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NO TOWN OF ITS CLASS IN SPAIN:
Civic Architecture and Colonial Social Formation in Sixteenth-Century Santo Domingo, Hispaniola

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German art historian Erwin Walter Palm's (1910-88) research on the colonial city of Santo Domingo (founded in 1496 on the island of Hispaniola and now capital of the Dominican Republic) has noted the plurality of architectural styles employed by early settlers in the construction of the first European city in the Americas. In his work of the mid twentieth century, Palm systematically identified Iberian stylistic models, largely focusing on religious works, and described their adaptations in Santo Domingo. In fact, the scholarship on sixteenth-century Spanish Colonial architecture in the Caribbean typically operates on the assumption that architectural manifestations in the colonial city reflect a continuum of contemporary southern Iberian styles and practices. The pattern of seeing that Palm and others have established downplays the fact that the architecture of early Santo Domingo was the product of an American society. This problematic legacy is due to several factors: one, the similarity of Santo Domingo's architecture to contemporary Iberian styles, two, the apparent lack of Native American influence in this architecture and three, a perception of the *placeless-ness* of the Caribbean islands. Studies of colonial social formation in the early colonial Caribbean, particularly as it relates to architectural styles in the Americas, suggest locally-oriented formative processes. Indeed, on close examination, we find that new American ideological formations around issues of social identity, political power, the island's native population and the introduction of new labor systems played an inseparable and under-investigated role in the development of early Spanish Caribbean architecture.[1] Our contextual understanding of Santo Domingo's rich architectural heritage is augmented by establishing connections between the material fabric of the city and its socio-political and economic history.

A useful methodology to better understand the Americanization at work in the city's civic buildings is to examine how a plurality of *European* architectural styles was appropriated by local elites in the process of colonial social formation. By focusing on local adaptations, we find that the city contributed to the construction of early modern American identities, early colonial labor systems and relationships between town and countryside. These cultural, economic and socio-spatial domains had serious ramifications for later Spanish Colonial contexts. Clearly, the city became part of an ideological framework through which Europeans began to conceptualize the western hemisphere. The architectural forms generated in this process, therefore, represent a local idiom in their direct relationship to the gradual

emergence of early modern American societies and economies. Substantial benefits to our understanding of American cultures will be gained by shifting our language, and thus our focus, on this material from its perception as a late Gothic, Plateresque and/or Renaissance phenomenon (all signifiers of European historical experience) to an early *American* idiom.

Civic architecture in early sixteenth-century Santo Domingo records how colonial governors and ambitious elites tested the limits of metropolitan power through architectural projects. Santo Domingo thus became an experimental city of the early Spanish Colonial enterprise: a testing ground for the role of architectural representation in establishing and maintaining power, constructing social identity and reinforcing new systems of production. The mandates of the Crown, in response to local building projects, reveal a power dialogue expressed through architectural representation, paralleling the initial conceptualizations of the enterprise of the *Indies* and emphasizing the disjuncture between Spanish policy and American implementation. A disproportionate focus on the religious architecture of the city, including its various mendicant complexes and remarkable cathedral completed in the 1540's, has inhibited such investigations. This essay examines the *civic* architecture of sixteenth-century Santo Domingo as a production of the first Euro-American urban society.

Established in 1496 by the brother of Christopher Columbus, the city of Santo Domingo was an attempt to create a permanent administrative center after a four-year campaign to map, settle and pacify the island that the Spanish named Española or Hispaniola (modern Haiti and the Dominican Republic). When Columbus landed on the island's northwestern shore in 1492, he encountered native *Taíno* inhabitants, who attempted to initiate trade with the peculiar newcomers. The admiral quickly established the fort of La Navidad, where he left thirty-nine sailors behind when he returned to Spain with *Taíno* captives and gold. His plan was to demonstrate to the Catholic monarchs, Ferdinand I and Isabella II, that the precious metal could be found in the newly *discovered* territories and that a labor force was available for its extraction. Columbus returned in 1493 with seventeen ships and armed with the tools necessary to transform the island's *Taíno* inhabitants into a slave labor force to work the Hispaniola goldfields. Upon his return, he found that the thirty-nine sailors had been killed by the warriors of a *Taíno* chieftain in retaliation for the settlers' raping and pillaging of nearby *Taíno* settlements.[2] Columbus then relocated the settlement to La Isabella on the island's northeastern coast in 1494, but within five years, the settlement had declined due to the discovery of gold deposits on the south coast in 1496.[3] Simultaneously, a European conquest had begun cutting from north to south

through the center of the island, establishing forts, which would become towns, such as Santiago and Concepción (both founded in 1495). The push inland was motivated by the search for gold (the principle preoccupation of the Spanish in the early years), the exploration of the remaining areas of the island, and the submission of the native population.

The mapping and conquest of Hispaniola corresponded to what Walter Mignolo has called a process of *emptying spaces* initiated by the Spanish in the Americas.[4] Erasing Native territoriality and memory, combined with the introduction of new power relations, the sources of which were obscured by a bureaucratic apparatus and an elite power structure, represented formative events in the development of an Atlantic world economy, and, ultimately, modern capitalism. Mignolo and others have explored how America was transformed from the *unknown* to the *new* in the European imagination, positing that whatever did not exist on the European horizon, did not exist at all until it was *discovered* and named.[5] The framework through which Europe conceptualized the Americas upon their *discovery* was one in which Europe assumed a hegemonic perspective, a domination of all other points of view. The *Taíno* of Hispaniola, the *Indian,* as labeled by Columbus, became the European *Other* and was framed in a variety of ways in the European imagination and in contemporary representations of Native Americans by European printmakers. The Indian was imagined and represented as savage, naked, cannibalistic–without culture, yet well constituted physically–thus possessing a natural affinity, as perceived by Columbus, towards European servitude.

