Considerations Concerning French Urban Influence on Spanish Colonial Cities on the Island of Cuba

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the French urban influence on cities created by Spaniards on the island of Cuba from the 16th to 19th century. Due to its geographical location, the island of Cuba acquired great influence from the American and European continent during the Spanish Colonial period.

The study was accomplished through the recompilation of the principal 58 cities created in Cuba during the colonial period, the analysis of their different urban types and the evaluation in several cities of the main characteristic of their French influence.

The evolution of the Hispanic-French relationship and the historical events that affected the Caribbean took place on many cities created during the last century of the colonial period. This is evident in the variations in their urban structure and block divisions.

Keywords: Spanish-American city; colonial city; Cuba; urban typology; French urban

1. Introduction

The Spanish colonization of the Americas began with the arrival of Christopher Columbus in 1492, and over three centuries the Spanish Empire was expanded from small early settlements in the Caribbean to the American continent.

Through its geographical situation, the island of Cuba played an important role in commercial relations between the American and European continents. During the mid-16th century *La Havana* was the third city and the first port of the New World.

Therefore, the island of Cuba became the Spanish colony which was most open to the influences of the main European nations with interests in the American continent, mainly France. These influences can be clearly seen in the architecture and urbanism of some Cuban cities.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the quantity and main characteristics of the French influences on the urban design of the Spanish Colonial cities on the island of Cuba.

2. Methodology

1) A Study of the urban evolution on the island of Cuba from the summary of historical and graphic information on the main 58 cities created in Cuba until the end of the 19th century. The cartography of the AGI (The Archive of the Indies in Seville) has been used as the main database¹, also the cartography of the National Archive of La Havana, as well as its photographic area and historical documentation belonging to this colonial period.

2) Based on *Considerations on Typology of the City Model described in the Spanish Colonial City Map* and *Considerations on the Typology of the Spanish Colonial City Model in Cuba*², analysis and classification of the different urban types of 48 out of 58 cities created on the island of Cuba until the 18th century³.

3) Analysis of the main urban characteristics of the cities with the greatest French influence on the Island of Cuba.

3. Historical Considerations Concerning the Colonial Period of the Island of Cuba⁴

The conquest of the island of Cuba by Spaniards began two decades after *Columbus's* first trip to America. *Diego Velázquez* (one of the richest Spanish colonists), began the recognition and conquest of the territory of the island of Cuba in 1510.

The Spaniards founded seven villages with the

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objective of controlling the conquered territory: *Asunción of Baracoa* (1512), *Bayamo* (1513), *Trinidad* (1514), *Sancti Spiritus* (1514), *San Cristóbal de La Havana* (1514), *Puerto Príncipe* (1515) and *Santiago de Cuba* (1515) as the government's headquarters. From these establishments the conquerors began the exploitation of resources of the Island (Fig.1.).

Fig.1. The First Seven Spanish Villages on the Island of Cuba

The economy was based on the work of the natives by the *encomienda*⁵ system. In the first years of the colony the main economic activity was the extraction of gold. However, the quick reduction of gold and indigenous population (including the Spanish population which left the island to conquer the American continent) produced a change in the economic system, and cattle raising became the main economic source of Cuba.

Salted meat and leather were the main goods which contributed to the overseas commercial circuits during the Spanish empire. This imperial trade was developed as a closed monopoly controlled by the *Casa de la Contratación* (The House of Trade) of Seville. The interests of other European nations in this trade brought corsairs from France, Holland and England (such as *Jacques de Sores*, *Francis Drake* and *Henry Morgan*) who attacked the Caribbean area, captured ships and plundered cities and towns. For more than a century, the island of Cuba was one of the main targets⁶. To protect its trade, the Spanish big fleets should arrive at the port of *La Havana*, which is strategically located at the beginning of the current Gulf of Mexico.

