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Intercontinental relations: the circulation of urban and artistic programmes

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Abstract

Research into the diffusion and miscegenation of European culture on the Global Map has been given a fundamental boost by academic research carried out in recent decades by universities and research centres. The year 1500 is a concrete milestone in intercontinental artistic interactions between Europe, Africa, America and Asia. In these territories and cultures, the Iberian countries played a pivotal role in the dissemination of European artistic systems. The design of urban structures, as well as architectures and functions, are great markers of this interaction.

Relazioni intercontinentali: la circolazione dei programmi urbani e artistici

La ricerca sulla diffusione e sulla mescolanza delle culture europee sulla mappa globale ha ricevuto un impulso fondamentale dalla ricerca accademica condotta negli ultimi decenni da università e centri di ricerca. L'anno 1500 è rilevante nelle interazioni artistiche intercontinentali tra Europa, Africa, America e Asia. I paesi iberici hanno svolto un ruolo fondamentale nella diffusione dei sistemi artistici europei in questi territori e in queste aree culturali. La progettazione delle strutture urbane, così come le architetture e le funzioni, sono grandi indicatori di questa interazione.

Keywords: Models, urbanism, architecture.
Modelli, urbanistica, architettura.

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1 | Introduction

European design and models were a hallmark of planning, knowledge and culture in the construction of new cities outside Europe.

The cultural and political relations between Portugal and Brazil promoted, from the 16th to the 19th century, an objective migration of artistic forms and models between the continents of Europe and America, namely in the various territories of Brazil, which is currently the fifth largest country in the world in geographical terms. It is important to note that the circulation of projects and designs also recognised a reverse route, i.e. from Brazil to Portugal [Rocha 1995]. The Portuguese presence first dominated and controlled the more coastal territories, then moving on to occupy inland territories along the river routes.

On the Atlantic coastline of Brazil, the defence system was developed as a guarantee of community settlement, which contributed to the development of urban agglomerations. The consolidation and defence of these territories were huge challenges in terms of knowledge and economic resources for the Portuguese Crown. It should be noted that the defensive architectures built in Brazil were at the forefront of modern pyrobolic practices and architectural forms that responded to this emergence of knowledge.

Still in the 15th century, the occupation of the Atlantic islands of Madeira and the Azores as virgin territories, in parallel with the conquest and occupation of strongholds in North Africa, posed other challenges.

Both situations raise questions about the circulation of European forms and models:

1. On the islands of Madeira and the Azores, the organisational model practised in the Kingdom was followed. In the same cultural environment, the builders of the various artistic facilities followed the practice in force on the mainland. With royal support, the foundation of the Cathedral of Funchal began in 1493 and was inaugurated in 1508; later, the occupation and organisation of the Azores required the construction of the Cathedral in the city of Angra do Heroísmo.
2. From 1500 onwards, the forms and models of European architecture circulated on the American continent, with the foundation of cities and towns in Brazil.

Following the Portuguese administrative organisation, reformed by the *Charters* issued by King Manuel I at the beginning of the 16th century, the central power sought to standardise weights, measures and laws, applied to all of Portugal's municipalities and extended to the territories under Portuguese rule, spreading to various continents beyond Europe: Africa, Asia and America. All according to the premise of One Territory and a single administrative and judicial system. The *Manueline Ordinances* (Ordenações Manuelinas), whose printed circulation began in 1514, applied to the whole of mainland Portugal and the territories and communities under Portuguese rule.

2 | Cities and design

Brazilian historiography has empirically established that Portuguese cities lacked a plan to regularise their layout, and thus the cities founded in Brazil from 1500 onwards suffered from a lack of urban study and planning [Menezes 2015, 19-20].

Three issues must be taken into account when scientifically analysing this subject.

The first one is the many of the cities that currently exist in mainland Portugal originated in urban centres of Roman origin. In addition to the cities that became extinct after the fall of the Roman Empire, and which are being explored by archaeology, many other cities resisted the cultural and religious clash and remained, transforming themselves during the High Middle Ages and continuing their evolutionary path to the present day. From north to south, we can highlight some urban centres: Bracara (Braga); Aquae Flaviae (Chaves); Scalabis (Santarém); Olisipo (Lisbon); Eborac (Évora); Pax Julia (Beja); Ossónoba (Faro). Later, the Muslim advance in the 8th century conquered the territory and imposed new religious rituals. In the north of Portugal, as in Galicia, the Moorish advance confronted Christian communities as well as structured and organised population centres. From this ideological, political, cultural and religious confrontation, the urban centres adapted their formal evolutionary process.

