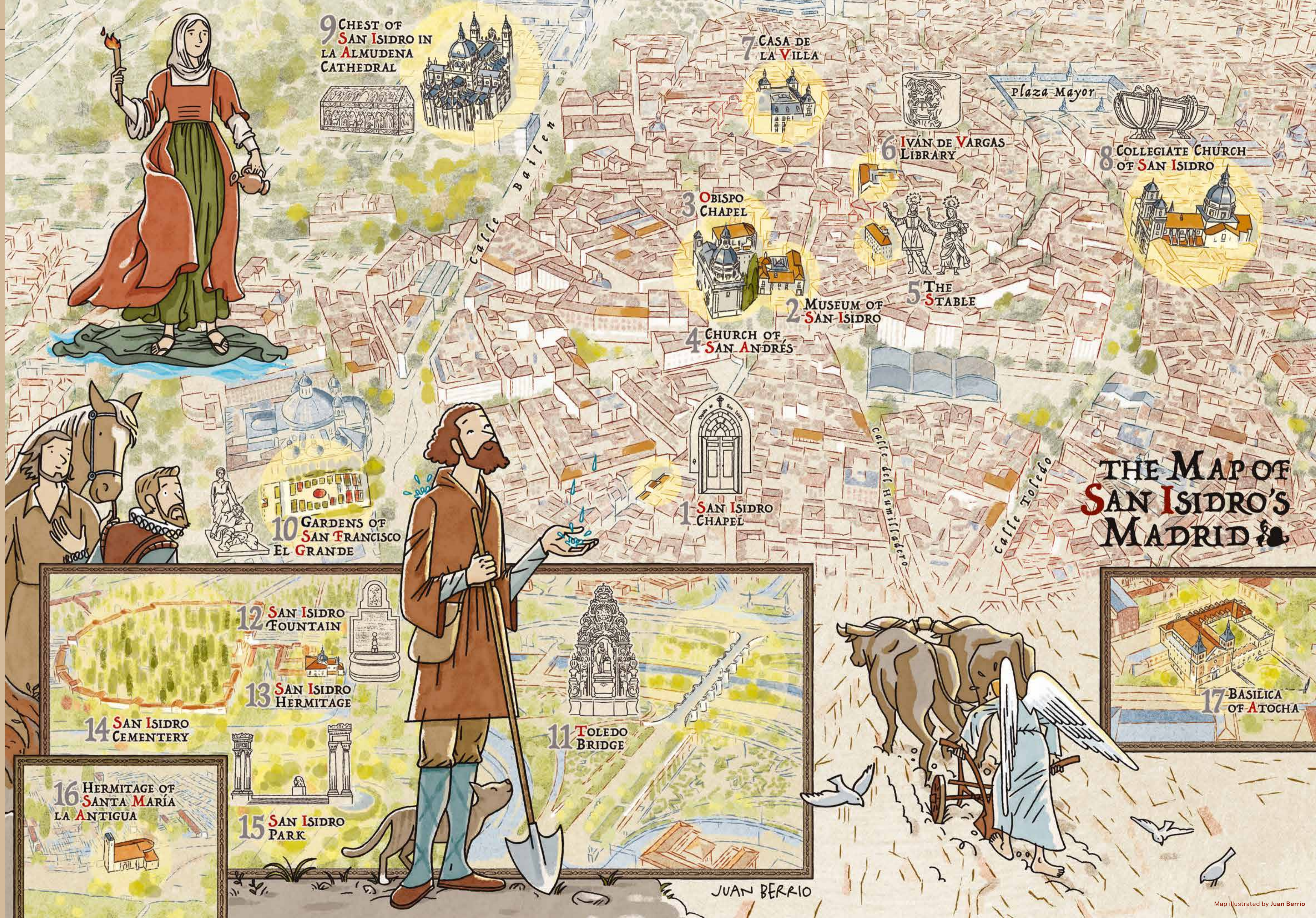


AN ILLUSTRATED MAP OF SAN ISIDRO'S MADRID



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FORO DE EMPRESAS POR MADRID

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SAN ISIDRO'S MADRID

There are few cities that identify as strongly with their patron saints as Madrid. The protective, benevolent halo of San Isidro (Isidore the Labourer) has shone in every era. While the city has undergone profound changes, they haven't affected the way his virtuous life and miracles are commemorated or the continued existence of places linked to the most popular traditions associated with him, which have adapted with the times.

