Biarritz. However, this son, who was said to have a degree in law, must have studied in Paris. He does not correspond with any of his marriages since, when Monfort died, he is not mentioned in his testament and disappears without claiming his heritage. The only explanation is that he was the fruit of an extramarital relationship that corresponds with his disappearance between 1835 and 1841 and which continued later. If this relationship had started around 1835, his son would have been about twenty years of age when mention is made of him helping his father in Paris – at his home on Boulevard des Italiens the seat of the *Salon Cosmos*. This would also explain why he left without leaving a trace after the death of his father and does not figure in the latter's testament. But, how could he have given concerts in the United States? How did he come to own property in Lower Louisiana? The only reply is that his mother was a rich American freeholder who took him to her homeland to present his precocious musical gifts. This would explain the absence of information on Monfort between 1841 and 1851 and his knowledge of French if he was already living in Paris before 1851 when the *Société Héliographique* first appeared on rue de l'Arcade. Likewise, this could provide the reason for his wife Margarita Abella living in Brussels until her death in 1855 while he and his illegitimate son were active in Paris. Of course, these comments have no other pretext than to present a hypothesis that is difficult to verify but which would make it possible to complete the puzzle. Anyway, these details concern his private life and have nothing to do with his public projects.

Regarding his second wife, the death certificate, dated 30 August 1855, informs us that she was living at 86 rue Royale and that she died in the evening, at the age of 59 years, 10 months and 11 days, and mentions her husband's titles and the names of her parents, all of this as stated by the merchant Victor Soefs, 36 years of age, Knight of the Leopold Order, and by Louis Cayanas, 33 years of age, property owner, both of whom signed. One important point still remains to be clarified: if he was back in France in January 1851 when the *Société Héliographique* was founded on rue de l'Arcade and, in addition to French, also had a command of photographic techniques... where had he learned them?... Probably, in his hometown

23. Serrano Morales, *José Enrique. Reseña histórica de las imprentas que han existido en Valencia... hasta 1848*, Valencia 1898–1899, 3323–64.

of Valencia and, there, from Pascual Pérez, the first professional photographer in the city who also belonged to the same generation. The same revealed by the works of Monfort in Paris, providing evidence of their friendship and collaboration. Moreover, how can it be explained that – as we will see later – in December 1847, Pascual Pérez confirmed that he had been successful in printing photographs on paper, based on the work of Blanquart-Evrard as the communication of the Institut de France from 19 June of the same year shows us; how did news of this kind reach Valencia; we consider it likely that – seeing that Monfort was living in Paris – they maintained a correspondence on the subject that was of such interest to the two of them. And this brings us to the second subject of this work.

Pascual Pérez, first professional photographer in Valencia, initiator of photography on paper and creator of the first album of original photographs in Spain



Figure 10
Pascual Pérez, Self Portrait, ca. 1855.
Archivo Tragallibres.

Let us look back at certain points. The daguerreotype was introduced in Paris on 19 August 1839; on 26 February 1840 the dentist Juan José Vilar presented his first daguerreotypes. In 1841, Talbot had his calotype process patented. In 1847, Pascual Pérez (fig. 10) opened his photo studio, the first in Valencia. Pascual Pérez, born in 1804, entered a seminary at the age of thirteen. When he was 19, he was already professor of literature. His health forced him to leave the order in 1833 and he received his secularisation in 1851. Starting in 1831, he published various works – with great success – and, in 1833, established and edited the *Diario Mercantil de Valencia*. He managed other publications; *El Cid*, *El Edetano*, *El Mole* and *El Tabalet* and collaborated with journals such as *Las Bellas Artes*, *El Miguelete*, *El Museo Literario*, *El Museo Universal*, etc. In 1840, he produced Spain's first publication targeted at a female audience: *La Psiquis*. He spoke several foreign languages which led to him being named the official interpreter of the council and commercial court, as well as the translator of several works. Two years after the start of his photographic activities, we read an article in *El Cid*, the Valencian journal of which he was editor-in-chief, dated 5 May 1849 in which we note:

“DAGUERREOTYPE ON PAPER. Remarks to the Journal de Barcelone on the subject of an article published in its number of 29 April. In the journal and number we refer to, the news on the subject of the progress made by M. Gabriel Coca in the field of photographic art launched by the journals of this capital city has led a certain journal in Madrid and another one in Valencia to claim the merit for the invention in favour of other subjects, involved, with more or less success, in this special area.” Other accounts follow and then “and seeing that the journal claims that M. Coca made greater progress in his particular field than anyone abroad, and that the fact that he is also the editor of *Le Cid*, has imposed a silence that is easy to explain on us.” Questioning the claims of M. Coca, he writes:

“On 19 June 1847, a commission of the Institut de France, comprising Hersant, Biot (...), presented its report on M. Blanquart’s invention and, since M. Vallicourt published his report, which is so full of details concerning photographic work on paper in *Tecnologista* in the same month and year, it is from there that the claim of those who consider themselves the inventors and perfectionists of the process must begin. However, based on what was reported in the numbers of *La Patria* and the *Diario de Barcelona* we refer to, M. Coca, at the moment, has done no more than M. Blanquart or M. Guillot Saguez, and those who, afterwards, grasped the news and progress that they so freely published as a gift to science.”