At the beginning of the XVII century, the island of Cuba had 30,000 inhabitants. The economic activity grew slowly and was diversified with the development of the cultivation of tobacco and the production of cane sugar. Gradually, new towns far from the coasts were created, and the original seven villages grew in size.

With the ascension of King Felipe V (*Philippe d'Anjou*, grandson of the French King *Luis XIV*) to the Spanish throne in 1700, the *Borbón* dynasty carried out a modernization of its mercantilist. In this case, the Spanish Crown promoted the monopolization of tobacco production in Cuba.

During the 18th century, America was involved in successive wars with the main European nations, which greatly affected Cuba. But the most transcendent was the *Seven Year War* (1756-1763) which surrendered the city of *La Havana* in eleven months (August 1762 to July 1763) to the English military. From the

reign of King's Carlos III, its *Enlightenment* ministers adopted several initiatives to favor the progress of the country. One of these initiatives was the recruitment of new scientists from foreign cities, which were mostly French (*Louis Joseph Proust*, *Francis Chavaneau* and *Charles Lemaure*)⁷. Concurrently, the strengthening of defenses and construction of several public and religious buildings were carried out as major projects on the island.

The external trade of the Island was enlarged, while at the same time the interior communications were improved and new towns created, with the participation of French Engineers (*M. De Vallière*, *M. Ricaud de Targale*, *Fresnel* and *Henri Lepante*, *Stephane Lafayette*, *José Tantete*, *Carriere de La Tour* and *Julien Lardiere*)⁸.

The war of independence of the *Thirteen English Colonies* of North America⁹ (1775-1783) also contributed to the prosperity of the island of Cuba. During this time, Spain, despite being a participant in the conflict, approved trade between Cuba and the rebel colonists. The economy of the island, which was based on sugar and coffee, grew dramatically. However, this economic progress was due to the increase of slavery over a period of 30 years from 1790, compared with the previous 150 years when more African slaves were brought to the island. In addition, thousands of Spaniards and French fugitives arrived in Cuba from Haiti during the revolution between 1791 and 1804.

During the 19th century the main European nations (Spain, France, England and Holland) established a colonial system by which control the world (Fig.2.). France founded colonies in much of eastern North America, on a number of Caribbean islands, and in South America (*Quebec and Montreal in Canada*; *Detroit, St. Louis, Mobile, Biloxi, Baton Rouge* and *New Orleans in the United States*; and *Port-au-Prince and Cap-Haïtien in Haiti*).

Fig.2. Colonial World System in 1850.
(Source: E.Crevari, L.Strazza, G.Dyszel)

4. Types of Spanish Colonial Urban Cities during the 16th and 19th Centuries

A database for 47 out of 58 main cities (Fig.3.) was created to analyzing the principal Spanish Colonial

Cities between the 16th and 19th century on the island of Cuba by the re-compilation of information through maps and a bibliography¹⁰. A study of the grid plan and block was made possible in order to classify 5 different types of urban design (Fig.4.):

1) Cities with an irregular grid (8 cities):

- 1.1 Six cities created in the 16th century: *Baracoa* (1510), *Bayamo* (1513), *Remedios* (1514), *Santi Spiritus* (1514), *Puerto Príncipe* (1515), and *Trinidad* (1515). *Baracoa* and *Trinidad* are coastal cities. *Trinidad* has a square-shaped plaza while *Bayamo*, *Santi Spiritus* and *Puerto Príncipe* have rectangular shaped plazas. The city of *Remedios* has an irregular shaped plaza, with two churches, one of them located in the main area.
- 1.2) One city created in the 17th century: *Melena del Sur* (1650), with a square shaped plaza.
- 1.3) One city created in the 18th century. *San Juan y Martínez* (1750) with an irregular shaped plaza.

2) Cities with Regular Grid, Imperfect Square and/or Rectangular Blocks (16 cities).

