Thus was this dark and insignificant town superbly placed at the center of the extravagant powers of the mid-16th century Spanish kingdoms. None of the monarchs of the Austrian dynasty would be as fond of pious prayers as King Felipe III. Nor would there be born a monarch with such a keen interest in festivals, both religious and secular. The Duke of Lerma, the king’s favorite, was able to exploit his privileged position and reap an excellent harvest. History cannot deny that it would be perhaps the duke who would the Spanish statesman of those modern times. He wisely and instinctively knew how to calculate the extent to which architectural needs should be subverted to political convenience.

All of this took place in the midst of the reign of the imperial Castiles, which were as powerful as they were impoverished. Andrés Navagero, ambassador from the Republic of Venice to Emperor Charles V, left a statement to the effect that in this region one lived “under somewhat less severe conditions than in the rest of Castile ... there was abundant bread, wine, meat, and all of the other things necessary to live.”

The first settlers in this area would be Celtic tribes with strange Nordic, although not barbarous, customs. Their behavioral norms were not always shared by the numerous clans which would end up settling in the area. It was not until the beginning of our era that the imperial legions of Rome managed to conquer the difficult and recalcitrant inhabitants, who had such firm and independent convictions. Although it is not actually known for certain, historians agree that the extensive territory of northern Castile would not welcome much external influence of any kind.

Relatively Christianized by around the 5th century, this still sparse and rough population would be subjected to barbarous invasions by the Swabian peoples, and then by the followers of Arrio from Eurico, giving birth to the ways and customs of Hispano-Visigoth Lerma.

The sparse population began to come together at a rural house of worship, more a chapel than a church, which fell under the diocese of either Osma or Burgos.

By the efforts and grace of the Council of Toledo (6th century), a significant portion of these new catechumens would embrace and be embraced by Christianity. The hamlet grew, snuggled against the walls of the feudal lord’s tower. The increased defense and production capabilities would be to the mutual benefit of both protector and protected. At that time the fertile lands of what was now virtually a town were undergoing an agricultural boom, and there were changes in the living habits of the residents of these modest dwellings.

Surprisingly enough, there is no record of the fruitful coexistence with the Arab presence in this area. What is recorded and known is that extensive territories would be abandoned as a result of military struggles and their status as border areas. Relatively early on, at the beginning of
the 9th century, these deserted strategic frontier areas would begin to be repopulated, soon marking the limits of the arbitrary Castilian borders.

Scarcely had the 10th century begun when the hamlet of Lerma began to return to life with a significant and stunning increase in inhabitants. In those early days of Castile, Lerma, was both protected and protector during the vicissitudes experienced with the comings and goings of Moors and Christian, and wars and conspiracies amongst nobles, kings, and parallel, but still powerful, ecclesiastical powers. It grew into a powerful fortified town, in spite of the fact that it was not able to avoid a certain number of Muslim invasions, although these were soon pushed back.

The brave warriors of the mythic Fernán González, count, master, and virtually lord of all Castile, watched over and maintained pleasant and somewhat prosperous times of peace. Lerma was now a town. The frontier had grown distant and the town had gotten bigger, becoming a strong and powerful countship by virtue of favoritism and royal decisions.

The town would still suffer the final death throes of the brave and terrible Almanzor, who imposed “great punishment and significant damage on this town.” Having exorcised the Muslim menace, its people were subjected to the intrigues of Christian nobles in search of territorial conquest, and perhaps generous profit. They frequently fought one another, and often against the monarchs themselves. There were many conspiracies and crimes of all kinds amongst nobles, courtiers, and royal families. Following a prolonged period of noble crimes, Lerma would find itself part of the kingdom of Navarre, although not for long.

These prosperous surroundings would even come to undergo such suffering and want that the “hunger of those lands” would be announced in the final part of the 12th century. And so there would be an intense ongoing struggle between overbearing nobles and ambitious rebels, and monarchs who took confidence from their crown and courtiers hypnotized into banality.

The dramatic conflict between the feudal powers and the monarchies would finally be resolved by King Alfonso XI, who would end up laying siege to the town, conquering it in the end: “He ordered the walls of Lerma to be pulled down, and the cellars to be raided.”

From that moment on, the struggle for power was no more. Finally, at the beginning of the 17th century, the court of Spain was moved to Valladolid. The duke well knew how to take advantage of this miraculous event, with surprising and profitable results. After extensive development and esthetic alterations, the duke came up with a complex strategy for creating his own court in the town. This court would attract the favor of the monarch, Felipe II, and draw him away from other less clever, or less ambitious, nobles and courtiers.

The duke would enjoy just one score years as the king’s favorite. However, this was quite sufficient, judging from the results. Between 1600 and 1617, this town was so enlarged and fortunate that it would come to boast, with good reason, of being one of the best, most magnificent and most luxurious historic and artistic sites of those times, the period of Juan de Herrera.

