SIZE AND SURVEILLANCE IN CONQUEST SPAIN:
THE VIEW FROM THE TOWER

TAMAÑO Y VIGILANCIA EN LA CONQUISTA ESPAÑOLA:
LA VISTA DESDE LA TORRE

TOM NICKSON
Courtauld Institute of Art
tom.nickson@courtauld.ac.uk

ABSTRACT
At their conquests in 1236 and 1248, Córdoba and Seville were among the most architecturally sophisticated cities in Europe, with monuments of near unparalleled size and height. I first explore the contemporary chronicles and verses that responded to these heroic cityscapes, understood within a long tradition of urban panegyric and polemics about religious sound. Numerous sources also record that the great minarets in these cities were climbed by their new Christian conquerors, and in the second part of this article I consider intersections of surveying and surveillance in relation to towers, and aesthetic responses to urban and rural views. I conclude with a survey of the tradition of climbing towers in medieval Europe, and consider its possible repercussions for surveying and the creation of urban panoramas in the later Middle Ages and the modern era.

KEYWORDS: Towers, Panegyric, Views, Surveillance, Panorama.

RESUMEN
Tras su conquista en 1236 y 1248 respectivamente, Córdoba y Sevilla estaban entre las ciudades más sofisticadas de Europa desde la perspectiva arquitectónica, con monumentos de tamaño y altura casi inigualables. En este artículo, examinó en primer lugar las crónicas y versos contemporáneos que evocaron a estos heroicos paisajes urbanos, entendidos dentro de una larga tradición de panegírica urbana y de polémica en torno al sonido religioso. Numerosas fuentes documentales también registran que los nuevos conquistadores cristianos ascendieron hasta la cúspide de los grandes minaretes de estas ciudades. En la segunda parte de este artículo considero las intersecciones de la topografía y la vigilancia en relación con las torres, y las respuestas estéticas a las vistas urbanas y rurales. Concluyo con un estudio de la tradición.
When conquered by King Fernando III of Castile and León in 1236 and 1248, Córdoba and Seville were among the largest and most architecturally sophisticated cities in Europe. The abandoned cities inspired wonder in their new Christian conquerors, captured in numerous contemporary descriptions of diverse rhetorical ambition. In his *Chronica Latina*, Bishop Juan de Osma, who led the Christian entry into Córdoba in 1236, offered a brief *laus urbis* of Córdoba in verse:

> The walls remained standing, the sublime height of the walls was adorned with lofty towers, the houses were resplendent with gilded panelling (*stant menia sublimis altitudo murorum/ turris excelsis decoratur domus,/ auratis liquoribus splendent*); the streets of the city, arranged in order, lie open to passers-by.¹

Lamenting the failure of settlers to repopulate Córdoba after its conquest, the verses may have originally circulated independently as a way to encourage Christian settlement.

There are distant echoes here of the “high fort of your walls” of Isaiah 25:12 and of Virgil’s description of the gilded panels in Dido’s palace at Carthage.² But Juan’s verses are most strongly indebted to a long tradition of urban panegyric that includes, amongst others, the fifth-century *De laude Pampilone epistola* (on Pamplona), Alcuin’s praise of the “high walls and lofty towers at York,” the extensive descriptions of walls and towers in the *Roman d’Eneas* (c. 1160), and the lengthy accounts of Babylon under Queen Semiramis in the early thirteenth-century Castilian *Libro de Alexandre*³. Walls and towers also feature prominently in medieval representations of cities, from civic seals to manuscripts or monumental wall paintings.⁴ Architecture, encomium and *imago urbis* worked together to persuade all of the magnificence of the city, and, by extension, its inhabitants and religious and political leaders.

