The Hatos and Corrals: 
Considerations on the Spanish Colonial Territorial Occupation System in Cuba

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the Territorial Occupation System used by the Spaniards during the colonial period on the island of Cuba. This system is based on the creation of circular areas: (Hato) with a ratio of 2 leagues, and (Corral) with a ratio of 1 league.

The study was accomplished in the following manner: 1) Study of the process of the Territorial Division of Cuba from the 15th to 20th century, 2) Analysis of the Hatos and Corrals using cartography of the AGI (The Archive of the Indies in Seville) and the creation of a database of the entirety of Hatos and Corrals in Cuba, 3) Study of several types, analyze the case of the county of La Havana, and their evolution until the present.

The system of Hatos and Corrals was only used on the island of Cuba. After four centuries they did not survive as territorial units, but have a direct influence on the current territorial divisions of municipalities and counties.

Keywords: Hato; Corral; Cuba; territorial; colonial

1. Introduction

During the urbanization process accomplished by the Spaniards on the American and Asian continents, almost a thousand cities were founded, and an extensive net of communications were created between them1. Over three centuries, millions of square kilometres of territory were occupied by the Spaniards. Although it is not possible to define one general model used for the occupation of the American and Asian territories, it is possible to recognize in several countries the use of models with geometrical forms, like the circle, in the case of the island of Cuba.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the Territorial Occupation System used in Cuba during the Spanish Colonial Period, concretely the Hato and Corral system, their different types, the process of the territorial occupation in the county of La Havana and their evolution until the present.

2. Methodology

1) Study of the process of the Territorial Division of Cuba from the 15th to 20th century.
2) Study of the Hatos and Corrals created by the Spaniards, through the analysis of old maps corresponding to the colonial Spanish period on the American and Asian continents. Seven thousand one hundred and fifty two images corresponding to cartography on the AGI (The Archive of the Indies in Seville) were used as its main database.
3) Creation of a database (date, proprietor and location) of the entirety of Hatos and Corrals in Cuba. This has been compiled through the analysis of historic documentation2.
4) Study of the Hatos and Corrals of the county of La Havana, through the use of GIS data.

3. Historical Considerations of the Territorial Division of the island of Cuba

In the 15th century, before the Spaniards arrived on the American continent, the island of Cuba was inhabited by the indigenous Ciguayos, who came from the island of Babeque (at the present time the island formed by Haiti and the Dominican Republic). In 1512 the island of Cuba was divided into 16 indigenous territories3: Guaniquanica, Marien, Habana, Sabaneque, Xagua, Ornofay, Cubanacán, Magón, Camagiuey, Maniabón, Bayamo, Cueiba, Macaca, Bayatiquiri, Baracoa and Mays (Fig.1.A).
On the 17th of October 1492 Christopher Columbus discovered the island of Cuba, but its conquest and territorial division did not begin until the year 1511, when the Spanish Kingdom commended to Diego Velázquez (one of the richest colonists of the island of La Española) the right to explore it.

With the foundation of Baracoa, in 1512, the Spaniards carried out the establishment of seven villages with the objective of controlling all the territories of the island: Bayamo, Trinidad and Sancti Spiritus (1513), la Havana (1514), Puerto Principe and Santiago de Cuba (1515), which was designated as the government’s headquarters (Fig.1.B).

During the year 1774, the Spanish Colonial Government divided the island of Cuba into administrative areas: the west department (with the city of La Havana as its capital), and the east department (with the city of Santiago de Cuba as its capital) (Fig.1.C).

In the year 1827, the island of Cuba was divided into three administrative departments: the West department (with the city of Pinar del Río as its capital), the central department (with the city of La Havana as its capital) and the east department (with the city of Santiago de Cuba as its capital) (Fig.1.D).

In the year 1878, after the Ten Years’ War, the Spanish Colonial Government divided Cuba into six administrative counties. This division was made in order to adapt the Cuban territorial division to be the same as the government system in Spain, as well as to facilitate the election of Government Deputies. The six new counties, from west to east were: Pinar del Río, Havana, Matanzas, Santa Clara, Puerto Príncipe and Santiago de Cuba (Fig.1.E).

In 1899 the name of the county of Puerto Príncipe was changed to Camagüey. In 1905 the name of the county of Santiago de Cuba was changed to Oriente. In 1940, the name of the county of Santa Clara was changed to Las Villas. (Fig.1.F).

