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'Bajo su sombra': The Narration and Reception of Colonial Urban Space in Early Nineteenth-Century Havana, Cuba

Paul Barrett Niell

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The University of New Mexico

“Bajo su sombra’: The Narration and Reception of Colonial Urban Space in Early
Nineteenth-Century Havana, Cuba”

by
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Faculty of the College of Fine Arts
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Doctor of Philosophy

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

INTRODUCTION.....	1
Chapter I. SPACE, TIME, AND IDENTITY IN HAVANA’S “TRADITIONAL” URBAN LANDSCAPE.....	13
I.1 Conquest and Urbanization	
I.2 The Plaza as Narrative Space	
I.3 Visual Representation and Identity	
I.4 Temporality and Reception	
Chapter II. INVENTING A VISUAL LANGUAGE OF PROGRESS IN COLONIAL HAVANA.....	77
II.1 The Bourbon Palaces: A Visual Reordering	
II.2 The Espada Cemetery: Local Agency and Visual Language	
II.3 The Havana Cathedral: A New Image of Antiquity	
Chapter III. THE SHRINE, THE TREE, AND THE PLAZA.....	145
III.1 Imagining/Imaging the Site of the Ceiba Tree	
III.2 The Didactic Shrine	
Chapter IV. <i>LA ISLA SIEMPRE LEAL</i> : PERFORMANCE, IMAGE, TEXT, AND PENINSULAR RECEPTION....	206
IV.1 The Shrine as Urban Spectacle	
IV.2 Peninsular Reception of Icons and Symbols	
IV.3 The Calm Within the Storm	
Chapter V. LOCAL IDENTITY AND RECEPTION: CREOLE AND AFRO-CUBAN.....	257
V.1 Modernity, Creole Community, and the City	
V.2 The Indian Figure and Miscegenation in Cuba	
V.3 <i>La Población Blanca</i> : Race, Representation and “White” Community	
V.4 Changó and the Tree: Afro-Cuban Reception of the City	
V.5 The Shrine and the Sacred Grove	

CONCLUSION.....	319
LIST OF REFERENCES.....	324

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

- Fig. 1 Cuba, map
Llilian Llanes. *Map of Cuba*. p. 6 in *The Houses of Old Cuba* by Llilian Llanes. New York: Thames and Hudson, 1999.....15
- Fig. 2 City and Bay of Havana, drawing
General Archives of the Indies, Seville, Spain
Anonymous. *Ciudad y Bahía de la Habana*. p. 23 in *La Habana Vieja: Mapas y Planos en los Archivos de España*. Madrid: Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores de España, 1985.....29
- Fig. 3 Reconstruction Drawing of the Plaza de Armas in 1570-74, drawing
Roberto Segre. *Plaza de Armas aún cubierta de construcciones. Siglo XVI (entre 1570 y 74)*. p. 27 in *La Plaza de Armas de la Habana: Sinfonía urbana inconclusa* by Roberto Segre. La Habana: Editorial Arte y Literatura, 1995.....31
- Fig. 4 Reconstruction Drawing of the Plaza de Armas in 1586, drawing
Roberto Segre. *Plaza de Armas a finales del siglo XVI (después de 1586)*. p. 19 in *La Plaza de Armas de la Habana: Sinfonía urbana inconclusa* by Roberto Segre. La Habana: Editorial Arte y Literatura, 1995.....34
- Fig. 5 Plaza de Armas and Environs, 1691, color drawing,
General Archives of the Indies, Seville, Spain
Sísacara. *Plaza de Armas y Alrededores*. p. 35 in *La Habana Vieja: Mapas y Planos en los Archivos de España*. Madrid: Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores de España, 1985.....38
- Fig. 6 Plan of Havana, late 18th-century, drawing
Pamela Gosner. *Plan of Havana, Cuba*. p. 33 in *Caribbean Baroque: Historic Architecture of the Spanish Antilles* by Pamela Gosner. Pueblo, Colorado: Passegiata Press, 1996.....40

Fig. 7	The Plaza Nueva, mid-19 th century, aquatint Hippolyte Garneray, <i>Vista de la Plaza Vieja o Mercado principal de La Habana</i> , mid-19 th century, aquatint, p. 148 in <i>Las Calles de La Habana Intramuros: Arte, historia, y tradiciones en las calles y plazas de La Habana Vieja</i> by Manuel Fernández Santalices. Miami: Saeta Ediciones, 1985.....	43
Fig. 8	View of the Plaza San Francisco, c. 1845-55, lithograph James Gay Sawkins and Louis Julien Jacotett, <i>Vista de la Plaza de San Francisco</i> , c. 1845-55, lithograph, p. 126 in <i>Las Calles de La Habana Intramuros: Arte, historia, y tradiciones en las calles y plazas de La Habana Vieja</i> by Manuel Fernández Santalices. Miami: Saeta Ediciones, 1985.....	45
Fig. 9	Church of Santo Cristo del Buen Viaje and Plaza de Cristo, 1870's, lithograph Victor Patricio de Landaluze, <i>Iglesia del Santo Cristo del Buen Viaje</i> , c. 1870's, lithograph, p. 315 in <i>Cuba: Arquitectura y Urbanismo</i> by Felipe J. Préstamo y Hernández. Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1995.....	46
Fig. 10	Central Doorway, Casa de la Obra Pía, Havana, 17 th century, photograph Photo by author.....	51
Fig. 11	Window Above Central Doorway, Casa de la Obra Pía, Havana, 17 th century, photograph Photo by author.....	52
Fig. 12	Façade, Casa del Conde de San Juan Jaruco, Havana, 17 th century, photograph Photo by author.....	55
Fig. 13	Cathedral of Havana Pedro Medina and others. <i>Cathedral of Havana, Plaza of the Cathedral</i> , 1748-71 Photo by author.....	57

Fig. 14	View of the Plaza of the Cathedral, 1852, lithograph Frederic Mialhe. <i>Vista de la Catedral</i> . p. 61 in <i>Mialhe's Colonial Cuba: The Prints that Shaped the World's View of Cuba</i> by Emilio Cueto. Miami: The Historical Association of Southern Florida, 1994.....	59
Fig. 15	Loggias Along Plaza, <i>Casa de los Trés Arcos</i> and the <i>Casa de los Condes Lombillo</i> , Havana, mid 18 th -century, photograph Photo by author.....	60
Fig. 16	Volute, <i>Casa de los Trés Arcos</i> , Havana, mid 18 th -century, photograph Photo by author.....	61
Fig. 17	Volute, Cathedral of Havana, 1748-71, photograph Photo by author.....	62
Fig. 18	Coronation of the Virgin by the Trinity, late 18 th -century, oil on board, 34 by 28 inches José Nicolas de la Escalera. <i>Coronation of the Virgin by the Trinity</i> . p. 51 in <i>Cuba: A History in Art</i> by Gary R. Libby. Daytona Beach, Florida: The Museum of Arts and Sciences, 1997.....	64
Fig. 19	Portrait of Don Tomas Mateo Cervantes, c. 1800, oil on canvas, 41 by 32 inches Vicente Escobar. <i>Portrait of Don Tomas Mateo Cervantes</i> . p. 53 in <i>Cuba: A History in Art</i> by Gary R. Libby. Daytona Beach, Florida: The Museum of Arts and Sciences, 1997.....	66
Fig. 20	Los Negros Curos, c. 1875, color lithograph Victor Patricio de Landaluze. <i>Los Curros</i> . p. 33 in <i>Santería Enthroned: Art, Ritual, and Innovation in an Afro-Cuban Religion</i> by David H. Brown. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003.....	72
Fig. 21	The Day of Kings, c. 1878, oil on canvas Victor Patricio de Landaluze. <i>El Día de Reyes</i> . p. ?? in <i>Santería Enthroned: Art, Ritual, and Innovation in an Afro-Cuban Religion</i> by David H. Brown. Chicago and London:	

	The University of Chicago Press, 2003.....	74
Fig. 22	Engraving of the Plaza Mayor of Mexico City, 1797, engraving José Joaquín Fabregat. <i>Engraving of the Plaza Mayor of Mexico City</i> . p. 60 in <i>The Grandeur of Viceregal Mexico: Treasures from the Museo Franz Mayer</i> edited by Héctor Rivero Borrell M. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002.....	80
Fig. 23	The Plaza de Armas of Havana in the Nineteenth-Century, c. 1800, color drawing Hipolito Garneray. <i>La Plaza de Armas en el siglo XIX</i> . p. 56 in <i>La Habana Vieja: Mapas y Planos en los Archivos de España</i> . Madrid: Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores de España, 1985.....	83
Fig. 24	Project for the Formation of the Plaza de Armas of Havana, 1773, color drawing, General Archives of the Indies, Seville, Spain Ramón Ignacio de Yoldi. <i>Proyecto para la Formación de la Plaza de Armas de la Habana</i> . p. ?? in <i>La Habana Vieja: Mapas y Planos en los Archivos de España</i> . Madrid: Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores de España, 1985.....	85
Fig. 25	Reconstruction Drawing of the Bourbon Intention for the Plaza de Armas of Havana, drawing Roberto Segre. <i>Proyecto de remodelación, nunca completado, propuesto por el Marqués de la Torre en 1773</i> . p. 37 in <i>La Plaza de Armas de la Habana: Sinfonía urbana inconclusa</i> by Roberto Segre. La Habana: Editorial Arte y Literatura, 1995.....	87
Fig. 26	Palace of the Second-in-Command, Plaza de Armas, Havana, 1771-76, photograph Antonio Fernández de Trevejos. Photo by author.....	88
Fig. 27	Palace of the Captain General, Plaza de Armas, Havana, 1776-91, photograph Antonio Fernández de Trevejos and Pedro Medína	

	Photo by author.....	89
Fig. 28	Central Doorway, photograph Antonio Fernández de Trevejos, Palace of the Second-in-Command, Havana, 1771-73 Photo by author.....	91
Fig. 29	Corner Entablature, photograph Antonio Fernández de Trevejos and Pedro Medína Palace of the Captain General, Havana, 1776-91 Photo by author.....	92
Fig. 30	Window Lintel Decoration, photograph Antonio Fernández de Trevejos and Pedro Medína Palace of the Captain General, Havana, 1776-91 Photo by author.....	93
Fig. 31	View of the Palace of the Captain General from Mercaderes Street Antonio Fernández de Trevejos and Pedro Medína Palace of the Captain General, Havana, 1776-91 Photo by author.....	94
Fig. 32	View of the General Cemetery of the City of Havana Frederic Mialhe. <i>Vista del Cementerio General de la Ciudad de la Habana</i> , c. 1860's, lithograph. p. 18 in <i>Mialhe's Colonial Cuba: The Prints that Shaped the World's View of Cuba</i> by Emilio Cueto. Miami: The Historical Association of Southern Florida, 1994.....	115
Fig. 33	Last Supper Attributed to José Perovani. <i>Last Supper</i> , early 19 th -century, Cathedral of Havana, west lunette of the sanctuary, fresco Photo by author.....	127
Fig. 34	The Judgment of Solomon Nicolas Poussin, <i>The Judgment of Solomon</i> , 1649, oil on canvas. p. 68 in <i>Ideal Landscape: Annibale Carracci, Nicolas Poussin, and Claude Lorrain</i> by Margaretha Rossholm Lagerlöf. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990.....	128

Fig. 35	Christ Giving the Keys to St. Peter Attributed to José Perovani. <i>Christ Giving the Keys to St. Peter</i> , early 19 th -century, Cathedral of Havana, east lunette of the sanctuary, fresco Photo by author.....	130
Fig. 36	Neo-Classical side altar Anonymous, Neo-Classical side altar, early 19 th -century, Cathedral of Havana Photo by author.....	131
Fig. 37	Assumption of the Virgin Attributed to Juan Bautista Vermay, <i>Assumption of the Virgin</i> , after 1815, Cathedral of Havana, central lunette of the sanctuary, fresco Photo by author.....	134
Fig. 38	Portrait of a Man Juan Bautista Vermay. <i>El Retrato del Hombre</i> , c. 1818, oil on canvas. p.?? in <i>Apuntes Sobre la Pintura y el Grabado en Cuba</i> by Jorge Rigol. Ciudad de la Habana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1982.....	135
Fig. 39	Main Altar Bianchini, Antonio Solá, and others, <i>Main Altar</i> , Cathedral of Havana, marble and Egyptian porphyry Photo by author.....	139
Fig. 40	Nave ceiling Anonymous, early 19 th -century, Cathedral of Havana Photo by author.....	141
Fig. 41	Nave Entablature Anonymous, Cathedral of Havana Photo by author.....	142
Fig. 42	View of the Temple and Part of the Plaza de Armas Frederic Mialhe. <i>Vista de Temple y Parte de La Plaza de Armas</i> , 1842, lithograph. p. 67 in <i>Mialhe's Colonial Cuba: The Prints that Shaped the World's View of Cuba</i> by Emilio Cueto. Miami: The Historical Association of Southern Florida, 1994.....	147

Fig. 43	El Templete Antonio María de la Torr�. <i>El Templete</i> , Plaza de Armas, Havana, 1828 Photo by author.....	149
Fig. 44	Plan, El Templete, drawing p. 77 in <i>La Habana: Gu�a de Arquitectura</i> by Maria Elena Mart�n Zequeira and Eduardo Luis Rodr�guez Fern�ndez. Havana and Seville: Junta de Andalusia, 1998.....	150
Fig. 45	Portico, El Templete Antonio Mar�a de la Torr�. <i>El Templete</i> , Plaza de Armas, Havana, 1828 Photo by author.....	151
Fig. 46	Elevation of revised project of 1764 of Ste. Genevi�ve, drawing Jacques-Gabriel Soufflot, <i>elevation of revised project of 1764 of Ste. Genevi�ve</i> , drawing, p. 76 in <i>The Architecture of the French Enlightenment</i> by Allan Braham. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980.....	155
Fig. 47	St.-Sulpice, Paris, west front, 1732-77 Giovanni Niccol� Servandoni, <i>St.-Sulpice</i> , Paris, west front, 1732-77, p. 134 in <i>The Architecture of the French Enlightenment</i> by Allan Braham. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980.....	156
Fig. 48	Cagigal Pillar Anonymous, Cagigal Pillar, Plaza de Armas, Havana, 1754 Photo by author.....	159
Fig. 49	Ceiba Tree Relief Anonymous, Ceiba Tree Relief, Cagigal Pillar, Plaza de Armas, Havana, 1754 Photo by author.....	160
Fig. 50	Bust of Christopher Columbus Anonymous, <i>Bust of Christopher Columbus</i> , El Templete, Plaza de Armas, Havana, 1827.....	164

Fig. 51	<p>The First Cabildo Juan Bautista Vermay, <i>The First Cabildo</i>, El Templete, Plaza de Armas, Havana, 1826 Photo by author.....177</p>
Fig. 52	<p>The Inauguration of El Templete Juan Bautista Vermay, <i>Acto Inaugural del Templete. Oficia Espada, Preside el General Vives</i>. p. 130 in <i>El Obispo Espada y su influencia en la cultura cubana</i> by Cesar Garcia Pons. La Habana: Publicaciones del Ministerio de Educación, 1951.....181</p>
Fig. 53	<p>The Inauguration of El Templete Juan Bautista Vermay, <i>La Inauguración del Templete</i>, 1828. Óleo sobre tela, 240 × 769 cm. El Templete. Colorplate 9 in <i>Vermay: Mensajero de las Luces</i> by Sabine Faivre D’Arcier. La Habana: Imagen Contemporanea, 2004.....182</p>
Fig. 54	<p>Church Group Juan Bautista Vermay, <i>The Inauguration of El Templete</i>, El Templete, Plaza de Armas, Havana 1828, oil on canvas Photo by author.....185</p>
Fig. 55	<p>Foreigners Group Juan Bautista Vermay, <i>The Inauguration of El Templete</i>, El Templete, Plaza de Armas, Havana 1828, oil on canvas Photo by author.....187</p>
Fig. 56	<p>Captain General Vives and His Daughters Juan Bautista Vermay, <i>The Inauguration of El Templete</i>, El Templete, Plaza de Armas, Havana 1828, oil on canvas Photo by author.....189</p>
Fig. 57	<p>Peninsular Group Juan Bautista Vermay, <i>The Inauguration of El Templete</i>, El Templete, Plaza de Armas, Havana 1828, oil on canvas Photo by author.....190</p>
Fig. 58	<p>Creole Group Juan Bautista Vermay, <i>The Inauguration of El</i></p>

	<i>Templete</i> , El Templete, Plaza de Armas, Havana 1828, oil on canvas Photo by author.....	192
Fig. 59	Group of Five Creoles Juan Bautista Vermay, <i>The Inauguration of El Templete</i> , El Templete, Plaza de Armas, Havana 1828, oil on canvas Photo by author.....	193
Fig. 60	Group of Women Juan Bautista Vermay, <i>The Inauguration of El Templete</i> , El Templete, Plaza de Armas, Havana 1828, oil on canvas Photo by author.....	194
Fig. 61	Group of Women and Children Juan Bautista Vermay, <i>The Inauguration of El Templete</i> , El Templete, Plaza de Armas, Havana 1828, oil on canvas Photo by author.....	195
Fig. 62	Afro-Cuban Lieutenant Juan Bautista Vermay, <i>The Inauguration of El Templete</i> , El Templete, Plaza de Armas, Havana 1828, oil on canvas Photo by author.....	197
Fig. 63	General Population Juan Bautista Vermay, <i>The Inauguration of El Templete</i> , El Templete, Plaza de Armas, Havana 1828, oil on canvas Photo by author.....	199
Fig. 64	The Coronation of Napoleon Jacques-Louis David, <i>The Coronation of Napoleon</i> , 1805-8, oil on canvas, Paris, Louvre Website: www.napoleonbonaparte.nl	200
Fig. 65	The First Mass Juan Bautista Vermay, <i>The First Mass</i> , El Templete, Plaza de Armas, Havana, 1826, oil on canvas Photo by author.....	203

Fig. 66	Frieze Anonymous, El Templete, Plaza de Armas, Havana, 1828 Photo by author.....	224
Fig. 67	Metope Sculpture: Bows and Arrows Anonymous, El Templete, Plaza de Armas, Havana, 1828 Photo by author.....	225
Fig. 68	Metope Sculpture: Cursive ‘F’ Anonymous, El Templete, Plaza de Armas, Havana, 1828 Photo by author.....	226
Fig. 69	Metope Sculpture: Crown and Orbs Anonymous, El Templete, Plaza de Armas, Havana, 1828 Photo by author.....	227
Fig. 70	Metope Sculpture: ‘7’ Anonymous, El Templete, Plaza de Armas, Havana, 1828 Photo by author.....	228
Fig. 71	Velázquez with Group of Indians Juan Bautista Vermay, The First Mass, El Templete, Plaza de Armas, Havana, 1828, oil on canvas Photo by author.....	235
Fig. 72	Velázquez with Indian Mother and Child Juan Bautista Vermay, The First Cabildo, El Templete, Plaza de Armas, Havana, 1828, oil on canvas Photo by author.....	240
Fig. 73	Amerigo Vespucci Awakens a Sleeping America Johannes Stradanus (Jan van der Straet). <i>Amerigo Vespucci Awakens a Sleeping America from Nova Reperta</i> . p. 24 in <i>American Art: A Cultural History</i> by David Bjelajac. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 2005.....	242

- Fig. 74 Plan of Havana and its Neighborhoods Outside the Walls
Anonymous, *Plano de la Habana y Sus Barrios Extramuros*. p. 78 in *La Habana Vieja: Mapas y Planos en los Archivos de España*. Madrid: Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores de España, 1985.....258
- Fig. 75 Spanish and Indian Produce a Mestizo
José de Bustos. *De español e india, produce mestiza*. p. 90 in *Casta Painting: Images of Race in Eighteenth-Century Mexico* by Ilona Katzew. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004.....286
- Fig. 76 Caste Painting
Luis de Mena. *Casta Painting*. p. 195 in *Casta Painting: Images of Race in Eighteenth-Century Mexico* by Ilona Katzew. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004.....288
- Fig. 77 The Day of Kings
Frederic Mialhe. *El Día de Reyes*. p. 50 in *Santería Enthroned: Art, Ritual, and Innovation in an Afro-Cuban Religion* by David H. Brown. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003.....304
- Fig. 78 El Quitrin
Frederic Mialhe. *El Quitrin*. p. 95 in *Mialhe's Colonial Cuba: The Prints that Shaped the World's View of Cuba* by Emilio Cueto. Miami: The Historical Association of Southern Florida, 1994.....305
- Fig. 79 Ceiba Tree
Ceiba Tree, Fraternity Park, Havana, planted in 1928
Photo by author.....311

INTRODUCTION

On the front page of the *Diario de la Habana* of March 19, 1828, an article appeared celebrating a Neo-Classical monument for Havana's Plaza de Armas. A passage read:

The Island of Cuba, faithful to its principles and to its duties, has given on this day to the entire world the ultimate proof of its refined loyalty and of its never contradicted patriotism. The magnificent monument that is presented today to public expectation, sponsored by the inhabitants of this heroic capital, presented to the future generations a glorious memory of the virtues of its ancestors..."¹

The article constructed grand images of a city that had discovered its historical foundations and translated this self-awareness into a monument. According to the author, the edifice reified Cuban history through the monument's qualities of "permanence" and "solidity." The engaging Neo-Classical work being described, like others in early nineteenth-century Havana, represented an emerging pride of place and sense of local identity. Forms derived from Europe had begun to take on local meanings in Cuba.

The emergence of Neo-Classicism in Cuba, however, as well as Latin America more broadly, has not been understood as a production of local society. This visual and architectural vocabulary in the context of Latin America is often framed as the product of late eighteenth-century Bourbon reforms aimed at reordering and reorganizing the empire's New World colonies. In this case, scholars have treated Neo-Classicism in Latin American contexts as a colonial initiative of the Bourbon monarchy, operating through the administrative and pedagogical apparatus of institutions such as the Academy of San

¹ "La Isla de Cuba, fiel á sus principios y á sus deberes, ha dado en este día al orbe entero la última prueba de su lealtad acendrada y de su patriotismo nunca desmentido. El monumento gradioso que se presenta hoy á la espectacion pública, costeadó por los habitantes de esta heróica capital, presentará á las generaciones venideras un recuerdo glorioso de las virtudes de sus antepasados..." See *Diario de la Habana*, March 19, 1828, p. 1.

Carlos in Mexico City. Neo-Classicism has also been viewed as implicitly temporal, as a visual rupture with a preceding Baroque style. Examples of the deployment of Neo-Classicism by diverse groups in varied contexts across Latin America, however, indicate the complexities by which Neo-Classicism was appropriated for local purposes and took on local meanings. Case studies such as the one that this project explores on Havana, Cuba indicate that what is at issue, in fact, is an Americanization of Neo-Classicism. Local adaptations of Neo-Classicism by Latin American societies reveal what Stephen Slemon has observed as the simultaneity and contradiction inherent in the relations between a colonialist institutional mechanism and the textual fabric of representational space.² In other words, a colonizer's sets of meaning do not always determine the local significance of a language of colonization. More contemporary methodologies if applied to this question of local adaptation would consider questions of reception and polysemy, challenging earlier scholarly assumptions about Neo-Classical architecture and visuality in Latin America. This study aims to undo these pre-conceptions by focusing on the Cuban appropriations of Neo-Classical visual arts and architecture in the early nineteenth century.

In the so-called "Age of Revolution," Cuban elites observed as the United States was formed in 1776, the French revolted against absolutism in 1779, and the African slaves on a neighboring island sounded the death knell for the French sugar trade in 1791. In the late-eighteenth-century Caribbean, France witnessed the collapse of its dominance in the West Indian sugar trade when African slaves rose up and overturned the colonial social order on the island of Ste. Domingue, also known as Hispaniola (now Haiti and the

² Stephen Slemon, "The Scramble for Post-colonialism," Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, eds., *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 45-52.

Dominican Republic). Planters on the neighboring island of Cuba heard reports of the carnage and welcomed fleeing French sugar planters who had escaped the massacre and sought refuge in Cuba. These developments irreversibly altered the Atlantic world economy and presented Cuban elites with the opportunity to achieve dominance over the production of world sugar. As the industry developed in the nineteenth-century, the Cuban planter class would appropriate European Neo-Classicism to represent an emerging ideology of material progress.

In March 1828, *El Templete*, a small Neo-Classical commemorative monument consisting of a Greco-Roman temple façade attached to a small, rectangular cella, was inaugurated in the Plaza de Armas of Havana, Cuba. The small structure contained three academic history paintings executed by ex-patriot French artist, Juan Bautista Vermay, a student of Jacques-Louis David who had come to Havana in 1815 following Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo and the return of the Bourbon monarchy in France. On the east side of the plaza, the monument joined a legendary ceiba tree (several times replanted) that marked the site, according to local tradition, where the first mass and town council meeting had been held by the Spanish conquistadors in the sixteenth-century. The narrative content of the paintings reconstituted the symbolic content of the urban site in which the ensemble was placed. With remarkable clarity, the new Neo-Classical program gathered the existing associations of that location, lucidly articulated them through painting, and enshrined them within a Greco-Roman frame.

El Templete has been suggested by scholars of Cuban architectural history to be one of the first significant manifestations of Neo-Classicism in Cuba, a prototype of sorts to all subsequent architectural constructions in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. While

the history of the monument has appeared in works by noted scholars, such as Cuban architectural historian, Joaquín Weiss y Sánchez, a comprehensive study of how this European system of forms took on local meaning in Cuba, including the reception of the monument by colonial society is missing. The monument was not, in fact, the first Neo-Classical structure in Cuba, but having become a national symbol, it is remembered by many authors as such. The rise of Neo-Classicism in Cuba is a complex phenomenon, deeply woven into the tenuous political scene casting local elites both in cooperation with and opposition against the Spanish authorities. The story of patronage and artists alone reveals that Neo-Classicism came to the island through multiple sources, each of which contributed to its local significance. Indeed, architectural histories of Cuba, including more recent works, such as that of Rachel Carley, generally do not grasp the socio-political complexities out of which Neo-Classicism emerged on the island. French historian, Sabine Faivre D’Arcier, has recently published a book on Juan Bautista Vermay, which treats El Templete and the painted oeuvre of the artist against a background of Cuban intellectual developments and historical events. However, Faivre D’Arcier’s work stops short of fully contextualizing El Templete as a social object. This small, Neo-Classical shrine was an artistic ensemble (involving painting, sculpture, architecture, and urban space) in which Neo-Classical forms became profoundly Cuban, replete with icons and symbols directed at a wide spectrum of the local population. Investigating the reception of the work by colonial subjects based on social identity (race, social rank, gender, politics, etc.) becomes a crucial means for grounding Neo-Classicism in local society.

Several socio-spatial aspects emerge that anchored this building to place. El Templete, as well as the projects that preceded it, was thoroughly a product of Cuban colonial society and interpenetrated the local social spectrum at every level both semiotically (as sign systems) and phenomenologically (as objects in urban space experienced through time). The dynamic between Cuban Neo-Classical programs and the intricacies of a colonial urban space shaped the choices of patrons and designers, and determined, furthermore, the reception of monuments by the colonial population. Colonial urban space was a narrative, a daily enactment that transformed meaning, narrated by works of architecture and spatial arrangements, as well as by the presence and movements of colonial bodies. This space of urban experience was also part of a political fabric constituted in what Henri Lefebvre has called a “conceived space” occupied by individuals, such as civic planners, colonial administrators, elite societies, *letrados* (colonial scribes), architects, and powerful patrons.³ These entities implemented abstract structures, like Spanish imperial laws, geometrical city designs, official decrees, and codified social categorizations. Recognition of the tension that existed between this conceived space and actual lived experience is crucial to this study, which is concerned with a more inclusive interpretation of the function and reception of this iconic monument in colonial Havana.

The erection of El Templete represents power and politics, a deliberate appropriation of a symbolic site by various civic elites with divergent agendas. The monument created a space between the inner “subjective” realm of colonial individuals

³ See Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 1991), pp. 38-41; 261-2.

and groups, and the outer “objective” realm of socio-political reality.⁴ It was, as a Neo-Classical program, an attempt to define a new social vision, and complex in its intentionality. Neo-Classicism was embraced by colonial elites as a means of representing a more universal space amidst the contingencies and accidents of colonial society. The filtration of Enlightenment thought into Havana coincided with the reforms of the Spanish Bourbon monarchy in the late-eighteenth century and the development of the sugar industry in the early nineteenth-century. These abrupt transformations became associated with “progress,” suggesting a more linear conception of time, combined, in the minds of colonial elites, with the forms of Neo-Classicism. Universal visions, however, took on local significance, and projects like El Templete became an instrument of domination for both the Spanish authorities and the local elite.

Early nineteenth-century Cuban patrons and artists, influenced by the European Enlightenment, appropriated theories of art and architecture as conventional language from both French Neo-Classical and local sources. The work of Antoine-Chrysostome Quatremère de Quincy, Perpetual Secretary of the Académie des Beaux-Arts in Paris (1816-39), corresponded in time to these Cuban developments and epitomizes French Neo-Classical theory as it was formulated in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-centuries. Quatremère de Quincy articulated a theory of architecture as conventional language. Furthermore, the cultural elite of Havana appropriated French theory and culture as a response to their conceptions of international culture (e.g., their place in

⁴ Throughout, this project will study subject-object relationships as they relate to power. This inquiry owes much to Thomas Markus and his proposed methodologies for the study of architecture and power, including architecture’s capacity to “narrate” public spaces, which will become an important aspect of this argument. See Thomas Markus, *Buildings and Power: Freedom and Control in the Origin of Modern Building Types* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 1-25.

Euro-American modernity) and their knowledge of local socio-economic developments (including a sugar industry dependent on slavery and a heterogeneous population with varied allegiances and interests). In Cuban intellectual society, the scholar and liberal priest, Félix Varela, broke from the predominant Scholasticism (which emphasized the divine law underlying all things) to synthesize studies on empirical reasoning. Varela's works included studies of physical sciences and philosophical treatises that dealt with such issues as artificial and conventional languages and the imitation of Nature in the arts. Varela, a professor at Havana's Seminary of San Carlos, provided a powerful local articulation of Enlightenment ideas.

Neo-Classical forms became a means for the Spanish monarchy and Cuban colonial elites to construct an abstract realm of unity and perfection amidst social difference and heterogeneity. *Criollos*, or Creoles (Cuban-born individuals of Spanish descent), represent the central group in this study, a section of the American population whose sense of themselves as a coherent community escalated with the development of the sugar industry in early nineteenth-century Cuba. Creole sugar planters became socially wedged between Peninsulars (Spaniards born on the Iberian Peninsula), who dominated colonial politics and commerce at the apex of the social ladder. Beneath Peninsulars and Creole elites were the lower class Creoles, the *castas* (racially mixed individuals), and *morenos* or *negros* (phenotypically "black" individuals), who occupied the lowest echelons of the social hierarchy. Native Americans of the Taíno and Ciboney cultures were also found on the island, primarily living clandestinely in the mountains. The impulse of the Creole elite to generate a symbolic system to represent their collective identity was motivated by the interest in legitimating themselves in terms of modernity

(measuring themselves in a changing Atlantic world economy) and reinforcing their vision for the island's future population, which was complicated by the reality of slavery. El Templete, thus, played an important representational function for this social group by appropriating the city's sacred, symbolic heart and restructuring it. Likewise, the Spanish authorities who dominated systems of visibility on the island, seized the moment in 1828, amidst political turmoil, to contextualize this Creole work as a testament to Cuban loyalty to the Spanish Crown.

While exposing the conditions under which Neo-Classical ideas were actualized as Cuban expressions and considering the reception of these works from the perspective of the upper classes, this study also aims to study this formal idiom from the perspective of the social periphery and the marginalized. Taking into account a broader spectrum of interpretation and experience, this approach reveals the polysemic nature of colonial architecture and urban space. Architectural and visual works under investigation, especially El Templete, will be studied as an elite claim to the city itself and its memory in an attempt to assert cultural authority over the marginalized, and increasingly feared, lower classes. Elite fears of Africans and Afro-Cubans intensified after the Haitian Revolution, which began in 1791. However, colonial urban space existed as a multivalent text in which colonial subjects, of all classes, exercised some degree of social agency by (re)configuring the meaning of the city in their own ways. In an attempt to lend validity to their interpretations, the study will focus attention on the African and Afro-Cuban reception of El Templete based on their local religious complexes, synthesized in the context of slavery, as methods of cultural survival. The reception of El Templete will thus be studied from three divergent perspectives: Peninsular, Creole, and Afro-Cuban.

Dividing reception into these specific groups does not limit a member of a certain group to one reading; rather it fragments the potential interpretation of Neo-Classical monuments into at least three interpretive realms in order to emphasize the impact of social pluralism on reception.

Chapter One identifies and defines the dynamics of colonial urban space in Havana and the interrelationships between the lived and imagined aspects of the colonial city. The chapter provides background on the conquest and urbanization of Cuba, maps the history of the Plaza de Armas, interprets the plaza as narrative space, and notes the relationship between visual representation and identity in colonial Havana. By focusing on the temporal structure of colonial society, chapter one reveals the complexities by which colonial urban space in Havana was experienced and interpreted by the colonial population. These concise studies aim to establish a frame of reference for understanding the multiple meanings of the late eighteenth-and nineteenth-century rise of Neo-Classical forms as they relate to social identity.

Chapter Two explores the Cuban synthesis of the visual language of Neo-Classicism in Cuba and its relation to the major patrons; artists, architects, and engineers; and works that contributed to its development. Simultaneously, the chapter discusses local political, economic, and social developments contributing to an ideal of “progress,” associated with and sustained by Neo-Classical works. The major historical and political forces that shaped this epistemological shift are studied chronologically, and include the Bourbon monarchy and their eighteenth-century reforms, the rise of the sugar industry, and the establishment of the *Sociedad Económica de Amigos del País*, (The Economic Society of the Friends of the Country), a Cuban society chartered by the Creole planter

class to promote economic and cultural modernization. The influence of the work of Félix Varela is also considered, as well as the arrival of Bishop Espada (an educational force from the University of Salamanca in Spain). These political entities, cultural institutions, and powerful individuals were indispensable to the adaptation of Neo-Classical theory and the synthesis and implementation of a new visual idiom. This idiom was conceptualized as an object of aesthetic refinement, or “art,” and a conventional language. The chapter considers three case studies, including the Bourbon palaces and the reconstruction project for the Plaza de Armas, the Espada Cemetery, and the transformations of the Cathedral of Havana. The chapter also looks at how the Sociedad Económica chartered the Fine Arts Academy of San Alejandro in 1818, the second art academy to open in the Spanish Americas after the Academy of San Carlos in Mexico City in 1783. Bishop Espada was instrumental in obtaining a leader for this academy, Juan Bautista Vermy, Jacques-Louis David’s protégé, to create Neo-Classical frescoes for the cathedral sanctuary.

Chapter Three addresses how the political power players of Havana (including the Spanish authorities, the Sociedad Económica, and the bishop) merged concepts of visual language, “progress,” and abstractions of Cuban history with the real space of the Plaza de Armas in 1828 in the monument known as El Templete. Through a discussion of artists and patronage, and an analysis of its site and rich symbolic program, this chapter situates El Templete within this developing visual language of forms.

From a discussion on formal synthesis, the study shifts to the question of reception: how did different sectors of the colonial population generate meaning out of El Templete (and by consequence, of the visual language, in general)? What impact did factors such as an

individual's position within colonial society and temporal determinants, such as ritual and the structure of colonial social life, have on the monument's reception? Chapter Four considers these questions from the perspective of Peninsulars, who exerted considerable influence over El Templete's function and reception. Excerpts from the colonial press will be used to understand the Spanish mentality towards Cuba in 1828 and how the authorities attempted to shape the meaning of the monument and plaza through image, text, and performance.

Chapter Five considers the question of reception from the Creole point of view, taking into account the divisions between Creoles along lines of social rank and gender. While deeply identifying with many forms of Spanish culture and material life, Creoles began to think of themselves as Americans, as will be examined through analysis of the colonial press, El Templete, and the writings of leading Creole intellectuals. A growing elite Creole community, furthermore, sought images around which to formulate their difference from Spanish Peninsulars, which in turn shaped their reception of Cuban Neo-Classical works. The rising African and Afro-Cuban population on the island, a consequence of the sugar industry, forced the Creole elite into a position of dependence on the Spanish military, and spurred them to generate images reinforcing Creole dominance over the social forces beneath them.

This chapter also addresses African and Afro-Cuban reception of El Templete. African and Afro-Cuban interpretations of urban space were shaped, not only by pro- and anti-Spanish politics, but also by entire religious constructs outside the white population's systems of signification. Afro-Cuban *Santería* (a religion generated by transculturation and the collision of indigenous African beliefs with Catholicism in the sixteenth-century)

possessed complex symbolic systems and cultural landscapes of memory brought to Cuba from Africa and transformed into something profoundly Cuban. These beliefs even appear to have been gradually absorbed by elite whites. This religion will be studied to explore potential *santero/a* (a Santería priest/priestess) reception of El Templete.

Chapters four and five raise questions on points made in the first three chapters regarding art and architecture as language with the capacity to construct a legible text in urban space. The plaza became an essential narrational space in colonial Havana through which an abstract space of politics intersected with the actual space of civic life. The plaza's ability to communicate the city's purpose (to narrate) depended on the subject's ability to read a text in an intended way. By attempting to fragment a monument's meaning between three different receptions, this project negates certain assumptions that have plagued the study of Cuban architectural and urban history. The approach advocated in this study contends that to limit the full range of reception of Spanish colonial art and architecture is to deny colonial subjects' ability to invert and/or contest meaning. This approach aims to re-empower all colonial subjects to their place as generators and interpreters of visual culture, of urban space, and of the historical moment they inhabited.

CHAPTER ONE

SPACE, TIME, AND IDENTITY IN HAVANA'S "TRADITIONAL" URBAN LANDSCAPE

Conquest and Urbanization

When Christopher Columbus sailed past what is today the island of Cuba in 1492 and landed on Hispaniola (now the Dominican Republic and Haiti), the explorer believed he had found pristine islands in Asia, naming the insular territory “the Indies.” The foundational acts of naming and cataloging the unknown lands became a means by which Columbus and his successors attempted to (re)order their visual surroundings in a manner that was legible to a European perspective and worldview. The European impulse to restructure the American landscape corresponded to epistemological shifts that had been unfolding in Europe for over a century. The revival of interest in Greco-Roman antiquity in the European Renaissance became part of a new culture of “knowledge” that brought objects and subjects increasingly into a rationalized system. Michel Foucault has argued that signs began to perform signifying functions from within knowledge in this period, taking on a binary structure. The “enigmatic, open, and sacred area of signs” of medieval thought and knowledge developed into “a brief and concentrated kind of knowledge.”⁵

The fervor with which the Spanish began applying signs to the Americas in the fifteenth-

⁵ Foucault describes an epistemological space in which the relationship between “signifier” and “signified” (“sign” and “referent”) began to be consolidated into a binary system in the European sixteenth-century. The use of Foucault here neither suggests an abrupt rupture from medieval modes of thought nor that this process was completed by the end of the sixteenth- or seventeenth-centuries. Rather, the author articulates the initiation of epistemological transformations that would continue to grow and develop in the European and Euro-American spheres well beyond these centuries. See Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), pp. 46-71; specific quote from p. 60.

and sixteenth-centuries belongs to this impulse to order a new universe of things (perceived as a “New World”). A technique of knowledge production would become an instrument of colonization, and central to this process would be language, spoken and written.

The initial explorations and contact with the Native American inhabitants of the Caribbean led to the processing of Natives into knowable forms by the Europeans. Native customs, settlement patterns, and religions were documented by Spanish chroniclers and priests as both aids to Christian conversion and in developing colonial strategies for the conquering of space. The brief European and Native contact in the Caribbean was followed by a brutal conquest to claim the islands’ resources for Spain. Through conquest, Native cultural and linguistic structures were systematically transformed and eradicated. The crippling diseases, such as smallpox, brought by the conquerors wiped out large portions of the Caribbean’s Native population leaving few indigenous people to contribute to colonial social formation in this region of the Western Hemisphere. Of the few who survived the onslaught of diseases, most perished through overwork and brutality.

The Spanish invaded Cuba in 1511 from the island of Hispaniola after gold deposits were identified. The geography of Cuba, with its length of approximately 750 miles and width of 150 miles, forced the Spanish to explore and settle the island in a succession of waves (Figure 1). From the lofty mountains in the island’s east to the flat plains and river valleys of the west, the conquerors launched repeated attacks against groups of Taíno and Ciboney peoples. Columbus, who made contact with the Taíno on his second voyage in 1493, described the people and their ways of life. He noted villages



Figure 1. Map of Cuba

of up to fifty dwellings, “all very large and built of wood with thatched roofs. [The] houses were round and tent-shaped.”⁶ Taíno settlements could be found in the fertile uplands away from the coast, near fresh water sources. Villages typically contained between one thousand and two thousand inhabitants organized under the authority of a regional chief, or *cacique*. Houses, known as *bohíos*, consisted of conical palm-thatched huts, which housed multiple families. Villages were oriented around a rectangular space fronted by the house of the resident cacique. In addition to this Taíno presence, a surviving population of Ciboney could be found on the western end of the island. The Ciboney primarily lived in caves and had come to the island before the Taíno in two distinct migrations beginning in 1000 BCE.⁷

Although Native cultures in Cuba possessed languages, cultural structure, architecture, and town planning, the Spanish perceived these people as living in a state of disorder. Without sufficient clothing, an alphabetic writing system, stone architecture, or Christianity, the Spanish perceived the Natives of the Caribbean as barbaric, diabolical, and lacking history and culture. This misperception along with the Spanish desire for economic opportunities legitimated the conquest of the island in the minds of the Europeans. A spatial conquest was launched to pacify the Caribbean islands. Native political jurisdictions, ruled over by powerful caciques, were broken down through the reduction of lands to rational abstractions in the form of maps. Physical interventions, such as Spanish colonial urbanism, were combined with maps to reformulate spatial boundaries. By the time of the conquest of Cuba in 1511, the conquistadors possessed

⁶ See Louis A. Pérez, Jr. *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 18.

⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 16-18.

over a decade of experience in the pacification of the Caribbean. Christopher Columbus first settled the island of Hispaniola in 1492, when he left thirty-nine sailors behind and returned to Spain. Throughout the 1490's, Columbus and his brother, Bartolomé, would wrestle conceptually with the dimensions of Hispaniola, testing the advisability of placing settlements inland and on the shoreline, and attempting to quell Native resistance. As with southwestern port cities of Spain, the capital city of *Santo Domingo de Guzmán*, known initially as *La Nueva Isabella*, was founded at the mouth of what became the Ozama River by Bartolomé Columbus in 1496. By 1502, the city had been moved from the eastern to the western side of the river and had become an administrative center. The plan of Santo Domingo was based roughly on a grid design with a central ecclesiastical structure echoing European Renaissance concepts of the ideal city. Stone construction of streets, houses, religious buildings, and fortifications began under the direction of Nicolás de Ovando, a royal knight of Alcántara. As governor, Ovando became distributor of lands and director of architectural works. He established civic order through the intersecting spatial spheres of legal documents, architectural representation (such as orderly house facades), and urban planning (specifically straight, regular streets and plazas). As Tom Cummins and Joanne Rappaport have argued in their study of the northern Andean colonial city, the ideological structures that determined colonial social formations “manifested...simultaneously in a variety of domains, including alphabetic literacy, visual representation, architecture, and town planning.”⁸ By manipulation of these

⁸ Cummins and Rappaport study the relationship between visual and alphabetic literacy and their intimate connection to bodily practice. The “spatial order” of colonial society is conceived as a fluid matrix of relationships that can never be fixed or assigned a final signification. They argue that colonial social formation involved the social production and reconfiguration of “spatial genres,” demonstrating that the creation of spatial order in the colonial city was as a multidimensional phenomenon. See Thomas B.F. Cummins and Joanne Rappaport,

spatial genres, as the authors term them, Ovando was able to maintain control over the inhabitants of the colonial city. Ovando extended this urban order into the countryside, establishing land grants known as *encomienda*. Some Spanish conquerors became *encomenderos* (holders of encomiendas) with mansions in the city and allocated lands in the countryside, along with the Natives who occupied those lands as a slave labor force. Natives were also relegated to indigenous villages created by Spaniards where the villagers became an indentured labor force.⁹ The Spanish brought these techniques of authority, which resembled feudal forms from the Iberian Peninsula, with them to Cuba from Hispaniola in the early decades of the sixteenth century.

In 1511, Diego Velázquez de Cuéllar, a wealthy landowner from Hispaniola, led a force of three hundred Spaniards who landed on the eastern shores of Cuba. He was followed soon thereafter by a smaller group departing from Jamaica and led by Pánfilo de Narváez, whose expedition occupied the southern coast. The eastern regions of Cuba were quickly conquered using terror and massacre to subdue the encountered native populations and to quell resistance. Having conquered the eastern end of the island, Velázquez and Narváez split their forces into three groups and began advancing westward. Two groups sailed along the northern and southern coasts, while Narváez led a bloody march through the island's interior. The conquistador used violence as a tool of intimidation, evidenced by an unprovoked massacre at Caonao in northern Camagüey. After the successful pacification of the region, the group rendezvoused at Carenas Bay,

"The Reconfiguration of Civic and Sacred Spaces: Architecture, Image and Writing in the Colonial Northern Andes," *Latin American Literary Review* XXVI (52), 1998, pp. 174-200.

⁹ The system of *encomienda* was later replaced with *repartimiento*, another forced labor system that allowed Natives to live in their own towns while offering tribute and labor to local land owners. See Pérez (1988), p. 24.

the present site of the city of Havana, and from here, colonial urbanism was implemented and expanded as an effective way to consolidate and pacify the island.¹⁰

In creating urban environments, the Spanish co-opted some material culture and spatial practices of the Taíno, such as by adopting the palm-thatch methods of house construction. However, given that Taíno populations built with perishable materials and did not use stone, their urban settlements were either abandoned or destroyed. The new towns of Cuba were all founded on “pristine” sites (sites previously uninhabited by Native Americans) and built hastily by trial and error. However, town planning (the formal drafting of town plans) appeared increasingly as additional towns were established. These “representations of space,” as Henri Lefebvre has called them, existed within an order of signs embodied by a new European knowledge and the logic of conquest. The drawing of town plans belonged to the realm of the city planner (whether conquistador or ecclesiastical authority), who wielded abstractions (such as mathematical techniques, maps, and city plans) to create urban spaces. Cities were imagined first based on principles of regularity, before becoming physical realities. At this point, Lefebvre argues that the city became home to “representational spaces,” which produced their own meanings and logic as they were configured by urban inhabitants (or users of space).¹¹

Lefebvre’s more complex critique of the traditional separation between *urbs* (the physical fabric of cities) and *civitas* (the human element of cities) expands our appreciation of the

¹⁰ Ibid, pp. 25-27.

¹¹ Lefebvre defines “representations of space” as conceptualized space belonging to the space of city planners, scientists, and social engineers who “identify what is lived and what is perceived with what is conceived.” He defines “representational spaces” as space directly lived by ‘inhabitants’ and ‘users’ who are impacted by “images and symbols.” See Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1974), pp. 38-39.

interrelatedness of the urban fabric (buildings, urban spaces, etc.) and the social activities and human rhythms of urban inhabitants.

A useful methodology for understanding the relationships between the architecture and spaces of the city and subjective social formation is a consideration of the urban environment as a social text. Adapting the work of early twentieth-century linguistic theorists (such as Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Peirce) to more contemporary visual culture studies, the city, like the surface of the written page, could be considered a visual text populated by a multitude of signs. Although the binary nature of Saussure's theories has been largely abandoned by modern scholars, certain aspects of his work are still relevant. Saussure's linguistic theory was contingent on the *arbitrary nature of the sign*, the assumption that the meaning of the sign derived from a social agreement and collective training. If the city, like the book, is composed of many socially and culturally constructed signs, which are interpreted as ensembles, urban space could be said to belong to social language (and is therefore, a social text). At any particular moment, however, in the temporal structure of the city, the living subject who reads the urban environment interprets only some of its signs in combination. These conditions of urban semantics are, of course, complicated by such factors as bodily movement through space, temporal shifts in the city's human rhythms, and phenomenological interpretations of the city, such as *perceptions of place*. Considering the Caribbean colonial city as a social text requires an acknowledgement of the heterogeneous human element that negotiated and interpreted this text. A complex social spectrum led to a plurality of meanings in the colonial city.

Caribbean colonial cities became the products of both European-inspired models and the configurations of local society. José Rabasa speaks of the “invention” of the Americas rather than the “discovery.”¹² The meanings and logic of colonial cities were thus “invented” cultural constructions. However, the initial control that European conquerors and colonial administrators exercised over urban planning, writing, and legal mandates allowed them to maintain a framework of order. Conceptions of the Americas as a “blank slate” led to the European use of writing as a binding force in the colonization process. The transformative capacities of “writing,” of assigning a European signifier to objects and subjects previously unknown, allowed the European conquerors and colonial administrators to establish control over material possessions and the ideological structure of human settlements.

Spanish American urbanism grew from both practical and ideological models. The urban theory of Italian Renaissance figures, such as Leon Battista Alberti, addressed the problem of urban planning in ideological terms. The well-measured, geometrically conceived urban and architectural forms of Greco-Roman antiquity embodied the divine order of God’s universe and the heavenly city described in St. Augustine’s *City of God* (first published in 1467).¹³ The concept of “grid” planning emerged in concert with the epistemological shifts and changing aesthetic practices underway in Renaissance Europe.

¹² José Rabasa explores how the act of naming geographical features, flora, fauna, and indigenous inhabitants was a means by which the Spanish “invented” the Americas through the prism of an ongoing European development of knowledge. Here, Rabasa attempts to expand the European perception of the Americas as “Other” or as “absence of culture” to stress the transformative power of writing. This perception of the Americas as an empty field for European innovation is what Rabasa has called, “an integral condition of the Renaissance.” José Rabasa, *Inventing America: Spanish Historiography and the Formation of Eurocentrism* (Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), p. 42.

¹³ St. Augustine, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans*, translated by Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin Books, 2003).

“Fixing” objects and subjects in time and space according to mathematical formulas was the principle occupation of Renaissance painters after the invention of one-point linear perspective by Filippo Brunelleschi in early fifteenth-century Florence, Italy. The search for a totality, for an attempt to match every object and subject with an equivalent sign, shaping reality through language and knowledge generated a vision of the ideal city. The ideal city was entirely knowable and measurable, reflecting God’s ordering of the cosmos. According to Angel Rama, the potential for this model in the Spanish Colonial Americas spawned “utopian dreams.” Rational city plans held a vision of the future and signs could, “...be made to represent things as yet only imagined.”¹⁴ The ideal city possessed a new temporal structure: one oriented towards a utopian, but not yet realized future.

The tension between ideal city planning models and the social reality of colonial cities characterized the urban experience of the Spanish Americas. The civic authorities, through an emphasis on urban order, aimed to create and sustain a Christian community that was politically loyal and economically productive. The Iberian experience with building a city that would sustain such a community was circuitous at best. Consisting of irregular medieval city plans, the vast majority of Spanish towns reflected centuries of gradual developments by Islamic, Jewish, Christian, and other ethnically Iberian dwellers. As responses to both pragmatic and political impulses, regular city planning began to emerge in Iberia at the end of the fifteenth-century. In the final assault on the Islamic presence in southern Spain, the forces of Ferdinand and Isabella erected a temporary siege town to facilitate the efficient movement of troops. The town of Santa

¹⁴ Angel Rama, *The Lettered City* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), p. 13.

Fé, outside Granada, was erected in 1492 as a military fort and barracks, and likely based on Spanish knowledge of Roman colonial towns in Iberia and North Africa. Santa Fé was planned according to a rigorous military logic, ordering the activities and spatial locations of its inhabitants. This efficiency of bodily movement for military purposes, in the Spanish Colonial city, doubled as a mechanism of social and commercial regulation, where bodies could be easily located and in which commerce could easily flow.

Thirteenth-century bastides in Southern France also provided models for the pragmatic development of Spanish American cities, as noted by Robert Smith. Bastides were towns erected quickly, based on gridded plans, and intended to order their inhabitants on an expanding frontier. Therefore, the early Spanish Colonial cities in the Americas, such as Santo Domingo, owe something to both the Spanish military experience in Iberia and ideal city planning generated in fifteenth-and sixteenth-century Italy.¹⁵

The military nature of the Spanish conquest combined with the culture of ideal city planning to produce major Caribbean fortress cities, such as Santo Domingo, San Juan (Puerto Rico), and Havana, whose plans loosely approximated a grid and functioned as defensive strongholds. The early towns of Cuba reveal this roughly conceived grid accompanied by a central plaza for ritualized military functions. To consolidate the pacification of Cuba and create regional centers for economic development, the Spanish established seven *villas* between 1512 and 1515, of which San Cristobal de la Habana (1514) and Santiago de Cuba (1515) were the two most important. Santiago de Cuba served as the island's capital until the honor was bestowed on Havana in 1607. These two

¹⁵ See Robert C. Smith, "Colonial Towns of Spanish and Portuguese America," *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* (Vol. 14, No. 4, Town Planning Issue, Dec. 1955), pp. 3-12, and Dan Stanislawski, "Early Spanish Town Planning in the New World," *Geographical Review* (Vol. 37, No. 1, Jan., 1947), pp. 94-105.

towns, at opposite ends of the island (Havana in the west and Santiago in the east), became loci of colonial administration and developed their own distinct colonial cultures. As towns, they served as material junctures through which lands were distributed to incoming settlers. Towns were flanked by peripheral town lands, which were situated between sections of land reserved for common use. Beyond this common pasturage were grants of land, known as *mercedes*, distributed to settlers as farms and ranches.¹⁶ City centers, focused on central plazas, became the nucleus of this radiating structure. The plaza became symbolically evocative of spatial order and thus became a model for the organized land distribution beyond the city walls.

In the Spanish Colonial Caribbean, incoming colonists of higher social status preferred to live in the cities. Rama notes an important distinction between the development of European and American urban centers: whereas in Europe, agrarian growth led to the rise of urban trade centers, in the Americas, the city preceded rural development. Consequently, incoming settlers aspired to be wealthy urban dwellers, to become *hidalgos* (lesser nobility), and to shun manual labor. A wealthy urban resident exerted more influence than country people over land allocation and had higher social status and political agency. In the early towns of Cuba, the *cabildos* (town councils) assumed the power, initially held by Governor Diego Velázquez, to allocate land grants. Cabildos, composed primarily of local property owners, gave the town relative freedom to distribute lands to incoming settlers. Acquisition of property became increasingly competitive and based on social status as small land parcels, known as *peonías*, were

¹⁶ Duvon C. Corbitt, "Mercedes and Realengos: A Survey of the Public Land System in Cuba," *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, (Vol. 19, No. 3, August, 1939), pp. 262-263.

distributed to peasant farmers, while grand *caballerías* were awarded to esteemed gentlemen, or *caballeros*.¹⁷

The first generation of large land holders in Cuba was likely drawn from either the original conquerors of the island or elites who came in after the pacification. Early Cuban colonial town societies were composed of a two-part class structure. Laborers and peasant farmers, drawn from Spain and the Canary Islands comprised the lower sector of the population. The aristocracy was generally composed of Spanish *hidalgos*, members of the Spanish lesser nobility from the regions of New Castile and Extremadura.¹⁸ Anthony Pagden's analysis of identity formation in Spanish America suggests the restless energies of this class of *hidalgos*, as impetus for involvement in the conquest. Pagden theorizes that the "fluid social environment" of the American colonies was attractive to ambitious conquistadors whose access to noble status had been trampled during the consolidation of Spain under Ferdinand and Isabella in 1492. Therefore, conquistadors and early settlers possessed a certain degree of political self-awareness, spurring them to establish a feudal landed society and fostering, among some, a socio-cultural attachment to the conquered land. Pagden argues that for the conquistadors, in general, "participation in the conquest conferred a legitimate right to independent political action" and they perceived themselves as a landed aristocracy.¹⁹ This model of identity formation in Spanish America suggests an early identification with the land that was passed on to subsequent

¹⁷ Rachel Carley and Andrea Brizzi, *Cuba: Four Hundred Years of Architectural Heritage* (New York: Whitney Library of Design, 1997), p. 53.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Anthony Pagden, "Identity Formation in Spanish America," from Nicolas Canny and Anthony Pagden, eds., *Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World, 1500-1800* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), pp. 60-61.

generations. As these generations became more self-aware, they increasingly viewed themselves as belonging to American societies, which would ultimately challenge the Spanish imperialism under which they possessed limited political rights and commercial opportunities.

As the first generation of settlers passed into the next, individuals of European descent born in Cuba, or *criollos* (Creoles), would be classified differently from Spanish *peninsulares* (or Peninsulars), individuals born on the Iberian Peninsula. This difference in categorization would have major socio-political ramifications that would persist throughout the colonial period. Peninsulars dominated political offices in the colonial administration. The Spanish Crown levied heavy taxes on local Creole producers and limited their trade opportunities under a system of strict Spanish mercantilism until the nineteenth-century. Such restrictions would undercut Creole pride and dignity and forge a distinctive Creole identity manifested in a growing variety of cultural expressions. Political and economic pressure exerted by Spanish Peninsulars would help to forge a strong Creole culture in Cuba that manifested itself, in part, through visual culture.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Cuba, Creoles held tightly to the agency that they possessed by occupying seats on the *cabildo* as wealthy property owners. The *cabildo*'s inextricable relationship to the town fostered a deep sense of civic loyalty and identification among Creoles in Cuba. The town became the central nexus of Creole politics and power, and wealthy land owners would almost always possess at least one residence in town as a form of socio-political representation. Pagden asserts that in the sixteenth century, "[Creole] culture drew its coherence and appeal from an attachment

to the land.”²⁰ But, upon this land, it was in the town where Creole land owners found the agency to distribute property and to shape material life. In 1728, with the ascension of the Bourbon monarchy, the cabildo’s power to distribute public lands in Cuba would be abolished, undercutting an essential form of Creole political power. Such measures would exacerbate extant tensions among wealthy Creoles in Cuba towards Spanish imperial policies.

The Plaza as Narrative Space

The plaza was a centralized space situated in the center of a Spanish American town, which became the socio-political heart of the community. As many colonial towns took the form of grid plans in the sixteenth-century, plazas frequently defined the nucleus of these grid formations with streets extending outward on all sides. Such Spanish Colonial urban practices took official form in the Laws of the Indies issued by King Phillip II in 1573.²¹ However, towns were responsive to enigmatic features of natural topography, and in an attempt to utilize natural elements, such as rivers, valleys, inlets, and bays, plazas within the colonial urban grid could take on decentralized arrangements. Such was the case with Havana, Cuba, where the large bay of Carenas, accessible only from a small inlet from the Straights of Florida, necessitated the establishment of the plaza directly

²⁰ Ibid, p. 58.

²¹ The Laws, based heavily on Vitruvius, called for a rectangular space in a ratio of 3:2 (length:width) to be surrounded by the major church, house of government, and portals to be used for market and other civic functions. See Dora P. Crouch and Daniel J. Garr, and Axel I. Mundigo, *Spanish City Planning in North America* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1982).

adjacent to the inlet thus preventing streets on its east side. An anonymous sixteenth-century drawing records this spatial arrangement (Figure 2).

The foundation of towns was a fundamental strategy employed by the Spanish in “civilizing” the Americas, according to European expectations and social mores. Within those towns, architectural representations and spatial arrangements contributed to the normalization of social life, assuaging the anxieties of incoming colonists and reassuring them that they had landed in a “civilized” place. The physical environment of the colonial town (the *urbs*) was thus embedded with architectural and spatial codes for order, power, and civic tranquility. Straight cornice lines, regular bays, and rhythmic colonnades established a sense of psychological calm.

As representational spaces, plazas were points of contact between bodily practices and architectural signs and images. The colonial urban population engaged the plaza and its various objects through ritualized activities. The plaza, depending on its functions, would be enclosed by architectural representations of civic and/or religious institutions, domestic structures, and would house such objects as sculpture, various kinds of images, and ephemera. Objects in the plaza were activated by civic and religious rituals, such as processions for a number of religious holidays, rites of investiture of colonial officials, and funerary rites. These more formal occasions punctuated the city’s mundane rhythms at regular intervals to reify social hierarchy and political authority. Individuals in the plaza interpreted its signs in ever-fluctuating combinations depending on this shifting spatio-temporal order in the colonial city. In this way, plazas became narrational spaces, locations where ritualized activities shaped public perceptions of social order.

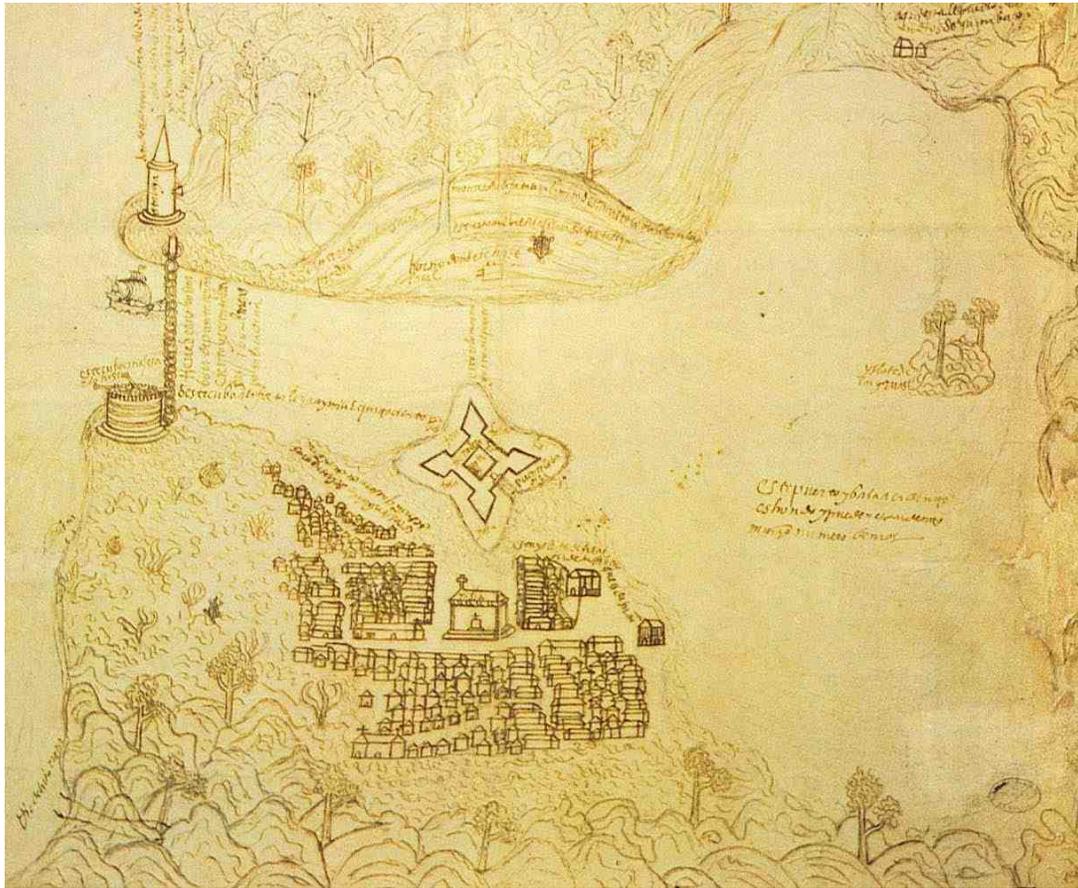


Figure 2. Anonymous, *City and Bay of Havana*, 16th Century, General Archives of the Indies, Seville, Spain

The central plaza of Havana developed quickly after the establishment of the city. The Spanish first attempted to settle San Cristobal de Habana (Havana) on Cuba's southern coast in 1514. The city was moved in 1519 when the Spanish deduced the strategic advantages of the deep water harbor at the so-named "Bay of Carenas". The site consisted of several rivers draining into a large bay that emptied into the Straights of Florida via a relatively long stretch of water. This waterway could be defended by establishing a town on its west side, next to the harbor. The earliest records reveal the central plaza of Havana, the *Plaza de Armas*, situated directly adjacent to the inlet with the city extending outward from its south, west, and northwestern sides. The Spanish conquerors adapted Havana's plan to a particular geography, which did not reflect the pure Albertian concept situating the church in a central public space. By gauging Havana's urban configuration in the eighteenth-century, the early plan was based on an approximation of the grid design with some nonconformist streets and public spaces. Roberto Segre suggests that the early city extended from the Plaza de Armas which he documents in reconstruction drawings indicating the likely placement of buildings (Figure 3). Havana's central plaza housed the major parochial church of the city on the south side of the space with the apse facing east.²² A fortress known as the Castillo de la Real Fuerza, based on contemporary Renaissance fortification theory, stood guard between the plaza and the water.²³ French rivals and corsairs plagued Cuba throughout

²² Roberto Segre, *La Plaza de Armas de la Habana: Sinfonia urbana inconclusa* (Habana: Editorial Arte y Literatura, 1995), p. 27.