The all-powerful duke, plenipotentiary minister of the monarch Felipe III, turned the town into an opportune and opportunistic recreational court. It was a privileged, obligatory, and very select meeting place for illustrious personages and a handful of the best-known artists of the time, among them Góngora and Lope de Vega.

The monarch enjoyed frequent visits to the duke’s festive treats. Here, in the Convent of the nuns of Saint Clare, the Infanta Margarita would come to be baptized with splendorous religious rites, accompanied by excessively generous parties and celebrations.

The dukedom embraced up to forty towns, with subjugated areas subject to high taxation, a “just and necessary” contribution to the glorification of the model town. The town put on a dazzling and costly display of buildings. Renowned architects of the time, masters such as Francisco de Mora, Juan Gómez de Mora, and Fray Alberto de la Madre de Dios, would create such beautiful buildings as the Ducal Palace, the Main Square with its adjoining buildings, more than a dozen monasteries, a collegiate church, and a hospital.

There was also industry; a woolen cloth and dye factory and a printer’s with royal privileges where fourteen reference and legal texts, two grammar books, four religious romances, and seven histories were printed.

Perhaps it would be worthwhile to recall certain aspects of the norms and habitual behavior of those Golden Age societies, from the glitz of the wealthy to lives subjected to imperious necessity. According to the Bishopric of Valladolid’s regulations, there were around one hundred...
holidays per year. To these we must add a generous handful of guild and brotherhood festivals and other activities with which the days honoring each of their patron saints (unavoidably never falling on the same day) were celebrated with rigorous religiousness and merited merrymaking. Furthermore, there were the not-infrequent extraordinary celebrations, which one favorite or another lavished on the monarch in his honor whenever they could. Nor should we forget military victories, visits from the king and queen, the founding of convents and monasteries, and even the frequent *Autos-de-Fé.* "What was once penitence has become a festival" was a common saying and comment.

Even the immortal and charismatic Quevedo wished to warn, this time with greater severity than irony, that "so extensive did the festivities become in Baroque society that they threatened the continuation of the most urgent and essential public obligations."

At that time a sort of feverish habit became popular throughout the nearby ducal lands: constructing ingenious mechanical devices, each one more surprising and complex than the next. There were fireworks, lamps, awe-inspiring pyrotechnics, and other diversions with which the dark and darkened villages and town would be lit on "the ordinary days of the year."

There were also other festive activities, some reserved for noble knights, such as reed spear tournaments, which hardened back to the struggles between Moors and Christians. In others, the participation of the people helped to round off the spectacle, as in the case of the Leap of the Bull, very common along the banks of the Arlanza, quite close to this Parador:

A herd of bulls were penned in and forced to move onto a ramp built of slippery wood which pushed the bull towards the river. Awaiting the beasts in the water were the boatmen bullfighters, able to handily steer the beasts towards the opposite bank. When on dry land, they were fought and stabbed "by people who knew just what they were doing."

Lope de Vega himself had occasion to witness the strange spectacle, about which he wrote:

"Behind the gallery there is a hidden trap called the precipice, because upon setting foot on it there is no somersault that twists and turns so strangely as the bull does, moving towards the river whose currents await it."

The balcony of the palace where the traveler enjoys the privilege of staying is an exceptional view only limited by the river. This was the site where much-talked-about spectacles were performed, to the wonderment of the country folk, and frequently of select noble guests, social climbers eager to rub shoulders with the royals.

Carnival-like masquerades and mummeries in plebian taste offered lovely scenic effects with singular and surprising staging.

There were even surprising sea festivals, pseudo naval battles with abundant fireworks for the marveling admiration of courtier guests.

This short but intense period would have been experienced simultaneously as dazzling nobility and extreme poverty. On the one hand, there were eminent architects, designers, planners, masons, jewelers, silversmiths. On the other, a rural population whose land was extremely limited in size. The farmer’s workday – from sunup to sundown – provided such scant income that it scarcely covered the minimum needs of the family. Not even the owners of larger properties – little more than a hectare – were able to obtain sufficient yields, once fees and taxes were deducted. There were also times of shortage, pestilence, storms, and other calamities. Although the abundance of bread and wine helped make up for a lack of food, there came famines, somewhat difficult to explain amongst such splendors.

In any case, today’s visitor will enjoy this unusual and lovely town, by virtue of its past greatness and misery. That is how history is made.
Vast amounts of the best materials were brought in: wood from Palacios de la Sierra and Valsaín, precious marbles from Espeja, bricks from Quintanilla, hundreds of carts of stone from Hontoria, and an infinite number of artists and artisans, including blacksmiths, carpenters, locksmiths, and stone masons.

