URBAN FORM IN SPANISH AMERICAN COLONIAL CITIES: CARTAGENA DE INDIAS, NEW GRANADA, IN 1777

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ABSTRACT: *The traditional model of the Spanish American colonial city emphasizes the significance of a central plaza surrounded by buildings, people and economic activities of the highest status. The principal church, civil administrative offices, and homes and businesses of the wealthiest elite were concentrated on or near this central plaza. Residents and land uses of lesser social and economic status were found with increasing distance from the central plaza. The accuracy of this model is examined with data from a census carried out in 1777 in Cartagena, New Granada (today Colombia). The census data show that the pattern of the traditional model was evident in Cartagena at the level of the barrio or neighborhood. However, individual clusters of residents, activities or land uses were scattered throughout the city without necessarily conforming to the traditional pattern.*

Keywords: *Cartagena, Colonial city, Urban form, Plaza*

INTRODUCTION

In 1980, Griffin and Ford introduced a comprehensive model of changing urban form in Latin American cities, a model which provided a baseline for future debate, empirical studies and models of increasing complexity. Their emphasis was on how land use patterns changed with modernization, industrialization and population growth, but the starting point for their model was the traditional Spanish American colonial city.

The colonial city that Griffin and Ford incorporated into their model was apparently shaped in large part by the Laws of the Indies (Nuttall, 1922; Stanislawski, 1947; Crouch et al., 1982), which "mandated everything from treatment of the Indians to the width of streets" (Nuttall, 1922, p. 398). A central plaza was the focus of the entire city and a geometric grid of streets. Surrounding the plaza were the buildings of highest status and authority, such as the cathedral or principal church, the town council, and offices of important officials. Surrounding this core were the residences and businesses of Spaniards, and then, at a greater distance from the central plaza, those belonging to citizens of mixed races, lower-status occupations, or lower social status. This had generally been accepted as an accurate description of colonial city cores when Griffin and Ford developed their model. As they put it, "Almost by decree,

increased distance from the plaza, the core of urban activity, meant decreased social and economic status for residents" (Griffin and Ford, 1980, p. 399). Later discussion and alternative models introduced more details or brought our understanding up to date to the twenty-first century, but there has been almost unanimous agreement about the form of the colonial city and the importance of the central plaza. As Crouch et al. (1982, p. 42) describe it, "The importance of the main plaza in the history of the cities and towns of Hispanic America cannot be overemphasized, for its role as the center of civic life has endured ever since its creation as the pivotal space around which the entire town's plan evolved."

This paper asks how closely Cartagena de Indias, New Granada (today Colombia) conformed to that generally accepted model, with population, buildings and activities of highest status located closest to the central plaza and a decline in status with distance from the center. Are there complexities in Cartagena's social and economic geography that provide additional details about colonial urban form? These questions can be answered with data from a civil census conducted in 1777 in Cartagena (and in most places in Spain's colonies). Cartagena's streets, neighborhoods, and buildings were enumerated in this census, each individual was counted, and his or her sex, marital status, race, age, occupation, and relationship to others in the household were recorded. This information makes it possible to reconstruct the

spatial patterns of population and status throughout the city.

BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Cartagena de Indias was founded in 1533 and quickly became one of Spain's most important Caribbean ports. Its broad and easily defended harbor was located on a bay that extended off the Caribbean Sea and behind the city itself. This harbor gave the city important commercial, navigational and strategic advantages (Del Castillo Mathieu, 1997; Grahn, 1991). Port cities of Spain's American colonies were the gateways for advancing the colonial enterprise, and the handful that were given official status in the colonial era, such as Cartagena, were of particular significance. Cartagena's location and function were so important that the city suffered frequent naval attacks and raids by pirates, and was therefore heavily fortified. Historians have detailed the colonial city's vulnerability to attacks, the events of battles, feats of engineering in construction of fortifications, and the city's role in regional and international commerce (including slave trafficking and smuggling). They have also produced a number of descriptions of the buildings, streets and important figures of Cartagena's history. By the seventeenth century Cartagena began to face competition for commercial trade and influence as Mexico became a principal supplier of silver to Spain (Grahn, 1991). And the economic vitality of the region began to shift westward with the construction of a new canal

(Segovia Salas, 2001). Nevertheless, Cartagena continued to grow and expand, with a population of about 12,700 in 1772 and 17,600 in 1809 (Bossa Herazo, 1967).

