INTRODUCTION

In the center of Old Madrid, at the juncture of the medieval city and its early modern expansion, stands the Plaza Mayor (Fig. 1). For the wandering tourist, the bartering stamp and coin dealer, or the lone woman in high heels running over the cobblestones in a film by Pedro Almodóvar, the Plaza Mayor offers a retreat from the bustle of downtown Madrid. Closed off by arches at street level, the grand city square of a uniform architectural design stands nearly silent. Once, however, the Plaza Mayor opened directly onto the streets of Madrid. Vibrant and crowded with people, the plaza pulsated at the heart of one of Europe's fastest growing cities.

The Plaza Mayor was planned and built as an urban centerpiece for a new capital envisioned by the Spanish Habsburg ruler Philip II (ruled 1556–98) and realized by the king and his successors. On most days, the plaza served as the principal market space of Madrid. Following a well-ordered arrangement, vendors brought fruit, vegetables, dried nuts, candied almonds, and other goods to sell from specially designed tables and stands. In shops located under the plaza's porticoes, merchants offered stationery, pastries, and luxury goods to the inhabitants of the Spanish court. Residents of all social classes also gathered in the plaza to buy bread and meat from municipal buildings that were part of the ensemble of the square. Merchants and courtiers, bureaucrats and widows alike lived in the apartments rising four stories above the ground-level shops that lined the perimeter of the Plaza Mayor. Housing in the plaza was built of brick and articulated at ground level by a granite colonnade and on balconies by iron balustrades.

FIGURE 1. Madrid, Plaza Mayor, view of the northern range from the southwest. (Photo, author.)

On festival days, the refined and utilitarian architecture of the plaza was transformed into a glorious arena for civic and court spectacles. The Flemish artist Juan de la Corte records such a display in his painting of a horse tournament in the Plaza Mayor held to honor Charles Stuart, the Prince of Wales, during his visit to Madrid in 1623[1] (Fig. 2). With an eye toward a truce between two nations in the midst of war, the English prince arrived in Madrid incognito to seek the hand of the Infanta María, sister of the nineteen-year-old Spanish king, Philip IV (ruled 1621–65). Warmly welcomed, Charles stayed for six months at the Spanish court and was entertained lavishly. Without doubt, the bullfights and tournaments held in the Plaza Mayor were the grandest of the many festivals he witnessed. Contemporary chroniclers write that as many as 50,000 spectators might have gathered in the Plaza Mayor during festivals such as the tournament recorded by the painter.[2] Residents displaced by such events could be heartened by the rental income they collected for prized viewing locations on their balconies, which were as valuable as seats in Madrid's playhouses.[3]

Figure 2. Juan de la Corte, *View of the Plaza Mayor of Madrid in 1623*, 1630s. Oil on canvas. (MM, IN 3422; photo, MM.)

Looming over the plaza in the center background of de la Corte's painting is the Panadería, a monumental edifice housing a bread mart at ground level, a royal apartment on its main floor, and private residences above. On the festive occasion captured by the artist, the king appears on horseback just to the left of the granite arcade fronting the Panadería. The other members of the Spanish royal family occupy the central window of the royal apartment, which is adorned with brocaded and gilt stencils. A special balcony was erected for the English prince and his entourage. Elsewhere in the plaza, seating arrangements reflect the etiquette and hierarchy of the Spanish Habsburg court. Ladies of the court sit to the right of the royal family, while male attendants stand in a more crowded arrangement on the balconies to the left.[4]

As in the arch entryways of a Roman amphitheater, the bays of the Plaza Mayor were similarly numbered to facilitate seating. Courtiers of all ranks, therefore, observed social hierarchies through their seating arrangements. Anyone in the square, even the visiting English, could understand the display of power by means of colors and symbols laid over balconies.[5] For instance, the Council of Castile, the crown's preeminent consultative body, sits in the main floor windows immediately west of the Panadería. Easily recognized by the crowd below, the judges sit in balconies surrounded by blue stenciled fabric.

The intended alliance between Spain and England ended in failure in the autumn of 1623. Yet Madrid and its Plaza Mayor, the public

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stage on which the drama unfolded in part, grew in importance. In these early years of the seventeenth century, Madrid was very conscious of its status. Only six decades earlier, the capital was a secondary town in Castile noted for its market activity and its proximity to a cluster of royal retreats. In 1561, Philip II chose Madrid to serve as his court.[6] The town then underwent one of the most dramatic urban transformations in early modern Europe.[7] The choice of Madrid signaled the royal favor granted the city, and the order and regularity of the Plaza Mayor symbolized the good government the Spanish Habsburgs wished to impart to all of Spain.

