

MADRID ...This city is not to be seen till one comes just upon it, because it stands in a hollow on the banks of the famous Manzanares. The entrance into Madrid bears a faint resemblance, for a little way, to the entrance into Rome through the Porta del Popolo: three streets, in the shape of a bird's foot, lead to the centre of the city. I took that on the right, which led me to the Plaza de Santo Domingo, where was a French inn to which I had been recommended.

Lettres et mémoires, London, 1747.

CHARLES LOUIS POLLNITZ

1747

...Madrid is fair, rich, flourishing and populous, and although it is not entirely flat, the streets are straight, the squares wide, the houses tall; majesty reigns in the temples, wealth in the palaces, magnificence in the court, and splendour among the people; there are 600 public highways, 14 squares, 18 parishes, 58 religious houses, 27 hospitals; every year about 50,000 sheep are eaten, together with 12,000 oxen, 60,000 kids, 16,000 calves, 13,000 pigs, besides countless fowl, both game and domestic. To conclude, whichever way the eye turns it sees sparkling the rays of grandeur, abundance and luxury. And if it should happen that, here or there, it chances to fall upon some picture of poverty or meanness, yet this too is nonetheless decently upheld by majestic gravity, which here is ever to be seen even though it be lean, gnarled, and enveloped in rags. Indeed! Everything is filthy, everything is revolting, everything stinks; wherever you go, indoors or in the street, in sun or shade, on foot or in a carriage, it is always like being in a privy. And in this boiling heat, whoever walks through the city finding himself continually amid swirling dust, must perforce swallow some of it, and feed by day upon what was his superfluity of the night before; this I tell you from experience. Here are of no avail sweet-smelling waters, such as those called *Regina*, or *Mélisse*, or *Sans-pareille*, nor the essences of Florence, nor all the perfumes of Arabia. Our most fragrant, most scented and most well-prepared Lombard ladies, if they came here, would be unable to protect themselves from this brave stench which at all times makes its presence felt. Nevertheless, one lives, one endures...

In order to give you a description of the Escorial, after the many which have already been made, without being constrained to particularize, I shall begin by telling you that many of the noblest arts, and especially painting and architecture, have contributed to the adornment of this magnificent place...

Spain, Italy and France all believe that they gave the Escorial its architect, each country claiming for itself the fame to which it considers itself entitled of recognition as the mother of great men - a game usually played by cities... The Spaniards pride themselves correctly on their Juan Bautista Monegro, who was helped by Juan de Herrera and by Antonio Villacastin, a lay-brother of the Escorial itself.

The great monarch who with more justification than Augustus could call himself Master of the World drew to his service, with the promise of large rewards, the most expert men in all the necessary arts to help in the great work which was to be the fulfilment of a vow made for victory. From among these worthy craftsmen he chose Monegro as his principal architect, perhaps because he was a Spaniard, but certainly also because he considered him the person most capable of effecting a vast design, as indeed he proved to be.

...The whole building is disposed in the shape of a gridiron, the instrument of the martyrdom of the saint to whom it is dedicated. Although the principal front is, as I have said, unfortunate, it is no less pleasing, majestic, noble, than the rest of the edifice. At each of its two extremities there is a tower with its appurtenances, and at the corners behind these there are two more identical towers, so that each of the principle corners has its tower.

One enters by three large doorways, the largest in the centre, and all three are flanked by large half-columns of the Doric order, four on either side, with intercolumnation and niches, which have windows above them. The windows of the Escorial amount to 4,000, and with the 1,000 doors make as many as 12,000 openings.

...Entering by the main doorway and crossing a large and well-arranged vestibule, above which is the library, one passes into a great courtyard of such majesty and harmonious proportions that the eye cannot tire of contemplating it...

Five well-spaced windows open above five arches, between which rise tall columns; these support huge stone statues of the six most worthy kings of the Old Testament.

...There is no need for me to describe the church to you at great length since, as I have said, this is built on the plan of St. Peter's in Rome, although St. Laurence is smaller and crowded with defects that the other does not possess. What does infinite harm to the plan of the church, and is at once noticeable, is the ill-conceived position of the choir. Although this is raised with admirable mastery on only four pillars, it nonetheless seems to fall on your head as you enter, and covers you so that you seem to be entering a dark cavern rather than a well-lit temple.

Lettere di un viaggiatore italiano ad un suo amico, Lucca, 1759.