Demographic studies of colonial Cartagena have analyzed the city's total demographic make-up and, to some extent, the populations of barrios, or urban administrative units, as well (Aguilera Díaz and Meisel Roca, 2006; Meisel Roca and Aguilera Díaz, 1998; Rodríguez, 1997). However, a street-by-street map of these demographic characteristics has yet to be produced. According to the 1777 census, Cartagena had a total of 13,690 residents living in five barrios (Table 1). According to Meisel Roca and Aguilera Díaz (1998), females outnumbered males (7,409 to 6,281), an imbalance that was greatest in the city's slave population. They suggest that the high death rate among male slaves and their exportation to interior mines and haciendas may have been causes of this imbalance. Nearly one-third of the residents were white or Spanish, and nearly one-half were free people of mixed racial ancestry. These were mostly *pardos*, usually free people of color, although this definition and usage varied considerably (Kinsbruner, 2005). About 19% of the residents were slaves, many of them brought to Cartagena in part to maintain and expand its fortifications.

The city was constrained on a peninsula, and within the limits imposed by its irregular shape, the city included the usual features of Spain's colonial urban form (Figure 1). The street grid was as regular as one could expect, and blocks were reasonably geometric. The center of civil and religious authority was the central plaza, the Plaza Mayor. Nearby were

Table 1. Population of Cartagena, 1777

	Inner Barrios		**Outer Barrios**		**Total**	**Total**
	San Sebastián	**La Merced**	**Santo Toribio**	**Getsemaní**	**4 Barrios**	**(City)**
Total Population	1,618	1,610	3,166	4,054	10,448	13,690
Males	762	588	1,220	1,686	588	7,409
Females	853	977	1,937	2,365	6,132	6,281
Not Recorded*	3	45	9	3	60	
Slaves	263	438	643	188	1,532	
White or Spanish Primary Household Heads (N)	92	90	113	Race was not indicated in the census	295	
% of Barrio's Primary Household Heads	55%	68%	37%			
Two-story houses (N)	97	52	37	33	219	
% of Barrios' Houses	52%	36%	11%	7%		

*The final census returns did not include this category.

the Cathedral, the town council and, eventually, the offices of the Inquisition. These were part of the barrio of Santa Catalina, which was surrounded by four other barrios. Cartagena also had a second area of interconnected plazas of great significance, located in the barrio of San Sebastián near the Plaza de la Hierba. Streets adjacent to this secondary plaza area held much of the commercial activity of the city, such as docks, shops, offices of import-export merchants, and warehouses. The presence of a second principal plaza area with a role that was quite distinct from the Plaza Mayor makes Cartagena somewhat of an exception to the traditional model, but perhaps typical of colonial cities built along rivers or seacoasts, as Pérgolis (2005) suggests.
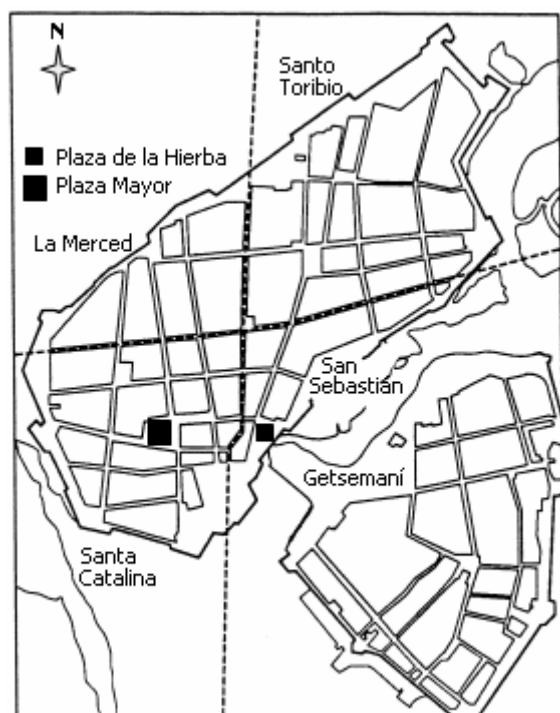

Figure 1. Cartagena in 1777.