In 1496, a new town was founded on the island's southern coast nearer to the inland goldfields. It was named Santo Domingo, known unofficially as La Nueva Isabella, and located on the eastern shores of the mouth of the Río Ozama. Christopher Columbus then attempted to govern the island from this new settlement. Initiating a system of forced labor known as *repartimiento*, Columbus employed contractual labor to accommodate a rival faction headed by a Spaniard named Roldán. The faction led by Roldán had taken a defiant position against official authority, organized a following, and allied itself with several *Taíno* groups. In this new labor system, Columbus allocated Natives to Roldánistas (followers of Roldán), who divided the *Taíno* slaves and pitted them against each other.[6] Columbus' deference to the demands of defiant settlers through the allocation of Indians as property enraged the Crown, which had mandated that Indians were not slaves but vassals who needed to be converted to Christianity. Columbus' defiance of royal authority–along with local complaints–overcame his credibility as an administrator. Consequently, the Crown ordered his replacement by an interim governor

Francisco de Bobadilla, who arrived in 1500 and had Columbus put into shackles and returned to Europe.[7]

Bobadilla presided over a population of about 300 and reduced taxes on gold production; which, although it upset the Spanish monarchs, produced major gold returns. The Crown sent his replacement, Nicolás de Ovando (r. 1502-09), a member of the knightly Order of Alcántara from the town of Cáceres in Extremadura, in 1502, to gain control over the *Indies* and of royal revenues. The new governor arrived with 2,500 settlers to join the population of 300 already suffering food shortages. The hurricane that struck the island that year destroyed the largely wooden settlement of 1496. Ovando, realizing the possibilities of limestone deposits along the shores of the Ozama River, had the settlement moved to the western side of the river and initiated the construction of a stone city. A sixteenth-century urban view by Italian mapmaker, Baptista Boazio, depicts Santo Domingo's location on the western bank of the Ozama River (Figure 1).

This western location placed the city closer to the goldfields of San Cristóbal and Cibao. Yet, food shortages and disease killed off an estimated 1,000 settlers in just a few months of Ovando's arrival. Those who remained, many of them ill, began trading with the 300 settlers already on the island, who lacked basic sustenance but controlled land and Indian labor.[8]

Ovando faced some immediate dilemmas: his colonists' need for labor, the Crown's policy of Indians as vassals not slaves and the economic vitality of the 300 settlers already on the island dependent on Native servitude. The governor's solution was to reinforce the *repartimiento* and *encomienda* systems, the legal basis for which had been established by the Crown. In the *encomienda* system (a more refined version of the *repartimiento* system on Hispaniola), Native villages would supply seasonal labor to Spanish landowners in exchange for religious instruction; Indian labor was given to settlers willing to cooperate with official authorites. As the scholars Deagan and Cruxent point out, what actually emerged was a social system in which the governor gave the best lands and the greatest number of Indians to Spaniards of high social rank while those of lesser standing received less of both land and Indians.[9] 'What emerged was a peculiar set of accommodations between Crown interests in religious conversion of the Indians..., the Crown's economic interests, the economic interests of the settlers, and Ovando's local problems of governance in a remote colony.'[10] What the governor succeeded in creating was an early elite social echelon in Santo Domingo based on political alliances and favoritism in the acquisition of property.

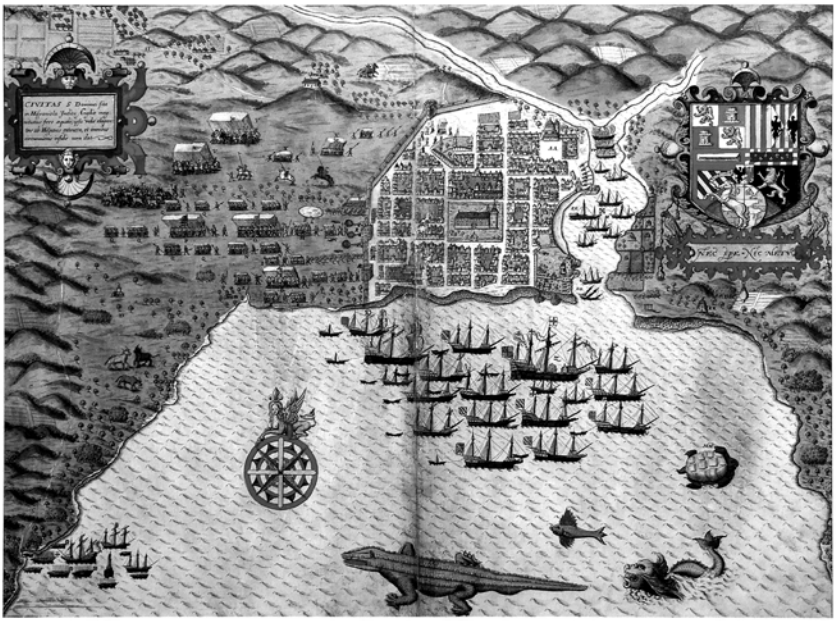

Figure 1. Baptista Boazio, *The Attack on Santo Domingo,* from *A summarie and true discourse of Sir Francis Drake's West Indian Voyage (1589)*, 5×8cm. The Dallas Pratt Collection, The American Museum in Britain, Bath, England.

While enforcing royal mandates to respect the rights of Indians, the new governor dealt harshly with Native resistance. Ovando targeted the remaining Native political strongholds of the island, including the southeastern chiefdom of Higüey and the southwestern Xaraguá. A rebellion in Higüey was met with the execution of 600–700 *Taíno*s, who were corralled into the chief's *bohío* (house) and stabbed to death by Ovando's soldiers. The governor ordered their bodies dragged into the neighboring plaza and formally counted. Ovando visited Chief Anacaona in 1503, a *Taíno* woman who governed the last independent chiefdom of Higüey. She was compelled to organize a meeting in her *bohío* of eighty district chiefs, at which Ovando ordered his soldiers to seal the doors and burn them alive. Chief Anacaona was hanged out of respect for her status, and the remaining village inhabitants were executed.[11] The governor's brutality forcefully erased the remaining Native political structure on the island, further *emptying* Native space, in order to prepare the island for the advent of European urbanism.