NORBERTO CAIMO

...My lodgings would have been excellent were it not for the lack of a fire, since the cold was dry and more piercing than in Paris, in spite of the forty degrees of latitude. The reason for this is evident: Madrid is the highest city in Europe. From whichever point of the coast one chooses to enter Spain, to reach this capital one climbs almost imperceptibly until one arrives at one's destination. Moreover the city is surrounded at a distance by high mountains such as the Guadarrama, and more closely by smiling hills which ensure that the least wind from the north or east comes to play around the city. The air is appalling for anyone who does not live here, because being pure and thin it is not suited to the constitution of those who are inclined to corpulence. It is only propitious to the Spanish, who in general are thin, frail, dry and feel the cold to the point of always going about wrapped up, even when it is extremely hot, the well-to-do in a wide black cape and the poor folk of the people in a black arab cloak, especially in the countryside.

The men of this country are full of prejudices and the women, although they are ignorant, feel very intensely the life of the spirit; the people of both sexes are possessed by desires and passions as strong as the air they breathe and as burning as the sun beneath which they live. Every Spaniard detests a foreigner merely because he is not a Spaniard, since they cannot explain their hatred any other way; the ladies, however, who recognize the injustice of this hatred, avenge us by loving us, yet fencing themselves about with precautions, because the Spaniard, who is jealous by nature, likes to have also an evident reason for being so. His honour depends on the least stain upon the woman who belongs to him. Gallantry in this country must be shrouded in mystery because it tends to absolute power and is strictly prohibited. From this result the secrecy, the intrigue, the uncertainty of mind, vacillating between the duty imposed by religion and the force of passion which opposes it. The men are more often ugly than handsome, although there are numerous exceptions, whereas the women are generally pretty and not a few of them are beautiful. The blood which boils in their veins makes them ardent in love and always ready to participate in any intrigue which may deceive those people who are always about them to spy out their comings and goings. The lover who is most ready to risk danger is always the most favoured. During walks, in church, in the theatre, they speak with their eyes to whomever they please,

and they know how to use this language to perfection. The man to whom it is addressed, if he knows how to seize his opportunity and make use of it, is always sure to be fortunate, and he must not expect any resistance: if he neglects this opportunity and if he does not profit by it, no one will ever offer him another.

Mémoires (1763-1774).

GIACOMO CASANOVA

1767

...The Spanish are by no means naturally a serious, melancholy nation: misery and discontent have cast a gloom over them, increased, no doubt, by the long habit of distrust and terror inspired by the Inquisition; yet every village still resounds with the music of voices and guitars; and their fairs and Sunday wakes are remarkably noisy and riotous. They talk louder, and argue with more vehemence than even the French or Italians, and gesticulate with equal, if not superior eagerness... Like most people of southern climates, they are dirty in their persons, and over-run with vermin. I was surprised to find them so much more lukewarm in their devotion than I expected; but I will not take upon me to assert, though I have great reason to believe it, that there is in Spain as little true moral religion as in any country I ever travelled through, although none abounds more with provincial protectors, local Madonnas, and altars celebrated for particular cures and indulgences: Religion is a topic not to be touched, much less handled with any degree of curiosity, in the domains of so tremendous a tribunal as the Inquisition... The burning zeal, which distinguished their ancestors above the rest of the Catholic world, appears to have lost much of its activity, and really seems nearly extinguished.

Travels through Spain, London, 1779.

HENRY SWINBURNE

June 1776

...As I approached Madrid I had occasion to compare it with Berlin. The modern capital of Spain is built upon sand, and in this city when it does not rain one is suffocated by dust; but as one goes further from it into the surrounding country, there are quite fertile fields. Coming from Barcelona one enters Madrid by the Puerta de Alcalá de Henares, a gate which is truly splendid... Having seen many capitals and royal residences which are strongly fortified, I was at once struck as I entered Madrid to see only walls of earth, and instead of a great river a little stream called the Manzanares, across which Philip II caused to be thrown a large and magnificent bridge; which has given rise to various witty sayings and has caused more than one to observe that 'the King should have sold the bridge to buy a river for his capital'. This capital was only a small town when Charles V, recovering from a quartan fever which had long troubled him, decided to found a great city here and to transfer to it the royal residence. And indeed he did not err. Madrid enjoys a pure, light air, but it is at certain times cold, due to the proximity of the mountains. On the other hand, there is abundance of everything here. Madrid is situated in the middle of a fertile countryside, on a height surrounded by well-cultivated hills, and almost at the centre of Spain, being 110 leagues distant from Lisbon, 105 from Cadiz and 106 from Barcelona.