²³ Sixteenth-century fortification theorists in Europe responded to the realities of artillery by creating structures with low, battered walls, constructed according to geometric plans, and often sunken into trenches or moats. These buildings were increasingly angular and more consciously oriented to the line of potential attack to reduce the risk of a direct hit by cannonball against the masonry walls. Two excellent sources on the development of Italian Renaissance

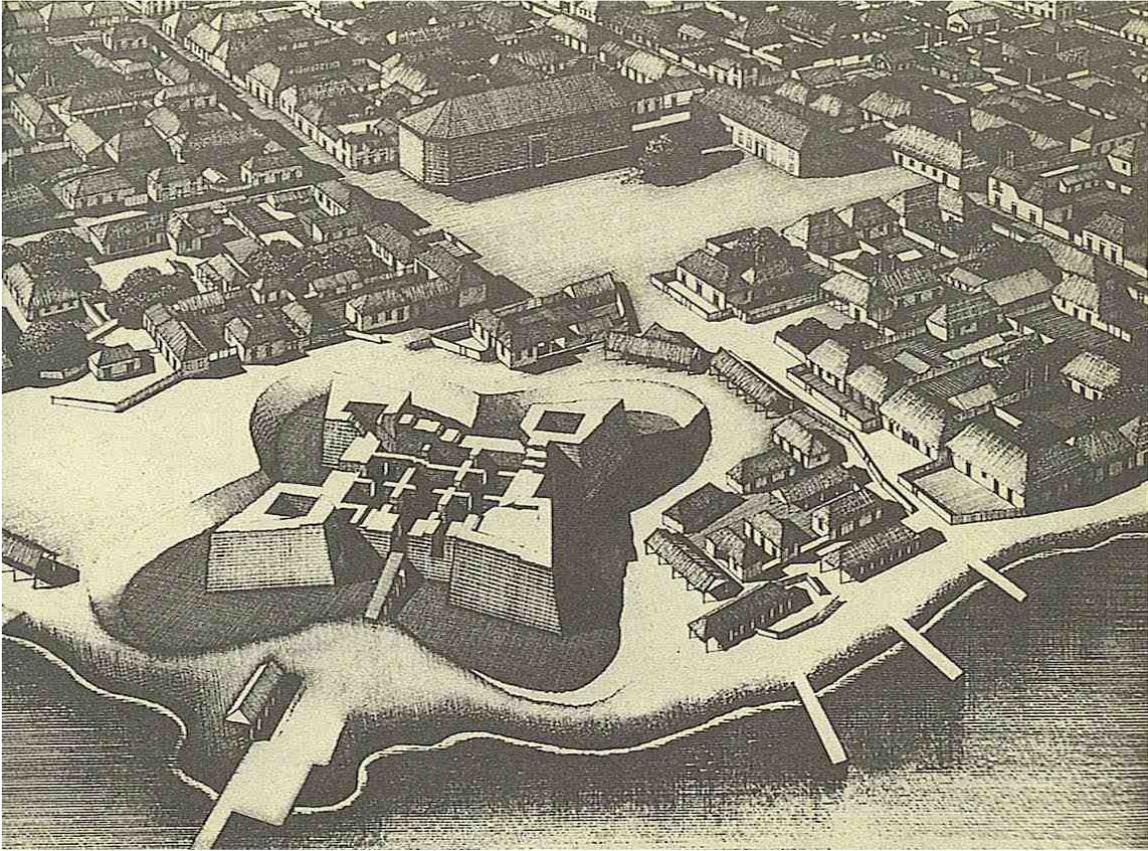


Figure 3. Roberto Segre, Reconstruction Drawing of the Plaza de Armas in c. 1570-74

fortification theory are Michael S.A. Dechert, "The Military Architecture of Francesco di Giorgio in Southern Italy," *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol. 49, No. 2 (June, 1990), pp. 161-180 and William E. Wallace, " 'Dal disegno allo spazio': Michelangelo's Drawings for the Fortifications of Florence," *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol. 46, No. 2 (June, 1987), pp. 119-134.

the sixteenth-and seventeenth-centuries. In 1555, a French naval force led by Jacques de Sores attacked Havana and nearly destroyed the city.²⁴ Attacks on the city from land and sea motivated the Crown to repeatedly evaluate the city's defensive position and to order the construction of fortifications guarding vulnerable points in the city's defenses.

Spanish maritime traffic came under increased threat from rival European powers, thus trans-Atlantic shipping had to be guarded by armed convoy. The Spanish created the *flota* system, after the 1560's, condensing this traffic into two annual fleets, which departed from Vera Cruz (in New Spain or modern Mexico) and Nombre de Dios (in modern Panama). These flotas would sail through the Yucatán Channel and Florida Straights, arriving at Havana, the last stop before crossing the Atlantic in ships weighed down with gold and silver. The sheltered harbor at Havana supplied refuge to the annual flotas so that final preparations could be made before the trans-Atlantic crossing.²⁵ Havana assumed an important status in the Spanish American empire from the mid-sixteenth century onward. The city's purpose became one of military support: to safe-guard the Caribbean shipping lanes and provide refuge for the annual flotas.

The early Plaza de Armas was enclosed by the fortress, the Church, and houses of colonial settlers, which consisted of *bohíos*. The Spanish authorities and the Church seem to have shared the space for ritual and practical uses. As the Spanish considered Havana a military outpost, the Plaza de Armas, as the name "Arms Square" implies, was frequently used for military drilling necessary to prepare the troops and the population in case the city came under siege. Public performances namely by both Church and State

²⁴ Pérez (1988), pp. 34-35.

²⁵ Ibid, pp. 35-37.

appropriated the plaza to actualize their role in ordering the city and shaped the collective memory of place in the plaza. The public memory and the phenomenological experience of being in touch with past actions and events modified the reading of objects in plaza space.

By 1586, the configuration of the Plaza de Armas had changed. Segre provides another reconstruction drawing of the plaza's new orientation (Figure 4).²⁶ Houses on the east side were demolished, extending the space to the east. The lateral entrance to the parish church was enclosed by an atrial forecourt. The buildings and sheds surrounding the Castillo were also eliminated and the Castillo itself had been completed. The building became the residence of the *captains general* (the senior colonial official on the island and representative of royal Hapsburg authority) in 1577, making it the embodiment of the State. Segre asserts that the Castillo became the first symbol of the city and its cylindrical tower was crowned by an emblem of Havana, known as La Giraldilla, sculpted by Jerónimo Martín Pinzón in 1633. Civic and religious rituals in the Plaza de Armas now possessed architectural backdrops, the meanings of which were continually reshaped by ritual proceedings.

In his reconstruction drawing of the plaza in 1586, Segre notes an element that would become woven into the central myth of the city's history. On the east side of the space, Segre shows a tree where the legendary ceiba tree of Havana has been standing since the eighteenth-century (the tree has been replanted at least four times). Segre admits doubt, however, that the tree actually existed in the sixteenth-century. Indeed, the mythology of the ceiba tree emerged in print in eighteenth-century historical discourse. The story claimed that underneath the shadow of a leafy ceiba tree, the first Christian

²⁶ Segre (1995), p. 29.

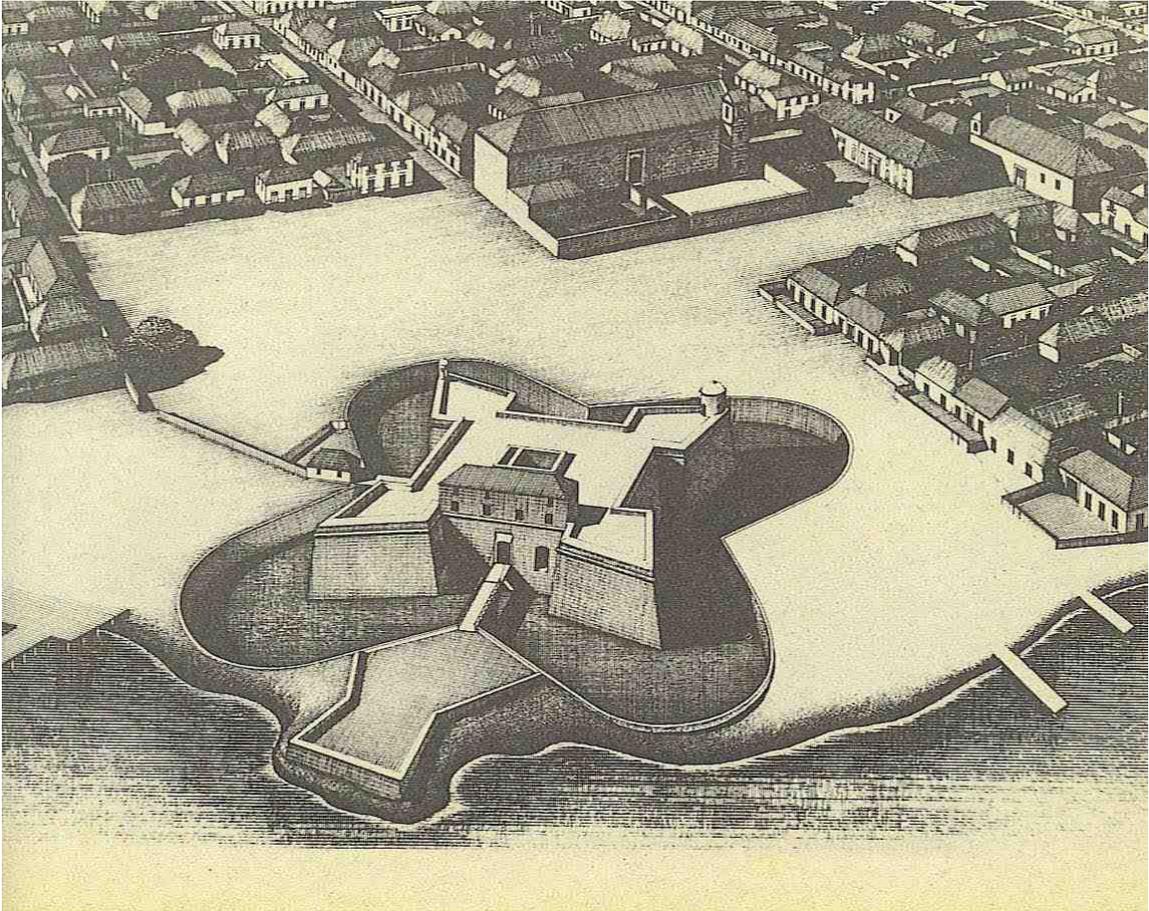


Figure 4. Roberto Segre, Reconstruction Drawing of the Plaza de Armas in c. 1586

mass and the first meeting of the cabildo (town/city council) were held in 1519. The ceiba tree, an element of local American fauna, thus took on social and political significance for local society. Eighteenth-century Cuban historians began to equate the ceiba tree with the city itself, inscribing it with cultural meaning. Yet, was this tree really a part of the urban plan from the beginning and, if so, what was its original meaning? How has its meaning changed through time and has it always been associated with the city itself? As its significance evolved, what did it mean to various audiences in Havana's diverse population through time? How was the ceiba tree appropriated by local elites to carry meaning in urban space?

The background to the Spanish appropriation of ceiba trees in the Americas is fragmentary. Ceiba trees, tropical silk cotton trees that grow abundantly in Cuba and Central America, possessed intense sacredness to many Native American groups that the Spanish encountered during the early conquest. The Maya of the Yucatán held the ceiba to be a cosmic world axis that connected different planes of reality. Natives in the Mayan lowlands often incorporated ceiba trees in central places in their towns. Historical evidence suggests that in certain instances, the Spanish appropriated the cosmic associations of the ceiba tree as an act of cultural authority. Bernal Díaz del Castillo, the chronicler who followed Hernán Cortés in his conquest of Mexico, recounts in *The Conquest of New Spain* how Cortés took possession of the lands around Champoton:

Then Cortés took possession of that land for the King, performing the act in His Majesty's name. He did it in this way: he drew his sword, and, as a sign of possession, *made three cuts in a large silk-cotton tree which stood in that great courtyard*, and cried that if any person should raise an objection he would defend the King's right with his sword and his shield, which he held in his other hand.²⁷

²⁷ J.M. Cohen, trans, Bernal Díaz del Castillo, *The Conquest of New Spain* (London: Penguin Books, 1963), p. 71.

This act of physically marking the ceiba tree, which stood in the central public space of the Native town, was a means of expressing and reinforcing a succession in power structures. In claiming the tree, Cortés claimed the town and the surrounding lands, and subjugated them to the King's authority. The cultural geographer, Kit Anderson, has studied the relationship between contemporary Mayan peoples and ceiba trees in urban environments and cultural landscapes. Anderson notes that in choosing locations for forced resettlement in the sixteenth-century, the Spanish often sought out sites with large ceiba trees.²⁸ The historian, Polonsky Celcer, claims that Charles V, the Hapsburg Emperor, encouraged the appropriation of ceibas in Spanish planning:

The ceiba appears in our history as founder of towns; under the spell of its branches the people gathered and its extensive shade opens the limits of the public plazas; one could say it is the first building, the center of the community, and for that reason, Carlos V dictated a decree that towns should be founded around a ceiba, knowing that it gathered people and traditionally protected the markets.²⁹

In spite of fascinating connections that can be made between Spanish colonial urban practices and Mayan cosmology as they relate to ceiba trees, no equivalent scholarship has been done on the significance of ceiba trees for the Taíno and Ciboney of the Caribbean. However, we know that the ceiba has grown profusely throughout Cuba for millennia, and it is probable, as the largest species of tropical tree in Cuba that ceibas took on some form of sacred and social significance for island Natives. Did the Spanish appropriate a pre-conquest Taíno and/or Ciboney sacred form in colonial urban space to reinforce Spanish power over Native groups? According to Bernal Díaz, Diego

²⁸ Kit Anderson, *Nature, Culture, and Big Old Trees: Live Oaks and Ceibas in the Landscapes of Louisiana and Guatemala* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), p. 105.

²⁹ Enrique Polonsky Celcer, ed. *Monografía Antología del Árbol* (Guatemala: Centro Editorial "Jose de Pineda Ibarra," 1962), quoted in Anderson, p. 106.

Velázquez was an important supplier of Native slaves, which by 1519, still constituted a significant work force in Cuba.³⁰ Did the conquistador recognize something integral and sacrosanct about the ceiba tree still extant in the memory of Cuba's Native population? If so, did the conquistador choose to deliberately plant a ceiba in the Plaza de Armas during the founding of Havana to take possession of these sacred associations? Such a question is extremely difficult to answer for a variety of reasons. A comprehensive study on ceibas and Spanish planning in the Americas is yet to be attempted.

The earliest visual evidence of the ceiba in Havana's urban history comes from a drawing of the Plaza de Armas from 1691 by Síscara (Figure 5). The image is oriented to the compass with the Castillo framing the plaza on the north side, diagonally across from the "Iglesia mayor." Ecclesiastical and administrative buildings extend southward away from the church. The scheme indicates a less rectangular plaza space and not conforming to the Laws of the Indies.³¹ A set of urban planning strategies codified in the 1570's under Phillip II, the Laws of the Indies mandated appropriate site conditions as well as spatial and architectural layouts for Spanish Colonial towns. Based on the work of the Roman architect, Vitruvius, the Laws specified that a rectangular public space, or plaza, surrounded by portals (loggias), should be located in the center of a colonial town.³²

Síscara's drawing reveals the author's attempt to represent the basic physical facts of this

³⁰ Bernal Díaz del Castillo, pp. 15-26.

³¹ Havana's Plaza de Armas adopted the functions of the market only temporarily, and according to Segre, in 1559, the cabildo created a new plaza, La Plaza Nueva, several blocks from the Plaza de Armas, to house market functions. Furthermore, the Plaza de Armas had no portals surrounding the space, as specified by the Laws of the Indies. Síscara's image reveals that in 1691, Havana's Plaza de Armas was a space determined by Havana's unique physical geography in relationship to the harbor and the utilitarian, military role played by the city. Segre, p. 24.

³² Crouch (1982), pp. 1-15.

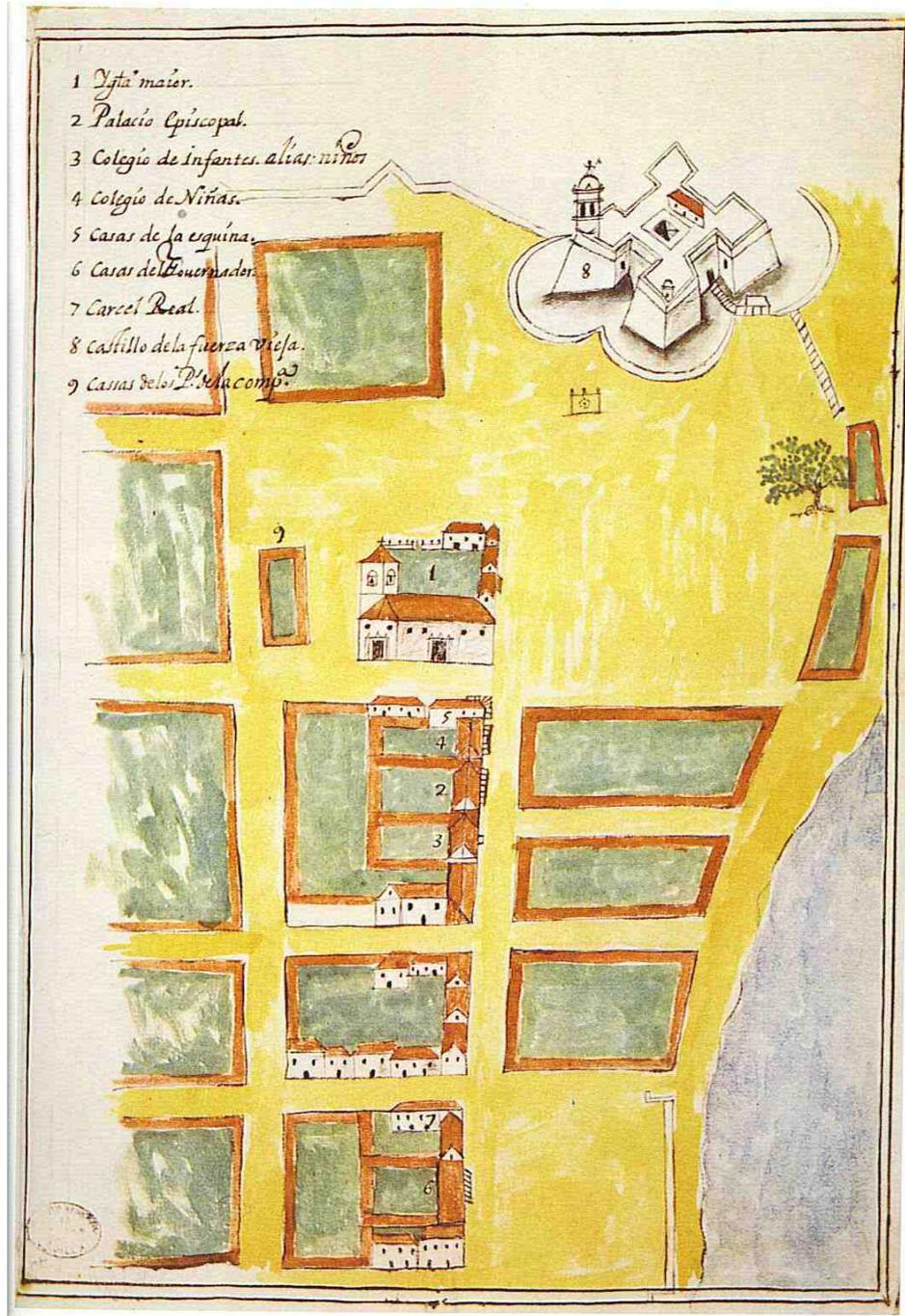


Figure 5. Siscara, Plaza de Armas and Environs, 1691, General Archives of the Indies, Seville, Spain

section of Havana's urban grid. He provides a key to identify specific buildings. The lone tree on the east side of the plaza occupies the site where the ceiba of Havana stands today, along with the sculptural and architectural monuments erected to honor it in the eighteenth-and nineteenth-centuries. The image thus represents a growing discourse on Havana's origins as they related to the plaza and the ceiba tree, and an attempt to graphically connect this consciousness of civic genesis to a particular site. Understanding how the tree became a representational object, requires more consideration of the urban spaces, forms, and functions in colonial Havana.

By the eighteenth century, Havana's city plan consisted of a walled grid of streets and public spaces stretching one mile north to south and half a mile east to west (Figure 6). Having been placed in its physical location because of the harbor, the city grew outward from the Plaza de Armas and was divided into northern and southern political jurisdictions, or *cuarteles*. The northern jurisdiction was *Cuartel de la Punta*, and the southern was known as *Campeche*, named for the *mestizos* and *indios* (Indians) who lived in this part of the city in the sixteenth century. Ecclesiastically, the city was divided into four quadrants: *Parroquia (Parish) Santo Angel del Custodio* in the city's northwest, *Parroquia Santo Cristo del Buen Viaje* in the west, *Parroquia Espíritu Santo* in the south, and the *Parroquia Mayor*, in the northeastern area alongside the inlet to the bay. Established in the sixteenth century, the *Parroquia Mayor* (Main Parish) was the city's oldest and most affluent parish. The wealthiest families occupied houses sited near its four principle public squares. On the contrary, the *Parroquia Espíritu Santo* was the



Figure 6. Plan of Havana, late 18th-century

city's poorest parish and housed several monasteries that tended to the inhabitants living in tight conditions.³³

Havana possessed five major public plazas by the end of the eighteenth century: Plaza de Armas, Plaza Nueva, Plaza de la Catedral, Plaza San Francisco, and Plaza de Cristo, along with over a dozen smaller public spaces, known as *plazuelas*. All but the Plaza de Cristo were found in the Parroquia Mayor, attesting to the parish's elevated status. Private houses were found on the Plaza de Armas from the beginning of the colony, and many had come and gone as the space was transformed through time. The second plaza developed in Havana's urban history was the Plaza Nueva (today referred to as the Plaza Vieja). According to historian Fernández Santalices, the Havana cabildo (town council) commenced the project for a "new" plaza in 1584. Work proceeded slowly, as in 1590, nothing had been built, and by the early seventeenth century, the area had become a small lake. Gradually, large houses were constructed after 1620, and by the end of the century, building licenses had been issued for general construction as well as the addition of *portals*. By the late eighteenth century, the Plaza Nueva was surrounded on all four sides by two-story urban mansions.³⁴ This configuration conformed more closely to the Laws of the Indies of 1573 than its neighbor, the Plaza de Armas, in its adherence to the 3:2 (width to length) ratio of the space and its enclosure with buildings.

Houses flanked the Plaza Nueva on its four sides and were the property of the wealthier residents of Havana. Architectural historian Joaquín Weiss called the Plaza Nueva:

³³ Sherry Johnson, *The Social Transformation of Eighteenth-Century Cuba* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2001), pp. 24-40.

³⁴ Manuel Fernández-Santalices, *Las calles de la Habana intramuros: arte, historia y tradiciones en las calles y plazas de la Habana Vieja* (Miami: Saeta Ediciones, 1985), p.100-125.

...an important field of experimentation for Creole domestic architecture...it is evident here that the “two-story” house type reached its full development with wooden balconies and tile roofs, introduced in the last decades of the seventeenth century and maintained until the advent of the house of flat terraced roof at the end of the eighteenth century.³⁵

The presence of opulent houses, many owned by Creole families, defined the plaza’s spatial boundaries and framed diverse activities in the space with reminders of the affluence of the city’s upper social ranks. By 1836, the *Mercado de Cristina* (one of the city’s principle markets) was installed in the Plaza Nueva. An aquatint by the French printmaker Hippolyte Garneray shows the market sheds on three sides of the space surrounding a central fountain (Figure 7). The presence of the market transformed the plaza into a space of rich social interactions between the users of the market and elite spectators, many of whom only observed market activities from their wooden balconies. These balconies, known as *balcones de madera*, became performative platforms upon which elite house owners could physically embody their elevated social status by making appearances from an elevated position. While serving as spatial boundaries tied to the city’s social structure, such spatial separations between elite and commoner still allowed for cultural exchange through time. Market space was socio-culturally complex with myriad individuals from different social ranks interacting around the buying and selling of goods. These social spaces, in their entirety (including market sheds and activities, human bodies, and elite Creole houses) produced a spatial language. The temporal structure of market functions ordered the human rhythms of the plaza. Henri Lefebvre makes important points about spatio-temporal order in pointing out that while “space is known only in and through time...time is known and actualized in space, becoming a

³⁵ Ibid, p. 149.

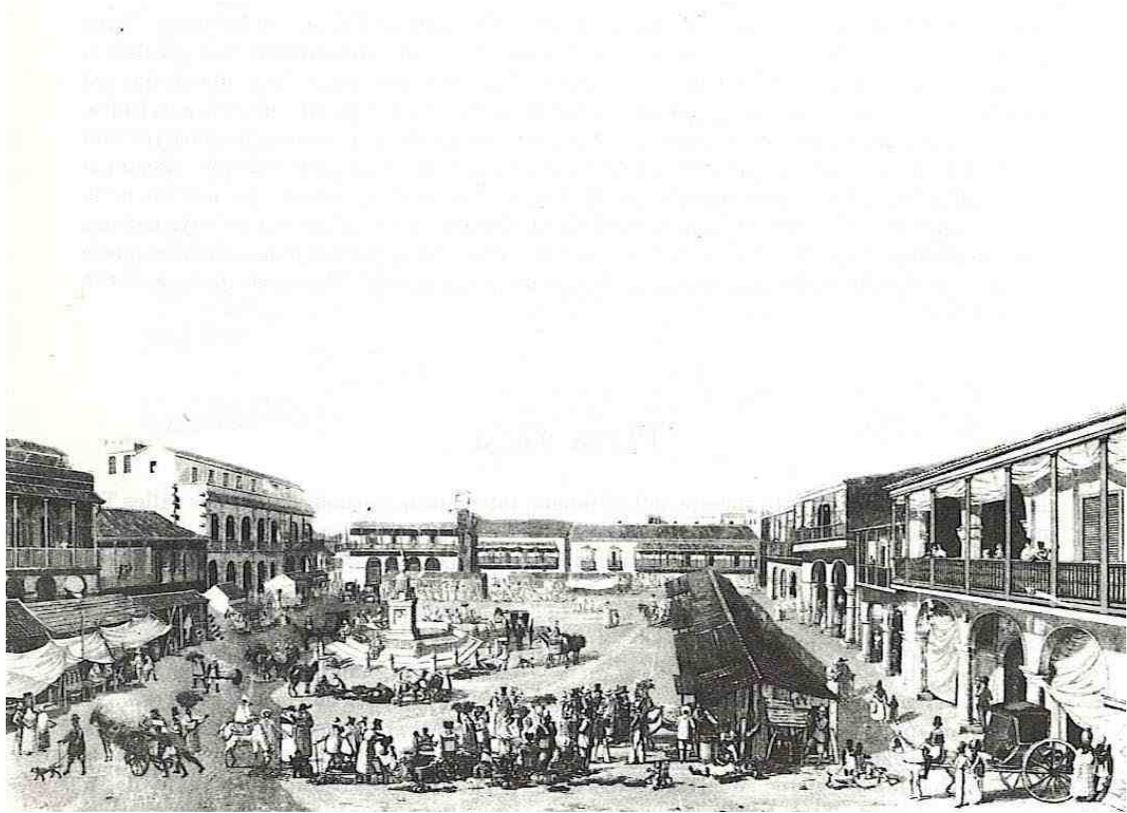


Figure 7. Hippolyte Garneray, *The Plaza Nueva*, mid-nineteenth century, aquatint

social reality by virtue of a spatial practice.”³⁶ Daily market activities actualized the city’s ideological structure by providing a setting for the performance of social hierarchy. Yet, in spite of physical and psychological barriers, the plaza offered a space for cultural exchange and shared time which produced a sense of community amongst disparate individuals and groups in colonial society.³⁷

The Plaza de San Francisco developed in the seventeenth century on land three blocks south of the Plaza de Armas facing Havana’s harbor (Figure 8). By 1628, *las casas de cabildo* (town council chambers) were established along a roughly rectangular space.³⁸ The south side of this space was defined by the lateral façade of the Convent Church of San Francisco, a monastery dating to 1574.³⁹ Fernández Santalices suggests that the plaza was created, “...because it was useful, and because there the armadas prepared barrells, for armadas and flotas.”⁴⁰ The Plaza de San Francisco, in addition to serving as a stage for religious ceremonies associated with the convent church, served utilitarian purposes related to the functions of the harbor.

The eighteenth-century development of the Plaza de Cristo corresponded to the creation of an *ermita* (a small devotional church) for the extreme westward side of Havana’s intramuros (Figure 9). The diminutive building was called *Iglesia del Santo Cristo del Buen Viaje* (Church of the Holy Christ of Good Voyage), and the plaza was

³⁶ Lefebvre (1974), p. 245.

³⁷ John Brinkerhoff Jackson, *A Sense of Place, a Sense of Time* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), p. 40-60.

³⁸ Fernández-Santalices (1985), pp. 80-100.

³⁹ Martha de Castro, “Plazas y Paseos de la Havana Colonial,” in Felipe J. Préstamo y Hernández, *Cuba: Arquitectura y Urbanismo* (Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1995), p. 322.

⁴⁰ Fernández Santalices (1985), pp. 75-100.

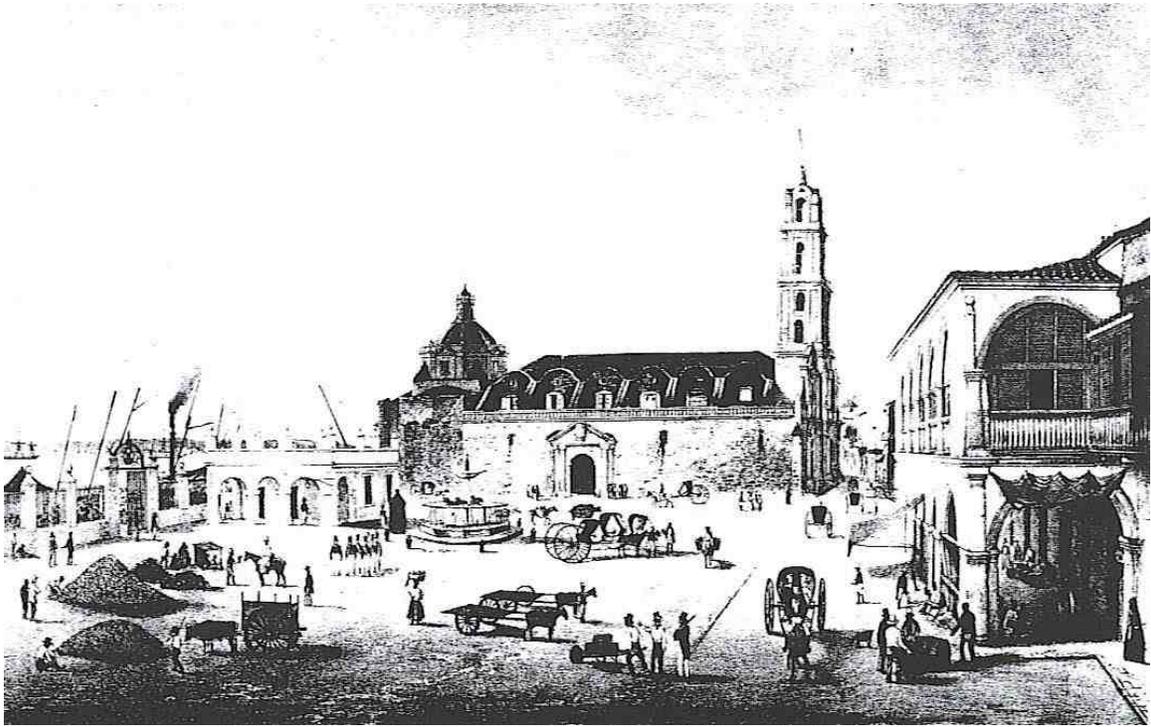


Figure 8. James Gay Sawkins and Louis Julien Jacottet, *Vista de la Plaza de San Francisco*, c. 1845-55, lithograph



Figure 9. Victor Patricio de Landaluze, *Iglesia del Santo Cristo del Buen Viaje*, c. 1870's, lithograph

created along its western side. The space served a variety of functions through time, including a place of prayer (in the ermita) for a good voyage as one prepared to venture beyond the city walls into the countryside. Houses were built along the plaza in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In 1814, a market was established in the Plaza de Cristo, joining the Plaza Nueva as one of two principle markets within the city walls. The historian Pezuela described the market structures as “a parallel line of impoverished and defective huts.”⁴¹ Thus, by the early nineteenth century, the Plaza de Cristo served as a complex social stage bounded by market structures, a religious building, elite houses, and a diverse population that appropriated the space from day to day.

Visual Representation and Identity

Artistic vocabularies that developed in Havana from the sixteenth-to the eighteenth-century reveal Ibero-Islamic, Italian Renaissance, and Italian and Spanish Baroque sources, which were transformed by artists and craftsmen into a Cuban idiom. As a class-based society developed in colonial Havana, varying combinations of this Cuban visuality were appropriated to represent emerging social identities. In this process, Cuban forms took on a variety of local meanings depending on their location in the urban fabric. These visual forms manifested themselves with relative inconsistency and were not bound by a rigorous conceptual system. However, the Church, the State, and individual patrons appropriated Cuban idioms to serve the maintenance of social structure.

In the early sixteenth-century, as Spain began expanding into the American mainland in search of gold, Cuba became a major point of departure. The island

⁴¹ Ibid, p. 59.

prospered as a supply center for numerous expeditions. However, as conquistadors and missionaries settled and colonized the mainland, the importance of Cuba and the Caribbean waned and the island fell upon hard times. A large portion of Cuban settlers departed for better prospects in New Spain prompting the Council of the Indies to issue several decrees in the late 1520's and early 1530's prohibiting such departures upon penalty of death and confiscation of property.⁴² By the mid-sixteenth century, multiple towns in Cuba stood abandoned along with fields and mines. Attacks by rival European powers and corsairs further debilitated the island's economic condition. The most important civic center in Cuba became Havana, whose place in the Spanish empire remained significant because of the flota system. With the completion of the Castillo de la Real Fuerza in the 1570's and of El Morro, guarding the mouth of the harbor's entry off the Florida Straights, in the early seventeenth-century, Havana emerged as a strategic, military center in the empire. As a result, Spanish officialdom began to shape Cuba as a military outpost, not a prospective commercial enterprise. Professional peninsular soldiers were given senior positions in colonial government and were charged more with holding the Spanish line than developing Cuba's infrastructure. The inauguration of the flota system gave new status and privilege to Havana and an economy grew up around the needs of transients on their way to the American mainland from the Iberian Peninsula.⁴³

Havana was promoted from a *villa* (town) to a *ciudad* (city) in 1594, and in 1607, it became the official capital of the island, replacing Santiago de Cuba. The city's new

⁴² Pérez (1988), p. 33.

⁴³ Ibid, pp. 34-36.

status amounted to a transfer of power, although a captain general was kept in Santiago to govern over the now-languishing eastern region. An elite class composed of merchants and property owners began developing in Havana. Wealthy Creoles and Peninsulars reveled in Havana's prosperity in the Spanish empire. House building became a means of reconfiguring the social text of the city to reinforce elite status, and wealthy families vied with one another for superior house sites. The house became a vehicle for the identity of the family and reinforced family status spatially and temporally, as day-to-day activities and more socially elevated rituals took place in the streets and plazas below.⁴⁴ The house maintained the family's social profile through generations and established a memory of their identities and achievements in urban space.

Visual representation through house building in Havana became a form of socio-political agency for wealthy *habanero* families. Elite Creole families sought visual representation in the city to complement their agricultural enterprises in the countryside. A visually impressive house gathered, unified, and elevated space, time, and familial identity, anchoring it to a specific urban site.⁴⁵ Regardless of their property holdings on rural estates, a Creole family would require at least one house in the city, preferably, near

⁴⁴ Art historian Shelley Hales has studied the complex relationship between politics, house building, elite status, and the city in ancient Roman society. These Latin foundations in the Mediterranean substantially impacted Iberian, and ultimately Spanish American, urban practices due to the ancient Roman presence in Spain. As in Havana, the highly self-conscious elite in ancient Roman cities negotiated for visible space using the house as a political instrument. The house was, "a mediator between the individual and the community," and assisted in the "construction of memory." Shelley Hales, *The Roman House and Social Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 42-43.

⁴⁵ See Stephen Holl for the "anchoring" and "gathering" function of architecture, in its ability to gather the intentions of a site into a building. I am suggesting that architecture, in this case, gathers the duration of time by its permanence (or monumentality), gathers space, and gathers the complexities of family identity into a singular image. Stephen Holl, *Anchoring: Selected Projects, 1975-1988* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1989), pp. 9-12.

an important urban space. Complex systems of signage, based on formal models from Iberia, were devised to distinguish individual families. The use of heraldry, such as *blazons* (coats of arms), left unmistakable marks on individual houses, signifying the family's level of prestige. The house constructed a familial mythology by its permanence, in its ability to actualize oligarchic power in material form, and in its placement of a mask-like facade between the family and society. As *bohíos* were replaced by houses of stone walls and tile roofs, Lillian Llanes reveals how the house grew bigger in the seventeenth-and eighteenth-centuries, became more open to the street, and grew increasingly individualized through architectural and decorative elements.⁴⁶ Houses thus contributed to the narration of urban spaces and those spaces became associated with the family narrative communicated by the house. Most importantly, in a colonial city, such as Havana, the house intervened in the heterogeneity of the city, posing a statement of singular order amidst social difference.

The *Casa de la Obra Pía* in Havana, a house from the seventeenth century, reveals the importance of the doorway in the construction of identity (Figure 10-11). A large wooden door is flanked by decorative Tuscan colonettes on pedestals surrounded by a variation of volute scrolls. Above the door, an active entablature composed of multiple undulating cornice lines supports two Ionic colonettes on pedestals that flank a central window. Above this window, a richly carved coat of arms surmounts additional volute

⁴⁶ Lillian Llanes, *The Houses of Old Cuba* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1999), pp. 55-110.



Figure 10. Central Doorway, Casa de la Obra Pía, Havana, 17th century



Figure 11. Window Above Central Doorway, Casa de la Obra Pía, Havana, 17th century

decorations. Signifying the family and its accumulated titles, this stonework is topped by another broken entablature. Architect Daniel Taboada has located similar architectural vocabularies along Spain's western coast in locations, such as Jerez de la Frontera, Cádiz, and Puerto de Santa María.⁴⁷ However, the decorative forms of the Casa de la Obra Pía reveal less restraint than European equivalents. Spiraling forms, dignified columns, and ornate heraldry reveal the ambitions and self-consciousness of colonial elites, suggesting the emergence of a local meaning and aesthetic. Cuban architectural study suffers from a lack of consistent terminology, but generally, as published in a recent book by Havana's Office of the City Historian, this early colonial idiom could be categorized as "Hispano-Mudéjar" and "Baroque."⁴⁸ These forms, combined with the coat of arms, maintained a distinguished presence for an elite family in Havana by shaping the perceptions of the colonial public. The elite residence in colonial Havana reveals the ability of the upper echelons of colonial society to reconfigure the urban text. Although complex visual codes found in heraldry might have been illegible to the lower social classes (and were comprehended in detail only by other elites), the physical size and stylistic sophistication of the house would have been understood by commoners to signify higher social status.

Composing family identity in space through architecture was contingent on the status of the urban space itself. Elite families in Havana vied, from an early period, for superior house sites. Unequivocally, house sites on or near the public plazas of the city were considered more advantageous to the general goals of house building. Sites on

⁴⁷ Daniel M. Taboada Espiniella, *Otras portadas de La Habana* (La Habana: Cátedra Gonzalo de Cárdenas de Arquitectura Vernácula, 2005), pp. 228-254.

⁴⁸ UNESCO, *Una Experiencia Singular: Valoraciones Sobre el Modelo de Gestión Integral de La Haban Vieja, Patrimonio de la Humanidad* (La Habana: Plan Maestro, 2006), p. 34.

plazas provided optimal visibility for the family house, presence during civic rituals and public performances, and visual connections to other buildings associated with official authority. As the plaza was typically utilized to stage performances which reified the city's ideological structure, an elite residence reinforced to spectators that the home owners were aligned with the city's authorities. These characteristics of the plaza made house building in the space a means by which a sign of family identity and status became monumentalized. As a monument, the house could be ever present as daily life occurred around it, as politicians came and went, and as meaning was continually created and re-created in public spaces.

On the Plaza Nueva, houses with portals survive from the seventeenth-and eighteenth-centuries, which were constructed by wealthy Creole families. The *Casa del Conde de San Juan Jaruco*, heavily restored by the Office of the City Historian, occupies a prominent site on the southwest side of the plaza (Figure 12). Arcaded portals were considered status symbols and required that the home owner apply for a license from the Spanish Crown. The owner of the house, Gabriel de Santa Cruz, applied in 1732 for permission to build an arcaded portal, "...being that I am among the leading personages of this city and that my forbears and myself have faithfully served Your Majesty in all things...I beg you grant me license."⁴⁹ Gabriel de Santa Cruz argued for his contemporary social status, that of his ancestors, and his loyalty to the King, appealing successfully for the right to restructure the spatial narrative of the plaza. The portal of this house reveals familiarity with Italian Renaissance architectural styles, including the

⁴⁹ María Luisa Lobo Montalvo. *Havana: History and Architecture of a Romantic City* (New York: Monacelli Press, 2000), p. 86.



Figure 12. Façade, Casa del Conde de San Juan Jaruco, Havana, 17th century

double loggia with stone outlining between spandrels.⁵⁰ A portal defined not only the house, but also the street below, as individuals who used the market in the Plaza Nueva might inadvertently seek shade beneath the arcaded loggia of the house. This point of contact between elite and non-elite space belonged to the shared material landscape of Havana between elite and common classes. The elite provided space for the city that non-elite individuals appropriated, at times reconfiguring the meaning and function of these spaces. The ability of ordinary individuals to act upon the urban text, transforming it in their own ways, was an important aspect of how meaning was constructed in the plaza.

On the Plaza de la Catedral (“The Plaza of the Cathedral”), the last of the city’s plazas to be developed, house building acted as a vital form of elite representation. Certain decorative elements on houses worked to connect these buildings to architectural symbols of sanctity. Havana achieved cathedral status in 1788, as the only bishopric on the island had been in the region around Santiago de Cuba. The cathedral church in Havana, however, dates to the 1740’s when the Jesuits had begun building a church for their order with a façade based on Francisco Borromini’s *San Carlo alle Quattro Fontane* in Rome, 1638-41 (Figure 13). With the expulsion of the Jesuit order in 1767 from the Spanish Americas and the confiscation of their property, the building became the parish church until 1788 when it was named the cathedral. The cathedral structure was built on marshy ground that had once served as a fish market and terminus for the Zanja Real, the royal aqueduct. As the space became consecrated by the erection of a church, owners of houses already fronting other streets applied for permission to construct portals to line the

⁵⁰ The building also echoes the façade of Diego Colon’s palace, 1509-10, at Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic. This house had a similar double loggia on both sides, one facing the city, the other the Rio Ozama. The louvered shutters and glass work on the second floor are of the nineteenth-century, when the second floor loggia would have been converted into an interior space.



Figure 13. Pedro Medina and others, *Cathedral of Havana*, Plaza of the Cathedral, 1748-71

new, developing plaza (Figure 14). On two of these houses, we find interesting volute decorative features that connect these buildings, ornamentally, to the cathedral façade. At either end of the portals of the *Casa de los Trés Arcos* and the *Casa de los Condes Lombillo*, both from the seventeenth-century, decorative scrolls are situated in an atypical placement near column capitals (Figures 15-17). These elements echo similar scrolls carved on the façade of the cathedral and could have been created by the same masons and stoneworkers. The wealthy home owners would see this visual consistency and aesthetic harmony in the new plaza as a means of visually connecting themselves to the cathedral and the power, sanctity, and heavenly majesty it embodied.

As icons in highly performative and socially dynamic spaces, such as the streets and plazas of colonial Havana, elite houses carried a vocabulary of visual forms read differently by different classes of people. Formalized ritual, everyday life, the mundane appropriation of the plaza for commercial activities, as well as differing social identities and status, influenced the reception of such visual representation. At times, the houses became mere backdrops to the activities and circadian rhythms of the quotidian. At other times, their representational messages were activated through formal ritual. The signs embedded in house facades could be associated with the established meanings of the plaza itself as well as perceptions of place generated through time and collective experience. The Plaza de la Catedral, for instance, became the site of religious rituals that, through time, established collectively remembered religious associations in the plaza. The messages sent by the urban mansions in the space thus absorbed these religious meanings and would have been read by the colonial population, during religious ceremonies, as possessing a degree of sanctity.



Figure 14. Frederic Mialhe, View of the Plaza of the Cathedral, 1852, lithograph



Figure 15. Loggias Along Plaza, *Casa de los Trés Arcos* and the *Casa de los Condes Lombillo*, Havana, mid 18th-century



Figure 16. Volute, *Casa de los Trés Arcos*, Havana, mid 18th-century



Figure 17. Volute, Cathedral of Havana, 1748-71

In addition to house building, religious painting and portraiture were two forms of visual representation that intersected with, and at times reasserted, the identities of the social classes of Cuban Colonial society. The interpretation of religious meanings in the Plaza de la Catedral continued as one entered and experienced the interior of the Havana cathedral where numerous religious paintings would be found. The Church developed ecclesiastical modes of representation in the first few centuries of Cuban settlement. These forms took the Hispano-Mudéjar and Baroque elements of western coastal ports in Spain and had links with other colonial regions but possessed Cuban traits. Cuban-born residents of Havana were socialized through the church, and thus internalized religious imagery as constituent elements of their identities. Colonial painting was dominated by religious subjects in Baroque idioms up until the end of the eighteenth-century. José Nicolás de la Escalera (1743-1804), a Cuban born artist, painted saints and other religious subjects in the dramatic Baroque style of the Counter-Reformation. His *Coronation of the Virgin by the Trinity*, late 18th c., oil on board, presents the body of the Virgin suspended in the clouds, cloaked in heavy drapery, and being crowned by Christ and God the Father (Figure 18). The dove of the Holy Spirit above the crown descends towards the Virgin's head, which is surrounded by a halo of stars. Among the Trinity group and at the feet of the Virgin, baby angels or cherubs cavort in heavenly space and gesticulate in various directions. The painter achieves harmony with dominant reds, yellows, and blues combined with compositional order and balance. Escalera organizes the composition on a double inverted triangle-scheme, and the figures are united by a sense of heavenly atmosphere. The floating figures and the fantastic quality of the work place this painting within Counter-Reformation strategies to lure wayward Protestants



Figure 18. José Nicolas de la Escalera, *Coronation of the Virgin by the Trinity*, late 18th-century, oil on board

and retain Church loyalties. By appealing to the viewer's emotions, works such as these convinced the spectator of the spiritual truth of the visual message.⁵¹ In the late-eighteenth century, local audiences encountered and interpreted such imagery in the public space of the Cathedral where they associated religious imagery with Baroque aesthetics.

Elite portraiture became a necessary prop for Havana's upper social echelons in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, along with the house, clothing, furniture, carriages, horses, and slaves. These aspects of material life, which were used in temporal life of the city, were interpreted as signs of social status. Vicente Escobar (1757-1854), a native of Havana, and possibly a "free man of color," emerged as an extremely important portrait painter. Escobar's patrons were predominantly Creole aristocrats who utilized portraiture, like house building, in the construction of their identities. His *Portrait of Don Tomás Mateo Cervantes*, c. 1800, oil on canvas, a prominent citizen of Havana, reveals various portraiture conventions, such as the three-quarter view, fine clothing, sword, text at the bottom of the canvas, and coat of arms at top left (Figure 19). His white lace cravat and cuffs contrast with his blue tunic, and his face possesses an aura of self-assured intelligence.⁵² The image also reinforces Don Tomás as a *blanco* (white), which was necessary for supporting and maintaining his social status. Portraits such as these framed

⁵¹ Libby says Escalera was certainly of Cuban and possibly of mestizo (mixed) origin. Escalera is considered the premier Cuban Baroque painter of the late eighteenth-century. Contrary to Europe where the Baroque peaked in the early eighteenth-century and was gradually replaced by Neo-Classicism, in the Spanish Americas, Baroque forms persisted longer in time, and in Cuba, Neo-Classicism only emerged at the beginning of the nineteenth-century. See Gary R. Libby, *Cuba: A History in Art* (Daytona Beach, Florida: The Museum of Arts and Sciences, 1997), pp. 50-51.

⁵² *Ibid*, pp. 52-53.



Figure 19. Vicente Escobar, *Portrait of Don Tomas Mateo Cervantes*, c.1800, oil on canvas

the male sitter as a prosperous and influential man of the city and constructed the memory of his family.

Temporality and Reception

The ways in which colonial subjects made meaning out of architectural signs in colonial Havana was determined by issues of space, time, and identity. When colonial subjects interpreted the city, their perceptions were shaped by a combination of architectural signs, spatial meanings, and temporal factors. The meanings of objects in urban space were thus modified by the associations of the spaces themselves and the particular signs that may have been emphasized by particular rituals. The reception of urban objects and spaces was also impacted by the identities of the interpreting subjects.

Roland Barthes has argued that “the city is a discourse, and this discourse is truly a language.” Barthes’ theory emphasizes the dialogic nature of the city, and how interpretations of the city are always in flux.⁵³ Colonial Havana was a city in which the meaning of signs was always shifting according to a host of variables. The ritual life of the city impacted the interpretations of signs, as did the status of the space in which the signs were interpreted. The plaza as civic theatre, which was surrounded by ordered architectural embellishments, sent signals calling for certain types of social behavior and soliciting a kind of interpretation based on time of day and the city’s ritual calendar. In the diverse temporal, spatial, and social environment of colonial Havana, the city became

⁵³ Roland Barthes, “Semiology and the Urban”, Neil Leach, *Rethinking Architecture: a Reader on Cultural Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 166-167.

“truly a language” constantly renegotiated and interpreted in myriad ways within the overriding ideological structure of colonial society.

Within a formalized and controlled matrix of behavioral expectations, colonial individuals experienced and interpreted the city. Yet, the heightened sense of self-awareness that the plaza produced generated an opportunistic feeling of self-creation in many colonial subjects who used the space. This less structured performative aspect of plaza space was produced in a space between individual freedom and colonial order, an ever-present spatial dynamic. The phenomenological experience of being in touch with the residual qualities of past actions, events, and identities modified the reading and interpreting of signs. Although the different social echelons of colonial Havana were “structured” according to law, language, and their absorption of ideologically determined cultural constructs, their experience of signs and signs-in-combination shifted according to temporal factors. Individuals in colonial society defined themselves through identification with the urban fabric only in and through time. In return, the temporal order of the colonial city was actualized in space, where it became a social reality.⁵⁴

During the early evenings in colonial Havana, a ritual commenced known as the *vueltecita*. The upper classes of colonial society would take to the streets in carriages and on horseback for a nocturnal performance. Great parades of upper-class society would ride through the streets and out into the public spaces, making turns through the Plaza de Armas. This flood of elite society into urban space activated the emblems and heraldry on house facades, as the ritual heightened elite self-consciousness and compelled the upper classes to evaluate one another. Sophisticated architectural facades came forward as

⁵⁴ Lefebvre (1974), p. 245.

narrative devices for a city suddenly transformed into a space of opulence and high society. These nightly public spectacles spread familial mythologies into the streets and the four plazas of the main parish where actual individuals would perform their social identities. Elite Creoles relished these opportunities for visibility and for the ability to narrate urban space through their own immediate presence. The excitement elevated the elite Creole image before the city's population and reinforced their entitlement to wealth and status. Peninsulars participated as well, as evidenced by the colonial authorities allowing and actively encouraging nightly *paseos* (promenades through the city), providing entertainment. At nine o'clock at night, unless raining, free musical presentations were held in front of the Castillo de la Real Fuerza in the Plaza de Armas. Here, the captain general would make appearances, displaying his patriarchal benevolence to the gathered crowd.⁵⁵ These acts of imperial generosity contributed to the propagation of a fiction: that of a stable, prosperous empire that cared deeply for the lives of its colonial subjects. Thus, the state was worthy of their loyalty. To actualize this fiction, the entire drama was reenacted nightly in the Plaza de Armas. The plaza was, thus, transformed as rituals of elite social performance modified the meanings of official monuments which framed the space. In these moments, the elite shored up their share of civic power as architecture, like the Castillo, legitimated elite entitlement, evoking the antiquity of the city to which they belonged and held social prestige.

Daily appropriations of public urban space in colonial Havana were rituals embedded with social codes denoting race, social rank, and gender. Architecture served not only to mediate social action in physical space, but also social identities. The

⁵⁵ Johnson (2001), pp. 24-30.

architecture framing the plazas in the city's main parish (whether elite houses or official monuments) established an image socio-political power that reinforced social structure. If elite Creoles felt the affirmation of their status in architectural forms during nightly paseos, Afro-Cuban slaves were made to feel subservient by the same forms at those times. Havana's social composition in the eighteenth-century was divided hierarchically among *peninsulares* (Peninsulars), *criollos* (Creoles), *gentes de color* (free people of color), and *esclavos* (slaves). Racially, Peninsulars and Creoles were categorized as *blanco* (white), whereas free people of color and slaves were categorized *mulatto* (a mixture of African and Spaniard) and *negro* (African, phenotypically "black"). Gender determined not only social rank with men elevated above women, but also restrictions of movement in the colonial city. White women were not allowed to walk the streets of the city and could only venture out by carriage (or *volanta*) accompanied by a chaperone. This restriction intensified with the eighteenth-and nineteenth-century increase in the African slave population in Cuba. White women were viewed by elite white society as bastions of racial purity. The maintenance of *limpieza de sangre*, or "purity of blood," among the elite white classes in Havana (and in many other parts of the Spanish Americas) was contingent upon limiting racial mixing between whites and *castas*, or the racially "mixed," inferior social classes. Elite Creole houses, in this respect, became bastions of racial purity and strict limits would have been imagined and reinforced between elite and non-elite space.

Architecture was, therefore, interpreted as a means of separating social classes and maintaining the ascendancy of *blanco* (white) social status. The colonial social elite, classified "white," shared the city of Havana with a variety of racially "mixed" and black

individuals who had different relationships to public space. Contrary to upper-class white women, mulattas (women who were the products of a union between Spanish and black), could be seen strolling on foot through the Plaza de Armas and other principle spaces of the city.⁵⁶ Mulattas, although legally owning less of the urban environment, owned a greater freedom to physically move through the spaces than did white women. They had less social status to protect, and thus were subject to different kinds of social restrictions in public spaces.

The racialized spatial codes of Havana's non-white residents developed in the interstices of Creole-Peninsular policies. The city's non-white residents often appropriated urban space in less structured ways, employing improvisation and spontaneous expressions. David Brown, building on the earlier work of Fernando Ortíz, discusses the subversive activities of *los negros curros*, "the black show-offs" (Figure 20). Although representation in public space was highly controlled by the colonial elite, Havana's enormous population of free Africans and Afro-Cubans in the nineteenth-century, many living outside the city walls in the *extramuros*, negotiated this web of control in surprising ways. "The *curros* were known for their flamboyant clothes and accessories, their outré hairstyle (*mancaperros*, which today we call dreadlocks), and their incomprehensible- to whites- pronunciation of the Spanish language."⁵⁷ Brown asserts that this "hybrid" cultural style was used intentionally in public "in assertive, parodic, and subversive fashion in order to 'revise' and 'reform' oppressed bodies."⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Johnson (2001), pp. 30-35.

⁵⁷ David H. Brown, *Santería Enthroned: Art, Ritual, and Innovation in an Afro-Cuban Religion* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), pp. 32-33.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

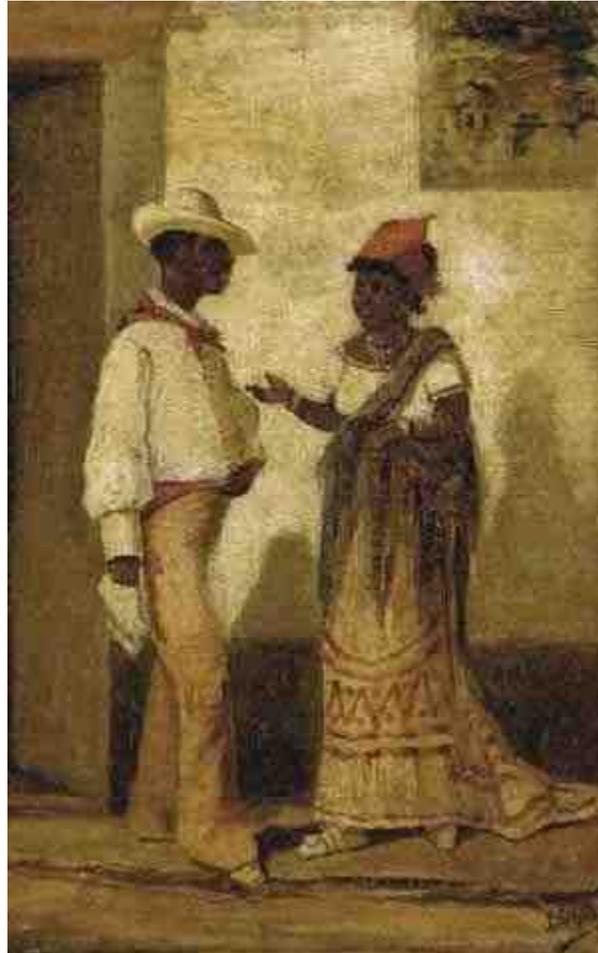


Figure 20. Victor Patricio de Landaluze, *Los Negros Curos*,
c. 1875, color lithograph

While white elites appropriated the plazas to represent their status and receive social recognition of their accomplishments, negro and mulatto individuals would use the same representational spaces to parody, invert, and subvert the colonial social order.

The Church held dramatic religious spectacles on holy days, and specifically in the Plaza de la Catedral beginning in the eighteenth-century. The State would likewise employ spaces, such as the Plaza de Armas, for dramatic political performances that reified Spanish power and its local presence on the island. The Creole oligarchy appropriated the plazas according to a regular daily schedule to shore up their share of socio-political power. Inserting themselves into this spatial narrative, Africans and Afro-Cubans organized elaborate methods of demonstrating their temporary control of public space. The *cabildos de naciones*, brotherhoods of free Africans and Afro-Cubans, would hold processions through the city on the *Día de Reyes*, “the Day of Kings” (Figures 21). The Catholic Church, in the sixteenth-century, established cabildos for the socialization and Christianization of incoming African slaves. Cabildos in Cuba, known as *cofradías* (brotherhoods) elsewhere in Latin America, devised means of inverting the colonial social order in their dramatic processions. Seta Low discusses “contested space” in an anthropological study of the city, by which socially marginalized individuals and groups symbolically invert the power structure of the city as a form of agency.⁵⁹ Cabildos, thus, provided their members opportunities to contest the colonial social order.

Cabildo processions would begin in the *extramuros* of Havana (area outside the city walls), where the members would organize and then process through the streets of Havana, shouting, dancing, posturing, and drumming. Members wore elaborate costumes

⁵⁹ Seta Low and Denise Lawrence-Zúñiga, eds. *The Anthropology of Space and Place: Locating Culture* (New York: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), pp. 18-25.



Figure 21. Victor Patricio de Landaluze, *The Day of Kings*,
c. 1878, oil on canvas

that represented their status in the hierarchical cabildo (the cabildo king would wear a European-like costume, whereas lower ranking members might dress in indigenous African regalia). For several hours, the cabildos would symbolically control the streets of Havana with the goal of collecting *aguinaldo* (money gratuities) from upper-class households. The processions exposed the racial tensions embedded in urban space, as upper-class white families generally stayed indoors, usually passing gratuities to cabildo members through the bars of their windows, suggested in the late nineteenth-century lithograph by Victor Patricio de Landaluze. The processions would culminate in the Plaza de Armas, where the cabildo king would meet face-to-face with the colonial governor who would offer the final, most generous *aguinaldo*.⁶⁰ The processions were both a means for the Spanish administration to assuage the needs of the island's free black population, and a means for that population to both earn money and represent themselves in urban space.

For all individuals in Havana's colonial society, the plaza was a space where representational agency was sought and could be achieved. Architecture, individual costuming, and public performance were all means of expressing identity in public space, for appropriating and/or contesting the colonial social order, and for affirming possession of some degree of social power. Thus, the reception of visual and architectural signs in urban space in colonial Havana, how the public made meaning out of visual and architectural messages, was interconnected with these social goals of identity creation in a complex negotiation between colonial subjects and the city. From here, we turn to the development of a new symbolic and philosophical system in colonial Havana,

⁶⁰ Brown (2003), pp. 35-51.

synthesized in the locus of Creole-Peninsular politics, which would reconfigure the perceived and lived experiences of the colonial city.

CHAPTER TWO

INVENTING A VISUAL LANGUAGE OF PROGRESS IN COLONIAL HAVANA

The Bourbon Palaces: Reordering the Architectural Text

In 1773, the local Spanish authorities initiated a total reconstruction project for the Plaza de Armas. After two hundred and fifty years of a consistent configuration, the captain general had buildings removed, the boundaries of the plaza redrawn, and new structures erected. This abrupt transformation of Havana's central public space corresponded to political transformations in Spain and new mandates for the American territories. In 1700, the French Bourbon dynasty took the Spanish throne after the Austrian Hapsburg departure and embarked on a campaign to reverse Spain's economic stagnation and regain its status in Europe. A series of official improvement measures known as the Bourbon Reforms were launched and aimed at increasing the efficiency of trans-Atlantic Spanish mercantilism. The monarchy intended to maximize profits, but, as Susan Deans-Smith points out, reforms were not meant to radically change the existing social order in the American colonies; rather, more rigorous colonial legislation and practices would drive the colonies to increase their functional effectiveness in the interests of Spain.⁶¹ The Bourbon Reforms included the increased secular control over public health and education, the development of a professional bureaucracy and a standing army, and the centralization of power in the state at the expense of provincial and corporate privileges.

⁶¹ Susan Deans-Smith, "Bourbon Reforms," *Encyclopedia of Mexico: History, Society, and Culture, Volume I* (Chicago and London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1997), pp. 152-157.

⁶² The reform measures also included the implementation of new architectural modes and spatial practices to reinforce the ideologies and political agendas of the state.

The culture of the European Enlightenment influenced the Bourbon monarchy's project to reorder the Spanish American colonies. Born of the physical sciences, such as in the work of Sir Isaac Newton, the Enlightenment harbored faith that the laws of Nature could be abstracted into socially progressive forms and institutions that would uplift society. Architectural forms, once spatially and decoratively complex, became more austere in their adaptation of Classical orders, details, and spatial forms. Simple, geometric shapes became a favored mode for representing human reason and social progress instead of the swirls and curvilinear compositions of the Baroque. The Bourbons viewed the Baroque as a reminder of the *laissez-faire* economic practices of the previous Austrian Hapsburg monarchy and the preponderance of the Church in colonial affairs. However, many Baroque details and spatial patterns were retained in urban remodeling projects for colonial cities. Scholars have emphasized the Bourbon monarchy's implementation of Neo-Classicism in the Americas as a succession of the previous Baroque style, without acknowledging how Baroque elements lingered in the actual buildings erected to represent the Bourbon reforms. Nor have many studies of Latin American Neo-Classicism entertained the idea that the meanings of Neo-Classical forms were configured from within Latin American societies. The appropriation of Neo-Classicism in diverse contexts by varied groups throughout Latin America reveals that the issues involved were complex and local in nature. ⁶³

⁶² Ibid, p. 153.