Expansion outward into the blocks farthest from the Plaza Mayor had completely populated all five barrios by the eighteenth century (Redondo Gómez, 2004). The city was completely filled in by then, and entered a period of consolidation, with reconstruction, repairs, and greater density of construction rather than expansion. In this study, the two barrios closer to the center, Nuestra Señora de la Merced and San Sebastián, are considered the "inner barrios" because of their proximity to the central plaza. Rodríguez (1997) characterizes them as "*los barrios nobles*" with relatively luxurious residences,

some of them similar to the spacious countryside villas of the wealthy. The two barrios farther from the center, Santo Toribio and Santísima Trinidad de Getsemaní, are grouped together as the "outer barrios" and by all accounts their residents were poorer and more diverse racially.

SOURCES AND METHOD

The census that was undertaken in Spain's colonies in 1777 was part of the widespread Bourbon administrative reforms designed to produce efficiency and greater revenues. The census was thorough, detailed, and quite reliable. However, returns for only four of the five urban barrios of Cartagena are extant, despite numerous searches by historians and others over the years. The four barrios contained about three-quarters of the total city population of 1777 (Table 1). The census documents outline the census-taker's routes and describe buildings, households and individuals throughout the city. The races of residents of Getsemaní barrio were, for some reason, not recorded. Otherwise, a wealth of data is provided at several scales. To estimate the status of Cartagena's barrios, three demographic indicators are used here: race of the primary household head, two-story houses, and occupation of the household head.

Certainly whites and Spaniards had many advantages over people of mixed, Indian or African ancestry in Spain's colonies, and Cartagena was no exception (Cunin, 2003; Helg, 2004; Navarrete, 1995), but it was common for people of different races to share a household, and for households with residents of different races to share a building. Mapping the city's population by race creates some difficulties in predicting status, since the presence of blacks in a household could mean either a very poor household of slaves or a very wealthy household of Spaniards or whites who owned a number of slaves. This problem is overcome to some degree by considering the race of the household head in estimating status. There were usually several households sharing a building, some of them dependent on the building's owner and principal resident. The race of that person, the primary household head or the first person described by the census-taker for each building, is more revealing of the status of the entire building's population than simply the racial composition of the building's entire population.

A second indicator of status is whether the house was a one-story or two-story building. Two-story houses were rare in the colonies and were generally concentrated around the central plaza (Rodríguez, 1997), but Cartagena was different. Cartagena had an unusual number of sumptuous elite residences and two-story homes because of the many opportunities for gaining wealth in the colony. It was a major military fortification with high-ranking officers, the seat of provincial and ecclesiastical authority, an officially recognized port city for international trade, and a port-of-call for smugglers and slave traders. In addition to "palaces" of the wealthy elite, many two-story houses had shops and warehouses on the first floor, because the residents were involved in finance and trade, a higher-status occupation (Porras Troconis, 1954). In Cartagena, about 79% of two-story houses had a white person as the head of all households in the building, whereas one-story houses were as likely to have a white person as the head as a person of mixed or other races. Taken together, these facts underscore the usefulness of two-story houses as an indicator of higher status.

A third indicator of status is the occupation of the household head. Those involved in commerce were among the most powerful, along with officials, military officers and the religious orders (Lucena Giraldo, 1993; Uribe, 1995). Most men in these occupations in Cartagena were whites or Spaniards. In a lower level of status were artisans and domestics, who were mostly people of mixed racial ancestry (*pardos*) in Cartagena. Indians and slaves, almost all of them African or black, were dominated by the other groups, and the greatest number of slaves resided in Santo Toribio barrio (Table 1). The five most common occupational groups were examined, and the percentages of each that were found among residents of each barrio were calculated. Those in commercial occupations were divided into the very prestigious import-export or international merchants and the local shop owners or storekeepers.

RESULTS

Each of the city's barrios had its own personality and unique combination of characteristics, and these are quite consistent with the traditional model of declining status with distance from the central plaza. This is clear from a comparison of the central barrio, Santa Catalina, two "inner barrios" closer to the central plaza, La Merced and San Sebastián, and the two more distant barrios, Santo Toribio and Getsemaní.