Nicolás de Ovando's stone city of well-measured spaces reinforced the Spanish project to consolidate power on the island, which had begun with Columbus' earliest attempts to map and label the *West Indies*. Thus, the

construction of the city as a physical and political space was interconnected with the imposition of a Spanish nomenclature on the physical geography of the Caribbean island. Ángel Rama has argued that Spanish Colonial urbanism involved the imposition of an *order of signs* on the American landscape, emphasizing the power of writing in the consolidation of territory.[12] Writing was the privileged domain of the city's *letrados* (literate classes), who wielded authority through the understanding and manipulation of language. Thomas B. F. Cummins and Joanne Rappaport, however, have extended Rama's earlier analysis to include a variety of intersecting *spatial spheres* in the construction of order in the colonial city, including alphabetic literacy, visual representation, architecture and urban planning, which worked together in the production of colonial ideologies.[13] Early royal decrees and laws in Hispaniola were reinforced by a more comprehensive '*order of signs*,' including the construction of an ordered city, architecture, visual messages on buildings and visible ritual performances that established a European-style order of both space and time.

The ordered city of stone responded to the necessity for establishing control over various groups: to coordinate the distribution of property grants and to oversee both the extraction of gold and its shipment back to Spain. A city of stone construction actualized Spanish authority over the island's Native population in a permanent form and established a sense of the solidity of Spanish law over factional groups. *Taíno* villages were built of wood and thatch construction; thus, Native leaders would have been awed and intimidated at massive buildings of stone. Such a city would also lend legitimacy to the enterprise of the *Indies* as a profitable endeavor, encouraging additional immigration with promises of material acquisition. The most desirable form of *property* that incoming settlers might acquire in this early period, according to Stuart Schwartz, consisted of a grant of *encomienda* that gave a participant in the conquest or an arriving Spaniard control of Indian labor and production. Schwartz states that, "These grants...were the key to the formation of the first elite after the conquest."[14] Grants of Indian labor to work rural estates combined with an urban existence to create an early modern American city dweller of elite status. The stone city supported and sustained the claims of wealthy urban residents to rural estates and reinforced both the finality of Spanish law and a new American labor system.

The 2,500 settlers who arrived with Governor Ovando in 1502 included brick masons, stone masons and master craftsmen, who began the construction of fortifications and houses along the first streets of Santo Domingo. Most of these craftsmen, according to Pérez Montás, were trained in schools of craftsmanship under the royal patronage of the Catholic monarchs and helped develop a late Gothic style known as the Isabelline or *the style of*

the Catholic kings on the Iberian peninsula.[15] This idiom evolved into a style known as the *Plateresque* in the sixteenth century, a word derivative of the art of the silversmith, which involved intense surface ornamentation within traditional frameworks. The style of the Catholic monarchs was thus a transitional style and its visual traits can be identified in many architectural works in early Santo Domingo.

The Catholic monarchs had presided over the expulsion of populations of Jewish and Islamic descent on the Iberian Peninsula in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. This period, one of extreme intolerance in Spain, also witnessed the ascension of the Spanish nation. This conquering mentality, coupled with ideologies of the ideal Christian community and the firm location of an *Other* against which fifteenth-century Iberian Christians defined themselves, was carried by the architectural forms of early Santo Domingo. However, in Hispaniola, the Indian replaced the Muslim and Jew, becoming an Ibero-American *Other*. The new divinely ordained mission became the conversion of Indians to Christianity and the expansion of Christian territories. Thus, Iberian visual forms that acted as ideological signals in Europe took on a reconfigured meaning in the Colonial Americas while maintaining a resonant power to delineate race, social hierarchy and over-arching political agendas.

Italian Renaissance aesthetics, also tied to political and economic motives, emerged in early Santo Domingo, including a more heightened concern for linear clarity and geometric harmony in architectural surface compositions and urban configurations. Italian Renaissance theorists, such as Leon Battista Alberti (1404-1472), propagated graphic models of correct proportion, believing that well-measured urban spaces endowed the city with a reflection of the divine order of nature and the cosmos. Correct proportion and ordered architectural surfaces intersected with the imagined space of the ideal Christian community, as that described in St. Augustine's City of God (begun c. 413 CE).[16] Concepts of *ideal city planning* had reached the Iberian Peninsula in the late fifteenth century; however, the labyrinthine streets of cities, such as Toledo, left no possibility for realizing these ideas in physical form. Santo Domingo was built, by comparison, on what was perceived as a blank slate upon which ideal urban designs could be realized. Regular city planning and this plurality of architectural idioms (the Isabelline, the Plateresque and the Renaissance) coexisted with visual elements of Ibero-Islamic origin, all of which were appropriated in Santo Domingo as part of an emerging Spanish proto-national style in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century. These ideal visions of the city also cohesed with more pragmatic approaches to urban planning learned in European warfare. Santo Domingo resembled the grid-planned siege town of Santa Fé, which was constructed

in 1492 outside of Granada for the final assault against the Islamic kingdom of the Nasrids in al-Andalus or southern Spain by the armies of the Catholic monarchs.[17] Thus, a variety of concepts, urban models, and architectural styles informed the urban configuration of Santo Domingo in the first decades of the sixteenth century.