- 2.1) Three cities created in the 16th century: *La Havana* (founded in 1514 by *Pánfilo de Naváez*) and *Santiago de Cuba* (founded by *Diego Velázquez* in 1515) are coastal cities. The Plaza and surrounding blocks were drawn as a perfect square, while the growth of the city resulted in the square grid being modified to squares and rectangular blocks. And the city of *Hoguín*¹¹ (founded by *Francisco García*

Holguín in 1523).

- 2.2) One city created in the 17th century: *Villa Clara* (1692), with a rectangular shaped plaza.
- 2.3) Eight cities created in the 18th century: *Jiguani* (1701), *Juan Alberto Gómez* (1747), *Guaimaro* (1750), *Las Tunas* (1750), *Sagua de Tanamo* (1750), *Guisa* (1766), *Pinar del Rio* (1773) and *San José de las Lajas* (1778).
- 2.4) Four cities created in the 19th century: *Manzanillo* (1805), *Colón* (1818), *Gibara* (1820) and *Nueva Gerona* (1827).

3) Cities with Regular Grid and perfect square blocks (8 cities).

- 3.1) One city created in the 17th century: *Santiago de las Vegas* (1694). In the AGI cartography there are two different city plan designed by *José Tantete* in 1747¹² and 1756¹³, both with perfect square grid.
- 3.2) Four cities created in the 18th century: *Güines* (1735), planned with a perfect square grid designed by *José del Pozo Sucre* and *Luis Huet*¹⁴ in 1784; *Jaruco* (1770), designed by *Luis Huet* in 1773, its plan¹⁵ is based on a perfect square grid which was the current city design, but the dimensions of the plaza have been reduced by half, *Nuevitas* (1775), which was a rare plan designed by *Vicente Sebastián Pintado* in 1819¹⁶; and, *Cumanayagua* (1800).
- 3.3) Three cities created in the 19th century: *Nueva Paz* (1802) the plan of which was designed by *Rafael Gómez Ronband* in 1806¹⁷, *Guantánamo*

Fig.3. 58 Main Spanish Colonial Cities in the Island of Cuba

- 1- Baracoa (1512), 2-Bayamo (1513), 3-La Habana (1515), 4- Remedios (1514), 5 - Santi Spiritus (1514), 6- Puerto Príncipe (1515), 7- Santiago de Cuba (1515), 8- Trinidad (1515), 9- Melena del sur (1650), 10- Holguín (1523), 11- Consolidación del sur (1690), 12- Villa Clara (1690), 13- Matanzas (1693), 14-Santiago de las Vegas (1725), 15- Jiguani (1701), 16- Bejucal (1713), 17- Güines (1735), 18- San Felipe (1739), 19- San Cristóbal (1743), 20- Juan Alberto Gómez (1747), 21- Guaimaro (1750), 22- Las Tunas (1750), 23- Sagua de Tanamo (1750), 24- San Juan y Martínez (1750), 25- Los Palacios (1763), 26- Guisa (1766), 27- Jaruco (1770), 28- Pinar del Rio (1773), 29- Nuevitas (1781), 30- San Diego de los Baños (1775), 31- San José de las Lajas (1778), 32- Güira de Melena (1779), 33- San Antonio de los Baños (1782), 34- Mariel (1797), 35- Cumanayagua (1800), 36- Santa Rita (1800), 37- Nueva Paz (1802), 38- Madruga (1805), 39- Manzanillo (1792), 40- Casilda (1808), 41- Sagua la Grande (1812), 42- Varadero (1815), 43- Cifuentes (1817), 44- Colón (1818), 45- Cienfuegos (1817), 46- Santo Domingo (1819), 47- Gibara (1820), 48- Guantánamo (1820), 49- Morón (1827), 50- Nueva Gerona (1827), 51- Cárdenas (1828), 52- Caibarién (1832), 53- Ciego de Ávila (1840), 54- San Luis de los Pinos (1845), 55- Bemba (Jovellanos) (1849), 56- Sibanicú (1849), 57- Viñales (1875), 58- Banes (1887).