Santa Catalina Barrio

The city's principal plaza (Plaza Mayor) was located at the edge of Santa Catalina barrio, with the Cathedral, the town council, the office of the Inquisition and the city jail located around the plaza itself. Historians have described the Plaza Mayor as an area of highly prestigious social and bureaucratic functions (Borrego Plá, 1983). The *Consulado*, the royal office controlling trade, was found at the extreme southeast corner of Santa Catalina on a block bordering the commercial district of San Sebastián.

Because the census returns for this barrio have vanished, it is impossible to reconstruct the demographic patterns of this barrio at the scale of the street or block. However, there is some empirical evidence that Santa Catalina was the center of power and wealth. The city's total population of whites and Spaniards was 4,034 including 1,413 (35%) in the four barrios of this study. (Census-takers in Getsemaní did not describe residents' race, but all other data indicate that the white population must have been quite small.) Therefore, Santa Catalina must have had the great majority of white residents of the city—certainly more than 50%, compared to only about one-quarter of the city's total population. The census totals also indicate that the city's residents included 2,584 slaves, with 1,532 (almost 60%) in the four study barrios. So Santa Catalina, with about one-quarter of the city's population, had about 40% of the slaves, another probable indication of wealth and status.

San Sebastián Barrio

The barrio of San Sebastián, close to the central Plaza Mayor, was a commercial neighborhood centered on the Plaza de la Hierba. This plaza was located along an outer wall along the waterfront, with docks, warehouses, merchants' offices and shops throughout. Traffic leaving the four barrios of the walled city was channeled through this plaza onto a causeway and into the Plaza del Camino of Getsemaní barrio.

San Sebastián was clearly a neighborhood of high status among the four in the study area. A large proportion of its primary household heads were white or Spanish, and it had a greater percentage of two-story houses than the other three barrios. It also had a higher proportion of businessmen than the other barrios, and nearly all the elite merchants with international connections (Table 2). In the late eighteenth century, there were 40 or 50 import-export

Table 2. Occupational Groups by Barrio

| | Inner Barrios | | | | Outer Barrios | | | | |
| | San Sebastián | | La Merced | | Santo Toribio | | Getsemaní | | |
Occupational Group	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	**Total**
Commerce-Import/Export	20	80	2	8	2	8	1	4	25
Religious	10	7	49	37	56	42	19	14	134
Military	18	10	49	28	100	57	9	5	176
Commerce-Shop Owners	6	9	15	21	28	40	21	30	70
Artisans	42	10	69	16	192	44	130	30	433
Sailors, Fisherman	1	1	0	0	9	6	139	93	149
Total	97		184		387		319		987

merchants residing and doing business in Cartagena at any given time. Many had come directly from Spain. Most were agents of commercial houses in Spain, and closely linked to them and to each other by family and marriage because, to succeed, they had to maintain extensive networks of contacts, customers, and sources of credit and capital. Cartagena's merchants often stored imported cargo and shipments of goods in their homes while they sold and distributed them to merchants in the interior or to businessmen throughout the city (McFarlane, 1983). Thus, it is not surprising that San Sebastián also had a higher proportion of males than the other three barrios, and fewer families; nearly half of the households of San Sebastián consisted of a single adult, most often a white or Spanish male living alone or with slaves or other unrelated household members. Many of these were merchants, traders and storeowners, and probably owners or associates of the many businesses enterprises that were concentrated in San Sebastián.

La Merced Barrio

Like San Sebastián, La Merced had a substantial proportion of two-story buildings, and it had the highest percentage of white primary household heads of the four barrios. Professionals were numerous in La Merced's work force, particularly priests and other clerics, storeowners, military men, and law clerks. Altogether, it seems to be a barrio somewhat lower in status than the busy commercial district of San Sebastián with its elite merchants, but above the outer barrios in its social and economic standing.