The visitor will already have admired the lintelled façade which presides over the square and palace, protected by Tuscan columns, and the magnificent main patio with an elegant blend of Tuscan and Ionic columns.

For his greater vainglory, the duke designed and had built a large network of elevated galleries and passageways linking these palatial rooms with the churches, monasteries, convents, and other buildings also commissioned by the all-powerful favorite. In this way the ducal person could attend any religious ceremony or events of any kind, without being either seen or heard by his vassals.

Joined to the palace, on the slope overlooking the Arlanza River, a whimsical landscaped area was created, including a man-made branch of the river, a private pier and ingenious contrivances which raised the water for the plants, and "pools of drinkable water."

An excellent place for the visitor to start a tour of the town is the square overlooked by the Parador. Ask for more information and advice in reception. What follows will provide a few points of reference:

1. **Collegiate Church of San Pedro.** Built in 1613. Proudly displays the coat of arms of the Duke of Lerma. Inside there is a praying statue of Cristóbal Rojas y Sandoval.

2. **Convent of Santa Clara.** The Infanta Margarita, daughter of Felipe III, was baptized here. These nuns also make delicious sweets.

3. **Monastery of San Juan.** Inhabited by Carmelite friars from the time of its construction in 1617 until the 19th century. The façade displays the coats of arms of the duke and his wife, Catalina de la Cerda. Currently the town hall occupies the monastery’s cloister.

4. **Arcos Viewpoint in Santa Clara Square.** Used as a passageway between the Ducal Palace and the Collegiate Church of San Pedro. Magnificent views of the riverbank.

5. **Prison Arch.** Entry gate in the 9th-century medieval wall. Used as a prison during the time of the duke.

6. **Convent of El Carmen.** also known as Madre de Dios. It is said that the duke founded it for the Carmelite nuns in 1608 for family reasons.

7. **Santo Domingo Monastery.** Built on the orders of the duke to protect the Dominican friars. Its façade contains Romanesque elements.

8. **Convent of San Blas.** Commissioned by the lord of all Lerma. In 1612 the religious community was transferred from Cifuentes to Lerma. It possesses two interesting sculptures: a crucified Christ from the school of Gregorio Fernández and a lovely Virgin of the Rosary. The cloistered nuns of San Blas make pottery which they paint and decorate.

9. **Monastery of Santa Teresa.** Today the office of tourism. Its inauguration was attended by Felipe III and his court.
Because these lands are tolerant border areas, they are able to incorporate a variety of regional elements, and gastronomy is able to clarify and soften the harshest geography. Cuisine, like customs, handicrafts, and even language is inevitably easily shared. Thus are these stoves and simple yet learned cooking customs. Some say that "with good ingredients the stew makes itself," but no – one must know just the right measurements and methods, which these people well know. They are well versed in the culinary arts and possess palates capable of distinguishing between colors, smells, and flavors "without even a taste."

Before we go any further, the traveler should know that these are lands of straightforward cooking, frequently unsophisticated, but guaranteed to please.

It would indeed be surprising if the Parador should fail to offer dishes such as the duck breast salad with apple marinade, mango gazpacho with the tasty accompaniment of avocados and grilled shrimp, or wild green asparagus in saffron egg sauce.

Perhaps you might enjoy a selection of grilled white and blue fish, including swordfish, salmon, hake, and conger eel. Or perhaps you would care for Grilled Prime Beefsteak with Baldeón Cheese Sauce or Morucha Sirloin Steak in Truffle Sauce.

As an appetizer or dessert the diner or diners can always enjoy:

- A select sampling of Cheeses from Burgos (Pata de Mulo, Cabra de Rulo, and others).
- The Four Blood Puddings from Burgos and Chorizo Sausage from Villarcayo, a very special must-try.

We also offer the usual Mix of Mushrooms and Truffles (parrochicos, black chanterelles, yellow chanterelles, boletus, etc.); not to mention Salt Cod in Garlic, Egg and Paprika Sauce; very special "Twice-Cooked" Suckling Pig (prepared using a secret recipe); and most important of all, Suckling Lamb of Burgos Roasted Over a Wood Fire.

Finish the meal off with sweets which the northern Castilian peoples have learned from master bakers (primarily Jews and Moors), learned masters and consummate sweet makers.

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THE SECRET RECIPES

"TWICE-COOKED" SUCKLING PIG

Divide into two halves. Cook one half in oil, and roast the other over a moderately hot wood fire with water, salt, and some pork fat for four hours. Check for texture and seasoning and serve, nothing more.

Green parsley sauce

For any fish. Never thicken with flour. Simply sauté with the skin side up until done. Never use gelatin or anything of the kind.

For any vegetable

Boil with ice for 15 minutes to preserve the color, flavor, and natural qualities.

SAUTÉED MIXED MUSHROOMS

Wash well in cold water and drain immediately, placing the mushrooms on paper towels. Sauté with a little garlic powder and fresh garlic. Never reheat.

