

The City of Zacatecas at the End of the 18th Century: An Enlightened Project

Lidia Medina Lozano¹, Efrén Montoya Ortega², Inés del Rocío Gaytán Ortiz³

Universidad Autónoma de Zacatecas

Abstract: *The city of Zacatecas, founded in the 16th century and with its unique characteristics of a city without a Renaissance layout, rather a mining city that grew along the course of the stream and the mining benefits, was part of the broader project to explore the mines in northern New Spain. Although it is true that throughout the 16th and 17th centuries architectural spaces were built that defined the physiognomy of the city, we locate a first modern urban transformation at the end of the 18th century, with the so - called Bourbon reforms, and their urban planning project. The first two intendants carried out some urban interventions, which contributed to urban reorganization, the most important of them was the division of the city into quarters, a measure that contributed to having a better social and population control of the city. Some new spaces were projected redefining the city. We have the project for the grain warehouse, which was able to be carried out at the end of the 18th century due to the pressing needs for grain storage, but for various reasons the building was unable to fulfil the function for which it was intended. The layout of the Alameda was planned so that the city would have a recreational space for the inhabitants of the 18th century, however, despite the opposition of many sectors of the population, it was frowned upon by society. Talking about the history, culture and art of the city of Zacatecas means referring to what we consider to be three stages of urban transformation throughout its history. In this sense, we will focus on three moments in the history of the city that underwent transformations that influenced urban morphology, which means moving away from other moments, projects and social actors that intervened in the physiognomy of the historic city. This study sheds light on how Enlightenment ideals shaped urban governance and spatial arrangements, providing valuable insights into the historical evolution of modern urban planning.*

Keywords: Urban planning, Enlightenment, Bourbon reforms, Zacatecas, New Spain

1. The Intendants

The first stage that we consider relevant in the transformation of the city, considering a historic center as the oldest space in the city, where social relations originate and where the city begins to be laid out, is located during the Bourbon government at the end of the 18th century. The urban planning ideal of the enlightened was of utmost importance for the cities of New Spain, since it was more than anything a measure of social control for the urban centers: ". . . for the authorities and for the elite, the streets should stop being a territory dominated, in fact, by the popular classes and their activities, to become a showy decoration arranged according to the laws of reason. . . ."¹

The main social actors were the first two Intendants who carried out some urban interventions, which contributed to the urban reorganization. The first of them, Felipe Cleere (1789 - 1792), proposed to the viceroy, Count of Revillagigedo, the construction of a grain warehouse, the expansion of the royal houses and prisons, and the dedication of the San Juan de Dios hospital to a hospice for refugees. But his death surprised him in 1792. During Cleere's administration, the city reached a length of 2, 500 *varas* from north to south, according to the register of Ribera Bernárdez;² a stream that crossed it along

its length with some bridges to cross it, of which the main one was the one on Tacuba Street. Apparently, from east to west, the city had not changed much compared to the 16th century, although it already had some urban transformations.³

As part of the enlightened project to modify and restore the economic, political and social backwardness of the towns of New Spain, the public works of the city began to be projected with the arrival of the Intendant; bridges, roads and lighting were improved; the royal houses and prisons were enlarged; a hospice for the Recogidas was created in the old Hospital of San Juan de Dios and the Royal Court of Guadalajara was asked to build a new building for the Alhóndiga. Let us not forget that since 1791, under the government of Revillagigedo, urban sanitation measures were created in the capital of the viceroyalty: paving of streets and squares, dredging of old irrigation ditches and construction of more efficient sewers, public recreation areas such as squares, walks and gardens properly illuminated and adjusted to the alignment of streets.

In Zacatecas, the city changed its urban appearance with the establishment of barracks, with four Indian towns remaining that were incorporated into the urban fabric: El Niño Jesús, San José de Gracia, Tonalá Chepinque and Tlacuitlapan; The

¹ Gutiérrez del Arroyo, Isabel, "El Nuevo Régimen Institucional Bajo la Real Ordenanza de Intendentes de la Nueva España (1786)", en *Historia Mexicana*, México, COLMICH, julio-septiembre, 1989, p. 107.

