



Romantic Spain

David Roberts and
Genaro Pérez Villaamil

CATALOGUE

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Cover image

Genaro Pérez Villaamil, *View of the Giralda from the calle Borceguinería* (cat. 2.10). 1833. Oil on canvas, 82 × 62 cm. Leopoldo P. de Villaamil Alfaro.

Front flyleaf

Genaro Pérez Villaamil, *Patio of the Archbishop's Palace at Alcalá de Henares* (cat. 5.13). C. 1840. Ink and wash on paper, 305 × 360 mm. Instituto Ceán Bermúdez, Madrid.

Back flyleaf

David Roberts, *Alcalá de Guadaira* (cat. 2.1). 1833. Pencil, watercolour and gouache on paper, 251 × 356 mm. Instituto Ceán Bermúdez, Madrid.

2.1 **David Roberts**, *Alcalá de Guadaira*. 1833. Pencil, watercolour and bodycolour on paper, 251 × 356 mm. Instituto Ceán Bermúdez, Madrid

Inscribed: Lower left: ‘the castle Alcala on the banks of the Guadaira’, ‘David Roberts 1833’.

Provenance: Private collection; Sotheby’s London, 5 July 2016, lot 326.

Exhibitions: *David Roberts*, Barbican Art Gallery, London, 1986–87, no. 80.

Winding its way through the hilly area called Los Alcores, some 15 kilometres from the centre of Seville, the River Guadaira creates one of the most striking landscapes of the Guadalquivir valley. This area has a high heritage value on account of its natural features and architecture dating from different periods. Its castle, whose origins go back to the eleventh century, is perched on the summit, surrounded by the river.¹ Around it several defensive constructions such as fortified corridors, arches and towers give structure to the group of houses that spill down the hillsides. At the foot of the hills, beside the Guadaira, are many flour mills, most of them late medieval in origin. They have been a key factor in the local economy, which is based on artisanal breadmaking – Alcalá de Guadaira is known as Alcalá ‘de los panaderos’ (‘of the bakers’).

The spot has attracted many travellers, artists, photographers and landscape painters, who captured it in countless views,² especially in the nineteenth century. David Roberts visited Alcalá while staying in Seville from May to October 1833.³ There he befriended the British consul, Julian B. Williams, who was a prominent figure on the art market of the period and also welcomed Richard Ford and John Frederick Lewis.⁴ It was he who introduced Roberts to local artists and to Genaro Pérez Villaamil.

Roberts is known to have made several drawings of Alcalá, among them two views of the river and the castle, and a sketch with two peasants.⁵ The closer view was captured from the foot of the hill, beside the Arrabal mill,⁶ and the other from a hill near the Algarrobo mill.

The foreground shows a path beside the river; in the centre of the composition are the Algarrobo mill and a prominent mass of vegetation rendered in a darker tone. The late medieval architecture – a defensive tower adjacent to the milling rooms, similar to those of other nearby mills – is depicted quite accurately. The dam holding the water, which connected the two riverbanks, is joined to another construction the remains of which still exist.

Further in the background the complex topography surrounding the course of the river is depicted in detail in a sophisticated sequence of planes. Behind the vegetation are buildings that are difficult to identify, possibly the no longer extant Franciscan friary among the group of houses. The Calvario hill emerges in the upper left corner with the precisely drawn outline of the hermitage of San Roque. The castle hill and the silhouette of the walled enclosure with the church of Nuestra Señora del Águila inside it are visible on the right bank of the river in the background.

The foreground is enlivened by people, a carriage travelling along the path, a small boat and even animals and human figures on the mill dam. The tonalities of the sky, as it meets the horizon, correspond to the moments prior to sunset. All these features provide a foretaste of the Prado oil painting of a magnificent sunset, which he subsequently executed based on this drawing (cat. 2.2).

AGG and CJB

¹ FAJARDO DE LA FUENTE 2000.

² JIMÉNEZ BELLIDO 2015.

³ GIMÉNEZ CRUZ 2002, pp. 235–334.