The first street to be completed in Santo Domingo, *Calle La Fortaleza* (Fortress Street), ran the north-south stretch between the city gate on the river and its southernmost point facing the Caribbean sea, and became the city's early administrative center. The House of Ovando, built for the governor in 1502, reveals the appropriation of visual elements associated with wealth, power, and social status in contemporary Iberia (Figure 2). The walls were relatively unadorned, with surface decoration reserved for the doorways, the majority of which were accented by implied post-and-lintels in stone relief. The main entryway, however, consisted of a large door surmounted by stone relief Gothic tracery, visually aligning Ovando with the formal languages of Isabella II, who had appropriated French and Flemish Gothic idioms to represent the monarchy. Above this relief sculpture, an *arrabá* (a rectangular ornamentation of Islamic origin) symmetrically framed the doorway and defined the space between the door and the second-story window. Providing a backdrop for formal appearances by the governor, this doorway treatment resembled myriad examples in Ovando's hometown of Cáceres, where his family owned numerous urban mansions.[18] A reminder of Ovando's noble lineage, the doorway in Santo Domingo presented imagery that incoming settlers from southern Iberian towns would have identified as a signifier of regional dominance. The *arrába* in this American context reinforced Ovando as purveyor of *encomienda*, as well as identifying him as the king's representative in Santo Domingo.

The *arrabá* was a traditional element evocative of the *reconquista* (reconquest), the centuries-old Christian struggle to push back the Islamic frontier in southern Iberia. A substantial number of Spanish noble families had received their nobility for contributions to the *reconquista*. The *arrabá*, therefore, could have been used to reference such dedications to Christendom and/or memberships in prestigious knighthoods, like the Knights of Calátrava, Santiago or Alcántara (the last to which Nicolás de Ovando belonged). The *arrabá*, in Christian contexts, operated as a mechanism for signaling allegiance within the physical and ideological struggle against Islamic populations in Iberia. Similar motifs are found on other early sixteenth-century colonial buildings built during the administration of Ovando, such as the House of the Cord, located several blocks west of *Calle La Fortaleza*. While the carved cord connects the private house to the Franciscan order, the form that the cord took, echoing the Ibero-Islamic *arrabá*, formally mirrored the House

Figure 2. Exterior view: façade, detail of arrabá, The House of Ovando, Santo Domingo (1502). Photo by Author (2007).

of Ovando. These visual dialogues open up questions concerning alliances between powerful Spanish officials and local elites in the early days of the city. The distribution of *encomienda* in the early Spanish Americas involved an inherent favoritism, whereby the acting colonial governor gave grants to settlers from his hometown or province in Spain and to those of higher social status. Such practices existed in Santo Domingo as similar door frames on elite homes represented local alliances around colonial socio-politics and the acquisition of property.[19]

While the door treatment of Ovando's house resembled Iberian models, the absence of other elements distinguishes this building from comparable houses in Iberian towns like Cáceres. The lack of towers, associated with family status in medieval Iberia, distinguished early houses in Santo Domingo from their Iberian equivalents. The *tower-less* colonial city indicates a concern for more regularity, linearity, and urban uniformity reflecting, too, the influence of Renaissance aesthetics. Other non-Iberian elements included the regular two-door bays, the increased number of doors and windows, and the uniform building profile. The tropical climate of the Caribbean resulted in a need for the increased number of doors for ventilation. However, the emphasis on regularity reveals an ideology of order brought by Ovando in response to the unstable society he was sent to govern. Emphasizing efficiency in the building's economic use of space and surface ornamentation, Ovando expressed his desire to make the colony profitable for the Crown. This attention to the ordering of the building's surface features is repeated in the house directly across *Calle la Fortaleza* from the House of Ovando, which was built at the same time. The House of Hernán Cortés, so named because it is believed that the conqueror of the Mexica stayed here before his departure for the mainland, reveals an unbroken cornice line, regular bays, strict correspondence between windows and doors, and implied door lintels. Like its neighbor across the street, the House of Cortés seems to suggest practical concerns, such as defense, in the small size of the second-story windows accompanied by the need for ventilation in the large ground floor doors. Heavy wooden doors could have sealed these passageways, reflecting the perceived threats felt by the colonial elite in the early city due to the presence of Natives and eventually, Africans, Spanish factionalism, and possible concerns for potential raids by pirates at sea. However, the impregnability of walls and the fortress-like qualities of private houses also served a symbolic function: these buildings became *spiritual fortresses* sanctifying their inhabitants as paragons of the ideal Christian community.[20] When taken together, these elements reveal an ideological agenda in which the material solidity of the buildings and the linear clarity of the street reinforced a harmonious community, efficient commerce, and good government.

The size and surface articulation of these early stone houses reflects a high level of elite self-consciousness in the early city. Anthony Pagden attributes the search for social status as one of the primary impetuses for Spanish immigration to the *Indies* in the early sixteenth-century.[21] As Pagden and others have theorized, since the Catholic Kings had placed serious curbs on the privileges of the traditional nobility and decreased the chances for the lesser nobility (known as gentlemen, or *hidalgos*) of attaining noble status in Spain, the American colonies offered a territory free of Spanish restrictions

and were imagined as a utopia where many *hidalgos* felt they could fulfill their dreams of becoming noble. The ideal of nobility, as Ida Altman points out, included the acquisition of coats of arms, titles, a grand town house, an obedient wife and children, an entourage of servants and slaves, alliances through marriage and seats on the local city council.[22] This ideological framework of elite status took root in the Spanish Caribbean where we find a similar combination of features in the construction of social identity. For example, political involvement benefited a town actuary in Santo Domingo named Francisco Tostado, who built a house in the first decade of the sixteenth century that departed somewhat from Ovando's architectural language of power and social status. The House of Tostado, a corner house with a truncated tower (added in later centuries), possessed a single ground floor doorway with implied lintel, surmounted by a skillfully worked Gothic tracery window of stone.