What we know about the life and death of the humble farm labourer Isidore, patron saint of the city of Madrid and protector of agriculture, is rooted more in popular legend and tradition than documentary sources. The scant written information that exists on him comes from a manuscript known as the *Codex of John the Deacon*. It mentions very little about the era in which the saint lived, although most scholars place him during the 11th and 12th centuries, roughly between 1082 and 1172. Although the memory of his exemplary life was kept alive by the people, his veneration as a saint didn't begin until the 13th century, when his incorrupt body appeared in the Cemetery of San Andrés.

The solemn canonisation of Saint Isidore, which took place on 12 March 1622 alongside that of St Teresa of Ávila, St Ignatius of Loyola, St Francis Xavier and St Philip Neri, was one of the most significant events to occur in Madrid during the reign of Philip IV. Important festivities were held, featuring the participation of all of the court's great writers and intellectuals, particularly Lope de Vega, who composed several plays for the occasion including his famous work *Isidore: Spanish Poem (Isidoro. Poema castellano)*, which depicts the saint's life in Madrid at the beginning of the Christian conquest of the city. Over time, Isidore's legacy continued to grow, until in 1960 Pope John XXIII named him patron saint of all labourers, confirming his importance and the global reach of the reverence he has inspired.

Isidore the Labourer and his wife, María Torribia (also known as Santa María de la Cabeza), reflect the city's open, festive spirit. They have always inspired affection and respect from Madrileños and all the "Isidros" who every year visit the places linked to his life. Particularly popular was the hermitage where, according to tradition, the saint made water spout from the earth to quench the thirst of his employer, Iván de Vargas. In recent years, San Isidro Park, located in what was once a meadow next to the hermitage, continues to receive crowds of Madrileños on 15 May, the saint's feast day. The festivities will be extra special this year, as it marks the 4th centenary of his canonisation.

Eduardo Salas Vázquez
(b. 1959; Madrid) Director of the Museum of San Isidro: The Origins of Madrid

PLACES ASSOCIATED WITH THE SAINT



1 San Isidro Chapel

Calle del Águila, 1 - METRO: La Latina

It is believed that this same site in Calle del Águila once held the house where the saint was born on 4 April 1082, shortly before Alfonso VI of León and Castile conquered the city after more than 200 years of Muslim rule. Isidore spent his childhood here. To mark the day of his birth, the chapel opens on the 4th of every month and for special celebrations.



2 Museum of San Isidro

Plaza de San Andrés, 2 - METRO: La Latina

Devoted to Madrid's origins—including its Hispano-Islamic and medieval past—this museum is housed in a palace that was owned successively by the Lujanes, the apostolic nuncio, the Counts of Paredes de Nava and the Marquises of Peñafuente. After acquiring it in a ruinous state, Madrid City Council completely rebuilt it to turn it into a museum. Its façade, featuring a combination of stone and brick masonry, and the two-level courtyard with columns and a spread footing foundation made of granite, are a good example of the architecture of old Madrid. Since the 17th century, oral tradition has identified this as the site of the house owned by the Vargas family, which employed Isidore, although there aren't any documentary sources or archaeological findings that can attest to this. If it's true, the chapel, which is decorated with mural paintings by Zacarías González Velázquez, would have been built on the quarters where the saint lived and died. The well would also be the same one where little Saint Illan, Isidore's son, was saved from death by his father when he performed a miracle and made the water rise. Some of the museum's rooms are devoted to the saint's life.

3 Obispo Chapel

Plaza de la Paja, 5 - METRO: La Latina

Francisco de Vargas built this Gothic chapel in the mid-16th century to house Saint Isidore's mortal remains, although years later his body was moved to the neighbouring Church of San Andrés. The interior contains one of the most beautiful sets of Renaissance sculptures in Spain, which Gutierre de Vargas, son of Francisco and Bishop of Plasencia, commissioned from Francisco Giralte in 1547. There is a surprising prevalence of alabaster in the vivid figures that adorn the funeral monuments of several of the family's members. The sculptor, who had worked in Alonso Berruguete's studio, also made the spectacular polychrome wood altarpiece that dominates the space.