⁴ LLEÓ CAÑAL 2008.

⁵ Sotheby’s London, 14 November 1996, lot 144; Sotheby’s London, 25 January 2017, lot 97. There is also a street scene with people, inscribed and dated ‘Alcala la Guadera 1833’ (whereabouts unknown, Christie’s London, 20 November 1973, lot 52, bought by Agnew and sold by them to a private collector). We are grateful to Krystyna Matyjaszkiewicz for the information regarding this last drawing.

⁶ Sotheby’s London, 8 December 2005, lot 231.



CAT. 2.1

2.2 David Roberts, *Castle of Alcalá de Guadaira*. C. 1833. Oil on panel, 40 × 48 cm. Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid [P002852]

Provenance: Belonged to the collection of the Dukes of Montpensier in Seville; acquired by the Museo del Prado in 1943.

Bibliography: *CATÁLOGO DE LOS CUADROS* 1866, nos. 365–66; *MUSEO DEL PRADO* 1972, no. 2852; *IMAGEN ROMÁNTICA DE ESPAÑA* 1981, p. 13; SIM 1984; CALVO SERRALLER ET AL. 1991, p. 138; QUESADA 1992, p. 99; PALOMO REINA 1992, p. 350; BUENDÍA 1994, p. 485; QUESADA 1996, p. 86; FERNÁNDEZ LACOMBA 2002, p. 152; FERNÁNDEZ LACOMBA 2007a, p. 41; FERNÁNDEZ LACOMBA 2007b, vol. 2, p. 383; GÁMIZ GORDO 2010, p. 65; SOLKIN 2010, p. 90; BARÓN 2014, p. 32; ZOIDO NARANJO AND RODRÍGUEZ RODRÍGUEZ 2015, p. 204; *PINTURA DEL SIGLO XIX* 2015, p. 509.

Exhibitions: Exposición Provincial de Bellas Artes de Sevilla, 1857; *Vistas monumentales de ciudades españolas. El pintor romántico Genaro Pérez Villaamil*, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid, 2014–15.

This oil painting forms a pair with another by the same artist showing the Torre del Oro (Golden Tower) in Seville and dated 1833 (cat. 2.5). Both are similar in size and display the same careful atmospheric handling of the landscape.

Roberts visited the Alcalá de Guadaira area during his long stay in Seville. As in the preparatory drawing included in this catalogue (cat. 2.1), the composition of the painting is dominated by the castle hill, which is viewed from near the Algarrobo mill. Here, however, he depicts it from a slightly different viewpoint – a lower level on the opposite bank of the Guadaira – with the river in the foreground instead of a path.

The mill, seen from a closer vantage point in the present painting, is represented fairly accurately and painstakingly. It is easy to identify its architectural features, the milling room and even the battlements of the tower, which still stands today. Also depicted in detail are the buttresses at the base of the tower, which also still exist but were not included in the aforementioned drawing; their presence here suggests that the artist sketched the area extensively. To complete the foreground, he added two people and a donkey on the dam, as well as a boat with various figures and a delightful reflection of the sun, which captures the spectator's attention.

The darker tones of the planes in the middle distance are seen against the light, and the verticality of the topography is accentuated. Roberts completed the composition by slightly altering the outlines of the castle and the hermitage of San Roque, elegantly abstracting their state of neglect. Today it is not easy to gain such an attractive view of the distant landscape due to the major reforestation carried out on the banks of the Guadaira, which are now part of a large park or greenway stretching from Alcalá to the outskirts of Seville.

It is important to note that the motif of a castle on a hill reflected in the water appeared in the work of J. M. W. Turner in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, providing an example for Roberts.¹ Here, the artist converted the sunset suggested in the previous drawing into the main focus to produce a magical effect. Roberts also explored the theme of sunset in drawings made *in situ* in Seville² and Carmona,³ and years later he composed further evocative paintings of dusk in places such as Rome, Egypt and the Holy Land.

AGG and CJB

¹ BARÓN 2010, pp. 88–97.

² Sotheby's, 29 November 2001, lot 318.