Envisioning a Capital

This book is a case study of the Plaza Mayor of Madrid. It focuses on the process of shaping an urban environment on the part of early modern civic and royal institutions. The story is told within the context of the molding of an even larger entity, a political capital for the Spanish Habsburg empire that newly stretched around the globe. Although Madrid's physical transformation from a secondary town to a cosmopolitan city in the decades after 1561 is one of the most remarkable stories of its kind, no English-language study of the process has existed until now.[8] Important preliminary findings can be found in Catherine Wilkinson-Zerner's *Juan de Herrera: Architect to Philip II of Spain* (1993).[9] The portions of Wilkinson-Zerner's book devoted to Madrid are more concerned with the contribution of a singular architect to the city's urban history than with the larger social and political maneuverings of the building enterprise surveyed herein.

I have written this book to complement recent studies of other early modern cities and thereby evaluate Madrid in the broader contexts of Spain, Europe, and the Spanish colonial world. By examining the process of urban design, I hope also to contribute to the scholarly reappraisal of absolutism in the Baroque age.[10] Architectural history has much to contribute to this revised picture of the seventeenth

century. Hilary Ballon's *The Paris of Henri IV* (1991) has served as a model for this book.[11] In her work, Ballon explores the ways in which architects, royal advisers, and private individuals each played a role in building a showcase city. Tensions arose in such a process, as they did in Madrid. Lawsuits related to architectural undertakings in Madrid illustrate that Madrileños, the residents of the Spanish capital, were not discouraged from challenging an architectural program or even royal and municipal officials. As historians James Amelang, Helen Nader, and Richard Kagan have argued, the right to challenge authority was a built-in feature of Spanish urban culture.[12] Indeed, the contest between official planning initiatives and private concerns for property and status helped shape Madrid, just as Joseph Connors, John Pinto, and the late Richard Krautheimer have illustrated for Baroque Rome.[13]

Another aspect of my work is inspired by the interdisciplinary approach to urban history by the late Spiro Kostof. In his last works, *The City Shaped* (1991) and *The City Assembled* (1992), Kostof illustrated, on a worldwide scale, the long-lasting effect that interesting urban spaces can have on the souls of communities.[14] In all of Kostof's writing, the topography of a place and the ritual uses of that place are keys to understanding the ever-changing nature of a city.[15] The scholarship on early modern ritual by social and cultural historians such as Natalie Zemon Davis, Richard Trexler, and Edward Muir has also had an influence on recent works of architectural history, the present book included.[16] For Madrid, featured acts of public festivals were often recorded in great detail in manuscripts, books, and paintings. The mundane, and often equally illuminating, aspects of these celebrations usually go unnoted, although contracts and payments issued to the stage builders and performers who worked in the great theatrical stagings in Madrid are abundant. Historians of early modern Spain rely on the rich documentation that survives in Spanish archives, and I am indebted to much of their work for my own approach to the documents.[17]

The reconstruction of Madrid's architectural history in the early modern period has many obstacles. The neglect of Spain in the study of European urbanism, and the lack, therefore, of an intellectual framework on which to build a detailed case study, is the most difficult challenge in English-language scholarship. Among Spanish architectural

historians, the work of Fernando Marías offers the best introduction to the problem, as well as a sophisticated analytical approach.[18] I have also found the writing of Pedro Fraile, who considers "the other city of the king"– namely, its underlying political infrastructure – to be especially useful.[19] Despite important work by scholars in Spain, one still confronts gaping holes in the documented record, from the absence of biographical data on key individuals who built Madrid to the lack of research on guilds and their contribution to the city's economy.

On the topic of urban reform in Madrid, Francisco Iñiguez Almech's 1950 article on Philip II and the royal architect Juan de Herrera remains the pioneering study. The essay also highlights, however, further challenges facing the scholar interested in Madrid.[20] Based on research in Madrid's municipal archive, Iñiguez Almech outlines the reforms proposed by Philip II in the 1580s and 1590s, and attempts, simultaneously, to elevate Juan de Herrera to a position among the great architects of the European Renaissance. Given his concern with identifying a Spanish hero, Iñiguez Almech is not able to appreciate the participation of others in the planning of Madrid.[21] Most significantly, the historian overlooks the contributions of other architects, royal advisers, and bureaucrats. For instance, Juan de Valencia, a royal architect and cleric who emerges in the present study as one of the principal designers of Madrid, was simply labeled an assistant to Herrera.[22]