Directly beneath the window sill are two recessed square panels, and beneath the door lintel are small, pearl-like ornamentations associated with the style of the Catholic monarchs. Erwin Walter Palm noted that, 'this ornament is well known from other constructions of the Catholic King and Queen. These balls, which are a translation into stone of the iron or bronze nailheads in *Mudéjar* adornment on wooden doors, have to be associated with similar motives in the articulation of entire walls...'[23] A horizontal band of spherical ornamentations combined with the tracery window firmly connected this elite resident to the monarchs and the local governor through architectural signs. Imagery associated with the Catholic monarchs, repeated throughout the city, functioned to convey a variety of messages and could have been received in a variety of ways. Reinforcing alliances with the monarchs legitimated official authority, as well as noble status, raising the prestige of the entire city by giving it a royal seal of approval. However, given the frustrations with the Crown among individuals who contributed to the conquest, some residents of Santo Domingo must have despised monarchical imagery. As Anthony Pagden has argued, ambitious early settlers resentful of monarchical restrictions on their access to political involvement in the *Indies* would have seen such imagery as a reminder of the limits of power.[24]

Stone houses of the wealthy and powerful in early Santo Domingo reflected attempts to construct a sophisticated image for the colonial city, to convey social identities in urban space, and to create local alliances for the consolidation of power. Spanish-American cities, however, differed significantly in their urban and rural orientation from their Iberian equivalents. As Ángel Rama has observed, the fact that the development of the Spanish Colonial city preceded the development of the countryside

created a paradigm of urban existence.[25] Early Spanish-American elites in Santo Domingo were obsessively urban creatures, seeking to shun manual labor, maintain visible town homes, and build their grand urban existences on the backs of *Taíno* and, eventually, African slaves, who labored in the countryside. Thus, consolidations of power through the use of consistent architectural elements served not only to forge alliances in the colonial city, but also to normalize and legitimate a colonial society of dramatically unequal social relations and new systems of production.

Aristocratic consolidation of the city in Santo Domingo also involved attempts to dominate urban visibility by one elite family. Rodrigo de Bastidas owned a large house on *Calle la Fortaleza*, which was built in the first decade of the sixteenth century and sited within the fortification complex that guarded the city's southeastern flank facing the water. The fortress-like courtyard house built of Roman style brick, the House of Bastidas followed the line of opulent mansions established by the House of Ovando, but it exhibited a different southern Iberian source. A one-story structure with regular windows and grand entryway (the present portal was added in the eighteenth-century), the Bastidas house became the seat of one of the first Euro-American aristocratic families. The descendents of Rodrigo de Bastidas went on to occupy positions of prestige throughout the Spanish Americas, and the family eventually bought up most of *Calle la Fortaleza*, including the House of Ovando after the governor's retirement. This urban territoriality proves that the more a family could spread their visibility through the colonial city, the higher their social status. In Shelley Hales' work on the relationship between the Roman house and social identity, the author lucidly articulates the practice of urban house building in ancient Roman society as, 'the construction of memory.'[26] The elite residence became a sign and mnemonic device by which not only was an elite family's social status constructed in the city through the presence of the house, but also their urban existence. These Roman patterns entered Iberian urban and architectural practice due, in part, to the historical Roman presence on the Iberian Peninsula. A similar pattern existed in Santo Domingo, where the Bastidas family attempted to monopolize urban visibility within the original colonial city core. Evidently, the more houses a family possessed in the colonial city, the more memory they could construct and the greater likelihood of their family's continued prosperity. The existence of the private house as a semiotic vehicle for family identity is an under-investigated but extremely important aspect of the development of Colonial social structure in Caribbean and mainland contexts.

In 1510, a new image of elite authority appeared in the city of Santo Domingo. The city's third governor, Diego Columbus (1509-24), who had arrived in 1509 following Ovando's retirement, ordered the construction of a palace in

an area removed from the former governor's residence. Sited across a loosely defined open space from *Calle la Fortaleza* and near the city's entrance, the new governor's palace consisted of a two story rectangular structure built of local limestone (Figure 3). The building possessed a five-arch double-loggia defining the central portion flanked by two rectangular stone masses. Diego's palace resembled the modality of an Italian Renaissance villa and was sited with commanding views of the city to the west and the river to the east, and with identical loggias on both sides. Service facilities were located on the ground floor, along with bedrooms, offices, a music room and a grand hall on the *piano nobile* (the noble floor). The central grand hall created a breezy space between the eastern and western loggias where Diego held banquets in which guests could stroll onto either side for views of the city and the river. Columbus' new domestic environs represented the most ostentatious statement of aristocratic entitlement to emerge in the city of Santo Domingo at this time.

The story of the governor's socio-political ascendancy explains the architecture of his aristocratic ambitions. The eldest son of the admiral Christopher Columbus, Diego was dismayed at his father's humiliation and loss of family prestige in 1500. After his father's death in 1508, he was resolved to restore the family name, in which he succeeded through his marriage to María de Toledo, the daughter of a powerful Spanish aristocrat. Through this union, Diego gained entrance into the Spanish nobility and was able to convince the Crown to allow him to restore his family's legacy in the *Indies*

Figure 3. Distant exterior view: Palace of Diego Columbus, Santo Domingo (1509-10). Photo by Author (2007).

by making him governor of Santo Domingo in 1509. Diego Columbus, María de Toledo and a great entourage arrived that year in Santo Domingo to a large public celebration.

The fanfare with which the citizens of the colonial city received this European noble as their new governor would leave a legacy in the Spanish Americas, as future arrivals of Captain Generals and Viceroys would take place amidst immense urban spectacles. Columbus' entourage consisted of many women of *pure* Spanish blood (lacking any Jewish or Muslim traces), who were to marry into the high society of Santo Domingo. *Calle la Fortaleza* was renamed *Calle Las Damas* (The Ladies' Street) referring to the daily strolls by María de Toledo and her many maids-in-waiting. From these documented rituals and the opulence of Diego's palace, we see that a new level of aristocratic performance was imposed on the city in 1510 to reinforce ideals of tranquility, good government, domesticity and social hierarchy. Santo Domingo would be a Christian community of *pure-blooded* Spaniards, a place where refined ladies could walk the streets unharmed, as well as a place where an aristocracy could grow. The construction of these urban images, both real and imagined, not only reinforced social stability but also intended to entice more Spanish women to the *Indies*. The conquest of Española had been a male-dominated venture and led to Spanish men taking Native women as wives and concubines. Such practices could never consolidate an aristocracy in the *Indies*, which explains the influx of Spanish women with the entourages of Ovando in 1502 and Columbus in 1509. The city of Santo Domingo became a space for centralized administration and the formulation of Spanish law, as well as a stable environment in which to generate and reproduce a white American aristocracy.