Mémoires secrètes des Cours et des Gouvernements, Paris, 1793.

GIUSEPPE GORANI

November 1764

...As one travels towards Madrid, the new highway offers on either side a fine prospect of pine woods, and groves of oak and other kinds of trees. In the two leagues before Galapagar some villages are to be seen and, on the right, the Escorial and part of the extensive royal forests. In the stretch between Galapagar (where the road is joined by the new and equally magnificent road from the Escorial) and las Rozas, which is three leagues, although

the ground is well cultivated and sown with corn, yet there is a great scarcity of trees, as happens in other regions of Castile, a factor which makes the journey less pleasant and in hot weather very uncomfortable, in spite of the excellence of the new road. By this one reaches Madrid in two leagues more, leaving on the left the royal palace of La Zarzuela and then, to the right, the country villa called the Casa de Campo, its woods, gardens and palace. Before entering the charming Paseo de la Florida, which from the gate of St. Vincent leads for almost two leagues to the royal palace of the Pardo, one crosses the river Manzanares by the Segovia bridge and then, somewhat further on, by another stone bridge, which is decorated with two statues, of St. Ferdinand and St. Barbara. This district, like others near to the capital of Spain, has been made beautiful by planting new trees.

If I were to give a historical account of the metropolis and speak of the antiquity which has been attributed to the city by some writers, I should be obliged to go back in time to an age full of obscurity and fictions and to rely upon vague facts and uncertainties... But to suggest that Madrid, situated in territory that is fertile and abundant in the necessities of life, where the air is very pure, was from the beginning a town of some importance and that it was considered strong even after it had been conquered by the might of the Saracens; that the ancient kings came to reside there for a time and to hold their court, or national assembly, there; and, finally, that it became the metropolis and fixed residence of the sovereigns of Spain only in the time of Philip II, who enlarged and adorned the ancient royal palace, or Alcazar; all this seems to me not far from the truth nor from what we have been told by the most credible writers.

Descrizione odepórica della Spagna, Parma, 1793.

ANTONIO CONCA
1793

...Madrid lies in good measure on a sloping ground, which makes it appear to great advantage from that side by which I came. Its form approaches the circular, and its diameter is a little more than two English miles. The numerous spires and cupolas promise well at a distance, and several ample edifices fill your sight as you approach. I entered it by the magnificent stone bridge built by Philip II over the river Manzanares. A French traveller has made himself very merry at the expense of that bridge, and cracked some jests upon the disproportion of it to the water that runs under. But Frenchmen, like other people, will easily catch at opportunities of being censorious in other people's countries. The fact is, that the Manzanares becomes sometimes a considerable river by the sudden melting of the snow on the neighbouring hills, and is often half a mile broad in winter. Philip therefore did a very proper thing when he built a large bridge over it, and ridiculous are those who pretend to ridicule him on this account.