⁶³ These observations were formulated in collaboration with Stacie G. Widdifield, Ph.D. of the University of Arizona towards a session proposal for the College Art Association annual

The effects of the Bourbon reforms on visual representation and urban space in the Americas were earlier felt in the mid-eighteenth-century in Mexico City, the viceregal capital of New Spain. As early as 1755, the Plaza Mayor, the city's principle urban stage, was transformed by the elimination of the *parían* (the great market structure, which had served the local population for over a century) and the creation of an enormous oval to be crowned by a continuous balustrade (Figure 22). Juana Gutiérrez-Haces compared this design to Michelangelo's *Campidoglio* in Rome and suggests, "The intention here might have been to show, using the Roman model, the universal dominion of the Spanish empire by means of geometric shapes."⁶⁴ Manuel Tolsá, sculpture professor at the Academy of San Carlos, created an equestrian statue of Charles IV for the plaza center. Palaces in the vicinity were fitted with Neo-Classical facades, while the Mexico City Cathedral, which stood at the head of the space, was completed by Tolsá with the addition of a Neo-Classical dome. On the Cathedral, Tolsá added façade elements and balustrades, which brought previous styles together with the new Classicism. He added a clock (a new signifier for linear time and progress) crowned by sculptures of Faith, Hope, and Charity (codes for more progressive Church practices).

These urban transformations in Mexico City corresponded to the development of the first art academy in the Americas, the Academy of San Carlos, founded in 1783.

meeting in Los Angeles, 2009. The session title is, "The Americanization of Neo-Classicism in Latin America."

⁶⁴ Juana Gutiérrez Haces, "The Eighteenth Century: A Changing Kingdom and Artistic Style," in Héctor Rivero Borrell Miranda, *The Grandeur of Viceregal Mexico: Treasures from the Museo Franz Mayer* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), p. 67.



Figure 22. José Joaquín Fabregat, *Engraving of the Plaza Mayor of Mexico City*, 1797, engraving

Introducing a rationalized, rigorous curriculum for the training of artists, the academy attempted to replace the guild system that had controlled art production during the earlier Hapsburg period (1521-1700). Artistic instruction was now based on life drawing, color theory, the drawing of Classical statuary, and history painting. The academy also only accepted instructors of European origin and training, and the Bourbons conceived this institution as a pedagogical apparatus for the cultural modernization of New Spain.⁶⁵

Mexico City, as imperial capital of the Spanish Americas, preceded Cuba in this cultural modernization. The Council of the Indies considered Cuba a military outpost, a haven for the annual flotas, and an island of modest productive capacity. Comparable reform projects did not emerge in Cuba, therefore, until the late eighteenth-century and corresponded to the aftermath of the Seven Years' War (1756-63). In 1762, the British captured and occupied Havana for ten months, a shocking blow to the administration of the Bourbon king, Charles III. As the bottleneck of the Spanish flota system, nicknamed "The Key to the Indies," the loss of the city to the British, which crippled the flow of gold, silver, and other goods traveling back to Spain, revealed the strategic vulnerabilities of the Spanish empire. The monarchy quickly brokered a deal with the English to exchange Spanish Florida for Cuba in 1763. The Spanish returned to the island in fury, convinced that its residents and colonial administration were responsible for this near horrible loss. Bourbon perception was that centuries of neglect at the hands of the Austrian Hapsburg dynasty had reduced the island's elite to a corrupt, disloyal group of contrabandists. In response, the monarchy stepped up the intensity of the Bourbon

⁶⁵ Ibid.

reforms on the island, restructuring society along military lines, and calling for more efficient urban planning.⁶⁶

In order to prevent the British from capturing the city a second time, local authorities drafted a plan for the restructuring of administration and defense in Havana. This included a vulnerable strip of land across the inlet to the bay, which the British had exploited in their capture of the city, and the Plaza de Armas, a critical space for military and political responsiveness. The *Castillo de la Carenas* was begun 1764 on the opposite side of the inlet from the Castillo de la Real Fuerza, a massive fortification enclosing the remaining vulnerable point of approach and built by the labor of thousands of African slaves. This new fortified complex provided additional artillery support to the inlet. To physically and symbolically restructure the city's nerve center, the Plaza de Armas was likewise reconfigured with new administrative structures and a more rigorously conceived space.⁶⁷

The reconstruction of the Plaza de Armas became a means of both practical and ideological restructuring for the Bourbon officials in Cuba. As viewed in a painting by Hippolyte Garneray, the space was cleared and regularized according to more rational geometric principles (Figure 23). Unlike the Plaza Mayor of Mexico City, however, in which the stately Cathedral was maintained and Neo-Classiced, the old paroquial church of Havana stood in dilapidation and was demolished. Having eliminated the ecclesiastical building, the Bourbons thoroughly de-sanctified the plaza by the removal

⁶⁶ Johnson (2001), p. 62.

⁶⁷ Ibid.



Figure 23. Hippolyte Garneray, *The Plaza de Armas of Havana in the Nineteenth-Century*, c. 1800, color drawing

visible religious associations. This solution would have been impractical in Mexico City where the grand cathedral continued to serve the population. Colonial officials in Havana created a more functional seat of government and reinforced the centrality of the state by moving the captain general's residence from the sixteenth-century Castillo to a new Bourbon palace.⁶⁸ Colonial society found their traditional civic profile suddenly and radically altered. Lived experience and perceptions of power were irrevocably transformed. On a conceptual level, the Bourbons intended the new architectural configuration of the plaza to be transparent to new bureaucratic mandates.

The project for the plaza began almost immediately following the British return of the city. Captain General Felipe de Foyat, the Marqués de la Torre, initiated the original plan for the Plaza de Armas, which called for the enclosure of the space on its four sides. A plan from 1773 by Ramón Ignacio de Yoldi, entitled "Project for the Formation of the Plaza de Armas of Havana," reveals the Bourbon intention for architectural enclosure (Figure 24). The old paroquial church was to be demolished along with a row of private houses (marked C and L respectively on the plan). The space would be cleared and formed into a 3:2 (length:width) ratio as stipulated in the Laws of the Indies. The Bourbons perceived these older buildings as problematic particularities to be replaced with a more uniform configuration that better expressed an imperial centrality. The sixteenth-century Castillo was retained and incorporated, however, for its functionality and symbolic evocations of the city's history. The presence of the Castillo in the new plan created a subtle rupture in the scheme to reconfigure the space into a perfect rectangle. The rectangular configuration came from the sixteenth-century Laws of

⁶⁸ Segre (1995), pp. 35-40.

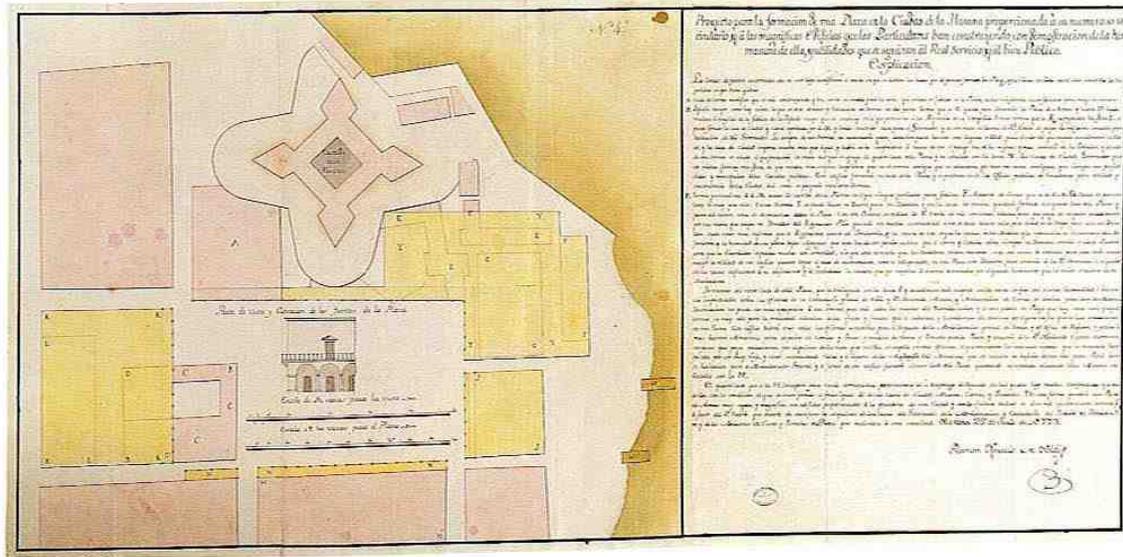


Figure 24. Ramón Ignacio de Yoldi, *Project for the Formation of the Plaza de Armas of Havana*, 1773, color drawing, General Archives of the Indies, Seville, Spain

the Indies of Phillip II, which the monarchy reinforced as a tool to visually communicate the consolidation of power expressed in a vast legislative restructuring. On all four sides, the plan called for a spatial enclosure by monumental buildings with portals, another urban requirement mandated in the Laws of 1573:

Around the plaza as well as along the four principal streets which begin there, there shall be portals, for these are of considerable convenience to the merchants who generally gather there; the eight streets running from the plaza at the four corners shall open on the plaza without encountering these porticoes, which shall be kept back in order that there may be sidewalks even with the streets and plaza.⁶⁹

Segre provides another reconstruction drawing of what this plan might have looked like had it been fully realized (Figure 25).

By the 1790's, only two of the monumental buildings from this plan of 1773 had been realized. Joaquín E. Weiss y Sánchez credits military engineers, Antonio Fernández de Trevejos and Pedro Medina, for the Marqués' two palaces: the *Palace of the Second-in-Command*, designed by Trevejos between 1771 and 1773, and the *Palace of the Captain General* (or Cabildo), designed by Trevejos and Medina between 1776 and 1791.⁷⁰ The buildings lined the plaza on the north and east sides, respectively, with ordered rationalized surfaces that contrasted the curvilinear Baroque façade of the Cathedral several blocks away on the Plaza de la Catedral (Figures 26-27). The buildings incorporated a more uniform system of Classical articulation while retaining various local Baroque elements. Curvilinear window lintels, massive doorways with complex sculptural framing, and a multiplication of cornice lines accented the overall rational

⁶⁹ Crouch (1982), p. 14.

⁷⁰ Joaquín Weiss y Sánchez, *Arquitectura Colonial Cubana* (Havana and Seville: Segunda Ediciones, 2002), pp. 260-271.

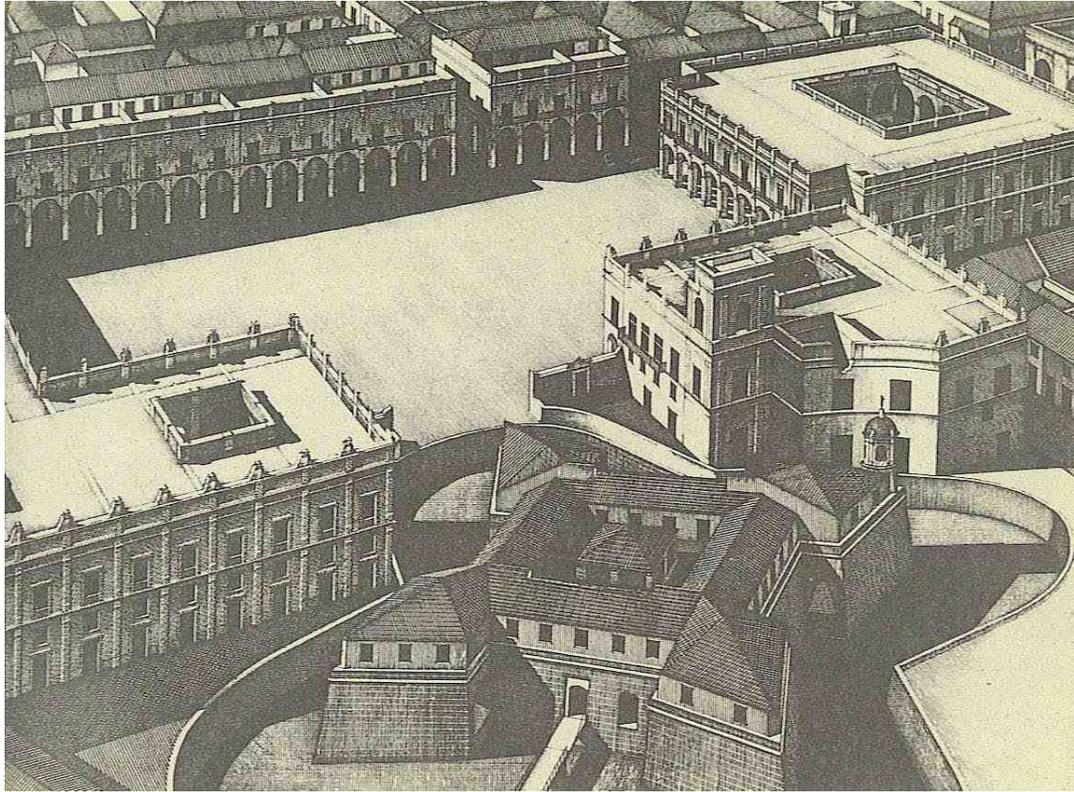


Figure 25. Roberto Segre, Reconstruction Drawing of the Bourbon Intention for the Plaza de Armas of Havana



Figure 26. Antonio Fernández de Trevejos, *Palace of the Second-in-Command*, Plaza de Armas, Havana, 1771-73



Figure 27. Antonio Fernández de Trevejos and Pedro Medina, *Palace of the Captain General*, Plaza de Armas, Havana, 1776-91

program with elements of the traditional Cuban idiom (Figures 28-31).⁷¹ The retention of local elements assuaged the population and facilitated their reception of the buildings by creating the illusion of a seamless transition. Furthermore, the new order communicated in these forms was made more effective by the adaptation of local idioms. In the words of the Marqués, the palaces were to be “commensurate with the numerous population and magnificent edifices being built by private citizens.”⁷²

While the Bourbons advocated a stricter, more academically correct Classicism, its application in the Americas combined geometric regularity with local forms. Gutiérrez Haces has referred to the emergence of this hybrid idiom in New Spain as *neóstilos*, or “new styles.” She attributes this phenomenon to the European Enlightenment, “when encyclopedic thought fostered revisionism and ordered a society’s entire past and accumulated knowledge.”⁷³ Encyclopedic thinking permeated legal mandates, social regulations, and architectural choices. Bourbon architecture employed a more geometrically rigorous arrangement of Classical forms associated with empire and unification, yet remained responsive to local formal traditions. This absorption and synthesis became a skilled means of tightening the order of signs in Havana, a strategy to re-colonize American subjects.

⁷¹ Architect Ihosvany de Oca of the Office of the City Historian of Havana told me that a consistent Cuban element involving a central decorative element flanked by swelling lateral forms often topping windows and door surrounds is referred to colloquially by the City Historian as “big-ears Baroque.” Ihosvany also feels that Havana has no “true” Baroque idiom because Baroque architectural culture in Cuba involved only surface ornamentation and not axial urban space.

⁷² Lobo Montalvo (2000), p. 96.

⁷³ Gutiérrez Haces (2002), pp. 45-66.

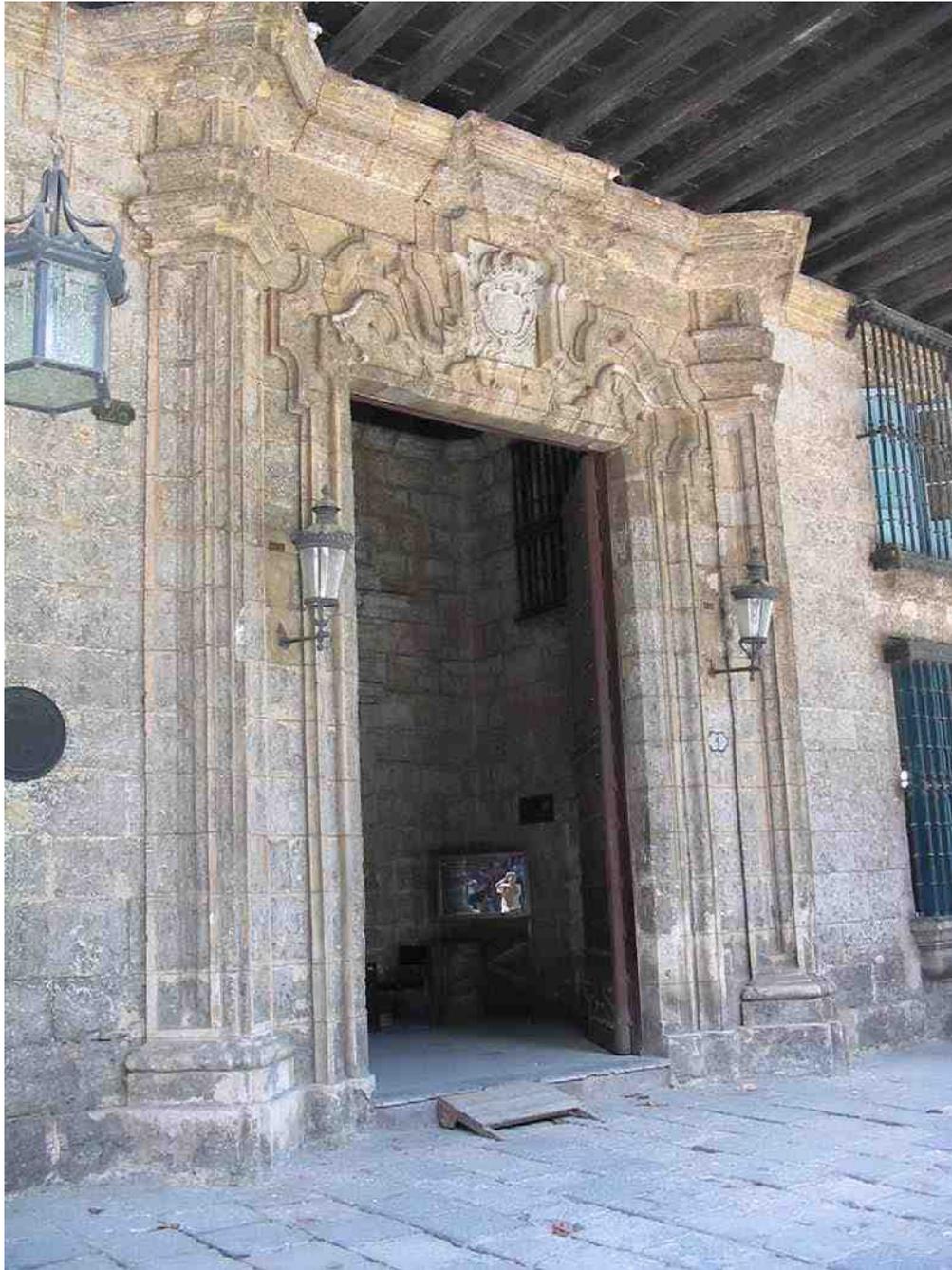


Figure 28. Central Doorway, Antonio Fernández de Trevejos, Palace of the Second-in-Command, Plaza de Armas, Havana, 1771-73



Figure 29. Corner Entablature, Antonio Fernández de Trevejos and Pedro Medina, Palace of the Captain General, Plaza de Armas, Havana, 1776-91



Figure 30. Window Lintel Decoration, Antonio Fernández de Trevejos and Pedro Medína, Palace of the Captain General, Plaza de Armas, Havana, 1776-91



Figure 31. View of Palace of the Captain General from Mercaderes Street,
Antonio Fernández de Trevejos and Pedro Medina,
Palace of the Captain General, Havana, 1776-91

Scholars have considered the relationship of these buildings to the plaza and categorized their surface ornamentation. Yet, what is needed is a new contextualization of the significance of these buildings as instruments of the Bourbon state and the significance of their visual messages for Cuban audiences. The local elements were easily identifiable by the populace of the city, and their deployment on the massive palace facades would have been signs of authority. Yet, how did more elite sectors of the population make meaning out of the palaces in relationship to their acceptance and/or rejection of Bourbon reform measures and their higher level of education? An answer to this question would more firmly situate the buildings in their socio-political context and reveal multiple agendas of individuals who used the same spaces and material culture.

Each building fronted the plaza with a monumental portal, which consisted of giant order piers accented with Tuscan pilasters and engaged columns. These vertical elements were drawn together visually by grand arcades. The *piano nobile* of both buildings rested on the ground floor portals with ornamental window bays divided again by pilasters and engaged columns. On the ground floor, the heaviness of the piers communicated an anchored sense of inevitability, permanence, order, and control. Colonial subjects that used the plaza daily, whether elites, commoners, whites, free blacks, slaves, men or women could read in these buildings the new Bourbon agenda of reform. These messages reinforced the social changes they were already experiencing as a result of Bourbon policies. Art Historian Magali Carrera has noted the Bourbon attempt in the eighteenth-century “to delimit, structure, and manage the social habits and identities of the people” who occupied the spaces of Mexico City. She refers to the city’s public plazas as “narrative spaces...where kinds of colonial bodies were described,

inscribed, and constructed.”⁷⁴ The Bourbon agenda to reconfigure the spatial narrative of the Plaza de Armas became a means of constructing a new platform for the performance of state ritual and a reconfiguration of the lived experience of the oldest plaza in the city.

Bourbon strategies to achieve order were conceived as both objective and subjective transformations. Using modern techniques of power, the monarchy ordered its subjects increasingly through advanced record keeping and social indoctrination strategies, such as education and militarization. These methods began shaping an order that would be instilled, that would come from within the subject. Michel Foucault has argued that the reordering of European power structures in the eighteenth-century involved greater record keeping and surveillance. The eighteenth-century state implemented the “disciplines,” a complex web of institutional restructuring that involved education, the prison system, hospitals, and the military.⁷⁵ This new mode of instilling control in the populace carried the power of the State down into the deepest recesses of society.

The Bourbon policies in Havana after the British invasion of 1762 reveal eighteenth-century techniques of power. The loss of the city prompted Charles III to use the military as a restructuring device. The King implemented a series of military reforms for Cuba designed to augment military preparedness, in the process, creating a new culture of discipline and loyalty. Historian Sherry Johnson contends that these reforms were enacted and received differently in Cuba than on the American mainland due to

⁷⁴ Magali M. Carrera, *Imagining Identity in New Spain: Race, Lineage, and the Colonial Body in Portraiture and Casta Painting*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), p. 107.

⁷⁵ For further discussion of the transformation of power structures in eighteenth-century Europe towards new systems of surveillance, see Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977).

Cuba's "economic structure, function within the imperial system, and the structure of society."⁷⁶ The Cuban military reforms were designed to accommodate and indoctrinate a broader section of the populace than in New Spain and Peru. Contrary to mainland territories, Creoles and free people of color were allowed to serve in the king's army in defense of the island. Many received substantial retirements and benefits from this service, which fostered a deep sense of loyalty to Charles III and the Bourbon state. This situation was made more complex by the large influx of peninsular Spaniards, who served as professional soldiers, received military benefits known as *fueros militar*, and often retired to the island rather than returning to Spain.⁷⁷ The benefits of military service fostered more solidarity between Peninsulars, Creoles, and free people of color than was seen elsewhere in the empire. Thus, a broad section of the populace would have received the new plaza favorably as a sign of a benevolent king in the years between 1763 and Charles III's death in 1788.

In spite of new benefits, the Bourbons viewed the Creole elite in Cuba with deep suspicion and sought to uproot Creole vested interests particularly those of the planter class, who were suspected of collaborating with the British. In New Spain, the traditional dominion that Creoles held over the high courts of justice, the *audiencias*, was eradicated by the replacement of Creoles with Peninsulars.⁷⁸ In Cuba, the power of the Havana cabildo to govern in the absence of the captain general after 1715 was transferred to the *teniente de rey*, an office appointed by the Crown. Cuban cabildos were denied the

⁷⁶ Johnson (2001), pp. 12-20.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Deans-Smith (1997), p. 154.

authority to distribute public lands in 1729, undercutting the power of local elites. State monopolies were established to consolidate production and suppress the illegal contraband trade. The Crown's interventions privileged Havana and the western regions over the eastern regions of the island and the city of Santiago de Cuba. Creole liberties in Cuba were undercut as peninsular privileges increased. As Pérez points out, "Bourbon policy increased the strength of the mercantile/commercial sector, largely Spanish, over the agricultural/ranching sector, mostly Cuban, and in so doing, sharpened the distinctions between *peninsular* interests and creole ones."⁷⁹ Economic tactics of reform thus reinforced group distinctions contributing to a new identity formation among Peninsulars and Creoles.

The British occupation of Havana in 1762, however, brought undeniable benefits to local elites. For eleven months, the trade barriers imposed by Spain were rendered obsolete, and Creole producers were allowed to trade freely with Europe and the North American colonies. Merchants of all types, including slave traders and myriad forms of merchandise, including African slaves, came flooding into Havana. Creoles envisioned a world free of Spanish mercantile restrictions, a lesson that would invigorate local commercial ambitions. When the Spanish monarchy returned in 1763, Crown officials realized that they could not risk returning to the old system without alienating important production sectors of the population. To augment Cuba's economic potential, the Spanish administration began to listen more receptively to the demands of the Creole elite.

In 1792, amidst the violent slave insurrection in Ste. Domingue (now referred to as the Haitian Revolution), Francisco de Arango y Parreño, a Cuban planter and

⁷⁹ Pérez (1988), pp. 52-53.

intellectual, submitted his *Discurso sobre la Agricultura de la Habana y Medios de Fomentarla* ["Discourse on the Agriculture of Havana and Means of Fomenting It"] to the Spanish Crown.⁸⁰ Representing the Havana planter class, Arango assessed Cuba's position in a changing Atlantic world economy and offered possibilities for its future production. As Dale Tomich notes:

The *Discurso* draws its effectiveness from Arango's acute awareness of the ways U.S. independence, the French Revolution, and the Haitian slave insurrection were restructuring the Atlantic economy and his profound understanding both of the possibilities that this political economic conjuncture opened for Cuba and of what was required for Cuba to take advantage of these conditions.⁸¹

The Haitian Revolution destroyed the French West Indian sugar trade (Cuba's biggest rival), English sugar was in decline, and the price of sugar skyrocketed between 1788 and 1795.⁸² Arango responded to the Haitian Revolution with urgency:

[S]eeing them [the French] immersed in a calamity that, if it does not destroy all of the prosperity of that colony will retard it indefinitely, it is necessary to look at it not only with compassion, but with political eyes, and, with the faith of a good patriot and a good vassal, announce to the best of kings the opportunity and the means to give to our agriculture of the Islands advantage and preponderance over that of the French.⁸³

⁸⁰ Francisco Arango y Parreño, *Discurso sobre la Agricultura de la Habana y Medios de Fomentarla* (1793), in *Obras I*: 114-75 (La Habana: Dirección de Cultura, 1952).

⁸¹ See Dale Tomich, "The Wealth of Empire: Francisco Arango y Parreño, Political Economy, and the Second Slavery in Cuba," from Schmidt-Nowara and Nieto-Phillips, eds., *Interpreting Spanish Colonialism: Empires, Nations, and Legends* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005), pp. 54-85; quoted on pp. 55-56.

⁸² Many French planters from Sta. Domingue, fleeing for their lives, arrived in Cuba after 1791 bringing with them time-honored French West Indian techniques of sugar and coffee cultivation that greatly assisted Cuban planters. See Hugh Thomas, *Cuba or the Pursuit of Freedom* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1999), p. 77.

⁸³ From "Francisco de Arango y Parreño, "Representación hecha a S.M. con otivo de la sublevación de esclavos en los dominios frances de la isla de Santo Domingo," (1791), Quoted in Tomich, p. 60.

Seeking to promote economic liberalism and Cuba's entrance into the world market, Arango called for the dramatic augmentation of the slave trade in Cuba to expand the sugar industry. As Tomich points out, Arango applied Enlightenment rationalism to justify a "second slavery" in Cuba by reconceptualizing "slave labor within the framework of free trade, individual self-interest, efficient management, and systematic technological innovation."⁸⁴ The Crown accepted Arango's proposals and he began collaborating with Cuban Captain General Luis de las Casas to develop the necessary infrastructure for this agricultural transformation.

While these initiatives benefited the Creole planter, lower class creoles and free people of color, many enjoying military retirement, were suddenly mandated to work on roads, bridges, and infrastructure necessary for large-scale sugar cultivation. The *fueros militar* given out by Charles III, who died in 1788, were not honored in the same way by his son, Charles IV. These broken contracts created increased hostilities among lower class creoles towards the planter elite and sharpened divisions within the Creole classes.⁸⁵

As the monarchy began to listen to the demands of local society, wealthy Cuban planters established an organization dedicated to local improvements. In 1793, the Crown granted Cubans of the planter class the right to charter the *Sociedad Económica de Amigos del País*, ["The Economic Society of the Friends of the Country"].⁸⁶ Modeled on "enlightenment" societies in Spain, the *Sociedad Económica* gave the planter class in

⁸⁴ Tomich (2005), p. 56.

⁸⁵ Johnson (2001), p. 63.

⁸⁶ This organization was known by several names: *The Royal Patriotic Society*, *The Economic Society*, and *The Royal Economic Society of the Friends of the Country*. See Thomas (1998), p. 77.

Cuba a voice to win concessions for the sugar industry and to promote civic improvements, such as projects for better sanitation and public health. In the nineteenth century, the organization would work to development of the visual arts as a new educational tool and cultural force. While the Sociedad Económica was staffed by both Creoles and Peninsulars, it functioned as an extra-institutional body established to make recommendations to the Spanish administration on a variety of public issues. The Sociedad could appeal directly to the Crown on local matters, and therefore, possessed a significant degree of local power.⁸⁷

The late-eighteenth century brought Bourbon reforms, development of the sugar industry, escalation of slavery, a new agency for the Creole elite in the Sociedad Económica. The abrupt architectural transformations of the Plaza de Armas provide a physical reminder of this period of rapid change, which introduced the connection between progress and architecture.

The Espada Cemetery: Architecture and Local Agency

The influx of Enlightenment thought and ideals into Havana came through various channels in the late eighteenth-and early nineteenth-centuries, but the three most significant for visual representation were the Bourbon monarchy, the Sociedad Económica, and a new liberal bishop. With the death of the conservative, pro-Vatican Bishop, Tréspalacios in 1799, Juan José Díaz de Espada y Landa was appointed as bishop to the see of Havana in 1800. Two years later, he arrived to the bishopric in Cuba. Bishop

⁸⁷ Izaskun Álvarez Cuartero, *Memorias de la Ilustración: las Sociedades Económicas de Amigos del País en Cuba (1783-1832)* (Madrid: Real Sociedad Bascongada de los Amigos del País, 2000), pp. 125-131.

Espada brought a similar visual aesthetic to Havana based in a political ideology formulated on the Iberian Peninsula in turbulent years. He showed little interest in Cuban political economy, but sought to promote social improvements through health measures, educational reforms, and artistic projects. He was anti-inquisitorial, interested in Neo-Classical forms, and committed to reforming the Church. The bishop would see himself in his new West Indian assignment as an agent capable of lifting Havana from a problematic existence into a state of social, cultural, and spiritual progress.

Espada was born in 1756 in the Spanish town of Álava and educated at the University of Salamanca. The oldest university in Spain, Salamanca was a recipient of the “enlightened reforms” of Charles III in 1771 aimed at improving its faculty and curriculum. The university maxim became, “the free search for truth,” and professors demonstrated their political activism by challenging the Spanish status quo.⁸⁸ During his studies at Salamanca, Espada developed an aversion for the “arte gótico” (“Gothic art,” equated with Baroque aesthetics and considered anti-progressive). He became increasingly attracted to forms evincing basic geometric shapes and Classical orders drawn from the art of the Italian Renaissance.⁸⁹ Neo-Classicism, under development in

⁸⁸ See Juan Marichal, “From Pistoia to Cádiz: A Generation’s Itinerary 1786-1812,” from A. Owen Aldridge, ed. *The Ibero-American Enlightenment*, (Urbana, Chicago, and London: University of Illinois Press, 1971), pp. 101-105.

⁸⁹ Espada along with other liberals at Salamanca seem to have been looking for a new architectural language capable of representing human reason. This imagined idiom conflicted with much of the architecture around them including buildings with “horror vacui” surface decorations such as the *Casa de las Conchas* in Salamanca, built in the sixteenth century. Various idioms such as the “Plateresque” represented the accumulation of ornamental strategies from the Christian, Jewish, and Islamic Middle Ages in Iberia which the liberals of Salamanca would have associated with the traditional aristocratic structure of Iberian town and cities to which they were reacting against. For discussion on the influence of Salamanca on Espada, See Cesar Garcia Pons, *El Obispo Espada y su influencia en la cultura cubana* (La Habana: Publicaciones del Ministerio de Educación, 1951).

France and England, appealed to this generation of students at Salamanca as a more progressive architectural idiom capable of representing their ideals of reform for Spain.

The University of Salamanca became a fertile environment for liberal ideologies and political activism in the early nineteenth-century. The existence of the Inquisition became a divisive and definitive issue in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In 1810, a group of Salamanca professors attended the Cortes of Cádiz and contributed to the abolition of the Inquisition in Spain.⁹⁰ As Juan Marichal frames the situation, “Strictly speaking, there were only two ideological and ecclesiastical ‘parties’ in Spain at the end of the eighteenth century: the inquisitorial and the anti-inquisitorial.”⁹¹ For the liberals, the Inquisition embodied an enemy of progress and the traditionalism of the Spanish state. In 1812, the Jansenists at the University of Salamanca united with Liberals in Cádiz to form a national resistance group against the authority of the Vatican. In addition to suppressing centralized Church authority, the group sought to eclipse the regular orders for fostering superstition and standing in the way of knowledge. At the Cortes of Cádiz, the Spanish constitution of 1812 was drafted, the same social contract that would abruptly be dissolved by Ferdinand VII with the resurgence of absolutism two years later. Bishop Espada emerged from this late eighteenth/early nineteenth-century political environment, having absorbed and internalized the position of the Liberals, and thus bringing an ideological agenda to Havana. Upon arrival in Cuba, he saw a culturally backward society, yet one that could be reformed by the application of empirical

⁹⁰ The Cortes of Cádiz, a Spanish legislative body, was created during the Napoleonic Wars, when the Cortes took refuge in Cádiz, Spain, and began proposing liberal alternatives to French-imposed rule. See Marichal, p. 102.

⁹¹ Marichal (1971), p. 105.

reasoning and more “enlightened” practices, via collaboration with the Spanish authorities and the Sociedad Económica. Neo-Classical architecture became a means for Espada to articulate a space of eternal, rational truth over the social, visual, and cultural disparities of the Baroque and nineteenth-century colonial life.⁹²

The bishop took an assertive position against what he perceived to be the decadent, inefficient, and particularized nature of Cuban colonial society, inflicted upon the island by a corrupt Spanish regime. He brought “enlightened” ideals of order, cleanliness, and public health. Espada’s initial measures to reconfigure the city visually reveal the extent to which he emphasized the role of art and architecture as a progressive agent of change. His actions reveal, to some extent, a reaction against visual and performative aspects of the city’s Baroque culture. Espada moved to subdue certain religious imagery and public processions in the streets and public spaces. He ordered crosses removed from many passageways in the city, as well as “objects that fostered superstition,” and he prohibited fanatical penitential processions.⁹³ García Pons stated that Espada, “believed, to a great extent, in the social influence of artistic work, not only because it represents a language for the spirit, but [also]...for cultivating its directions. His sense of aesthetic values was not in conflict with the fidelity owed to religious

⁹² The aggressiveness with which Espada asserted his liberal ideology brought him into direct conflict with the Vatican on numerous occasions throughout his career. See Miguel Figueroa y Miranda, *Religión y Política en la Cuba del Siglo XIX: El Obispo Espada visto a la luz de los archivos romanos 1802-1832* (Miami, Florida: Ediciones Universal, 1975).

⁹³ Sister Gemma Marie Del Duca, “A Political Portrait: Félix Varela y Morales, 1788-1853,” Ph.D. dissertation towards Doctor of Philosophy in Ibero-American Studies, the University of New Mexico, 1966, p. 35.

feeling.”⁹⁴ Espada, like the Bourbons, appropriated ideals from the Enlightenment to apply in colonial Havana, perceiving art and architecture to be a progressive agent. While the forms that Espada appropriated reveal Neo-Classical sources, his use of this idiom was not systematic. Rather, the works he commissioned reflect both Baroque and Neo-Classical aesthetics that, at times, were blended into a new expression.

With his new, progressive agenda, Espada quickly joined forces with the Sociedad Económica, a predominantly Creole organization receptive to opportunities to promote public improvements in the city. In 1804, they combined their efforts, citing that the church cemeteries of Havana within the city walls had become overcrowded with the increased population. A Creole physician in the Sociedad, Dr. Tomás Romáy Chacon, began to voice his concerns that the proximity of the residents of Havana to these cemeteries was a threat to public health.⁹⁵ Chacon expressed his concerns about Havana’s cemeteries in the *Papel Periódico de la Habana* of August 2, 1804, when he wrote of the “unfortunate effects that had always been produced in burying corpses in the churches, which has proven especially true in recent years.”⁹⁶ He proposed establishing a cemetery in the *extramuros* (outside the fortified walls of the city) that would be both

⁹⁴ “Cría, a mayor abundamiento, en la influencia social de la obra artística, no sólo porque representa una lengua para el espíritu, sino cultivando sus direcciones. Su sentido de los valores estéticos no estaba en pugna con la fidelidad debida al sentimiento religioso.” See Garcia Pons (1951), p. 123.

⁹⁵ Chacon was an Academic correspondent of the Royal Academy of Medicine in Madrid, and became a strong voice, along with the bishop Espada, for health improvements in Havana. The bishop and the doctor were responsible for the first city-wide vaccination in 1812 and corresponded on the need to prevent disease in the city.

⁹⁶ “Los funestos efectos que ha producido siempre el abuso de enterrar los cadáveres en las iglesias, se ha comprobado con mucha especialidad en los años próximos...” The words of Tomás Romáy Chacon, see José López Sánchez, *Tomas Romay Chacon: Obras Completas* (La Habana: Museo Histórico de las Ciencias Médicas, 1965), p. 123.

medically progressive in its respect for public health and socially progressive in its ability to “indistinguishably serve to bury the corpses of all classes of persons.”⁹⁷ He asserted that disease spread rapidly by too much human contact with the dead, thus he stressed the urgency of the situation.

The project for the new Havana cemetery reveals knowledge and appropriation of eighteenth-century European urban reform movements. Architectural historian Richard A. Etlin points out transformations in perceptions of death in eighteenth-century Paris as they related to new urban burial practices. The traditional Christian practices (beginning in the seventh and eighth centuries) of burying the dead in parish churches was intended to both protect souls by keeping them close to church in death (and to martyrs) and remind the living of their mortality. However, the eighteenth century brought a new concern for public hygiene and a preoccupation with the “corruption of air” (a phobia relating to the spread of disease). Parish cemeteries were viewed by reformers as a danger to public health, and transforming Paris into a less medieval, more progressive city, “required renewal according to the strictures of the Enlightenment: cleanliness, order, air, light, and sunshine.”⁹⁸ A nationwide reform movement began in 1740’s France to end the practice of burying the dead in parish churches. D’Alembert’s *Encyclopédie* recommended that the dead be buried, in a vast cemetery sufficiently far from the city.”⁹⁹

⁹⁷ “...indistintamente se hubiesen de enterrar los cadáveres de toda clase de personas.” See Ibid.

⁹⁸ Richard A. Etlin, *The Architecture of Death: The Transformation of the Cemetery in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 1984), p. 12.

⁹⁹ Quoted in Etlin (1984), p. 17.

On May 21, 1765, the Parlement of Paris ordered all parish cemeteries removed from the city. Cemetery reform was part of a larger project for improving the city, including relocating hospitals and slaughterhouses to the city's periphery and creating squares and freestanding fountains, which were thought to "purify the air."¹⁰⁰ As the suburban cemetery developed in late eighteenth-century Paris, it became the site of "high style" architecture. The combination of utility and beauty, revealed a new functionalism generated by the Enlightenment. In their new suburban locations, cemeteries were expected to perform various ecclesiastical and civic functions. They would be places of burial, but they would also be places of moral education.

The cemetery in Havana, completed in 1808, known officially as the *General Cemetery of the Havana*, but affectionately as the *Espada Cemetery*, reveals an appropriation of eighteenth-century European, specifically Parisian, ideals of cemetery reform. The project also reveals the agency that Creole elites now possessed due to the establishment of the Sociedad Económica de Amigos del País. The Sociedad collaborated with the Spanish authorities and the Bishop Espada, who contracted a European architect. The forms of the cemetery, including an austerity of surface decoration, simple geometries, use of allegory, and Greco-Roman architectural quotations (i.e. the triumphal arch and the temple) reveal the influx of Neo-Classical forms and practices. As for the monument's social reception, we begin to see the development of a consensus amongst the Creole elite. In such a project of Creole making, a conceived space emerged in which Neo-Classical forms became conflated with social improvements and progress. The cemetery signified a new view of architecture as artifice, a flexible language that could be configured to meet contemporary social needs.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 27.

The reformers in Havana, like the eighteenth-century Parisians, imagined the creation of new, more progressive cemeteries to be justified by the wisdom of the ancients. The Romans, in particular, were cited as a model, because they were known to bury their dead on the outskirts of town. The Enlightenment, in its revision of eighteenth-century institutions, elevated the Roman tradition for its functionalism, formal clarity, and humanist values. Havanese and Parisian reformers both saw the Christian burial practices of the Middle Ages as a deviation from an antique precedent. In support of a new cemetery for the *extramuros*, the physician Tomás Romáy Chacon published a pamphlet in 1806 titled, “Discurso Sobre las Sepulturas Fuera de los Pueblos” [“Discourse on the Tombs Outside of the Towns”]. In this document, he expounded on cemeteries in the European tradition and the Old Testament. Drawing on biblical narrative, Chacon related how Cain, having murdered his brother Abel, was too modest to bury the corpse near the house of his parents, so he hid the corpse in a crevice in the earth. As the population of the earth grew, according to Chacon, humans imitated this example. Abraham bought an outlying field in which he created a family plot that eventually held Abraham, Sara, Isaac, Jacob, Rebecca, and Lia. Subsequent generations inherited this tradition, down to Moses and Joseph of Arimathea’s handling of the corpse of Jesus Christ.¹⁰¹ Chacon

¹⁰¹ “La costumbre de enterrar los muertos léjos de las habitaciones de los vivos, tuvo su origen en el primero de los difuntos. Cain, horrorizado con el crimen que había cometido, y con el espectáculo que le presentaba la muerte en el cuerpo de Abel, no satisfecho con apartarlo quanto pudo del domicilio de sus padres, lo ocultó en el seno de la tierra. Sus primeros habitantes imitaron este exemplo, sin eximir ni aun aquellas personas á quienes amaron con la mayor terneza. Abraham compró un campo a los hijos de Heth, para inhumar en la cueva de Hebron el cadáver de su esposa Sara; y después fueron allí mismo sepultados aquel Patriarca, Isaac, Jacob, Rebeca y Lia. La sepultura de Rachel se hizo en el camino de Bathlehen; y Débora, ama de Rebeca, fue enterrada en la falda del Bethel.

Las generaciones subsecuentes continuaron executando sus enterramientos en los campos desiertos; y si acaso se sojuzgaron á la práctica de los egipcios mientras permanecieron baxo su opresión, luego que salieron al desierto la rehusaron voluntariamente hasta que la Ley publicada sobre el Sinaí autorizó la ceremonia de sus padres. El sumo Sacerdote Aaron, María, hermana de

discussed how Egyptians prepared the bodies of the deceased in order to house them closer to the realm of the living. However, he suggested that this Egyptian practice was not a viable solution. More progressive in his mind, the Greeks, and especially the Romans, passed strict laws, which established cemeteries outside of cities.¹⁰²

Chacon's narrative explained how the enlightened burial practices of the Greeks and Romans became part of early Christian burial practices in Italy and Spain, where the corpses were deliberately separated from the realm of the living in respect for public health. Contrary to this logic, out of "vanity," medieval kings began endangering the community by burying themselves and their relatives within the church, in disregard for public safety. Chacon considered this arrogant practice of both kings and clergy as a

Moyse, este mismo Caudillo del pueblo Israelita, todos fueron sepultados fuera de sus reales. Conquistaron en fin la tierra de Promision, y léjos de alterarse aquel rito, ni los Jueces y Reyes, ni los Pontífices y Profetas merecieron sepultarse en el centro de los pueblos. Edificado el Templo ¿quién osaria profanarlo con la inhumacion de un cadáver, quando su tacto dexaba ilegal al hebreo, las casas quedaban inmundas si en ellas se enterraban, y los viageros huian de transitar por los parages donde encontraban los supulcros? El de Joseph de Arimatea en que fue colocado el cuerpo sagrado de Jesu-christo; el campo que compraron los Sacerdotes con el precio de su sangre para enterrar á los peregrinos, y otros pasages del Nuevo Testamento, acreditan que en aquella época observaban los judíos escrupulosamente la costumbre de sus Patriarcas. See López Sánchez, p. 127.

¹⁰² "Los eqipcios y lacedemonios aunque miraron los cadáveres con menos horror, procuraron eficazmente evitar las funestas consecuencias de su corrupción. Los balsamos y aromas, las semillas mas fragantes que producian sus paisés y los vecinos, las empleaban con profusion para hacerlos incorruptibles. De este modo los conservaban en las casas y en los Templos; los primeros por luxo y vanidad, y los segundos para acostumar la juventud á no intimidarse con la muerte. El resto de la Grecia, ni tan austéra como Esparta, ni tan profusa como Egipto, enterró constantemente sus difuntos distantes de los pueblos. Los Generales mas ilustres de Athenas, fueron los únicos á quienes se concedió sepultura en el arrabal de Cerámico.

Una de las leyes de las Doce Tablas prohibía absolutamente quemar ó enterrar algun cadáver dentro de los muros de Roma. Ni las innovaciones del gobierno, ni la anarquia de los Triunviros, ni el despotismo de los Emperadores derogó jamas esta sancion; al contrario, notandose algunas infracciones en el consulado de Druilio, la ratificó el Senado sin excepcion alguna, y en los tiempos de Marco Tulio y de Varron se erigian los sepulcros cerca de los caminos públicos." See Ibid, p. 128.

corruption and social evil responsible for the sad predicament in which Havana found itself in the nineteenth-century. Chacon's thus discourse justified the need to co-opt the Classical tradition for contemporary use. The doctor's eye-witness account offers a window into the mentality by which nineteenth-century Creoles began to think of art and architecture as an agent of social change. What also becomes evident in the cemetery's program and Chacon's description are changing socio-political values associated with local dignity and accomplishments.

Eighteenth and nineteenth-century cemeteries for the *extramuros* provided a separate space for the dead, yet were also intended to be engaged by the living. As Etlin points out, "the new cemeteries presented in microcosm the totality of an individual's and a society's interests and concerns."¹⁰³ The Christian association of death with "humiliation" to be redeemed by the Final Judgment was combined with the humanist conception of death and commemoration. Death offered the opportunity for immortality through civic memorials that could be placed in the new cemeteries. Society, furthermore, had begun to question the source from which monarchy drew its legitimacy, positing that the King's authority rested upon the welfare of the people rather than Divine Right. Individuals could improve their social standing and lot in life based on noble deeds rather than noble birth. Memorials to meritorious individuals would thus inspire the populace to be better citizens. Suburban cemeteries in Paris took on a monumental character with tombs to distinguished individuals. In this social role, Etlin argues that the new cemeteries became "a school of virtue and achievement fostered through

¹⁰³ Etlin (1984), p. 39.

memorials.”¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, these civic memorials were different from isolated monuments in the public square because they, “were broadly extended to all classes.”¹⁰⁵

In Havana, Chacon’s description discussed the Espada Cemetery in socio-political context. He wrote that the establishment of such a cemetery would be both a political and religious institution, and would require the civil and ecclesiastical authorities to be convinced of its importance. In order to appease officialdom, he paid tribute to the good faith that existed between the Captain General, Señor Marqués de Someruelos, and the bishop of the city, Don Juan José Díaz de Espada. Chacon offered the cemetery as a means for perpetuating the memory of this harmonious relationship.¹⁰⁶ Even though the Bourbons agenda called for the diminishment of Church authority beginning in the eighteenth-century, the Church retained a strong role in social ordering. As in France, the Havana cemetery was to be a civic and religious institution. The public expected projects involving commemoration and the appropriation of civic memory, to be grounded by the consecration of both the Catholic Church and the Spanish authorities. The public responded to the elaborate rituals by which Church and State made their power felt in

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, p. 59.

¹⁰⁵ This commemorative aspect of the cemetery, according to Etlín, explains how the cemetery came to be viewed as a microcosm of the city and a means of instilling virtue in the populace. Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ “La erección de un Cementerio General estramuros de la Habana, como establecimiento religioso y político, exigía que las Potestades Civil y Eclesiástica convencidas de su importancia se ausiliasen recíprocamente, empleando con la mayor actividad todas sus facultades y recursos. La difícil combinación de estas circunstancias ha frustrado varias veces los deseos de sus gefes; pero al fin, llegó la época en que felizmente reunidas restaure el Santuario su primitiva pureza y dignidad; las leyes civiles y canónicas se observen inviolablemente, y la policia de esta Ciudad adquiere muchas ventajas, alejando de su recinto unas cloacas de horror y de infeccion.

Al genio ilustrado, al zelo y constancia y á la buena armonía que reina entre el Señor Marqués de Someruelos, Presidente Gobernador y Capitán General de esta ciudad é Isla, y al Ilustrísimo Sr. D. Juan José Díaz de Espada, Obispo de esta diócesis, debemos en el Cementerio Campal un monumento que hará grata y perpetua su memoria.” López Sánchez (1965), p. 136.

colonial urban space. The traditional alliance between Church and State in Havana served as a method of colonial social control in the early nineteenth-century by appealing directly to the memory of the local population. Although the Bourbon state, the liberal bishop, and the Creole elite had begun the move towards secularism, they represented a slim minority of the colonial population. The common and lower-class sectors of society were less aware of these ongoing transformations and possessed extensive indoctrination in the tenants of Catholicism. Religious imagery was integral to the visual culture of Cuba and a means of maintaining the city's ideological structure. Thus, in spite of undercutting ecclesiastical power, the Bourbons retained the ordering social function of the Church.

The Sociedad Económica played a substantial role as initiators and patrons of the cemetery, believing strongly that burying the dead in churches was a social abuse and that the proposed General Cemetery of Havana was a social improvement. By an election of 1802, the society made the recommendation to the captain general for a new cemetery outside the city walls, and gave five hundred pesos for the architect's fee. The captain general, impressed by this royal disposition, gave approval for the sake of the conservation of public health. The society, then, decided unanimously to establish a cemetery on the most convenient site. They formed a plan, calculated costs, and obtained the authorization to build on the land between the piers of *La Tierra* and *El Arsenal*. However, they soon encountered difficulties, which slowed the construction. After the British invasion of 1762, the laws of fortification did not permit construction directly adjacent to the walls. The Bishop had come down with Yellow Fever in 1802, which created more delays. Two years were lost until May of 1804 when an order came from

the king to commence with the new public cemetery. Having received the royal decree, the Bishop Espada, recovered from his illness, organized the local builders, obtained an architect, and began to direct the works.¹⁰⁷

The initiative with which the Sociedad acted to establish the cemetery reveals various things about elite Creole culture in Havana. Not only were Creoles interested in the public health of their city and island, but also their legitimacy before Peninsulars and the Spanish administration. If the new public cemetery in the extramuros would house memorials to distinguished individuals, then the cemetery would elevate the local achievements of the Creole elite. Such a commemoration of civic accomplishments would de-emphasize the issue of a male individual's birth by focusing on his talents and deeds. The issue of birth was at the center of the Peninsular-Creole conflict, as Creoles found limited power and political representation because of their "natural" inferiority in the Spanish colonial system based on their American birthplace.¹⁰⁸ The Sociedad, therefore, acted quickly to ensure that the cemetery was constructed to improve public health and provide an arena for the display of Cuban achievements.

¹⁰⁷ "Desde que la Real Sociedad Económica de esta Ciudad, por una eleccion que la recomienda, confió á Su Señoría Ilustrísima el año de 1802 el empleo de Director, la manifestó en sus primeras sesiones por un sencillo discurso, que la disciplina eclesiástica, las leyes civiles, los cánones, y la misma razón, abominaban el abuso piadoso de enterrar los cadáveres en los templos; y que si en otros pueblos eran convenientísimos los cementerios-estramuros, en este eran mucho mas necesarios, por su localidad, por el calor del clima, y por varias otras circunstancias; y ofreciendo en seguida quinientos pesos á disposicion de la Sociedad, indicó que parte de ellos podia ser para el arquitecto que hiciese un buen plano reales disposiciones, y en la conservacion de la salud, esforzó la macion del Ilustrísimo Señor Director, y la Sociedad convencida con unas pruebas tan incontestables, acordó se estableciera un cementerio en el parage que se juzgase mas conveniente. Formóse el plano de la obra, se calculó el costo que tendría, y parecio que podía ejecutarse en el terreno que media entre las puertas de Tierra y del Arsenal.

Añadióse por último, que las leyes de fortificacion no permitán construir cerca de los muros de esta plaza ni el débil cercado, ni la capilla que debía tener el cementerio; aunque todo fuese de madera." See *Ibid*, p. 137.

¹⁰⁸ For discussion on the conflicts between Creoles and Peninsulars, see Pérez (1984), pp. 34-50 and Gott (2004), pp. 20-30.

The Bishop Espada's architect for the cemetery was a Frenchman named Étienne-Sulpice Hallet (c. 1760-1825). Hallet received his training in France before arriving in Richmond, Virginia in 1788 to teach at the Academy of Sciences and Fine Arts. He soon left for Philadelphia, where work became scarce, leaving Hallet unemployed. He submitted plans for the design competition for the United States Capital building in Washington, D.C. on July 15, 1792. His design, austere in its basic geometries and subdued in surface ornamentation, revealed his knowledge of Neo-Classical aesthetics. He imagined a central rectangular block topped by a dome flanked by semicircular wings for the House and Senate. The building exterior was to be adorned with a continuous peristyle. The United States Congress approved of his peristyle exterior but rejected his plan, and Hallet was retained as a consultant. His design was rejected for one by William Thornton, whose submission was approved on January 31, 1793. When tensions flared between Hallet and Thornton, Hallet was discharged on November 15, 1794. He left Washington in August of 1796 and arrived in Havana by 1800 where he was noticed by Bishop Espada.¹⁰⁹ The architectural ideas that Hallet implemented in Cuba thus owed something to his training and experiences in both the United States and France.

Chacon describes the cemetery site as one mile west of the city, near the sea, and on a much frequented road, but hidden from the passerby by the leper's hospital of San Lázaro. The actual cemetery was demolished, but Frédéric Mialhe's *Vista del Cementerio General de la Ciudad de la Habana*, a lithograph from c. 1839, represents the cemetery from the vantage point of the entrance portal (Figure 32). Hallet designed a rectangle 150 varas (411 feet, 9 inches) north to south and 100 varas (274 feet, 9 inches) east to west,

¹⁰⁹ Narciso G. Menocal, "Etienne-Sulpice Hallet and the Espada Cemetery: A Note," *The Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts*, Vol. 22, Cuba Theme Issue, 1996, p. 59.

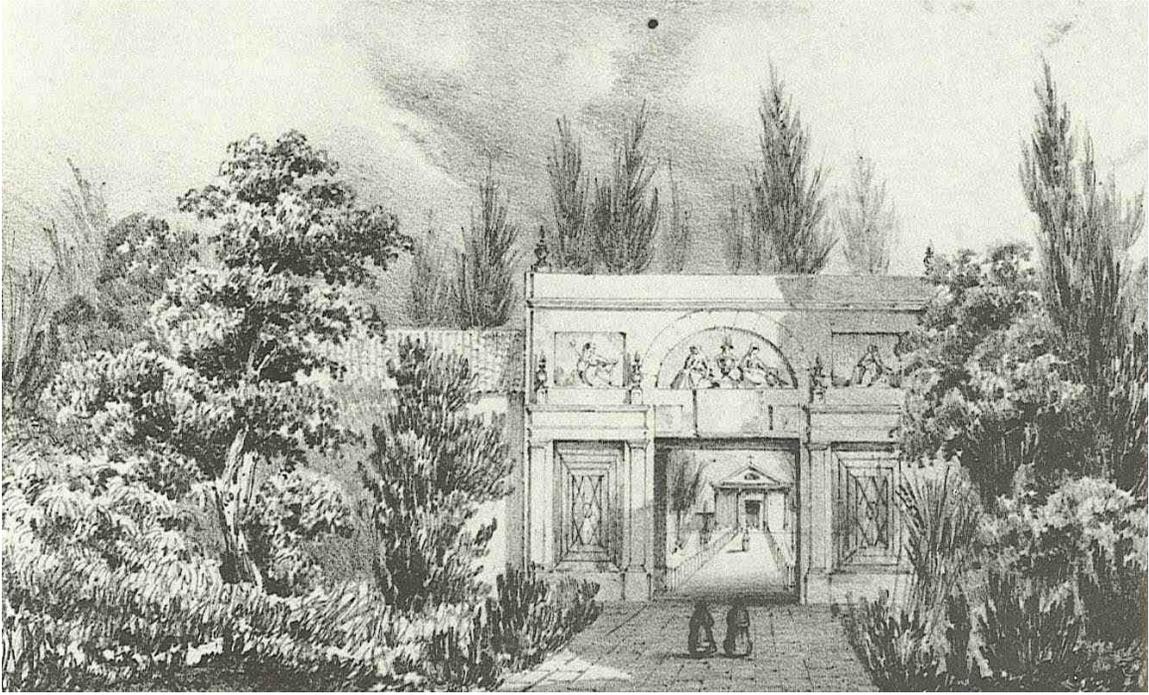


Figure 32. Frederik Mialhe, *View of the General Cemetery of the City of Havana*, 1860's, lithograph

enclosed by a masonry wall with a ridge of worked ashlar masonry.¹¹⁰ The total surface area was 22,000 square varas (726,000 square feet), including an atrium, with a capacity inside for 4,600 burials. The cemetery was sited over a subterranean spring. In each of the four corners were elevated four obelisks of imitation black jasper, with the inscription: “Exultabunt ossa humiliata,” a phrase pertaining to the ossuaries built in these corners in the shape of wells.¹¹¹ Ossuaries were depositories for exhumed bones and were reminders of human mortality.¹¹² Obelisks, icons of ancient Egypt, were considered appropriate for cemetery architecture in their period in Europe and the Americas. Cuban architect Orestes del Castillo suggests that in the context of nineteenth-century Havana, obelisks took on associations with resurrection.¹¹³ As icons of ancient Egypt, obelisks were frequently used in the symbolic complexes of Masonic orders, which had significantly grown in number in Havana as Creole networking centers following the British invasion of 1762.

¹¹⁰ A vara is a linear unit of measurement equivalent to approximately 33 inches. See glossary of Louisa Schell Hoberman and Susan Migden Socolow, *The Countryside in Colonial Latin America* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996), p. 284.

¹¹¹ “El Cementerio está situado una milla al Oeste de la Ciudad, cerca del mar y de un camino muy frecuentado; pero oculto de los transeuntes por el Hospital de San Lázaro. Es un cuadrilongo de ciento cincuenta varas Norte-Sur, y ciento de Este á Oeste, cercado de pared de mampostería mixta, con caballete de sillería labrada. Lo interior tiene pintado un feston de cipreses sobre el fondo amarillo jaspeado. La superficie total del terreno pasa de veinte y dos mil varas planas, incluso los atrios, con capacidad dentro del Cementerio para mas de cuatro mil seiscientas sepulturas, incluso las de los párvulos.

En los cuatro ángulos se elevan cuatro obeliscos, imitando el jaspe negro, con la inscripción: *Exultabunt ossa humiliata*, correspondiente a los osarios construidos en los mismos ángulos en forma de pozos.” See López Sánchez (1965), p. 139.

¹¹² Etlin (1984), p. 43.

¹¹³ Orestes del Castillo’s article identifies the iconography of classical statuary from the Creole and Peninsular point of view. Orestes del Castillo, “The Conventions of the Classical Statuary: The Reinvention of an Artistic Code in the Americas,” unpublished article given to the author.

Hallet divided the rectangular space into four quadrants by cross axial roads that formed a monumental cross upon the ground. The streets were covered with tile made from a smooth, slate colored stone. Chacon identifies this material as the “country stone of San Miguel,” from the place where it was quarried. The stone of San Miguel was considered some of the finest stone available in Cuba and was reserved for important architectural projects. The east-west, short axis finished in two pyramids of the same material as the obelisks, i.e. imitation black jasper. Orestes del Castillo also associates pyramids with resurrection, and along with obelisks, could represent an idealized realm of unity between reason and spirit. The north-south, long axis began at the cemetery portal and terminated in a chapel designed like an Etruscan or Republican Roman temple on axis against the far north wall.¹¹⁴

Hallet’s direct quotation of antiquity came with the temple-like chapel structure. Centered in the north wall, the chapel had a portico of four Tuscan columns, described by Chacon as “similar to the old temples.” Etlin says that the Tuscan order was used in new cemetery projects for Paris because it was considered the simplest and most humble (and therefore, less evocative of nobility).¹¹⁵ A lunette occupied the pediment bearing the inscription: “Ecce nunc in pulvere dormian, Job VI. Et ego resucitabo cum in novissimo die. Joann VII.” [“For the present behold me resting in the dust, Job VI. Rather the Lord resuscitates me on the final day, Joann. VII”]. These letters, in golden bronze and accompanied by a cross, reinforced the traditional Christian eschatological conception of

¹¹⁴ “Dos calles enlosadas con una piedra color de pizarra, bastante sólida y tersa, llamada en el país piedra de San Miguel, por el lugar de donde se extrae, lo dividen en cuatro cuadros iguales. La una calle se dirige de la portada á la Capilla, y la otra de Este á Oeste, terminando en dos pirámides del mismo color que los obeliscos. See López Sánchez, p. 139.

¹¹⁵ Etlin (1984), p. 43.

the humiliation of death. The portico and the chapel exterior were painted a light yellow color with black striations to resemble marble.¹¹⁶ Chacon describes the altar inside the chapel as made of the stone of San Miguel, in the shape of a tomb, with steps of the same. On the altar was placed a crucifix of ebony and ivory. In the center of the frontal was a golden engraving of a cross and halo, and to either side, two golden and striated pilasters. The door of the chapel bore the inscription: “Beati mortui qui in Domino moriuntur: opera enim illorum sequantur illos. Apoc.” [“Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord: because they go accomplished by their works. Apoc.”]. This message gave homage to the dead, revealing values of death and commemoration. Centered in the floor of the cella was a “lamp burning day and night,” representing the eternal flame.¹¹⁷ Images referencing eternity and Greco-Roman antiquity positioned traditional religious associations within a humanist framework.

Centered on the chapel’s back wall, a fresco, executed by the Brescian painter, Giuseppe Perovani, represented the resurrection of the dead. Chacon describes an angel

¹¹⁶ Cuban art historian Narciso G. Menocal identifies this painting practice as “a standard device used throughout the Baroque and Neo-Classical periods, yet heretofore unknown in Havana.” See Menocal (1996), p. 59.