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Size mattered. The footprint of Córdoba’s Great Mosque, whose prayer hall alone covered over 14,000 square metres, was larger than any church in Christian Europe, while its minaret rose over forty-seven metres, taller than any other tower in Christian Spain. Archbishop Rodrigo of Toledo, who first visited Córdoba in 1239, recorded in his De rebus Hispaniae that it “surpassed all other Arab mosques in ornament and size” (…cunctas mezquitas Arabus ornatu et magnitudine superabat). Seville was no less impressive. Its converted congregational mosque covered 9,000 square metres, dwarfing the vast new cathedral begun in Cologne in 1248, the year of Seville’s conquest. Seville’s city walls enclosed an area greater than those newly built by Philip Augustus in Paris, and Jonathan Bloom has calculated that Seville’s minaret, transformed into the bell tower known as the Giralda, originally rose to eighty metres (Figs 1 & 2). That would mean that in 1248 it towered over the nearby Torre de la Plata (14.55m tall) and Torre del Oro (36.75m), and was surpassed in height only by the towers of Tournai cathedral (83m), the timber spire of St Paul’s in London (possibly 120m or so), the Pharos at Alexandria (approx. 132.5m) and the pyramids of Egypt (146m at their tallest).

Christian writers sought a suitable language in response. The preface to the anonymous Rithmi de Iulia Romula (c. 1250) acclaimed the city of Seville in somewhat forced verses,
extensive in its extent, ample in its space, and strongly fortified by the circuit of its walls, protected all around by rivers and swamps, marvellously adorned with towers and thrones (Turribus et solis mire decorata).\textsuperscript{11}

A few decades later an anonymous contributor to the Estoria de España wrote that

It is a noble city…its walls are extremely high and strong and very wide; [with] high and well-spaced towers, large and made with great labour (torres altas et bien departidas, grandes et fechas a muy gran lauor)…Then all the glories of the tower of Santa María [the Giralda], and how great are its beauty and height and nobility (et de quan grant la beltad et el alteza et la su gran nobleza es): its roof is sixty fathoms wide, and its height is four times that much.\textsuperscript{12}

Towers are strikingly prominent in many of the Estoria’s narratives of heroic construction and conquest, notably its account of the foundation of Seville by Hercules, who was also credited with building two immense towers in La Coruña and Cádiz.\textsuperscript{13} These were in


\textsuperscript{12} O. R. Constable, Medieval Iberia: Readings from Christian, Muslim, and Jewish sources, Philadelphia, 1997, p. 218; D. Catalán and R. Menéndez Pidal (eds.), Primera crónica general de España, Madrid, 1977, vol. II, ch. 1128, p. 768. The Estoria is however notably silent about Seville’s congregational mosque – possibly because it was compromised by its associations with Islam, or perhaps because the available literary models were not suited to the task. See Paul Binski’s essay in this volume for other combinations of nobleza and alteza.

\textsuperscript{13} Catalán and Menéndez Pidal (eds.), Primera crónica general, vol. I, ch. 5, 7 and 9, pp. 8-11.
fact lighthouses of Roman origin, still much admired in the thirteenth century according to Rodrigo of Toledo. Towers (and walls) also feature often in contemporary accounts of the conquests of Seville and Córdoba. Juan de Osma, for example, recorded that a royal banner and relic of the true cross were displayed from the top of Córdoba’s main minaret immediately after the city was triumphantly entered. This must be understood as part of a wider polemic in which the Muslim call for prayer from minarets was contrasted with the Christian peal of bells from church towers. But the story also reminds us that towers were not only admired from below, but were also climbed. That much is clear from Arabic writers, who were no less impressed by Córdoba and Seville. Al-Idrisi, who visited in the 1140s, opined that Córdoba’s Great Mosque had “no equal amongst all Muslim mosques...both in its length and width, and its construction and decoration.” Its minaret (manara) was “an imposing work, with curious art and admirable proportions,” he explained, and was “climbed by two staircases, one on the east side, one on the west, so that two people ascending the minaret separate at the base and only meet one another when they reach the top” (Fig. 3).