Women outnumbered men in the city as a whole, but the difference was especially noticeable in La Merced, where females made up about 60% of the

barrio population. In La Merced, an unusual number of women were in charge of their own households, and this was the only barrio where women headed more households than men. About three-quarters of these women were unmarried or widows, and most had companions, servants, slaves and/or boarders sharing their households, a few with as many as 20 or 30 people living together. Quite possibly some of these women lived with their husbands, brothers or sons who were absent at the time of the census. In this neighborhood of professionals, many male residents probably left town for long periods to carry out commercial, government or military tasks. And quite possibly some of the widows in this district were from prosperous families, with the means to support themselves without having to move in with brothers or sons. We can only speculate, since the census-takers did not record these details.

La Merced's population of whites and Spaniards was balanced by nearly equal numbers of people of other races. This was because La Merced had a larger percentage of slaves than the other three barrios, and nearly all of them lived with (and probably belonged to) other residents; there were only three households of slaves living on their own in La Merced. Jaramillo Uribe (1963) commented that many of Cartagena's households had far more slaves than they really needed, citing two women living alone with 17 slaves, two families that had 16 slaves each, and similar situations. Slaves could be rented out to provide an income, which allowed women to earn enough to maintain a fairly large household. So the presence of a large slave population in this case could be taken to mean that many households had significant resources and status.

Santo Toribio Barrio

The barrio of Santo Toribio was more distant from the city's center but still within the walls of the city itself. The Church of Santo Toribio anchored the barrio on the northwest corner of the plaza of the same name. This was a district of working-class families and contained about one-quarter of the city's entire slave population (Díaz de Paniagua and Paniagua Bedoya, 1994). It had a modest percentage of white primary household heads and a much smaller percentage of two-story houses than the inner barrios. The most common occupations were artisans (especially carpenters, tailors and shoemakers), militia members, and the religious orders in the barrio's churches, monasteries and convents. This was neither a district of high-level bureaucrats and aristocrats, nor an elite commercial neighborhood. It was of lower status than either of the two inner barrios.

Forty-two percent of the slaves of the study area lived here, almost all of them described as black. Eight buildings were described as *cabildos* by the census-takers. Most descriptions of *cabildos*, other than the town council which is clearly not what the census-taker was describing here, refer to an event, a day of relaxation and revelry for the slave population, with music, dancing and costumes. However, in this census, the *cabildo* was also clearly a building, and each one was designated as belonging to a particular African population. The building itself was apparently a meeting place for preserving and enjoying African culture, possibly owned or rented by free blacks. It also offered refuge and mutual aid (Sánchez López, 2006). Most of Cartagena's *cabildos* housed a small group of black slaves from the same African culture or place of origin, usually with a free black or *mulato* as the head of the household. However, one *cabildo* contained 28 rooms housing 47 slave families in separate households. Porto del Portillo (1945) reported that one of the *cabildos* housed slaves who worked on construction of the city's fortifications.

Getsemaní Barrio

Across the canal and somewhat isolated on a small peninsula, the barrio of Getsemaní was focused first on the canal and the bridge leading to the other barrios, and second on the Plaza de la Santísima Trinidad, which was more central in its location. This plaza was the site of the Church of La Santísima Trinidad, which had been built precisely because the population of Getsemaní was so far from the central Cathedral (Aristizábal, 1998). Because of its distance and relative isolation, Getsemaní housed many of the least desirable activities of urban life, for example the slaughterhouse, hospitals, a refuge for prostitutes, and a home for orphans.

Unfortunately, the census-taker did not record the race of residents in this district. However, there was a very small population of slaves in Getsemaní, and therefore most residents were probably either white or, more likely, of mixed races. For residents of Getsemaní, life revolved around the sea, and most men whose occupations were recorded were sailors, fishermen or simply "at sea." There were also a number of artisans and a great many men (61) who were listed as "absent." About three-quarters of the buildings in this area were single-story homes, small and crowded according to descriptions of the time, belonging to people of little means and situated on narrow lots (Porras Troconis, 1954).

Historians agree that Getsemaní was a barrio of comparatively low status, often referred to officially and otherwise as an "*arrabal*" (on the outskirts) of the walled city. Díaz de Paniagua and Paniagua Bedoya (1993) argue that in reality Getsemaní was an integral part of the city's society and economy. Its position gave it an important role in the defense of the city, and its artisans and slaves fueled much of the economic activity of the city. But clearly it was lower in economic and social status than the three other barrios.