IRREGULAR GRID	REGULAR GRID				
	IMPERFECT SQUARE AND/OR RECTANGULAR GRID	PERFECT SQUARE GRID	PERFECT RECTANGULAR GRID	CENTRAL STREET	MAIN AVENUE

8 cities	16	8	6	7	2

Trinidad AGI-ST-132	Holguin AGI-ST-720	Nueva Paz AGI-ST-650	Matanzas AGI-ST-323	San Antonio de los Baños AGI-ST-533	Cardenas AGI-ST-797

Fig.4. Types of Spanish Colonial Urban Cities on the Island of Cuba

(1820) and *Caibarién* (1832).

4) Cities with Regular Grid and Perfect Rectangular blocks (6 cities).

4.1) One city in the 17th century: *Matanzas*¹⁸ (1693).

4.2) Two cities in the 18th century: *Bejucal* (1713) and *San Felipe*¹⁹ (1739).

4.3) Three cities in the 19th century: *San Luis de los Pinos* (1845), *Bemba* (1849) and *Viñales* (1875).

5) Cities with Regular Grid and a Central Street (7 cities)

Los Palacios (1763), *San Diego de los Baños* (1775), *Güira de Melena* (1779), *San Antonio de los Baños* (1784), *Madrugá* (1805), *Sagua la Grande* (1812) and *Cifuentes* (1817).

6) Cities with Regular Grid and a Main Avenue (2 cities)

Cienfuegos (1819) and *Cárdenas*²⁰ (1828).

5. The Main French Influence on Cuban Cities

Urban plans in the cartography of the AGI were analyzed and it was found that the most common urban group model used by the Spaniards on the American continent was apparently a simple plaza (with

Fig.5. San Antonio de los Baños. Guillermo Duncan, 1779, AGI-Santo Domingo 567

Fig.6. Plan of San Antonio de los Baños

Fig.7. Neuf-Brisach (1699-1702), Anonimus, Musée des Plans-Reliefs, Paris

8 streets in its corners) and a regular grid of square or rectangular blocks²¹. However, through the French urban influence, new design elements were introduced in the traditional Spanish Colonial urban models. These

	MAP 1792							
BLOCKS SIZES (VARAS)	40 x 75	40 x 81	80 x 72	80 x 75	80 x 81	80 x 80	80 x 80	80 x 100
PLOTS SIZES (VARAS)	40 x 25	40 x 27	40 x 24	40 x 25	40 x 27	30 x 20 20 x 40	30 x 20 20 x 20 80 x 43 80 x 17	50 x 20 20 x 40

Fig.8. Pattern Blocks of San Antonio de los Baños. (1 vara = 0.848 meter)

fundamental elements were the use of an axis in the formation of a main street or avenue; the localization of the squares; and the subdivision of the blocks.

These new contributions to the urban design are evident in cities like *San Antonio de los Baños*, *Cienfuegos*, *Santiago de las Vegas*, *Cárdenas* or *Nuevitas*.

a) *San Antonio de los Baños*: After the foundation of *San Antonio de los Baños* in 1784, the distribution of lots to work the land and build houses resulted in a great increase in the population. Recent inhabitants were French colonists that abandoned Haiti during the Slave Revolution (1791~1803). French emigrants were among the powerful farmers that were accepted on the island with the approval of Spain since they brought capital investment and a technically superior preparation that increased production. The plan of *San Antonio de los Baños* formed a central axis (the main street) that connects two plazas (Figs.5., 6.). This type of plan is unusual in Spanish Colonial cities, and unique on the island of Cuba, and no similar plan exists in the whole cartography of the AGI that corresponds to the entirety of the American continent. Also, the division of plots is another evidence of the French influence in the city of *San Antonio de los Baños* (Fig.8). The division of plots with eight smaller plots on the sides and two (or four) longer plots in the middle of the block pattern was created around 1698 by the French military engineer Vauban (1633-1707), for the fortified town of *Neuf-Brisach* (1699-1702) in the French province of Alsace (Fig.7). This pattern is used in several plans of French overseas settlements such as *New Orleans* (1728), *Pourt-au-Prince* (1749) or *San Marc* (1785).