¹¹⁷ “La capilla, colocada en el centro del lado Norte, es semejante á los templos antiguos: tiene un pórtico de cuatro columnas rústicas aisladas, y el frontispicio abierto de un arco de medio punto adornado con las inscripciones: *Ecce nunc in pulvere dormian, Job VI. Et ego resucitabo eum in novísimo die. Joann. VII.*, en letras de bronce doradas; rematando con una cruz de silería. El pórtico y todo lo exterior de este edificio se ha pintado de color amarillo bajo jaspeado de negro

El Altar, que está aislado, es de una sola piedra de San Miguel, en forma de túmulo, con su grada de la mismo piedra, y sobre ella un crucifijo de marfil de tres cuartas de largo en una cruz de ébano, sentada en una peña. En el centro del frontal tiene grabada y dorada una cruz de aureola, y á los lados dos pilastras estriadas y doradas. En la parte posterior contiene varias gavetas y cajones donde se guardan los ornamentos y vasos sagrados. La tarima y solería de la capilla y pórtico son de la mismo piedra. La puerta es de balaustres, y sobre ella esta inscripción: *Beati mortui qui in Domino moriuntur: opera enim illorum sequantur illos. Apoc.* Frente al altar, y en medio del pórtico está una lámpara encendida día y noche.” See López Sánchez (1965), p. 139.

with a trumpet telling the souls: “Surgite mortui et venit in iudicium” [“Raise up yee dead and come to justice”]. To the right of this angel, souls departed from their graves, while to the left, the damned were shown horrified by their fate and wanting to return to their tombs. This arrangement, echoing the medieval European formula of positioning the saved on the right hand of Christ and the damned on the left, reminded the viewer of their impending death and hastened them to seek salvation. The fresco must have employed some illusionistic perspective scheme, for Chacon describes other figures “to the back” who are “corpses being revived” and leaving the graves of the General Cemetery. Over the door and the two lateral windows were painted images of the three Theological Virtues: Faith, Hope, and Charity. The remainder of the chapel interior was ornamented by sixteen white pillars decorated with gold. Between these pillars were statues of eight sorrowful matrons holding a glass of fragrance in their hands (symbol of purity). These figures were all white on a black background articulated with white arabesques, further reinforcing the minimal, monochromatic color scheme of the chapel interior.¹¹⁸

Upon entering the cemetery through its south wall, as seen in Mialhe’s print, the viewer passed through a monumental portal, designed as a triumphal arch. From the front, a tile street ran from the atrium up to the portal, which was ten varas (27 feet, 2 inches) across. From the atrium, the portal was three bays across with two rectangular,

¹¹⁸ En el centro de la Capilla, detras del Altar, se ha pintado al fresco un cuadro que representa la Resurrección de los muertos. La parte superior la ocupa un ángel con una trompeta diciéndoles: *Surgite mortui et venit in iudicium*. A su derecha salen de los sepulcros varios predestinados, y á la izquierda los réprobos horrorizados, y queriendo volver, á sus tumbas: en el fondo se divisan otros muchos cadáveres reanimándose, y saliendo de los sepulcros del mismo cementerio figurado en el cuadro. Encima de la puerta y de las dos ventanas de los costados están pintadas en bajo relieve las tres virtudes Teologales: Fé, Esperanza y Caridad. El resto de la Capilla lo ocupan diez y seis pilares blancos con adorno de color de oro. Entre estos pilares se han colocado ocho matronas afligidas con los ojos vendados, y un vaso de aromas en las manos, los que consagran á las cenizas de los muertos. Estas figuras son todas blancas sobre un fondo negro contorneado de arabescos blancos.” See *Ibid*, p. 140.

recessed panels framed by Tuscan order pilasters flanking the roughly square gate. Above the gate, a lunette framed bronze relief figures representing Time and Eternity. The figure of Time holds a snake (possibly a caduceus) and weeps, according to Chacon, because of the corruptibility of man. The figure of Eternity extinguishes a torch, indicating that life has ended. Between these figures, a vase of perfume signifies that time destroys all and turns it into smoke. To either side of the central lunette, rectangular panels frame representations of Religion and Medicine with their respective attributes. A gilded inscription on the gate reinforces the visual messages of these images and reads: “A la Religión; A la Salud Pública,” (To Religion; To Public Health) and gives a date of 1805. Beneath the figures of Time and Eternity were inscribed the names: “El Marqués de Someruelos, Governor” and “Juan de Espada, Bishop,” respectively.¹¹⁹ The use of allegory corresponded to the Neo-Classical theory that posited allegorical representation as the most appropriate forms to represent universal truth (and republicanism). Allegorical images were purely conceptual, without time or place, and usually represented by female figures, as with the Espada cemetery.

The monumental gateway, by combining allegorical images of Time, Eternity, Religion, and Medicine, the dedication inscription to Religion and Public Health, and the insignias of the names of the bishop and captain general, reinforced that the establishment of Church and State were working together to bring progressive health conditions to

¹¹⁹ “La portada, vista por dentro, es toda abierta y forma tres luces, que dividen dos pilastras sencillas con su cornisa, y petril, cubierta de azotea, y enlosada con piedra de S. Miguel. El frente exterior consta de cuatro pilastras de orden toscano con ático encima; la puerta es un arco de medio punto elevado en el ático, y acompañado de dos arcos rectos balaustrados. La imposta del arco central contiene tres lápidas unidas: en la parte superior de la que ocupa el centro está grabada y dorada esta inscripcion: A la Religion: A la Salud Pública. MDCCCV. En la parte inferior de la colatera, á la derecha: *El Marques de Someruelos, Gobernador*; y en el mismo parage de la otra: *Juan de Espada, Obispo*.” See Ibid, p. 141.

Havana. Simultaneously, the Neo-Classical program elevated the inventive capacity of local society, celebrating their ability to effect positive change on the island. For Creoles in the Sociedad Económica, the forms of the cemetery evoked their sense of self-empowerment and progress. Additionally, the cemetery was conceived as socially progressive, insofar as it served “many classes of people,” and the work was embedded with textual and spatial codes. These codes, as in all colonial periods and contexts, affirmed community while reifying hierarchy. Graves for distinguished individuals that might have been buried within the walls were transplanted to the new suburban cemetery. Chacon relates that, “all those who have distinguished and own burials in the Churches, Parishes, and Convents conserved analogically the same right in the Cemetery [the Espada Cemetery].”¹²⁰ Directly in front of the chapel portico and to either side of the north-south walkway, eight brick graves with frameworks of the stone of San Miguel were constructed. The first sequence of four was found on the chapel’s right hand side and dedicated to the hierarchy of the Church. The first grave was dedicated to the bishops of Havana, the second to the ecclesiastical dignitaries, the third to the *benemeritus* (national hero) of the Church, and the fourth to the canons of the Cathedral. Those to the chapel’s left were dedicated to the hierarchy of the State. The first grave was dedicated to the captain generals, the second to the national hero of the State, and the third and fourth to the judges.

Immediately following the graves for the senior members of Church and State, were the graves of the first nobility. Directly behind the ecclesiastical group, occupying

¹²⁰ “Todas las que tengan sepulturas propias y distinguidas en las Iglesias, Parroquias y Conventos conservarán análogamente el mismo derecho en el Cementerio, y las que quisieran elegirlas en él se les concederán según sus clases. See *Ibid*, p. 140.

an area forty varas across from east to west, were the graves of the parish priests as well as the regular and secular clergy by order of their station in the Church. Preceding the graves of the senior members of the State, also forty varas across, were the graves of the first nobility according to their title. The cemetery was subdivided further. Behind the rows of the secondary powers were the graves of “the most honorable people in the city.” These included elite Creoles and Peninsulars, property owners and merchants, and reveal the cemetery’s role in Havana as a space for memorializing the achievements of the local elite. In this respect, the cemetery would act as a “school of virtue” (borrowing Etlin’s phrase), by establishing memorials of civic achievement for the public to emulate. The final portion of the cemetery was dedicated to “the common classes.”¹²¹ Therefore, the Espada Cemetery contained a strictly hierarchical spatial order organized according to social rank. The graves were laid in a sequential progression from the least to the most important members of colonial society mirroring the colonial city, as the more important members were placed closest to the chapel and ultimately the altar.

The ritualized inauguration of the Espada Cemetery demonstrates the importance of public performances in Colonial society for shaping the meaning of public monuments and constructing a memory for the viewer/spectator. The *Aviso Periodical* announced that

¹²¹ Frente al pórtico y contiguos á su cimiento se han construido de ladrillos ocho sepulcros mayores con marcos de piedras de San Miguel y lápidas de la misma materia, excepto los dos principales que las tienen de marmol. El primero de estos, al lado del Evangelio, se ha destinado para los Ilustrísimos Señores Obispos; el segundo, para las Dignidades Eclesiásticas; el tercero para los beneméritos de la iglesia; y el cuarto para los Canónigos. Los otros cuatro del lado opuesto son para los Señores Gobernadores, el primero; para los Generales de las Reales armas, el segundo; para los beneméritos del Estado, el tercero; y el cuarto para los Magistrados. A estos sepulcros seguirán los de la primera nobleza, como títulos, gefes, militares y Políticos, Regidores, etc. y ocuparán todo el ancho de este cuadro, y cuarenta varas de largo, dividiéndose del segundo tramo por una línea de ladrillos. A continuación de las otras cuatro sepulturas se colocarán las de los Curas párrocos y además clero secular y regular por el orden de precedencias que tienen en la Iglesia; ocupando estas la otra mitad del primer tramo hasta donde sea necesario.” Ibid, p. 140.

the inauguration of the cemetery would be held on February 2, 1806. The formal consecration involved the interring in the steps of two tombs the bones of the Señor Diego Manrique, former captain general of Havana, and of the Illustrious José González Candamo, Bishop of Milasa, Ausiliar of the Diocese of Havana and canon of the Cathedral. The separate sets of bones of the leaders of Church and State were ceremoniously and symbolically transferred from the cemeteries within the city walls to the new public cemetery. The bones were placed in two boxes lined in black velvet adorned with golden braids and insignias. At half past four in the afternoon a procession conveyed the remains to the cemetery singing psalms to the music of the Cathedral orchestra. A picket of dragoons preceded the procession, being constantly interrupted by the massive crowd “that obstructed all the course.” The various religious communities walked behind the great cross of the cathedral. The ecclesiastical assembly conducted the bones by means of four servants with liveries of the illustrious Bishop Espada.¹²²

Two town aldermen of the cabildo and two colonels carried the tassels of the box of the Señor Manrique on the shoulders of four lackeys of the acting captain general. Two ministers with loose tunics followed the Bishop Espada who wore a great cloak. The procession continued with both the military and political bodies, with their respective

¹²² “Habiéndose anunciado por el Aviso-Periódico que el día 2 de febrero debía bendecirse, se depositaron desde aquella mañana en la capilla de la Casa de Beneficencia los huesos del Señor Don Diego Manrique, Gobernador y Capitan General que fue de esta Ciudad é Isla, y los del Ilustrísimo Señor Don José Gonzalez Candamo, Obispo de Milasa, Ausiliar de esta Diócesis y canónigo de esta Catedral. Se contenian en dos cajas forradas en terciopelo negro guarnecidas con galones de oro distinguiéndose por las insignias que tenía cada una, peculiares a los empleos de estos Señores. A las cuatro y media de la tarde se dió principio en este lugar á la traslacion de esas respetables cenizas al Cementerio General entonando y cantando la música de la Catedral los salmos correspondientes. Un piquete de dragones de América precedía la procesion, deteniéndose a cada paso por la gente que obstruía toda las comunidades religiosas y el clero secular con sobrepellíz. Seguía el venerable cabildo eclesiástico acompañando los huesos del Señor Candamo, conducido por cuatro criados con libreas del Ilustrísimo Señor Obispo Diocesano.” See *Ibid*, p. 138.

leaders, the manager of the Royal Hacienda, the illustrious cabildo authorized by the captain general, and ended with a company of grenadiers of the fixed regiment of Havana. The procession converged on a series of two tombs for the boxes of remains. The tombs were six varas (198 feet) across with several steps adorned with wax candles. Upon the tombs was elevated an obelisk of four varas (132 feet), flecked of white and purple.¹²³ Thus the Spanish administration, ecclesiastical establishment, and the ranks of the military processed into a well-ordered Neo-Classical urban space, performing the city's hierarchy before the gathered crowd. The deliberate and highly coded performance reinforced the ideological structure of the colonial city.

The Señor Don Julian del Barria, canon of the Cathedral, gave a speech extolling the virtues of the former leaders. Following the oration, the Bishop Espada covered with pontifical vestments, solemnly executed the benediction of the cemetery. After this rite was finished, the bones of the Señor Manrique were placed in the grave destined for “the senior governors of this city” and those of the Señor Candamo were placed into the tomb built for the ecclesiastical dignitaries. The orchestra of the cathedral accompanied all the proceedings with “pathetic and sympathetic” music especially composed for the function.

¹²³ “Dos regidores de este Ilustre Ayuntamiento y dos coroneles llevaban las borlas de la caja del Señor Manrique, que iba en hombros de otros cuatro lacayos del Señor Presidente Gobernador y Capitan General. El Señor Dean con capa pluvial negra hacía de Preste, acompañándole dos ministros con dalmáticas, presididos por el Ilustrísimo Señor Obispo con capa magna. Continuaban la procesión los vecinos más distinguidos de esta Ciudad, los cuerpos militares y políticos, con sus respectivos gefes, el Señor Intendente del ejército y de Real Hacienda, el Escmo. Señor Comandante General de este Apostadero, y el Muy Ilustre Ayuntamiento autorizado por el Señor Presidente, cerrando la procesion una compañía de granaderos del regimiento Fijo de la Habana.” See Ibid.

The ceremony was concluded after 7:00 in the evening, when the light of a full moon ensured that the immense crowd dispersed without incident.¹²⁴

The Havana Cathedral: A New Image of Antiquity

In the early nineteenth-century, the Bishop Espada commissioned projects for the transformation of the Havana cathedral interior. Many of the Cathedral's Hispano-Mudéjar and Baroque elements initiated by the Jesuits in 1748 were remodeled to incorporate Neo-Classical elements. Espada's vision for the cathedral was to transition it away from its traditional character towards a more progressive image that he referred to as "the new style."¹²⁵ The bishop found fault with the particularized and idiosyncratic nature of traditional Cuban imagery and sought to modify it with a more classicizing sensibility that would communicate his "enlightened" perspective. As elite Creoles had seen an idealized vision for their city in the Espada Cemetery and celebrated the island's economic expansion, they would find continuation of this reformed urban text in their Cathedral with the remodeling of altars, vaulting, and pictorial imagery.

The bishop began searching for European artists who could carry out his new vision for the cathedral. He contracted the Brescian painter, Giuseppe Perovani (c. 1765-

¹²⁴ "El Señor Don Julian del Barrio, canónigo de esta Catedral, pronunció inmediatamente una oracion, manifestando el objeto de la ceremonia que iba a practicarse. Concluída ésta, el Illmo. Señor Obispo, revestido de medio pontifical, ejecutó con la mayor solemnidad la bendición de aquel santo lugar, ministrándole ambos cleros, y el cabildo eclesiástico. Terminado este rito, se inhumaron los huesos del Señor Manrique en el sepulcro destinado para los Señores Gobernadores de esta Ciudad, y los del Ilustrísimo Señor Candamo en el que se habia construido para las dignidades eclesiásticas. La Capilla de la Catedral acompañó todos los oficios con una música muy patética que se acababa de componer para esta función. Concluyóse despues de las siete de la noche; pero la luna que estaba en su oposicion, iluminaba con tanta claridad, que sin desórden alguno se retiró el inmenso concurso que presenció aquella ceremonia religiosa con un placer respetuoso." Ibid, p. 139.

¹²⁵ Weiss y Sanchez, p. 236.

1835), who had come to Havana from Philadelphia and worked for Espada on the cemetery chapel. Espada commissioned Perovani to decorate the chancel with frescoes. Perovani's *Last Supper*, completed for the north lunette of the sanctuary, c. 1808-15, reveals statuesque figures set against an austere Classical background (Figure 33). In the work, Christ sits in the center of the horizontal table beneath a chandelier and against a red cloak (symbolizing his sacrifice) stretched between two monumental pilasters. The disciples flank him on both sides of the table wearing red and yellow cloaks (evoking Roman togas) that contrast with the white drapery on Christ, a symbol of purity.

The use of compositional symmetry and balance, the drapery on the figures the Tuscan pilasters on either side of the Christ figure reveal a classicizing vocabulary. However, the sense of movement evoked by the figures as they react to Christ's revelation that "one of you will betray me," reveals persistent Baroque sensibilities. Perovani's fresco of the Last Supper hardly contains the strict linearity, subdued action, and visual stoicism of a late-eighteenth century work by Jacques-Louis David. Rather, we might compare Perovani's fresco to Nicolas Poussin's *The Judgment of Solomon*, 1649, which portrays a scene of Baroque intensity and action before a subdued Classical background (Figure 34). Although no direct connection to this work can be found, this comparison highlights the fact that as a "new style" emerged in Havana (possibly inspired by Neo-Classical sources), many Baroque elements remained. Perovani's work would have appealed to Bishop Espada, however, because it situated religious imagery within a Classical setting, as if to harmonize religious and humanist values.



Figure 33. Attributed to José Perovani, *Last Supper*, early 19th-century, Cathedral of Havana, west lunette of the sanctuary, fresco



Figure 34. Nicolas Poussin, *The Judgment of Solomon*, 1649, oil on canvas

In the right lunette of the sanctuary, Perovani's *Christ Giving the Keys to St. Peter*, reveals similar appropriations of Classical elements in a scene with the linear complexity, psychological tension, and drama of the Baroque (Figure 35). The fresco depicts Christ, dressed in white and red robes, holding the keys to the kingdom of heaven aloft in an orator's pose as Peter kneels with outstretched arms in an image of humility. The remaining disciples stand to either side of the two central figures. One disciple assumes a clearly defined contrapposto stance, and a group gathers in a *sacra conversazione* (sacred conversation) configuration, each elements that encode the scene with humanist messages. The landscape beyond, like a Poussain-esque image of Classical utopia, contains Greco-Roman temples, including a *tholos*, set upon a high ridge like an acropolis. The sanctuary thus contained frescos that narrated important moments of the New Testament combined with a classicizing visual vocabulary. These elements combined traditional religious teaching with a moral lesson of public virtue. As a public space, the cathedral would have presented these images to a broad section of the population. A spectator's background and location in the social structure would determine their interpretations of these images, but high ranking members of the Sociedad would have seen a balance between their traditional urban landscape and its religious associations and the rising tide of rational progress underway on the island.

Espada had existing Baroque paintings reframed in newly constructed side altars, which replaced more exuberant Baroque equivalents by 1814 (Figure 36).¹²⁶ Constructed of Caribbean mahogany and consisting of columns, pediments with dentils, and urns, the new altars modified the symbolic content and experience of such paintings as of the

¹²⁶ Menocal, p. 58.



Figure 35. Attributed to José Perovani, *Christ Giving the Keys to St. Peter*, early 19th-century, Cathedral of Havana, east lunette of the sanctuary, fresco

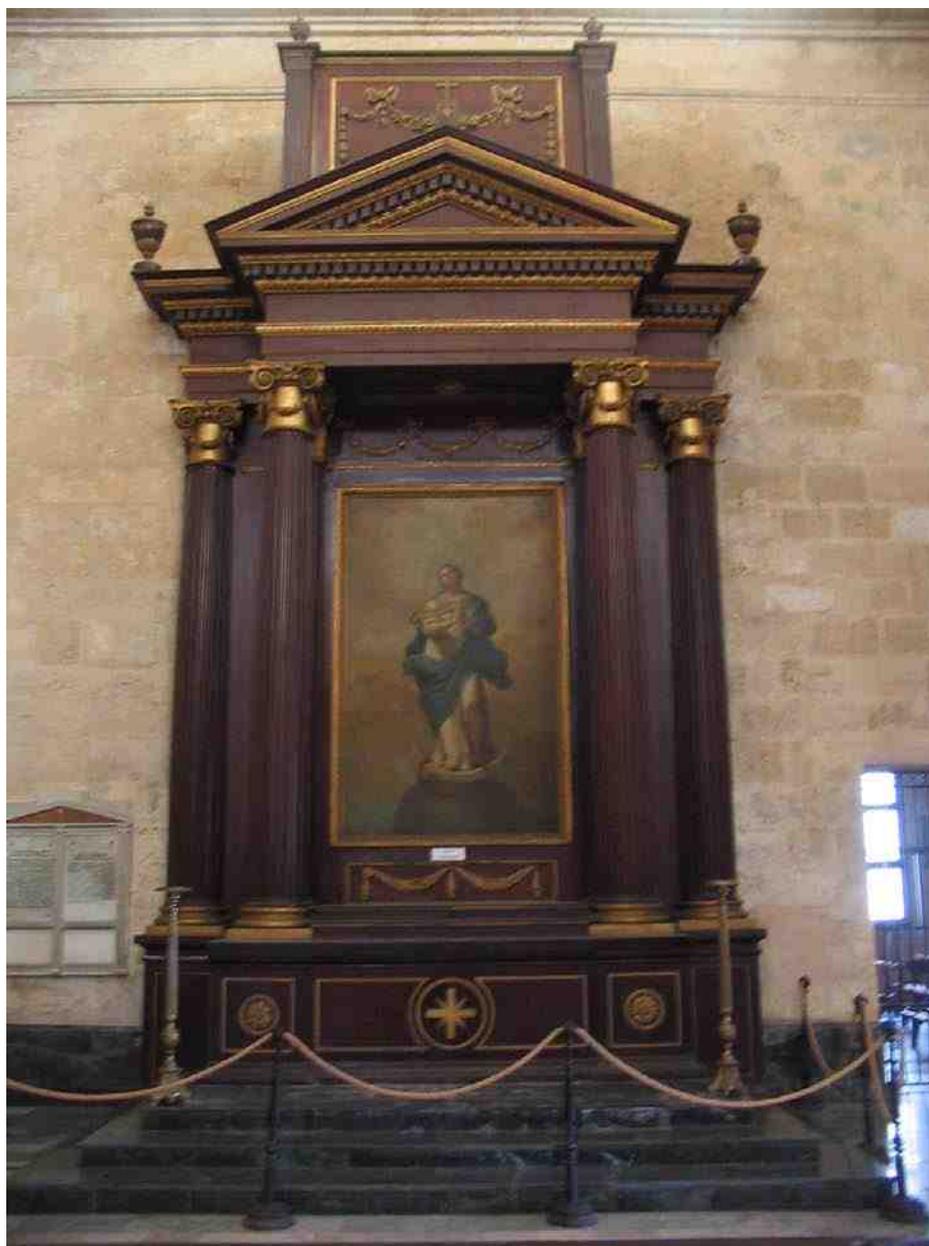


Figure 36. Anonymous, Neo-Classical side altar, Cathedral of Havana, early 19th-century

Virgin Immaculate. This project sustained the bishop's efforts to humanize traditional Cuban imagery by appropriating Classical elements, which in this case seem to have drawn on Neo-Classical sources (particularly in the urns, pediments with dentils, and unbroken cornice lines). These altars, like Perovani's frescos, legitimated the influx of liberal ideals in the mind of the viewer (in the case of elite Creoles, ideals of self-interest, technological change, and free trade) by blending it with traditional religious imagery and Baroque aesthetics.

At the recommendation of Spanish painter Francisco Goya y Lucientes, the bishop encouraged the French painter, Jean-Baptiste Vermay, who was living in Paris, to come to Havana and join Perovani in creating and restoring works for the cathedral. Born in Tournan, France in 1786, Vermay embraced painting at an early age. In the late eighteenth-century, he fell under the spell of Jacques-Louis David, to whom he became a disciple for eleven years. In these years, Vermay absorbed the republican ideology of his master, exhibiting works in the nineteenth-century that promoted themes of justice and self-sacrifice. Like his fellow students in the school of David, Vermay considered history painting to be the most elevated genre, followed thereafter by portraiture. He exhibited his *Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots, Receiving her Death Sentence* in his first Salon in 1808. Three more works followed in the Salon of 1810, three in 1812, and two in 1814, again consisting of historical subjects drawn from the lives of European royalty. Vermay was then in Italy near the end of 1814, copying the works of grand masters. He returned to Paris, and then embarked for the United States after the deposition of Napoleon and the return of the Bourbons in 1815. Vermay seems to have entered Cuba via New Orleans where Philippe d'Orléans supplied him with a letter of introduction to prominent Havana

families.¹²⁷ Espada commissioned Vermay soon after his arrival to paint a fresco for the central lunette over the sanctuary. The artist painted an *Assumption of the Virgin*, a scene of Mary ascending through clouds wearing heavy, statuesque drapery (Figure 37). She drifts in a heavenly space surrounded by angels, yet unlike Escalera's virgin whose body seems as light as the clouds around her, Vermay's Mary possesses a sense of gravity that reveals greater rationalism in the conception of the human figure. The feeling of solidity and reflected Vermay's training under David in France. However, the emotionalism of the scene and the way in which the Virgin's arms and the clouds spill across the painted boundaries reflect a Baroque language. Vermay thus adapted his expertise to his new Caribbean context, where the Cuban bishop called for greater rationalism to augment the traditional idiom of the Catholic Church (i.e., the Baroque).

Vermay's work at the cathedral soon caught the eye of Havana's wealthy families who were commissioning portraits from him by the end of the decade. His *Retrato del Hombre*, "Portrait of a Man," an oil on canvas from 1819, reveals an anonymous sitter leaning on the back of his chair with his head in profile (Figure 38). The subject holds a book, wears upper-class clothing, and his upper torso and head are illuminated by a bright light that seems to be coming from the viewer's left. These subtle elements denote the subject's personal distinction and identify him as an "enlightened" man, possibly a member of the Sociedad Económica. Portraiture followed history painting in the academic pantheon of the arts and served an essential social function for the Colonial elite. Traditionally, portraiture in Cuba constructed the memory of the distinguished

¹²⁷ The only two monographs on Juan Bautista Vermay are J. de la Luz de León, *Jean-Baptiste Vermay: Peintre Français Fondateur de l'Académie de Saint-Alexandre de la Havane, 1786-1833*, (Paris: Éditions de la Revue de L'Amérique Latine, 1927) and Sabine Faivre D'Arcier, *Vermay: Mensajero de las Luces*, (La Habana: Imagen Contemporanea, 2004).



Figure 37. Attributed to Juan Bautista Vermay,
Assumption of the Virgin, after 1815, Cathedral of Havana,
central lunette of sanctuary, fresco

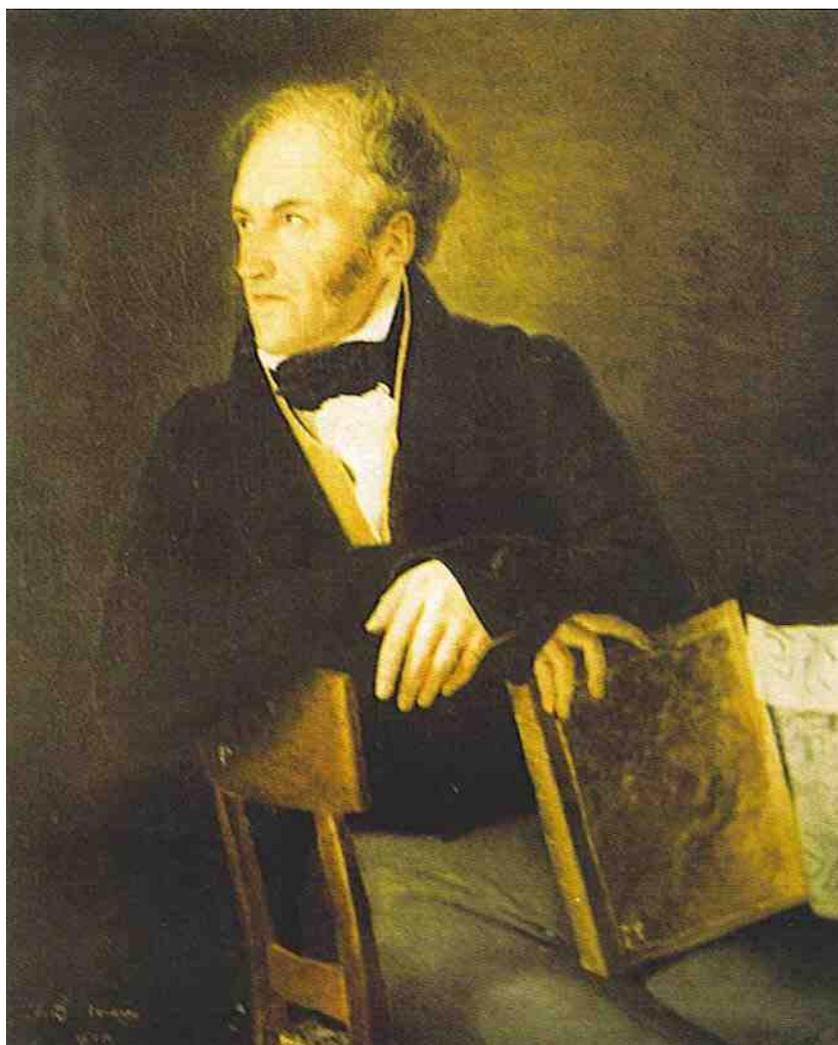


Figure 38. Juan Bautista Verma, *Portrait of a Man*,
c. 1818, oil on canvas

individual(s) in order to maintain the prominence and status of the family. With an emerging culture of rational knowledge in Havana, such works served to connote the sitter's individual worth. The coat of arms, textual identification, and posturing of Escobar's earlier portrait are absent from this painting. Vermay constructs a more individualized portrait, underscoring the rationalist belief that one's character came from self-edification (the reading of books) rather than aristocratic titles. Creoles in the Sociedad Económica would view this portrait as an image of a *modern* man.

Vermay's status as a disciple of Jacques-Louis David, made him attractive to the Sociedad Económica, which began to show interest, with the advent of economic prosperity, in culturally modernizing the island. As early as 1794, the Sociedad Económica began discussing in their assemblies the need for classes in drawing as fundamental to the education of the island's youth:

The principle fundamentals of all the Sciences and all the Arts, are included in the elements of the following: Mathematics, Drawing, Physics, Chemistry, Natural History, Botany, and Anatomy [...], all the sciences and arts have between them a tight connection, that is not too much to require of the young men that have to obtain the public offices of the motherland, all have an elementary course of each one of these indicated Sciences and Arts.¹²⁸

On January 11, 1818, in the cloister of the Convent of San Agustín in Havana, the Sociedad Económica, under the guidance of their director and army intendent Alejandro Ramírez, finally realized an academy of drawing. The auditor, Juan Bernardo O'Gavan, dedicated the new school to the Sociedad's director, naming it the Academy of San

¹²⁸ “Los principios fundamentales de todas las Ciencias y de todas las Artes, se comprenden en los elementos de las siguientes: Matemáticas, Dibujo, Física, Química, Historia Natural, Botánica y Anatomía [...], las ciencias todas y artes tienen entre sí tan estrecha conexión, que no es demasiado exigir de los jóvenes que han de obtener los públicos oficios de la Patria, hagan todos un curso elemental de cada una de aquellas indicadas Ciencias y Artes.” See Álvarez Cuartero (2000), p. 128.

Alejandro. Classes began in April of 1818 with a curriculum initially structured around the mastery of drawing, followed by the incorporation of painting instruction, given the expertise of Vermay, who became director and lead professor. Vermay and the Academy would become a primary instrument for the Sociedad and Bishop Espada in finding new means of translating cultural knowledge and the island's material progress into visual form.

The Academy of San Alejandro in Havana became the second art academy in the Spanish Americas after the Academy of San Carlos, which opened in Mexico City in 1783. Academic training emphasized drawing because it empowered the artist to select the most beautiful aspects of nature and gradually perfect them into an ideal form. Neo-Classical theorists had expressed deep distrust in late eighteenth-century France for the use of color, due to its capacity to arouse the passions and lead to emotionalism, which compromised human reason. Color could be used in painting only if it had been subdued, contained, and sealed by a perfected system of drawing.¹²⁹ This imagined realm of ideal form was thought to derive from the laws of Nature and existed in a conceived space that could be analyzed and appreciated by a community of rational individuals. The establishment of the Academy in Cuba represented a transition in which Neo-Classical modes began to be incorporated into Cuban arts with greater intensity. The Academy would contribute to the new visual language of progress around which communal consensus was to coalesce.

¹²⁹ Jean-Philippe Chimot, "The Effect of Color in the Birth of Modernity," in George Levitine, ed. *Culture and Revolution: Cultural Ramifications of the French Revolution* (College Park, Maryland: Department of Art History, University of Maryland at College Park, 1989), pp. 83-97.

Academic training at San Alejandro involved life studies, which connected students directly to the imitation of nature. Neo-Classical artists distinguished between “copy” and “imitation.” Copying masterworks or antique statuary without recourse to nature led to an uninspired art, redolent of individual perception. On the contrary, imitation of nature involved the artist’s inventive powers and revealed evidence of human reason. Life drawing courses and courses for drawing statuary often went hand in hand in academic training for this precise reason. As English painter Sir Joshua Reynolds phrased the issue, imitation involved “a perpetual exercise of the mind, a continual invention.”¹³⁰

Work continued on the cathedral as Espada commissioned a new main altar in 1820. Consisting of eight Corinthian columns configured in a circle and rising from a raised octagonal base, the altar supported a circular dome (Figure 39). The altar frontal below was made of a solid piece of Carrara marble with small engaged columns flanking a central relief of the Last Supper carved by sculptor Bianchini under the direction of Antonio Solá.¹³¹ The altar took the form of the Greek *tholos* (round temple), considered a paradigm of cosmic and terrestrial order and a tribute to all the gods in antiquity. The image of antiquity constructed in the main altar embodied Espada’s dream for the harmony of Christian faith and human reason. As the high altar, this structure was engaged temporally in religious ritual by the bishop, the clergy, and the laity who participated in the Mass. Espada had commissioned a new form, deriving from ancient Classical sources that would be layered with sacred meanings thus sanctifying this new classical language.

¹³⁰ Hugh Honour, *Neo-classicism* (London: Penguin Books, 1977), p. 35.

¹³¹ Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring, *Los Monumentos Nacionales de la Republica de Cuba, Volume II: La Plaza de la Catedral de La Habana* (La Habana: Juan Nacional de Arqueologia y Etnologia, 1959), pp. 78-81.

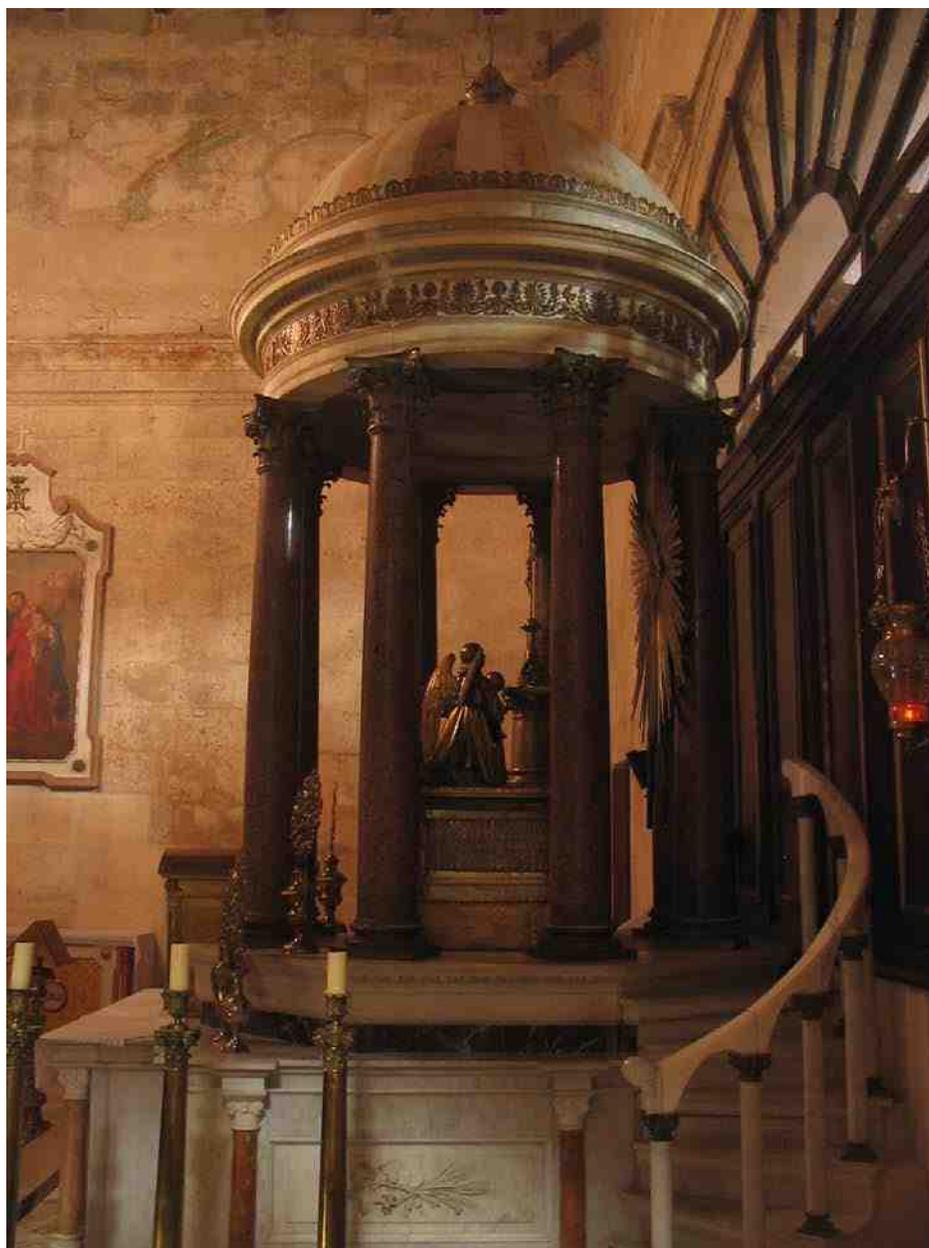


Figure 39. Bianchini, Antonio Solá, and others, *Main Altar*, Cathedral of Havana, 1820, marble and Egyptian porphyry

Although this high altar commanded much attention, the bishop's most dramatic alteration of the cathedral was the replacement of the traditional wooden, polychromatic nave ceiling with stone vaulting (Figure 40). The construction of austere stone vaults gave the nave interior a more permanent character. Although the vaults remained stylistically Baroque, the use of stone in this case, reveals Espada's disgust for the falsity of the former nave ceiling, revealing a more Neo-Classical emphasis on simplicity and tectonic honesty. Several other adjustments were made to decorative surfaces in order to, in Espada's words, "...adjust to *the new architecture* the cornice lines and moldings of the windows."¹³² However, it is unclear what the bishop meant by this as his attempt to reconfigure cornice lines, reveal the vibrant ornament of the Baroque that still showed through in the multiplication of flat surface elements (Figure 41). Thus, we see that the transition from the traditional Baroque character of the Havana cathedral to a "new architecture," was not an abrupt stylistic rupture. Rather, this process involved the adaptation of various classicizing elements (in different degrees), while respecting the Baroque idiom of the Counter Reformation that had been associated with religious imagery in Havana for over a century.

These visual projects in the cathedral corresponded in time to Espada's endorsement of education in Havana, which gives us further insight into how he and others might have read this imagery. Cuban society had received educational institutions under the Bourbons in the eighteenth-century. The University of Havana had been founded in 1728, and eighteenth-century society also witnessed the opening of the

¹³² "...arreglar a nueva arquitectura el cornismento y las molduras de las ventanas." See Joaquín E. Weiss y Sánchez, *Arquitectura Colonial Cubana* (La Habana y Sevilla: Segunda Ediciones, 2002), p. 255.

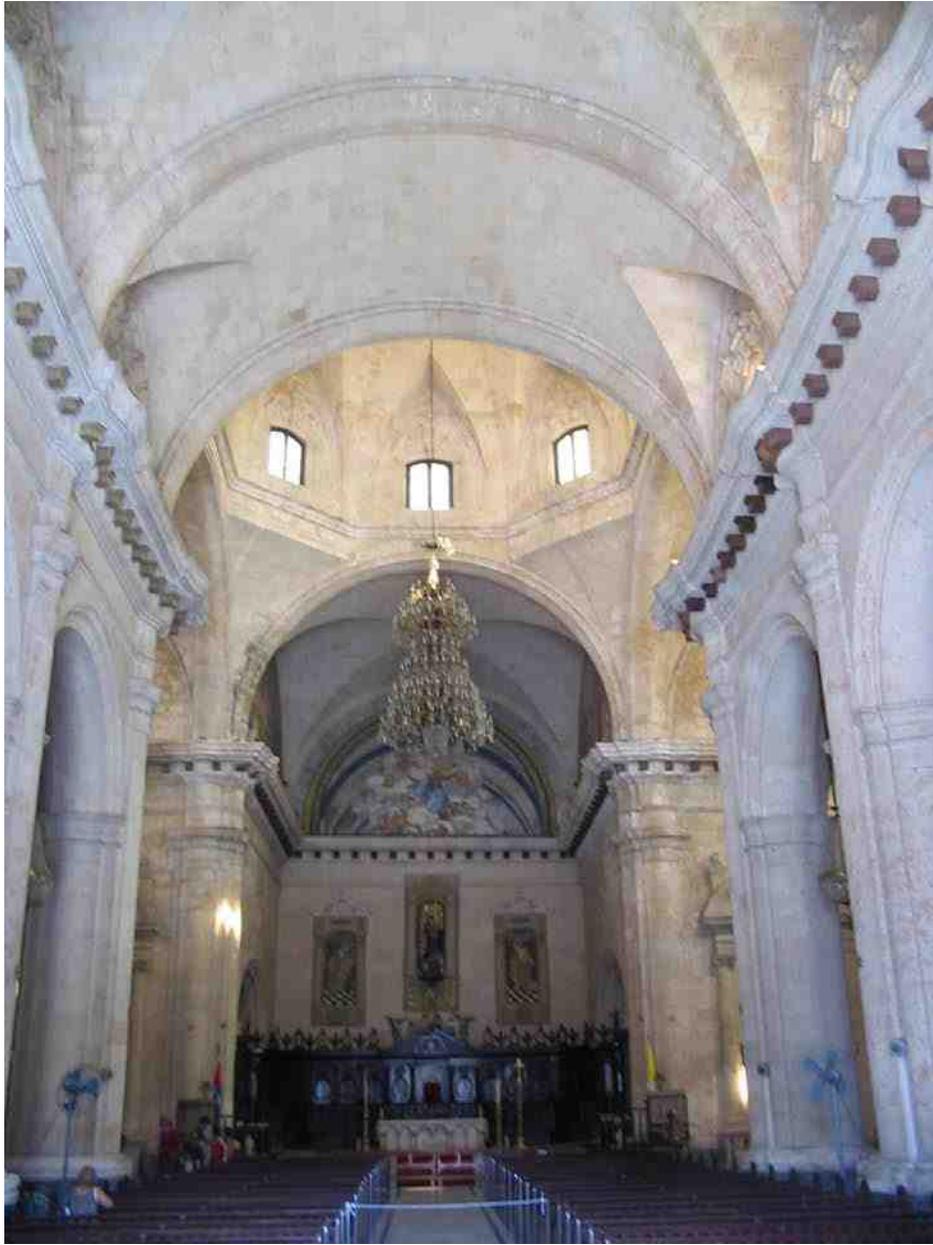


Figure 40. Nave ceiling, early 19th century, Cathedral of Havana

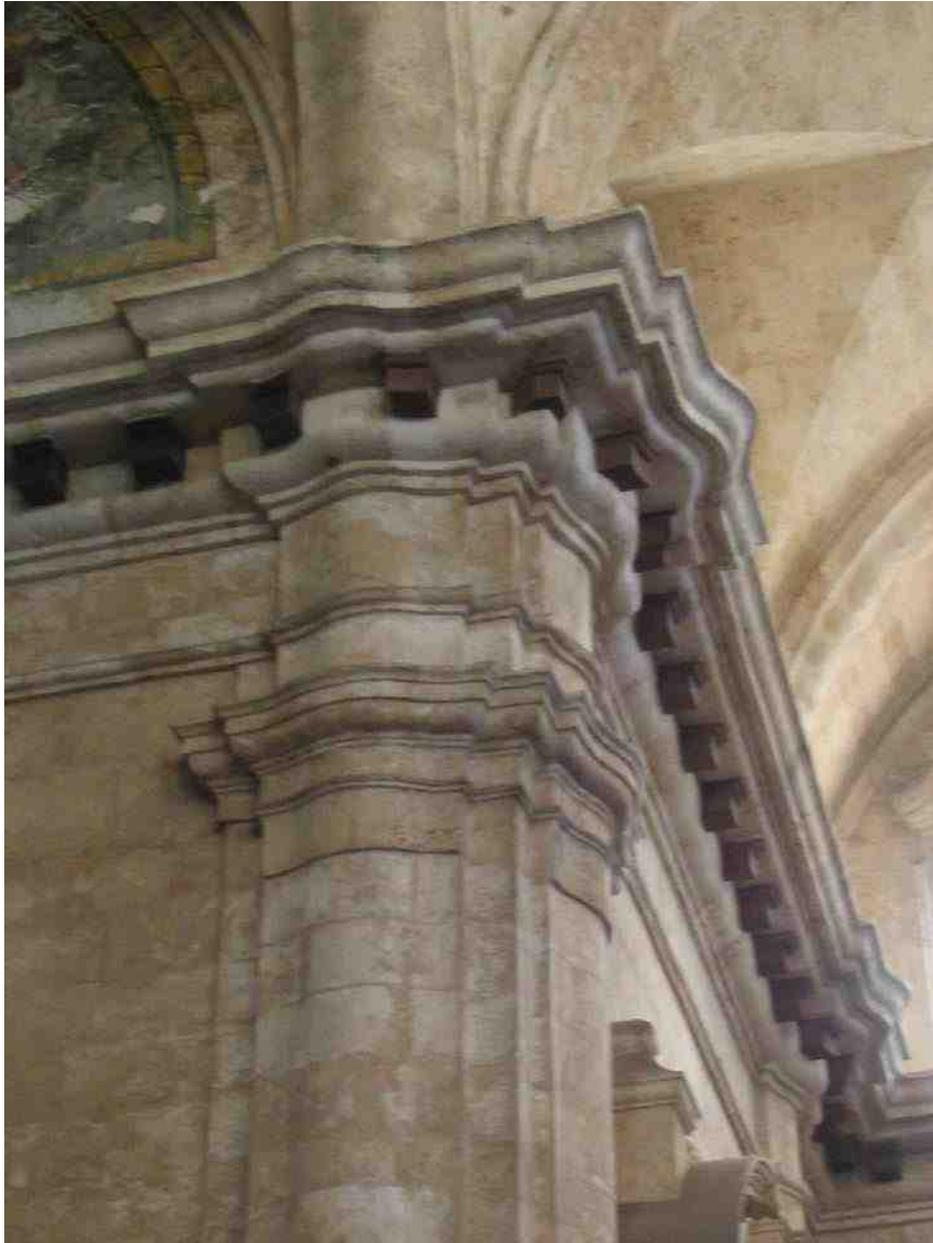


Figure 41. Nave Entablature, Cathedral of Havana

Colegio de San Francisco de Sales and *Real Colegio y Seminario de San Carlos y San Ambrosio* [“The Royal College and Seminary of San Carlos and San Ambrosio”]. Known familiarly as “San Carlos,” the institution fostered an eclectic approach to the study of philosophy, undercutting the predominance of the scholastic method.¹³³

Reforms in thinking and curriculum at San Carlos were initiated by a liberal priest, José Agustín Caballero (1762-1835). Born in Havana, Caballero studied at the Seminary of San Carlos and the *Real y Pontificia Universidad de San Jerónimo*, where he received a doctoral degree in Theology. He returned to San Carlos where he spent his career as a teacher, accepting the chair of philosophy in 1787. His theological selections drew more from Plato and St. Augustine than Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas. As Gemma Marie del Duca points out, this theological preference facilitated Caballero’s leap into the ideas of Descartes, Condillac, Newton, and Locke. He did not reject scholasticism but attempted to reconcile Aristotelian doctrine with contemporary methods that emphasized experience and experimentation.¹³⁴ His teaching echoed the tenets of French philosophers who contended that knowledge should be based on the direct observation of the natural world. Among other reforms, Caballero suggested the introduction of the study of the Spanish language. Latin had been accepted as the appropriate language for the study of knowledge at San Carlos, and Caballero’s call for courses in the vernacular “native tongue” reflected an interest in “naturalizing” progressive thought in Cuba.¹³⁵

¹³³ Sister Gemma Marie del Duca, “A Political Portrait: Félix Varela y Morales, 1788-1853,” dissertation in Ibero-American Studies, The University of New Mexico, 1966, p. 17.

¹³⁴ Juan M. Navia, *An Apostle for the Immigrants: The Exile Years of Father Félix Varela y Morales, 1823-1853* (Salisbury, MD: Factor Press, 2002), pp. 38-39.

¹³⁵ Marie del Duca (1966), pp. 29-31.

New chairs were added to San Carlos, supported by the Sociedad Económica and the Bishop Espada. In 1818, Licenciado Don Justo Vélez introduced a class on political economy. The Cuban-born priest and liberal thinker, Félix Varela was appointed by Espada to the *cátedra de la constitución*, [“the chair of the constitution”] and introduced courses on constitutional law in 1821. The notes for Varela’s course, titled, *Observaciones sobre la constitución política de la monarquía española* [“Observations on the political constitution of the Spanish monarchy”], were published the same year. In the support of the constitution of 1812, Varela stated in his *Observaciones*, “Effectively, by nature, all men have equal rights and liberties.”¹³⁶ His course was the product of years of epistemological development as Varela broke from Scholasticism and put his faith in experimental science. He had begun teaching at the University of Havana in 1811, where he introduced Descartes, Cartesian thought, and eclectic philosophy.

In 1819, he published his *Miscelánea filosófica* [“Miscellaneous Philosophy”], in which he made assertions regarding cognition and verbal language that translate well into the relationship between visual art and thought. As Luis Leal notes, Varela believed in a strong relationship between epistemology and signs. In Varela’s *Miscelánea filosofía*, the author states:

In the present state of our knowledge, all acquired through sensations, and closely attached to signs, it is impossible to think without their help. No matter what effort we may make to exclude them, we are not able to do it, and experience proves that whenever we think, it seems to us that we hear ourselves talk, and often we pronounce the words aloud without being conscious of it, and

¹³⁶ “Efectivamente, por la naturaleza todos los hombres tienen iguales derechos y libertad” See Félix Varela, *Observaciones sobre la Constitución Política de la Monarquía Española: Seguidas de Otros Trabajos Políticos* (La Habana: Editorial de la Universidad, 1944), p. 11.

that's why it is said that we speak to ourselves. From this it is deduced that to think is the same as to use signs, and to think well is to use signs correctly.¹³⁷

Varela emphasizes experience (knowledge “acquired through sensations”) rather than divine law, and asserts signs as the instruments of thought. He notices the tightening relationship between signs and things in the nineteenth-century formulating what Foucault noted as a “binary structure.” By “signs,” Varela meant artificial language, which by the 1820’s, was becoming associated with both words and the visual arts. Given that Espada (an ardent supporter of Varela) continued in his quest to bring a “new style” to Havana from his arrival in 1802 until his death in 1832, we can accept that the bishop regarded the visual arts as an agent of social change. However, these epistemological developments and visual projects failed to produce any consistent and sustained discourses, due to the preponderance of tradition and the continued repression of the Spanish regime. This eclectic Cuban intellectual milieu in the early nineteenth century (with its tensions between Scholasticism and Rationalism) mirrored the tensions between Baroque and Neo-Classical visual styles in the cathedral.

¹³⁷ Félix Varela, *Miscelánea filosófica*, (1819), pp. 55-56, quoted from Luis Leal, “Félix Varela and Liberal Thought,” from A. Owen Aldridge, ed., *The Ibero-American Enlightenment* (Urbana, Chicago, and London: University of Illinois Press, 1971) p. 237.

CHAPTER THREE

THE SHRINE, THE TREE, AND THE PLAZA

“The histories, the traditions, and the same oratory, almost remain mute if these large monuments did not speak to man in indelible signs and characters...”¹³⁸

-*Diario de la Habana*, March 27, 1828

Imagining/Imaging the Site of the Ceiba Tree

On March 19, 1828, a small structure designed by military engineer Antonio María de la Torr  was inaugurated on the southeast side of Havana’s Plaza de Armas amidst a dramatic three-day celebration and much public spectacle (Figure 42). Owing to its location on the plaza, de la Torr ’s building marked the site of the legendary ceiba tree of Havana under which, according to local tradition, the Spanish conquistadors held the first mass and cabildo of the city in the sixteenth century. Known as *El Templete* [“the small shrine”], the structure ennobled the site by evoking the forms of an ancient Greco-Roman temple. The temple-like structure housed three history paintings in its rectangular cella: *El Primer Cabildo*, [“The First Town Council Meeting,”], oil on canvas, 1826, *La Primera Misa*, [“The First Mass,”] oil on canvas, 1826, and *La Fiesta de la Inauguraci n*, [“The Festival of the Inauguration,”] oil on canvas, 1828. Executed by Juan Bautista Vermay, the director of the Academy of San Alejandro, the works visually articulated pivotal moments in the city’s history and combined them with a scene of the contemporary inauguration. The artistic developments of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries involving a new interest in Neo-Classical aesthetics, the foundation

¹³⁸ “Las historias, las tradiciones y la misma oratoria, casi permanecerian mudos si en estos grandes monumentos no hablasen al hombre con se ales y caracteres endebles...” See *Diario de la Habana*, March 27, 1828, p. 1.

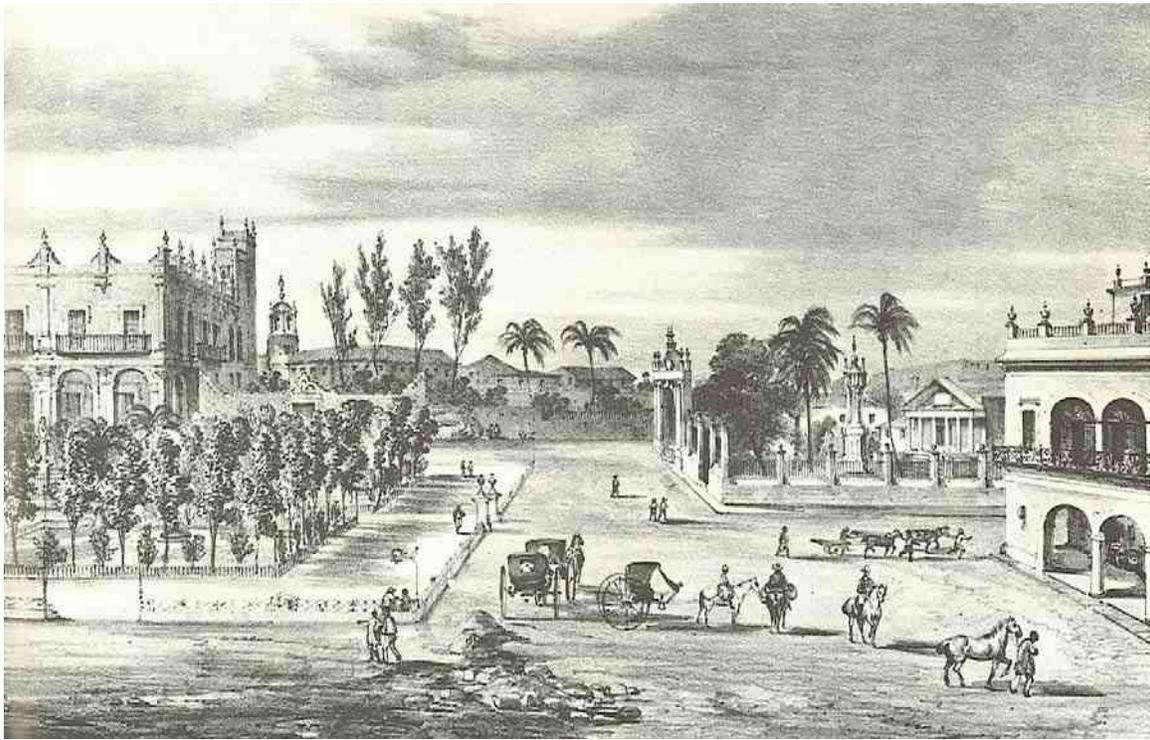


Figure 42. Frederic Mialhe, *View of the Temple and Part of the Plaza de Armas*, c.1842, lithograph

of an art academy, and the presence of socially-minded patrons, came together in this new work, which visually memorialized the history of the city (Figure 43).

The plan of El Templete echoed, on a reduced scale, the plan of the Espada Cemetery, and connected the new work to the progressive associations embodied by the suburban cemetery. The building's site consisted of a rectangular perimeter defined by a fence composed of a low stone wall topped by iron railings extending between square piers. Each pier supported decorative spheres on pedestals. At each corner of the fence stood larger piers topped by urns which supported pineapple forms cast in bronze. The visitor entered the rectangular space from the west through a gateway resembling a Roman triumphal arch like the portal of the Espada Cemetery.¹³⁹ As with the cemetery, the archway defined the central axis of the symmetrical space. Directly across a rectangular garden-like space, embedded symmetrically into the eastern wall, was a small structure with a Greco-Roman temple façade facing the gateway (Figure 44). The temple-like structure, recalling the cemetery chapel, also contained the Vermay paintings that referenced the site on which the structure was placed.

The shrine, as with the cemetery chapel, continued the linear clarity established by the other elements of the larger program. Consisting of a small cubical building raised on a rectangular base, the spectator approached the building by ascending three shallow steps, which extended around the three sides of the portico evoking the stereobate and stylobate of Greek temples (Figure 45). The Greek Doric entablature consisted of twelve triglyphs and eleven metopes with pointed guttae beneath each triglyph. The pediment

¹³⁹ This arch, however, was destroyed in a hurricane in the 1840's, at which time, the fence was scaled back. With the extension of O'Reilly Street, the fence was then scaled back to the level of the Baroque pillar and fitted with two iron gates. The stone perimeter wall was adjusted to the curvature of the pillar's base, which extended into the sidewalk fronting the plaza.



Figure 43. Antonio María de la Torre, *El Templete*, Plaza de Armas, Havana, 1828

Planta Baja: 1 COLUMBIA DE CAGIGAL DE LA VIEJA 2 JARDÍN 3 TEMPLETE

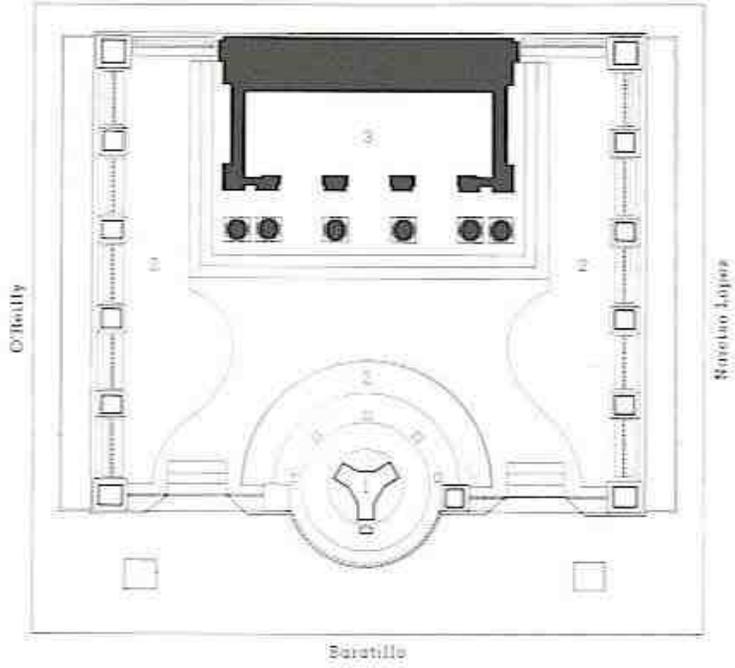


Figure 44. Plan, El Templete

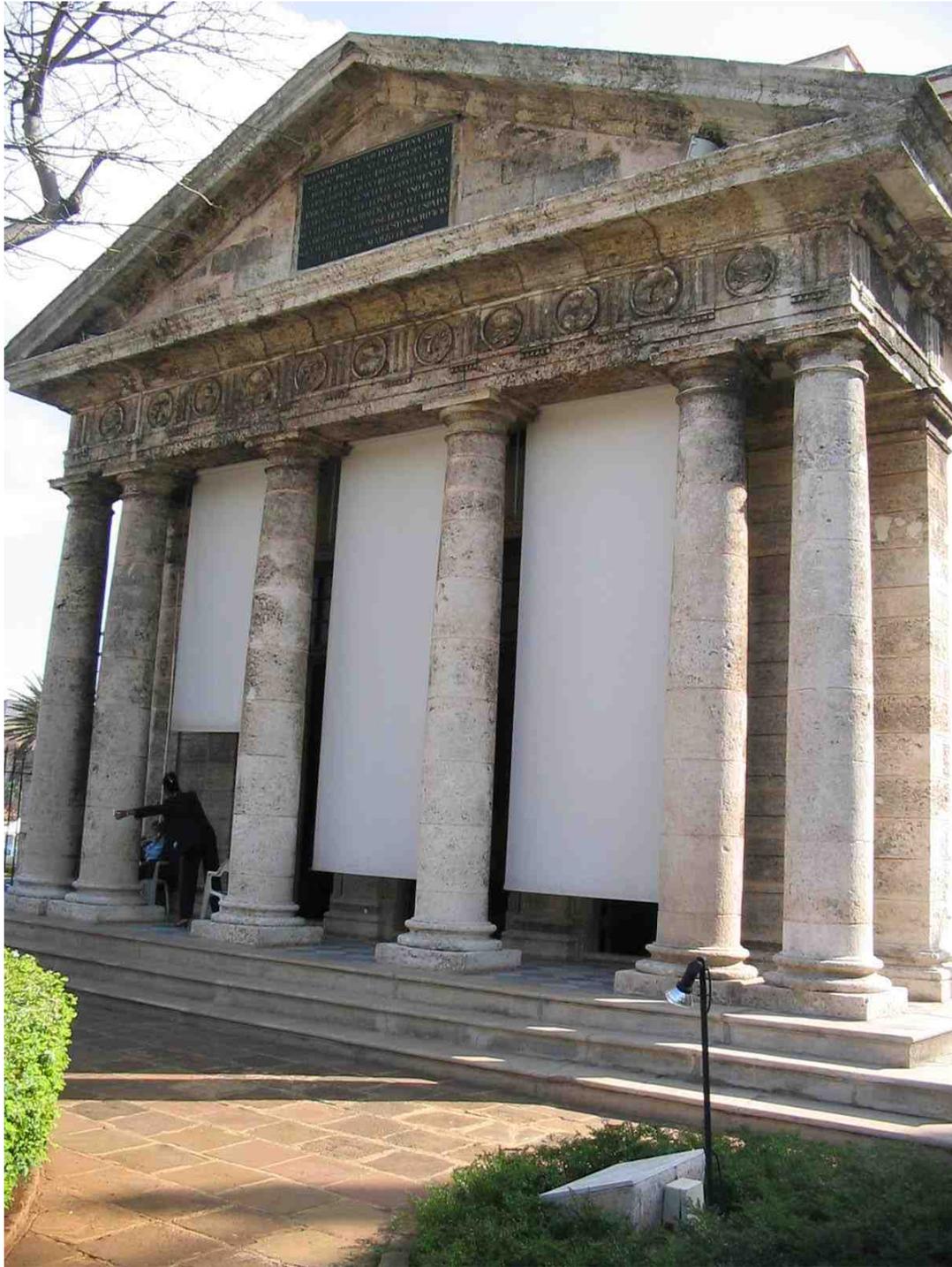


Figure 45. Portico, El Templete

contained a bronze plaque with dedicatory inscriptions. The columns of the portico, however, shifted the Greek Doric quotations to that of Roman Tuscan temples. Set on plinths, the freestanding columns consisted of torus and scotia articulation followed by an unfluted shaft topped by additional torus articulation, echinus, and abacus. Six columns were aligned along the unbroken entablature with doubled-columns on either end creating three prominent intercolumniations.