4 Church of San Andrés

Plaza de San Andrés, 1 - METRO: La Latina

Behind Obispo Chapel is the Church of San Andrés. According to art historian Elías Tormo, it was built on the foundations of an old mosque located next to a tower in Madrid's Arab city wall, which ran along the site where Plaza de los Carros is now located. Years later, it was the parish church attended by Saint Isidore the Labourer, which is why in 1544 it requested his relics from the Vargas estate. After a long legal battle, the request was finally granted, and in 1622, after his canonisation, a decision was made to build a more monumental chapel. The interior was decorated with works by Francisco Rizi and Juan Carreño de Miranda, among other artists. Unfortunately, a fire at the beginning of the Spanish Civil War destroyed all of them except a carving of the saint by Manuel Pereira. They were reconstructed in the mid-1980s.

5 The Stable

Calle de Pretil de Santisteban, 3 - METRO: La Latina

At no. 3 in Calle de Santisteban there's a chapel which, according to legend, stands on the site of the stable where Isidore kept the cart used by oxen to plough the soil on their own so that he could devote his time to prayer. Inside the chapel, which only opens on 15 May, there are several paintings by Manuel Castellano and a stained-glass window made by Casa de Maumejean.

6 Iván de Vargas Library

Calle de San Justo, 5 - METRO: La Latina

One of the houses that definitely was owned by the Vargas family is now a municipal library with a section devoted to Madrid-themed books and films. The courtyard still holds the wellhead where the famous miracle is also said to have taken place.



7 Casa de la Villa

Plaza de la Villa, 5 - METRO: Ópera

Casa de la Villa, the historic former location of Madrid City Hall, housed relics associated with María Torribia until 1769. The most famous of the miracles performed by Isidore the Labourer's wife was crossing the Jarama River on a shawl without getting wet. They met in Torrelaguna, a town where he had sought shelter during a Muslim raid. The chapel of the old town hall is decorated with mural paintings by Palomino that tell the story of the labourer's life.

8 Collegiate Church of San Isidro

Calle de Toledo, 37 - METRO: La Latina

Built in the first half of the 17th century as the church of the Imperial School of the Society of Jesus, many of the court's officials were trained here. After the Jesuits were expelled in 1767, the place of worship was used to house the incorrupt body of the saint and the relics of María Torribia. From the time the diocese of Madrid was created in the 19th century until La Almudena was consecrated in 1993, this monumental collegiate church with a design reminiscent of the Church of the Gesù in Rome served as the city's cathedral. The cloister currently houses the Instituto de San Isidro secondary school.



9 Chest of San Isidro

(La Almudena Cathedral)

Calle de Bailén, 10 - METRO: Ópera

According to one legend, after the Battle of Las Navas de Tolosa, Alfonso VIII wanted to travel to Madrid to thank the city for its support, and during his travels he visited the mortal remains of Saint Isidore here. Upon seeing him he was struck not only by his height of 5'9" but also because, according to the king, his face was identical to that of a shepherd who had guided them through the crags and preserves of the Sierra Morena mountains during the battle. As a token of his thanks, the King of Castile commissioned a chest, which was replaced in the late 18th century by the one now housed in La Almudena Cathedral, whose leather is painted with scenes of miracles.



10 Gardens of San Francisco el Grande

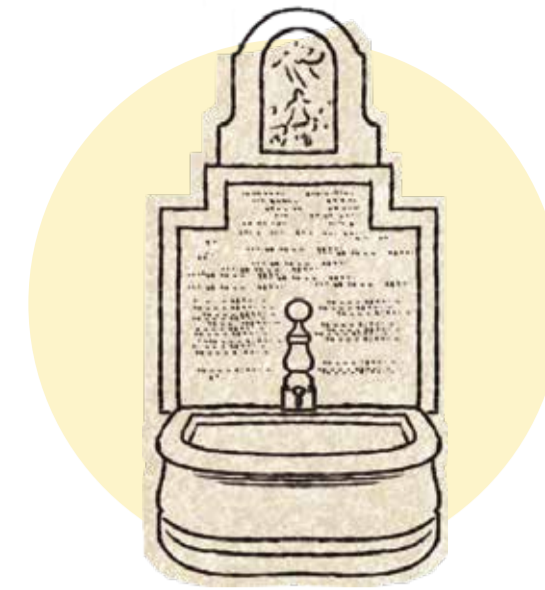
Avda de la Gran Vía de San Francisco, 29 - METRO: La Latina