b) *Cárdenas*: The current plan of *Cárdenas* city was designed in 1830 by Spanish surveyor *Andrés José Portillo*, who studied in North America. The plan of *Cárdenas* city was a regular grid of rectangular blocks with central axis (the main avenue) that crosses the entire city. The streets were designed with a width of 14 varas²² and the main avenue with a width of 20 varas.

The grid was formatted with blocks of 80 varas x 120 varas (blocks of 8 lots) and blocks of 80 varas x 90 varas (blocks of 6 lots). However the division

Fig.9. Block Pattern of *Cárdenas*

Fig.10. *Cienfuegos*. Anastasio Echevarria. 1798. Naval Museum, Spain

Fig.11. *Cienfuegos*, Alejo Helvecio Lanier, 1839, BN Jose Marti

of blocks by lots with the same area and dimensions was typical in Spanish Colonial cities. In the case of *Cárdenas* city the lots have 1200 square *varas*, 30 *varas* in front of the street and 40 *varas* in depth (Fig.9.).

c) *Cienfuegos*: The first plan of *Cienfuegos* was designed by the Spaniard *Anastasio Echevarria* in 1798²³ during the expedition of *The Real Commission of Guantánamo*. This first plan (Fig.10.) was designed with a regular grid of rectangular blocks with central axis (the main avenue) that crosses the entire city. However the current plan of the city of *Cienfuegos* was designed by *Juan Luis Lorenzo D'Clouet* in 1819. *D'Clouet* was a rich French colonel who emigrated from *Louisiana*. In March of 1817 *D'Clouet* introduced a project to Spanish General Captain *José Cienfuegos* to colonize the bay of *Jagua*. The Spanish Court accepted the project in October of 1817 and authorized the foundation of the city. In April of 1819, *D'Clouet* started the colonization with 46 colonists coming from *Bordeaux* (France), the French doctor *Domingo Monjeni* and the French surveyor *Dubrog*. In the year 1820, 382 colonists arrived in the city (50 from *Philadelphia*, 74 from *Baltimore*, 13 from *New Orleans*, 12 from *Louisiana* and 229 from several locations of the island of *Cuba*. The main characteristic of the plan of *Cienfuegos* is the creation of a main avenue, which was not aligned with the main plaza. The regular grid was formed by square blocks of 100 *varas*. The streets were designed with a width of 15 *varas* and the main avenue with a width of 30 *varas* (Fig.11.).

The division of plots was the same as that of the French pattern of *Vauban* with eight smaller plots on the sides and two longer plots in the middle of the block (Fig.12.).

d) *Santiago de las Vegas*: The plan of *Santiago de las Vegas* was designed by *José Tantete*. Colonel *José Tantete y Dubruiller* was born in *Orchies* (Douai, France). From 1742 *Tantete* was colonel of engineers in *La Havana*. He worked on several urban designs such as the *Plaza de San Ignacio en La Havana*²⁴, *Plan of Santiago de las Vegas*²⁵, city of *Horcón*²⁶, the *Bay of Nipe*²⁷ and the *Fort of Jagua*²⁸.

For the first plan of *Santiago de las Vegas*, *Luis Huet* designed an original block pattern based on eight plots of the same shape and dimensions in a rotary pattern (Fig.13.). For the second plan of *Santiago de las Vegas*, *Huet* designed a different pattern block of eight plots with different shapes and dimensions, but with the same area (Fig.14.). The current division plots of *Santiago de las Vegas* is based on this pattern.