The placement of doorways continued the quotation of the Tuscan temple, as described by Vitruvius, with three doorways placed symmetrically between intercolumniations.¹⁴⁰ The doorways, flanked by Tuscan pilasters, revealed simple door surrounds with minimal moulding. The proportional system and plan of the shrine amplified the connection to Roman architecture. Lacking the low, compact proportions of a Doric temple and with a cella that extended laterally to the edge of its plan, the shrine evoked the configuration of urban Roman temples. Pilasters wrapped each of the four corners of the outer cella wall, flanking two lateral side walls consisting of flat, unadorned surfaces. Three cornice lines dipped inward and outward along the sides similar to eighteenth-century Cuban Baroque details.

The architect of El Templete, Antonio María de la Torr , was a senior military engineer working for the Spanish administration in Cuba, and leaves behind little evidence to suggest his stylistic sources. Military engineers in eighteenth and nineteenth-century Cuba executed maps and architectural plans as well as the designs of fortifications. However, engineers wrote almost nothing on architectural style and produced no theoretical works. We can, therefore, locate the sources of El Templete's

¹⁴⁰ Vitruvius, *The Ten Books of Architecture*, translated by Morris Hicky Morgan (New York: Dover Publications, 1960), pp. 120-122.

architecture by analyzing it against the backdrop of early nineteenth-century architectural developments in Havana, including the Espada Cemetery and the bishop's remodeling of the cathedral. The Greco-Roman image that the shrine presented continued this shift in the architectural text of the city. As the patrons and artists of these earlier projects, especially Hallet and Vermay, were informed by architectural and visual forms inspired by the French Enlightenment, we must read El Templete in relation to eighteenth and nineteenth-century developments in France.

Intellectuals in the eighteenth-century French Enlightenment were inspired to great extent by the theories of Sir Isaac Newton. Newton's revelations on mathematics and establishment of natural law (which replaced divine law) stimulated a more empirical approach to natural and social phenomenon. The Enlightenment began to subject society's institutions, such as the monarchy, to greater scrutiny and sought to remake social space into the embodiment of reason. Advances in historiography, particularly in the study and awareness of "primitive" civilizations (such as the Greeks and Romans) through primary observation, led to a new appreciation of the conventional nature of architecture and the visual arts. Under the influence of the Enlightenment, a new revisionist appreciation for antiquity in France produced forms that rejected Renaissance and Baroque modes, particularly the traditional proportional system of the Orders.

The use of columns as applied decorative devices in the Renaissance and Baroque periods was replaced with an emphasis on the freestanding column. Columns were to fulfill their role as structural elements by supporting straight lintels in unbroken entablatures. This revival of the trabeated architecture of the ancients was meant to communicate the space of human progress. The French development of "Neo-

Classicism” (the term given to this phenomenon in architecture, after the fact) began as a gradual emancipation from the strictures of the Renaissance-Baroque traditions. Jacques-Gabriel Soufflot’s *Church of Ste-Geneviève*, Paris, 1757-90, intended as a tribute to the patron saint of Paris, incorporated freestanding columns supporting straight entablatures in both its portico and nave interior (Figure 46). These elements replaced Renaissance and Baroque preferences for entablatures supported by arcades, buildings adorned by pilasters, and the use of heavy piers.¹⁴¹ The interest in unbroken entablatures was also shown in Giovanni Niccolò Servandoni, *St.-Sulpice*, Paris, 1732-77, which presented two large, unbroken entablatures across the front of the façade (Figure 47). These two buildings, while serving religious functions, established the regularity, visual rhythm, and geometry of the Greek temple in the civic landscape of eighteenth-century Paris.

El Templete’s unbroken entablature and use of freestanding columns inherited the emphasis on trabeated architecture from this eighteenth-century French vocabulary. The simplified use of columns, lintels, pediment, and “pure” geometries was consistent with several eighteenth-century French treatises on “correct” architecture, including the influential work by Abbé Marc-Antoine Laugier. Laugier’s *Essai sur l’architecture* (1753) proposed the “primitive hut” as a standard of excellence in architecture. This radical return to sources located the early moments of architecture when the built form was literally, an extension of nature.

El Templete’s architecture thus inherited important aspects of this eighteenth-century French architectural language. The shrine’s freestanding columns, straight entablature, and geometric “purity” contrasted the forms of the Bourbon palaces across

¹⁴¹ Allan Braham, *The Architecture of the French Enlightenment* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980), pp. 33-36.

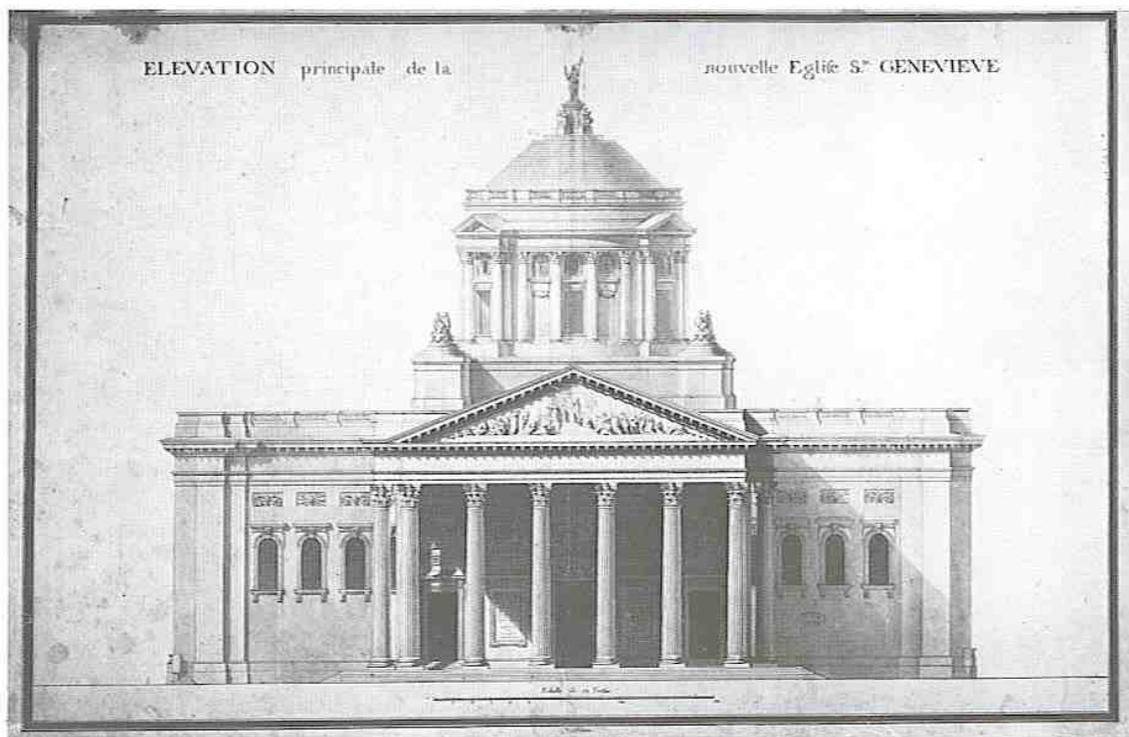


Figure 46. Jacques-Gabriel Soufflot, elevation of revised project of 1764 of Ste. Geneviève, drawing



Figure 47. Giovanni Niccolò Servandoni, *St.-Sulpice*, Paris, west front, 1732-77

the Plaza de Armas, with their evocations of the Renaissance and Baroque traditions (including arcades, pilasters, and piers). The forms of the shrine evoked a more revisionist interpretation of classical antiquity and, as with the Espada cemetery, indicated the emergence of a new aesthetic in the city. Given the placement of the shrine on the symbolic ceiba tree site, we will see that the patrons of the work intended it as a response to the architectural languages of the Bourbon palaces and to the Spanish state in general.

Architectural forms and practices generated in eighteenth-century France, were as Antoine Picon points out, related to “a new concern to relate architecture to society.”¹⁴² As the Enlightenment sought to resolve the problems of society, architects endeavored to make architecture more transparent to the social sphere. Buildings needed to express their purpose and function in society. These new conceptions, linking architecture to social agency, filtered into Havana in the early nineteenth century. El Templete’s role, for instance, in memorializing the foundations of the city expressed a greater directness not only in form, but also in function. The shrine’s architecture, symbolic site, and other imagery combined to serve the public by directly teaching them the history of the plaza and the city.

The shrine’s “legibility” in communicating the city’s history to Cuban audiences in the 1820’s reveals a connection to contemporary architectural theory in France. According to French Neo-Classical theorist Antoine-Chrysostome Quatremère de Quincy, Perpetual Secretary of the Académie des Beaux-Arts in Paris from 1816-1839, architecture was a conventional language with roots in the socio-cultural practices of the

¹⁴² Antoine Picon, *French Architects and Engineers in the Age of Enlightenment* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 7.

ancient Greeks. The ancient Greeks had successfully abstracted nature into cultural forms, thus transforming natural language into social language.¹⁴³ Architecture (and the visual arts generally) could directly communicate the history, values, customs, and manners of a society to its viewers. Quatremère wrote extensively on these ideas and had begun to dominate post-Napoleonic architectural production in France in the early-mid nineteenth century.

In reconstructing and depicting the ceiba tree myth in Havana, El Templete was juxtaposed with another object that had been erected on the site as a memorial. In 1753, with the death of a previous ceiba tree on the site, three new ceibas were planted to join a public monument, erected in 1754. Captain General Francisco Cagigal de la Vega ordered the construction of a vertical stone pillar, which took the form of a symbolic ceiba tree surmounted by an image of Our Virgin of the Pillar (Figure 48). Made from coral limestone, the pillar consisted of a circular base that gave rise to a stone shaft configured in plan as a triangle. Three stone volutes rose to an entablature followed by three more volutes and the primary shaft. The pillar was crowned by a small entablature supporting three crenellations and a statue of the Virgin and Child. Near the pillar's base was a sculptural relief image of a ceiba tree with no leaves, emulating the profile of the pillar, within a rectangular frame (Figure 49). A passage in Latin on a plaque near the base connected the monument to history and place. A translation of the passage from Havana's city historian, Eusebio Leal, reads:

Stop, traveler, this place is adorned by a tree, a leafy ceiba, I'd rather say, a notable sign of prudence and old religion of a young city, because actually under its shadow the author of city health was solemnly sacrificed. For the first time the

¹⁴³ Sylvia Lavin. *Quatremère de Quincy and the Invention of a Modern Language of Architecture* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 1992), pp. 35-45.



Figure 48. Anonymous, *Cagigal pillar*, Plaza de Armas, Havana, 1754



Figure 49. Anonymous, *Ceiba tree relief*, Cagigal pillar, Plaza de Armas, Havana, 1754

meeting of prudent counselors was celebrated two hundred years ago: it was preserved by a perpetual tradition; however, it gave up to time. Look, then, and may Havana's faith not perish in the future. You will see an image engraved in stone, that is, the last day of November in the year 1754.¹⁴⁴

Cagigal's impulse to honor the legendary site of the ceiba tree with a monument was related to developments in eighteenth-century Cuban historiography. Several important works of Cuban history, completed in the second half of the century, discussed the conquest of Cuba, the costumes of Indians, the founding of towns, including Havana, and established important historical figures, such as Christopher Columbus and Diego Velázquez. The most important of these histories were by Pedro Agustín Morell de Santa Cruz (1694-1768), *Historia de la Isla y Catedra de Cuba* ["History of the Island and Cathedral of Cuba"], José Martín Félix de Arrate (1701-65), *Llave del Nuevo Mundo, antemural de las Indias Occidentales* ["Key of the New World"], and Ignacio José de Urrutia y Montoya (1735-95), *Teatro histórico, jurídico y politico military de la isla Fernandina de Cuba, principalmente de su capital La Habana* ["Historic, Juridical, Political, and Military Theatre of the Island Fernandina de Cuba, Principally of its Capital Havana"]. José Martín Félix de Arrate included a segment on the significance of the plaza, the tree, and the city:

There are in this city three major plazas: la de Armas, in which is the Royal Fort and mother Church, that is the oldest and has the referred denomination because in it they always held the revisions and exercises of the military. Until the year 1753 it conserved in it a robust and leafy ceiba in that, according to tradition, at the time of the colonization of Havana the first mass and cabildo were celebrated under its shadow, knowledge that was meant to perpetuate to posterity the Field

¹⁴⁴ Eusebio Leal Spengler, "Stop Pedestrian" (Italy: 1988), quoted in Antonio Núñez Jiménez, *San Cristobal de la Habana* (Ciudad de la Habana: Ediciones Caribbean's Color, 1995), p. 51.

Marshall D. Francisco Cagigal de la Vega, governor of this plaza, that constructed on the same site a memorial stone that preserved this memory.¹⁴⁵

Arrate's work attempted to weave these traditions into an historical narrative, and contributed to a growing popular interest in the city's history and traditions. The Cagigal pillar of 1754, in tandem with such historical texts, became vehicles for the invention of local traditions.¹⁴⁶ Projects such as the eighteenth-century pillar filled representational spaces like the plaza with visual signs associated with a congealing realm of conceptual knowledge in which spaces came to be known in relation to historical discourses and events allegedly held there.

The erection of the Cagigal pillar of 1754 was also an indication that the local authorities were beginning to respond to the reality of local society as a cultural entity with specific demands. Although Creoles had lost substantial power with the advent of the Bourbon reforms, including the loss of the cabildo's power to delegate public lands, the Spanish authorities in eighteenth-century Cuba began to accommodate the local population to boost morale, retain loyalties, and stimulate production. This accommodation theory is discussed at length by historian Sherry Johnson who focuses on Spanish accommodation of Creoles as an eighteenth-century process that escalated after

¹⁴⁵ "Hay en esta ciudad tres plazas mayores: la de Armas, en que está la Real Fuerza e Iglesia matriz, que es la más antigua y tiene la referida denominación porque en ella se han hecho siempre las revistas y ejercicios de la tropa. Hasta el año de 1753 se conservaba en ella robusta y frondosa ceiba en que, según tradición, al tiempo de poblarse la Habana se celebró bajo su sombra la primera misa y cabildo, noticia que pretendió perpetuar a la posteridad el Mariscal de Campo D. Francisco Cagigal de la Vega, gobernador de esta plaza, que dispuso levantar en el mismo sitio un pordon de piedra que conserve esta memoria." See José Martín Félix de Arrate, *Llave del Nuevo Mundo: antemural de las Indias Occidentales* (La Habana: Cubana de la UNESCO, 1964, 4th edition), pp. 77-78.

¹⁴⁶ Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds. *The Invention of Tradition* (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

the British invasion of 1762.¹⁴⁷ Honoring the site of the ceiba tree with a commemorative monument meant honoring the city itself and its population but was specifically targeted at the Creole elite with whom the Spanish authorities had to so frequently negotiate in order to ensure compliance and production.

The program of 1828, including the shrine and the gated enclosure, incorporated the 1754 monument to augment its visibility and amplify its significance. The historical meaning of the Cagigal pillar, evincing a Cuban Baroque aesthetic, had been etched in history by Arrate and re-inscribed with more rationalized meaning by El Templete. The pillar stood forming a triangular relationship with the shrine, and the two monuments were aligned with the monumental gateway. This arrangement created a pathway within the enclosure as one meandered through the space. The monuments were, thus, positioned to create a circulating space for the spectator who would be drawn into the garden between the pillar and the shrine.

To reinforce local historical associations, the Bishop Espada donated a marble bust of Christopher Columbus set on a free-standing pedestal at the pillar's base. The image called forth an historical figure whose identity had been reframed by eighteenth-century Cuban historians (Figure 50). Columbus began to appear increasingly in eighteenth-century Cuban history as a hero of the Spanish conquest of the Americas and was appropriated to legitimate Spanish claims to power and authority. However, Columbus also came to embody, for Creole audiences, the original generative force in the early modern Americas, which gave rise to American societies. Was Columbus an agent of Spain, or an agent in the creation of place in the Americas? For Creoles, Columbus became a mythic hero and pan-Caribbean ancestor whose significance was invoked to

¹⁴⁷ Johnson (2001), pp. 65-70.

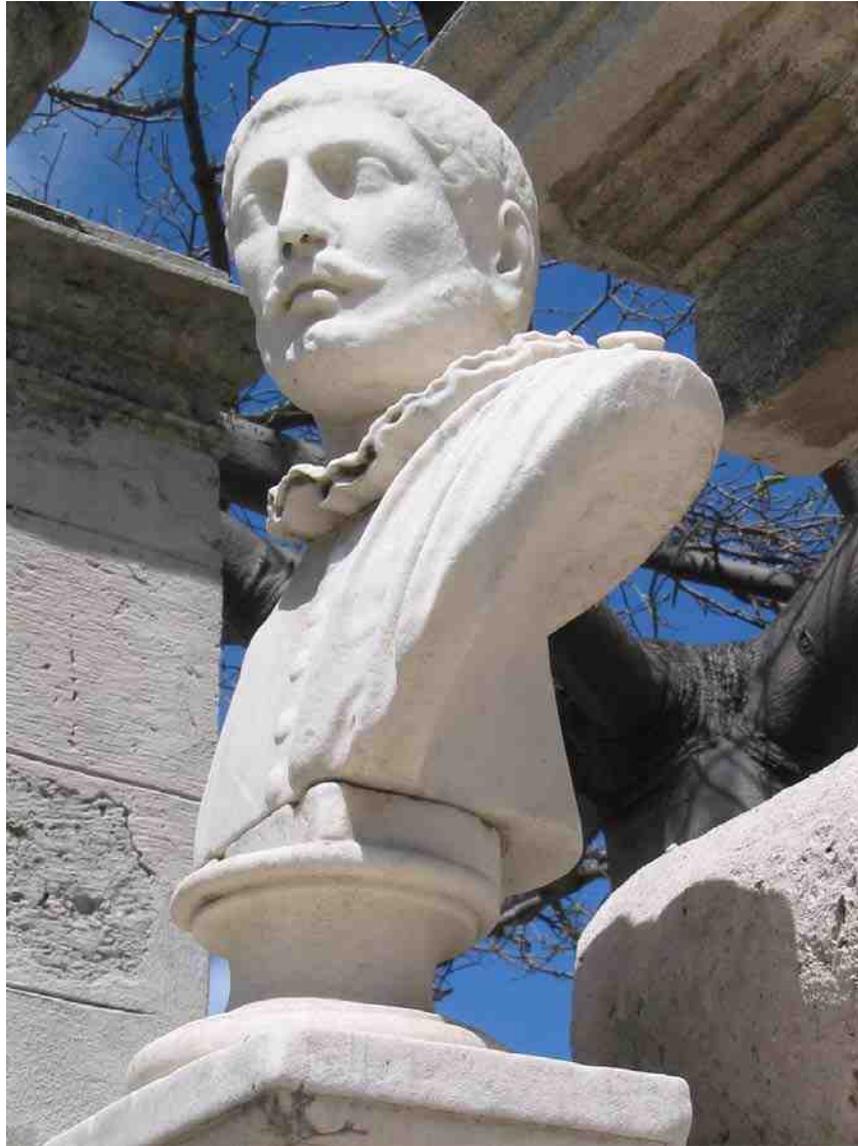


Figure 50. Anonymous, *Bust of Christopher Columbus*,
El Templete, Plaza de Armas, Havana, c. 1827

underscore their attachment to the conquered land. Local society combined this image with the idea of civic genesis embedded in the site of the ceiba tree, which identified Columbus as a patriarchal figure to Havana. The portrait bust revealed a white marble face and partial torso with ruffled shirt suggesting sixteenth-century finery. The serene detachment and idealism of the face connected the figure to works of eighteenth-century Neo-Classical sculpture, particular those produced in academic circles. The identity of Columbus, re-contextualized on the pages of eighteenth-century history and idealized in art, became a perfected ancestor residing in the dignified space of empirical truth.

The 1828 bust of Columbus was the second statue commissioned of the legendary explorer in nineteenth-century Havana. An earlier work commissioned by Captain General Dionisio Vives (1824-32) was entrusted to Juan Bautista Vermay, whose task was to coordinate the project and produce a model. Vermay soon presented his project and budget to the Sociedad Económica who accepted his proposal with pleasure and stated it would be honored to collaborate with the Captain General on the project. Once it was agreed that the statue would be placed in the Plaza de Armas to celebrate Columbus, a search began for materials in Cuba and Italy. In a letter from Vermay to the Sociedad of May 9, 1824, the artist presented his budget:

To the gentlemen members of the Royal Patriotic Society... Keeping in mind the measures of the Plaza de Armas and the entrance of the port, has seemed to me convenient to give to the statue a height of two varas and three cuartos and the same for the pedestal, including the three steps that should serve as base. A grill adorned with spearheads in bronze will surround the entire monument. I deliver to you the budget of the smelter, of the engraver, of the mason, and of the blacksmith:

- Barrier executed here.....600 pesos
- Pedestal of Philadelphia marble.....449 pesos
(not including transport freight)
- Work of masonry and materials.....200 pesos
- Smelting/Casting.....7,000 pesos

-Engraving.....	2,000 pesos
-Carving.....	0 pesos
-Total.....	10,249 pesos

I repeat what I already said in the project that I had the honor to present, to be in charge of doing the model of Columbus and to oversee the work until the end, happy that it has offered me the occasion to give a sample of gratitude to the Royal Patriotic Society.¹⁴⁸

Vermay created a clay model for the sculpture but the finished work in bronze was executed by an artist listed as F. Butot.¹⁴⁹ The actual sculpture has been lost, but the letter from Vermay to the Sociedad reveals a close collaboration between artist and client (another characteristic of art production during the French Enlightenment) and a growing interest in employing academically trained artists like Vermay to generate historical representations.

The increased interest among eighteenth-century Cuban historians in Caribbean history as defined by human and temporal precedents reflects a changing conception of historical processes among the Creole classes throughout the Americas. Stories of the

¹⁴⁸ “A los señores miembros de la Real Sociedad Patriótica... Teniendo en cuenta las medidas de la Plaza de Armas y de la entrada del puerto, me ha parecido conveniente darle a la estatua una altura de dos varas y tres cuartos y lo mismo para el pedestal, incluidos los tres escalones que deben servir de base. Una reja adornada con puntas de lanzas en bronce rodeará todo el monumento. Les entrego el presupuesto del fundidor, del cincelador, del albañil y del herrero:

-Barrera ejecutada aquí.....	600 pesos
-Pedestal de mármol de Filadelfia.....	449 pesos
(no incluye el flete de transporte)	
-Obra de albañilería y materiales.....	200 pesos
-Fundición.....	7,000 pesos
-Cinceladura.....	2,000 pesos
-Escultura.....	0 pesos
-10,249.....	10,249

Repito lo que ya dejé en el proyecto que tuve el honor de presentar, que me encargaría de hacer el modelo de Colón y de velar por el trabajo hasta el final, feliz de que se me haya ofrecido la ocasión de dar una prueba de gratitud a la Real Sociedad Patriótica.” Letter from Juan Bautista Vermay to the Royal Patriotic Society, May 9, 1824. See Faivre D’Arcier (2004), pp. 84-85.

¹⁴⁹ J. de la Luz de León, pp. 27-30, 76-77.

first mass and cabildo in Havana combined with the contemporary scene of the inauguration represented a Creole conceptualization of Cuban history as a linear development. The large tableaux of the inauguration scene, populated by nineteenth-century elites, revealed the human progress that was unfolding in a Havana as measured against the simplicity of Havana's first moments. On the other hand, the scenes of the first moments of the city, noble in their simplicity, legitimated the nineteenth-century social order. The ceiba tree of the plaza became a conceptual bridge between past and present.

Articulating Cuban history with commemorative architecture amplified the shared memory of place based on the ritual life of the city. These meanings thus became interconnected with the temporal aspects of the plaza. The sense of time in urban spaces, as John Brinkerhoff Jackson has revealed, is often more important than space itself in the creation of community. Jackson notes, "In the urban environment which is constantly undergoing irreversible changes, a cyclical sense of time, the regular recurrence of events and celebrations, is what gives us reassurance and a sense of unity and continuity."¹⁵⁰ As the Bourbons secularized the Plaza de Armas and increasingly imposed spatial and temporal limits on urban activities, Creoles found means of converting time and space in the city into an expression of local culture. The ritualized public promenades that

¹⁵⁰ Jackson argues that our sense of belonging to a community comes through a shared sense of ritualized events more than art and architecture. He emphasizes this sociological pattern in correspondence to the nineteenth-century rise of "mechanical time" when "schedules, programs, timetables, and the automatic recurrence of events" relegated place to a subordinate position in North American cities. In Havana, however, the relationship between time and space was much more integral and increasingly controlled by the Bourbons who deployed spatial and legal tactics to rationalize their subjects. What is of interest to this study is how Creole created a sense of community through appropriation of urban space and time. See John Brinkerhoff Jackson, *A Sense of Place, a Sense of Time*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), pp. 151-162.

occurred daily through the streets and plazas of Havana became settings in which a sense of Creole community was produced. Riding on horseback and in carriages, Creoles subtly contested the Spanish power structure and achieved visual recognition of their accomplishments. With the advent of a new visual language of progress, Creoles began to subtly re-inscribe the city with icons and symbols of local significance. The construction of El Templete in 1828, offers an important case study in how Creoles began to combine time and space in Havana around a shared sense of community. The process involved both the comprehension of signs referencing local culture (legible through a visual language) and the tightening of a sense of community in the ritual use of the city.

The ceiba tree became a conceptual link to the past for Creoles by virtue of its naturalness and authenticity. The tree bore witness to the city's early foundation and thus remained as a living testament (in spite of numerous tree fatalities) of the city's original purpose and social structure. Creoles felt that the Bourbons had compromised what was rightly theirs, and urban monuments began to resurrect and universalize these hidden meanings. This urban dialogic also took on gendered dimensions. Europeans had begun to think of the relationship between Europe and the Americas in gendered terms. Neo-Classical forms were gendered masculine and perceived as a superior, European-imposed language. On the contrary, Spanish Peninsulars imagined the American hemisphere as an inferior, feminized landscape associated with the local Baroque aesthetic. The Cagigal monument's appearance reflects a new ordering of space and time underway in Havana by the mid-eighteenth century. By locating spatial and temporal geographies in the imagined space of Cuban history, which intersected with the representational space of the plaza, Creole readers began to orient themselves in space, time, and in terms of identity.

The patronage of the program deserves investigation and speaks to the complexity of colonial politics and the widening distinction between things Cuban and things Spanish. The Spanish authorities, the Sociedad Económica, and Bishop Espada each played important roles in the monument's conception, construction, and inauguration and brought furthermore their own agendas to the work. Like the Cagigal pillar of 1754, the Spanish state initiated the project to enhance the plaza. Captain General Dionisio Vives (1824-32) ordered his chief military engineer, Antonio María de la Torre, to design all architectural aspects of the monument. Although this engineer left behind drawings for fortifications and city plans, no plans of El Templete have ever been recovered.

Like Cagigal, Vives wished to immortalize himself in the major public space of the city he had ruled over during his administration. Yet, as early as February 5, 1819, members of the Sociedad Económica had circulated a petition to the *ayuntamiento* (town hall) arguing for the need to construct a “casilla” (hut, lodge) on the Plaza de Armas between the wall and the Castillo on the site where the column had been erected to celebrate the first mass and cabildo of 1519. This new structure would be “A similar monument [to the Cagigal pillar of 1754] dedicated to transmitting to future generations this memorable epoch....”¹⁵¹

The petition of 1819 pointed out that the space around the Baroque pillar had deteriorated and was employed by the local neighbors for “common uses.” Neighbors deposited their trash close to the monument and someone had erected a tavern near the

¹⁵¹ “Un monumento semejante consagrado a trasmítis á las generaciones venideras esa época memorable...” Petition found in the Library of the City Museum of Havana in the notes of Emilio Roig (Havana's first City Historian) regarding El Templete, “February 5, 1819, se dio cuenta de un informe del Sr. Francisco Filomeno sobre la Petición hecha por el Sr. Bonifacio García, cuyos originales estan unidos al acta y copiado dicho informe dice así.”

site. The petition lashed out at this tavern and its owner: "...destroy it immediately; the land does not belong to him..."¹⁵² A new construction in the form of a "hut/lodge" would bring respect and dignity back to the site, and the gated enclosure would mediate the use of the space. In the minutes of the Ayuntamiento, which met on June 15, 1827, Havana's *alcalde* (mayor) noted that the whole of Havana, "even the uncultured" reckoned and respected the significance of this hallowed place in the city's history. He found the abandonment and poor maintenance of the site "deplorable" and called for an intervention, "to re-establish its publicity and decorum."¹⁵³ The mayor's use of the word "decorum" would have been a code for "taste," for the site's level of conformity to a conceptual space of ideal perfection articulated within academic circles. From these petitions and meetings, we learn that, by the first decades of the nineteenth-century, the Sociedad Económica and the Spanish authorities had begun to take a more assertive stance in defense of this site and to view it as an opportunity to appropriate the city's memory.

The construction of El Templete thus grew from a complex of desires and ambitions, including the Bourbon reform measure to educate local society, the captain general's desire to proliferate his memory and reinforce Cuban loyalty. The Sociedad Económica wished to emphasize social progress, to educate the public about local history and traditions, and to articulate the distinctiveness of things Cuban. Bishop Espada endeavored to harmonize faith and reason, articulate defiant stances against centralized church authority, and remake colonial urban space in Havana into a more progressive

¹⁵² Excerpt from the Petition of Feb. 5, 1819.

¹⁵³ Minutes of the meeting of the Ayuntamiento of June 15, 1827, found in the Library of the City Museum of Havana in the notes of Emilio Roig regarding El Templete.

image. As was seen in the Espada Cemetery, the bishop and the Sociedad collaborated on and played a major role in the conception of El Templete in 1828. The leading authorities on Espada, particularly Cesar García Pons and Eduardo Torres-Cuevas, discuss El Templete as one of the bishop's productions. Havana architect, Ihosvany de Oca, says that the city's scholarly community generally agrees that the monument's designer, military engineer Antonio María de la Torr , was merely an official tool for the bishop Espada's architectural vision.¹⁵⁴ Given the visual language the bishop felt he was guiding in the cathedral and in the cemetery, he would have seen the remaking of the ceiba tree site as an excellent opportunity to impart his idealism in visual form. Furthermore, with the growth of the Academy of San Alejandro, the local elite had begun calling for more works in this antique language of forms. Thus, the choice to transform the site of the ceiba tree with a Neo-Classical program resulted from competing agendas as elites vied to control physical and conceptual space in the city's memory.

The Didactic Shrine

Within the new shrine, the events of "this memorable epoch" were visually translated for nineteenth-century audiences. The leader of the academy, Juan Bautista Vermay, was commissioned to complete three paintings of Cuban history for the monument's rectangular cella. Vermay's paintings *La Primera Misa*, "The First Mass," oil on canvas, completed in 1826, and *El Primer Cabildo*, "The First Cabildo," oil on canvas, completed in the same year, were placed on the north and south walls, respectively. Shortly after the monument's inauguration, Vermay added *La Fiesta de la Inauguraci n*, "The Festival of

¹⁵⁴ Architect Ihosvany de Oca related this and other important information on El Templete in several conversations with the author in late March, 2007.

the Inauguration,” oil on canvas, for the monument’s larger eastern wall. The paintings visually articulated the conceptual link between the present and the historical past. The scenes constructed a narrative cycle designed to teach the chronology of the space to nineteenth-century audiences. The interior of the shrine presented the viewer with an historical diorama of images that allowed the individual to follow a pictorial cycle of historical events while being on the site where these events allegedly occurred. In contrast to traditional Baroque painting, which floated in a timeless sacred space, the Vermay paintings referenced actual events, the histories of which were known to literate audiences. The paintings were thus perceived as conventional language and mnemonic devices meant to edify contemporary individuals through specific lessons.

In the *Diario de la Habana* of March 27, 1828, an article about El Templete claimed, “The histories, the traditions, and the same oratory, almost remain mute if these large monuments did not speak to man in indelible signs and characters...”¹⁵⁵ This overt reference to El Templete’s capacity to directly communicate the city’s history and traditions reveals a local understanding of the visual arts and architecture as conventional language. Furthermore, the use of the term “monument,” reveals a conception of the shrine as both mnemonic device and aesthetic object. Architectural historian François Choay illuminates that the concept of the monument was in transition in eighteenth-century Europe. Choay distinguishes between Renaissance humanists and eighteenth-century antiquarians in a discussion of the changing conception and function of the monument. For humanists, according to Choay, antique monuments confirmed the higher

¹⁵⁵ “Las historias, las tradiciones y la misma oratoria, casi permanecerian mudos si en estos grandes monumentos no hablasen al hombre con señales y caracteres endebles...” See *Diario de la Habana*, March 27, 1828, p. 2.

truth of ancient texts written by Greek and Roman authors. However, for antiquarians in the eighteenth century, antiquities became more reliable than texts as conduits to the past. Antiquities were “objects incapable of having attempted to mislead about their times.”¹⁵⁶ Antiquarian culture, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, was widespread across Europe and involved individuals “diverse in birth, status, and fortune.”¹⁵⁷ Collectors of antiquities, or “débris” of the past, corresponded and networked across Europe. Members of this cult of the antique, as François Choay points out, were contributors to a new conception of visual “art.” The art object had been expanded beyond its classical understanding as *mimesis* (an imitation of nature) to an aesthetic object whose qualities could be apprehended through the cultivated mind.¹⁵⁸

These transformations in the conception of art contributed to changes in the public understanding of the role of monuments in society. The monument’s traditional function (from the ancient world to the medieval period) had been in providing a memorial to assist communities in perpetuating the memory and significance of practices, beliefs, individuals, and/or events. As Choay says, “For those who erect it, as for those who receive its messages, the monument is a defense against the traumas of existence, a security measure.”¹⁵⁹ The monument assuaged fears of death, and its essence was in “its relationship to lived time and to memory.” However, in the eighteenth century, Choay argues that a shift occurred, as the monument evolved into an object with an aesthetic or

¹⁵⁶ François Choay, *The Invention of the Historic Monument* (Cambridge and London: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 41.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p. 42.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid*

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p. 6.

prestige value. Quatremère de Quincy addressed this phenomenon, defining the architectural monument as “an edifice, constructed either to perpetuate the memory of memorable things, or conceived, erected, or placed in such a way as to become an instrument of embellishment and magnificence in cities.”¹⁶⁰ The eighteenth-century architectural monument thus perpetuated memory and appealed to new abstract sensibilities.

Important aspects of these eighteenth-century French ideas on monuments and art had arrived in Havana by the 1820’s through a number of channels. The arrival of bishop Espada, Juan Bautista Vermay, and the establishment of the Academy of San Alejandro each contributed to this influx of Enlightenment theory on art as both mimesis and aesthetic perfection. These patrons of El Templete crafted a historically “legible” space through which the city’s history could be remembered and the individual’s intellect and aesthetic sensibility could be cultivated. Based on the method in which the shrine is approached today, an individual would enter the left gateway from the Plaza de Armas and pass the ceiba tree on the left (a single ceiba tree was planted in this location in 1828). Having passed, and potentially circumambulated the tree (an annual ritual is held today on November 16th where the tree is circulated in this manner), the viewer would ascend the three stairs and pass under the portico of the shrine (30 feet high from base to top of pediment, 33 feet across at the base). In the 1840’s, El Templete contained three rectangular doorways framed by pilasters, which were fitted with mahogany doors. Passing through the left doorway, one found oneself in the rectangular space of the cella. On the left wall was a large painting with life-size figures populated by the images retelling the story of the first cabildo (14 feet high by 11 wide). The eye was then drawn to

¹⁶⁰ Quote in Choay, p. 7.

the right and the enormous canvas of the inauguration ceremony with dozens of half life-sized figures reconstructing the ceremony that occurred on the site in 1828 (14 feet high by 25 wide). Another turn to the right, and one encountered the canvas telling the story of the first mass with life-sized figures (with same dimension as first cabildo). Having meditated on these historical moments, one exited the shrine and traveled around the Baroque pillar and out through the shrine's right gateway and back into the Plaza de Armas.¹⁶¹ Their education of the city's past and their intellectual and moral transformation was complete.

The shrine's systematic pedagogical function provided a detailed articulation of an essentialized view of Havana's early history. The history paintings by Juan Bautista Vermay (direct imitations of nature), wrapped in an architectural language of progress, embodied by the shrine (an abstraction of nature more noble than painting), elevated the historical narrative of place to a universal paradigm for the city. The attempt was to ground the historical myths in empirical proof. The forms reduced the complexity of the city and plaza, and positioned them in the realm of essential truths that were timeless and self-evident. Idealized forms framed and immortalized idealized moments in Cuban history, selected for their ability to present history as an evolutionary process, thus legitimating the contemporary moment based on historical foundations.

Vermay's painting *The First Cabildo* pictorially resurrects the historical episode whereby the Spanish instilled European systems of municipal law and order in the villa of San Cristobal de la Habana in 1519. The scene depicts the conquerors holding the first

¹⁶¹ The position of these paintings within the shrine was described in the *Diario de la Habana* on March 16, 1828, and they appear today in this same position. This placement will, therefore, be treated as what the patrons and artist intended, and it will be assumed that they have continued to occupy this placement through time.

official town council meeting under the ceiba tree, to draw up town plans, divide power, and distribute lands and encomienda to those who had contributed to the conquest (Figure 51). Anchoring the events to time and space is the majestic ceiba tree, whose canopy dominates the upper third of the canvas. Vermay used the tree to divide the pictorial space into three horizontal registers. Centered in the lowest register, emulating the power and firmness of the ceiba, we find the bearded figure of the conquistador Diego Velázquez. The conqueror with luxurious clothes and graceful, masculine manners echoes pictorial conventions for full-figure male portraiture, which developed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in various regions of the Spanish Americas. Colonial societies immortalized their conquistadors as vestiges of power, often depicting these men with a sword and/or a staff that signified the conqueror's virility, sexual potency, military strength, and masculinity. Vermay imagined the figure of Velázquez as an idealization of the conquistador archetype, possessing all the right qualities, like an antique statue dressed as a sixteenth-century Spanish lord. Velázquez came from Española near Santo Domingo where he was a wealthy land owner. In the eighteenth-century history of Cuba by Arrate y Acosta, the author had described Velázquez as a "...reputable and rich person of great prudence and affability in the management and commissions that he had obtained."¹⁶²

Vermay configures the head of Velázquez along a complementary horizontal axis defined by the heads of seventeen Spaniards who occupy the foreground and background of the canvas' lowest register. The two axes defined by the men and the ceiba tree unite humans and nature with the divine by simultaneously forming the shape of the cross,

¹⁶² "...persona rica y acreditada de gran prudencia y afabilidad en los manejos y comisiones que había obtenido..." See José Martín Félix de Arrate y Acosta, p. 22.



Figure 51. Juan Bautista Vermay, *The First Cabildo*,
El Templete, Plaza de Armas, Havana, 1826, oil on canvas

revealing Christ's presence during these events. The prominence of Velázquez derives also from his light blue and navy uniform accompanied by a ruby red and white cape with red sash across his torso, identifying him as an agent of the Spanish Crown. His dark leather boots rest firmly on the sand-colored ground with his right toe turned outward as Vermay shifts his weight onto his left leg in a skillfully rendered contrapposto stance. In his right hand, Velázquez holds his red feathered hat and wooden staff, as his sword rests in its holster on his left hip. Parting his cape and removing his hat, Velázquez confirms that the conquest is over and the time for establishing order has begun. His body pivots on axis to the left as he enters an ongoing conversation amongst a group of Spaniards who stand in the foreground to the viewer's right.

Directly to the left of Velázquez, standing in front of the ceiba tree, we find a priest dressed in black and white, identified by the colonial periodical as Bartolomé de las Casas. The figure of Bartolomé de las Casas in the scene provides another historical archetype. Literate viewers, who had read their eighteenth-century Cuban histories, would recall the Dominican priest who wrote passionately in defense of Indians in the sixteenth-century, shaping Crown policy on the issue. Bartolomé de las Casas stands silently, yet his presence along with Velázquez, each man standing directly in front of the ceiba tree, underscored the secular and religious foundations of the city. To the left of these two figures, a group of bearded men talk and gesticulate, and complete a circle of figures organized around a table draped in a richly embroidered red and gold fabric. The Spaniard closest to the viewer, dressed in black except for a brown belt and white collar, stands with his back to us and motions with his right hand as he converses with two men on his right. The Spaniard in black holds rolled paper(s) in his left hand to signify official

documents, royal decrees, and/or town plans. The men stand at ease on solid ground and possess a strong sense of gravity. Gone is the weightless, hovering dreaminess of José Nicolas de Escalera's Baroque visions. Vermay anchors these figures on the solid ground of reason, replacing soft, pastel, and hazy colors with tones derived directly from the primary colors (red, blue, and yellow). The artist's knowledge of drawing comes through in the well-defined outlines, which encapsulate regions of color thus controlling the emotional sensations that color provoked.

The painting draws the viewer inward by means of the high horizon line, which contributes to the viewer feeling that he/she is in the space. The perspective scheme places us at the same level or a bit higher than the figures, further augmenting our participation in the events. This technique, an ongoing development of spatial illusionism begun in the European Renaissance, democratizes the work by convincing the viewer that he/she is in the scene. To the left of Velázquez, the eye travels to three other groups placed further in the background who likewise converse amongst themselves. One holds a spear that fades into the mist as we look across the bay of Havana to the green hills beyond. Vermay composes the scene to convince the viewer that the area around Havana remains in its untamed and uncivilized form. The vacant hills across the bay, the local vegetation that protrudes into the work and the overpowering canopy of the ceiba tree suggest that the conquistadors have encountered a pristine wilderness. These aspects of local flora and geography situate the scene on the island of Cuba.

To reinforce a sense of the untamed wildness in the picture and reassert its Cuban setting, Vermay includes what Columbus identified as "Indians." In the bottom left of the canvas, almost in the shadows, a Native American mother and child are shown humbly

gazing upward at the group of men beyond and the magnificent figure of Velázquez towering above. The female Native figure personifies the Americas, as seen in seventeenth-century European representations in which this allegorical device was first used. The mother, covered in a brown garment, crouches downward and embraces her child, who is completely nude. The child reveres the conquistador figure, almost as though in a trance. In his childlike curiosity, he begins stepping towards Velázquez, subtly pointing his right index finger while lifting his right arm. Without looking, his mother restrains him, for she, too, is mesmerized by the grandeur of these statuesque Spanish dignitaries. The Native mother and child, brown-skinned, scantily clothed, and cowering in the corner, provide a visual and conceptual foil to the expansive solidity of the Spaniards by substituting a curvaceous and introverted character. The pair embodies the feminized landscape of the Americas as the men embody the masculine, civilizing entrance of European culture.

As the viewer turned away from this image of the first cabildo, the painting to the right against the rear wall of El Templete is the enormous canvas of *The Festival of the Inauguration* (Figures 52-53). Vermay composed the scene as a group portrait of intense accuracy intended to reconstruct, categorize, and ennoble the attendees at the March 19th event.¹⁶³ In a technique common in colonial painting of public spectacles or processions, different social ranks are zoned. The spectators and participants in the inauguration scene occupy spatial zones that communicated social hierarchy. Vermay zoned the human participants into six groups: 1) Leaders of the Church 2) Foreigners 3) Spanish

¹⁶³ This painting proved exceedingly difficult to photograph due to its large size, and due to the fact that it was being restored and was partially out in the floor when attempts were made by the author to photograph it. Only one reproduced photograph has been published, and it appears, in black and white, in García Pons (1951), p. 131.

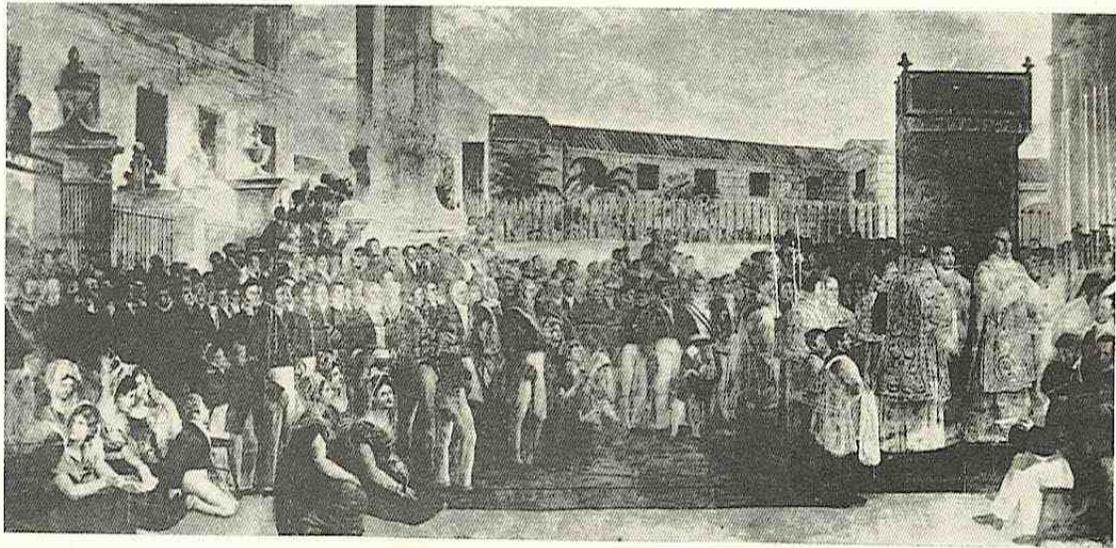


Figure 52. Juan Bautista Verma, *The Inauguration of El Templete*,
El Templete, Plaza de Armas, Havana, 1828, oil on canvas



Figure 53. Juan Bautista Vermau, *The Inauguration of El Templete*,
El Templete, Plaza de Armas, Havana, 1828, oil on canvas

administrative and military officials [Peninsulars] 4) Men of important families [Creoles] 5) Women and children 6) the general population. The human figures were interspersed amidst architectural icons of the Plaza de Armas, including the Bourbon Palace of the Second-in-Command, the Castillo del Real Fuerza, the Baroque pillar of 1754, the new stone and iron enclosure of El Templete, and a glimpse of the shrine itself at the far right of the painting. Vermay represents the Castillo and the Bourbon Palace much closer to the shrine than they actually exist in physical reality on the Plaza de Armas to visually connect the inauguration event to the city. While the majority of the attendees stand within the enclosure, the sixth group, the general population, stands outside the space, peering through iron bars over the stone wall.

This kind of pictorial manipulation of urban spaces is evident in a variety of colonial paintings throughout the Spanish Americas, particularly in depictions of *entradas* (the formal entrance of viceroys) and public celebrations. The creation of an illusionistic space within the shrine in which the viewer is made to feel that he/she is surveying actual urban space also resembled late eighteenth-century French diorama theatres. Christine Boyer discusses how such theatres fed a growing appetite for illusionism, which flowered in nineteenth-century France.¹⁶⁴ Revealing another Cuban appropriation of French culture, Vermay had been commissioned in 1827 by the Sociedad Económica to paint the interior of the Diorama theatre for Havana. The structure was composed of a Neo-Classical façade with three grand doorways similar to El Templete. Although destroyed in a hurricane of 1846 and the content of the paintings is unknown, this structure reveals a similar fascination with illusionism corresponding to

¹⁶⁴ Christine Boyer, *The City of Collective Memory: Its Historical Imagery and Architectural Entertainments* (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 1994); p. 165.

the conceptualization of El Templete.¹⁶⁵ Perhaps, Vermay's illusionistic work at the Diorama influenced his combination of images in the 1828 shrine.

At the far right of the inauguration painting, nearest the shrine, Vermay depicts the representatives of the Church. The bishop Espada swings a burning incense vessel and conducts the mass while standing on a wooden platform (Figure 54). He has removed his miter and stares at the open Gospels on the stand in front of him. Vermay elevates Espada as the most prominent figure in the ecclesiastical group and surrounds him with the canon, Don Juan Bernardo de O'Gaban, Don Pedro Gordillo, and Don José María Reina, school master and canon of La Merced.¹⁶⁶ The ecclesiastical figures wear white and gold vestments, as the group surrounding Espada stands on the wooden platform before a vertical red and gold canopy that resembles a baldachin seen in images of seated royalty or seated madonnas. The vertical canopy provides a regal backdrop for the ecclesiastical proceedings. Only two of the men's faces are fully visible, including Espada's; since one turns his head completely away from the viewer. To their right, the painter allows us a glimpse four columns and entablature of El Templete behind a series of seven large candles flanking a small crucifix. By placing the ecclesiastics closest to the shrine, Vermay underscores their social prestige in Colonial society, and elevates Espada who was its principle patron. The bishop is represented, by hieratic convention, as the largest and most elevated figure in the painting.

¹⁶⁵ Faivre D'Arcier (2004), p. 35.

¹⁶⁶ A list of the attendees of the inauguration ceremony is given in multiple sources. The list in this description comes from a booklet in the Library of the City Museum of Havana entitled "El Templete: Su Historia y Descripción," (La Habana: Jesus María y Curazao, Imp. Y Papelería de Miranda y Honos, Dragones 13). Also see Mario Lescano Abella, *El Centenario del Templete* (La Habana: Sindicato de Artes Graficas de la Habana, 1928), p. 28; J. de la Luz de León, p. 37; and Garcia Pons (1951), p. 132.



Figure 54. Church Group, *The Inauguration of El Templete*, El Templete, Plaza de Armas, Havana, 1828, oil on canvas

Directly below the figure of the bishop, Vermay includes his self-portrait (Figure 55).

The artist is seated on a wooden chair with his legs crossed wearing white trousers and a dark coat. He stares outward to the gathered crowd as he sketches on a bundle of white paper. Behind him is Don Pascual Pluma, consul of Tuscany, Don Ramón Lasagra, director of the Botanical Garden, and Don Guillermo Lobé, consul of Holland. One of these men places his hand on Vermay's shoulder and whispers something in his ear. The artist separates these figures from the rest of the population, including himself, to connote them as foreigners, i.e. non-Cuban and non-Spanish. Vermay was denied membership to the Sociedad Económica because of his French nationality, but they later made him a member after the completion of El Templete in 1828. Because of his achievements since his arrival, the particular success of El Templete, and the completion of the Neo-Classical theatre designed by Vermay, known as the *Diorama*, the artist was admitted to the society by Act of the Assembly of the Economic Society of the Friends of the Country on June 3, 1828.¹⁶⁷ The reluctance to admit Vermay due to his non-Cuban/non-Spanish nationality resulted from the intensifying issue of identity in nineteenth-century Cuba. Creoles, as Llanes points out, began to draw distinctions between themselves and Peninsulars using

¹⁶⁷ “La Comisión Preparatoria, habiendo examinado el informe de don Juan Bautista Vermay en el cual solicitaba su admission como miembro de esta Sociedad, habiéndose informado debidamente conforme al Artículo 6 de los estatutos y tras haber cumplido las formalidades previstas en ese artículo, propone no solamente aceptar a don Juan Bautista Vermay como miembro ordinario, siguiendo la facultad que le concede el Artículo 16 del Capítulo 3 de los propios estatutos, sino además concederle el título de Miembro de Honor, al considerarlo digno de tal distincion tanto por sus conocimientos artísticos y la reputación que éstos le han valido, como por los destacados trabajos, bien conocidos por el público y apreciados por los amantes del arte, que le han hecho merecedor del título de Pintor de la Cámara de Su Majestad.” From the Act of the Assembly of the Economic Society of the Friends of the Country, June 3, 1828. See Faivre D’Arcier (2004), p. 154.

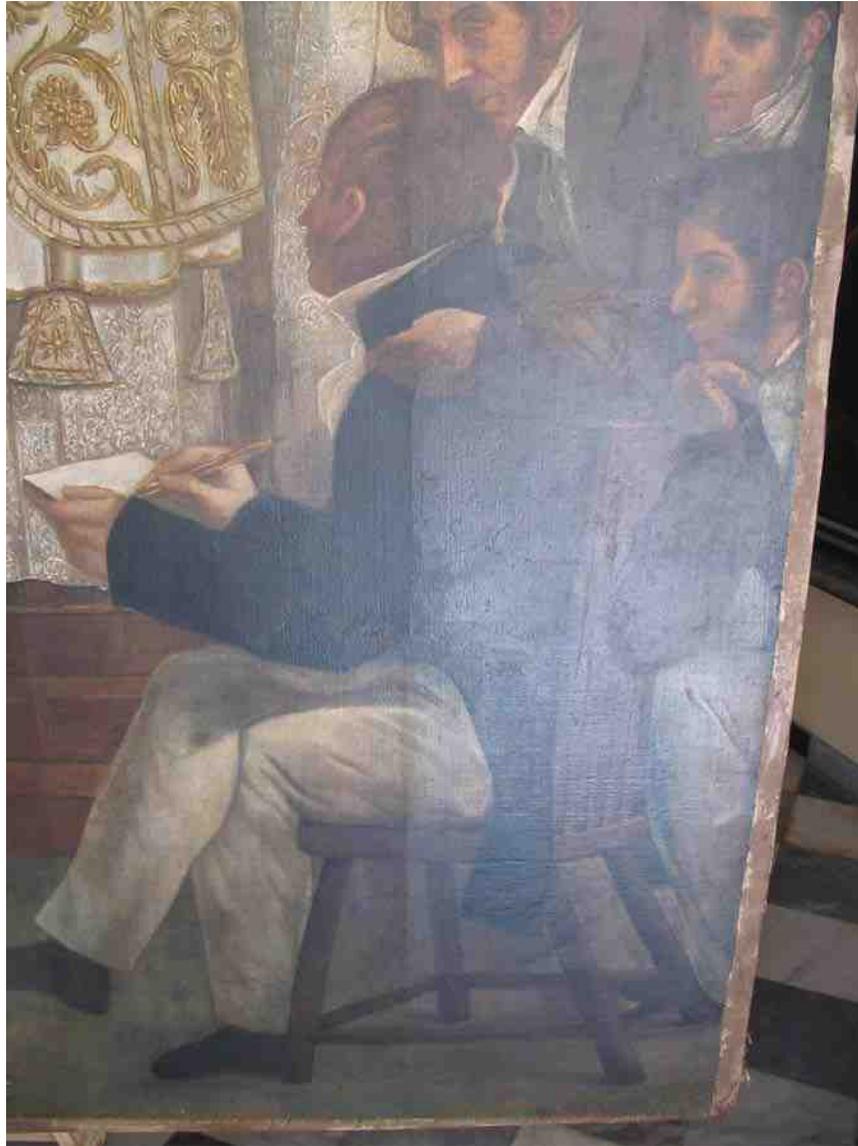


Figure 55. Foreigners Group, *The Inauguration of El Templete*,
El Templete, Plaza de Armas, Havana, 1828, oil on canvas

the word *naturales* to delineate those who were “native” to the island versus Spaniards who had just arrived.¹⁶⁸

In the center of the inauguration painting, Vermay places the Captain General Dionisio Vives on an ornamental rug that has been rolled out in his honor (Figure 56). He supports himself with a cane that he holds in his right hand and clasps his hat under his left arm. The governor appears serious and stern as he glares at the ecclesiastical proceedings. Vives’ two daughters, dressed in black, stand and kneel below and are joined by governesses and several servants. The group of Peninsulars which Vermay arranges around the figure of Vives dominates two-fourths of the horizontal space occupied by human figures (Figure 57). Vermay positions important figures in the Spanish administration and military officials, extending from the ecclesiastical group left and ending before the Baroque pillar. The military officials included the sub-inspector general of the military, Don Melchior Aymerich; the general treasurer of the army, Próspero Amador García; coronel of militias, José Marín Herrera; coronel of dragoons, José de Acosta; coronel Martín Aróstegui; brigadier José Cadavar; and sub-inspector of engineers, Antonio Arango. The Spanish administrative officials included the the alcalde (mayor) of the city, Próspero Amador Díaz; intendent of provinces, Tomás Agustín Cervantes; the regidores (town aldermen), Antonio Ponce de León, José María Chacón, Andres de Zayas, and José Francisco Rodríguez; the secretary of the government and architect of El Templete, Antonio María de la Torre; the director of the plaza, Manuel Molina; the auditor, José Sedano; the censor of the university, José María Calvo; and the notary public, Martín Ferrety. The artist identified these individuals by their portrait

¹⁶⁸ Llanes (1999), p. 58.

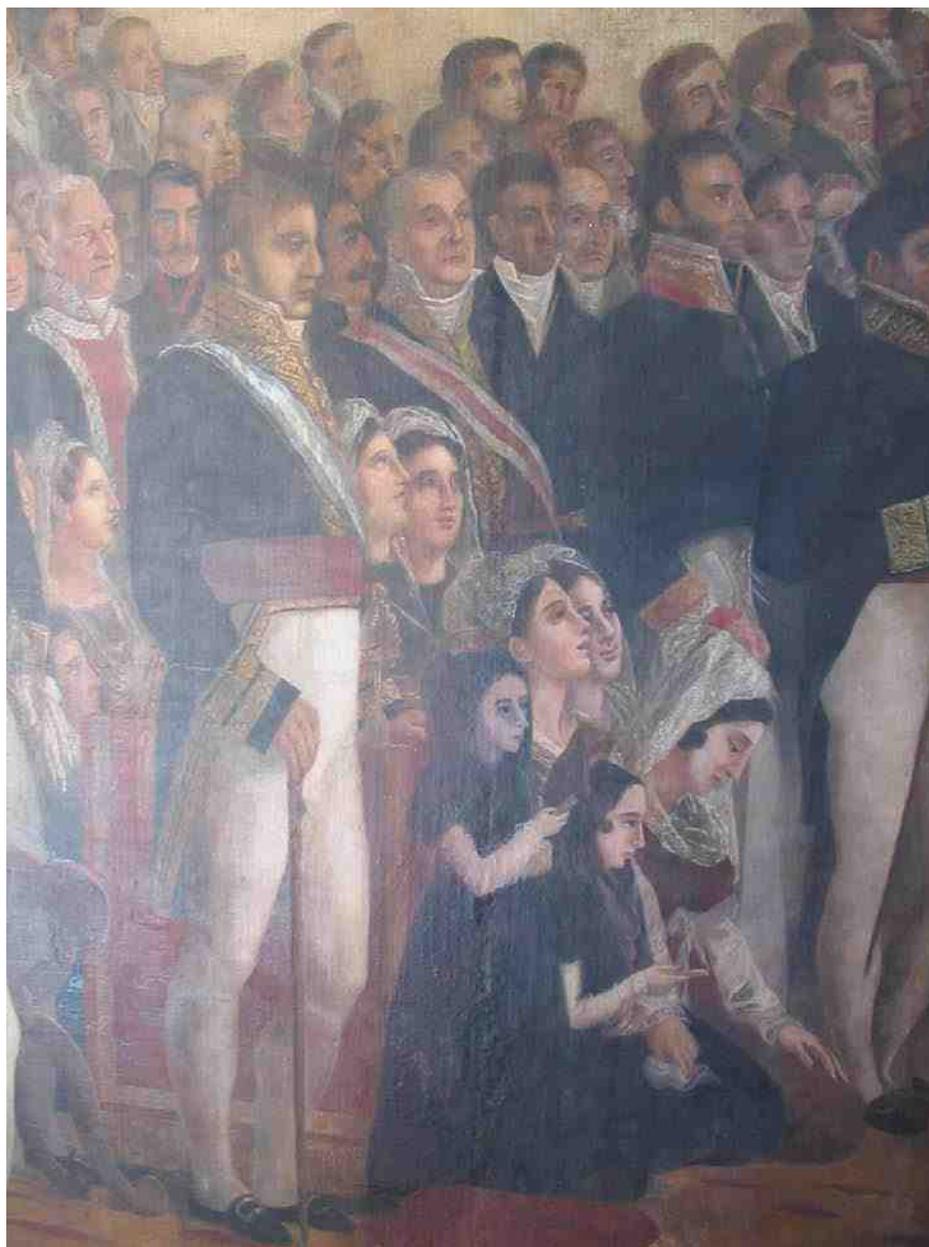


Figure 56. Captain General Vives and His Daughters, *The Inauguration of El Templete*, El Templete, Plaza de Armas, Havana, 1828, oil on canvas



Figure 57. Peninsular Group, *The Inauguration of El Templete*, El Templete, Plaza de Armas, Havana, 1828, oil on canvas

likenesses and their official positions by the complex system of official Spanish signage found on the uniforms of each person.

To the left of this official group, Vermay placed important male heads of household, predominantly Creoles from important habanero families (Figure 58). This group extends back towards the entrance and wraps around the massive Baroque pillar. Still well-dressed, yet without the elaborate badges of office, the Creoles included the Condes (counts) of Villanueva, Fernandina, Cañongo, O'Reilly, Casa Bayona, and San Juan de Jaruco; founder of the Economic Society, Francisco Arango y Parreño; and the Marqués de Prado Ameno. In contrast to the Peninsulars whose expressions range from befuddlement, ambivalence, indifference, incompetence, to stern, dignified, jovial, and loyal, Creole faces evince different psychological qualities. From those whose faces are close enough to study, we realize that, in general, Vermay depicted the Creoles as more intelligent, concerned, skeptical, humane, and individualized. As many of the Peninsulars possess angular, gaunt faces and seem to pose in slouched, artificial, and frivolous stances, Vermay represented the Creoles, particularly a tight group of five, as more full-faced and healthy, more rooted and rational, and more serious and cultivated (Figure 59). Vermay connotes their organic quality, their attachment to the soil by emphasizing a slight sense of ruggedness. The expressions on the faces of the five Creole men suggest that they are looking towards the vision of reason, logic, and antiquity embodied by El Templete.

Vermay positions the fifth group of figures, the women and children, kneeling on the ground on the left half of the canvas like the Native woman and child in the cabildo painting (Figures 60-61). A group of eight women dressed in dark green, red, and brown



Figure 58. Creole Group, *The Inauguration of El Templete*, El Templete, Plaza de Armas,



Figure 59. Group of Five Creoles, *The Inauguration of El Templete*, El Templete, Plaza de Armas, Havana, 1828, oil on canvas



Figure 60. Group of Women, *The Inauguration of El Templete*, El Templete, Plaza de Armas, Havana, 1828, oil on canvas

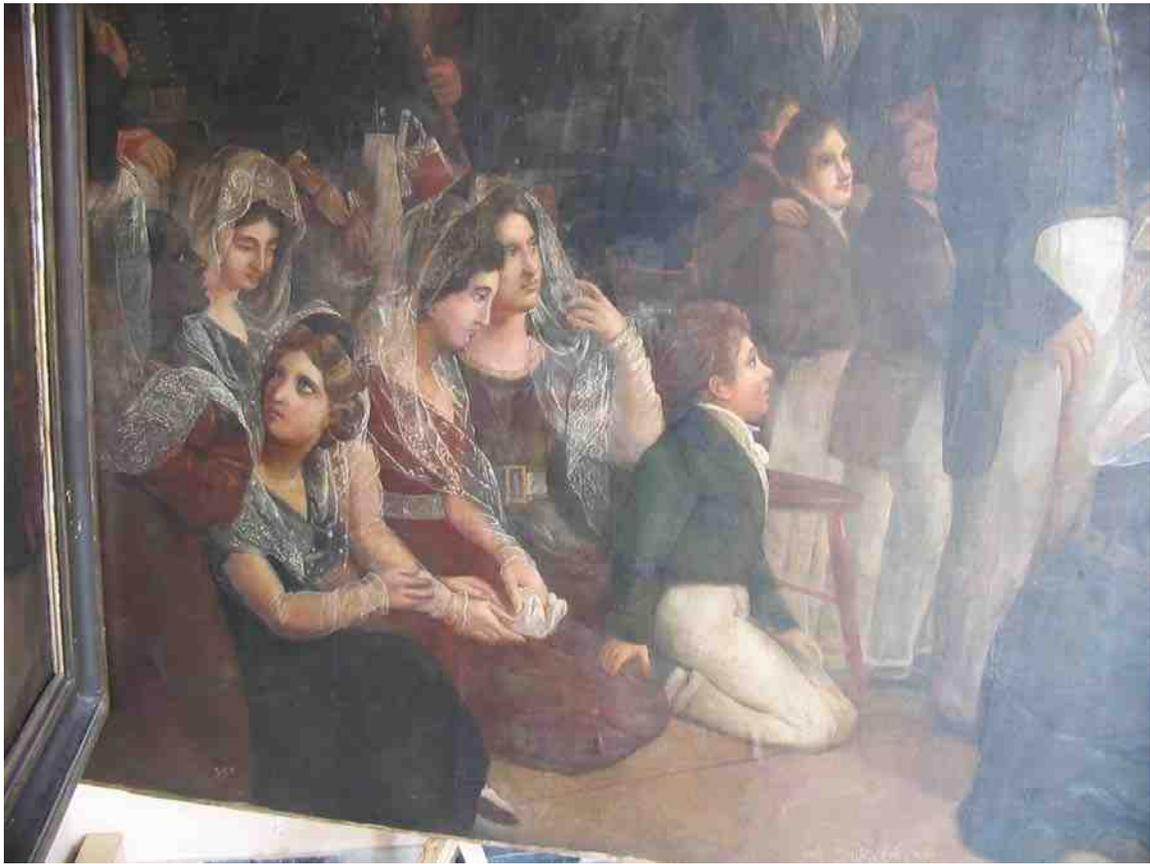


Figure 61. Group of Women and Children, *The Inauguration of El Templete*, El Templete, Plaza de Armas, Havana, 1828, oil on canvas

Havana, 1828, oil on canvas dresses with lace-like shawls sit in varying positions on the ground, pictorially subordinating them to the standing men. Another group of three women somewhat separate from the rest, near the Peninsulars, and are possibly peninsular wives. The remaining group, including several standing and one seated child, occupies the bottom left of the canvas. This group includes one Afro-Cuban woman in similar dress who represents an upper-class domestic slave or servant. According to García Pons, among these women are the wives of Juan Bautista Vermay, O'Farrill, Montalvo, and Cárdenas.¹⁶⁹ The dark skin tone of the Afro-Cuban woman sharply contrasts the pale, rosy skin of the white women, and she would be considered a *morena* (black). Augmenting this contrast is the practice among elite white women in the Colonial Americas who powdered their skin to accentuate its whiteness. The presence of the house slave thus provides a foil for the whiteness of these upper-class Creole women, revealing the dichotomy of race in Cuban colonial society. Two realms of the social spectrum among women in colonial Havana, that of upper-class white women and domestic slaves, are communicated by skin tone. Yet urban domestic slaves in Cuba were among the most privileged in the nineteenth century compared to rural slavery, particularly on plantations, which meant brutal labor and short life expectancies. Paradoxically, Vermay's slave in the inauguration painting would be considered quite comfortable among slaves in Cuba. In spite of their superior status, the white women possess much less social status than the men as denoted by their visual subordination occupying the lowest register on the canvas.