Ultimately, Iñiguez Almech was caught up in the nationalism of his era and sought to parallel Philip II and Herrera's work in Madrid with contemporary undertakings by Francisco Franco and his architects.[23] This is an aspect of his research that has gone largely unnoted. Yet Iñiguez Almech's implicit association of Philip II with the post–Civil War rebuilding of Madrid must contribute in part to the general oversight of Madrid in the literature on early modern cities.[24] Likewise, the scholarly approach to, not to mention the public reception of, Habsburg monuments such as El Escorial have undeniably been colored by the many Renaissance-inspired historicist monuments built by the nationalist regime in Madrid. Although much work remains to be done with regard to these lingering associations, scholars have begun to separate Philip II from twentieth-century politics, as well as from the propaganda surrounding the king in his own day.[25]

By focusing this book on the years 1560 to 1630, I am not only writing a microhistory, but also a history that cuts through the traditional art historical definitions of Renaissance and Baroque periods and styles. This book follows José Antonio Maravall's historical definition of Baroque from his influential study *The Culture of the Baroque* (1975).[26] According to Maravall, the Baroque age that gave rise to a theater state began around 1580, a date that coincides nicely with the shaping of Madrid and the arrival of Baroque urbanism in Europe as a whole. In many ways, the historical label seems more apt than a stylistic one in an effort that seeks to examine the process of city design.

"Is it really Baroque?" is a question I have been asked about the Plaza Mayor on a number of occasions. At the root of this question is a stylistic definition derived from architectural practice in mid-seventeenth-century Italy, specifically from Rome. Answering the question of style requires comparative analysis, and studies of other early modern cities offer interesting parallels with the architecture of Madrid. In his *Venice and the Renaissance* (1985), Manfredo Tafuri examined the particularities of a place in the periphery of the cosmopolitan capital of Rome.[27] As an international center of commerce, Venice attracted architects who saw great opportunities for building commissions. When Jacopo Sansovino and other Rome-based architects arrived following the Sack of Rome in 1527, a new classical style of building was introduced to Venice. The new style carried much symbolic value that, as Tafuri illustrated, was not always deemed proper for Venice.[28] The reasons for rejecting the classical style were not merely matters of taste, but also had to do with notions of civic and political life.

In Madrid, the Plaza Mayor was the largest of projects built in accordance with Renaissance and Baroque principles derived in part from practice in central Italy. But the Italian influence only went so far. The designers of Madrid's main square looked to the local building tradition in Castile, as well as to the artful rooflines and gables of Burgundian architecture best exemplified elsewhere in the Habsburg empire and especially in the buildings of the Low Countries.[29]

Moreover, the designers of the Plaza Mayor were concerned with an outward appearance of uniformity. One can find a full-blown

Baroque style *alla italiana* in contemporary churches and palaces in Madrid, but the style employed at the Plaza Mayor was subdued and especially suited to public architecture.[30] With a refined classicism expressed largely in brick, the buildings of the Plaza Mayor, save on those ceremonial days when they were transformed into theatrical backdrops, blended into the fabric of Madrid. The buildings also carried powerful associations with other royal works of the era of Philip II.

The combination of Spanish, Italian, and Netherlandish forms resulted in an architecture that spoke to the concept of empire and the international realm of the Spanish Habsburg monarchy. Located in the center of the city, the Plaza Mayor thus functioned as a forum for the new capital. Although scholars have noted a lack of Roman imperial ideology with regard to cultural production in Madrid in the sixteenth century,[31] the careful study of architecture and public spaces in the city suggests that alternative representations of empire existed in Madrid.[32]

From the start, Madrid was shaped to function as a new kind of city, the political center of the Spanish Habsburg government. With the exception of the appellate courts of Valladolid and Granada, or trade matters handled in Seville, most business related to governing the most powerful monarchy in Europe took place in Madrid. The royal councils dedicated to war, finance, and other areas of governance were all located in the city. They were essential components of an increasingly bureaucratic system of government that characterized early modern Spain.[33] Bureaucracy in Madrid, however, did not end with the court. Madrid also had its own local form of government, the Ayuntamiento. Composed of aldermen from Madrid's leading families, the municipal body was responsible for the upkeep of the city and soon came to sponsor the public works required by the court through increased taxation and even private loans.

Just as the government of Madrid was split between royal and municipal bodies, the city's building trade was also two tiered. One hierarchy of builders and planning officials was located in the Alcázar, or royal palace, and another responded to the decisions of the Ayuntamiento in the Plaza de San Salvador. For modern reforms as important as the Plaza Mayor, architects and builders of royal and

municipal rank mixed with bureaucrats and other middlemen who re-
ported directly to the king on his royal and public works.[34] Madrid,
therefore, illustrates that street maintenance and public works were
worthy not only of the attention of the best architects, but also of
skilled bureaucrats.

