



# The Court Historian

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: [www.tandfonline.com/journals/ycou20](http://www.tandfonline.com/journals/ycou20)

## Madrid and the Architecture of Power

Jesús Escobar, *Habsburg Madrid: Architecture and the Spanish Monarchy* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2022), 266 pp., 117 colour and 26 black and white illustrations.

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To cite this article: José Eloy Hortal Muñoz (2024) Madrid and the Architecture of Power, *The Court Historian*, 29:2, 185-188, DOI: [10.1080/14629712.2024.2367343](https://doi.org/10.1080/14629712.2024.2367343)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14629712.2024.2367343>



Published online: 17 Jul 2024.



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## Book Review

# Madrid and the Architecture of Power

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BY JOSÉ ELOY HORTAL MUÑOZ 

Jesús Escobar, *Habsburg Madrid: Architecture and the Spanish Monarchy* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2022), 266 pp., 117 colour and 26 black and white illustrations.

For several decades now, Early Modern studies have been conducted chiefly from an interdisciplinary approach. Scholars have adopted this approach because it is only possible to gain further knowledge by bringing into dialogue the novel methodologies they are developing in various fields of the humanities. In recent years, this dialogue has enabled us to enjoy books as thorough and interesting as this one, which, taking as a starting point the history of architecture — the author's speciality — draws on elements from other disciplines to explore the subject in greater depth and even address very significant changes in one of the principal monarchies of the period, that of Spain. Together with Jesús Escobar, other architectural historians, such as Krista de Jonge, Laura Fernández-González, Stephan Hoppe, Konrad Ottenheim and Merlijn Hurx, among others, are making very significant progress in this direction. This book furthermore brings into the discussion schools and academic fields that have not always been included, an aspect that significantly enriches its comprehensive vision.

Escobar's book examines the profound changes the city of Madrid underwent during the seventeenth century to turn it into a major capital and the requirements that this entailed. This transformation process is a phenomenon that occurred in the main European courts of the time but had certain peculiarities in Madrid as the city needed to become the capital of a global empire.

As the author points out, these distinctive traits have yet to be sufficiently appreciated. It is undoubtedly due in part to the image held of the Spanish Habsburg dynasty until a few years ago — especially of the seventeenth-century monarchs, whom historians referred to for several decades as *Austrias menores* (lesser Habsburgs), diminishing their importance and portraying the Spanish monarchy of the period as one that was in decline. However, numerous studies produced in recent years have highlighted the crucial importance of the monarchs of that century and the reforms they devised to reshape the monarchy as a whole. It involved modifying the structures established by Charles V and Philip II, which had proven inadequate for preserving the monarchy since the early 1600s.

Escobar discusses some of the significant reforms the seventeenth-century Habsburg monarchs carried out. In particular, he analyses the role of public buildings and plazas as active spaces for the practice of power in the city of Madrid. As it was the capital of a global empire, other courts of the seventeenth-century Spanish monarchy mirrored these

practices, which can be considered a ‘monarchy of courts’. One of the main contributions made by the author is his comparison of Madrid’s public buildings and their functions with those of other courts, such as Mexico, Lima, Naples and Barcelona. These comparisons provide an insight into the relationship between these courts since, contrary to what scholars thought until a few years ago, influence did not always spread from the centre to the periphery but also in the opposite direction, with other courts influencing Madrid.

The volume analyses explicitly the reign of Philip IV, the regency of Mariana of Austria, acknowledged as a significant entity of its own, and the reign of Charles II, spanning from approximately 1620 to 1700. In a sense, this period is a continuation of the one examined in the author’s first book, *The Plaza Mayor and the Shaping of Baroque Madrid* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), which studies the evolution of Madrid from its designation as the capital of the Spanish monarchy in 1561 to its conversion into the capital of a global empire. One of the main contributions of this first book was its analysis of the style implemented in Madrid by the architects who worked for Philip II from the 1550s in what the author calls the ‘Flemish phase’: the ‘Court style’ or ‘Madrid style’, which in recent years has come to be termed *Estilo austriaco*, a concept that Escobar continues to use in Habsburg Madrid.

The book reviewed here begins with an introduction outlining the main themes addressed and providing a brief historiographical overview justifying the author’s reasons for considering that Madrid’s Habsburg architecture has yet to be deservedly appreciated. One of them is the fact that this architectural style, especially the ‘Herrerian’ variant — named after Juan de Herrera, architect of the monastery of San Lorenzo de El Escorial — was copied during Franco’s regime in many public buildings, causing it to diminish its value in the collective imaginary. The author ends the introduction by explaining the layout of the five chapters that make up the book. It is structured specifically into studies of two palaces, the court prison, the town hall and four monumental plazas in the city, with the chapters arranged chronologically according to the date they were built.