³ Museo de Bellas Artes de Asturias, Oviedo. RODRÍGUEZ BARBERÁN 2007, p. 263; FERNÁNDEZ LACOMBA 2007a, p. 28; GÁMIZ GORDO 2014, p. 345.



СЕЕН

CAT. 2.2

2.3 Genaro Pérez Villaamil, *Castle of Alcalá de Guadaira. C.* 1833. Oil on canvas, 50.5 × 68 cm. Colección Carmen Thyssen-Bornemisza [CTB.2003.11]

Provenance: Private collection, c. 1930, through inheritance; Sotheby's London, lot 236, 18 November 2003; purchased by the Colección Carmen Thyssen-Bornemisza.

This picture, attributed to Villaamil, is a painstaking copy of a sunset view painted in oil by David Roberts around 1833 (cat. 2.2). There are only a few minor differences in the details of the scene, described in the previous commentary. It features the River Guadaira, the Algarrobo mill and a scene with similar people in the foreground, and the hilltop castle and the hermitage of San Roque in the background. The light is more intensely orange and the backlit effect is more pronounced. The two painters coincided in Seville – their encounter would mark the Spaniard's career – and probably in Alcalá, too.¹ Although the present painting might seem less important, because it is a copy, it belongs to a noteworthy series of works by Villaamil depicting this landscape in different formats, media and moods, as described below.²

The 9 October 1836 issue of the *Semanario Pintoresco Español* featured an article on the exhibition of 1836 at the Real Academia Bellas Artes in Madrid, which praised Villaamil – among other painters – for his productiveness, originality, attention to detail, colouring and clever use of perspective, and other factors.³ Listed among the fourteen paintings he entered for the exhibition were 'ruins and mills in Alcalá de Guadaira' and a 'view of the village from the road to Madrid'.

The diptych acquired by the Prado Museum in 2011 containing forty-two views of Spanish cities dated around 1835–39⁴ (see fig. 31) includes three of Alcalá de Guadaira:

a slightly distorted view of the castle hill; one of the Algarrobo mill with accurate details which suggests that he made sketches in situ; and an interior view of an Arab mill.

A small painting of the interior of the Cartuja mill was published as a lithograph in 1838,⁵ and the second volume of Villaamil's album of lithographs *España artística y monumental* includes a delightful view of the ruins of Alcalá de Guadaira castle and one of the interior of the Arab mill of La Mina.

In another oil painting, dated 1843, Villaamil freely interpreted this view of the Alcalá de Guadaira castle with a complex foreground scene.⁶ The present picture may have been a companion piece to a now unknown and undated landscape attributed to Villaamil, with powerful backlighting, and similar in size and technique. It may also be related to a painting signed and dated 1846, *Summer Afternoon at the Lake*, which shows an unidentified castle and reflections in the water at sunset.⁷

The abovementioned group of works became an important reference in Spanish landscape painting of the period. Later, various prominent painters belonging to new generations established what became known as the School of Alcalá,⁸ whose members produced countless views of the scenery of the castle hill and the River Guadaira with its mills.

AGG and CJB

¹ GIMÉNEZ CRUZ 2002, p. 285.

² See ARIAS ANGLÉS 1986, cat. 28, 41, 63, 76, 114, 115, 116, 236.

³ The text stated: 'He works tirelessly to capture our natural and artistic riches, visiting at his own expense the villages which still contain them with the sad conviction of obtaining no other reward than the appreciation of intelligent people and lovers of the country' (BNE, BA/2551(1) 1836)

⁴ BARÓN 2014, pp. 21, 32, 34.

⁵ ARIAS ANGLÉS 1986, p. 228, cat. 76.

⁶ Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Buenos Aires, inv. 2801.

⁷ Colección Carmen Thyssen-Bornemisza, CTB.2003.12 / CTB.2000.51.

⁸ PALOMO REINA 1992; FERNÁNDEZ LACOMBA 2002; FERNÁNDEZ LACOMBA 2007; JIMÉNEZ BELLIDO 2015.



CAT. 2.3