² The units of measurements in the New Spain, were different than the actual ones, one *vara* was equal to 0.838 meters; therefore, the total is 2.095 meters.

³ Its limits were: to the north, the town of Tlacuitlapan; to the east, the Crestón de la Bufa; to the south, the Garita de Barrio nuevo; and to the west, the Quebradilla mine. For its part, the three entry routes were: to the west from Fresnillo, Malpaso and Jerez; to the east, Guadalupe,

Cuisillo and Mexico City; and to the north, Vetagrande and Pánuco. The protection of the roads and accesses to the city was carried out by installing *Garitas* that were sentry boxes that depended on the Provincial Council of Commerce: to the north the "San Francisco" one, located between the streets of San Francisco and San José de Gracia; the "Barrio Nuevo", heading towards the Pánuco and Fresnillo road; the south *garita* or sentry box, towards the Tierra Adentro Road and that of Guadalupe. Magaña, Claudia, *Panorámica de la ciudad de Zacatecas y sus barrios (durante la época virreinal)*, México, Gobierno del Estado, 1998, pp. 60-61.

Mexicapan *barrio* was incorporated into the latter. At the same time, the increase in public spaces was reflected with the construction of ten small squares—de la Compañía, de la Garita, de Guzmán, del Maíz, de Gallos, de la Pirámide, de San Agustín, de Santo Domingo, de Villarreal, from Zamora—; three new *barrios* - Montalvo, Nuevo, San Pedro - , two schools - *El Mayor* and *Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe* - , added to the five convents - San Agustín, Santo Domingo, San Francisco, San Juan de Dios, de la Merced—and a sanctuary—the Señor de los Guerreros.⁴

In this context, the center of the city had the *Plaza de la Pirámide* - previously *Maestre de Campo* -⁵ and the *Plaza* and *Parroquia Mayor*, along with the Jesuit convent and that of San Agustín; It also had the Real Caja building⁶ and the College - Seminary of San Luis Gonzaga.⁷ The royal houses and a variety of mansions owned by the peninsulars and mestizos were already “two floors, two interior patios, richly ornamented facades, both on their walls and interiors; whose prevailing style was baroque, occupying approximate areas of 2, 600 m²”.⁸ In this regard, Berghes comments that “despite the difficulties that the country of Zacatecas presents, it has very good buildings”.⁹

Under such circumstances, there was a city in constant growth and population increase, where the Spanish still dominated the center. Public officials, merchants and miners prevailed in

“the main square, Santero alley, bridge and street of Tacuba and the street in front of the parish.”¹⁰ Meanwhile, the creation of the *barrios* far from the mining settlements caused the gradual abandonment of the former, which deteriorated due to time and rain until they became ruins.¹¹ Since 1763 the *pueblos de indios* of San José, Niño Jesús, Chepinque and Tlacuitlapan were formally incorporated into the urban fabric, they were constituted as *barrios* called “*de indios*” and in 1796 they were located in their respective urban *cuartel*.¹² Either because these *pueblos* were founded very close to the city, or because over time they came to annihilate and extinguish, for the most part, their weak buildings.¹³ The rest of the population that was not settled in these *barrios* was distributed in the vicinity of the urban center.¹⁴ Despite the importance of work related to the extractive sector, the population integrated into other activities, whether commercial, guild or domestic.¹⁵

Under the second Intendant (1796 - 1810), Francisco Rendón,¹⁶ some public works were programmed to improve the urban appearance. For example, ruined houses were repaired and some farms were built on abandoned lots to restore order and good appearance to the city.¹⁷ The French illustrated model of *cuarteles* was implemented, leaving the city divided into four major *cuarteles* and each one made up two minor ones, making eight in total. Thus, in 1796, with the arrival of the

⁴ Although José Olmedo only mentions eight. Olmedo González, José de Jesús, *Dinero para el rey. El padrón de 1781 y los artesanos de Zacatecas*, México, INAH, 2009, pp. 76-78.