An Afro-Cuban male stands just to the left of the Captain General Vives (Figure 62). Vermay depicts him in military dress along with the other Spanish Peninsulars.

¹⁶⁹ García Pons (1951), p. 54.



Figure 62. Afro-Cuban Lieutenant, *The Inauguration of El Templete*, El Templete, Plaza de Armas, Havana, 1828, oil on canvas

Occupying a similarly high status as the domestic female slave, the man represents the captain of a volunteer police force, organized by the Spanish authorities to accommodate Havana's growing free black population and to increase surveillance and security on the streets. The final group in the scene is the general population represented by the masses huddled together outside of the enclosure who stare through the green iron bars (Figure 63). They remain anonymous and serve to underscore the hierarchical nature of the painting. As the first cabildo served to educate the public on establishment of civic order, the inauguration painting taught a carefully arranged visual lesson on the spatialized social hierarchy of Havana along the lines of race, social rank, gender, and national or regional origin.

In his appropriation of a contemporary event in the inauguration painting, Vermay violated a purist tenet of Neo-Classical picture theory. The sculpted allegorical imagery employed at the Espada Cemetery reflected earlier representational practices inspired by French rationalism. By the time of *El Templete*, however, France had endured the collapse of both Republicanism and the dictatorship of Napoleon Bonaparte, and the return of Bourbon imperialism, which changed the function of artistic imagery. Jacques-Louis David, Juan Bautista Vermay's teacher, found new opportunity in his career, albeit the sacrifice of his Republican ideals, in the service of the emperor Napoleon. Imagery of the Napoleonic era was intensely propagandistic, framing contemporary episodes in the life of the emperor in order to construct his public identity. One of David's most epic projects for the emperor was the monumental *Coronation of Napoleon*, a scene depicting the official coronation ceremony held in Notre-Dame in Paris in 1806 (Figure 64). Sabine



Figure 63. General Population, *The Inauguration of El Temple*, El Temple, Plaza de Armas, Havana, 1828, oil on canvas



Figure 64. Jacques-Louis David, *The Coronation of Napoleon*, 1805-8, oil on canvas, Paris, Louvre

suggests this work as a model for Vermay's painting of the inauguration.¹⁷⁰ Vermay would surely have seen the work, which was exhibited at the Salon of 1808 along with two paintings by Vermay. Vermay would have marveled at the immense size of the canvas (thirty-three feet wide, twenty feet high) and the interesting compositional method by which David represented the event.

Like Vermay's inauguration, David divided the group portrait into a series of zones. With court members all about, David created distinct areas for the representatives of the Church, Napoleon's mother and entourage, the emperor's brothers and sisters, the emperor himself crowning his wife Josefina, and a group of ambassadors who stand to the lower right of the canvas. As with Vermay's painting in which invisible diagonals converge in the center on the figure of Vives, David's composition centers on the figure of Napoleon. David includes a glimpse of the redecorated interior of the cathedral of Notre-Dame in Paris to reinforce the grandeur of the moment, as Vermay gathered the Bourbon Palace, the Castillo, Baroque pillar, and El Templete into his canvas to convey a similar sense of monumentality and civic grandeur. Vermay may also have copied the red and gold canopy found on the left side of David's painting along with the seven candles, which flank a central crucifix on the right. Like Vermay's work, David depicted himself sketching the scene in the background. David also represented figures, like Napoleon's mother, who had refused to attend the ceremony. As each painting was artifice, we must entertain the possibility that Vermay may have also depicted figures in the painting that were not actually in attendance at the ceremony. The painters of both works construct their compositions to include the viewer by opening up the foreground. Neither painting

¹⁷⁰ Faivre D'Arcier (2004), p. 142.

obstructs our view of the main events, making the viewer feel as if he/she is in attendance.

The centralized figure of Dionisio Vives, echoing the figure of Napoleon from David's work, was an attempt to connect the captain general to the deposed dictator. Vermay might have meant this reference intentionally as an additional slight against the Bourbon monarchy that he must have despised. Napoleon's memory was that of an over zealous despot, whose ambitions may have led to his own demise. Vermay seems to be suggesting Vives as such, an autocrat whose time will come. Furthermore, Vermay elevates Espada and places him closest to El Templete, positioning him as the true source of Havana's cultural modernization.

To the right of the monumental inauguration painting, against the south wall of the cella, the viewer encountered Vermay's painting of the first mass (Figure 65). Vermay transports the viewer again to the scene of the founding event in the history of Havana. Beneath the massive canopy of a ceiba tree (again dominating the top third of the canvas), a group of Spaniards gather and bow their heads as a priest conducts a solemn mass. The *Diario de la Habana* of March 16, 1828, also identified this figure of the priest as Bartolomé de las Casas. The Dominican friar wears a red vestment appropriate to the transubstantiation of the mass and stands with hands lifted in prayer directly in front of the ceiba tree trunk. Behind him, to his left, a cross is visible against the bark of the ceiba, and a white candle and book of the gospels can be found erected on a table draped in a white cloth suggesting the purity of the scene. Beyond, the horizon is defined by the water of the bay of Cardenas out of which the verdant hills rise empty of any signs of human settlement. Vermay filled the painting with flora and fauna indicative



Figure 65. Juan Bautista Vermay, *The First Mass*, El Templete, Plaza de Armas, Havana, 1826, oil on canvas

of the tropical Americas, including a parrot that perches in the ceiba tree and a local species of cactus at the bottom left. Spread before the friar are the pious Spaniards, expressing their devotion. Vermay modulates the scale of these figures in order to create the illusion of three-dimensional space and underscore that the crowd stands around the priest and the ceiba tree. One Spaniard in the foreground, totally surrendering to the spiritual power of the moment, falls to his knees, his hands outstretched, which gives Vermay an opportunity to display his skill at foreshortening. A Spaniard at left holds the shaft of a lance that rises to a red flag and metallic spear point emphasizing victory in the conquest. Diego Velázquez reappears as identified by the colonial periodical. His back is turned to the viewer, yet he still wears the red cape and sash on top of a blue uniform. He stands contrapposto again, only this time he reaches his right arm downward and places his right hand on the shoulder of a prostrate and orant Native American identifiable by his long black hair and bare torso. As if cowering before the power of the Spanish god and straining to understand the mysteries of Christ, the native is instructed towards the altar by Velázquez, who points towards it while holding a staff in his left hand. A second native stands on the right side of Velázquez and likewise expresses reverence towards the altar. Two native children can be seen, one standing directly in front of Velázquez with raised arms, and the other kneeling in prayer in front of the priest Bartolomé de las Casas. Vermay totally surrounds Velázquez with native figures, casting him in the role of benevolent patriarch, whose concern is for their spiritual well-being. The natives are again gendered as feminine or as children in relationship to the Spanish men, their nude and curvilinear profiles contrasting the dressed and angular outlines of the Spaniards. Eighteenth-century Cuban historian Arrate y Acosta wrote of the:

...memory of the nature and customs of the Indians in her [Cuba], on that our chroniclers speak with uniformity, writing down, without substantial discrepancy, they were of peaceful, docile, and bashful humor, very reverent with the superiors, of large ability and aptitude for the instructions of the faith, healthy and of good character, and of graceful form and beauty...¹⁷¹

Did Vermay read this text and literally translate its descriptions? The artist, at any rate, constructed his own vision of a verdant garden of peace and tranquility. The viewer enters the garden at the moment of the sixteenth-century spiritual conquest of Cuba. Vermay suggests the episode as a moment of redemption, just as docile heathens are saved by compassionate conquerors.

This lush, garden-like imagery combined with the actual landscaping surrounding the shrine, reference centuries-old European conceptions of the Americas as an unspoiled garden landscape. Regular ecclesiastics, such as the Franciscans, Dominicans, and Augustinians, conjured such utopic images in their minds as justification for conversion. Heathens were innocents living in a comparable Garden of Eden. The regular orders began to aggressively convert Natives, desperately trying to save as many souls as possible in preparation for the end of the world. Conquistadors likewise envisioned the Americas as a garden, a space in which to indulge the fantasies of power denied them by a misguided monarch in a rigid feudal society. The garden imagery surrounding the shrine referenced surviving utopic visions indulging the cravings of nineteenth-century *habaneros* to know the past.

El Templete, along with the Espada Cemetery and the formal transformations of the cathedral, reveal that Creoles were developing a more consistent means of visually

¹⁷¹ "...memoria de la naturaleza y costumbres de los indios en ella, sobre que hablan con uniformidad nuestros cronistas, asentando, sin discrepancia sustancial, eran de humor pacífico, dóciles y vergonzosos, muy reverentes con los superiores, de grande habilidad y aptitud para las instrucciones de la fe, bien dispuestos y personados, y de graciosa forma y hermosura..." See Arrate y Acosta, p. 18.

articulating their collective self-interest. These architectural projects reaffirmed their growing sophistication by ennobling their city and working in tandem with advances in the sciences and arts. The appropriation of a conceptual system of representation introduced by the Bourbons and bishop Espada provided the groundwork for the construction of Creole community. El Templete combined ideals of universal truth in Neo-Classical architecture with painted representations that highlighted specific moments in Cuban history, which augmented the relevance of Neo-Classical forms to local society. In spite of these high ideals and intentions, however, how did different sectors of colonial society make meaning out of El Templete upon its inauguration and in the following years? Given the monument's complex patronage, what was the general range of its multivalent capacity? For answers to these questions, we must consider the reception of the work from the perspective of Peninsulars and Creole loyalists, elite Creole planters and intellectuals eager to advance Cuban interests, and Creole intellectuals in educational institutions. We should also consider the reception of Creole petite bourgeoisie, local radicals (Creole and Afro-Cuban), and other sectors of local society such as Africans and Afro-Cubans, who I believe were expected to see and experience both the shrine and the paintings as members of the local population. In reconstructing the reception of the Creoles, we realize that Neo-Classical forms in Cuba took on a wide variety of meanings upon their introduction and became instruments of empowerment and domination.

CHAPTER FOUR

LA ISLA SIEMPRE LEAL: PERFORMANCE, IMAGE, TEXT, AND PENINSULAR RECEPTION

The Shrine as Urban Spectacle

The *Diario de la Habana* of March 12-14, 1828 circulated a “Superior Order” warning the public that carriages would not be allowed in the Plaza de Armas on the 18th, 19th, and 20th days of March, due to the festival celebrating the birthday of the Queen. The ceremonies would climax in the inauguration of the monument that commemorated the memory of the first mass celebrated on the island. El Templete was framed in the colonial press as a gift to her majesty in order to demonstrate the city’s loyalty to the Crown.¹⁷²

Though the three days of celebration conducted on order of the Captain General Vives, the Spanish authorities attempted to control the range of meanings that the monument would evoke in the public. This field of semantic control included embedding signs that asserted Spanish dominion over Cuba, performing these meanings in urban space, and formally contextualizing the work in the colonial press. The governor and leading peninsular elites would reassert royal power over the plaza, the city, and the island by narrating the plaza through architecture, ephemera, text, and performance.

El Templete became a prop for an elaborate staging of the Spanish claim to the island by appropriation of the historical messages inherent in the work. The monument as local agent of change that comprised a new visual language of progress was honored and subordinated simultaneously by emphasizing the divine Providence by which Cuba was

¹⁷² *Diario de la Habana*, Thursday, March 13, 1828, p. 2.

made part of the Spanish nation. The Spanish used the monument to construct a pedigree of imperial power in space and time, suggesting Cuba's place in this sovereign structure, also part of the natural order. By skillfully manipulating the conceived valences of the work, the Spanish authorities staged a dramatic reconquest of the island and de-emphasized El Templete's elevation of local culture. I am interested here with how these visual spectacles, public performances, and periodical writings were read by Peninsulars, whose position in the political structure of the Spanish empire was reified by these ritualized festivities.

In March of 1828, the shrine became the focal point of a wider spectrum of visual and performative propaganda leading up to the monument's inauguration. On March 13th, at 12:35 pm, a large crowd gathered in the Plaza de Armas under the surveillance of José Lopéz, a Peninsular from Granada and member of the battalion of Cataluña. Lopéz was joined by Francisco Fernández of Madrid and several soldiers. A group of convicts hoisted into position a golden bronze plaque reading: "Immortal memory of Francisco Dionisio Vives y Planés, Lieutenant General of the Royal Armies, national hero of the Country. In the Year 1828."¹⁷³ The soldiers fired fifteen rifle shots into the air and the crowd exclaimed three times, "Long live the King," and another three, "Long live our General Vives."¹⁷⁴ Like the viceroys of New Spain, the Cuban captain general's persona and body was considered an extension of the king's authority, like one branch of a large tree. The tree trunk metaphorically became the king's body from which the arms of

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ See "Office directed by the Sr. Regidor D. José Francisco Rodriguez Cabrera, to the Excellent Señor President, Governor, and Captain General, who ordered it inserted into this diario," *Diario de la Habana*, March 16, 1828, pp. 2-4.

empire radiated. By publicly invoking both names simultaneously in the Plaza de Armas, the crowd ritually performed the connection between the colonial governor and the king, linking, too, the colonial plaza and the Plaza Mayor of Madrid, the central metropolis of empire. Speaking these names aloud transformed the written reality of the king and captain general as political center into a new psychological reality in the space of the plaza. The the public proclamations of the two figures in the Plaza de Armas lent a deeper resonance to the act by associating Vives and Ferdinand with the concepts of centrality, hierarchy, and history already established in the space.

As the time of El Templete's inauguration drew closer, Vives augmented the propaganda campaign to impress the public with spectacle. The visual field he created reveals how colonial authorities used the plaza and civic theatrics to construct a social reality. The residents of the Plaza de Armas were required to decorate the balconies and windows of their house facades with *cortinajes vistosos* (decorative, visually appealing curtains). Stages and platforms were constructed along with triumphal arches, allegorical paintings, and posters bearing text and images. Military bands were assembled to play amidst fireworks and whirling confetti. The Bourbon Palaces and Ayuntamiento were illuminated with candles and colored glass, and allegorical images were placed on the Castillo de la Fuerza representing Havana's piety and loyalty to the King.¹⁷⁵ To enhance the spectacle, a European aeronaut named Robertson was invited to Havana to conduct the first flight of a hot-air balloon in the Americas during the three day celebration. Robertson's flight became a Spanish demonstration of progress and modernity, seeking to

¹⁷⁵ D. Miguel Mariano Gomez, *El Primer Centenario del Templete* (La Habana: Sindicato de Artes Graficas de la Habana, 1928), pp. 14-21.

convince the public that Spain was invested in the cultural modernization of Cuba.¹⁷⁶

The Peninsular government would frame the inauguration of El Templete as a testament to the island's loyalty to Spain by appropriating the primary symbolic messages within the work to amplify this message. This construction of meaning, orchestrated by Peninsulars, represented the Spanish response to the historical events of the 1820's which brought Spain's political structure to the breaking point, shattering its empire forever.

With the loss of New Spain in 1821 (Spain's most profitable viceroyalty), similar stirrings of independence in South America (led by Simon Bolívar), and the reinstatement in 1820 of the Constitution of 1812, Spain found itself teetering on the edge of political and economic disaster. Spanish troops waiting for Russian ships on the island of León near Cádiz in 1820 to take them to fight the American rebellions, abruptly mutinied against the peninsula itself. Resentful of their treatment following the Napoleonic wars, the troops vented their frustrations against Ferdinand VII. They succeeded in compelling the king to pledge his support to the Constitution of 1812. Constitutional monarchy briefly returned to the peninsula and to Spain's remaining colonies. When the news of this political revolt reached Havana, Captain General Juan Manuel de Cagigal (1819 – 1821) attempted to delay the political transition, which angered the local Catalan battalion. In the Plaza de Armas, an angry crowd of soldiers, peninsular residents, and others gathered to pressure the captain general to publicly proclaim the Constitution of 1812. As Jensen relates, "For the sake of public order, Cagigal reluctantly came down to

¹⁷⁶ While Spain sought to modernize Cuba's productive capacity, the monarchy simultaneously squeezed the local population with taxes and trade regulations which belied their real intentions: to maintain Cuba as a production center for a modernizing Spain. These spectacles of Cuba's modernity were, therefore, a fiction propagated through visual representation, written contextualization, and public performance.

the plaza and swore loyalty to the constitution.”¹⁷⁷ Cagigal thus utilized the plaza as a space of normalization for public policy through ritualized enactment of official decrees in public view as was done in the plazas of all colonial cities.

The reaction of local society to these political events reveals how the debate over constitutionalism was perceived in Cuba. Jensen argues that Creole sugar planters, who since the Restoration of 1814 had benefited from peninsular cooperation, were actually discouraged by the return of the Constitution of 1812. Peninsular benefits had included the abolition of the tobacco monopoly in 1818, the validation of old municipal land grants in 1819, and the control of public censorship of *periódicos* and the theatre. The return to constitutionalism was thus not welcome by the sugar oligarchy because as Jensen states, “Constitutionalism brought back different legal standards, representational formulas, and most immediately, a free press.”¹⁷⁸ The distinction must be drawn here among Cuban Creoles between what might be called “liberal progressives,” followers of the liberal priests, José Agustín Caballero and Félix Varela, and of pro-constitutional advocates at the San Carlos Seminary versus the conservative, resistant Creole planter class who profited from the status quo. The question of slavery became an intensified issue for Creole planters, whose livelihood depended on the institution and who consequently relied on the support and protection of the Spanish military to prevent slave uprisings. The Creole planter had only to look back thirty years to the successful slave revolt now known as the Haitian Revolution of 1791, which sent hundreds of French planters fleeing

¹⁷⁷ Larry R. Jensen, *Children of Colonial Despotism: Press, Politics, and Culture in Cuba, 1790-1840* (Tampa: University of South Florida Press, 1988), pp. 52-53, quote on p. 53.

¹⁷⁸ Jensen relates that these colonial publications and theatrical productions were censored, by member of the Sociedad Económica, to ensure the absence of anti-despotic content. *Ibid*, p. 55.

for their lives, many arriving in Cuba with stories of murder and carnage. The martial support provided by the Spanish military and the collaboration between Creole planters, the Spanish bureaucracy, and Peninsular merchants, bound the Creole elite into a tight web of interdependencies that galvanized their support of absolutism. The threat constitutionalism brought to this well-entrenched social order from which Creole planters benefited caused their initial reaction to be one of objection to the new socio-political order.

As the political structure was reordered in Havana in 1820-22, the oligarchy found ways to make constitutionalism serve elite Creole interests. Liberal writers for the colonial periódicos began to espouse the theoretical benefits of representational government, and the Creole elite found commercial benefits. As Jensen argues, elite Creole loyalty to constitutionalism, “was born of a peculiar blend of idealism and self-interest: admiration for the theoretical basis of constitutionalism mixed with fear of political innovation, an ironical coincidence of a new assertive ‘Americanism’ and a deepened identification with peninsular politics.”¹⁷⁹ Gradually, however, Peninsulars began to argue for the return of absolutism, having lost the mercantile autonomy they had possessed in Cuba before the constitution was reinstated. In 1823, two groups from Cuba, the Peninsulars backed by the mercantile sector, and the Creoles represented by Félix Varela and two other candidates, vied in a public election to represent the province of Havana at the Spanish Córtes (courts) of 1823. The Creoles won the election and Varela was sent to Spain with three others to represent Cuban ideals and interests. However, proceedings at the Córtes did not go according to plan. Ferdinand VII, despising the

¹⁷⁹ Ibid p. 83.

constitution of 1812, requested troops from Louis XVIII of France to help restore him as absolute monarch. Varela, as testament to his anti-absolutist ideals, voted to depose Ferdinand VII for standing in the way of progress and narrowly escaped Spain with his life, when the king abolished the Córtes and reinstated himself as absolute ruler the same year.¹⁸⁰

Ferdinand VII moved swiftly to wipe out constitutionalism in what was left of Spain's possessions in the Americas. By May 3, 1823, the monarchy had appointed a new captain general in Francisco Dionisio Vives, who arrived on the island and declared "the time of illusion has passed; men no longer sacrifice themselves for mere theories."¹⁸¹ As the political pendulum swung back to absolutism, Spanish authorities began to frame the constitutional debate as theoretical and therefore illusory, whereas absolutism possessed substance as vindicated by hundreds of years of tradition. Spain appointed Vives to preserve political stability at all cost in the wake of the return of absolutism and the loss of New Spain; he arrived with almost unrestricted power to do so. Vives became a ruthless censor of the colonial press, and dealt harshly with any signs of Creole conspiracy and/or insurgency on the island. His primary responsibility was to ensure that Cuba did not go the way of Mexico, and his presence was welcomed by Peninsular merchants who regained full dominance over the Cuban economy.

¹⁸⁰ Varela escaped to the United States where he lived the rest of his life in exile as a priest in New York. He wrote a variety of works towards Cuban liberation including the periódico *El Habanero* which circulated in Cuba between 1831-33. See Juan M. Navia, *An Apostle for the Immigrants: The Exile Years of Father Félix Varela y Morales, 1823-1853* (Salisbury, MD: Factor Press, 2002), pp. 48-50.

¹⁸¹ Quoted in Jensen (1988), p. 88.

In the mid-late 1820's, Vives utilized every opportunity available to reassert Spain's hold over the island and the island's loyalty to Spain. In these years, Cuba acquired the nickname *la isla siempre leal* (the ever-faithful island), an allusion to the perpetual loyalty supported and maintained by the colonial press, architecture, visual representation, and the narration of urban space. Vives, therefore, did not hesitate to transform the inauguration of El Templete into a spectacle of propagandistic imagery and public performances intended to reify Cuban loyalty. Based on writings in the Cuban press, the iconography of El Templete and the content of ephemera placed around the plaza, Peninsulars read El Templete and the spectacles surrounding it as a sign of Cuban subordination. Furthermore, Peninsulars would make every attempt to co-opt its range of meanings to affirm that the colonial social order was rooted in the laws of Nature in a society in which they had political, economic, and social dominance. These visual and textual messages were intended to persuade the local population.

During the three days of El Templete's inauguration festival, the plaza was transformed by ephemera. Great triumphal arches communicated formally with the gateway of El Templete and large allegorical paintings communicated with the painted imagery by Vermay.¹⁸² Two plaques bearing sonnets hung from the Castillo del Real Fuerza and the Captain General's palace, each extolling the piety and faithfulness of the city and proclaiming the Divine providence of Havana's prosperity. The sonnet on the Castillo read:

Sinking to the deadly influence

¹⁸² No work has been done on the content of these allegorical paintings or the specific configuration of the triumphal arches either during this ceremony or other political ceremonies in the Plaza de Armas. Nor are we certain how frequently the plaza was transformed in this way and for what specific occasions.

Of evil that has turned this hemisphere upside down
Havana unharmed and pure has been saved
And maintains its existence happily
Giving to its firm religious belief
To its faithful king has been conserved
And the just Providence has conserved him
With the peace, abundance, and affluence
Alone so precious fruits are achieved
Those two virtues cultivating
And on being our fortunes
In exercising such preservation
It makes our goods tastier
The paternal government of FERDINAND.¹⁸³

In a hemisphere turned upside down by the madness of rebellion, the sonnet assured *habaneros* that their piety and faithfulness to their king had delivered them from desolation. By the grace of God and their own prudence, Havana was a city of peace, abundance, and affluence. The sonnet on the Palace read:

Ferocious hydra of odious rebellion
The world of Columbus has been transformed
And has exchanged paradisiacal vitality
In bloody region, sad, frightening
Cuba in the meantime, to be necessary
In rich and affluent has exchanged it
Under the empire of beloved Ferdinand
Fruit of its respectful obedience
Thus *habaneros* the loyalty and zeal

¹⁸³ “Espuesta a la mortífera influencia
Del mal que este hemisferio ha trastornado,
La Habana ileza y pura se ha salvado
Y mantiene dichosa su existencia.
Dando a su religión firme creencia
A su rey siempre fiel se ha conservado;
Y el cielo justo le ha recompensado
Con la paz, la abundancia y la opulencia.
Solo se logran frutos tan preciosos
Aquellas dos virtudes cultivando;
Y sobre ser nosotros venturosos
En ejercicio tal perseverando
Nos hace nuestros bienes más sabrosos
El paternal gobierno de FERNANDO.”

See Mariano Gomez (1928), p. 17.

Of your religion and faithful constancy
With generous hand Providence rewards
You have the virtue of perseverance
And settled always on your soil
The JUSTICE, PEACE, and ABUNDANCE ¹⁸⁴

The sonnet spoke directly to the citizens of Havana, assuring them that Providence (God's divine grace) had awarded them justice, peace, and abundance for their perseverance and constancy. Each sonnet constructed the empire as a nuclear family with a central father figure in the body of the king. Rebellion, a ferocious monster (or hydra), jeopardized the natural and ordained unity of this familial structure.

To locate the origins of the imperial family, the sonnet showed gratitude to Havana for preserving something of "the world of Columbus." *El mundo de Colón* referred to a utopic space and alluded to an artificial continuity of unbroken time stretching from the Spanish conquest era to the nineteenth-century, legitimating the imperial order. Peninsulars invoked Columbus as an epic hero and a European ancestor, whose image called forth the memory of the early moments of the Spanish Golden Age. Columbus was, after all, a European, albeit an Italian, but an indispensable historical figure who led the European advances on the Americas. The author of the sonnet invoked

¹⁸⁴ "Hidra feroz de rebelión odiosa
El mundo de Colón ha transformado,
Y de almo paraíso le ha trocado
En cruenta región, triste, espantosa.
Cuba en tanto, de ser menesterosa
En rica y opulenta se ha trocado
Bajo el imperio de *Fernando* amado,
Fruto de su obediencia respetuosa!
Así habaneros la lealtad y celo
De vuestra *religión* y fiel constancia
Con mano dadivos premia el cielo
Tened en la virtud perseverancia
Y fijaréis por siempre en vuestro suelo
La JUSTICIA, LA PAZ, Y LA ABUNDANCIA."

See *Ibid.*, p. 17.

Spanish Colonial history to present *habaneros* with a vision of an idealized spatial and temporal order to be read against the visual forms of El Templete. To consider how the forms of El Templete were interpreted through the prism of the Peninsular conception of Cuba, the forms of the monument and its symbolic structure should be investigated closely as contextualized in the colonial press. Through these considerations, it will become apparent how image, performance, urban space, speech, and writing combined to shape Peninsular reception and intended to control all readings of the monument.

Peninsular Reception of Icons and Symbols

Peninsulars interpreted El Templete based on their pre-conceptions of the Americas, the fever of the political moment, and their understanding of its various symbolic and iconic properties.¹⁸⁵ Their interpretations inverted the monument's assertion of Creole agency as they saw its forms as evidence of Spanish superiority. Peninsular readings of the shrine were assisted by publications in the *Diario de la Habana* in March of 1828 released on order of the captain general to bind the potential valences of monument and the festivities surrounding its inauguration.

¹⁸⁵ In using the terms "icon" and "symbol" here, I am appropriating the semiotic theory of Charles Peirce who divided the operation of signs into a set of three: icon, index, and symbol. In this structure, a *symbol* is a sign which refers to the Object it denotes by virtue of a trait it shares in common with that object. An *icon* is a sign which refers to the Object it denotes not so much by a similarity it shares with that object but because it is associated with a general characteristic that the object happens to possess and is linked to that object by a social agreement. See Charles Peirce, "Logic as Semiotic," Justus Buchler, ed. *Philosophical Writings of Peirce* (New York: Dover Publications, 1955), pp. 98-115 and Geoffrey Broadbent, "A Plain Man's Guide to the Theory of Signs in Architecture," (1977), in Kate Nesbitt, *Theorizing a New Agenda for Architecture: An Anthology of Architectural Theory, 1965-1995* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996) pp. 122-140.

As official coordinator of the project, Francisco Rodríguez Cabrera was careful that the gated enclosure surrounding El Templete be fitted with symbols and memorial stones connecting the monument to the city of Havana and the Crown. For much of this work, he contracted local talent and even co-opted the labor of convicts, many of whom worked voluntarily. The great iron entryway, designed like a Roman triumphal arch, served as a prop for heraldry, inscriptions, and sculpture. Cabrera entrusted the work to D. Francisco Mañon, a local metal caster, listed as a “natural” of Havana. At nineteen years old, Mañon was commissioned to execute all the metal work of the shrine. Cabrera later lauded the craftsman in the *Diario*:

This youth, nineteen years of age, has built that doorway, that I can assure is the first work in its class, so perfectly by hammering, so symmetrical and equal in plan, so much that all who have seen it, have celebrated and reckoned it a finished work of art. Mañon has been the one that has also done all the other ironwork with exactness and surety, deserving therefore my gratitude, and I do not doubt that all sensible persons would credit the appreciation to this youth who since so tender an age has known to continue the path of merit without being distracted by leisure, vagrancy, and idleness.¹⁸⁶

Cabrera’s exaltation of this “finished work of art” drew attention to the doorway as an aesthetic object capable of being intellectually appreciated. The “hard-working” merits of this youth placed him above the *vagancia* (vagrancy) which was understood as a social ill. David Brown notes that in the early nineteenth-century, as Havana’s population expanded outward from the city walls into the extramuros, the use of the word

¹⁸⁶ “Este jóven, de diez y nuevo años de edad, ha construido esa portada, que puedo asegurar es la primera obra en su clase, tan perfectamente á martillo, tan simétrica é igual al plano, cuanto que no ha habido quien la haya visto, que no la haya celebrado y estimado por obra acabada del arte. Mañon ha sido el que ha hecho tambien todo lo demas de herreria con puntualidad y empeño, mereciendo por lo tanto mi gratitud, y no dudo que sea acre-edor al aprécio de los sensatos este jóven que desde que desde tan tierna edad ha sabido seguir la senda del mérito sin distraerse en el ocio, la vagancia y la holgaz nería.” See Cabrera, *Diario de la Habana*, March 16, 1828, pp. 2-4.

“vagrancy” became increasingly associated with *la mala vida* (the bad life) and referred to African and Afro-Cuban *barrios* (neighborhoods) outside the walls.¹⁸⁷ This passage is a textual hint at the racialized divisions, actualized in urban spatial segregations that would come to shape the monument’s reception. The production and exaltation of the fine arts became a conceptual bastion for the white classes against the fear of an expanding African and Afro-Cuban population.

The iron gateway, represented in the Mialhe print, projected royal imagery into the Plaza de Armas and visually communicated with the Bourbon palaces. The coat of arms of the city of Havana, comprised of a golden key surrounded by three castles surmounted by a crown, rested on a horizontal mullion. Mañón’s coat of arms for the gateway was bronze and five feet high including a large crown nineteen inches high and twenty-eight wide, and a *blason* (the oval shield contained sculptural messages) thirty-two inches high and twenty-one wide. The shield and crown had a tan patina, and the castles and key were covered with smelted gold. In the fringe of the shield, golden letters read, “The ever faithful city of Havana.” Along the sides of the shield, two bronze palms and two branches (one laurel and one olive) extended upward from the mullion.¹⁸⁸ The presence of the palms and the coat of arms exalted Havana, yet symbolically positioned the city beneath monarchical authority symbolized by the crown, to suggest both union

¹⁸⁷ Brown notes Fernando Ortiz’s earlier observation that the modern Cuban nation reflected white anxieties towards urban black populations. The *barrios extramuros* (neighborhoods outside the walls), in the nineteenth-century, became incubators for *la hampa cubana* (the Cuban underworld) that produced *la mala vida* (the bad life) considered a threat to the white social order. The bad life was referred to as *delincuencia* (delinquency) in the later nineteenth-century but had been referred to by José Antonio Saco in the 1830’s as *vagancia* (vagrancy). See Brown (2003), pp. 28-29.

¹⁸⁸ Cabrera, p. 2.

and hierarchy. This powerful image of civic submission along with the bulk of the triumphal arch, dominated the first impression of an individual entering the fenced area of the shrine.

Upon entering the enclosure, along both sides, the large pillars facing the Plaza de Armas were fitted with adornments and stone inscriptions provided by the professor, D. José Antonio Sacagno. The inscriptions extolled the principle patrons and the significance of the work. One read:

The Reigning Señor Don Fernando VII of Bourbon, acting President, Governor, and Captain General the Escmo. Señor Don Francisco Dionisio Vives y Planés, Diocesan Bishop the Escmo. and Ilmo. Señor Dr. Don Juan José Díaz de Espada y Landa, General Superintendent of the Royal House the Escmo. Señor Don Claudio Martínez de Pinillos y Ceballos, and General Commander of this posting the Señor Brigadier Don Angel Laborde y Navarro, built this public building to perpetuate the memory of the principle of Christianity in this country at the expense of the Ayuntamiento and of the faithful and pious inhabitants of this island, the work having been directed by the Gentleman Regidor Don José Francisco Rodríguez Cabrera. In the year 1828.¹⁸⁹

While this sculpted plaque listed the principle patrons of the work, mentioned cost, and dedicated the work to Christian principles, the other specifically elevated Vives:

The Escmo. Señor Don Francisco Dionisio Vives y Planés, Gentleman of the Royal Grand Cross and distinguished Spanish order of Charles III, Gentleman of the Royal American Grand Cross of the order of Isabel the Catholic and of the Military of S. Hermenegildo, Gentleman of the Royal Third Class of S. Ferdinand, declared several times national hero of the Country, decorated with the Shield of Fidelity, the North Star, and by nine other military actions, Lieutenant General of the Royal ejorcitos, Governor of the Plaza of Havana, Captain General of the Island of Cuba, President of the Royal Audience, protector with particular

¹⁸⁹ “Reyando el Sr. D. Fernando 7° de Borbon, siendo Presidente Gobernador y Capitan General el Escmo. Sr. D. Juan José Díaz de Espada y Landa Superintendente General de Real Hacienda el Escmo. Sr. D. Cláudio Martinez de Pinillos y Ceballos, y Comandante General de este Apostadero el Sr. Brigadier D. Angel Laborde y Navarro, se contruyó este edificio publico para perpetuar la memoria del principio del Cristianismo en este país á espensas del Escmo. Ayuntamiento y de los fidelísimo y piadosos habitantes de él, habiendo sido el director de la obra el Caballero Regidor D. José Francisco Rodríguez Cabrera. Año de MDCCCXXXVIII.” See Cabrera, *Diario de la Habana*, March 16, 1828, pp. 2-4.

engagement in this work, whose plans were designed and built by the Señor Don Antonio María de la Torre y Cárdenas, of the Council of S.M., honoring secretary and effective of this governor. In the year 1828.¹⁹⁰

The plaque listed the colonial governor's titles and official awards, connecting him to generations of Spanish monarchs and to the city of Havana. The inscription reinforced the power structure of the Spanish state in the plaza, the most cultured area of Havana, over which Vives had dominion. The architect of the work, Antonio María de la Torre, received brief mention at the bottom of one of the two inscriptions, and even then, he was linked assertively to Vives. As official seals of approval, these sculpted plaques would perpetuate the memory, not so much of the designers of the work, but of the political power players in office at the time of its inauguration.

The Baroque pillar of 1754, referred to by Cabrera as “la pirámide” (the pyramid) was entirely ruined, according to the author, when work on El Templete began in November of 1827. By March of 1828, the pillar had been restored and surrounded by several stone posts suspending an iron chain. A new inscription had been added to the pillar ranking those responsible for the new monument and reading, “Religion – Ferdinand 7 – Escmo. Ayuntamiento – Vives – Espada – Pinillos – Laborde.”¹⁹¹ “Religion” meant “God” or “Divine Providence” under which were placed the king, the

¹⁹⁰ “El Escmo. Sr. D. Francisco Dionisio Vives y Plánes, Caballero gran Cruz de la Real y distinguida orden Americana de Isabel la Católica y de la Militar de S. Hermenegildo, Caballero de tercera clase de la Real de S. Fernando, declarado varias veces benemérito de la Pátria, condecorado con el Escudo de Fidelidad, la estrella del Norte, y por otras nueve acciones de guerra, Teniente General de los Reales ejércitos, Gobernador de la Plaza de la Habana, Capitan General de la Isla de Cuba, Presidente de la Real Audiencia and protegió con particular empeño esta obra, cuyos planos proyectó y levantó el Sr. D. Antonio María de la Torre y Cárdenas, del Consejo de S.M., su secretario honorario y efectivo de este gobierno. Año de MDCCCXXVIII.” Ibid.

¹⁹¹ “Religion – Fernando 7º - Escmo. Ayuntamiento – Vives – Espada – Pinillos – Laborde.” See Cabrera, *Diario de la Habana*, March 16, 1828, pp. 2-4.

city council, the captain general, the bishop, the superintendent general and the general commander. A new image of Our Lady of the Pillar was fashioned to crown the pillar replacing one of “Gothic” character, by which Cabrera meant traditional and non-modern. The shrine was retained, but like all other elements in the new monument, officially stamped by the emblems of the current administration. This compulsive labeling was meant to subdue the legacy of previous administrations and elevate the most current, and also emphasized progress and modernity. Vives was presiding over a growing Cuban economy on an island that felt itself to be more modern than the Cuba of the eighteenth century. Peninsulars reading these inscriptions perceived the captain general and the patrons of the work as champions of Cuba’s prosperity and this rising tide of modernity. The visual ranking of political hierarchy through text thus became an indispensable part of the political rituals surrounding the monument’s inauguration.

El Templete’s Neo-Classical aesthetic, as seen in earlier projects, such as the Espada Cemetery and cathedral transformations, provided a Peninsular audience with evidence of Cuban prosperity. The high degree of Peninsular literacy, knowledge of academic taste, and support for progressive improvements leading to the fiscal expansion of the Bourbon state provoked positive recognition for the forms of the Neo-Classical shrine. In this way, Peninsulars could “read” the shrine as a conventional language of forms corresponding to the dissemination of knowledge and the progress of society. However, the progress that the shrine extolled referenced a modernizing Spain to which Cuba was subject and servant. Peninsular identity, as in every other colonial territory, was composed of a mixture of loyalty to Spain, feelings of entitlement, an assumed superiority over Creoles and the American population, and a perception of the Western

hemisphere as inferior to Europe, although perhaps rife with greater economic opportunity.

The sculptural program of the shrine itself against the far eastern wall of the enclosure, on close examination, embedded with signs of Cuban allegiance to the Crown. Symbols suggesting loyalty to the state, from which elite Peninsulars benefited, would have been read as codes connoting peninsular dominion over the Havana of 1828. As they read the shrine, elite Peninsulars must have been conscious of the fragmenting state of the Spanish empire and the threat of that political condition to their own self-interest. Within the metopes of El Templete, emblems of Spanish authority were carved in high relief (Figure 66). The eleven metopes framed by twelve triglyphs became a horizontal visual text ordering Cuba's position in the Spanish empire. If read from left to right, the metopes contained the following symbols within perfect circles in stone relief: 1) an image of bows and arrows, 2) a cursive "F" and a "degree" symbol, 3) an image of a crown uniting two orbs, 4) bows and arrows, 5) a cursive "F" with a degree symbol, 6) a crown uniting two orbs, 7) a "7" and a degree symbol, 8) bows and arrows, 9) a crown uniting two orbs, 10) a "7" and a degree symbol, and 11) bows and arrows. (Figure 67-70). The cursive "F" and the "7" denoted the monarch, "Ferdinand VII." The peculiar "degree" symbols found next to the "7" and the "F" escapes direct explanation. In Cabrera's March 16th article in the *Diario*, he explained the crown and orbs as "two united worlds and a crown that embraces them" and wrote that the symbols, when taken together, "symbolize our intimate and faithful union with the mother country."¹⁹²

¹⁹² "...dos mundos unidos y una corona que los abraza..." and "...simbolizan lo nuestra íntima y fiel union con la madre patria." See *Diario de la Habana*, March 16, 1828, Cabrera, pp. 2-4.

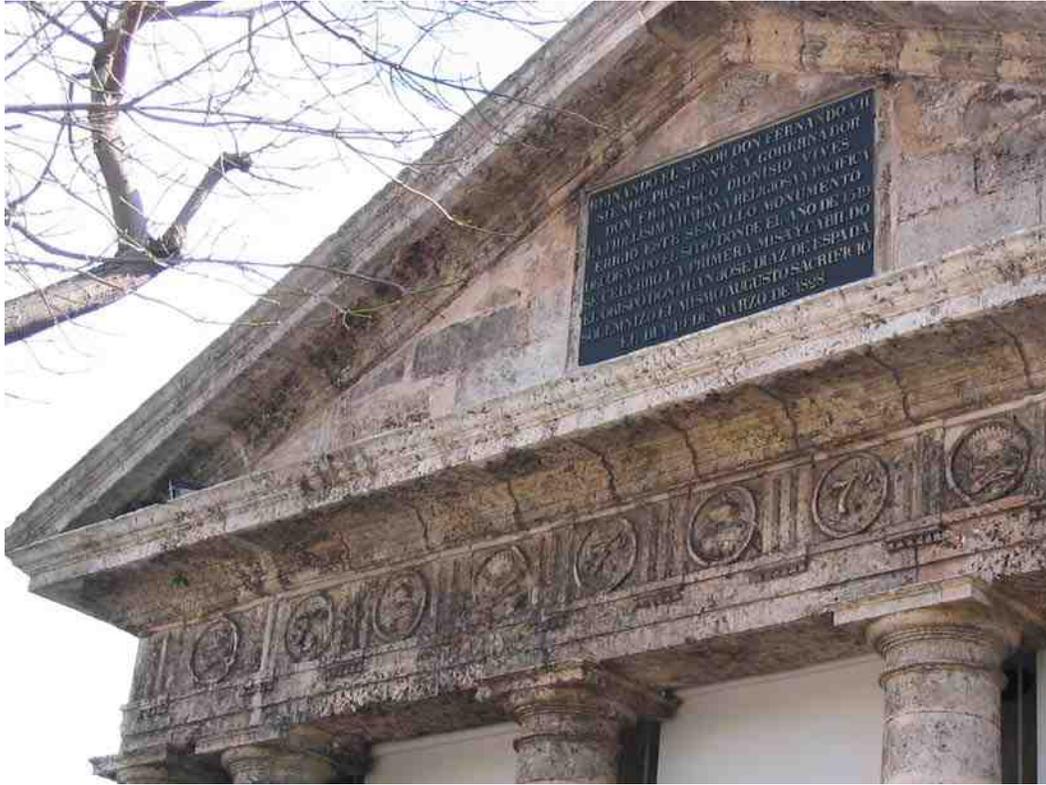


Figure 66. Frieze, Anonymous, El Temple,
Plaza de Armas, Havana, 1828



Figure 67. Metope sculpture: Bows and Arrows, El Templete, Plaza de Armas, Havana, 1828



Figure 68. Metope Sculpture: Cursive 'F', Anonymous, El Templete, Plaza de Armas, Havana, 1828



Figure 69. Metope Sculpture: Crown and Orbs, Anonymous, El Templete, Plaza de Armas, Havana, 1828



Figure 70. Metope Sculpture: '7°,' Anonymous, El Templete, Plaza de Armas, Havana, 1828

Combining bows and arrows (a symbol of the “New World”), emblems of Ferdinand VI, and a symbol of the “Old” and “New Worlds” united within a Doric frieze reified Cuban loyalty to a peninsular audience.

Although Cabrera was a resident of Havana, he was most certainly a peninsular, a Regidor (town alderman), entrusted by Vives to both coordinate the construction of El Templete and regulate its contextualization in the colonial press. His account in the *Diario* of March 16th is thus a material and symbolic analysis of the monument from a Peninsular’s point of view. The article encouraged Peninsular loyalty to Spain while disparaging of Cuba, the reading of the metope sculpture as an endorsement of the absolutism of Ferdinand VII, Cuba’s subordinate place in the Spanish political structure, and Peninsular dominance over Creoles. This reception of the work instantly connected the shrine to European Neo-Classical architecture and culture, positing the forms of El Templete as a Cuban borrowing of European sophistication. Peninsulars would have relegated Cuban society to the level of a peripheral colonial domain in need of European enlightenment. This paternalistic reading of El Templete elevated the king as patriarch and redeemer ruling with divine Providence, whose vision and magnificence were manifested in the perfect forms of the shrine. While evocative of Neo-Classical theories applied to connote the power of local society, the shrine became universalizing, referencing empire like the Bourbon palaces across the plaza. Elite Peninsulars profiting from successful mercantile business in Cuba or occupying senior positions in the Spanish administration would have wanted to seal the bonds between Cuba and the Crown all the more tightly as New Spain-Mexico and South America fell away from the fold.

Directly above and cresting the frieze, the pediment contained a grey colored granite slab of 2 1/3 varas long and 1 1/3 wide with an inscription in gilded bronze letters:

Reigning the Señor Don. Ferdinand VII °
Being President and Governor
Don Francisco Dionisio Vives
The Loyalty. Havana. Religious and Peaceful
Erected this simple monument
Decorating the site where in the year 1519
They celebrated the first mass and cabildo
The Bishop Dn. Juan José Diaz de Espada,
Solemnized the same agosto Sacrifice
The 19th Day of March, 1828.¹⁹³

Rather than a pedimental sculpture of gods and allegory as found in the temples of the ancients, the pediment of El Templete framed additional propaganda that visually ranked Cuban political power for the literate population. King Ferdinand occupied the highest position in the plaque, meant to be read as text from top to bottom. Captain General Vives followed the name of the king, followed thereafter by Bishop Espada. As was seen in the Espada Cemetery, pairing the bishop and captain general in a commemorative work structured the city's perception of social order as tied to religious and secular institutions. However, exalting the king in this work revealed the crisis of the political moment, as Spain desperately reached out to assert dominion over its remaining colonial territories as absolutism returned. All three individuals were Peninsulars, further

¹⁹³ “Reynando El Señor Don. Fernando VII °
Siendo. Presidente Y Gobernador
Don Francisco Dionisio Vives
La Fidelísima. Habana. Religiosa. Y Pacífica.
Erigió. Este. Sencillo. Monumento.
Decorando. El. Sitio Donde El. Año de. 1519
Se Celebró. La. Primera. Misa. Y Cabildo.
El Obispo. Dn Juan José Diaz de Espada.
Solemnizó. E. Mismo. Agosto. Sacrificio.
El. Dia. 19. De. Marzo. De. 1828”

See *Diario de la Habana*, March 16, 1828, Cabrera, pp. 2-4.

normalizing Peninsular dominance over Havana and connecting them to the generative moments in Cuban history: the first mass and cabildo.

The Spanish, moreover, did not reject the existence of Cuban history, as such a conception would run contrary to the rise of international historical consciousness. The Enlightenment taught Spaniards and Americans the historical significance of the Spanish word *país* (nation, country), as an entity unified by both geographical and cultural boundaries. The “country” in the sixteenth-eighteenth centuries, during periods of intense Spanish mercantilism, defined a political entity locked in an introverted and reactionary trade system. The boundaries of the nation were drawn by rigid policies aimed at controlling the flow of goods and marginalizing the interference of foreigners. As this iron curtain lowered in the late eighteenth/early nineteenth-centuries, ideas of the Enlightenment spread into Spain as Spanish territories became more fluid environments with the increased presence of foreigners. Representing cultural and historical roots of a nation in textual and pictorial forms became important ways of building new national boundaries from within. While Peninsulars generally viewed the Americas as inferior to Europe, the utility of seeking to define and elevate Cuban history was all too evident. Edifying colonial society would drive the colonies to function more efficiently in the interest of the Crown, an idea rooted in the eighteenth-century Bourbon reforms. Thus, Peninsulars had no objections to the synthesis of an artistic language to articulate Cuban history, as long as this history was contextualized to emphasize the Spanish roots of nation. The instruments of this contextualization in El Templete became the frieze sculpture, the inscriptions, the colonial press, the public performances surrounding the work, and included the paintings by Juan Bautista Vermay.

Vermay's paintings, combined with the architecture of the Neo-Classical shrine, concentrated the history of the city in two defining moments. The messages within these frameworks were elevated by the forms of the shrine to the realm of abstract perfection and empirical truth. The validity of these messages would be further reinforced by the memory of place in the Plaza de Armas. Yet, what the messages actually signified was completely contingent upon where one stood in the social fabric, their personal identities, and their level of literacy. Cabrera's article in the *Diario de la Habana* of March 16, 1828 remains the primary source on the content of these paintings. Whether or not what he identifies was the artist's intention is unknown; however, this was the press release available to the citizens of Havana and we can assume that his article, released in advance of the inauguration, heavily influenced the reception of the work among the literate.

Cabrera first contextualized Vermay's painting of the first mass. He discussed the scene as a moment when divine Providence intervened in the course of European history to grant the Spanish extensive lands in the Americas. He wrote, "...when entering El Templete, on the right has been placed a picture in which the act of offering that bloodless sacrifice is represented, like an homage to the gratitude of the Providence for the benefits that have been granted the discoverers and settlers of this Island."¹⁹⁴ Cabrera extolled Vermay's effectiveness in visually communicating the tropical context: "The ceiba under whose shadow appears the altar, the parrot that rests in its top branches, the thorns and prickly pear trees widespread upon the ground, a clear horizon elevating the sun in the East, all indicate that the scene happened on the bank of some country near the

¹⁹⁴ "se colocó hácia lo derecha entrando en el Templete un cuadro en que se representa el acto de ofrecerse aquei incruento sacrificio, como un homenaje de gratitud á la Providencia por los beneficios que habia dispensado á los descubridores y pobladores de esta Isla." See Cabrera, pp. 2-4.

Equator.”¹⁹⁵ He identifies elements of locale, “...the bay is discovered behind the tree and part of the slope of the Cabana, continuing until it skirts the beach, that itself extends to the inlet of Marimelena.”¹⁹⁶ Cabrera’s description opened by orienting the reader to the setting of the painting and suggesting that divine Providence graced the Spanish in the age of discovery along with the early settlers of the island. These descriptions of the painting constructed a temporal framework and encouraged colonial readers to have pride in their Spanish ancestry, an attempt to create “oneness” amidst difference and social heterogeneity. According to Cabrera, Cuba’s prosperity was the result of noble and heroic Spanish pioneers.

To identify these ancestors, Cabrera singled out the conquistador Diego Velázquez y Cuellar in the painting of the first mass.

Having celebrated the Mass the day of the martyr’s S. Cristobal, evoked since this time as the patron and protector of the new town, the priest with incarnate ornament is presented. The most prominent among those figures is the one that represents Diego Velázquez, as leader of the Spaniards, and settlers of this Island, he is distinguished easily by the insignia of his character, and by his respectable and noble attitude, declaring at the same time affability with the Indians that he has to his side, in the action of approaching the altar with one of them, or explaining to them what is being performed.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁵ “La seiba á cuya sombra aparece el altar, el papagayo que reposa en su copa; los abrojos y tunales esparcidos en el suelo, un horizonte claro y despejado al tiempo de elevarse el sol en el oriente, todo indica que la escena aconteció en la ribera del mar del algun país inmediato al Equator.” Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ “...la bahía detrás de aquel árbol y parte de la cuesta de la Cabana, siguiendo á su falda la playa que se estiende hasta la ensenada de Marimelena.” Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ “Habiéndose celebrado aquella misa el dia del mártir S. Cristobal, invocado desde entonces por patrono y protector de la nueva poblacion, se presenta el sacerdote con ornamento encarnado. Debiendo sobresalir entre aquellas imágenes la que representa á Diego Velázquez, como gefe de los españoles y poblador de esta Isla, se distingue facilmente por las insignias de su caracter, y por una actitud noble y respetable, manifestando al mismo tiempo afabilidad con los indios que tiene á su lado, en la accion de aproximar al altar á uno de ellos, ó explicarle lo que en él se ejecutaba.” See Cabrera, pp. 2-4. Cabrera’s identification of the conquistador figure Diego Velázquez y Cuellar, from which subsequent historians have drawn their own, remains the

Cabrera casts Velázquez as the respectable leader of the Spaniards, whose “noble attitude” bore witness to the authenticity of his character. Although the conquistador wore signifiers of his position, his true grace came from within, from his Spanish strength of character (Figure 71). The author measures the character of Velázquez by his dignified posture, and his noble and charitable acts, as Velázquez demonstrates his “affability” towards the Indians, helping them comprehend the significance of the ceremony. This contextualization of the encounter as benign and paternalistic, where Velázquez saves an innocent savage race by bringing them to Christianity, of course conflicts with actual reality of the conquistador’s complicity in rape, murder, and enslavement of the Taíno and Ciboney. The narrative constructed ideal behavior, according to Enlightenment paradigms of reason and self-restraint, and suggested that Natives would comprehend the self-evident truths inherent in Spanish culture.

Cabrera continues with his construction of Spanish ancestry: “...having begun to be established in this land since 1511, always accompanied by some minister of religion, many of its naturals were able to be instructed in it [Christianity] and even baptized.”¹⁹⁸ These passages from the Cuban *periódico* reasserted the pictorial dichotomy between Spaniard and Indian, and suggested Velázquez as a Spanish masculine archetype, redolent of strength, civilization, balance, and vision. As architect of the island’s destiny, Velázquez, accompanied by members of the Church, liberated Cuba from a state of

primary source for the identity of this figure. Whether Vermay intended this or not is unknown, but Cabrera’s article in the *Diario* provided its readers in 1828 with an identity for this figure.

¹⁹⁸ “...habiendo empezado á establecerse en esta tierra desde el año 1511, acompañados siempre de algun ministro de la religion, muchos de sus naturales podian estar instruidos en ella y aun bautizados.” *Ibid.*



Figure 71. Velázquez with Group of Indians, Juan Bautista Vermay, *The First Mass*, El Templete, Plaza de Armas, Havana, 1828, oil on canvas

isolation and non-existence and placed it on a proper course for the future. Peninsulars, having read Cabrera's account, would perceive the painting of the first mass as a narrative on Spanish exceptionalism and look upon the figure of Velázquez as a noble ancestor and contemporary role model. The forging of direct connections between contemporary Peninsulars in Cuba and Spanish ancestors legitimated their dominance over Creoles and local society. Being the descendants of Spanish discoverers justified their lofty status and privileges.

Cabrera's use of the word *naturales* (naturals) to describe the Native American figures links his perception of Natives to epistemological frameworks conceptualized by the European Enlightenment. The concept of "natural man" debated among the French philosophes (Rousseau) idealized an innocent primitive man, sometimes referred to as a "noble savage," living uncorrupted in a state of nature. This idea became a conceptual technique for deconstructing civilization itself in order to transform it, which certainly appealed to the Bourbons, who utilized all means available to maximize the functional effectiveness of the colonies. However, the idealization of the Indian figure served elite Peninsulars as a stereotype of the Americas; the Native figures provide an uncivilized, weak, and cowering foil to the more noble traits embodied by the conquistador archetype. These images provided Peninsulars with needed self-definition. The paternalistic scene between Velázquez and the group of natives would have connoted the inferiority of the Americas to a peninsular audience. Vermay's depiction of the Natives as timid and scantily clothed communicated to Peninsulars the lower order of civilization on which the Americas were based and the perpetual duty of Europeans to bring light and direction to this wayward hemisphere.

Cabrera remarked on the skill with which Vermay united the figures psychologically in the composition. In the process, he introduced another Caribbean historical archetype to solidify the Spanish claim to Cuba. He wrote:

The other group is comprised of ten Spaniards hearing the mass, well marked by their clothing and facial features, and in them is so admirable the fertile invention of the artist in the quality and success of the execution, therefore being all penetrated by the same feelings, piety and devotion, all they manifest with different expressions. One of them waves the royal banner of Castile, to whose kingdom the island belongs since the discovery and worthy possession of her by the Admiral Don Christopher Columbus, by having been sponsored in his business by the Señora Queen Doña Isabel, without the intervention of her husband Señor King Don Ferdinand of Aragon.¹⁹⁹

Although the Catholic Kings, Ferdinand and Isabel, were both deceased by 1519, Cabrera drew them into the discussion through the figure of Columbus. Columbus himself, only skirted the island of Cuba on his first voyage, and did not participate in the conquest led by Diego Velázquez, as Columbus died in Valladolid in 1508. The appropriation of the name of Columbus and the Catholic Kings here was to establish a royal pedigree to buttress Spanish claims to Cuba in the nineteenth century. Suturing social constructs of lineage, Cabrera suggested a seamless succession of power players to whom “the island belongs since the discovery and worthy possession of her.” Furthermore, his exaltation of the Queen placed the American territories under her domain just as El Templete was being offered to the Spanish Queen in 1828 as a birthday gift. As with the figure of

¹⁹⁹ “El otro grupo consta diez españoles oyendo la misa, bien marcados por su trage y facciones, y en ellos es tan admirable la fecunda invencion del artista como la propiedad y acierto en la ejecucion, pues estando todos penetrados de unos mismos sentimientos, piedad y devocion, todos los manifiestan con diferentes espresiones. Sobre ellos tremolo el estandarte Real de Castilla, á cuyo reino pertenece esta isla desde que la descubrió y tomó posesion de ella el almirante D. Cristóbal Colon, por haber costeadó su empresa la Sra. Reina Da. Isabel, sin intervencion de su esposo el Sr. Rey D. Fernando de Aragon.” See Cabrera, pp. 2-4.

Velázquez, Columbus, already an important Caribbean ancestor, became a cipher for the social construction of nineteenth-century identity.

Cabrera described Vermay's painting of the first cabildo in detail, drawing attention to its similarities to the first mass. He wrote:

The left side of El Templete...is occupied by another picture 5 varas high (14 feet) as the previous one and 4 wide (11 feet) representing the installation of the ayuntamiento. Being comprised of the first cabildo ...that in that period was composed of two alcaldes and four regidores; the same one is supposed among a number of capitularies in the act of its construction, presided over by Diego Velázquez. In that group the notary is distinguished by his black clothing and the papers he has in his left hand, presenting with the right the sign of the cross to the chosen so that he lent the oath owed [to Christ]. As some of those capitularies are being named among the Spaniards that concurred with the mass; not only Velázquez but also others equally resemble in their facial features and in the color of dress the ones contained in the other picture.²⁰⁰

To further ground the work in known history, he identified a third Caribbean historical archetype:

The religious Dominican that appears immediately next to the ceiba, seems to have been the same one that celebrated the mass. Although it is certain to be the presbyterian Bartolomé de las Casas, clergyman in that case, who went to Cuba with Velázquez, accompanied Panfilo de Narvaez when by his order he was called upon to recognize it, and ultimately reunited in Jagua to the first leader [Velázquez].²⁰¹

²⁰⁰ “El lado izquierdo del Templete...le ocupa otro cuadro de cinco varas de alto como el anterior y cuatro de ancho, representándose la instalacion del ayuntamiento. Constando del primer cabildo...que en aquella época se componia de dos alcaldes y cuatro regidores; se supone el mismo número de capitulares en el acto de su ereccion, presidida por Diego Velázquez. En ese grupo se distingue el escribano por su traje negro y los papeles que tiene en la mano izquierda, presentando con la derecha la señal de la cruz á los electos para que prestasen el juramento debido. Como algunos de esos capitulares serian nombrados entre los españoles que concurrieron á la misa; no solo Velázquez sino aquellos igualmente se asemejan en las facciones y en el color de los vestidos á los que contiene el otro cuadro.” See Cabrera, pp. 2-4.

²⁰¹ “El religioso dominico que aparece inmediato á la seiba, indica haber sido el mismo que celebró la misa. Aunque es cierto que el presbítero Bartolomé de las Casas, clérigo entonces, vino á Cuba con Velázquez, acompañó á Panfilo Narvaez cuando por su orden se interesó á reconocerla, y últimamente se reunion en Jagua al primer gefe...” See Cabrera, pp. 2-4.

Bartolomé de las Casas became the Dominican friar known for his fiery rebukes of encomenderos who he felt were exploiting and dehumanizing their Native American labor force. His work *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies* (1542) was dedicated to Phillip II and warned the king that God would bring his wrath against Spain if such atrocities continued.²⁰² Cabrera framed Vermay's priest figure as Las Casas to lend greater historical authenticity to his contextualization, again emphasizing Spanish roots.

In the first *cabildo*, Cabrera asserted the figure of the Indian as a foil to the noble traits of the Spaniards: "...being very notable the timidity of the child that seems to see the Spaniards who is guided by an Indian" (Figure 72).²⁰³ The Native woman who restrains her child from reaching towards the magnificent figure of Velázquez in her timidity serves to embody the "New World" and frame it as female with all of its attendant traits. Her mothering capacity in the work underscores her gender and provides a foil for the idealized masculine figure of Velázquez. By placing the child between them, Vermay even suggests the boy as their offspring, the son of a Spanish father and Native mother. This grouping would have evoked Christian associations between God, the Virgin Mary, and the Christ child. However, instead of seeing this child as messianic, Peninsulars would have viewed this image as evidence of Creole inferiority because it alluded to the racially "mixed" character and thus polluted blood of nineteenth-century Americans. Peninsulars would also have read the image as evidence of the paternalistic

²⁰² Bartolomé de las Casas, *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*, Nigel Griffin, ed/trans. (London and New York: Penguin Books, 1992).

²⁰³ "...siendo muy notable la timidez que manifiesta al ver los españoles el niño que conduce una India." See Cabrera, pp. 2-4.



Figure 72. Velázquez with Indian Mother and Child, Juan Bautista Vermay, *The First Cabildo*, El Templete, Plaza de Armas, Havana, 1828, oil on canvas

role of Spain in spawning the Americas, doomed to forever bear the stigma of miscegenation.