Columbus brought additional masons and master craftsmen to assist him in constructing this architectural image of local authority and familial legacy. The Palace of Columbus contained several flattened arch windows similar to those found in Ovando's buildings. Directly below the balustrade of each loggia, small pearl-like ornamentations–also found on the House of Tostado–visually reasserted Columbus' allegiance to the Spanish Crown. On the western façade, the central doorway situated symmetrically beneath the ground floor loggia was accented with Gothic door jamb articulations, an elaborate vertical framework filled with vegetal relief sculpture and surmounted by Gothic banderole ornamentation. These elements belonged to the transitional style of the Catholic monarchs, employed here to emphasize the legitimacy of Columbus' governorship to the general colonial population by connecting him to pre-existing visual vocabularies in the city. Columbus' recognition of his place in the official hierarchy was counter-balanced by his overt statements of aristocratic privilege. An elegant Renaissance staircase

complemented the space of leisure embodied by the *piano nobile*, which was built for the palace's northwest side connecting the upper and lower loggias. Based on a square module, the staircase was as much a space for social exchanges as a means of getting from one floor to another. A window and built-in ledges for seating are found on the second landing of the staircase for leisurely repose while overlooking the city below. Contrasting the opulence of this Renaissance stair, was the functionalism of a medieval spiral staircase situated near the kitchen on the palace's southeast side, likely used by servants and slaves.

The aristocratic sophistications of the Palace of Columbus furnished colonists with a new architectural image of the lifestyle and social identity of a wealthy American elite. This image was reproduced in the nearby Española countryside, as seen in the formal configurations of the façades of several sixteenth-century estates. These estates included main houses with similar arrangements of surface elements, including the arched loggia (single and double) flanked by rectangular building masses. Furthermore, such architectural idioms for communicating the leisurely life of an American aristocrat, first articulated in Santo Domingo, were later appropriated and integrated on the American mainland. Hernán Cortés, the conqueror of the Aztec empire, had initiated his career in the *Indies* on Española, where he was a notary in the town of Azua during the governorship of Nicolás de Ovando. Scholars of Dominican architectural history, such as Eugenio Pérez Montás, believe that the house across from the residence of Ovando on *Calle las Damas* to have once been occupied by Cortés before his departure for the mainland and arrival on the east coast of what today is Mexico. In such case, Cortés, who participated in the conquest of Cuba but returned to Santo Domingo before embarking on his historical expedition, would have seen the Palace of Columbus, completed in 1510. The Palace of Hernán Cortés in Cuernavaca, completed in 1532, possessed a similar configuration of two double loggias on each side flanked by rectangular building masses. Overlooking the town of Cuernavaca (*Cuauhnahuac* in its original Nahuatl), the palace lorded over a massive estate that Cortés had secured from the Crown in honor of his achievements. This example reveals the early role of Santo Domingo in both colonial social formation and in the production of forms to represent ideologies of power and regional dominance, as they related to the construction of the feudal, patriarchal, Spanish-American nobility.

As a governor and aristocrat, Diego possessed a coveted place in the society of early sixteenth-century Santo Domingo. The palace he constructed reinforced his position as lord over the extraction of raw materials from the countryside

and their shipment back to Spain. In an era that witnessed the beginnings of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, the introduction of non-native crops into the Caribbean for cultivation and shipment elsewhere, and the establishment of mining (three crucial steps in the advent of the Atlantic world economy), social hierarchy and aristocratic privilege received lucid formal articulation in the Palace of Columbus.[27] Art historians Reinhard Bentmann and Michael Müller, in their classic study The Villa as Hegemonic Architecture (1970), have argued that the Venetian Renaissance villa transformed social divisions within systems of labor into ideological constructions.[28] The perfected forms of the Venetian villa communicated that the surrounding social relations, tied to the inherent hierarchy of agricultural production in the Venetian countryside over which the villa presided, were part of the order of Nature and ordained by God. Similarly, Diego's palace in Santo Domingo reinforced the moral authority he held over the social ranks occupied by elite and common Spaniards, Indians, eventually Africans and ultimately the racial mixtures of these groups. The building's symmetry, geometric clarity and use of classical ornamentation associated it to an abstract space of perfection, suggesting a divinely ordained social hierarchy in the Americas. The building reinforced social and racial segregation by the symbolic divisions inherent in its arrangement of spaces (*piano nobile* over ground service floor) and the reference to these separations through surface articulation. The work of art historian, Charles Burroughs on the Renaissance palace façade has shown that the façade could serve as an index for a variety of social divisions, including internal organizations and delineations between house interior (the space of nobility) and street (the space of commerce).[29] In Santo Domingo, Columbus's palace defined a boundary between elite and non-elite space, as both a physical locus and as a sign system that demonstrated these divisions on the building's surface.[30]

The opulent imagery utilized by Diego Columbus, together with the stigma of Italian (i.e. non-Spanish) ancestry, produced many enemies for the governor during his administration. Rival elites and civic officials sent warnings to the Crown that Columbus was trying to declare his own sovereignty over the *Indies*. In 1520, the monarchy ordered the construction of *Las Casas Reales* (The Royal Houses) at the end of *Calle las Damas*, a project that would take four years to complete (Figure 4). The new structure served as a means of dividing the functions of colonial administration among a group of officials rather than leaving all of the power in the hands of one governor. A high court was established for the *Indies*, known as an *audiencia*, whose courtroom was located in the Royal Houses. The completion of the building complex in 1524 corresponded to the Crown's establishment of the *Consejo de Indias* (Council of the Indies), an administrative body headquartered in Seville, which was responsible for presiding over the Spanish-American enterprise.