Fig. 2. Composite image by the author, showing the Giralda today (photo: author) and on the funerary slab of Sancho Ortiz de Matienzo in Villasena de Mena (Burgos), 1499 (from L. Torres Balbas, “Alminares hispanomusulmanes”, Cuadernos de arte (1939-41), pp. 59-89)

Who climbed those stairs? In his remarkable eye-witness account of the construction of Seville’s new Almohad mosque and minaret, Ibn Sahib al-Sala wrote that

This minaret, the description of which surpasses speech and whose mention comes first for every historian, has no equal among the mosques of al-Andalus in its lofty elevation, its firm foundations, its solid workmanship, brick construction, rare craftsmanship (gharābat al-ṣan’a), and splendid appearance. It soared into the air and towered in the sky and could be seen by the naked eye a day’s journey from Seville with the stars of Gemini...It was built without stairs, and one ascended it by a passage wide enough for beasts of burden, people and the custodians.19

From this it seems that it was not only custodians who climbed the tower, and indeed several travellers imply that climbing architectural and natural wonders was common practice in the Arabic tradition. In 1184, for example, the Andalusi geographer Ibn Jubayr climbed Mount Qasioun outside Damascus and recorded that “From this hill [overlooking Damascus] one may look over all the western gardens of the town, and there is no prospect like it for beauty, comeliness, and spacious vista”.20 In 1204 Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi described locals climbing the pyramids in Giza, and from the xth century onwards numerous travellers (including several from al-Andalus) recorded that they had climbed the Lighthouse

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of Alexandria.\textsuperscript{21} Visitors to Alexandria marvelled particularly at the arrangement of the stairs in the Lighthouse, and this feature of Córdoba’s minaret was also singled out by al-Idrisi and by the author of the fifteenth-century Descriptio Cordubense, who placed Córdoba alongside the other wonders of the world.\textsuperscript{22}

The Giralda was also regularly climbed after Seville’s conquest in 1248 (Fig. 2). Writing in the early fourteenth century, for example, the anonymous author of the \textit{Estoria de España}, recorded that

so wide and so smooth and with such mastery was it made (\textit{tan ancha et tan llana et de tan grant maestria fue fecha}), and so fine is the stairway by which they go up to the tower, that kings and queens and important men who want to go up there on horseback can go up to the top when they wish (\textit{que los reyes et les reynas et los altos omnes que allí quieren sobir de bestías, suben quando quieren fasta en ssomo}).\textsuperscript{23}

So why did people climb the Giralda? One answer lies in late fourteenth-century evidence that it was used as a watchtower, with views towards other watchtowers near the border with Nasrid Granada.\textsuperscript{24} But it was also used to survey the city itself. A passage from the \textit{Crónica particular de San Fernando}, committed to writing in the early fourteenth century but based on earlier verbal accounts, describes how, soon after Seville’s conquest the jongleur, Paja, marvelling at the Giralda’s height and beauty, was persuaded to climb it (\textit{e viola tan alta e tan fermosa como es, e vinole à talante de sobir en ella}), and looking out was alarmed to see how much of the enormous city was uninhabited. So he enticed Fernando III and many nobles to climb the tower, and as Fernando admired the view from the top (\textit{cató toda la villa cómo parecia de ally muy bien e muy fermosa}), Paja seized the opportunity to point out how much of the city still lay empty, and thus persuaded Fernando to remain in the city and ensure its security.\textsuperscript{25}

This story resonates with accounts of the partition (\textit{repartimiento}) of Écija, conquered in 1240, in which it is recorded that those responsible divided the city into four parishes by


surveying it from a minaret and projecting over the city an imaginary cross – prompted, most likely, by traces of Écija’s Roman layout(26) (Fig. 4). It also has literary echoes. The Estoria de España describes Dido’s tower in Carthage as being so tall that the whole city could be seen from it, and later recounts how, having conquered Valencia, the Cid and his family climbed the city’s tallest tower and gazed out.(27) This story is taken from the slightly earlier Cantar de Mio Cid of c. 1200 (verses 1610-1615):

My Cid brings them to the citadel, to the very highest place, and they gaze about with their lovely eyes. They see Valencia, how it spreads before them, and beyond it the sea, and all things to delight them (miran Valencia, cómo yaze la cibdad,/ e del otra parte a ojo han el mar,/ miran la huerta, espessa es e grand).\(^{28}\)