The Native mother figure as an embodiment of America grew from a legacy of allegorical representations that represented the Americas in gendered terms to a European audience. The pictorial gendering of the Americas by European artists traces its roots to the sixteenth century with the work of Dutch engravers. Jan van der Straet (1523-1605), or Johannes Stradanus, produced an engraving printed by the Galles family in Antwerp in 1638 after a drawing representing Amerigo Vespucci and “America” (Figure 73).²⁰⁴ The image consists of an allegorical representation of the encounter between the “Old” and “New Worlds.” Vespucci has disembarked from his ship and stepped foot on American soil amidst exotic flora and fauna, a curious anteater, and an image of Natives in the background roasting human limbs over an open fire for cannibalistic consumption. The European explorer suddenly encounters a nude woman asleep in a hammock, who is abruptly awoken by his entrance. Her given name in the scene, “America” (the feminization of the explorer’s names, “Amerigo”), signifies her as the embodiment of the American hemisphere, gendered female, without clothes or culture, awaiting the civilizing force of the European figure of Vespucci. As the female figure is anonymous and allegorical, and thus abstract, the male figure of Vespucci is an identifiable, historical actor, whose intellectual vision must be brought to bear to order and “civilize” this new landscape. Sixteenth-and seventeenth-century Europeans, in an attempt to process the

²⁰⁴ There are actually two versions of this image: one was the actual drawing of Johannes Stradanus and the other was a mirror image produced by the Galles family. The first was designed for wall decoration while the second was included in a collection of prints in book format known as *Speculum diversarum imaginum speculativarum* (1638). See José Rabasa, *Inventing America: Spanish Historiography and the Formation of Eurocentrism* (Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), pp. 23-48.



Figure 73. Jan van der Straet, *Amerigo Vespucci Awakens a Sleeping America*, Antwerp, 1600, engraving

Americas, perceived the hemisphere as exotic but inferior to Europe, and conceptualized the Americas according to contemporary concepts of gender. Gendered female, the Americas were considered inferior, directionless, anonymous, listless, and without intellectual structure. The figure of Vespucci embodied the bold, European man of intellect arriving with his navigational instruments in hand, in order to spatially and temporally structure the disordered American hemisphere. This allegorical mode of representation reappears in *The First Cabildo* by Vermay, where we find the European historical actor in Diego Velázquez arriving to bring civilization and history to the anonymous and atemporal American hemisphere embodied by the Native mother and child. This arrangement of figures by Vermay reflects the academic tradition in which he worked: a systematic attempt to categorize and consolidate past modes of representation into a flexible, modern idiom and practice.

Cabrera's article in the *Diario de la Habana* excluded a detailed description of the Inauguration painting because, by March 16, 1828, the painting had not been finished. Vermay's large, group portrait represented an event that had not yet occurred. Yet, in examining the work, we can deduce the range of Peninsular reception from their conception of themselves in Cuban society. The Peninsular group dominates the center of the composition, focusing on the figure of Vives, who rises from his chair (he is the only figure provided with a chair) while holding a wooden staff. Upon careful examination, the staff appears identical to the one held by Velázquez in his left hand in the painting of the first mass and his right hand in the first cabildo. Vives' possession of the staff visually connects him to the conquistador archetype, identifying him as the natural successor like Vespucci. Furthermore, both figures wear a combination of red, white, and

blue colors. By visually tying Vives to Velázquez, Vermay constructed a symbolic ensemble that further reinforced imperial destiny and the divine Providence under which the Spanish had always ruled the island to a peninsular audience. The nineteenth-century peninsular identities constructed by the contemporary portraits thus rested secularly on the foundation of noble and virtuous Spanish ancestors who liberated the Americas from a state of darkness, savagery, and temporal immobility. The painting would transport the identity of these individuals “to the most remote posterity” would forever be remembered and associated with the progress and betterment of the island of Cuba in service of his majesty Ferdinand VII and Captain General Vives.

A peninsular audience would combine these concepts with the arboreal symbolism embedded in the site (although a young ceiba tree was planted in 1828 and no tree stood on the site during the inauguration). The tree symbolism attached to the site, which was visually represented in two of the paintings, suggested the natural order of Spanish rule and inserted the tree metaphor to stand for the imperial power structure. The tree symbolized imperial Spain, and more specifically, the king of Spain, whereas the spreading branches and canopy of the ceiba symbolized the expanse of empire, overseas possessions, and the Americas. Peninsulars would read the tree, the symbolic urban space, the pictorial narratives of divinely sanctioned conquest, and the “pure and true” forms of the Neo-Classical shrine as an articulation and authentication of their ancestral claim to the island and legitimization of their dominance over local society.

Cabrera was careful to include gratitude for the authors and principal patrons of the work.

He lauded Vermay, writing that the perfection of the paintings:

...transmits to posterity the memory of [their] author Don Juan Bautista Vermay, his happy and fertile invention, the property in the attitudes of the Spaniards and

the Indians, the clothing of those and the musculature of these, the expression of his affections, the situation of the groups, the softness and harmony of the colors, the impression of the light, the opportunity of the shadows; all recommend the instruction and dexterity of that professor; and in contemplating so much beauty none is persuaded that in less than three months he had begun and concluded the work, that was offered to be sponsored by our pious and wise Bishop the Escmo. and Ilmo. Señor Dr. Don Juan José Diaz de Espada y Landa...²⁰⁵

Of Bishop Espada, Cabrera wrote:

Señor Escia. Ilma., this dignified prelate to whom Havana owes so much, such that since his happy arrival to this city he has occupied himself constantly to enlighten his diocesans through principles, doing in addition other peculiar and precious works for the town,...he has also given the bust of Columbus in marble with pedestal of the same, and is going to place it among El Templete and the pyramid...²⁰⁶

Espada's introduction of "principles" referenced his ability to abstract Nature's tenets into "enlightened" forms to edify Cuban society. For a Peninsular audience, Vermay and Espada may have been agents of progress in colonial Havana thus deserving of praise; however, they shared one crucial thing: they were Europeans. Espada was Spanish. His dignified portrait in the inauguration painting positioned him in direct descent from the noble Bartolomé de las Casas who was depicted in the first mass and cabildo images. This association reaffirmed his noble lineage from heroic Spanish ancestors. Espada tirelessly contributing himself to the progress of Cuba, offered a bust of Columbus to

²⁰⁵ "...se trasmitirá á la posteridad la memoria de su autor D. Juan Bautista Vermay, su feliz y fecunda invención, la propiedad en las actitudes de los españoles y los indios, el traje de aquellos y la musculacion de estos, la esprecion de sus afectos, la situacion de los grupos, la terneza y armonía de los coloridos, la impresion de la luz, la oportunidad de las sombras; todo recomienda la instruccion y destreza de ese professor; y al contemplarse tantos bellezas nadie se persuadirá que en ménos de tres meses hubiera empezado y concluido esa obra, que ha ofrecido costear nuestro piadoso y sabio Obispo el Escmo. é Ilmo. Sr. Dr. D. Juan José Diaz de Espada y Landa..." See Cabrera, pp. 2-4.

²⁰⁶ "S. Escia. Ilma., este dignísimo prelado á quien tanto debe la Habana, como que desde su feliz arribo á esta ciudad se ha ocupado constantemente de ilustrar por principios á sus diocesanos, hacienda ademas otras obras preciosas y peculiars de un pueblo... tambien ha regalado el busto de Colon en mármol con pedestal de lo mismo, y que se va á colocar entre el Templete y la pirámide..." See Cabrera, pp. 2-4.

further assist Cubans in locating their historical roots. Vermay, the French master, brought the instruments of articulating progress and modernity based on a foreign paradigm. Cabrera's exaltations of Espada and Vermay were perhaps most damning to local society because it suggested that, without European intervention, Cubans were doomed to repeat the same cyclical patterns of backwardness that allegedly characterized this American land.

El Templete would raise these readings of Spanish heritage and exceptionalism to the level of universal truth, as self-evident axioms that needed no further empirical deduction. Cabrera, in a final exaltation of the shrine as a whole, wrote:

Many other beauties are discovered in this monument that, to my judgment, future generations will have an advantageous idea of the present, in the way we have of the refinement and delicacy of the old Egyptians and Greeks, and of the affluence of the Romans. In this memorable work are seen the beauty and perfection of the proportions to the most eminent degree, with a selection and a satisfied flavor in its forms; and is seen in short, without fear of deception, that this work in its extension is the first one of the island of Cuba, because none other retains equal beauty nor harmony, perfection nor solidity, so very distant from all of the Gothic type...this Templete, that will always be praised even by the most remote posterity.²⁰⁷

Revealing Cabrera's bias against what were held to be non-modern, Gothic forms, and his preference for those Neo-Classical forms that communicated the solidity, harmony, and perfection of European antiquity, he exalts the shrine for the grace it would bestow on Cuba. Conversely, the colonial columnist could have written on how the noble island

²⁰⁷ "Otras muchas bellezas se descubren en este monumento que; á mi juicio, harán que las generaciones futuras formen una idea ventajosa de la presente, asi como nosotros la tenemos de la finura y delicadeza de los antiguos egipcios y griegos, y de la opulencia de los romanos. En esta obra memorable se ven la hermosura y perfeccion de las proporciones hasta el grado mas eminente, con una eleccion y un gusto felicísimo en sus formas; y se vé en fin, sin tenor de engañarme, que esta obra en su estencion es la primera de la isla de Cuba, porque ninguna se le iguala ni en belleza ni en hermosura, perfeccion ni solidez, muy estraño y distante de él todo lo del genero gótico...ese Templete, que siempre sera ensalzado aun por la mas remota posteridad." See Cabrera, pp. 2-4.

of Cuba had been raised high enough to produce such forms. But, such was neither the tone nor the content of his article. The pro-Spanish position of Cabrera shone through his elevation of things Spanish at every turn leading to a final exhortation of the shrine. Cabrera leaves the reader with the impression of El Templete as a great Spanish achievement. He ended his article by crediting "...the piety and generosity of the faithful inhabitants of this privileged country [to whom] the cost of the work is owed....God grant Vives many years."²⁰⁸

The Calm within the Storm

Just as Cabrera's article in the *Diario de la Habana* encouraged Peninsulars and the literate population to read El Templete as a tribute to noble Spanish ancestors, additional articles published in the month of March spun mythologies of Havana as the last bastion of sanity in an insane world of rebellion. The ordered forms of El Templete were invoked by pro-Spanish propaganda written to re-frame ideals of liberalization and position Havana as a compliant, well-disciplined child of Spain. El Templete would signify the peace and justice, abundance and prosperity, tranquility and pragmatism of an island rewarded for its prudence and virtue. The monument, in its steadfast solidity, was cast as a symbol for the entire city and its loyal population and attempted to convince the public of this meaning. Having articulated its Spanish past, Cuba could navigate its future, setting a pristine example for even "the most remote posterity." A sonnet published in the Wednesday, March 19, 1828 issue of the *Diario* read:

To observe the luminaries of last night
improvised the following

²⁰⁸ "...la piedad y generosidad de los fidelísimos habitans de este privilegiado pais, se debe el costo de la obra...Dios guarde á V.E. muchos años." See Cabrera, pp. 2-4.

Raised straight up your proud façade
 Havana singular, and arrogant masses
 That descriptive, precious ornamental border
 Of the honor that to your name is adherent
 The bell, the sign but eloquent
 The image but glorious and expressive
 The painting but faithful, but pure and alive
 Of your eminent and heroic virtue
 Faithfulness always, illustrious Havana
 And always conserving this coat of arms
 In your immortal glory you enjoy pride
 So that always in addition to Religion
 Constant fidelity and abundance
 Raising up your armas the arrogance ²⁰⁹

The monument reaffirmed Havana's adherence to the boundaries of acceptable behavior in the empire; its "proud façade" spoke of the city's unwavering constancy. The monument's singularity in the city, its representational potency on the Plaza de Armas (a space appropriated by all classes of colonial society), and its visual dynamism made it the ideal vehicle with which to consolidate this fiction. The monument's visual engagement of social and conceptual structures in colonial society, including race, social rank, gender, loyalism, and ancestry combined with the phenomenology of place in the Plaza de

²⁰⁹ "Al observar las luminarias de anoche
 improvisó uno el siguiente
 Levanta erguida tu orgullosa frente
 Habana singular, y mira altiva
 Esa orla preciosa, descriptiva
 Del honor que á tu nombre es adherente
 El timbre, la señal mas elocuente,
 La imagen mas gloriosa y espresiva,
 La pintura mas fiel, mas pura y viva
 De tu virtud heroica y eminente
 Fidelísima siempre, ilustre Habana,
 Y siempre conservando este blason,
 En tu gloria inmortal gózate ufana
 Para que siempre asi la Religion,
 Fidelidad constante y abundancia
 Sostengar de tus armas la arrogancia"

See "Soneto," *Diario de la Habana*, March 19, 1828, p. 2.

Armas, with ephemera, the colonial press, and collective memory to create a highly potent propagandistic field.

The colonial press staged the empire as a nuclear family, which it cast Havana as the last loyal child of a family in crisis. This child was obedient and stable, like the forms of the shrine on the plaza. On the final day of the inauguration ceremony, the *Diario* of March 20, 1828 carried a poem entitled: “Ode: to the Monument of the Plaza de Armas.” El Templete became a steady ship launching out into turbulent seas, cutting resolutely through time and space. The monument plowed through the seas of memory on route:

To our most future descendants
Announces with your venerable vision
That if to the Supreme to be here was raised
The first homage, the fortunes
Its protection so certain and so palpable
That today our beloved country enjoys
Them due to the virtues
That to threaten of a thousand vicissitudes
And horrors, with constancy
Knew to practice, therefore always made to shine
Its good judgment, its faith, its tolerance ²¹⁰

The ode conflated Havana with El Templete, which visually represented the city’s virtues of constancy and stability amidst rebellion and a disintegrating empire. The paintings reaffirmed the heroic deeds and noble ancestors that created the empire to which Havana

²¹⁰ “A nuestras descendencias mas futuras
Anuncia con tu vista venerable
Que si al Supremo Ser aquí se alzara
El primer homenaje, las venturas,
Su proteccion tan cierta y tan palpable,
De que hoy disfruta nuestra patria cara,
Las debe a las virtudes
Que al amagar de mil visicitudes
Y horrores, con constancia
Supo egercer; pues siempre hizo brillare
Su cordura, su fé, su tolerancia”

See “Oda: Al monumento de la plaza de Armas,” *Diario de la Habana*, March 20, 1828, p. 1.

owed so much. Combining pictorial narrative, architecture, and symbolic urban space overwhelmed the public with the authenticity of the experience, further reinforcing its validity. Havana existed as a bastion of peace and calm in turbulent imperial seas, while El Templete provided safe shelter for the contemplation of timeless truths amidst a hectic and bustling city. Peninsulars thus intended the shrine to be seen as an imperial mnemonic device by which the citizens of Havana might be reminded of the reasons for their loyalty. These meanings were reified in the Plaza de Armas by the colonial press and the monument and would echo the architectural icons of the Spanish state.

El Templete thus became a paradigm of civic achievement as praised in the ode:

The commerce, the sciences, the culture
All today shines and flourishes to raise it up
The abundance shows off, and nothing alters
The peace of our rich agriculture²¹¹

The ode praised Havana for its gratitude to the Crown and called El Templete "...a monument, To its charity." The author expressed the immutability and interconnectedness of the social, political, and cosmic order:

"Religion and virtue, peace and good justice;
In no more than three centuries to such heights
They elevated You...You, descending
You continue the same path that gives indication
Of the same way you reach even higher
Even more prosperity if you are prudent
My sweet country
Of the world be the precedent one day
And you, adorable God
Pours in her your glorious excellence

²¹¹ "El comercio, las ciencias, la cultura,
Todo hoy brilla y florece al levantarle;
La abundancia se ostenta; y nada altera
La paz de nuestra rica agricultura"

See Ibid.

Calm her well-being; make it immutable”²¹²

The author of the ode paralleled the passage of time with the disintegration of the Bourbon Empire. The omnipotence of wisdom and the eternal virtue of Havana shielded the city “against the attacking time,” just as the Neo-Classical monument established timeless ideals of historical foundations and primordial ancestors. The shrine equated abundance and prosperity, linear time, and Cuban loyalty to help habaneros imagine a wonderful vision for the island’s future if they stayed on course. The unpredictability and uncertainty of curvilinear Baroque architecture lingered in the city’s urban fabric as a reminder of the backward state from which Havana had evolved.

An article appeared on March 19th, which lauded Havana for preserving the memory of the virtues of Spanish history. It suggested El Templete was empirical proof of Cuban patriotism and a crowning achievement based on Iberian historical foundations. Again, Cuba became the virtuous child of Spain:

The Island of Cuba, faithful to its principles and to its duties, has given on this day to the entire world the ultimate proof of its refined loyalty and of its never contradicted patriotism. The magnificent monument that is presented today to public expectation, sponsored by the inhabitants of this heroic capital, presented to the future generations a glorious memory of the virtues of its ancestors; and soften the posterity considering its magnificence and the sweet memories that in it

²¹² “Religion y virtue, paz y buen juicio
En tres siglos no mas á tanta alteza
Te elevaron... Vosotros, descendientes
Seguid la misma senda que es da indicio
De como alcanzaréis aun mas grandeza
Aun mas prosperidad si sois prudente
La dulce patria mia
Del orbe sea el ejemplar un día
Y tú, Dios adorable,
Vierte en ella tus dones escalentes
Calma su bien; hazlo inmutable”

See Ibid.

have been engraved, was filled with pride and enthusiasm, and imitated with veneration and respect the noble examples inherited from its parents.²¹³

The message was clear: El Templete provided self-evident proof of Cuban loyalty and “never contradicted patriotism,” as measured in the historical lessons captured by Vermay’s paintings in the shrine. Spain, as Havana’s proud parent, looked on with much satisfaction at the noble child honoring the glorious memory of its ancestors. The monument would serve as a beacon of stability to Cuba and the world by representing reason over passion, as it was:

...presented to the naturals of this beautiful country and to the foreigners that visit its shores, that simple but majestic building that in the middle of the horrors of the political convulsions and in opposition to the torrent of the fabulous passions, daughters of our century, they elevated the native love and loyalty...²¹⁴

Future generations would look back on this building and say, “my parents and my grandfathers...they conceived this idea and they carried it out; and we are made vain to descend from such illustrious progeny.”²¹⁵

And as for the mutinous brethren of the mainland, the author utterly condemned them for falling short of the paradigm articulated in the monument:

²¹³ “La Isla de Cuba, fiel á sus principios y á sus deberes, ha dado en este dia al orbe entero la última prueba de su lealtad acendrada y de su patriotismo nunca desmentido. El monumento grandioso que se presenta hoy á la espectacion público, costado por los habitantes de esta heróica capital, presentará á las generaciones venideras un recuerdo glorioso de las virtudes de sus antepasados; y enternecida la posteridad al considerar su magnificencia y las dulces memorias que en él se han grabado, se llenará de orgullo y entusiasmo, é imitará con veneracion y respeto los nobles ejemplos que heredara de sus padres.” See *Diario de la Habana*, March 19, 1828, p. 1.

²¹⁴ “...presentará á los naturales de este hermoso pais y á los estrangeros que visiten sus orillas, ese sencillo pero magestuoso edificio que en medio de los horrores de las convulsiones politicas y en oposicion al torrente de las pasiones novelescas, hijas de nuestro siglo, elevarán el amor patrio y la lealtad...” See *Ibid.*

²¹⁵ “... ‘mis padres y mis abuelos’ ... ‘concibieron esta idea y la llevaron á cabo; y nosotros nos envanecemos de descender de tan ilustre progenie.’” See *Ibid.*

...those denaturalized children of our country, that instead of offering worthy monuments as this of virtue and enlightenment, they launched into the arena, insulting and filling with insults the same to whom they owe their civilization and their glory.²¹⁶

All across the Americas, it was believed and professed, the children of empire were biting the hand that had fed them, causing an offense to Nature herself.

You see on the fertile shores of the Rio de la Plata, in the immense region that exists from Panama to the tip of Hornos, and in the ardent beaches of the Costafirme some fighting with others in the middle of the disorder and the confusion; and to be united so alone so that Nature trembled hearing the horrible shout of “war of death to our parents.” You extend the view toward the beautiful city that Cortés built and that illustrious Spaniards made the most beautiful of the world that Columbus discovered; and see them how rabid they throw off the breast of those that they owe their being and political representation... Do you not see that patricide nails the steel in the heart of your elders?²¹⁷

As eluded to in the passage, the major revolutionary movements of the 1820’s were concentrated in areas of former viceregal control. Victor Andrés Belaunde locates “three principle foci, one in Mexico and two in South America: the Colombian movement headed by Bolívar, and the Argentine.” The Argentine movement was centered in Buenos Aires, where the Creole aristocracy engaged in revolutionary politics in the cities.

Although popular uprising in rural communities contributed substantially to these radical movements, particularly in Mexico, the city provided a theatre where Creole ideology could be acted out in discursive form. The passage emphasizes the city only to diminish

²¹⁶ “...esos desnaturalizados hijos de nuestra patria, que en lugar de ofrecer monumentos dignos asi de la virtud y la ilustracion, se lanzen á la arena, insultando y llenando de baldones á los mismos á quienes debieran su civilizacion y su gloria? See Ibid.

²¹⁷ “Vedlos en las fértiles orillas del rio de la Plata, en las inmensas regiones que existen desde Panamá al cabo de Hornos, y en las ardientes playas de la Costafirme luchar unos con otros en medio del desórden y la confusion; y unirse tan solo para que la naturaleza estremecida oiga el horroroso grito de ‘guerra de muerte á nuestros padres.’ Tended la vista hácia la hermosa ciudad que edificara Cortés y que españoles ilustres hicieron la mas hermosa del mundo que descubrió Colon; y vedlos cuán rabiosos arrojan de su seno á los que deben el ser y su representacion politica...¿No veis que parricidas clavais el acero en el corazon de vuestros mayores?” See Ibid.

its formative capacity in the production of revolutionary discourse, and invokes the memory of the nobler sixteenth-century cities of Cortés and Columbus. The *Diario* positions Havana in direct line with these nobler cities to underscore its duty to carry on the tradition.

The author calls forth the “world of Columbus” once again for its normative force, as a pan-American ancestor universally exalted by the white classes. The memory of Columbus recalled an Eden, a lost paradise, when the promise of Spanish empire was fresh and untarnished by dissident thought. As the shrine imitated the forms of Nature and synthesized them into a legible abstract language, so the loyalty of Spain’s colonial dominion was part of the natural order. The rebels of the mainland, disrespecting the fundamental principles of Nature, were left to fend for themselves:

We leave these gullibles to continue frenetic the path that leads to the deep abyss into which they are going to sink, or better we beg to the Providence stop them immediately and make them reflect ‘upon what they are and what they are able to be’: and our eyes become pleasant towards this privileged island of Nature...while we, despising the suggestions of a false enlightenment...we give in this day an obvious proof of...how firm is our resolution not to contradict its principles.²¹⁸

The inauguration ceremony lifted the spirits of the local population by interrupting the monotony of everyday existence and focusing collective energies on the ritualized engagement of a new way of thinking. As the Plaza de Armas was the representational space in which abstract policy became reality through public performance, it was also the space where the limits of the world were defined. El Templete contributed something

²¹⁸ “Dejemos á estos ilusos seguir frenéticos la senda que conduce á la profunda sima en que van á hundirse, ó mas bien roguemos al Cielo los detenga de una vez y les haga xionar ‘sobre lo que son y lo que podrian ser’: y tornemos gustosos nuestros ojos hácia está Isla privilegiada de la naturaleza...mientras nosotros, despreciando los sugeriones de una falsa ilustracion...damos en este día una prueba notoria de...cuán firme es nuestra resolucion de no desmentir estos principios.” See *Ibid.*

new to this conceptual field and was instantly seized on by the Spanish authorities, who rapidly deployed techniques of propaganda to redefine the space and formulate a consensus on the monument's significance. We learn through these writings that Peninsulars would have seen the monument as a technique of propaganda and validation of their assumptions of American inferiority. Historical archetypes established Spanish ancestors, loyalty became equated with natural order, duty and obligation with eternal truth, and an unbroken temporal continuity between the conquest and the nineteenth century was constructed.

Roland Barthes, however, warned of the ever-fluctuating meanings of the city. Barthes' thoughts remind us that after the ceremonies concluded, Havana returned to a less heightened rhythm of activity. "Normalcy" involved the daily negotiation of urban space by the colonial population, a multiplicity of interpretations, and the passage of time. Beneath the propagandistic rhetoric and spectacle, what enduring meanings did the monument convey? Surely, Bishop Espada and the Sociedad Económica had planned for such Spanish distractions. Yet, what made the monument truly "eternal" and culturally relevant? The plaza's monumentality, its ability to constitute a sense of the collective and the shrine's new textual insertion into the space re-emerged the day after the festivals concluded and local society began to create meaning independently once again. Let us now consider how the Creole population took the meaning of their city back after the last piece of confetti was swept from the plaza. A new monument now stood, loaded with icons and symbols, around which an emerging Creole community could now build itself. Monuments are solid and constant. As Lefebvre argues, the monument has the power to transcend codes themselves, to effect a "consensus", and this is the strongest sense of the

term, rendering it practical and concrete.”²¹⁹ Once the rhythms of the city resumed as foreign Spanish pressure subsided, El Templete’s new role in the colonial social fabric began as intended by its principle patrons.

²¹⁹ Lefebvre (1974), pp. 220-226.

CHAPTER FIVE

LOCAL IDENTITY: CREOLE AND AFRO-CUBAN RECEPTION

“Kingdoms are like trees; some will be silk-cotton trees, others will remain dwarf palms and the powerful silk-cotton tree will cover them with its shade.”

-*Sundiata: An Epic of Old Mali*

The Spanish authorities understood the relationship between space, time, and identity in the colonial city as evidenced by their insistence on staging elaborate rituals to consecrate public monuments. Both the Espada Cemetery and El Templete involved formalized rituals, which became a structured and highly visible means of transforming the abstract space of colonial power into the actual and temporal space of the city. The inauguration ceremony interrupted urban life and reordered an unfolding urban drama to shape the reception of new works of architecture, attempting to implant a “definite signified” into colonial urban space.²²⁰ El Templete’s complex semantic program actualized historical time by picturing and framing Cuban history and combining these images with an architectural representation of empirical truth to lend validity to the messages. The Spanish attempt to control these valences reveals the plaza as colonial urban theatre in which politically-laden dramatic performances were conducted to manipulate the population. However, the ability of local society to interpret the city in their own ways, to construct their own sense of time and space, becomes an important aspect of the study of the monument’s reception.

²²⁰ Roland Barthes refers to concrete meaning in urban space as a “definite signified.” However, the author argues that “fixed” and “finite” meanings in urban space do not exist. Rather, the city is constantly being reinterpreted by its users, who read urban artifacts differently based on factors such as space, time, social identity, and individual disposition. See Barthes, pp. 167-168.

Henri Lefebvre notes that because monuments persist through space and time, they possess a “residual” and “irreducible” quality.²²¹ This longevity accounts for the flexibility of monumental signification, as these structures witness political transformation and the passing of generations, what the *Diario* called “the attacking time.” The principle patrons of El Temple who concerned themselves with local cultural development (Bishop Espada and the Sociedad Económica) intended the work to serve its monumental function: to become part of a new visual language with universalizing imagery that would carry Cuban meanings of local dignity and identity into “the most remote posterity.”

Modernity, Creole Community, and the City

In the early decades of the nineteenth-century, Creoles in Cuba began to conceive of themselves as a community of modernizing individuals.²²² The process by which Creoles began to think of themselves as such was a complex one involving the history of economic development on the island, the island’s slave economy, and the persistent presence of the Spanish. The abrupt nature of the Bourbon reforms presented an insult to Cuban dignity, yet economic prosperity brought the opportunity to contest Spanish

²²¹ Lefebvre emphasizes the totality of experience and meaning that monuments often evoke. Monuments transcend death and “this transcendence embeds itself in the monument as its irreducible foundation.” These works of architecture are thus beyond the reach of semiotic codes because of their “durability” and thus their transcendence of human mortality. They are reinterpreted by successive generations, yet simultaneously embody some continuity with the past. See Lefebvre, pp. 220-221.

²²² My use of “modernity” in this section refers to the changing socio-cultural spectrum of the island of Cuba with the impact of the Bourbon military reforms and the rise of the sugar industry. By using this term, I don’t intend any special relationship with the concept of modernity formulated by Charles Baudelaire in 1860’s Paris, but instead, refer to a Cuban Creole conception of “modernity,” which by the 1820’s, meant advances in free trade, technological innovation, and cultural modernization.

domination in the early nineteenth-century and to play a more active role in shaping the island's material life. A new visual language emerged from the Bourbon project of urban restructuring that was internalized as a language of progress and reconfigured by the Sociedad Económica in projects, such as the Espada Cemetery. The arrival of Bishop Espada, Juan Bautista Vermay, and the establishment of an art academy provided further tools with which Creoles could synthesize representational forms evocative of their sense of modernity, their state of being modern, and living in a progressive society. Through educational advances and the introduction of empirical thought, truth became located in nature, and art was capable of representing this truth. Creoles understood their modernity in civic, religious, and historical terms. Local Cuban Creoles began to formulate a sense of cohesion around a shared experience and conception of their city, religion, and sense of the past.²²³ However, Creoles were differentiated by class and gender, elements that shaped their contemporary view of themselves and of the ideal future community for the island. El Templete was a mnemonic device for recollecting the past and formulating identity in the present that reflected age-old cultural patterns of Creole use of the city in Cuba as a form of political agency.

Successes in sugar cultivation, which peaked in the 1820's, and achievements in education, sciences, and the fine arts, boosted local self-esteem and encouraged Creoles to think of themselves in relationship to the modernizing centers of Europe and the United States. Their conflict with Peninsulars grew not only from economic but also cultural conditions, as Creoles struggled with their dependence on formal modes of

²²³ Benedict Anderson discusses "creole states" in the Americas as "imagined communities" who drew a sense of coherence from a shared language, common descent, and a sense of shared experience. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso, 1982).

European culture and the need to define their sense of “Americaness,” as would New Spain and other regions. The conflict between their European and American heritage in tandem with racial “Others,” challenged Creole interpretations of themselves as a community and drove them to synthesize local culture and history into representational forms. El Templete became a form of Creole agency combining portraiture, religious representations, history painting, iconic architecture, and urban semantics. The patterns by which Creoles established their social visibility in the urban space in colonial Havana through house building and public performance, and the importance of the plaza to socio-political representation, framed the production of El Templete in 1828. The shrine elevated their city and articulated their history. Its uniqueness as a semantic ensemble placed in the Plaza de Armas combined with Creole ritual urban life to contribute to a new, nobler conception of their city.

As Cuban sugar production increased, the city became an object around which Creoles formulated their sense of community. Richard L. Kagan has cited the distinction between *urbs* (the physical element of cities) and *civitas* (the human element of cities, or “place”) to demonstrate how concepts of Creole community became attached to architecture, urban space, and other physical features of the urban fabric appropriated to represent, “metonymically, the city as a whole.”²²⁴ Ecclesiastical buildings, fortifications, administrative structures, plazas, streets, and the idiosyncratic material fabric of a particular urban environment became synonymous with the city at large and were internalized by Creoles in a developing urban-oriented sense of community. As the city had been the bastion of Creole claims to the land in historical times, the nineteenth-

²²⁴ Richard L. Kagan, *Urban Images of the Hispanic World, 1493-1793* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 138.

century city and all of its artifacts became a space of increased abstractions in an intellectual battle to rest cultural authority away from the Spanish. In Havana, we have begun to see how the city became a form of representational agency for Creoles in a semiotic and phenomenological field involving urban space, collective memory, architecture, pictorial art, and the colonial press.²²⁵ Paradoxically, the “new visual language of progress,” capable of representing the universal ideals of Enlightenment thought, was appropriated by Creoles to emphasize the particular and diachronic nature of their city in order to assert pride of place under colonialism. In the Espada Cemetery, El Templete and the “improvements” to the Havana Cathedral, we see an artistic evolution by which Neo-Classical forms became increasingly localized. The Creoles co-opted European patrons and artists reconfiguring the *urbs* to shape and reflect the *civitas* of Havana.

As the city expanded beyond its walls, producing neighborhoods increasingly populated by Africans and Afro-Cubans, the Creole elite reacted by attempting to consolidate a singular image of the city (Figure 74). El Templete symbolically and iconically concentrated the power of the city in elite hands in response to the decentralization of Havana with its expansion beyond the city walls. These *barrios extramuros* became associated with *la mala vida* [the bad life], which fragmented and threatened the coherence of a Creole vision of Havana as a predominantly white and tranquil community.

Since the sixteenth-century, the normative order of the city had involved the presence of Creoles filling seats on the *cabildo*, where they presided over the distribution of land grants. As Pagden has argued with regards to identity formation in Spanish

²²⁵ Anderson (1983), pp. 37-46.

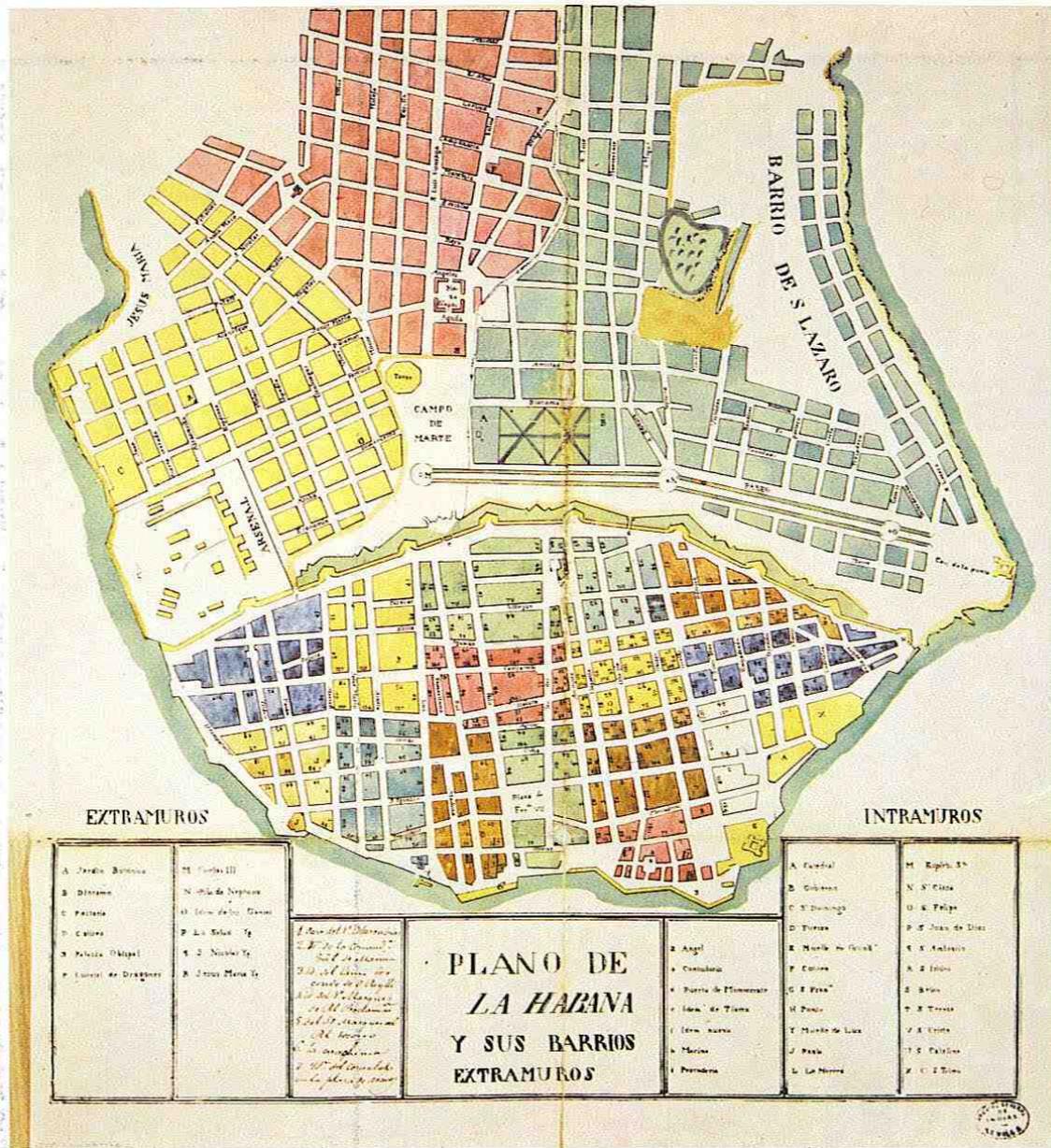


Figure 74. Anonymous, Plan of Havana and its Neighborhoods Outside the Walls, 1829, General Archives of the Indies, Seville, Spain

America, Creole identification with the land quickly developed into a sense of community and autonomy. The Bourbons abruptly undermined Creole agency in Cuba by revoking the right of the cabildos to distribute public lands in 1729. The monarchy dealt another blow to local society by simultaneously transforming Havana's Plaza de Armas, possibly the most important symbol of the Creole city. As social norms and civil order were actualized in the central plaza, the Bourbon transformation automatically signaled a turning point, a new order. El Templete would have, on some level, been seen by Creoles as a reaction against the Bourbons and a taking back of the normative force of their plaza. To protect landed interests, Creole producers returned to the cities, where many possessed mansions as forms of socio-political representation, and lobbied for their interests through new avenues, such as the Sociedad Económica. This dynamic of rural/urban Creole life and political power reveals that urban symbolic projects, like El Templete, served to represent Creole claims not only to the city, but also to far reaching interests on the island, including land and estates in the countryside.

Vermay's painting of the first cabildo must have testified to the authenticity of Creole claims to civic power over the land, directed to a Creole audience. The conquistadors, in civic terms, became Creole ancestors because they founded the city and first divided the lands. The forms of the Neo-Classical shrine communicated that Creole entitlement to the land was rooted in Nature and the nobility of the original function of the cabildo. The symbolic site of the ceiba tree located a primordial space of absolute Truth, which referenced this essential Creole claim to civic power.

As evident in the *Diario* articles surrounding the inauguration of El Templete, Spanish nationality and Cuban community were articulated and understood in civic

terms. Amidst the dense pro-Spanish propaganda, authors praised Havana in a discussion on improvements to the urban theatre in relationship to the term “país” (country), an ambiguous term, at times referring to both the Spanish empire and the island of Cuba. The use of the word “nation” became an ambiguous qualifier of local and metropolitan society. Cabrera, in his March 16th article in the *Diario* referred to “the faithful inhabitants of this privileged country” (seemingly referring to Cuba) while the *Diario* article of March 19th focused on New Spain, referred to “those denaturalized children of our country” (seemingly referring to Spain). Referring to Cuba, the ode to El Temple on March 20th made the distinction between “the children of this soil and the foreigners,” while the March 19th article lauded “the naturals of this beautiful country and to the foreigners.” The use of the terms “naturals” and “children” to refer to local society suggested emerging concepts of community and proto-nationalism as tied to local ancestry. Or was Cuba considered part of Spain? Either way, throughout these articles, the use of these terms was attached to the city and its architecture. Concepts of Spanish nationalism and Cuban proto-nation began to take on linguistic, architectural, and urban meanings. The fraternity of the Sociedad Económica and the many Masonic lodges throughout the island were settings where ideas on economic class, Cuban culture, and proto-national identity could congeal. These concepts, however, had their clearest conceptual form when expressed in the urban theatre of Havana in which the Plaza de Armas was its principal stage.²²⁶

Ontological valences were also projected through the language of the colonial press, which intersected with the visual language of the Neo-Classical shrine in the minds

²²⁶ Escobar (2004), pp. 190-224.

of the literate Creole audience. Cuban-born individuals were increasingly referred to as “naturals” to distinguish them from “foreigners” (a code word for Peninsulars and Europeans). Emphasis on and elevation of “this soil” and “this beautiful country,” at times referring to Cuba, reveals a semiotic transformation within the Creole classes of Havana. *El Templete* gave visual evidence (in the sense of empirical proof) to concepts of urban genesis as they related to Creole discussions of their “authenticity” as Cubans. Reading these textual framings of Creoles as “naturals,” in tandem with Vermay’s visual framing of the first mass and cabildo, the canvases became “speaking pictures” in their imitation of nature, alluding to the natural order of things. If Creole identity was rooted in nature, it was absolute like the “solidity” of the Neo-Classical monument. Certain iconic images dramatically underscored the Cuban relationship to the land. In the painting of the first mass, the central foreground figure to the left of Velázquez lowers himself to the ground as he steps into the light. His knee contacts the soil and his right hand extends outward and downward towards the brown earth. Bathed in the radiance of divine Providence, he seems to epitomize veneration for the land, a suggestion of patriotism.²²⁷ This visual image placed within an architectural code for a growing culture of education and empirical thought in the most politically resonant urban space in Havana, sent powerful messages of civic destiny to Creoles reaffirming their own connection to the land based on self-evident, empirical truth.

As Creoles now had an “authentic” temple of the ancients on their principle urban stage, the progressive image of their plaza would further legitimize Havana among other modernizing cities. We do know that elite Creole families were able to travel more freely

²²⁷ Kagan points out that Creoles developed an early connection to their “*patria*” (their region), an ideology of loyalty and identification, or patriotism. See Kagan (2000), p. 131.

with the increase in prosperity in the nineteenth-century; many had visited the North American cities of Charleston, Philadelphia, and Boston, and had been to cities in Spain, France, and Italy. Consequently, the *Diario de la Habana* carried an increasing number of stories on developments in cities, such as Philadelphia. Foreign encyclopedias and periodicals circulated in Havana. The Sociedad Económica established the first public library on the island in 1793, which contained many European volumes (although more radical works were censored by the colonial administration). This suggests that the Creole elite were aware of cultural developments abroad in the modernizing cities of the Atlantic World as they related to architecture. A week after the monument's inauguration, an article of March 27, 1828 in the *Diario de la Habana*, while fraught with pro-Spanish rhetoric, seemed more reflective on the monument's broader significance and less caught up in the intensity of the propagandistic moment. Entitled, "Something more on the new monument erected on the Plaza de Armas," a passage read:

The island of Cuba, in the progress of its laws, of its customs and of its wealth, has already begun to be elevated to the rank of the towns of Europe, the extension of its commerce and of its relations can be felt in the most remote countries of the world; natural consequence of its privileged situation, climate, and political conduct of its inhabitants...²²⁸

A passage intended to retain Cuban loyalty also reveals how Cuban elites imagined themselves in modern terms.

Such views were driven by Bourbon modernization programs, such as the creation of new public parade grounds like the Alameda de Paula and the Paseo de Extramuros,

²²⁸ "La isla de Cuba en el progreso de sus leyes, de sus costumbres y de su riqueza, empieza ya a elevarse al rango de los pueblos mas cultos de Europa; la estension de su comercio y de sus relaciones se hace sentir en los paises mas remotas del mundo; consecuencias naturales de su privilegiada situacion, clima y conducta política de sus moradores..." See Anonymous Author (possibly Creole) "Alguno cosa mas sobre el nuevo monumento erigido en la plaza de Armas." *Diario de la Habana*, Thursday, March 27, 1828, p. 1.

both dating from the late eighteenth-century. The Alameda was a double-lane avenue accented by sculpture stretching alongside the harbor running down the southeastern section of the city wall. The Paseo de Extramuros defined a similar axial space directly outside the walls on the city's northwest side. As the city expanded into the extramuros in the nineteenth-century, this paseo became a new performative stage and receptacle for new symbolic urban works, such as statues and fountains. As Creole society embraced Neo-Classical architecture in tandem with their increased prosperity, the appearance of a shrine to the ancients on their main public plaza would have been a sign to Creoles that Havana was modernizing following a foreign urban paradigm.

El Templete introduced a new urban experience for the Creole elite of Havana. In their daily promenades through the city, Creoles on horseback and in carriages processed through the streets of Havana and into the public plazas. This daily ritual, centuries old, represented an essential public performance that Creoles utilized to assert their connection to their city, their wealth and social status, and increasingly, their particularity as Cubans in a city dominated politically by Peninsulars. In this ritual life, El Templete exerted its most powerful urban aspect, in its capacity to reshape the total experience of the plaza. As individuals in colonial society experienced the sense of social expectations upon entering the plaza, what Richardson has articulated as *cultura*, their perception of all objects in the space was heightened. The Bourbons had exploited this experience in their insertion of monumental portales and new palaces in attempts to modernize local society. El Templete's separation from the plaza by its orientation within the gated enclosure, and the separation of the paintings within from the outside world, created an experience of increasing levels of sanctity and self-edification for the visitor to the shrine.

The shrine thus extended the experience of the plaza to a space open to more of Havana's citizenry (and thus more democratic) than the Bourbon palaces.²²⁹ In an imagined space in which Cuban identity came to be articulated, Creoles could experience a sacred reconnection with their ancestral identities as embodied in the site, the tree, and the paintings. The shrine gave these meanings civic dignity and raised them to abstract realms of perfection and geometric harmony as imagined in the world of Greco-Roman antiquity. The tree (replanted after the inauguration), rather than a symbol of imperial structure, became a civic axis mundi (world axis) focusing the symbolic power of the work and anchoring timeless realizations of Creole identity to the plaza and the city.

Cuban Creoles also conceptualized their sense of modernity in religious terms; the symbolic structure of El Templete reaffirmed the importance of religion to Creole identity. The Bourbon attempt to subordinate the influence of the Church on local society undercut Creole dignity, whose identities were rooted in Catholicism. The Catholic Church had provided a normalizing force throughout the colonial period in Cuba, stabilizing and ordering local society. From the early days of the sixteenth-century, the Church structured education, social indoctrination, art production, and identity formation. Creole assertion of their Catholic faith grounded them in local history and tradition. Early nineteenth-century urban construction projects reveal that, as Creoles appropriated visual elements associated with the secular doctrine of the Enlightenment, they simultaneously thought of themselves in religious terms. This facet of Creole culture manifested itself in

²²⁹ As far as how open the shrine was to the public, we know that as conspiracies were plotted throughout the nineteenth century, the Spanish authorities increasingly placed regulations on urban life in Havana. By 1871, Samuel Hazard reported that the shrine was only open once a year, but did not specify what classes of people were allowed to enter it. See Samuel Hazard, *Cuba with Pen and Pencil* (Hartford, Connecticut: Hartford Publishing Company, 1871), pp. 104-105.

Vermay's representation of the first mass, praised in the colonial press for reaffirming the steadfast religion of Cuban society. The fact that the myths of the first mass were preserved after three centuries and memorialized exquisitely in the nineteenth-century testified to the depth to which Catholicism was embedded in local identity.

For a Creole audience, Vermay's image of the first mass, rather than evidence of the civilizing agency of the Spanish, represented the divine Providence with which the early settlers of the island had been blessed. The scene reasserted that Havana was founded on Christian principles through the generosity of the Creator, and connected associations between divine intelligence and contemporary advances in the sciences and the arts. The painting of the first mass transported its Creole audiences back through the generations to the moment of "that sacrosanct sacrifice" that planted Catholicism into the soil beneath the nineteenth-century city, and initiating the good faith and Christian principles of generations of Creoles.²³⁰ The ceiba tree would have taken on genealogical associations, such as a metaphor for the holy pedigree in the Old and New Testaments, as alluded to by Tomás Romay Chacon in his justification for the Espada Cemetery. The tree could have referenced the conceptual bridge embodied by the Christian cross, connecting humans to the divine. Simon Schama, however, points out that Christian culture traditionally avoided weaving the tree into biblical semantics for its association with pagan cults.²³¹ The ceiba tree was recast in the nineteenth-century Cuban imagination by combining both religious and secular doctrines, synthesizing

²³⁰ The episode of the first mass was variously referred to in the *Diario de la Habana* of March and April, 1828 as "that sacrosanct sacrifice," "the blessed sacrifice," among others. This phrase comes from *Diario de la Habana*, March 27, 1828, p. 1.

²³¹ Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), pp. 214-226.

Enlightenment thought with local culture. Vermay's highly naturalistic rendering of the figures, the convincing psychological cohesion in the work, and the life-size scale of the images would have overwhelmed a nineteenth-century Christian Creole audience.

Creoles would have felt themselves enlightened and morally uplifted by the religious fervor demonstrated in the participants of the first mass.

While religion was a key component of Creole identity, the influx of empirical reasoning in the eighteenth-century taught Cubans to consider themselves in historical terms. The major historians of this century, such as Arrate y Acosta, had gathered histories of the island into historical texts from the conquest to the nineteenth-century. History, rationally understood, could lead to a foundation upon which to create the future. The ceiba tree became a metaphor for Nature in contrast to the "pure" classical forms of the shrine, revealing Creole self-conceptions as a modern community resting on a historical foundation of ancestors and natural law. The March 27th diario instructed Creoles how to read the shrine and think of their town in relationship to the past:

Entertaining the thought with memorable memories, repeating events that delight the memory, and the imagination pauses contemplating the most notable and honorable that exist in the duration of man, they are exactly the distinctive ones [memories] that belong to the good concept and opinion of the cultured towns, in whose annals contain examples of heroic and sublime deeds.²³²

Memory thus buttressed the well-conceived "concept and opinion" of "cultured towns," resting on a foundation of "heroic and sublime deeds." The passage also explained to the Creole audience how architecture and painting could serve as language:

²³² "Entretener el pensamiento con recuerdos memorables, repetir sucesos en que se deleita la memoria, y detenerse la imaginacion contemplando lo que existe de mas notable y honroso en la carrera civil del hombre, es propiamente el distintivo que pertenece al buen concepto y opinion de los pueblos cultos, en cuyos anales se encuentren ejemplos de hechos heróicos y sublimes." See *Diario de la Habana*, March 27th, 1828, p. 1.

The histories, the traditions, and the same oratory, almost remain mute if these large monuments did not speak to man in indelible signs and characters, until that point they [the citizenry] are unable? to reach its intentions, its virtues and also its vices...²³³

The *Diario*, here, discusses how monuments were capable of directly communicating the histories and traditions of a society through “indelible signs and characters,” thus confirming that certain sectors of colonial society (primarily the upper echelons) conceived of these buildings as a social language. The monument served as a mediator between the “intentions, virtues, and vices” of historical precedent and living subjects who must act in contemporary space. Subjects possessed of the means by which to read “signs and characters” became the beneficiaries of these historical lessons, whereby their contemporary thoughts and actions were justified. Creoles drew moral lessons regarding their present state of being from historical messages embedded within the shrine, which strengthened their sense of identity in the 1820’s, allowing them to formulate a vision for the island’s future community.

These historical vindications augmented a Creole sense of communal identity imagined in opposition to their local Peninsular rivals. Such a task involved considerable thought as both Creoles and Peninsulars shared the same socio-cultural space. Creole identity in nineteenth-century Cuba was highly contingent on the social norms, ritual practices, and ideologies of Europeans. Nineteenth-century Cuban clothing, food, religious belief, marriage, race, class, gender, and sexuality were packages of cultural learning that greatly resembled Peninsular customs, beliefs, and practices. To find elements of Cuban experience that conceptually disentangled Creoles from their

²³³ “Las historias, las tradiciones y la misma oratoria, casi permanecerian mudos si en estos grandes monumentos no hablasen al hombre con señales y caracteres endelebles, hasta que punto pueden alcanzar sus empresas, sus virtudes y tambien sus vicios...” Ibid.

internalization of European culture involved thinking in both practical and abstract terms. In daily life, nineteenth-century Creoles began to drink coffee and eat beans and rice rather than drinking chocolate (even though chocolate came from native and novohispanic sources) and eating paella as did the Spanish.²³⁴ Dietary preferences signified place of birth. Bronze pineapples cresting the tops of square pillars in the new shrine, referencing local delicacies, became emblems of Cuban identity. In more abstract ways, Creoles turned to the space of history and singled out elements underscoring the uniqueness of their historical experience in America. The painted images of Cuban and pan-Caribbean history signified an authentic Cuban cultural space that underscored their difference from Europeans.

Cuban historical writing began in the late eighteenth-century during the period of Bourbon Reforms. José Martín Félix de Arrate's *Llave del Nuevo Mundo* provided a written historical narrative for literate Creole audiences of the "discovery," conquest, settlement, and architectural foundations of Havana, as well as of customs and appearances of Indians. Arrate's historical actors, including Christopher Columbus, Diego Velázquez y Cuellar, Bartolomé de las Casas, and others were particular elements of Cuban and pan-Caribbean history that became increasingly important to the literate of local society. Developing a consistent historical narrative gave Creoles roots and oriented them in modernity.

The symbolic structure of El Templete represents a Cuban version of what O'Gorman has termed *criollismo* in New Spain (the expression of Creole pride and ancestry) which began earlier in the eighteenth-century. Criollismo took a number of cultural forms, the most salient of which were painting and literature. The presence of

²³⁴ Llanes (1999), pp. 124-125.

Spaniards and Indians in the Vermay paintings would have been read by Cuban Creoles as a visual representation and elevation of their Cuban ancestors. Inverting the official assessment of these figures found in the *Diario* as testaments to Spanish destiny and superiority in bringing light to a savage land, nineteenth-century Creoles began to claim these figures as the progenitors of their societies.²³⁵ The precise, academic delineation of sixteenth-century ancestors provided Creoles with tangible archetypes on which to rest their claims to legitimacy as a social community in the early modern era. The ceiba tree, a symbolic axis anchoring time and space, emphasized the historical continuum between sixteenth-century ancestors and this nineteenth-century community.

Nineteenth-century Creole community in Cuba was differentiated along lines of social rank, gender, and race. A Creole's situation in the economic fabric and the assertiveness of their stance for or against Spanish rule shaped Creole readings of urban monuments and growing historical discourses. Creoles indoctrinated into the ideologies of the conservative planter class, more liberal intellectual movements at the Seminary of San Carlos, the working mentality of the creole petite bourgeoisie, and the growing radical tendencies within upper and lower Creole classes would have produced variant experiences of urban space and interpretations of urban signs. Creole women, who had marginal representation, likewise interpreted the city and its architecture differently from Creole men. In considering the differentiation with this social group, the readings of *El Templete* became increasingly complex and diverse, underlying its polysemic character.

²³⁵ Ray Hernández-Durán, "El encuentro de Cortés y Moctezuma: The Betrothal of Two Worlds in Eighteenth-Century New Spain," *Woman and Art in Early Modern Latin America*, co-edited by Kellen Kee McIntyre and Richard E. Phillips, Leiden (The Netherlands: Brill Academic Press, 2007), pp. 195-200.

Different classes of Creoles participated to varying degrees in Creole modernity and defined “modernity” itself in different ways based on their access to wealth and knowledge. At the fiscal apex of Creole society was the Cuban planter elite, an aristocracy whose well-established dominance over land and wealth made them the natural rivals of Peninsular merchants. Planters were island born, property owning, and producers of sugar, coffee, and tobacco (the most important crops on the island). They were the leaders in the Sociedad Económica, since its inception by Francisco Arango y Parreño in 1793, and were the loudest voices in winning concessions from the Spanish Crown. Planters were the principal slaveholders, the bedrock of their wealth, which brought them into an inconvenient entanglement with Spanish Peninsulars. As members of a white community in the post-Haitian Revolution Caribbean, they were exceedingly fearful of slave insurrection and relied on the Spanish military and administration to maintain social order. The community Creoles imagined for the island involved Peninsular participation. The marshal support provided by Spain’s standing army as part of the Bourbon reforms of Charles III, assuaged Creole fears of slave revolt. In spite of the independence wars elsewhere in the Americas and subtle stirrings of independence thought in Cuba, Pérez asserts that “Creoles [of the planter class] preferred security to change...fearing economic ruin and social chaos.”²³⁶ Collaborating with Peninsulars to maintain security included the production of both visual and textual propaganda aimed at convincing the lower social strata of the naturalness of elite Creole-Peninsular hegemony.

²³⁶ Pérez also asserts, “Creole property owners were imbued with a deep sense of class solidarity, united by a determination to win political and economic concessions from Spain without losing social control over slaves.” Pérez (1988), 94.

Cuban planters also shared intimate economic ties with Peninsulars who dominated the island's mercantile sector. Peninsular merchants were the primary moneylenders to Cuban producers who also controlled the critical junction between imports and exports. As Cuban production expanded in the years after the British invasion and Creoles won more economic freedoms from the Crown, they found themselves subject to "a new tyranny of Spanish merchants."²³⁷ Peninsulars sought to dominate the import/export trade economy between Cuba and Spain, often underpaying for imports and overcharging for exports. These inequities compelled Cuban producers to demand greater trade freedoms outside Spain's mercantilist structure, to trade more directly with Europe and the United States. As Pérez argues, "These developments served to accelerate and accentuate the deepening contradiction of the colonial political economy: a Cuban landed elite dependent on Spanish merchants."²³⁸ Wedged in an economic corner between Spanish merchants and the Spanish bureaucracy, Creole planters found few options but to pledge support to the status quo and to remain aloof from the independence wars of the mainland.

Their uncomfortable socio-economic predicament thus limited and bounded the range of meanings that the Cuban planter elite would see in the new visual language of progress. El Templete may have represented material gain and economic progress within the planter class, but not a desire for independence. Represented in the inauguration painting by Vermay and grouped together with Peninsulars, the Creole elite could hardly deny the necessary collaboration to which they submitted with Spaniards in order to protect their interests. The Cuban planter elite could identify their portraits exalted within

²³⁷ Ibid, p. 62.

²³⁸ Ibid.

the shrine like actors on the urban stage. They could make the visual connections between themselves and the foundational acts of their city's history. Rather than statements on the divine Providence with which Cuba was acquired, the scenes of the first mass and cabildo, became images that reified the legitimacy of Cuban society. The Cuban planter elite could read in the canvases the virtues of skill, perseverance, and superior intelligence with which their ancestors conquered and settled this land in the sixteenth-century. Such identifications would have called up the issue of their "natural right" to the land. Pagden's use of Creole "natural rights" refers to Creole claims to land that their ancestors had conquered for Spain in the sixteenth century. Planters saw in the shrine their natural entitlement to the conquered land. Yet, this concept of "natural rights" coexisted with a concept of "natural" social order. As the principle property owners, the primary interest of the Creole elite was in advancing themselves materially and preserving slavery. Slavery became an inextricable component of their modernity, and as Dale Tomich argues "Enlightenment thought and liberal political economy" were "constituent elements of [Cuban] proslavery thought."²³⁹ Planters were opportunistic, and as with Peninsulars, would have looked for aspects in El Templete and urban monuments that legitimated their socio-economic standing. Tomich suggests we "conceive of the Cuban planter elite as an active and reflexive subject, engaged in practical activity and capable of appropriating and transforming fields of knowledge and

²³⁹ Tomich provides an excellent analysis of the appropriation of rational principles and industrial management from the Enlightenment to augment the sugar industry and necessary slave importations under Francisco Arango y Parreño, the founder of the Sociedad Económica. See Dale Tomich, "The Wealth of Empire: Francisco Arango y Parreño, Political Economy, and the Second Slavery in Cuba," in Schmidt-Nowara and Nieto-Phillips, eds. *Interpreting Spanish Colonialisms: Empire, Nation, and Legends* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005), pp. 54-85, quoted on p. 59.

social ideas in order to grasp their historical condition in their own terms and act practically upon it.”²⁴⁰ This ability to adapt colonial meaning to the particularities of place was an aspect that Cuban Creoles shared with those in New Spain and elsewhere in the Americas.

The “inauguration” theme lent itself to the definition of Cuban territoriality, as the conquistadors, having pacified the Indians, established the *cabildo*, essentially a mechanism for the distribution of land grants. As the *cabildo* was the original Creole claim to political agency, stripped away by the Bourbons in 1729, the painting of the *cabildo* in El Templete affirmed this lost right to the Creole planter. The first mass reminded them of their deep religious roots and the “civilizing” force of Christianity in Cuba. Reflecting upon the inauguration scene, planters perceived three principle turning points in Cuban history. These defining moments of the island’s history (redefinitions of time and space) included the one in which they currently called home. The shrine encapsulated and reinforced the universality and essence of this truth, stressing the seriousness and sobriety with which these ideas should be contemplated. The conflicted social position of the Cuban planter class caused them to interpret El Templete as an assertion of their natural entitlement, while acknowledging the necessary entanglement with Spaniards. As they negotiated the spaces of their city, two essential truths emerged in 1828 above all others: the Creole planter class was a servant to a modernizing Spain and that their very existence depended on their complicity in that system.

Modernity came to signify something different for Creole intellectuals and progressive priests, like José Agustín Caballero and Félix Varela, whose interest in

²⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 60

knowledge and empirical reasoning outweighed any desire for material gain. For Cuban intellectuals, the city became a space of abstract ideals. Varela, in particular, and the students he influenced at the Seminary of San Carlos, took a more critical and abstract approach to the appraisal of Spanish politics. Varela was decidedly anti-absolutist, leading to his participation in the Córtes of 1823 and his exile. Living in New York, he continued to write to Cuba throughout his life, raising questions or doubts about the legitimacy of Spanish sovereignty and articulating a vision for Cuba's future independence from Spain. Varela's influence on Cuban thought was profound and his rejection of Scholasticism, empirical method, and support for constitutionalism inspired Cuban intellectuals, like José Antonio Saco in the 1830's.

For Creoles schooled in the tradition of Varela, El Templete resided in a higher terrain of abstract ideals in which constitutionalism, identity, freedom, and justice were to be perpetually debated and negotiated. As the social sphere was an artificial invention of mankind, humans had an obligation to constantly reinvent the social fabric. In order to avoid the perpetual mistakes of history, empiricism would locate abstract principles upon which society could be modeled. Varela, his followers, and subsequent Cuban intellectuals, would have viewed El Templete as an attempt to articulate empirical truth in public space. They would have remarked at the skill with which Cuban history, symbolic urban space, pictorial narrative, and collective memory were combined with the experience of the plaza to morally uplift the colonial population. However, as the most intellectual members of Cuban society, they would have felt dissatisfied with the work upon its inauguration for its propagandistic aspects. The painting of the inauguration which clearly elevated the interests of Peninsulars over the local population, and the

metopes that extolled Cuba's loyalty to Spain, contradicted the ideals of Félix Varela. As followers of Varela increasingly stood against slavery, the future community they imagined for the island conflicted with both the Spanish and the Creole planter class.

Beneath intellectuals and planters, the Creole petite bourgeoisie shared the skilled trades with many "free people of color" and a modest holding of Cuban revenues. These "middle-class" Creoles were island born and felt an attachment to the land, yet were outside the planter-merchant politics that drove the production of El Templete. Creole bourgeoisie found little representation in the Sociedad Económica, whose reform efforts concentrated most attention on the sugar industry. More modest Creoles saw a modernizing Cuba around them, a city of changing aesthetics which they owned a minimal share. Ultimately, it is this class, joining forces with free Afro-Cubans, who would expel the Spanish in the late nineteenth-century, causing Cuban planters to flee for their lives. If the Creole bourgeoisie found any reflections of their identities in El Templete, they should have also recognized a familiar urban pattern by which the Creole elite claimed cultural authority over urban space and the social forces beneath them.

Creole radicalism and revolt grew out of the early eighteenth-century and involved a broad spectrum of Cuban society, from the Creole elite to free people of color, and even slaves. The first stirrings of radicalism came from humble tobacco farmers known as *vegueros* who took up guns and farm implements against local authority in the early eighteenth-century. Vergueros revolted in 1717, when the Crown established a royal monopoly known as the Factoría de Tabacos with headquarters in Havana as one aspect of the Bourbon reforms. The Factoría fixed the price of tobacco and controlled its production. As Pérez points out, the long term goals of the policy were to "transfer

industry to Spain and reduce Cuba to an exporter.”²⁴¹ The creation of the royal tobacco monopoly led to a popular uprising and armed protest ignited by this rural agricultural sector. The demonstration ended with the Spanish removal of the captain general from office, encouraging farmers that organized protest could shape crown policy.