The creation of the Council of the Indies reflected a broader metropolitan concern to institutionalize the administrative apparatus in Spain's New World holdings now that substantial territory had been conquered and pacified. The Royal Houses in Santo Domingo consisted of two large courtyard structures (resembling the plan of the Ovando House), which were joined to create one monumental building. Situated across the open, plaza-like space facing the Palace of Columbus, the Royal Houses followed the line of residential structures on *Calle las Damas* but stylistically, the complex recalled the austerity of the Ovando House. A grand, brick cornice visually united the two-story limestone buildings, creating a symbolic and architectonic crown. The entrance along *Calle las Damas* was surmounted by a large *arrabá* surrounding a second-story window, which was ornamented by flanking columns and entablatures, as reconstructed in the 1980's. By joining with the architectural idiom established on *Calle las Damas*, the Royal Houses represented a reaction against the individualistic opulence found in the Palace of Columbus. This new urban orientation introduced by a civic institutional building signified a shift in the conception of the colonial city. The Crown was clearly sending a message: the American territories were to be subject colonies and not equal kingdoms of Spain.

Figure 4. Exterior view: The Royal Houses, Santo Domingo (1520-24). Photo by Author (2007).

The role of civic architecture in colonial social formation in Caribbean urban areas, like early sixteenth-century Santo Domingo, reveals embryonic socio-spatial relationships. The urban experiment in Santo Domingo would have major ramifications on subsequent urban-rural configurations in the Caribbean and on the American mainland. Previous scholarship on this material, having attained high degrees of formal analysis, could be extended to situate the architecture of Santo Domingo within the development of new American cultural patterns. We learn that the buildings of the early elite functioned in the maintenance of colonial alliances centered on the distribution of *encomienda* and the consolidation of elite society. Colonial civic architecture provided visual representation to discourses of power and social identity, and assisted in establishing ideological signs that were meant to reinforce socio-political hierarchy and new labor systems. Architectural historians of the Caribbean have under-appreciated the extent to which the construction of Santo Domingo in 1502 was a response to *Taíno* and European challenges to centralized authority in the *Indies.* Santo Domingo was a formative experience in the establishment of an order of architectural signs (after Rama) and the concretization of power relations within an emergent Spanish imperial system.

The significance of Santo Domingo, given its early date and formative qualities, enhances our understanding of the development of patterns concerning the relationship between town, countryside, and labor in the Caribbean, as well as throughout the early modern Americas. A further question, beyond the parameters of this article, would be to connect these observations on civic architecture to religious structures and consider how the two functioned in unison (or in opposition) in early Colonial societies. The governor of Santo Domingo in the mid sixteenth century, Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés, in his General and Natural History of the Indies wrote that, 'this city [of Santo Domingo] is so well built that there is no town of its class in Spain that is better constructed generally, aside from the renowned and very noble city of Barcelona.'[31] In an attempt to attract settlers and advance his own career, Oviedo constructed the image of a new urban paradigm for the Americas.

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NOTES:

1. This article grew from research carried out in a seminar titled, *Changing Concepts of Space, Land, and Landscape in the Early Modern Americas,* led by Ray Hernández-Durán, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Ibero-American Colonial Arts and Architecture at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque. As advisor and mentor, Professor Hernández-Durán has contributed greatly to my appreciation for the social and conceptual dimensions of Ibero-American architecture, particularly as they relate to the production of early modern American identities.

2. Irving Rouse is the preeminent anthropologist of the *Taíno*. For an in-depth analysis of *Taíno* material culture and the impact of the Spanish in fifteenth-and sixteenth-century Hispaniola, see Irving Rouse The Tainos: Rise and Decline of the People Who Greeted Columbus (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), pp. 139-150.

3. The recent book by Kathleen Deagan and José María Cruxent draws on ten years of archaeological research at La Isabela in the Dominican Republic. This study reveals much that was heretofore underappreciated about the relationships between the Spanish and the *Taíno*. The authors emphasize the impact of American realities on the Spanish conquest and settlement of Hispaniola that raises questions on early modern American identity formation. See Kathleen Deagan and José María Cruxent, Columbus's Outpost among the *Taíno*s: Spain and America at La Isabela, 1493-1498 (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), pp. 201-212.

4. Walter Mignolo's work on the colonization of languages, memory and space in the early modern Americas probes the complexities of the conquest era to understand a process he calls 'the darker side of the Renaissance'. Mignolo's findings suggest that this process began from the first moment of the encounter, thus calling attention to the importance of appreciating the civic architecture of Santo Domingo as the product of an early modern American society. Walter D. Mignolo, The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality, and Colonization (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1995), p. 35.

5. Mignolo discusses Renaissance epistemology as functioning within a process of filtering the Americas, as Europeans applied new signs to previously unknown things. The way in which Europeans selectively processed the Americas into the *known* contributed to the *invention* of a new American landscape in actual space and within the European imagination. Ibid, pp. 30-50.

6. The conspiracy of Roldán gives us a Caribbean case study that relates to Anthony Pagden's theory of Spanish factional and aristocratic ambitions, which he claims emerged immediately following the conquest. See Rouse, pp. 150-161.

7. Columbus' willingness to negotiate with recalcitrant settlers infuriated the Crown as much as his failure to protect the Natives from exploitation and convert them to Christianity. Ibid.