This concern with landscape is shared in the autobiographical Llibre des Feits of James the Conqueror, King of Aragon, in which he surveyed the borderlands with Muslim Xátiva in 1240:

And we went to that peaked hill that is at the side of the castle, and we saw the most beautiful huerta [irrigated farmland] that we had ever seen of a town or a castle, and there were more than two hundred terraces in the huerta, the most beautiful that one could find, and many farmhouses around the huerta; and, moreover, we saw the castle, so noble and so beautiful; and such a beautiful huerta. And we felt great joy and great happiness in our heart (tan noble e tant bel, e tan bela orta, e haguem ne gran gog, e gran alegre en nostre cor).\(^{29}\)

Once again, there is a strong emphasis on the beauty of the view, albeit once again in a triumphal context.\(^{30}\) The promise of “supervision” (from the Latin super + videre, over see) from on high should also be understood in relation to the role of bell towers and bells in regulating daily and liturgical rhythms, and in resounding in times of crisis – at the same time implicitly celebrating Christian identity both within the city walls and beyond.\(^{31}\) That point is underlined by the apotropaic formulae inscribed on the Campana Gorda that the German doctor and traveller, Hieronymous Monetarius (Münzer), admired in the bell tower of Toledo

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cathedral in January 1495, together with the explicitly triumphal formula “Christ conquers, Christ reigns, Christ commands” (*Christus Vincit, Christus Regnat, Christus Imperat*). The same triad was inscribed on a bell made for Seville’s *Giralda* in 1400, and resounded across the city on regular occasions.

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Iberian accounts of climbing, surveying, and enjoying the view are not without parallel, and in the second part of this essay I will explore this phenomenon in greater depth across medieval Europe. One early example, Lucian’s twelfth-century description of Chester, *De laude Cestrie*, also compares the city’s plan to a cross, and it has been suggested that he viewed the city from a bell tower.34 Or we can think of the words Orderic Vitalis placed in the mouth of the young Henry I, when in 1090 Henry marched the rebellious Conan to the top of Rouen’s highest tower before pushing him off:

> Consider, Conan, the beauty of the country you tried to conquer (Considera Conane, quam pulchram tibi patriam conatus es subicere). Away to the south there is a delightful hunting region, wooded and well stocked with beasts of the chase.... On the other side see the fair and populous city, with its ramparts and churches and town buildings (ciuitas populosa menibus sacrisque templis et urbanis edibus speciosa), which has rightly been the capital of all Normandy from the earliest days35.

Or, we might remember the lines from Chretien de Troyes’ *Perceval, the Story of the Grail*, written in the 1180s or early 1190s:

> Then he wished to go see the view from the tower.  
> Accompanied by his host (the boatman)  
> He climbed a spiral staircase  
> along the wall of the vaulted hall  
> until they reached the top of the tower  
> and could see the surrounding countryside  
> more beautiful than words could describe (plus bel que nus ne porroit dire).36

Poggio Bracciolini’s introduction to *On the Inconstancy of Fortune* (c. 1448), in which he surveyed the ruins of Rome from the top of the Capitoline Hill, represents an alternative literary tradition in which contemplation of a view prompted historical reflection.37 The conceit may stem from Virgil’s description of Aeneas gazing from his roof at the falling city of Troy (*Aeneid* 2. 302-312), but Poggio’s most immediate source was Petrarch’s letter to Giovanni Colonna (*Epistolae familiares*, 6.2) in which he recalled how they had together contemplated the prospect (*prospectus*) of Rome’s ruins from the vaulted roof of the Baths of Diocletian. These accounts were celebrated by Jacob Burckhardt in *The Civilisation of the Renaissance in Italy* (1860), but he gave pride of place to Petrarch’s account of his ascent of Mount Ventoux in 1336, in which Petrarch claimed to have been the first since Antiquity to climb a mountain and enjoy the view for its own sake.38