The journalist of the *Diario* replied:

“Following the process of M. Talbot, the dark ink only appears in the colour of iron monoxide, while with M. Coca they are not lower than Indian ink. Whereas M. Blanquart, the same as the amateur in Valencia, adds the colour of iron monoxide, sepia, bistre, Indian ink and lithographic ink *of his own free will* to his ink (...) When dealing with its inalterability, we assume that M. Blanquart and the amateur from this town have managed to completely achieve this since the second set of prints dated with December 1847 have preserved their strength and freshness although they were exposed to light all the time without any special precautions being made (...) And finally, we allow ourselves to indicate that the amateur in Valencia simplified the apparatus for working on paper, as described by M. Vallicourt, which led to an actual cost, without including the chemical products and paper, of some 50 francs or 190 reales, reducing this to around 30 reales. With what we have just revealed, we have no petty intention of hindering the honourable work of M. Coca but the remarks made by his apologists were much too absolute and we wanted to make it clear that if a Spaniard from Catalonia made advances three months ago, another Spaniard from Valencia had also been working for one-and-a-half years on the progress of science without making any claims or hoping to be recompensed.”

It seems to be clear that M. Pascual Pérez kept a close eye on all the progress being made and that his first prints date from 1847. His position at the *Diario Mercantil*, his proficiency in foreign languages, his scientific interest and his contacts made it possible for him to have rapid access to the latest developments in photography – especially, through his relationship with Benito Monfort when one bears in mind that the correspondents of *La Lumière* in Spain were the Busy Bookshop in Barcelona and Pascual Pérez in Valencia; or that the *Diario Mercantil* published news on *La Lumière*, including advertisements, and that – later – *Cosmos* praised the work of Pascual Pérez. But, in 1849, the polemic caused by the article in the *Diario de Barcelona* spurred it to prove its scoop since, on 3 June, we read:

“Among the notices in yesterday’s *Diario Mercantil*, there is information on an artistic novelty published in Spain for the first time. Namely: coloured, miniature portraits on paper. For more details, we refer our readers to the mentioned advertisement. For our part, we limit ourselves to drawing attention to the fact that Valencia was, undoubtedly, the first town in which one began to work with and perfect this charming application of M. Daguerre’s splendid invention and also the first where photography on paper was made available to the public.”

A few days later, the advertisement, accompanied by the painter Codecasa who carried out the colouring, appeared a second time, stating:

“The first print was a kind of matrix or mould from which one could make thousands of copies with the remarkable advantage that this matrix would not deteriorate as happens with others of this kind and, after a thousand reproductions, provides prints that are as good as the first.”

However, Pascual Pérez did not stop there and went one step further. Between 1844 and 1846, Talbot produced *The Pencil of Nature* the first book in the world to be published with photos pasted in by hand. Pérez decided to take up the idea and we read in the *Mercantil* of 1 September:

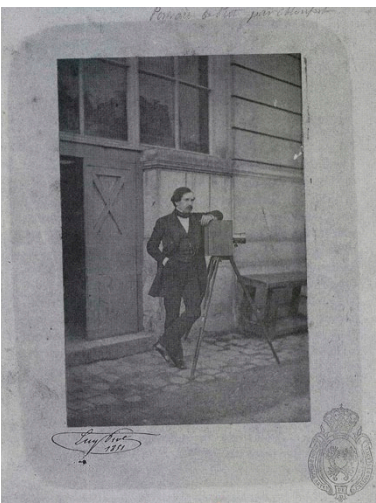
“M. Pascual Pérez, who is well-known in this city for the progress he has given to heliography, is about to publish a wonderful collection of daguerreotype views on paper, which will show the most splendid sights in Cabañal under the title of *Album del Cabañal*. Not only the interest it shows for the natural beauty, but also the precision of the landscapes shown in M. Pérez’ work, will give us the privilege of being the third of this kind to be published in Europe since the introduction of heliography on paper and the first to see the light of day in Spain. In 1847, M. Pérez began working with daguerreotypes on paper and his first attempts, which are in the possession of several admirers in this city, were already promise of the remarkable results that the study and hard work led to. We recommend purchasing the *Album del Cabañal*, a work that does honour to an artist and merits a place alongside those of the kind that have been published in other countries.”