8. Deegan and Cruxent, pp. 202-205.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid, p. 206.

11. Ibid, pp. 153-54.

12. Ángel Rama has argued that the Spanish-American city took on a new *order of signs,* one oriented towards a future, i.e. utopian vision. Ángel Rama, The Lettered City (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996), pp. 1-16

13. Thomas B.F. Cummins and Joanne Rappaport, *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.

14. Stuart Schwartz, *The Landed Elite,* from Louisa Schell Hoberman and Susan Migden Socolow, The Countryside in Colonial Latin America (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996), p. 98.

15. Eugenio Pérez Montás discusses the architectural forms of Santo Domingo in detail and

mentions various craftsmen and architects that have emerged from historical documents. His work represents the most contemporary study of this material in English. See Eugenio Pérez Montás, Casas Coloniales de Santo Domingo (Santo Domingo, 1980), pp. 20-36.

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

17. 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

18. The urban landscape of Cáceres contains many notable examples of medieval architectural façades that combine the arrába, the coat of arms, and Classical door articulation. This source contains many illustrations. The winding streets, irregular public spaces, and dramatically uneven architectural surfaces in Cáceres reflect that the city was *unplanned*. See Carlos Callejo, Cáceres Monumental (Madrid: Editorial Plus-Ultra, 1960).

19. These arguments have been developed, in part, through studies on the relationship between medieval society, power, and image reception with Justine Marie Andrews, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Medieval Art History at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque.

20. Clara Bargellini argues that early twentieth-century scholars who researched sixteenth-century Spanish Colonial architecture, particularly monasteries, over-emphasized defensive functionality. Bargellini notes that the arrangement of seemingly defensive elements, such as crenellations, on monastic buildings often seemed inappropriate to the function of defense. Rather, she suggests, "the redefinition of the massive buildings, once generally thought to have fulfilled real military needs, as spiritual fortresses, expressions of the church as heavenly Jerusalem" (p. 94). I suggest that civic architecture could have carried this symbolic function as well, within the Christian ideologies of early Spanish settlers. See Clara Bargellini, *Representations of Conversion: Sixteenth-Century Architecture in New Spain,* The Word Made Image: Religion, Art, and Architecture in Spain and Spanish America, 1500-1600 (Boston: Trustees of the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, c.1998), pp. 91-102.

21. Anthony Pagden argues for the immediate emergence of local identity and aristocratic ambition in the early modern Americas, similar to the phenomenon seen at Santo Domingo with the conspiracy of Roldán. See 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.

22. Ida Altman's work treats the under-investigated reality of Spanish returnees (sixteenth-century Spaniards who became wealthy in the Americas before resettling in their native Iberian towns). Thus, this source provides a compelling comparison of early modern connections in Iberian and American contexts. Ida Altman, Emigrants and Society: Extremadura and America in the Sixteenth-Century (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1989), pp. 126-164.

23. By *Mudéjar* Palm employed a term that has come to mean the visuality of Islamic people living under Christian domination. However, we are neither always sure that these particular groups were producing this imagery nor exactly what the imagery meant to populations living in post-1492 Iberia. I suggest noting that such formal elements were of *Ibero-Islamic* origin and concede that they could have been used by different individuals and groups in different ways and could have carried a multiplicity of meanings. See Erwin Walter Palm, *Plateresque and Renaissance Monuments on the Island of Hispaniola,* The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, Vol. 5, Latin American Architecture (1945-46), p. 2.

24. Pagden, p. 62.

25. Rama, p. 11.

26. Shelley Hales gives dramatic accounts of how exiled Romans would actually have their

houses torn down to erase their identities from the urban landscape and public view. These practices did not exist in the Colonial Americas as house building generally served to *civilize* the perceived *barbaric* frontier and sustained ideologies of the good Christian community. See Shelley Hales, The Roman House and Social Identity (Cambridge and London: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 40-60.

27. These and other reflections owe much to conversations with David L. Craven, Ph.D., Professor of Latin American Art History, and Ray Hernández-Durán, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Ibero-American Colonial Arts and Architecture, both at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque.

28. In this classic study, the Renaissance villa is discussed as a means of inscribing celestial order onto an agricultural landscape. The proportional system at work in the villa, its mathematical harmonies and its integration into a geometrically conceived landscape served to legitimate an unequal set of social relations including that existing between master and slave. Exploitative economic practices were thus suggested as constituting part in God's divine plan. See Reinhard Bentmann and Michael Müller, Trans. Tim Spence and David Craven, The Villa as Hegemonic Architecture (London and New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1992), pp. 27-37, 50-59.

29. Charles Burroughs deconstructs the complex semiotic structures at work in the Italian Renaissance palace façade drawing attention to the indexical codes found on building surfaces, the relationship between these codes and social order and the façade's function in communicating social values in the broader urban landscape. In light of Burroughs' work, it is apparent that in Santo Domingo, the construction of buildings with Italian Renaissance-inspired façades, such as the Palace of Columbus, served complex functions of signage in the developing city. See Charles Burroughs, The Italian Renaissance Palace Façade: Structures of Authority, Surfaces of Sense (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 1-38.

30. This discussion of the social artifice inherent in Renaissance forms as it relates to the loss of tectonic transparency in fifteenth and sixteenth-century Europe owes a great deal to my studies with architectural historian Christopher Curtis Mead, Ph.D. of the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque.

31. Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés lived in Santo Domingo from 1514 to 1557 and became a chronicler of the *Indies* after 1532. His chronicles reflects his enthusiasm for the developing city of Santo Domingo. Throughout his work, while acknowledging the sovereignty of the Spanish Crown, Oviedo captures a spirit of Spanish optimism on the economic, social and cultural possibilities of the Americas. His exaltation of Santo Domingo as rivaling all towns in Spain except for Barcelona speaks to a relatively early (c.1550) pride of place in the Spanish Americas. Don José Amador de los Rios, General and Natural History of the Indies, Islands, and Mainland of the Ocean, by Captain Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés (Madrid: Royal Academy of History Printing House, 1851), p. 211.