⁵ In the words of Federico Sescosse: “It was initially called “*Plazuela del Maestre de Campo*” because on its eastern side the *Maestre de Campo* Don Vicente Saldívar y Mendoza built his houses, a rich miner and peacemaker in the “chichimeca war”, builder of the first Jesuit temple of the city and husband of a daughter of the conqueror Baltasar Temiño de Bañuelos—in what is now the Government Palace. At the end of the 17th century, Don José de Urquiola, first count of Santiago de La Laguna, bought the Saldívar houses, but the plaza kept its name. In the 18th century, the second count of La Laguna, Don José de Rivera Bernárdez, transformed “the houses” into a palace and in 1724 he erected in the center of the square, in honor of King Luis I, a curious obelisk made of *cantera*, decorated in its four sides with Egyptian hieroglyphics, which is why the Zacatecans began to call it Plaza del Pirame (sic), a curious popular name that it retained until the end of the last century despite the fact that the obelisk was demolished, as expected, in the midst of the iconoclastic furor anti-Spanish, in the third decade of the century”. Sescosse, Federico, *Temas Zacatecanos*, [s.e.], México, Sociedad de Amigos de Zacatecas AC, 1985, p. 87.

⁶ One of the few estipite baroque facades in the city and which was destroyed in 1914 during the *Toma de Zacatecas*.

⁷ Flores Olague, Jesús, *La fragua de una leyenda. Historia mínima de Zacatecas*, 1ª edición, México, Limusa, 1995, p. 202.

⁸ Toribio Rivas, Raquel Ciceley, *La casa de Rétegui*, 1ª edición, México, Tribunal Superior de Justicia, 2000, p. 30.

⁹ Berghes, Carl Von, *Descripción de la Serranía de Zacatecas, formada por I.M. Bustamante, 1828 y 1829, aumentada y combinada con planes, perfiles y vistas, trazada en los años de 1829, 30, 31 y 32*, México, Imprenta de Galván a cargo de Mariano Arévalo, calle de Cadena, número 2, 1834, p. 8.

¹⁰ Archivo Histórico del Estado de Zacatecas (From now on AHEZ) Zacatecas, 1781, Padrón, Bando, f. 2v.

¹¹ Magaña, Claudia, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

¹² García González, Francisco, *Familia y Sociedad en Zacatecas. La vida de un microcosmos minero novohispano. 1750-1830*. México, COLMEX-UAZ, 2000, p. 40.

¹³ Fernández Moreno, Joseph, «Ordenanzas de la división de la muy noble y leal ciudad de Nuestra Señora de los Zacatecas en cuarteles: creación de los alcaldes de ellos, y reglas de su gobierno, mandada formar por el Exmo. Señor Marqués de Branciforte, Virrey que fue de este Reyno, y aprobada por el Exmo. Señor D. Miguel Joseph de Azanza», en Ernesto Lemoine Villicaña, *Miscelánea zacatecana. Documentos históricos-geográficos de los siglos XVII al XIX*, [s.e.], México, [s.e.], 1964, p. 284.

¹⁴ In the upper and lower streets of Santo Domingo, Juan de San Pedro street, Plazuela de Zamora, Plaza de Villarreal and Calle del Coso. Zacatecas, 1781. AHEZ, Padrón, Bando, f. 2v.

¹⁵ For example, those in charge of the wine and mezcal stores; warehouses, shops, *cajomillos*, bakeries, butcher shops, as well as mestizo stores where new and old clothes were sold, called *almonederos*. According to recorded data, for the year 1781 the city's servants occupied a low percentage of the workers, since only some mulattoes or Indians worked in Spanish houses or on haciendas, convents and churches. Only in the ecclesiastical houses fifty-one people worked: in the main Parish nine worked; in the convents of La Merced, San Juan de Dios and San Agustín there were four respectively; while in the convent of San Francisco nine and in the priest's house twenty-one, including some entire families. These people joined the city's working population, whose economic stability depended on the mining boom or decline. Among the guilds included were shoemakers, tailors, barbers, stonemasons, water carriers, *nunfleros*, carpenters, laborers, stallholders, bricklayers, bakers, bacon makers, silversmiths, rocket workers, farriers and table scratchers for tricks. Between them there were nine hundred and fifty-seven workers who were organized in a specific activity. Medina Lozano, Lidia, *Las diversiones en nuestra Señora de los Zacatecas, 1785—1796*, Tesis de Licenciatura en Humanidades en el área de Historia, Universidad Autónoma de Zacatecas, México, 1998, p. 10.