The French influence is also clear in urban designs made by Spaniards, for example the plan of the city of *Nuevitás*, made in 1819 by *Vicente Sebastián Pintado*. This is a plan of regular grid and rectangular and square blocks. The divisions of the blocks are based

Fig.12. Pattern Blocks of *Cienfuegos*. (1 vara = 0.848 meter)

Fig.13. *Santiago de las Vegas*, José Tantete, 1747, AGI. Santo Domingo 324

Fig.14. *Santiago de las Vegas*, José Tantete, 1756, AGI. Santo Domingo 302

on the pattern of *Vauban*. From the corner of the main plaza four diagonal avenues connect four secondary plazas. Rarely were any churches designed in all of these 5 plazas. This plan was not carried out, and the current drawing remains as a perfect square grid with no plaza with church.

Fig.15. Nuevitas, Vicente Sebastián Pintado, 1819, AGI- Santo Domingo 731

6. Conclusion

After a geometric analysis of the maps of the Archivo General de Indias, it is possible to verify that 60% of the existing Spanish Colonial Cities were created based on common geometric characteristics. Nevertheless there are a great number of plans with interesting variations of urban design. According to an analysis of the maps of the AGI, Cuba has more cities with variations in urban design. This is because, as a Spanish colony on the American continent, it received more influence from ideas from Europe up until the 19th century.

French urban influence on Spanish Colonial cities on the island of Cuba was carried on directly by the designs of French engineers and with designs indirectly introduced by Spanish engineers with the formation of French academics.

In the mid-17th century, the Spanish crown programmed the formation of Spanish engineers by bringing in foreign scientists, the majority of whom were from France. This influence is more evident in urban designs on the island of Cuba in the 19th century. During this time, new urban elements were introduced in the classic Spanish grid, such as central axes and avenues, combinations of plazas, variations on the regular grid and on new patterns of the block division.

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- 13) Santiago de las Vegas, José Tantete, 1756, AGI. MP ST.-302.
- 14) Plano de San Julián de los Güines y el proyecto de la nueva villa, echo de orden de S.M. por el brigadier e ingeniero director don Luis Huet, José del Pozo Sucre and Luis Huet, AGI. M MP ST.-503.
- 15) Plano de la nueva ciudad de Jaruco, Luis Huet, AGI. MP ST.-381.
- 16) Plano de la ciudad de San Fernando de Nuevitas, Vicente Sebastián Pintado, AGI. MP ST.-731.
- 17) Plano en la figura cuadrada de la ciudad de Nueva Paz, Rafael Gómez Ronbaud, AGI. MP ST.-665.
- 18) Plano de Matanzas, J. F. y Sotolongo, 1764, AGI. MP ST.-323.
- 19) Plano de la ciudad de San Phelipe y Santhiago, Bartolomé Lorenzo de Flores, 1751, AGI. MP ST.-282.
- 20) Plano de la población del puerto de Cárdenas, Andrés José del Portillo, 1830, AGI. MP ST.-797.
- 21) Juan Ramón Jiménez Verdejo, The Spanish-American City Study of the urban model used by José de Escandón to create the Colony of Nuevo Santander, Ph. D Dissertation, 2005.
- 22) 1 Cuban vara = 0.848 meter
- 23) Naval Museum. Spain. MN.MS 552. MN-19-D-5.
- 24) Plano plazuela San Ignacio, José Tantete, 1749, AGI. MP ST.-260.
- 25) Idem references 9 and 10.
- 26) -Plano de pueblo de N. Sra del Rosario de Horcón. José Tantete, 1749, AGI. MP ST.-259., - Plano de las tierras de don S. Muñoz en el Horcón de M. González, José Tantete, 1758, AGI. MP ST.-313.
- 27) -Plano del puerto de Nipe. José Tantete, 1754, AGI. MP ST.-296.
- 28) Plano del Fuerte de Nra. Sra. De los Ángeles de Jagua en la ysla de Cuba, AGI. MP ST.- 373.