Clusters of Status Indicators

House-by-house and street-by-street comparisons reveal a landscape of great variety across the city, more than one might expect by examining only barrio differences. Commercial and residential land uses were found next door to one another or occupying the same building. People of different races and occupations shared houses, streets and neighborhoods. These details, the often ambiguous facts of reality, are examined below.

An individual's racial make-up was of such surpassing importance in colonial Spanish America that officials had devised a precise and far-reaching lexicon to describe individuals. Census-takers presumably recorded each individual's race based on their observations and their interpretations of the terminology, and thus resorted to only a handful of the many possible terms. In Cartagena, census-takers used the terms *blanco* (white) and *español* (Spanish), *negro* (black), and *pardo* or other terms for persons of mixed ancestry, including *mestizo* (usually having a Spanish father and an Indian mother), *quarterón* (usually having a Spanish father and a *mestiza* mother), *quinterón* (usually having a Spanish father and a *quarterona* mother) or *zambo* (usually having a black father and an Indian or *mulata* mother). These

terms were fluid over time and across regions, and were therefore only crude indicators or race or status.

Clusters of homes with white or Spanish household heads were most noticeable in La Merced and San Sebastián (Figure 2). In La Merced, the same north-south streets with concentrations of two-story buildings also had clusters of white and Spanish households. In San Sebastián, particularly near the plazas, whites were also predominant, including several streets where every building was owned and headed by a white or a Spaniard. In the peripheral blocks near the city's walls, especially in far eastern and northern Santo Toribio, very few whites were found and households headed by blacks or people of mixed ancestry were most common. These were also the areas of the city where the *cabildos* of Africans were found (Figure 3). Clusters of white or black primary household heads, then, follow the traditional model.

This is not to say that neighborhoods were entirely segregated. In San Sebastián, for example, households of single or widowed *parda* women with their families were interspersed among the white merchants' households. Many of these women had husbands who were absent, and their children lived with them, often adult sons who worked as artisans. Similar households of black women were clustered in the far southeast corner of Santo Toribio.

The barrio of San Sebastián had more two-story houses than any of the other three barrios, despite its small size. All of its streets and blocks had two-story houses and the two blocks closest to the Plaza de la Hierba had nothing but two-story houses (Figure 2). This is not surprising given the commercial nature of this district. In La Merced, two of the north-south streets that emptied into the central plaza also had clusters of two-story houses. These two clusters were part of a broader, citywide pattern in which the streets and blocks closer to Santa Catalina had more two-story houses—and more status—than areas farther afield. On the far northern and eastern edges of Santo Toribio, there were many streets with no two-story houses at all. In Getsemaní, the pattern held, too. The few two-story houses of the barrio were located near the plazas and the causeway into the main city, and its peripheral streets had less than a handful of larger houses. The spatial arrangement of clusters of two-story houses, then, conforms to the traditional model of declining status with distance from the city's center.