In June 1978, one century after the creation of the six traditional counties, the communist government of Cuba made a new territorial division:

1) The county of Havana was subdivided into 3 counties: Havana, City of Havana and the Special Municipality of Isla de la Juventud.

2) The county of Las Villas was subdivided into 3 counties: Villa Clara, Cienfuegos and Sancti Spíritus.

3) The county of Camagüey was subdivided into 2 counties: Ciego de Ávila and Camagüey.

4) The county of Oriente was subdivided into 5 counties: Las Tunas, Granma, Holguín, Santiago de Cuba and Guantánamo.

The resulting fourteen counties and the Special Municipality are: Pinar del Río, Havana, City of Havana, Matanzas, Villa Clara, Cienfuegos, Sancti Spiritus, Ciego de Ávila, Camagüey, Las Tunas, Granma, Holguín, Santiago de Cuba, Guantánamo and the Isla de la Juventud (Special Municipality) (Fig.1.G). These fourteen counties were divided into municipalities (169 in total), and the municipalities were divided into Barrios. The formation of the Barrios is a consequence of the unions, intersections and divisions of the Hatos and Corrals.

4. The formation of the Hatos and Corrals

In 1511 the Spanish Catholic Monarchs granted the power to Diego de Velázquez to distribute the conquered lands between the natives and the first Spanish residents. Diego de Velázquez distributed the land in the form of caballerias and peonias. The new land proprietors had the obligation to work the land during the first four years. The
lands were distributed into private property and communal property of the town councils. With the passage of time, the town councils assumed the power of land distribution, and created the first Municipal Ordinance on January 15th, 1512.

The procedure for acquiring the lands was the application for a **merced**. The concession of the **merced** meant that the land was free, but it was necessary to fulfill the following requirements:

a) A certain amount of money was needed to pay for the Council of Indies.

b) To provide cows to the town council for public consumption.

c) To meet the deadline for the raising of livestock, in order to avoid the risk of losing the **merced**.

d) To build lodging near the proprietor's house for the benefit of the travelers, provided with water and firewood.

The land grants of the **merceds** were carried out using the names **Hato** and **Corral**. The Hato is a circular area of land with a ratio of two leagues, (1,684 caballerias) and was dedicated to the raising of livestock. The Corral is a circular area with a ratio of one league, (421 caballerias), and was dedicated to the raising of smaller livestock. One Cuban league\(^2\) is 4.240 kilometers (approximately the distance that a person walks in one hour). **The Realengo** was the free land between the Hatos and Corrals, which were the property of the Spanish kingdom.

The procedure to obtain a Hato or Corral through **merced** remained for 179 years. In the beginning, the **merced** did not define the area of the Hato or Corrals, but only mentioned the place where it was requested. The important matter was to define the position of the center of the circle, its limits could be imprecise because in the first part of the 16th century the country was uninhabited. With the concessions of new **merceds** some of the properties were being combined with others, which created abundant disputes concerning their limits.

In 1579 the Government of La Havana wanted to impose regulations concerning measures for the properties. The surveyor **Luis of Peña** adopted the circular form for the Hato and Corral as units of territorial area. Through the study of the map of **AGI-Santo Domingo 209**, it is possible to define 11 types of Hatos and Corrals (Fig.3.).

The period for the creation of Hatos and Corrals was from the year 1509 to 1742. During this period a total of 858 Corrals, 100 Hatos and 26 Hatos with Corrals were created. However, the use of the Hato and Corral as units of territorial area remained until the first part of the 20th century. In the cartography of the AGI there are 149 maps where 287 Hatos and Corrals were drawn\(^10\). The older map dates from 1728 up to 1847. This basically means that during the creation of Hatos and Corrals the graphic information of maps was not

![Fig.2. Map of Hatos and Corrals in the Island of Cuba. Ricardo V. Rousset. 1918](image)
There were a total of 548 Hatos and Corrals from which the first proprietor's name could be known. Unfortunately, 310 of the proprietor's names were unknown, which resulted from the destruction of the archives made by English pirates during the 16th and 17th centuries. Therefore the groupings of Hatos and Corrals formed the municipalities. Camagüey was the municipality with the largest number of Hatos and Corrals (79), followed by the municipality of Sancti Spiritus (78), the municipality of Guane (37), the municipality of Santa Cruz del Sur (33), the municipality of Mantua and the municipality of the island of Los Pinos (32).