Government permeated the streets and squares of Madrid, a cap-
ital born of a newly centralized government. Although it is a challenge
to date the rise of the capital city to the late sixteenth century,[35] *città
capitale*, or head city, is precisely the term that the sixteenth-century
political theorist Giovanni Botero uses in his discussion of the world's
great cities.[36] For Botero, writing in 1589, the principal city of a realm
is that in which the prince resides, but it is also home to "the Par-
liament, the Senate – which we like to call the Supreme Tribunals of
Justice –, the secret Councils and the Councils of State, as well as all
important businesses, . . . the ambassadors of the Republic and of the
King, and the agents of the said city."[37] Measured against Botero's stan-
dards, Madrid, which he mentions only in passing, can be considered
a typical capital. And yet Madrid, together with the Spanish world in
its entirety, has been consigned to the margins of current research on
the emergence of the early modern capital.[38]

Building the Plaza Mayor

With arches closing the city square from its neighborhood today, the
Plaza Mayor has been altered considerably from its original appearance
during the Habsburg era. Fires in 1631, 1672, and 1790 resulted in
changes to the design, the most extensive being an overhaul of the
square between 1790 and 1830.[39] Figure 3 is based on a map of the
Plaza Mayor and its environs made in 1790 and now lost.[40] The map is
useful to understand the city square as built in the Baroque era. Names
provided for building ranges in the map are derived from documents,
although they do not suggest an exclusive trade practiced within them.
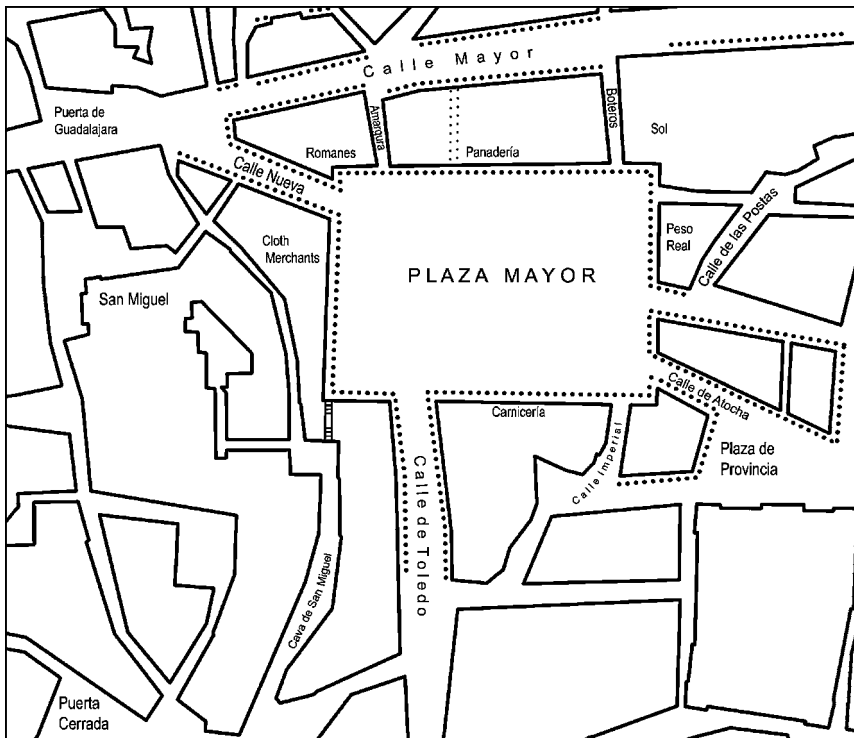For instance, I use the term "cloth merchants range" to refer to the

FIGURE 3. Map of the Plaza Mayor of Madrid and its environs, based on an anonymous printed map of 1790. (Produced by the author.)

large western block of the Plaza Mayor that in documents is more often called simply the merchants range. A connection between the spatial arrangement of trades in the Plaza Mayor and the organization of guilds in early modern Madrid has not been established but might emerge in future research.[41]

The streets (*calles*) that enter the square under arches were, and remain, among the most important arteries through Madrid's center: the Calle de Toledo leading from the bridge also named for the Castilian city to the south; the Calle de Atocha, which led to the important sanctuary of the Virgin of Atocha; and the Calle de Ciudad Rodrigo (formerly the Calle Nueva), which provided a ceremonial entry from the Calle Mayor into the square. Although altered from its original form, the ground-level portico remains the setting of much commercial activity and continues to provide protection from the elements, as well as framed vistas of the city beyond (Fig. 4).