The Gardens of San Francisco el Grande, from which you can make out the other bank of the Manzanares River, contain a set of statues entitled *Saint Isidore's Dream*. Created in 1952 by Santiago Costa, they depict a moment when the saint became transfixed—perhaps he was talking to God—while oxen ploughed the soil. During the patron saint festivities, held each year around 15 May, Carrera de San Francisco and the neighbouring Las Vistillas Gardens host the *verbena*, an outdoor party, that marks the occasion.

11 Toledo Bridge

METRO: Pirámides

This lavish bridge over the Manzanares River was designed by architect Pedro de Ribera, who added the Baroque whimsy of his facades to Madrid's cityscape in the early 18th century. It's decorated with two Churrigueresque recesses that protect the sculptures of Isidore the Labourer and María Torribia.



12 San Isidro Fountain

Paseo de la Ermita del Santo, 72 - METRO: Marqués de Vadillo

On a hot summer afternoon, Madrid's patron saint stuck his ox goad into the soil of this farmland in Carabanchel and brought forth a spring of water to quench the thirst of Iván de Vargas, who owned the land. According to popular tradition, this fountain has healing properties.

13 San Isidro Hermitage

Paseo de la Ermita del Santo, 72 - METRO: Marqués de Vadillo

Although its origins go back to the Middle Ages, it was Empress Isabella of Portugal who ordered a new sanctuary to be built next to the miraculous fountain, in appreciation for its healing of her husband, Charles V, and her son, the future King Philip II, who had drunk its water to restore their health.

14 San Isidro Cemetery

Paseo de la Ermita del Santo, 72 - METRO: Marqués de Vadillo

In the early 19th century, behind San Isidro hermitage, the Royal Sacramental Archconfraternity of St Peter, St Andrew and St Isidore opened what is now the oldest preserved cemetery in the Spanish capital, where many members of the bourgeoisie and aristocracy would choose to be buried. A large number of illustrious figures are laid to rest here, including writer Leandro Fernández Moratín, musician Francisco Asenjo Barbieri and *cuplé* singer Consuelo Vello Cano, aka "La Fornarina". Some of the mausoleums house important works by artists like Agustín Querol and Mariano Benlliure.

15 San Isidro Park

Parque de San Isidro - METRO: Marqués de Vadillo

On 15 May, a pilgrimage is held that also features lots of music, lemonade and *rosquillas* (Spanish mini doughnuts), which are served *tontas* ("dumb", or plain) or *listas* ("clever", or glazed with sugar). Many Madrileños head to the park to spend the day, eat lunch and enjoy an afternoon snack, as immortalised in a sketch by Goya that can be viewed in the Prado Museum.



16 Hermitage of Santa María La Antigua

Calle de Monseñor Oscar Romero, 92
METRO: Eugenia de Montijo

It was likely at the doors of this Romanesque hermitage, one of Madrid's oldest buildings, that the donkey miracle occurred. It's said that while Isidore was praying inside, some people interrupted him to warn him that a wolf could attack the donkey he had left outside at any moment. He told them not to worry and to go in peace. When he finished praying, the saint found the wolf dead right outside this place of worship.

17 Basilica of Atocha

Avenida de la Ciudad de Barcelona, 1
METRO: Menéndez Pelayo

According to some chronicles, Isidore the Labourer used to stop to pray at the Basilica of Atocha on his way to work in the fields. It's even said that some of his most famous miracles, such as that of the well, were made possible by the intervention of the Virgin of Atocha, protectress of the monarchy and one of the oldest titles under which Mary is venerated in Madrid. The current building is a loose reconstruction of the one that burned down in the Spanish Civil War.