THISTLES BURGOS STYLE

Carefully remove the fibers. Cook in boiling water. Sauté with garlic, toasted almonds, bits of cured ham, and a touch of cream.

ARLANZA Suckling LAMB

Roast over a wood fire with salt, water, pork fat, and its own drippings (two hours over a moderately hot fire). Serve with nothing more than sliced potatoes.
more than thirty years ago in a place called the Atapuerca Mountains, just a short distance from the city of Burgos, between Ibeas de Juarros and Atapuerca, an outstanding group of researchers came across an amazing opportunity to study the earliest origins of our species in the area known as Eurasia. These professionals use laborious, prior field studies from these universal sites to study our roots, knowing what they might discover.

Visitors who come to this site out of interest or curiosity will hear the following: this is a young and rejuvenated team of researchers. They exude enthusiasm and their work has raised science and the study of human evolution in Spain to unexpected heights.

The Professors Juan Luis Arsuaga, José María Bermúdez de Castro and Eudald Carbonell jointly manage the Atapuerca Research Team. From the beginning, this team, which was at first well-managed and led by Professor Emiliano Aguirre, has put every effort into bringing to light the knowledge arising from the discoveries and studies at these sites and in 2000, they were added to the UNESCO list of World Heritage Sites. The results of their laborious studies have shown that our tiny universe was definitely occupied by humans long before it was previously thought. So many thousands of years that it is difficult for our brains to comprehend.

Visitors to the sites will sense this as they are led by enthusiastic guides who bring them this good news. They are honourable tellers of stories that are far removed from the legends of the Road to Santiago, legends that exude enthusiasm and their work has raised science and the study of human evolution in Spain to unexpected heights.

As the chronicles state, with their ever-present additional layer of legendary airs, it was in Visigothic times that a large part of the Tabladillo valley came to be inhabited by small monastic communities. These were independent but not incomunicado; all of them fell under the care and shadow of Silos.

From the 10th century, the monks of Silos achieved a comfortable standard of living, with their daily lives divided up amongst mystic and musical activities, and even an influential “press” fed by a conscientious team of copyist monks. A significant number of notable and influential works were translated and disseminated, including the famous manuscript of the Glosses of Silos, and the Commentary on the Rule of Saint Benito, an order with rebellious ideas for the time. Saint Benito, head of the community from the mid-10th century, imposed a rigorous and puritanical monastic system.

Almanzor’s time would bring periods of “hardship and great misery” for this community, which would later come to possess and govern extensive properties.

Not much later, a renovating abbot, head of the community, came to Santo Domingo. He is a sanctified and respected model for Christendom past and present: “He is the hero to emulate, the patron saint before God, the surgeon who works miracles; he is the symbol of Silos.” This is how the figure is summarized in a booklet available in the monastery’s own shop.

According to the squire, the monastery was born this sublime monastery, eternal jewel of an excellently-fashioned Romanesque style whose virtues are self-evident.

Between the 11th and 15th centuries, the monastery served as a forum and center of much internal activity and powerful outside influences. It welcomed pilgrims who came on foot in search of the Apostle’s sepulcher, while also taking in the sick and needy. Its monastic school was a highly influential source of information and training, and an artistic center with an amazing workshop where many of the best metal smiths of the era were trained.

In the end it would possess great assets capable of easily supporting not only the congregation, but also numerous churches, hamlets, farms, monasteries, and an endless list of works scattered throughout both Castiles.

Romanesque Monasteries and Castilian Epics

Along the edge of these streams of tinkling romances the Arlanza River flows through the peaks and valleys of monasteries and medieval chansons de geste between Lerma and Santo Domingo de Silos. These lands are rich in the sublime arts and supreme nature tended by Count Fernán González.

The landscape shares its pleasant valleys with rugged high plateaus. It contains the unusual protected areas in the Las Mambisas Mountains and Yecla. The southern border is formed by the Cervera Crags. Carazo Mesa recalls historic medieval frontiers.

Silos: Romanesque monastery

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Once the visitor is immersed in this powerfully moving monastery, he or she will surely agree that the most learned opinions coincide with the visions of any humble contemplative soul: the magic of Silos lives in its cloister. The area exists in a perfect harmony of universes of peace and silence. Each capital is a masterful lesson in art, history, and spirituality which invites—nay, requires—profound teaching and reflection. The corner high reliefs feature motifs from the life of Christ: the Coming of the Holy Ghost, the Ascension, the Resurrection, the Descent from the Cross, etc.

The museum has preserved valuable Visigothic and Mozarabic stones and masterful pieces of singular metalwork. At the beginning of the 18th century, the pharmacy already had a specialized botanical garden, a biochemistry laboratory, and a library in which recipes and masterly formulas of inestimable value could be found.