Residents of Cartagena were employed in a wide variety of occupations, but the most common were the artisans, particularly tailors, carpenters, and shoemakers. Of these, three-quarters lived and worked in the "outer barrios" of Santo Toribio and Getsemaní but they were widely scattered. The
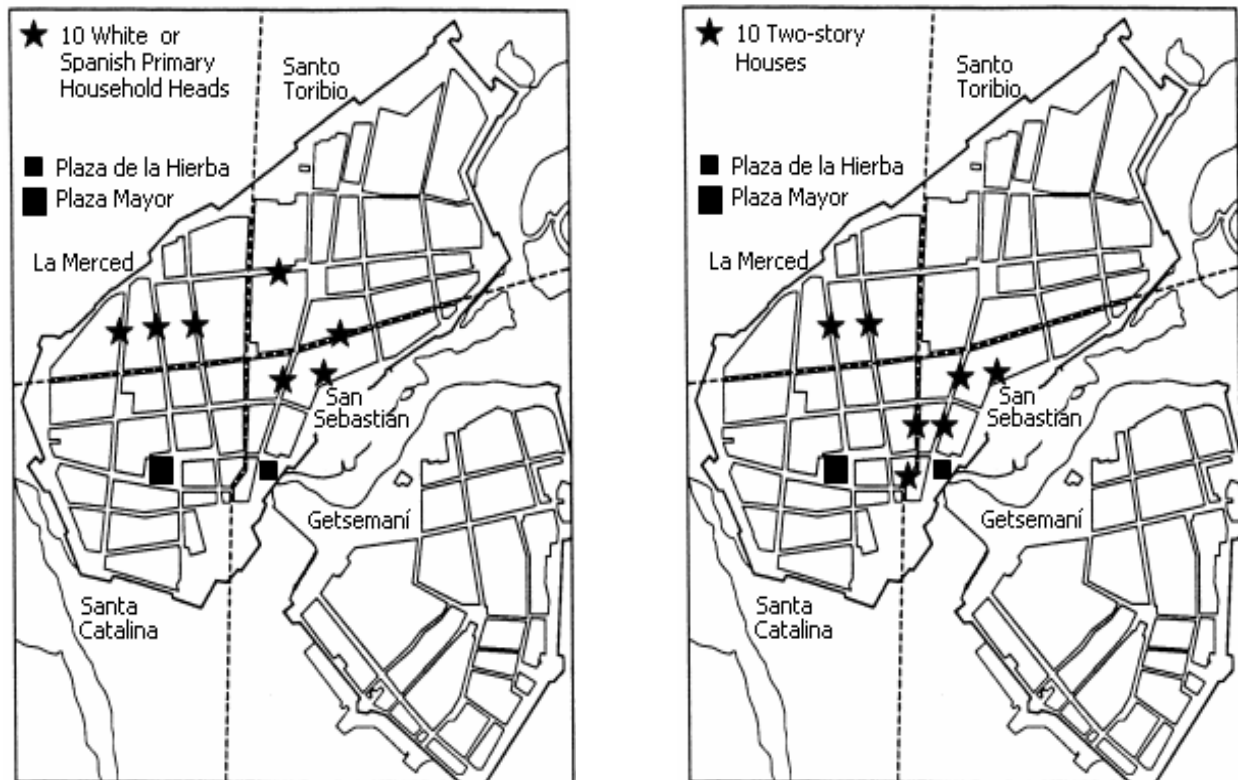

Figure 2. Clusters of white or Spanish primary household heads (left) and clusters of two-story houses (right).

second largest group was the soldiers, militiamen and officers of military units, and about one-half of them lived in Santo Toribio, widely dispersed as the artisans were. Nearly all of the sailors, fishermen and others employed in seagoing jobs lived in Getsemaní. Priests and members of the monasteries and convents were numerous, and three-quarters of them lived in La Merced and Santo Toribio near the churches and monasteries of these barrios. Finally, commerce and trade employed many men, and nearly all of those involved in the lucrative import-export business lived and worked in San Sebastián in a distinctive cluster close to the Plaza de la Hierba (Figure 3). Most of the shopkeepers and storeowners lived and worked in Santo Toribio and Getsemaní.

At the barrio scale, then, the model of declining status with distance from the central plaza holds up. However, concentrations of particular occupations do not follow the model as closely. Most occupations are widely dispersed. However, a cluster of import-export merchants was found in lower San Sebastián barrio near the plaza and commercial districts, close to but not adjacent to the central plaza. Priests, nuns and members of the religious orders were clustered near the churches and monasteries.

CONCLUSION

With one important exception, Cartagena of 1777 conformed to the traditional model of Spanish American colonial cities. The barrios of San Sebastián and La Merced, which were closer to the central plaza and the central barrio of Santa Catalina, had more of the city's larger elite homes, a whiter population, and residents employed in higher-status occupations of finance, trade, and official positions. These two barrios were actually quite different in their demographic make-up and in their economic orientation, but the record shows that the diverse populations of both neighborhoods were quite prosperous and influential. The outer barrios of Santo Toribio and Getsemaní were the neighborhoods of smaller and more modest homes, more people of African or mixed ancestry, and the homes and workplaces of artisans, unskilled workers and slaves. Clusters of white households, more spacious homes, and *cabildos de negros* are reasonably aligned with the traditional model.