Its publication was announced on 18 October and the first delivery of five images was shown to the public at the journal’s printing plant. It was mentioned that the album would consist of three instalments of five plates each, at a price of 40 reales amounting to 8 reales for each plate, and details of the views included. Then, it specified:

Figure 11
Pascual Pérez,
Portrait of M. Pascual Pérez Gascón,
Valencia 1848. Real Academia de Bellas Artes
de San Carlos, Valencia.



Figure 12
Benito Monfort, *Eugene Piot*, 1851, probably in
the courtyard of the Monfort house, rue de
l'Arcade. Collection of the Royal Academy of
Fine Arts of San Carlos of Valencia.



“As the editor does not only aim at a scoop on remarkable progress in the practice of the daguerreotype on paper and the merit of the person who introduced it into Spain in spite of the great costs involved in mass reproduction, he has set a price that is without competition in Spain or in England.”

In fact, this was not actually the third book of this kind in Europe. A few months previously, Blanquart-Evrard had launched the publication of the *Album photographique de l'artiste et de l'amateur*, which was sold in monthly instalments containing three photographs. But Pascual Pérez had no idea of it. Anyway, he was a pioneer and, without doubt, his book was the first with photographs of Spain. Unfortunately, we were unable to find a copy of it.

The Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Carlos in Valencia has a stock of old photographs including six by Pascual Pérez that were published in the *Museo Universal* that he managed in 1857. Seeing that photogravure had not been invented at the time, an engraver must have copied them by hand to make it possible for them to be printed. But, quite recently, the exhibition “*El mundo al revés: el Calotipo en España*” (*The World Reversed: The Calotype in Spain*) showed the first photograph (calotype) made in Spain in the year 1848: it is a portrait of M. Pascual Pérez Gascón (fig. 11), a Valencian organist and composer and a personal friend of Pascual Pérez, which would confirm his authorship seeing that, at the time, he was the only person making calotypes in Spain.²⁴

Among the photographs at the Academy, we also found one by Blanquart-Evrard, as well as the only known one by Benito Monfort – a portrait of Eugene Piot in the courtyard of a house (fig. 12), probably the one on rue de l'Arcade, in addition to others by Talbot, Clifford, etc. Part of the collection could have belonged to Pascual Pérez on account of the coincidence with his work, and some of them correspond to gifts from Benito Monfort; this would also corroborate their friendship, as well as their collaboration, and make it possible to attribute Pascual Pérez with the authorisation Monfort received from the Real Sociedad Economica de Amigos del Pais to use the Society's emblem on the front page of *Cosmos*, just as transmitting news on its activities in the *Diario Mercantil*, which he managed. Certainly, we are indebted to Pascual Pérez for the opportunity of identifying Monfort without which his activities in Paris would never have revealed his actual nationality since we were successful in finding out, in France, that he was a foreigner.

We were ultimately able to confirm that the relationship between Monfort and Pascual Pérez was fruitful, for both parties, and that it guided both of them to become pioneers in their passion and work for photography.

24. Exhibition *El mundo al revés. El calotipo en España*, Universidad de Navarra 12 March–26 April 2015.

Archives Consulted

Archives de France CARANDossiers BB29/587 and F18/312-426. The name of Monfort does not appear.

Archives Nationales. Printers and bookshop. P.41 ; *Le Cosmos* 1852-1880 P.262-288.

Archives de Paris: *Magasin pittoresque*: Checked from 1851 to 1865: nothing on Monfort.

Bibliothèque Historique de la ville de Paris : *L'illustration*: January and February 1851, reviewed ; *Le National*: January and February 1851, reviewed; *Le Siècle*: December 1851, January 1852 and May to December, reviewed.

Bibliothèque Nationale : *La Lumière* ; *Le Cosmos* ; *Firmin-Didot* 1849-1857 ; *Bottin* 1849-1857 ; *Le Courrier de Paris* 1850 and January 1851, reviewed ; *L'Observateur Parisien* 1852, reviewed; *Le Palais de Cristal* 1851 : Minutes of the meeting of the Société Héliographique on 13 June 1851 are reproduced here.

José Huguet Chanzá, Benifayó / Valencia

Mercantile Professor, Enterprises Manager, President of the Valencian Society of History of Photography, author of History of Valencian Photography and several publications about photography. Curator of several expositions, assisting to conventions. Together with two friends he created the Printing Museum in the Monasterio del Puig, donated to the Valencian Government in 2006. As a collector he has actually a Graphic Archive with more than 100.000 images from Valencia. Since 2004 he is Academician of Honour from the Fine Arts Royal Academy of San Carlos of Valencia.