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However contrived, Petrarch’s account and its subsequent interpretation underline the fact that the appreciation of views from above is a cultural and historical phenomenon, not some trans-historical human instinct. So do such descriptions reveal a genuine appreciation for the beauty of the view, or are they attributable merely to feelings of triumph over “the imperial landscape”? I think both. In an age before aerial travel those views gave pleasure, presumably, because of the novel perspectives they afforded, for the superior understanding of topography they offered, and for the delightful miniaturisation or “minificence” they conjured. Towers provided opportunities to “step back” from crowded medieval streets, to reflect and to admire – especially in cities that were not flanked by hills. It was perhaps Victor Hugo’s wonderful panoramic description of medieval Paris as seen from the towers of Notre-Dame – together with Gaspard-Félix Tournachon’s early photographs of Paris from a hot air balloon (1858) – that prompted some especially perceptive observations from French social theorists. Writing of the view from the Eiffel Tower, Roland Barthes explained that “the Tower makes the city into a kind of nature; it constitutes the swarming of men into a landscape…the bird’s-eye view, which each visitor to the Tower can assume in an instant for his own, gives us the world to read and not only to perceive…to perceive Paris from above is infallibly to imagine a (hi)story (une histoire).” Or as Michel de Certeau succinctly put it, the view from above made it possible “to be lifted out of the city’s grasp.”

Climbing Towers

In this final section I will briefly sketch the unwritten history of tower climbing and of aesthetic responses to land and city views in the European Middle Ages, offering new perspectives on long-standing debates about landscape, vision and modernity. From Daedalus to Moses, Christ, Muhammad or Alexander, from the tower of Babel to Sinai, Sion and the bibli- cal watch-tower, high places have long been treasured for their promise of proximity to God, dominance over what is below, and for the views they offered – most fully explored in tropes of seeing the world from a tower (a specula) or from above (the kataskopos). Conversely, they have also been condemned for excessive pride and superfluity, or for providing opportunities for voyeurism. Towers have also always been climbed – typically for ritual, military or

39 John Leland, for example, mentions innumerable towers in his itinerary of c. 1538-1543, but apparently felt no compulsion to climb them.
47 T. G. Frisch, Gothic art 1140 c 1450: sources and documents, Toronto, 1971/87, pp. 30-33, includes convenient translations of Alexander Neckham and Peter the Chanter’s invectives against lofty towers. On voyeurism see D.
other functional reasons – and architecture has long been used to frame urban and rural views in the form of belvederes, turrets, leads, sitting-windows, galeries, miradors, manāzir, altanas and gloriettes or glorietas. But when did the practice begin of climbing real towers simply to savour the challenge, survey the city and enjoy the view?

In the early eleventh century Daniel the Abbot recorded that there were 200 steps to climb up the Tower of David in Jerusalem, but accounts of pilgrimage to the Holy Land almost never mention climbing towers for the view. Significantly, some of the earliest evidence for tower climbing comes from the context of urban panegyric. In 1288 Bonvesin de la Riva recorded in his *De magnalibus urbis Mediolani* that the city of Milan was circular and advised that anyone who wishes to see and savour (*videre delectat*) the form of the city (*civitatis formam*) and the quality and quantity of its estates and buildings, should ascend thankfully (*gratulanter ascendat*) the tower of the curia of the commune; from there, turning eyes all round one can marvel at the wonderful sight (*inde oculos circumquaque revolvens poterit miranda mirari*).

Evidence for “tourists” climbing towers accumulates in the fifteenth century. A visitor’s description of Paris of 1434 alleged that there were as many steps in the towers of Notre-Dame as there were days in the year. Václav Šašek z Bířkova recorded that in 1465 he and Leo von Rozmithal climbed the tower of the town hall in Brussels, “from which we could overlook the whole city,” and three years later they climbed the tower of Wiener Neustadt in modern-day Austria. And in the 1490s Münzer claimed to have climbed dozens of towers, giving no indication that he considered this very remarkable. Between September 1494 and April 1495 he climbed towers in Barcelona, Valencia, Murcia, Guadix, Granada, Seville, Lisbon, Zamora, Salamanca, Toledo, Zaragoza, Toulouse, Poitiers, Tours, Orléans, Paris, Amiens, Arras, Lille, Bruges, Ghent, Antwerp, Mechelen and Cologne. In Granada, Paris and Cologne he climbed...
more than one tower; in Toledo, Tours and Amiens he admired the bells; and in Granada and Rouen he also climbed a hill for the view. In most cases Münzer counted the number of steps, a common form of description by enumeration, and a crude measure of height. Perhaps encouraged by his friendship with the cartographers Hartmann Schedel and Martin Behaim, Münzer also took the opportunity to survey the city below, typically comparing it in size to his native Nuremberg.54 Münzer’s account of visiting Seville in November 1494 is quite typical:

ascendentes autem turrim altissimam ecclesie Beate Virginis, que olim erat maxima mesquita, contemplabar ipsam et iudicavi eam in duplo maiorem esse Nuremberga. Et est omnino rotunda et in planissimo sita.55

His vocabulary is telling. From a total of twenty-nine climbs, there are fourteen instances in which he employed derivatives of *contemplare* (*con + templum*, a temple, shrine or open space), a word he used almost exclusively in the context of looking out from towers. On nine occasions he simply describes himself looking or seeing (*videre*), but he also took the opportunity to judge or measure (*iudicare*, used four times), and deployed related compounds for looking out: *inspecere* (2 instances), *prospicere* (1) and *conspicere* (2). He admired the site (*situm* or *situm loci*, 19 instances) and the view (*spectaculum* or *aspectus*, each used twice), which he found beautiful (*pulcher*, 13 instances), joyous or pleasing (*iocundus* or *placere*, each used twice) and on one occasion marvellous (*admirabile*). Normally he described himself climbing the highest tower (*turris*), but in Barcelona he described himself looking out *ex specula*, betraying his familiarity with this long-standing literary genre.56

Münzer seems to have established a trend. In 1517/18 Antonio de Beatis climbed towers at Strasbourg, Ghent and Milan, and in the same period an anonymous merchant from Milan climbed towers in Paris, Rouen, Amiens, Antwerp, Córdoba, and Seville.57 In 1521 Albrecht Dürer admired the view from a tower in Ghent, and earlier paid one stiver to go up the tower at Antwerp, which he was told was higher than Strasbourg cathedral’s.58 Perhaps inspired by these visits, Dürer recommended in his Treatise on Measurement (1525) that towers should “be erected in the most suitable spot of a city and placed in the middle of a market square, so that the entire city can be seen from it (*daraus sehen*) and it can serve as a

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55 Trad.: “We climbed the highest tower in the church of the Blessed Virgin, which was once the largest mosque, and I studied the city and judged it to be twice as large as Nuremberg. It is quite round and on a level site”. *PFANDL*, “Itinerarium”, p. 74; *MÜNZER, Münzer’s Itinerary*, p. 78.

56 *PFANDL*, “Itinerarium”, p. 6.


58 R. TUMBO (ed.), *Albrecht Durer: Records of Journeys to Venice and the Low Countries*, Boston, 1913, pp. 73, 79.
guidepost to strangers, no matter which street they may find themselves in”.59 In 1526 Andrea Navagero climbed Seville’s Giralda, comparing it favourably with the campanile of San Marco in Venice, while in the late 1530s it once again became possible to climb Trajan’s Column in Rome.60 By the early seventeenth century a view of a city’s “prospect” from a high tower was an entirely routine element of a city visit.61

So was it tower climbing that was new, or just the urge to record it? Perhaps a bit of both, though the steep and narrow stairs of most church towers suggests that they were not originally intended for regular use, and descriptions of climbing towers – by an increasingly wide variety of people, and in several different literary genres – multiply exponentially from the 1490s onwards, fractionally lagging behind the explosion in perspectival city views, or “portraits” in the same period62 (Fig. 6). The fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries also saw the completion of many towers of ever greater height (fuelled in many cases by campanilismo),

Fig. 6. Jan van Eyck, The Madonna of Chancellor Rolin, 1435, detail. Painting on wood panel, 66 x 62 cm. Paris, Louvre. © 2019. Photo Scala, Florence