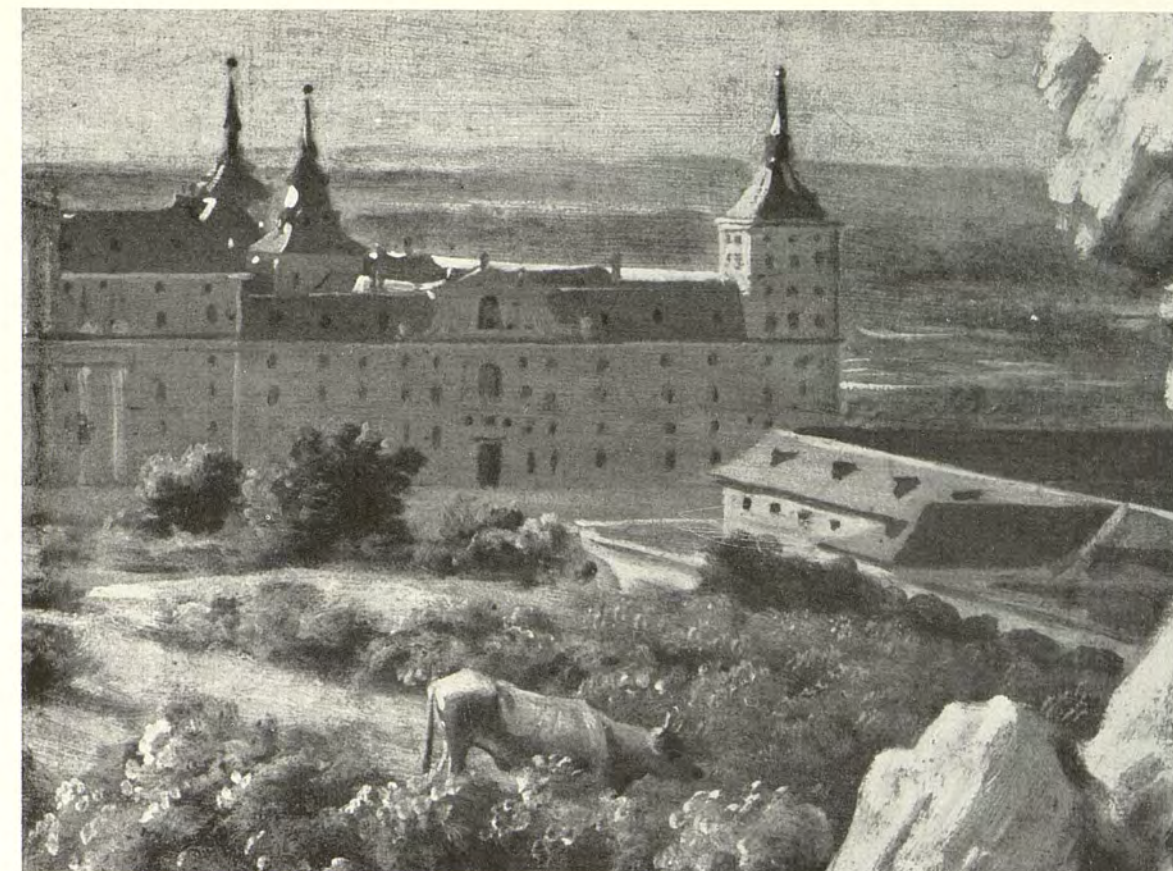
From the bridge to the gate of the town there is a straight and wide avenue of fine trees, which renders the entrance on that side very noble. But it is impossible to tell how I was shocked at the horrible stink that seized me the instant I trusted myself within that gate! So offensive a sensation is not to be described. I felt a heat all about me, which was caused by the fetid vapours exhaling from numberless heaps of filth lying all about. My head was presently disordered by it, and the headache continued very painful from that moment. ...The few streets which I have seen as I was coming to the inn, are all straight and wide, and many of the houses and churches very sightly. Was it not for the abominable ordure that scarcely leaves a passage to foot-passengers along-side the walls, I should judge Madrid to be one of the noblest cities in Europe: but the shocking stink has made me repent I came to see it.

A Journey from London to Genoa, London, 1770.