Creoles of the lower social echelons plotted several unsuccessful revolts in the early nineteenth-century in collaboration with Afro-Cubans. In 1810, a white independence movement of Freemasons, led by two aristocrats and a white officer joined with some free people of color serving in the black militia, proposed a constitution, and planned an independence movement. Their constitution stipulated that slavery would be maintained and the whites would remain in power. For symbolic representation, they “devised a flag with the figure of an Indian woman, entwined in a tobacco leaf,” the first political movement to invoke Cuba’s pre-Hispanic past.²⁴² A white volunteer militia composed of recent white immigrants was raised to help the Spanish authorities combat the rebellion, and Captain-General Salvador José de Muro Salazar, the Marqués de Someruelos (the same official who was memorialized in the Espada Cemetery) presided over the defeat of the conspiracy.²⁴³ The appropriation of the Indian figure by the rebels of 1810 invoked Cuba’s pre-Hispanic past to represent total freedom from Spain and the emergence of an independent state. The body of an Indian woman, commonly used as an allegorical figure for the Americas, thus became the embodiment of the Cuban nation. The re-emergence of the Indian figure in *El Temple* in 1828 represents a continuum in

²⁴¹ Pérez (1988), p. 104.

²⁴² Richard Gott, *Cuba: A New History*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), pp. 48-52.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*

an ongoing attempt to symbolically articulate a sense of community and proto-nationality in Cuba around this Amerindian trope. Yet, for Creole radicals, the awkward constraints placed on the imagery of El Temple by the Spanish regime and the frank portrayal of the elite social order that subordinated the island's population would have seemed unacceptable to anyone calling for total independence.

In the early 1820's, the Venezuelan revolutionary Simón Bolívar forced Spanish armies to withdraw from Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia, and established a constitution.²⁴⁴ Bolívar's charisma and the breadth of his ambitions spread his revolutionary ideals across Spanish America. The Cuban section of Bolívar's movement, led by a former officer in Colombia, José Francisco Lemus, became known as *Soles y Rayos de Bolívar* ["Suns and Rays of Bolívar"]. Appropriating Cuba's pre-Hispanic past again, the movement sought to establish an independent state known as Cubanacán, an indigenous word for Cuba. The conspiracy was foiled when the Spanish authorities uncovered the plot, which involved a popular uprising in Cuba to coincide with an invasion of Bolívar's troops from Venezuela.²⁴⁵ The Creole appropriation of Cuba's indigenous past would authenticate a new nation, providing it with a characteristic, non-European quality.²⁴⁶ These nationalist discourses in Cuba paralleled similar developments in New Spain-Mexico and South America, whose newly independent political bodies struggled to define their national identities and their place in modernity.

²⁴⁴ Gott (2004), p. 51, and John Lynch, *Simón Bolívar: A Life* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006).

²⁴⁵ Gott, p. 51. For a detailed account of how the conspiracy played out in Cuba, see Roque E. Garrigo, *Historia Documentada de la Conspiración de los Soles y Rayos de Bolívar*, (La Habana: Imprenta "El Siglo XX," 1929).

²⁴⁶ Hernández-Durán (2007), pp. 200-203.

The figure of the Indian generated a non-European conceptual locus of American history and experience around which American Creoles were formulating a vision of national identity. The Indian figures in Vermay's paintings of the first mass and cabildo would have been read by Creoles as part of this pan-American discourse on American identity and proto-nationalism, regardless of their visions for the island's future community. For more in depth considerations of this imagery, much can be gained from a comparison with similar developments in Mexico and pictorial genres such as casta painting.

The Indian Figure and Miscegenation in Cuba

Vermay's representation of Cuba's pre-Hispanic past constructed non-European ancestors around which Cubans could imagine themselves as a non-Spanish community. The unspoiled Native belonged more to a fictional than real past. The Taíno and Ciboney had perished through overwork, brutality, and disease. These images of Indians were essentially Creole "invented traditions." As Hobsbawm has defined them, invented traditions involve both the establishment of images around which communities build cohesion, as well as an apparatus for future socialization.²⁴⁷ The myth of the Native figure would become a construct around which Creole communities would articulate their sense of difference from Peninsulars for generations to come. This counter discourse to Spanish authority existed amidst desperate Spanish attempts to consolidate loyalty. These Cuban developments relate closely to similar formulations in New Spain (Mexico) beginning in the early nineteenth-century.

²⁴⁷ Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983), pp. 1-15.

As Creoles in New Spain experienced the indignities of the eighteenth-century Bourbon reforms, they were, by the early 1800's, seeking to articulate themselves as a social group. New images were required around which community could be built. After the establishment of the independent nation of Mexico in 1821, localized representational forms were brought to bear to articulate national community. As discussed by Claudio Lomnitz-Adler, the articulation of Mexican national space by the late nineteenth-century involved a "reappraisal of the mestizo and the Indian" with the goal of "reformulating the relationship between race and nation."²⁴⁸ In an attempt to define national space, Mexican history was cast as a struggle between competing Spanish and Indian cultural threads. The gendered Indian became a matrilineal alternative, or what Lomnitz-Adler calls "the matrilineal principle" in contrast to the paternal Spanish element, considered the embodiment of imperialism. These late nineteenth- and early twentieth century developments, known as the *indigenismo* movement, had their roots in the early nineteenth-century when anti-Spanish discourses were first emerging in visual form.²⁴⁹

The appearance of Indians in the Vermay paintings, then, suggests similar developments among Cuban Creoles seeking self-definition and conceptual emancipation from Spain. The Indian figures became a means of articulating the "matrilineality" of Cuban history and identity by offering racial groups (Natives) as components of patrimony and blood absent from the European experience and thus wholly American. Ray Hernández-Durán notes that pre-Hispanic symbols, in the context of New Spain, became "a rhetorical device utilized by the Creoles as an argument for their sovereignty

²⁴⁸ Claudio Lomnitz-Adler, *Exits from the Labyrinth: Culture and Ideology in the Mexican National Space* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), p. 277.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 277-278.

as a class and a nation.”²⁵⁰ Similarly, in Cuba, the reception of the Indian figure in this way became a means of inverting the official contextualization of the monument. The maternal element embodied by the Indian as the mother of the Creole community.²⁵¹ Her capacity to birth this community of “naturals” was supported by the Edenic setting of Vermay’s first mass and cabildo each resonant of the generative associations embodied by the ceiba tree. The term *naturales*, in the *Diario* articles of March and April, were applied to both painted indigenous bodies and Cuban-born residents of Havana and interchangeably conflated the two subjects at the etymological level. The body of the Native figures grounded the divine Providence of the conquest in “natural” bodies (both historical and contemporary) that lived, distinguishably from Spaniards, in an ontological relationship with the land in Cuba.

To balance the principle of maternity embodied by the Indian, Mexicans turned to the *mestizo*, an individual of equal parts Indian and Spanish blood. The racial mixing by crossing a Spaniard with an Indian according to the Novohispanic *sistema de castas* (caste system) resulted in the category known as *mestizo* (an individual of Spanish and Indian parentage). Creoles in New Spain/Mexico elevated the mestizo out of a constellation of phenotypic categories to that of “a hero of Mexican nationality” with both Indian and Spanish blood but with “higher spiritual qualities than both.”²⁵² I propose that Vermay’s Native child would have been read by Creoles as the mestizo son of the Native mother and Velázquez. In fact, the three figures form a triad capable of

²⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 278.

²⁵¹ Hernández-Durán (2007), pp. 201.

²⁵² Lomnitz-Adler (1992), p. 277.

being visually isolated and excised from the surrounding figures. Vermay modulates the skin tones of the figures to contrast the pale skin of the conquistador with the dark brown tone of the mother and the lighter brown shade of the native child.²⁵³ Considering this figure of a Native child as the mestizo would further connect Creole developments in Cuba to pan-American discourses on race and nation in the first half of the nineteenth-century.

Intensive pictorial categorizations of race in New Spain began in the eighteenth-century under the Bourbon reforms. Caste painting emerged, a genre that provided European patrons with images of the “exotic” nature of American societies. The paintings typically appeared as single installments and sometimes as part of a larger series. For local Creoles, caste paintings asserted the uniqueness of American societies in their overt references to miscegenation. New Spain’s dominant Spanish and Indian foundations ensured that a *casta* series would invariably begin with the mestizo result of crossing a Spaniard and an Indian. In the painting by José de Bustos, *Spaniard and Indian produces a Mestizo*, a *casta* painting from 1725, the respective figures are identified by both labels, clothing, and the artist’s manipulation of skin tones (Figure 75). A light skinned Spaniard in sophisticated, Euro-American clothing holds a wedding band between the fingers of his right hand.²⁵⁴ To his left stands a Native woman with a brownish skin tone who wears simpler garments. In her left arm, she cradles her mestizo daughter, whose skin is lighter than her mother’s yet darker than that of her father’s. The figures stand within an ornamental, oval framework that contains a caption below which reads, “De Español y

²⁵³ Hernández-Durán (2007), pp. 200-205

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

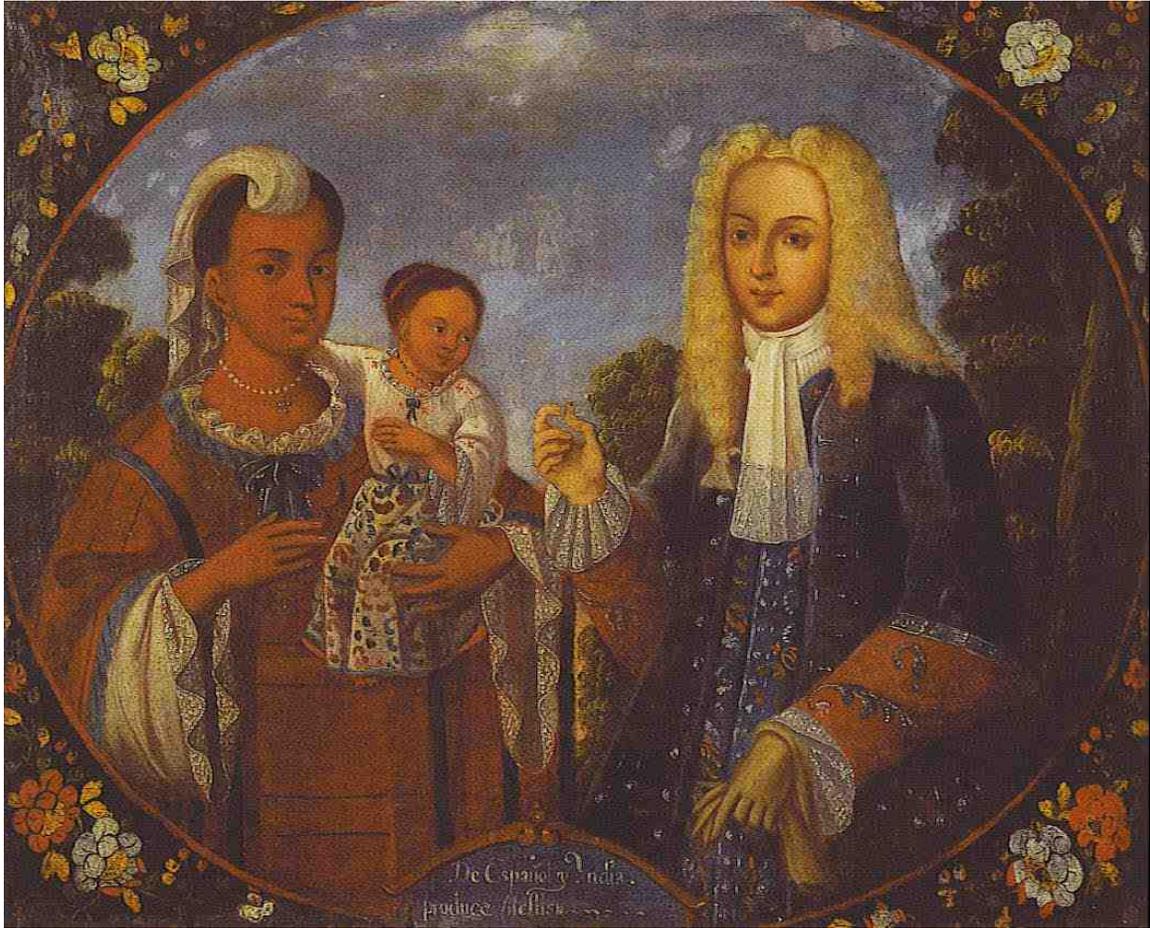


Figure 75. José de Bustos, Spaniard and Indian produce a Mestiza, c. 1725, oil on canvas

India produce Mestiza...” [“Spaniard and Indian produce a Mestiza...”]. The choice of skin tones and clothing patterns pictorially articulated different racial compositions for eighteenth-century European and American audiences. Casta painting has been studied by Ilona Katzew and Magali Cabrera in the context of categorizations of race in the rationalist environment of eighteenth-century New Spain under Bourbon rule.²⁵⁵ Most of these paintings were intended for European markets to satisfy foreign demands for representations of the exotic content of American societies. While casta paintings do reveal the rigor with which legal categorizations were brought to bear on colonial society by the Bourbons, Ray Hernández-Durán questions their reception by the local Creole elite, suggesting them as playing a role in emerging Creole identity.²⁵⁶ In a continuum with nineteenth-century proto-national awareness, Hernández-Durán suggests Creoles saw in casta painting that which distinguished them from Peninsulars, the mixed racial content of their American societies. The paintings thus became manifestations of *criollismo* and images that Creoles would have embraced as signifiers of their Americanness.

Luis de Mena’s *Casta Painting*, integrates multiple genres, the representation of which could be connected to an emerging *criollismo* (Figure 76). A sequence of eight casta paintings appears in two central registers revealing 8 ½ of the usual 16 vignettes, racial mixtures that underscored the nature of the casta system. In the first installment, a Spanish woman and Indian man produce a Mestizo son, followed by a Spaniard and a

²⁵⁵ Magali Marie Carrera, *Imagining Identity in New Spain: Race, Lineage, and the Colonial Body in Portraiture and Casta Paintings* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003) and Ilona Katzew, *Casta Painting: Images of Race in Eighteenth-Century Mexico* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).

²⁵⁶ Hernández-Durán (2007), pp. 200-205.



Figure 76. Luis de Mena, *Caste Painting*, c. 1750, oil on canvas

Mestizo who produce a Castizo. Spanish blood is restored, however, when the Castizo joins with a Spaniard to produce a Spaniard once again. Such finite distinctions reveal the nature of race as a social construct in New Spain, where individuals, who possessed the means, could literally purchase a higher racial status. Phenotype thus becomes a euphemism for social rank and quality, i.e. degrading the more diluted white blood becomes. Inversely, non-whites of quality with significant financial resources could purchase, and thus attain, white status.

In the fourth installment from the left, the result of introducing African blood into the white blood line is revealed. A Spaniard and a Negro produce a Mulatto, and through the various racial peregrinations that follow, including more Spaniards, Moriscos, Lobos, and Indios, Spanish blood cannot be restored. African blood, in the *sistema de castas*, represented an irreversible contaminant to purity of blood, something an ambitious Creole seeking noble titles and other privileges would seek to avoid at all cost. Yet, the deeper purpose of Luis de Mena's painting, given Creole cultural development, may be to communicate the diversity and non-European character of American society. The casta sequence is joined by a central image of the Virgin of Guadalupe, the patron saint of New Spain who miraculously appeared to the newly converted Indian, Juan Diego, in 1532. On either side of the Virgin, the artist represents social activities and rituals distinct to colonial societies in New Spain. In the lowest register of the painting, we find fruits and vegetables of the Americas including avocados and melons. Depictions of local landscape further ground the image in an American context. This pictorial collection of the "stuff of the Americas" reveals impulses to translate a growing Creole pride and awareness into

representational forms. This practice reveals a general tendency of this time period in American colonial contexts.

La Población Blanca: Race, Representation, and “White” Community

We have seen how Cuban Creoles thought of themselves in racialized terms, as part of pan-American developments involving race and Creole identity. However, in co-opting the figures of the Indian and mestizo, Creoles in Cuba found themselves in an apparent contradiction: as an elite society identifying with images connoting “mixed races,” yet obsessed, to an extremely urgent degree, with their own phenotypic “whiteness.” Creole obsession with whiteness in Cuba grew from the massive African and Afro-Cuban population that, by the 1820’s, had almost assumed the majority. References to “Cubanness” coexisted with a political economy that involved total dependence on this lowest order of the Spanish casta system. The fear of slave revolt (sparked by the Haitian Revolution of 1791) and of the rapidly growing “black” and mulatto populations became an integral part of Creole self-fashioning and communal identity. Consequently, such tensions, contradictions, and imaginings must have factored into the function and reception of *El Templete* in 1828. In order to take charge of the island’s destiny, the Creole community in nineteenth-century Cuba would have to distinguish itself, not only from Spaniards, situated above them in the social order, but also from Africans and Afro-Cubans, below.

As Creoles expended efforts to locate a rational past in order to shape their island’s future, they were forced to re-evaluate the ideal future community of Cuba. The African slave population, 85,000 in 1791, had increased to 287,000 by 1827. The Spanish

practice of *coartación* (the right of slave owners to grant freedom to their slaves) contributed significantly to the island's large population of *gentes de color* (free people of color). The combined population of "free people of color" and slaves by 1827 represented a majority of the Cuba's human population leading to an "Africanization" scare. The presence of blacks and mulattos in colonial society and the persistence of slavery was a constant reminder of the potential carnage Creoles faced without the support of the Spanish military. Peninsulars, in turn, exploited these fears to keep Cuban elites loyal.²⁵⁷ Creoles imagined their collaboration with the Spanish as necessary for the time being, but the future seemed uncertain due to the increased "blackness" of their population. As Gott argues, "Cuba's blacks were perceived as a threat to the white elite and to its imagined notion of the island's future community."²⁵⁸ Thus, Creole elevation of Havana and their central claim to their city through historical writing, architecture, visual arts, and the colonial press provided a means for both building a sense of community, and for strengthening the physical and conceptual bastions between themselves and the black population.

Africans (individuals brought to Cuba from Africa) and Afro-Cubans (individuals of African descent born in Cuba) in both cases either *moreno/negro* (black) or *pardo/mulatto* (of mixed Spanish and black ancestry) and either *gentes de color* (free people of color) or *esclavos* (slaves), had little visual representation in the pictorial program of El Templete.²⁵⁹ The shrine consisted of forms comprising a language of

²⁵⁷ Gott (2004), pp. 46-48 and Pérez (1988), pp. 75-105.

²⁵⁸ Gott (2004), p. 53.

²⁵⁹ From here on, the phrase "Afro-Cuban" will be used to signify, undifferentiated, both Africans and Afro-Cubans (whether negro or mulatto).

architecture representing the material progress of the island and a new historical temporality. A consensus in the elite classes was forming, combined with increased secular education that the monument should be read as a sign of the dawning of a new age. This abstract “conceived” level of the monument’s interpretation would have been illegible to the majority of Afro-Cubans in Havana. Such understandings belonged primarily to the intellectual and propertied classes of the city, for whom such readings became a strategy and instrument of exclusion. The Spanish authorities, while establishing fraternities to care for the needs of incoming African slaves, prohibited their formal education in local institutions of secular learning in the early nineteenth-century. El Templete, in almost all of its visual aspects, contributed to the conceptual relegation of Afro-Cubans to a lower order.

In the academic nature of the paintings, figures were placed according to social rank and importance during the festivities. Bishop Espada, who presided over the inauguration, was elevated in the painting of the event along with the captain general and a group of Peninsulars. Creole men came after Peninsulars followed by white women and children, and the general population outside the shrine. The inauguration painting represented the Afro-Cuban presence but marginalized it, as the painting contained only images of the female domestic slave and the lieutenant of the city police force. Within the paintings of the first mass and cabildo, Vermay represented only Spaniards in a superior relationship to Indians. These pictorial hierarchies became frameworks in the construction of contemporary community.

The two images of Afro-Cubans in the inauguration painting represent different types of colonial individuals, as the female figure likely represented a slave, whereas the

male figure represented a “free person of color” presiding over a volunteer militia. The primary point of commensurability was that these images constructed role models of dignified, orderly, and tranquil existences for female slaves (urban domestic slavery was the most desirable place for slave women) and male “free people of color” (the lieutenant of the volunteer police force was a paradigmatic achievement for male “free people of color”). While providing the Afro-Cuban population with archetypal figures of their own, the images also served to reinforce the delimited and controlled range of social mobility for Afro-Cuban populations. Afro-Cubans, here, were cast in idealized roles to maintain social order, yet possibly to also comment on the nature of Cuban society as another manifestation of local awareness.

The image of the domestic slave, appearing somewhat terrified as she stares towards the proceedings, is met with a sharp look by the seated white woman below her. The two are suggested as relative social equals by their clothing and delicate white veils, yet sharply contrasted by their skin tones. However, the dressing of the Afro-Cuban woman in white clothing draws her into the crouching elite society of women in which her only place can be in servitude. Like the Native figures that Velázquez attends to in the first mass, the domestic slave seems astonished by the proceedings. The domestic slave’s discomfort provokes a reaction from the white women next to her, who turns, gives her a harsh glare, and raises her right arm motioning towards the proceedings. This small exchange referenced the Spanish perception of Africans as fundamentally superstitious and incapable of human reason. The white woman, as cultural superior, turns to chastise the black woman for her subtle outburst and suggest she act “civilized,” just as the patriarchal figure of Velázquez directed the Natives in the scene of the first

mass. By drawing a parallel between Africans and Natives, suggesting the fundamentally “uncivilized” nature of both, the domestic servant/slave reinforced Creole and Peninsular perceptions of characteristic African behavior and mentality. Simultaneously, this figure of the black domestic slave was as much a social code for Creole audiences as was the figure of the Indian and mestizo because it assuaged their worst fears. Slavery here is reduced to a “feminine principle” in order to assert its benign existence on the island.

The Afro-Cuban male figure can be seen standing alongside the captain general towards the center of the painting. Dressed in full peninsular regalia, he represents the captain of a volunteer city police force organized by the Spanish authorities to appease a rapidly growing population of free people of color. Vermay represents the man as slightly lighter skinned than the African woman, possibly suggesting him as a *pardo*. The man stands in proximity to the captain general to suggest a connection and assure Afro-Cuban populations that the Crown cared for their plight. The painted bodies of Africans and Afro-Cubans in this scene narrated ideal roles for these groups in colonial society and situated them within a framework of ideal social order. Afro-Cubans were intended to read these images as role models. The images in their pictorial context communicated that the ideal existence for Africans and Afro-Cubans was as slaves and service was the ideal or proper existence for Africans. The overarching theme of natural order embodied by Neo-Classical forms grounded the culture of white society in the order of Nature, a paradigm that Africans and Afro-Cubans could only emulate but never embody.

The overwhelming number of *blancos* (whites) in the inauguration scene asserted white dominance over an increasingly “mixed” and black population. These images of the ecclesiastical establishment, the Peninsulars, Creoles, Women and Children, and the

general population reassured a nineteenth-century Creole audience of a fictionalized ratio of white to black on the island. The white masses reflected the Creole vision of the ideal future community of Cuba, memorializing the contemporary elites who would make this community possible. The forms of the Neo-Classical shrine and the ceiba tree grounded these readings in Nature and local destiny while the paintings of the first mass and cabildo provided historical precedent for the absence of Afro-Cubans in Cuban Creole community. Although African slaves arrived as early as the 1530's in Cuba, Creoles would find no evidence for their presence in their bloodlines in the scenes of Havana's early moments. This epic past populated by Natives and Spaniards buttressed the naturalness and authenticity of a predominantly white social order in the nineteenth-century, regardless of the large mulatto population, many of whom were the product of liaisons between Spanish and Creole men and Afro-Cuban women.

By positioning the group of white women and children beneath the line of Creole and Peninsular men, the painting reinforced the concept of "noble" marriages in colonial society and their offspring. In October of 1805, the Council of the Indies issued the "Royal decree on marriages between persons of known nobility with members of the castes of negroes and mulattos." The decree stated "in cases where persons of age and known nobility or known purity of blood attempt to marry with members of the castes, recourse should be taken to the Viceroys, Presidents, and Audiencias so that they grant or deny their permission."²⁶⁰ Verena Martínez-Alier discusses the interrelationships between the regulation of marriage among whites and castes and "family honor," deemed

²⁶⁰ Quoted in Verena Martínez-Alier, *Marriage, Class and Colour in Nineteenth-Century Cuba: A Study of Racial Attitudes and Sexual Values in a Slave Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), p. 12.

integral by the Spanish authorities to social order in Cuba.²⁶¹ Children of noble families under twenty-five years of age needed parental consent in order to marry down (into the racially “impure” spectrum of negroes and mulattos). Children of the Cuban nobility faced the dreaded fate of disinheritance if they violated the “purity” of their family’s blood and social status via tainted marriage. Cases of illegitimate marriage were brought by parents before the Spanish authorities who would rule either for or against the legitimacy of the union. If however, a white from a non-noble family married into the castes, they were outside the realm of prosecution, as they had no social status to lose.²⁶²

Limpieza de sangre, “purity of blood,” represented an ideological construct derived from the *reconquista* in Iberian Peninsula where Christian families sought to maintain or gain access to status in the upper nobility. After the expulsion of Jews and Muslims from Spain in 1492 under Ferdinand and Isabella, Christian families wishing to seek or maintain noble status had to prove that their bloodlines were free of Muslim or Jewish “impurities.” The Spanish transported this ideology of blood purity to the Americas where, in ethnically diverse colonial societies, such as nineteenth-century Havana, blood purity meant Spanish blood free of the “contamination” of “inferior races,” such as the castes. On a practical level, purity of blood allowed noble habanero families to retain their social status, which was threatened by members of the family marrying into the castes. White skin was a marker of status. White women in elite households came under strict controls as their reproductive function was perceived as the key to maintaining racial purity. In nineteenth-century Havana, white women were

²⁶¹ Martinez-Alier (1974), pp. 1-26.

²⁶² Patricia Seed, *To Love, Honor, and Obey in Colonial Mexico: Conflicts over Marriage Choice, 1574-1821* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988).

forbidden from walking the streets and could only venture out of their family homes by carriage, accompanied by a chaperone. This social practice has been attributed to the growing Afro-Cuban population and the attempt to control white female sexuality and the risk of illegitimate liaisons. Yet, this convention also corresponded, in a broader sense, to the inevitable constraints placed on the elite Creole identity formation as this group found themselves wedged between Spanish repression and the need to imagine the “whiteness” of the island’s future community. Vermay’s grouping of white men and women amidst white children would have resonated with an elite Creole audience the urgency with which “purity of blood” had to be maintained as a fundamental requirement for building a new society.

In the spirit of “enlightened reforms” on the island, the Spanish authorities and the Creole elite began to imagine “blackness” as a social evil and the “whitening of the island” as a social improvement. In December of 1823, the physician and member of the Sociedad Económica, Tomás Romay Chacon submitted a letter to the “General Assembly of the Royal Economic Society” entitled “Report on the Necessity to Augment the White Population in this Island...” In the report, Chacon expressed, “...the gravity and urgency of the assignment...” they had been entrusted with, and said, “...I will try to fulfill with great efficacy...in knowing, what can be done and what should be done quickly inside the limits permitted by our laws...”²⁶³ Throughout the 1820’s and 30’s, Chacon would send similar reports and proposals to “augment the island’s white population” to captain generals, the King, and the *Junta de Población Blanca* (Council of White Population).

²⁶³ “...de la gravedad y urgencia del encargo...” “...procuró desempeñar con la mayor eficacia...á saber, lo que podía y debía hacerse de pronto dentro de los límites que permitian nuestras leyes.” See José López Sánchez (1965), p. 162.

The Council of White Population had been established in 1817 by Captain General José Cienfuegos and by Alejandro Ramírez (after whom the Fines Arts Academy of San Alejandro was named), treasurer and leader of the Sociedad Económica. The Council was the result of several decades' efforts to convince the state to officially encourage white immigration to the island. Creole elites stressed the urgency of preventing another black revolt as had happened on Ste. Domingue in 1791. Unlike Ste. Domingue, however, Cuba did not have a majority black population, but population figures predicted a black majority in the future.

In the mid-1790's, Francisco Arango y Parreño, founder of the Sociedad Económica, conceived a scheme for white immigration whereby villages would be created for white immigrants to lessen the concentration of rural blacks, seen as the primary instigators of insurrection. The project offered an alternative to abolishing the slave trade, an unthinkable move given Cuba's prosperity, and as Arango stated: "It is necessary to proceed carefully – with the census figures in hand – in order that the number of Negroes may not only be prevented from exceeding that of the whites, but that it may not be permitted to equal that number."²⁶⁴ The Council of White Population generated money to finance white immigration by taxing incoming male slaves, and sought opportunities to establish white settlements as envisioned by Arango. With the establishment of Cienfuegos on the bay of Jaragua in the early 1820's, the first major white town was realized. Named for the captain-general, Cienfuegos attracted white settlers from Philadelphia, Baltimore, and New Orleans.²⁶⁵ The town was built along

²⁶⁴ Quoted in Gott (2004), p. 54.

²⁶⁵ Ibid, pp. 52-57.

Neo-Classical lines, from the grid planning of streets to the appropriation of Neo-Classical vocabularies. Thus, in the 1820's as "the whitening of the island" was equated with social progress, Neo-Classical forms came to embody this ideology.

We have seen how Creoles appropriated the city, religion, and history to articulate and assert their emerging sense of communal identity in early nineteenth-century Havana.

The geography of Creole identity and modernity was located in both a real and imagined space in the city's Plaza de Armas, a physical space that became a conceptual space for articulating this emergent sense of collective self. Their sense of a unified community amidst the difference of the castes beneath them found expression and reinforcement in El Templete. With the crisis of the increasing Afro-Cuban population, Creoles were forced to reassess their vision for the island's future community. Their careful maintenance of "legitimate" marriages and their attempts to "whiten" the island through immigration reveals an ideology of "whiteness" that likewise was attached to Neo-Classical visual culture as it was developing in Havana, and "new towns" like Cienfuegos. The construction of Cienfuegos in a Neo-Classical mode and how it relates to race and the ideology of Creole whiteness is a fascinating question, though beyond the scope of this study. What remains to be investigated, however, is how the castes, the negroes and mulattos, made meaning out of El Templete in the late 1820's. For this, we must consider religions completely different from that practiced by the white population, primarily Afro-Cuban religions, and their attendant deities, rituals, and mythologies.

Changó and the Tree: Afro-Cuban Reception of the City

The trafficking of individuals from Africa to work as slaves on Cuban plantations began in the mid-sixteenth century and continued through the first few centuries of Cuban agricultural production. The slave trade in Cuba rapidly expanded in the late eighteenth/early nineteenth-centuries with the development of the sugar industry, the years leading up to the inauguration of El Templete. Africans provided not only physical bodies for exploitation in the slave system, but also religious and mythological ideologies which encountered Roman Catholicism upon arrival in Cuba. The resulting processes of transculturation impacted Afro-Cuban interpretations of the cultural and natural landscape of the island, which were oriented around shared beliefs and practices that allowed for cultural survival. These lower members of colonial society were generally denied access to the realm of abstract thinking, articulated within elite circles, in which architecture and visual arts were woven together with Creole and Peninsular knowledge. Rather, as a mechanism for their survival, Afro-Cubans negotiated and interpreted the city in their own ways connecting signs and experiences to their own realm of sacred knowledge and belief.

The Havana-Matanzas province of Cuba became a major recipient of incoming African slaves in the late eighteenth-and early nineteenth-centuries. These new arrivals were classified by their “nation,” or the region/cultural group in Africa from which they came. The two primary cultural divisions were the Lucumí from the coast of the Gulf of Guinea and Bantu language families primarily from the Congo basin. These groups were socialized, especially in Havana, in various *cabildos de africanos* or more precisely, *cabildos de naciones* (as defined by Reid: socioreligious and cultural mutual aid

organizations for free and enslaved men and women of African origin; also social clubs as pointed out by Brown).²⁶⁶ Cabildos de nación in the eighteenth-and nineteenth-centuries, according to Reid, evolved from Spanish “cofradías de negros” (fraternities of Africans) organized in Seville, Spain in the early sixteenth-century and transplanted in Cuba by the mid-sixteenth century with the introduction of African slaves. Cabildo members spoke a mixture of *bozal* (their African dialects) and Spanish. David Brown studies these cabildos as spaces of “new ethnic formations,” that in African-American studies, emphasizes the more “forward-looking ‘cultural building’ perspective, rather than the more backward-looking ‘search for tribal origins’” of early twentieth-century scholarship.²⁶⁷ Brown’s work reveals the intersections in cabildo culture between their internal hierarchies, costumes and performative practices, and appropriations of colonial urban space. Through elaborate performances and inventive interpretations of the colonial city, Afro-Cuban cabildos in Havana located specific representational spaces in which to assert their identities.

Africans also encountered proselytism upon arrival in Cuba. The Catholic Church moved swiftly to convert incoming Africans to Christianity in order to save souls and indoctrinate these individuals into Iberian culture. African religions and ritual practices were subordinated and replaced with catechism, communion, and saints. In the process, and as a means of cultural survival, Africans adapted Christianity to their own strong religious traditions in a process often referred to as cultural syncretism. Two primary types of syncretic religions were produced in Cuba. The Lucumí of the Guinea coast

²⁶⁶ Michele Reid, “The Yoruba in Cuba: Origins, Identities, and Transformations,” Toyin Falola and Matt D. Childs, eds. *The Yoruba Diaspora in the Atlantic World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), pp. 117-118; Brown (2003), p. 27.

²⁶⁷ Brown (2003), pp. 27-28.

created “Santería” or “Regla de Ocha” and members of Bantu language families of the Congo created “Regla de Palo Monte.” Christian deities, saints, and martyrs were, thus, layered over African deities and spirits, who continued to be worshipped clandestinely.

By 1828, the Plaza de Armas had become a dynamic urban stage where power, social status, and the synthesis of “high” cultural forms were represented and reinterpreted daily. The Bourbon transformation of the plaza had cleared the space to prepare it as a new instrument of power in the creation of ideological structure. The degree to which the colonial population perceived this space as such is attested to by the ways in which Peninsulars, Creoles, and Afro-Cubans appropriated the space routinely. The *vueltecita* functioned as a daily civic ritual in which the social elite reasserted their hold over urban space, converting it into a space for the performance of their social identities. Men and women of elite society paraded through plazas and city streets on horseback and in carriages and enjoyed evening music in the Plaza de Armas. These daily promenades were supported and encouraged by the Spanish authorities because they actualized an ideological structure, visually legitimating a social hierarchy, and thus maintaining social order. The heightened awareness of being in the plaza, what Richardson has articulated as *cultura*, impacted the perceptions and readings of architectural monuments, such as the Bourbon palaces, the Cathedral, and El Templete. Creoles encountered these architectural icons in the heightened ontological experience of “being-in-the-plaza,” which reaffirmed they were living in both a modern city with its own identity. Likewise, Afro-Cubans clearly understood spatial codes of power through the cabildo processions, which took place at the beginning of the New Year and culminated in the Plaza de Armas with a confrontation between the “cabildo king” and

the captain general (Figure 77). In doing so, Afro-Cuban cabildos, if only temporarily, contested the colonial social order of the city climbing from their marginal place in urban spatial organization to the most central and representational space of urban political experience. This formalized spatial procession reveals how the Afro-Cuban population of Havana perceived urban space, an understanding, which would likewise shape their interpretation of urban monuments.

Beyond such formalized rituals, Afro-Cubans experienced the city in more casual and less structured ways. “Gentes de color” (free people of color), male or female, had relatively fewer restrictions on their physical mobility through urban space than elite white women and some men due to less stringent social expectations, such as seen in the inventive, and subversive, activities of *los negros horros*. For these individuals, colonial urban space became a stage for more diachronic and spontaneous contestations of the city’s power structure. Domestic slaves in Havana drove carriages for white elites, dressed in elaborate costume, and became part of the nineteenth-century urban theatre (Figure 78).

While free people of color converted urban space into a performative stage to contest the colonial social order, their physical place of residence was segregated from the realm of colonial mansions that lined the streets and plaza of the Paroquial Mayor. The *barrios extramuros* (neighborhoods outside-the-walls), according to Brown, “included large and growing African and Afro-Cuban free and slave populations.”²⁶⁸ While the total population of Havana in 1827 was 112,000, 94,023 people lived in these developing suburbs. Cabildo processions were organized in the extramuros before

²⁶⁸ Brown (2004), p. 28.



Figure 77. Frederic Mialhe, *The Day of Kings*, c. 1850, lithograph

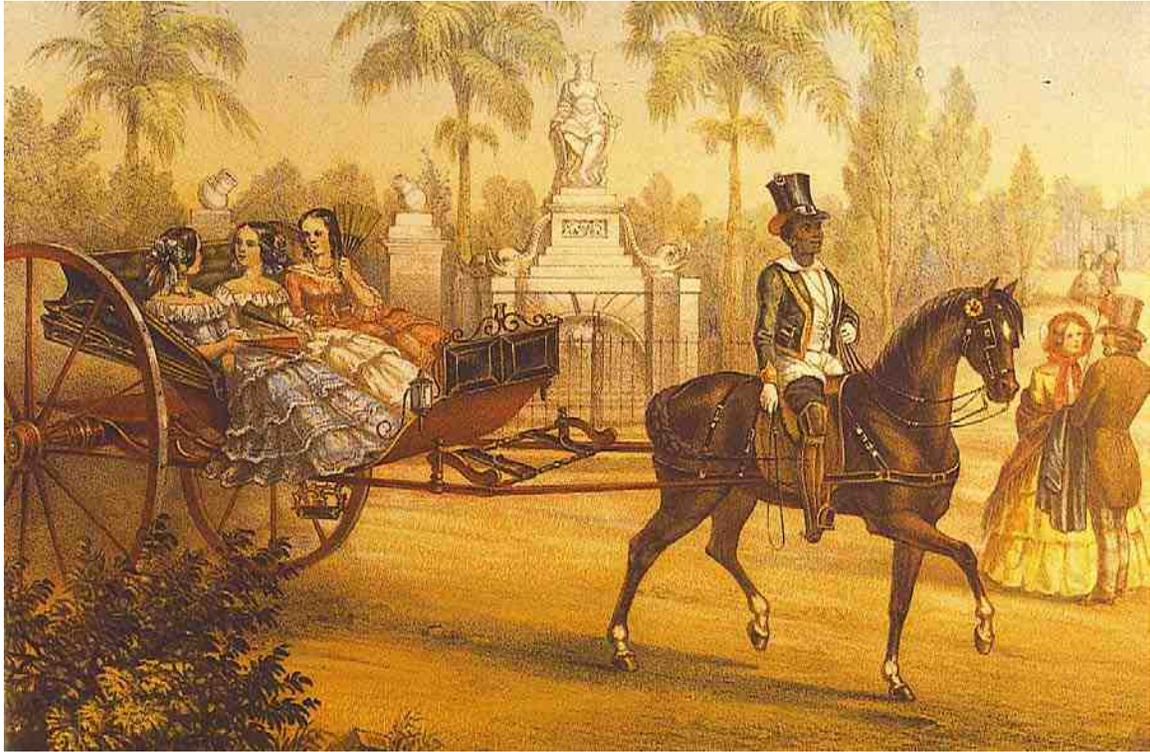


Figure 78. Frederic Mialhe, *El Quitrin*, c. 1840, lithograph

passing through the city walls and streets en route to the Plaza de Armas. The sense of anticipation generated in this ritual movement, with its final climax in the central plaza, heightened the cabildo members interpretive engagement of the plaza.²⁶⁹ How then would an Afro-Cuban cabildo member interpret El Templete in 1828? Did cabildos engage the shrine in any way during their processions? How did free people of color and slaves who used the plaza daily make meaning out of the little shrine to antiquity on the plaza's east side? Were these individuals even able to enter the shrine's cella? To address such questions, it is necessary to combine studies on how Afro-Cuban communities in Havana appropriated urban space with the complex religious and ritual systems through which they interpreted the colonial city.

Between Regla de Ocha and Regla de Palo Monte (the two groups of syncretic religions in Cuba), Regla de Ocha, “the law of the orishas,” also known as Santería, “the way of the saints,” is the best documented and understood. Sacred narrative systems in African religions are crucial to understanding the origins of the complex pantheon of gods, as well as the function of rituals and the interpretation of social and natural phenomenon. Myths of African origin, known as *pwataki*, were reconfigured in the colonial process and became Cuban. These myths, as Barnet illuminates, became functional means by which ordinary people explained many things. Practitioners of Santería elevate a “Supreme Trinity” of deities: Olofí, Oloddumáre, and Olórun. These “gods” wield authority over various *orishas* (or “orichas” in Cuba), their messengers on earth. Orishas are worshipped directly by humans who build personal cults around them. They are entities identified by their associations with natural phenomena, colors, and

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

conduct in sacred narrative stories. In Cuba, because of forced conversions to Christianity, slaves often associated Christian saints with oricha identities. Often the identity of the saints was completely ignored and the oricha identity venerated entirely.²⁷⁰ Pierre Fatumbi Verger emphasizes that, in Africa, orishas become associated with cities where they serve to reinforce the power of the king or chief. The ruler uses the orishas to maintain stability, proliferate his dynasty, and protect his subjects. Believers in Africa and Cuba understand all happenings in nature and society in relation to orisha myths. As Barnet points out, practitioners generally do not contemplate the legitimacy of the myths, but rather take them at face value and even “mold myths to suit changing conditions in society.”²⁷¹ Barnet states:

This is one of the most unusual and remarkable features of Afro-Cuban mythology. It demonstrates perfectly the force of the popular imagination and its capacity for substituting elements and even adapting philosophical values to suit new social situations.²⁷²

The fluid adaptability of Afro-Cuban mythology allowed not only for a wide range of interpretive strategies in de-coding the city, but also the opportunity for the colonial authorities and social elites to exploit Afro-Cuban reception of urban visuality.

Through centuries of colonial rule, Spanish authorities learned the mythical and symbolic constructs of the Afro-Cuban subjects and exploited them to maintain social order. Elite whites even absorbed beliefs and practices of African origin such as healing and divination. The appropriation of Afro-Cuban culture for political ends persisted after

²⁷⁰ Miguel Barnet, *Afro-Cuban Religions*, translated by Christine Renata Ayorinde (Princeton: Markus Wiener, 2001), pp. 1-22.

²⁷¹ *Ibid*, p. 7.

²⁷² *Ibid*, p. 8.

the colonial period officially ended. Anthropologist Ivor L. Miller has studied the dialogic by which politicians in the Caribbean appropriated symbols of Afro-Cuban religions to their own advantage in more contemporary times. Miller argues, “Coded performances in the Caribbean political arena often have dual implications.”²⁷³ He sites Fidel Castro’s January 1959 televised address to the Cuban nation, watched by millions around the world. During the speech, a white dove landed on Castro’s shoulder and another on his rostrum, and remained there throughout his oration. While the Roman Catholic world would associate this occurrence as a gift from the holy spirit (embodied in the white dove), for *santeros/as* (male/female Santería priests), the white dove was associated with the orisha Obatalá, a god of purity and justice, representing truth and peace. Barnet states, “Obatalá is equated with Our Lady of Mercy or with the Blessed Sacrament of the Catholic religion. Obatalá is the creator of the world, the beginning of everything.”²⁷⁴ By staging the spectacle of white doves, Castro suggested himself to a santero/a audiences as a ruler consecrated by the forces of Obatalá. Castro’s ability to bring justice, peace, and innovation to the country was thus legitimated to santeros/as who could disseminate the meanings of these signs to other Afro-Cuban believers.

These twentieth-century practices do not represent new dialogues between Cuban officialdom and Afro-Cuban audiences, rather a continuum of practices that began in the colonial period. In fact, I argue that the escalation of slave populations culminating in the “Africanization” scare following the 1827 census prompted authorities to act not only by encouraging white immigration, but also by the creation of public images and spectacles,

²⁷³ Ivor L. Miller, “Religious Symbolism in Cuban Political Performance,” *TDR*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (Summer 2000), p. 30

²⁷⁴ Barnet (2001), pp. 52-55.

including El Templete and the performances surrounding its inauguration, to psychologically subdue the Afro-Cuban population. El Templete could be used as a multivalent signifier legitimating Spanish rule over a variety of audiences.

The ceiba tree was itself a powerful mythological and symbolic construct in Afro-Cuban religion. For Santería and Palo Monte practitioners, the ceiba tree is a “living divinity” and channel for supernatural forces. These beliefs had roots in Africa, as shown through stories of a *griot* (oral storytellers in Africa and Afro-America) in *Sundiata: an Epic of Old Mali*. “Silk-cotton trees,” references to the ceiba pentandra found in equatorial African, America, and Southeast Asia, often defined the center of towns as a vertical axis that connected the local space and ruler to the gods. In *Sundiata*, the principle silk-cotton tree of the town was always located in the king’s central courtyard. Throughout Yorubaland (West African region of Yoruba-speaking peoples, i.e. Southwestern Nigeria and Benin), ceiba trees are often used in this way, to define the center points of towns. Trees became metaphors for kingdoms, as evidenced by the griot’s narrative in *Sundiata*. “Kingdoms are like trees; some will be silk-cotton trees, others will remain dwarf palms and the powerful silk-cotton tree will cover them with its shade.”²⁷⁵ These cultural landscapes were transported to Cuba through memory as Africans and Afro-Cubans identified ceiba trees with civic centrality and kingship as well as cosmic bridges. I am arguing that the Spanish authorities, the Creole elites in the Sociedad Económica, and perhaps the bishop, knew well of these Afro-Cuban interpretations of ceiba trees and chose to augment the symbolic site as a means of reasserting control over the city in a time of racial crisis. This interpretation might be seen as one of many motives by which

²⁷⁵ D.T. Niane, *Sundiata: An Epic of Old Mali* (Essex: Pearson, 1965), p. 5.

the shrine was erected, and would reveal the responsiveness of the artists and patrons of such monuments to the complexities of colonial society.

In the twentieth century, civic authorities used the ceiba tree in such a manner in Havana. Miller cites Romula Lachatañeré, a Cuban ethnographer, who relates an incident involving Gerardo Machado, President of Cuba from 1924 to 1933. During the Sixth Pan-American Conference in Havana (1928), Machado christened the event with the inauguration of a newly reconstructed park, naming it the Park of Pan-American Fraternity. A ceiba tree was planted on inauguration day in the center of the park and surrounded with earth taken from the twenty-one republics represented in the conference. Romula Lachatañeré observes:

In the same ornamentation of the park, palm trees had been utilized, which had clear symbolic meaning for Cubans, and especially *santeros*: the palm tree is where Changó found sanctuary for his anger. The Ceiba tree is one of the homes of Changó [...].

What could a *santero* deduce from this ceremony where with so many types of earth a Ceiba was planted, symbol of Changó, and precisely during the government of one of his “sons”? Again the deduction was logical. Changó had ordered the president to make this magic ceremony to protect him from his enemies, because at the time they were increasing in numbers. The truth is that five years later Machado was overthrown; but in the period of collecting this material, a stroller who passed by the Park of Fraternity in the light of dawn could find sacrifices for Changó deposited at the foot of the palms and at the now robust Ceiba.²⁷⁶

Machado’s association with Changó via divination by personality type, cult practice, and appropriation of the palm and ceiba trees placed him in line with perhaps the most powerful orisha in Santería (Figure 79). As Barnett states:

Changó is one of the most venerated saints of the cults of Yoruba origin in Cuba. For many people, he is the most powerful and important orisha. In Nigeria he always held a prominent position among the founders of the Yoruba kingdom. He was a heroic king of the land of Oyo. During his reign he won countless victories

²⁷⁶ Miller (2000), pp. 31-32.



Figure 79. Ceiba Tree, Fraternity Park, Havana, planted in 1928

that enhanced his reputation as the greatest Alaafin of Oyo, a title given to the highest chiefs of that region for centuries.

According to Alan Burns, Changó was the fourth king of Oyo, a mythical king of the Yoruba. He was the father of the nation and an eponymous hero. All the legends confer on him epithets that represent him as a virile and warriorlike hero. He was a womanizer, pugnacious, hard-drinking, brave, fearless, adventurous, given to defiance and challenges, proud of his manly attractions and very conscious of his strength and virile beauty.

When believers utter his name, they rise from their seats in order to salute and revere him. He is the god of music, owner of the sacred batá drums and of thunder and lightning. He is a very violent orisha...His colors are red and white... For santeros his manifestation as St. Barbara makes Changó a deity with an androgynous quality. But nothing can detract from his manly pride and his invincibility as a victorious warrior...A set of batá drums, a bright red flag...are some of the favorite possessions of this god...He is both feared and adored.²⁷⁷

I am theorizing that Afro-Cuban santeros/as in 1828 would have interpreted El Templete, by its symbolic structure, location in urban space, and principle patrons as a physical manifestation that reified Changó's blessing over the city's leaders and the tranquil social order of the city of Havana. Captain General Vives would be associated with Changó by his fiery temperament, aggressive agenda, and by historical association with the "warrior" Diego Velázquez. The ceiba tree, home of Changó, which was planted in 1828 and was accompanied by the pictorial representations of the tree by Vermay, would have reassured a santero/a that these interpretive impulses were real. By skillful manipulation of urban space and symbolic imagery, the colonial elite were able to convince Afro-Cubans in Havana of the legitimacy of their rule by connecting to the most important oricha in Santería and Palo Monte religions.

To further substantiate such claims, we should consider the nature of social organization within oricha cults in Cuba. In Santería, cults of the orisha are inextricably connected to the concept of family originating with a common ancestor. "Cults" (groups of believers worshipping a central oricha) replaced tribal and family lineage structures in

²⁷⁷ Barnet (2001), pp. 47-50.

Africa by substituting godfathers (padrinos) and godmothers (ahijados) for village chieftains. These patriarchal and matriarchal figures, loyal to the central orisha, presided over their “children” (members of the cult group) in an organization known as *línea de santo* (line of the saint). Orichas, such as Changó, participated in adventurous exploits on earth before becoming deified. Their material existence, after vanishing, left behind only their *aché* (power that animates all life). As deified ancestors, the oricha occupied the highest most venerated rung of this familial hierarchy in Santería oricha cults.²⁷⁸ These were the primary social models that Afro-Cubans had available to interpret the dominant social structure into which they had been cast by fate and historical circumstance.

When interpreting the colonial social order, Afro-Cubans identified with concepts of family and ancestral identity. When the Bourbon king Charles III expanded the ranks of the colonial militias to include free people of color after 1762, Afro-Cubans looked upon him as a great father figure. Small busts of Charles III were found in the possession of Afro-Cubans apprehended by the Spanish authorities for conspiratorial activities in the nineteenth-century.²⁷⁹ The political performances initiated by Captain General Vives in March of 1828 served to reinforce Cuba as part of an imperial family, a message intended for both Creoles and Afro-Cubans. We see how power structures within *cabildos de naciones* intersected with Spanish power structures during the processions. Indeed, *Cabildos* were organizations in which *cabildo* members could exercise social agency in the interest of their group. Yet, these groups were not isolated within colonial society from the social forces around them. The evidence of cultural dialogue can be found in how *cabildo* members on feast days and the Day of Kings dressed in both European and

²⁷⁸ Ibid. pp. 17-41.

²⁷⁹ Johnson (2001), pp. 25-70.

African-style dress, depending on their status in the cabildo. In colonial contexts, European cultural forms were codes for hierarchical power structures, and not unlike families, they were structures in which everyone knew their place. The propaganda surrounding the inauguration of El Templete reinforced the mythology of the peaceful and contented colonial family through coded performances of power and hierarchy that Afro-Cuban audiences had been conditioned to perceive and respond to. The dramatic meeting between cabildo king and captain general during Feast Day processions was a visual spectacle intended to encode a link between the Spanish and Afro-Cuban. The Spanish hoped that this image would further socialize Afro-Cubans into the Spanish political system, winning their loyalties, and convincing them of their legitimate place in the empire. How would such strategies of power have influenced Afro-Cuban reception of El Templete?

The Shrine and the Sacred Grove

In the rich iconographic program of El Templete, a santero/a would have seen much that connected the shrine to Changó, oricha of thunder and lightning. In the scenes of the first mass and cabildo, an overall red-white color scheme predominated (colors of Changó). The red sash of Velázquez in both scenes and the red and white vestments of Bartolomé de las Casas connected these ancestors to Changó. As the oricha was a deified ancestor, the priest and conquistador could become “sons” of Changó, blessed by the oricha to lead ceremonies in his honor and enact his will. The presence at the base of the ceiba tree reaffirmed this connection in the paintings. In the painting of the first mass, the red parrot in the branches of the tree reinforced the ceiba as Changó’s home. The red flag

was another indication of his presence. The table draped in white at the base of the tree on which candles and a cross are found would have suggested ritual “divination” to the santero/a, conflating the scene with a ritual practice by which devotees actually made contact with the oricha. The red-white color scheme also predominates in the painting of the inauguration, wherein the ecclesiastical group is bathed in these colors as are the Peninsulars focused on the figure of Vives. While the captain generals red band and white trousers were standard colonial costume, they signified the presence of the orisha for the Santería priest. Vives and his group of Peninsulars similarly became “sons” of Changó, individuals endowed with legitimacy by the orisha. The wooden staff, associated with diviners, held by both Velázquez and Vives suggested their possession of the power of a *babalawo*, a Santería priest or ritual diviner of immense power who mediated between humans and the divine.

In West African religion, the tree serves an important function as spiritual bridge during religious ceremonies. Trees are often found at places of worship such as shrines, temples, houses, and compounds. Most “sacred spaces” in which rituals are conducted are referred to as “groves,” denoting basic clearings in the forest where rituals are performed. Ray Hernández-Durán points out that groves are selected as ceremonial spaces for two primary reasons: the existence of specific trees in the vicinity associated with a particular god or the perception of a spiritual presence in that particular location.²⁸⁰ The use of trees in religious rituals was adapted by Afro-Cubans and other groups in the Afro-Caribbean diasporas who appropriate certain native tree species (including the ceiba) to

²⁸⁰ Ray Hernández-Durán, “The Sacred Tree and the Poteau-Mitan: The Translation of an African Visual Metaphor in Haitian Vodun Iconography,” unpublished MA thesis, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1994, pp. 28-30.

attract and/or embody spiritual presences. In the context of Haiti, for example, Herández-Durán says that the tree “becomes the interface between the physical and spiritual realm.”²⁸¹ In Afro-Caribbean religions, including Santería, trees (often ceibas) become a spiritual bridge between humans and the divine and reinforce the unity of the cosmos.

The elements of color, the flag, the staff, and the tree were icons that connected these paintings to the iconography of Changó veneration for Afro-Cuban audiences. Yet, as David Brown points out in regards to such elements found within Santería altars, “Beyond their role as ‘iconographic representations’ or ‘adornments,’ these attributes are material embodiments at one with the oricha’s constituted bodily presence in the world.”²⁸² These elements communicate to the initiated that the oricha is physically in the world at that moment and capable of being on the scene and in the space with devotees. El Templete’s combination of these elements and the significance of the site of the ceiba tree signified to the santero/a that Changó had been present at the founding of the city, that he lived in the city’s sacred heart, and that he bestowed his blessing on the city’s contemporary rulers. Moreover, the idealized social order projected in El Templete involving “whiteness” and colonial hierarchy was also blessed by the orisha.

The verticality of El Templete and its location at the ceiba tree site made it appear as a kind of altar to Afro-Cuban audiences seeking to process the city in their way. Santería altars take two primary forms: ephemeral thrones and more permanent table or shelf-like structures. Both of these types are erected in private houses, usually in a sacred room associated with the oricha. The altars take on iconographic features to signify the

²⁸¹ Ibid, p. 26.

²⁸² David H. Brown, “Thrones of the Orichas: Afro-Cuban Altars in New Jersey, New York, and Havana, *African Arts*, Vol. 26, No. 4, (Oct. 1993), pp. 48.

oricha to whom they are dedicated and become points of contact between humans and the divine. El Templete, by its location on the plaza, may have been associated with a sacred grove marked by the tree by Afro-Cuban audiences, particularly those who internalized the Spanish rhetoric of the empire as extended family. During the three-day inauguration ceremony in March, a variety of visual cues were deployed to reassert Spain's dominion over the island and suggest Cubans as loyal children. The parent-child relationship suggested in the propaganda was the central organizational principle of oricha cults in Cuba. Suggesting the empire as a close family with the king and captain general as father figures, the plaza became an intimate space among family members where sacred bonds were rejoined. The ceiba tree as both symbol of the city and home of Changó legitimated a political structure in which Afro-Cubans were simultaneously children of Changó, the Spanish king, the captain-general, and the city's elite.

In Africa, local chiefs protected their subjects and passed on their dynastic lines with the aid of orichas, which were associated with a chief's town or city. This pattern continued in a hybridized form in Cuba. Connection and identification with a city seems to have been an important aspect of Afro-Cuban existence. As with Creoles, Afro-Cubans found significantly more agency to improve their condition in the cities particularly in the cabildos. One of the principle concerns of cabildos was collecting *aguinaldo* (money gratuities) to accumulate the means to buy their brethren out of slavery. In the Plaza de Armas, during the Day of Kings, in the meeting between cabildo king and captain general, both power and money were exchanged. Symbolically inverting, contesting, and momentarily transforming the social order through ritual performance was only possible in cities. Therefore, urban symbolic projects that elevated the city's status, like El

Templete, were targeted at Afro-Cuban populations in an attempt to manipulate their reception of the city's social order. If the city was graced by Changó, this message suggested that the oricha consecrated its rulers and social order. Colonial authorities, for their part, hoped that such visual programs would discourage violent insurrection and increase acceptance of the colonial system.

CONCLUSION

In the late eighteenth-century, Francisco de Arango y Parreño's plan to develop the sugar industry led to the development of ideals of self-interest, free trade, efficiency, and technological innovation in the Cuban planter class, which found expression through the use of a Neo-Classical idiom. Under the aegis of Spanish Colonial officials, the Sociedad Económica de Amigos del País, and Bishop Espada, the early nineteenth-century witnessed the development of a Cuban Neo-Classical language of forms. The process by which Neo-Classical programs began to reference local society was gradual and culminated in El Templete of 1828, a monument that grew from a volatile political moment. The patronage of the monument was complex. The heightened self-awareness of the Creole planter class spurred the Sociedad Económica to look for ways to elevate local Cuban culture, while Bishop Espada sought opportunities to express his anti-absolutist ideology. The Spanish authorities, reeling from the loss of New Spain and other major South American territories, needed a high-publicity project that would reify Cuba's loyalty to Spain. These complex forces essentially produced the monument known as El Templete from which each group benefitted.

El Templete, while drawing on universal symbols formulated by French Neo-Classical theorists, architects, and painters, became a Cuban expression by appropriating local history and social experience. Juan Bautista Vermay pictorially translated the symbolic valences of the urban site into lucid murals of the first mass, the first cabildo, and the inauguration ceremony of the monument to make the work "speak" to its time and place. As the architecture of the shrine, designed by military engineer Antonio María de la Torre, communicated the tectonic clarity which Havana's Baroque cathedral lacked,

the paintings became signifiers of the shrine's commemorative function. This emphasis on transparency elevated reason over the passions and vices harbored in Hispano-Mudéjar and Baroque forms. Neo-Classicism presented a code for "progress" and "modernity," in contrast to "tradition" and "custom." El Templete was thus endorsed by the Sociedad Económica as a pedagogical tool that would teach moral and civic virtue to the Cuban planter class. Members of the Sociedad, mostly Freemasons, believed in architecture as a conventional language of forms that could communicate, through abstractions, the fundamental principles of Nature. Society, having comprehended these principles through art and architecture, could begin to live progressively.

The polysemic nature of colonial urban space was, to some extent, understood by the planners of El Templete and Juan Bautista Vermay. The shrine possessed images intended for a broad audience, including Peninsulars, Creole elites, middle-class Creoles, Afro-Cubans, and Africans reflecting the social order manifested in public rituals in the urban sphere. Vermay essentially ranked and reinforced the colonial social order in the inauguration painting by reference to historical precedent in the paintings of the first mass and cabildo. Although Neo-Classicism became distinctly Cuban and localized in El Templete, the monument retained the universalizing valences of this idiom by its assertion of the absolute and "natural" authority of the white classes over colonial society. In spite of attempts by Peninsulars to co-opt the meanings of the monument to reassert Spanish exceptionalism, Cubans could find affirmation of the authenticity of their identities in the Indian figures that populated the two history paintings. The concentration of these images on the symbolic site further testified to the veracity of the

messages to all audiences, particularly the literate Creole upper classes whose identities were coalescing in the conceived space of education, literacy, visual arts, and sciences.

Both the conquistadors and Indians in the paintings of the first mass and cabildo referenced Cuban ancestors to Creole audiences. Images of Diego Velázquez recalled ancestral land claims; a scene of the first cabildo reminded Creoles of their natural right to control the distribution of these lands. The Christianized Indian figures in the history paintings referred to non-Spanish elements indicative of an American identity. The Indian figures became a trope appropriated by Afro-Cuban and creole radicals, Cuban planters, and creole intellectuals alike to dignify their existences by locating an American authenticity. The triad assembled by Vermay in *The First Cabildo*, including Velázquez and the Native mother and child, suggested miscegenation, another distinctly American characteristic that differentiated Creoles from Peninsulars. The growing distinction in nineteenth-century Cuba between *naturales* (natives) and foreigners intersected with this pictorial definition of the Cuban “race.”

While the paintings of the first mass and cabildo defined “race” in historical terms, the inauguration painting mediated between past and present, bringing ancestral claims to the contemporary setting. The tableaux captured the elite view of the city in political and racialized terms. The predominance of Peninsulars centering on Captain General Vives revealed a city politically and economically dominated by the Spanish. Vermay elevated the Bishop above the civil authorities, yet portrayed the Creole elite in a marginal position to the Peninsulars, albeit above and more privileged than the Creole middle classes observing from a distance outside the fence. Vermay’s fidelity to Neo-Classical painting, including the rigorously frontal view, philosophical calm, ordered

narrative storytelling, and balance of horizontal and verticle, projected a balanced and stable vision of an idealized social order.

Within this order, the artist carefully framed the African and Afro-Cuban presence in colonial society (by 1828 comprising a population majority) in the figures of the *negro* domestic slave/servant and the *mulatto* captain of the city guard. These figures are measured visually against white society to locate their perceived strengths and inequities. The domestic servant reveals both her docility and loyalty yet simultaneously divulges, by her reaction, a fundamentally superstitious nature incapable of grasping reason without white assistance. The captain of the city guard is measured against the captain general, revealing the mulatto man's much shorter (and therefore weaker) stature, yet simultaneously suggesting him as a "mixed-race" individual who can be taught to emulate white manners and laws. Both figures are thus ultimately redeemable and can be "civilized" as the Indians were in the time of the conquistadors. These images served to teach Africans and Afro-Cubans to accept their positions in colonial society and behave with virtue, faithfully executing their duties. The images also assuaged the white viewer by reducing the perceived African threat on the island to a manageable compartment embodied by two small and unimimidating figures.

Irrespective of intended meanings and programmatic reception, we have learned that the dynamics of the colonial population in Havana generated readings of the shrine completely outside the white echelons. Afro-Cuban Santería practitioners would have interpreted a monument incorporating prominent ceiba tree symbolism as a reference to the powerful oricha Changó. The configuration of El Templete suggested to a santero/a that Changó had blessed the city and its fathers, both past and present. I suggest that the

Spanish authorities and the Creole elite took notice of the importance of ceiba trees for African and Afro-Cuban populations and augmented the ceiba tree symbolism with these factors in mind. This symbolic maneuver ran contemporary to attempts to “whiten” the island, a perceived need to regulate the island’s African population, that dated back to the Haitian Revolution of 1791. The “Africanization” panic of 1827, when census figures revealed an impending African majority, shocked the authorities and the cultural elite into action resulting in the construction of El Templete the following year.

El Templete presents a dramatic example of the Americanization of Neo-Classicism in nineteenth-century Latin America, a process by which universal symbols were appropriated for local purposes. This process of reconfiguration and adaptation of European practices and forms to the local American environment is common throughout the colonial period, but the forms these processes took in the early nineteenth-century speak of the particulars time and place. For local society, these forms carried values of increased rationalism, education, material progress, nationalism, local identity, race, class, and gender to the varied audiences who negotiated and interpreted them. Rather than the adaptation of a universal language of material progress that would elevate all of society, Neo-Classicism in Latin America had serious implications for the unequal distribution of power and knowledge, revealing a persistent coloniality. We should multiply our studies on how the abrupt introduction of Neo-Classicism in eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century Latin America became an instrument for the local elite to represent, in the words of Angel Rama, “...things as yet only imagined.”

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