The one bothersome point, and it is an important one, is the elite commercial district located around the plazas of the waterfront. Without the census returns of Santa Catalina, it is difficult to
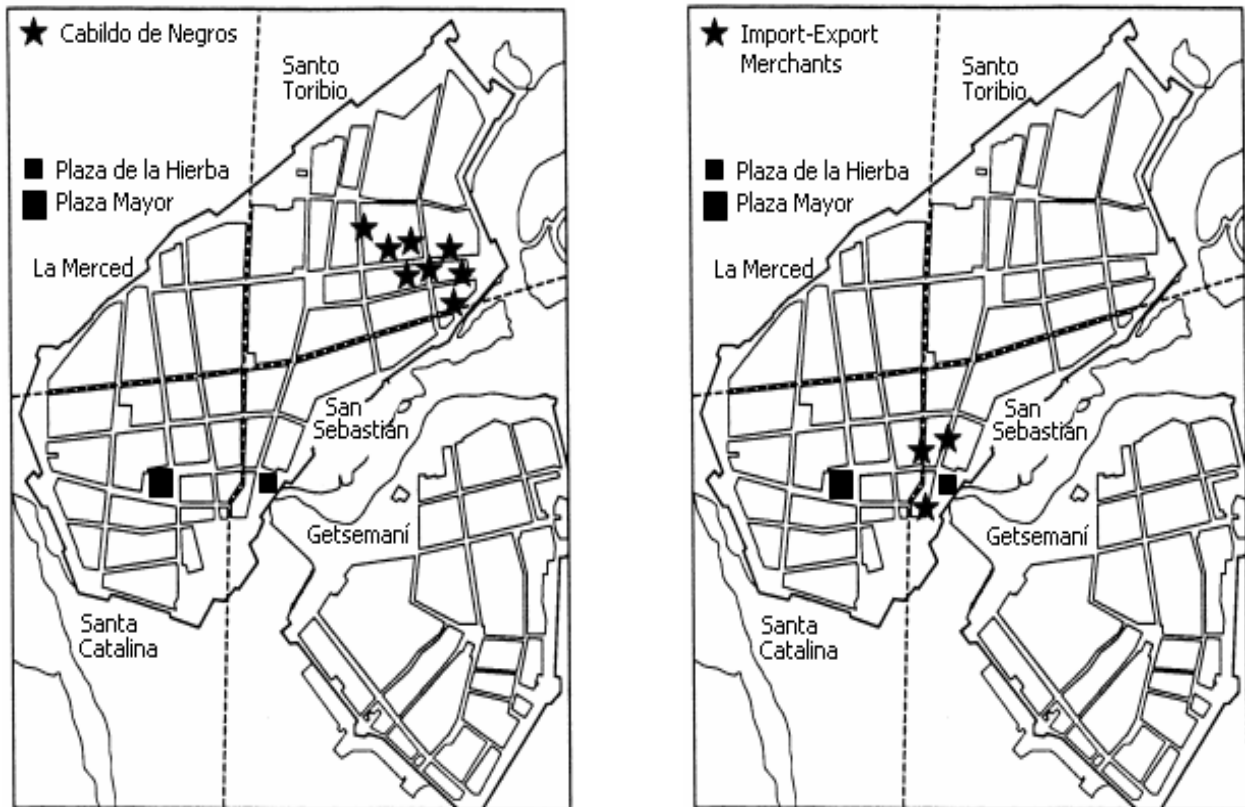

Figure 3. Clusters of Cabildos (left) and import-export merchants (right).

know how much the waterfront plazas of San Sebastián rivaled the central plaza in status. It certainly seems that the two barrios had different and equally prestigious functions. Santa Catalina was the seat of religious and administrative control, while San Sebastián was the center of commercial and financial activity. In the Spanish colonies, riverfront and seacoast port cities filled all of these functions and designated separate spaces for them from their earliest settlement (Pérgolis, 2005). This is in contrast to other cities that grew in population and size, adding secondary plazas and barrios in newly built neighborhoods as the city's edge expanded outward. In that respect, Cartagena resembles more the polynucleated settlements of Brazilian cities than the traditional model for Spanish American cities (Curtis, 2000).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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