

*Spanish Cities of the Golden Age: The Views of Anton van den Wyngaerde.*  
Edited by Richard L. Kagan (Berkeley, University of California Press,  
1989) 415 pp. \$275.00

In regard to visual evidence from the past, historians of early modern Spain tend to resign themselves to glancing wistfully over the shoulders of their colleagues beyond the Pyrenees. In comparison with, say, Italy and the Low Countries, proverbial for their rich traditions of contemporary artistic representation and wide circulation of images through diverse print media, Spain appears to be the poor relation of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe. It is thus a happy irony that a commission by Philip II to the Flemish artist Anton van den Wyngaerde (d. 1571) should have led to the creation of a thick portfolio of detailed topographical depictions of the major cities of Spain drawn at the height of their demographic and economic prosperity.

During his travels throughout the Iberian peninsula in the 1560s, van den Wyngaerde produced views of over fifty cities and towns at the behest of a monarch unrivaled in collecting information about his subjects. Indeed, there is an intriguing parallel between these views (their probable destiny was an atlas to be published by the Plantin printing house) and the famed *relaciones topográficas*, or comprehensive questionnaires, that royal officials sent to Castilian villages beginning in 1575.

Christoph Plantin's project to edit the views never came to fruition; fortunately for present-day historians, the University of California Press has taken up where he left off.

The first 100 pages of this impressive book contain 5 introductory essays which situate the artist and his drawings in the political and artistic contexts in which he worked. Jonathan Brown begins by discussing the role and motives of the project's patron, Philip II, and by examining this commission in relation to the hitherto largely neglected question of the king's patronage of the arts in general. He is followed by Kagan, on contemporary knowledge of and interest in geography in sixteenth-century Spain, and by Egbert Haverkamp-Begemann, on the artistic career of van den Wyngaerde. The section closes with two final essays by Kagan and Fernando Marías on, respectively, early modern Spanish cities and city planning.

These introductory pieces complement each other well; in fact, the two concluding chapters are without question the best short introductions to the socioeconomic and planning history of sixteenth-century Spanish cities available in any language. Taken together, by offering a succinct and balanced discussion of the principal issues raised by this unique venture in urban topography, they provide a thorough background to the rest of the book.

Fine as these essays are, they literally pale in comparison with the next 300 pages, wherein are reproduced all of the Fleming's city sketches and finished drawings. No one interested in early modern towns should miss these splendid views. Van den Wyngaerde not only showed a passionate interest in topographical accuracy (a trait made especially apparent through repeated comparisons with his contemporary Joris Hoefnagel, the author of the city views in the bestselling *Civitates orbis terrarum*, first published in Cologne in 1572). The Flemish artist also devised innovative approaches to his subjects, as in his imaginative reconstructions of urban waterfronts (his renderings of Barcelona and Málaga are particularly striking examples). And although his emphasis upon key buildings as defining elements of the urban landscape led him to present cities as "monumental enclaves," he nevertheless also depicted a host of interesting subsidiary details, including references to distinctive urban functions and activities. Kagan and Marías comment on these and other matters in explanatory notes accompanying each view. Although their relentlessly topographical focus often makes for slow reading, these brief essays provide a valuable commentary on the individual cities, while highlighting van den Wyngaerde's painstaking techniques as a draughtsman and his (often subtle) emphases and biases as an observer of city life.

James S. Amelang  
Autonomous University of Madrid