JOSEPH BARETTI
October 1760

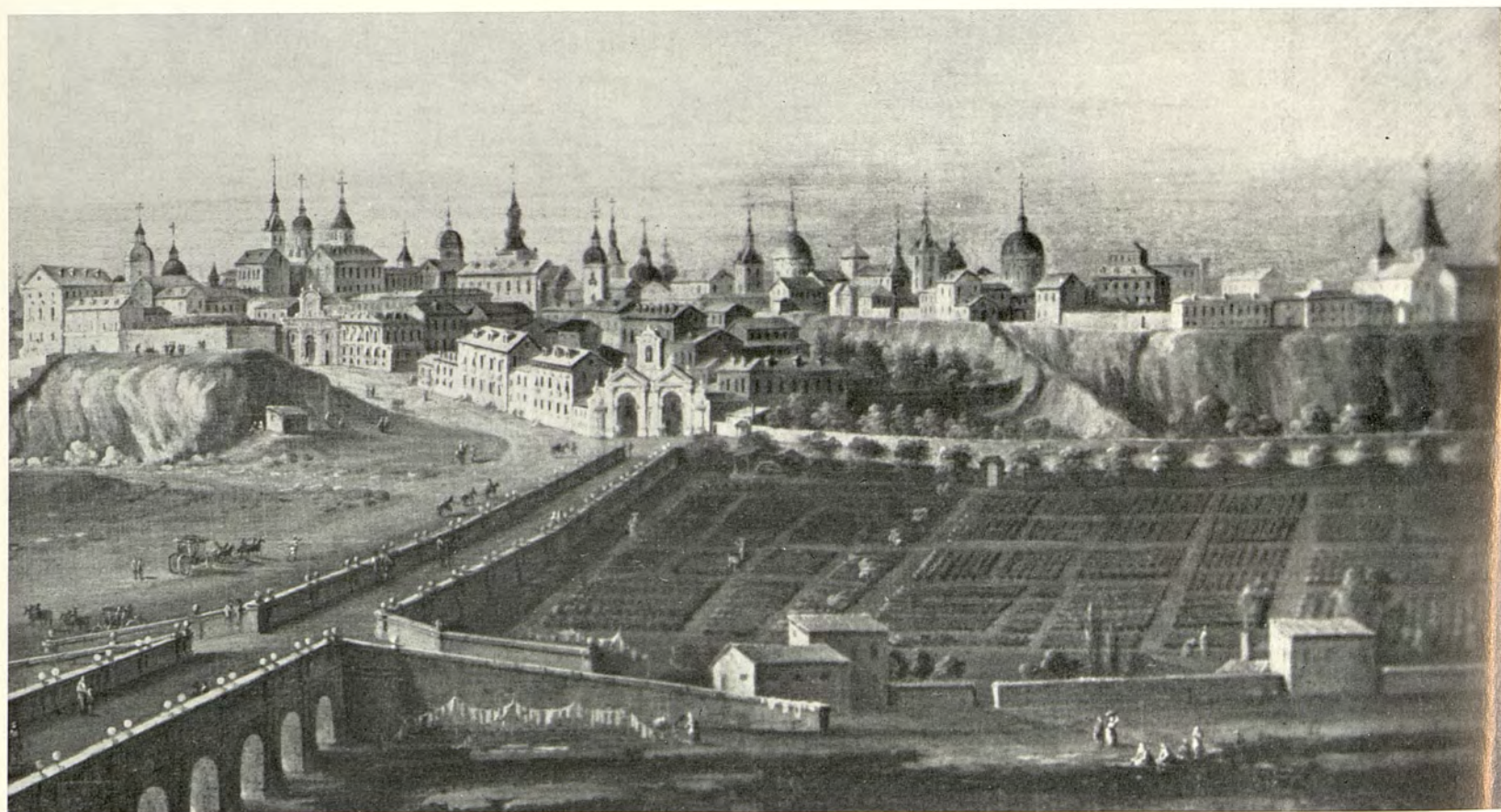
110-111. MICHEL-ANGE HOUASSE: *View of the Escorial* (details). Madrid, Prado.

There is evidence that Michel-Ange, the son of René-Antoine Houasse who was director of the Académie de France in Rome, was at the court of Philip V in Madrid in the years 1715 to 1730. Besides this painting, other small paintings of the same artist depicting various aspects of the palace-monastery of the Escorial are kept in the Moncloa palace. The view shows the main façade of the building with the plain in the background.