The counties were formed by groupings of municipalities. In the beginning of the 20th century the county with most municipalities (30) was Santa Clara, followed by the county of La Havana (20), the county of Matanzas (19), the county of Los Pinos (14), while the county with the least number of municipalities (8) was Camagüey.

In the county of Oriente the territorial limitations were not carried out in a circular way as in the case of the Hatos and Corrals. The main reason for this was the abundance of mountains in the Oriente area.

5. A Study of Hatos and Corrals in the county of La Havana

The map R.V. Rousset (Fig.2.) is the best compilation of the Hatos and Corrals of Cuba. However the geographic information of the island and the location of the centers of the Hatos and Corrals are very imprecise.

For the study of the county of La Havana the correct locations of the Hatos and Corrals have been pointed out on GIS data (Fig.5.).

In the data of R.V. Rousset (Table 1.) some of the dates of establishment of the Hatos and Corrals are unknown. These dates have been identified as approximating the creation of their capital cities: La Havana city (1515) (30), Melena del Sur (1650) (9), Santiago del las Vegas (1725) (14), Bejucal (1713) (16), Guines (1735) (17), San Felipe (1739) (18), Jaruco (1770) (27), Guira de Melena (1779) (32), San Antonio del los Baños (1782) (33), Mariel (1797) (34).

The number of Hatos and Corrals created in the county of La Havana were 124. There were 7 Hatos, 115 Corrals and 1 Hato with Corral (Fig.5. and Table 1.). Currently the county of La Havana has 18 municipalities formed by the grouping of Hatos and Corrals.

The process for the occupation of the territory is carried by groupings of Hatos and Corrals. In these groupings the centers of the circles are fixed by geographical points of reference such as rivers, roads, costs or cities. In the case of the county of Havana, and according to a study of the AGI maps and of its evolution on GIS data, is possible to appreciate four areas (A, B, C, D) (Fig.7.):

A) Northwest area: the grouping of circles was clustered around the west road near the coast. Nine Corrals were created. At the present time the territorial division of this area is formed by...
3 municipalities: Batua (5 Corrals), Guayabal (2 Corrals) and Marianao (2 Corrals).

B) Northeast area: the grouping of circles had their reference points taken by fixing the distances from the city of La Habana, the coast and the east road toward the city of Matanzas. Four Hatos and 24 Corrals were created. At the present time the territorial division of this area is formed by 5 municipalities: Aguacate (2 Hatos and 1 Corral), Guanahacabo (9 Corrals), Jaruco (1 Hato with Corral and 13 Corrals), Madruga (1 Hato and 1 Corral).

C) Southwest Area: where the references are the Hato of Ariguano, and the road to Batavana from the city of La Habana to the south coast. Two Hatos and 19 Corrals were created. At the present time the territorial division of this area is formed by 6 municipalities: Aiquizar (7 Corrals), Bejucal (10 Corrals), Melena (1 Hato and 9 Corrals), La Salud (2 Corrals), San Antonio de los Baños (1 Hato and 1 Corral).

D) Southeast area: where the main reference is the center of the river Bayamo at this point and with an area 6 leagues in diameter, the Hatos and Corrals are grouped. Three 3 Hatos and 46 Corrals were created. At the present time the territorial division of this area is formed by 6 municipalities: Batanamo (1 Hato and 4 Corrals), Guines (10 Corrals), Melena del Sur (1 Hato and 9 Corrals), Nueva Paz (1 Hato and 7 Corrals), San Jose de las Lajas (20 Corrals) and San Nicolas (8 Corrals).

The period between 1550 and 1575 (Fig.6.) was the first period during which an increased number of Hatos and Corrals were created. The development of the Cuban colony in the first half of the 16th century was carried out through the exploitation of the aborigines for the system of encomienda\(^1\). The second period during which an increased number of Hatos and Corrals were created was a century later, from 1650 to 1675. During the 17th century the Portuguese introduced many slaves from Africa, and the cultivation of sugar was intensified. The creation of ingenios (small sugar factories) increased from fifteen in 1650 to a hundred by the end of the 17th century. In the 18th century the entire territory of the county of La Habana was occupied by Hatos and Corrals.
At the beginning of the 16th century each merced was an individual concession. With the passing of generations, the rights of the merceds were divided by different members of every family, or even by non-family members who were admitted into the Hato or Corral, and received some rights over the land. During the 17th century the Hatos and Corrals were evolving to communal properties, where each participant in the property was recognized based on their wealth.