The first chapter, entitled ‘Architecture and Grandeza’, falls outside this chronological structure, laying the groundwork for the importance of Madrid’s architectural constructions by analysing the concept of grandeur as it was understood in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. A novelty is that it takes into account not only the perspective of court historians of the time, such as the well-known López de Hoyos, Pérez de Messa, González Dávila and Quintana, but also the information supplied by cartographers and artists of the time, including Van den Wyngaerde, Manzelli, Lavanha and, above all, Teixeira and his famous *Tophografía de la Villa de Madrid*.

The author then analyses the architectural history and significance of specific buildings in Chapter 2, entitled ‘Monarchy and Governance: The Royal Palace, ca. 1620’, where he examines the Alcázar of Madrid and the major alterations to convert it into a palace. As it was a Royal Site and principal residence, the changes made to the palace stemmed from new ideas and needs concerning the monarchy. This chapter discusses the importance of the *Junta de Obras y Bosques* (Board of Works and Woodlands) in the entire process (pp. 62-68). This institution enjoyed architectural and artistic prominence and played a political, jurisdictional and even ceremonial role. In this connection, the author also discusses the ceremonial significance of the Alcázar using Gómez de Mora’s architectural drawings housed in the Vatican Archive (pp. 74-91).

Chapter 3, entitled ‘Justice and Penance: The Court Prison, ca. 1640’, traces the history of a building that was intended for the Council of Castile, subsequently became known and used as the Court Prison, and is now the Palacio de Santa Cruz or Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The architectural development of the building was undoubtedly complex, as the relational difficulties and clashes between municipal and court justice are reflected in its history. The intricacies of the royal justice system of the time also became apparent when, in 1635, it was decided to set up an office there for the Juez Alcalde de Obras y Bosques (chief magistrate for works and woodlands).

Chapter 4, entitled ‘Town Versus Court: The Town Hall, ca. 1660’, analyses the architectural and ceremonial history of the building that was Madrid’s town hall, as well as the Plaza del Salvador directly opposite it. This building and its square were the primary setting for civic events in Madrid until the mid-sixteenth century; however, as a result of the city’s newfound status as capital and the omnipresence of the court, this central space shifted to the Plaza Mayor, especially after the reforms of the 1580s. The author likewise examines how those spaces previously used for municipal ceremonies were co-opted to host the Crown and Royal Household festivities during the seventeenth century, such as the Corpus Christi.

Chapter 5, entitled ‘Regency and Renovation: Palaces and Plazas, ca. 1680’, returns to the Alcázar of Madrid and surveys Mariana of Austria’s efforts to complete the building’s façade in the 1670s. In addition, the author emphasises Mariana’s important role in Madrid’s architectural transformation, a subject to which little attention has been paid until recently. However, studies by authors like Silvia Mitchell have focused on the impetus that Mariana gave to Madrid’s public buildings to shape the dynastic image. The chapter discusses not only the Royal Site of the Alcázar but also that of Aranjuez and its conversion into a dynastic space through erecting monumental statues by Leone and Pompeo Leoni, such as *Charles V overcoming the Fury* and *Mary of Hungary*. She also played an essential part in renovating the Escorial and the Plaza Mayor following the fires of 1671 and 1672 through her valido, Fernando de Valenzuela, who was appointed Superintendent of Royal Works.

Finally, the conclusion, entitled ‘Madrid of the Spanish Habsburgs’, summarises the main ideas discussed in the volume, and analyses the notion of Madrid as ‘Villa y Corte’ and the merger of both concepts in the architecture of public buildings during the seventeenth century.

This book is undoubtedly a major contribution to the history, not only of seventeenth-century architectural Madrid, but also of the evolution of the monarchy as a whole during the period. For this purpose, as explained on p. 17, the author combines visual analyses of buildings, paintings and engravings with extracts from manuscript sources, novels, chronicles and political theorists. He has also produced various maps and plans of no longer extant buildings.

It would have been useful if the author had analysed other Royal Sites that existed in or around the city of Madrid and underwent significant architectural changes during the period — such as the Casa de Campo and El Pardo — as he does with the palace of Aranjuez, albeit briefly, in chapter 5. However, this minor issue does not detract from the importance of this volume, which is also very well-edited and contains high-quality images. All the above has earned it the Eleanor Tufts Award from the Society for Iberian Global Art in 2022, an honour it undoubtedly fully deserves.

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