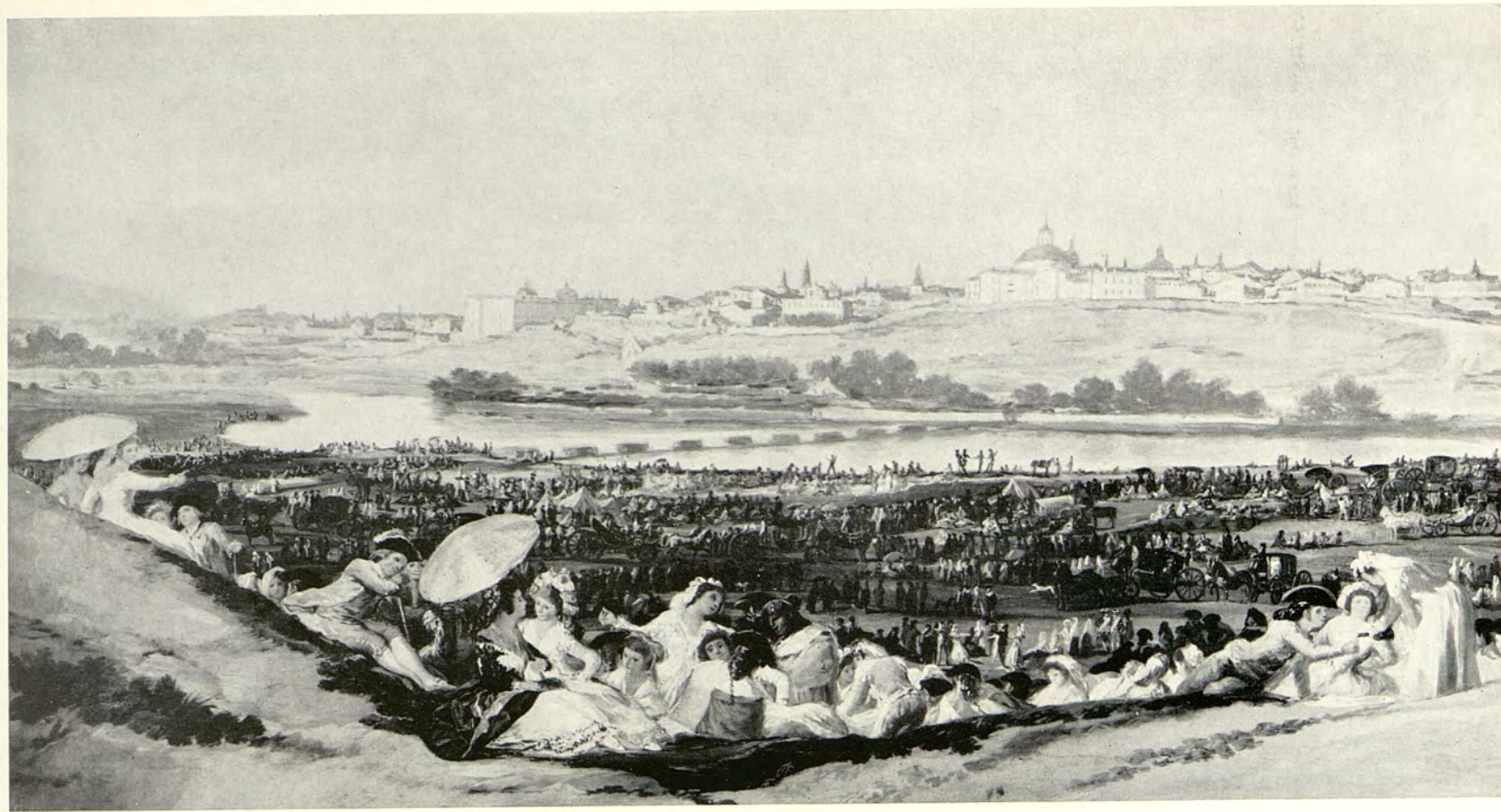


112-113. ANTONIO JOLI: *View of Madrid* (details). Private collection. One of a series of four views of Rome, London, Vienna and Madrid. The view is from the far side of the bridge over the Manzanares and shows the vast edifice of the Palacio Real and the gardens sloping down to the river, with the spires and domes of the churches of Madrid in the background.



114-115. FRANCISCO GOYA: *La Pradera de San Isidro* (details). Madrid, Prado. A view of the meadows outside Madrid on 15 May, the feast of San Isidro. Beyond the Manzanares is a panoramic view of Madrid, with the Palacio Real and the Church of San Francisco el Grande.





◁ 116. FRANCISCO GOYA: *La Pradera de San Isidro*. Madrid, Prado.

In this masterpiece of landscape painting Goya depicts the crowds who have gathered for the feast of San Isidro and in the distance, on the far side of the river, a view of the city lit by a pale, spectral light which makes it seem detached from the festivities in the foreground.

◁ 117. ANTONIO JOLI: *The Calle de Alcalá, Madrid*. Madrid, Collection of the Duchess of Alba.

Joli was in Madrid about 1750, where he worked as scene-painter in the Teatro del Buen Retiro. He also painted views of the city, of which the paintings of the Calle de Alcalá are among the most important. This view shows the road looking towards the Plaza Mayor and the Puerta del Sol.

118. ANTONIO JOLI: *A View of Madrid, Calle de Alcalá*. Madrid, Collection of the Duchess of Alba.

This second view of the Calle de Alcalá, the chief street of old Madrid, shows the city from the direction of the Puerta de Alcalá, the many spires of its religious and municipal buildings standing out against the background.



119. ANTONIO JOLI: *A View of Madrid, Calle de Alcalá* (detail). Madrid, Collection of the Duchess of Alba.

Many small figures, most of them in motion, enliven the painting of the Calle de Alcalá enclosed by the long boundary wall and by a succession of buildings arranged in a kind of theatrical perspective.