During the sugar expansion in the 18th century, many sugar ingenios were located inside the Hatos and Corrals, which were private country properties obtained by merceds. Although the rights to the merceds were divided, their proprietors did not have the authority to divide and sell the lands, because the law of the Spanish kingdom did not grant possession of the merced lands.

In 1819 the law regarding the right of property changed and the possession of land became possible. This law favored only the Hacendados (the rich class of proprietors). Thousands of small farmers were harmed, because their former rights (that authorized establishment of places for employment, vegas for tobacco in merceds and land for the raising of livestock) were annulled. However, the small farmers remained on their properties and lived independently, which resulted in frequent quarrels with the Hacendados. When the right to ownership of the merced lands was granted to the Hacendados, the small farmers that lived on their lands were expelled, and had to pay rent periodically for the pieces of land which they occupied.

Towards 1819 the division of the Hatos and Corrals was intensified and the sugar ingenios began to dominate the geographical landscape of Cuba. Before the Ten Years’ War began, the average area of sugar ingenios was 42 caballerias, 10% of the area of one Corral.

Until the end of the 19th century, the largest area of the entire ingenios of sugar (as the rest of the agriculture land) was in the possession of the Cubans. However, the fight for independence ruined almost all of the Hacendados.

At the beginning of the 20th century, during the time of Independence, the reconstruction of agriculture was carried out through foreign
investment. The economic ruin of the fields meant that Cuban land was sold at a very cheap price. The big sugar factories established by foreign capital began to occupy big extensions of land. Their administration system was not economic and they began to lease land to independent farmers, thereby stimulating colonization. In 1949 each big sugar factory controlled an average of 1200 caballerias of land, of which only 43% was used.

The evolution of the interior divisions, the Hatos and Corrals have been part of the division between Municipalities for a long time, even now this is evident in the influence of their intersections and divisions in the formation of the Barrios (Fig. 8.).

7. Conclusion

In the colonial Spanish period the Hatos and Corrals were a practical system for the occupation of territory. Their concept was based on two elements:

1) The concrete localization of a central point.
2) The determination of the circular limits (usually unknown) through a distance from the central point (one league for the Hatos and two for the Corrals).

From the analysis of the maps of the AGI cartography it is possible to understand that the system of Hatos and Corrals were only used on the island of Cuba. The Spanish kingdom did not use this system in any other Spanish colony of the American or Asian continent. The main reasons for their use on the island of Cuba were the small population during the 15th century and the abundance of empty land.

Throughout three centuries of Hato and Corral use two main problems arose:

1) Disputes regarding the determination of their limits, usually in the case of intersection with other Hatos and Corrals. This was because, during the two centuries of the creation of Hatos and Corrals little and imprecise cartography was available.
2) Disputes in the determination of the property when the Hatos and Corrals were divided.

At the present time, the Hatos and Corrals are not used as territorial units, and are being divided into Barrios. However, the formations of the current municipalities are a direct consequence of the grouping of Hatos and Corrals.

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References

2) Main historical documentation:
   -La española: first Spanish name of the island of Haiti and Dominican Republic.
   -The Ten Years’ War (1868-1878) was the first of three wars that Cuba fought against Spain for its freedom. The other two were The Small War (La Guerra Chiquita; 1879-1880) and the Cuban War of Independence (1895-1898). Carlos Marquez Sterling and Manuel Marquez Sterling - Historia de la Isla de Cuba, La Moderna Poesia, Inc., Miami, FL. ISBN: 0-88345-251-0.

7) One Caballeria = 1143 has.

8) One Peonia = 381 sq.m.

9) One Cuban League = 2.635 miles = 5,078 Castillian varas.

10) After a study of the maps of the AGI cartography (7,152 images on microfilm), it is possible to know that all maps of Hatos and Corrals are only in the Section Maps of Santo Domingo (collection of 916 images from Cuba, Dominican Republic, Haiti and Puerto Rico). There are a total of 149 maps of Hatos and Corrals, and they are located only on the island of Cuba.