62 Á. GOMEZ MORENO, “La torre de Pleberio y la ciudad de ‘La Celestina’ (un mosaico de intertextualidades artístico-literarias… y algo más)”, in El mundo social y cultural de la Celestina: actas del Congreso Internacional de la Universidad de Navarra, J. M. USUÁRIZ GARAYOA and I. ARELLANO AYUSO (eds.), 2003, pp. 211-236; H. BALLON and D.
even as, ironically, the growing taste for Italianate architecture curbed the fashion for building new towers of prodigious height.63

A letter of Isabella d’Este from Venice in 1502 captures the modern flavour of these visits:

after lunch we went to straight to San Marco, hoping to find very few people at that hour, but we were wrong as there were a good many, and so as not to leave out anything and to see this singular city properly, we climbed the campanile of San Marco, where we took great pleasure in admiring the setting and the excellent buildings on all sides (dove pigliassimo gran piacere considerando el sito et ex.\textsuperscript{e} hedificii che vi sono).64

Here the tower is as much an attraction as the church and its relics, one more element of Venice’s \textit{mirabilie}. Isabella visited two years after Jacopo de’ Barbari created his extraordinary view of Venice, made, it has been shown, by surveying the city from a number of towers, especially that of San Giorgio Maggiore (Fig. 5).65 Towers had long been used as landmarks

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Fig. 5. Jacopo de’ Barbari, Map of Venice, printed by Anton Kolb, 1500. Photo: Minneapolis Institute of Art

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64 A. L\textsc{uzio} and R. R\textsc{enier} (eds.), \textit{Mantova e Urbino: Isabella d’Este ed Elisabetta Gonzaga nelle relazioni famigliari e nelle vicende politiche}, Rome, 1893, p. 309.

65 See especially J. S\textsc{chulz}, “Jacopo de’ Barbari’s View of Venice: Map Making, City Views, and Moralized Geography before the Year 1500”, \textit{The Art Bulletin}, 60 (1978), pp. 425-474; S. B\textsc{adene}, G. R\textsc{omane}lli and C. T\textsc{onini} (eds.), \textit{A volo d’uccello: Jacopo de’ Barbari e le rappresentazioni di città nell’Europa del Rinascimento}, Venice, 1999.
by surveyors, and geometrical treatises and *abbaco* textbooks commonly instructed readers how to calculate the height of towers. But prior to the introduction of new instruments in the mid-fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries (notably the polimetrum), these calculations seem always to have been made at ground level: the Barbari map (together perhaps with the slightly earlier *View of Florence with a Chain*) represents the earliest firm evidence that a city was systemically surveyed from a tower.66

Deborah Howard has also suggested that the Barbari map was distorted to make it more like the shape of a dolphin.67 This could be perceived only on the map, but draws attention to a longer tradition of interest in the shape of cities, seen in the comparisons of Chester and Écija with the shape of the Cross, or descriptions of Milan’s circular shape, cited above. Münzer also betrayed an interest in the *forma urbis*: viewed from above Seville was round, he recorded; Arras “rounded like an arc”; Bruges “built in a circle”; Ghent “star-shaped”; and Cologne like a semi-circle.68 It has been suggested that some garden designs were intended to be seen from above; is it possible that such concerns informed urban design in the early modern period?69

Commenting on the view over Manhattan in 1980, Michel de Certeau wrote that “Medieval or Renaissance painters represented the city as seen in a perspective that no eye had yet enjoyed. This fiction already made the medieval spectator into a celestial eye. It created gods”.70 De Certeau’s general notion was certainly correct, but in this essay I have sought to show that some did in fact enjoy that perspective before the Renaissance.71 Together, these striking accounts suggest a complex and largely overlooked relationship in the late Middle Ages between travellers, competitive tower building, urban panegyric, city views and map-making.72


The examples from Córdoba and Seville arguably represent a kind of heroic pre-history to this phenomenon, in which architectural marvels were central to the rhetoric of the city, but also made it possible to view the city anew, and to appreciate its beauty.