¹⁶ As a result of the Bourbon reforms, General Visitor José de Gálvez announced that all cities would be divided into *cuarteles*, for their greater social and economic functioning. Thus, Zacatecas had the model of Mexico City in 1789, but it was not until 1796 when Zacatecas had this type of urban division.

¹⁷ Magaña, Claudia, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

Intendant Rendón, a new Government plan was issued in the City, to establish the division of *cuarteles*.

As a result of the administrative division of the city, in 1799 Fernando de Portugal, prepared an urban map in which he represented the city divided into *cuarteles*, fragmented as a Cartesian plan and covering the entire city, including the Indian towns. Due to the physical conditions, the *cuarteles* had a disproportionate layout, without equality of land, number of houses and residents. The ordinances refer to the difficulty of obtaining a map of the city due to “the extreme irregularity that is observed in the establishment of its Streets and Buildings; Since the town was located in a crooked and narrow ravine, it was not possible—even from the beginning of its foundation—to lay out the same streets and houses in regular order”.¹⁸

In that sense, the division of *cuarteles* and *barrios* benefited the city by keeping track of the residents, registering the nomenclature of streets and regulating their cleanliness, like any enlightened city. The town of Tlacuitlapan was incorporated into the second major *cuartel*, while the *barrio* of Niño and San José were integrated into the fourth *cuartel*. With such measures, the viceregal authorities had greater control to legitimize and order the cities. This new division, as specified in the ordinances for the city of Zacatecas, intended for the administration of justice to be more "expeditious", by offering greater attention and surveillance to matters related to public health, provisions that lasted until the first decades of the 19th century.

The division of *cuarteles* and *barrios* brought better road planning, streets were named and the cleaning of them and the different squares was regulated. A new category of public order officials called *barrio* mayors was also created, which were made up of a magistrate, a legal lieutenant and two ordinary mayors, who were in charge of four major *cuarteles*. These new officials were chosen from the population, that is, they were residents of the city who distinguished themselves among the residents for having an attitude of well - being for the city, that is, the latter would be in charge of the *barrio* mayors, elected from the population, for being decent by birth, that is, “prudent, urban, good men, who have what is necessary for their subsistence, with culture and civility”.¹⁹ Given the requirements of this profile, those in charge of occupying such positions would preferably be miners.

To eliminate popular unrest and control robberies in the city, public security was reinforced by installing day and night guards in the main streets and squares such as: streets of San Francisco, San Juan de Dios, la Condesa, Tacuba and the small plazas of Villarreal, Santo Domingo, del Maíz and the Ronquillos alley.²⁰ On the other hand, during religious

celebrations the city was more secured, since that was when there was the greatest influx of people, setting up patrols of aldermen throughout the day.²¹

Other measures of order and cleanliness consisted of incorporating a cleaning executioner, who was dedicated to supervising the cleanliness of streets and plazas, removing all dead animals or beasts that were in the streets.²² This undoubtedly helped a lot to the public health of the city, reducing diseases and epidemics. On the other hand, all food stalls that were installed on the streets would be prohibited, as they were not only a space for contaminated food, but were also considered indecent and offensive.²³ In that sense, work began on the new Alhóndiga building, with the project approved in 1804, but for several reasons the building failed to fulfill the function for which it was intended.

2. Conclusions

The Enlightenment's urban ideals profoundly influenced Zacatecas in late 18th - century New Spain. These transformations, driven by the Bourbon reforms, introduced modern urban planning as a tool for social and spatial control. Key interventions included city quarter divisions, public space reorganization, and improved infrastructure. This study highlights these changes as foundational to modern urban practices while reflecting societal aspirations of order and progress during the Enlightenment.

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¹⁹ Lemoine Villicaña, Ernesto, (compilador), *Miscelánea zacatecana. Documentos histórico-geográficos de los siglos XVII al*

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