The second issue is that in medieval times, monasteries were key players in this process [Rocha 2011, 227-230; Gaspar 2002, 87-93; Rocha, Montero 2023, 283-290], promoting the foundation of urban centres, conditioning the adaptability of streets, squares and walls to the natural requirements of the site. During the Middle Ages, we highlight the plan defined by the cities of Porto and Guimarães, whose walls surround an irregular perimeter with various natural features, which modelled the organic shapes of streets and squares. These urban centres were designed and developed «adapted to the natural structure, in a symbiosis between man and nature» [Teixeira 2022, 113]. In the Portuguese diaspora, the monasteries accompanied the occupation and consolidation of territories in Africa, Asia and America.

The last issue is that more than pre-established plans in this historical-cultural melting pot, Portuguese cities developed according to an organic plan of adaptation and assimilation of intercultural forms produced and transformed in diachrony. At times, systematic planning of the

city's territory was observed, following orthogonal and rectilinear designs. The city of Tomar is an excellent example of the use of regular planning in the Middle Ages in Portugal.

The city of Salvador da Bahia hosted the first seat of the General Government of Brazil in 1549, under the command of Tomé de Sousa. In view of the administrative role that the centre would take on, the general government hired the appointed Master of the Fortresses of Salvador, Luís Dias, to plan the city [Dias 2007, 40-41]. Bahia, the seat and capital of government and the centre of Brazil's religious organisation, saw its sociocultural prominence decline in the 19th century after the Portuguese Crown fled to Brazil and King John VI chose the city of Rio de Janeiro as the capital of the United Kingdom of Portugal and Brazil.

The structuring and growth of the city of São Salvador attracted fundamental institutions in the 16th century, which contributed to defining the design of the city. Conventual units, Confraternities and Third Orders, churches and parishes, together with the houses of different social strata. The establishment of the Jesuit School in the upper part of the city should be emphasised as a determining factor in urban structuring. It made an indelible contribution to the development of the urban agglomeration in the lower (maritime) part and in the upper part to the establishment of the city's main architectural, religious and civil facilities.

In European urban culture, and as a result of the classical Greco-Roman tradition, public spaces are decisive in structuring the design of cities [Teixeira 2022, 27].

The doctoral study on the city *De Filipéia à Paraíba: uma cidade na estratégia da colonização do Brasil séculos XVI-XVIII* (From Filipéia to Paraíba: a city in the colonisation strategy of Brazil in the 16th-18th centuries) [Moura Filha 2004] unequivocally and scientifically demonstrated that the cities founded in Brazil by Portugal in the 16th-17th centuries followed a pre-established plan. In the centre of the city was the Municipal Power Building, or Town Hall, with a square in front; from the centre of the municipal power, several straight streets were laid out that defined the design of the city.

Although Brazilian historiography considers that the cities founded by the Portuguese had no planning, squares, streets and civil and religious institutions were defined arbitrarily, following the course of needs, and without prior definition of the study of the urban fabric, the rationale based on documentary and iconographic research requires the reinterpretation of data, and is pointing to new scientific results, factually forcing the replacement of publicised knowledge about the design of Brazilian cities between 1500-1900, covering foundation, development and restructuring. Based on the study *De Filipéia à Paraíba*, carried out at the University of Porto, three phases were recognised in the occupation of the city, which were reflected in the redefinition of the design of the streets and squares, as well as in the architectural forms and functions of the buildings. These are the foundation of the city of Filipéia de Nossa Senhora das Neves by the Portuguese Crown (1585); the Dutch takeover and domination of the city (1634-1654); the resumption of Portuguese control of the city (1654-19th century).

3 | Intercontinental migrations of artistic languages: models and forms

As far as urban planning is concerned, the circulation of forms and models from Europe to Brazil, in addition to those disseminated by Portugal, found strong propagation during the Dutch domination of Brazilian territories, led by the West India Company (1630-1654) in what Brazilian scientific tradition has labelled *Dutch Brazil*. The invasion and conquest of Olinda and Recife, located in the profitable colonial emporium of the captaincy of Pernambuco, in 1630, represents a watershed in urban terms. The Dutch transferred the centre of colonial power

from Olinda to Recife, which triggered the transition from «a simple fishing village around a small church» [Freyre in Mello 2010, (6)] to the effective occupation of the isthmus where the process of urbanisation began [Reinaldo, Alves 2013, 2] and the start of its territorial march as a city towards the mainland [Jurema 1971, 28-29].

The influx of people, foreigners and those leaving Olinda [Barreto 1994, 31], increased the demand for housing in the peninsular town. The West India Company therefore needed to find a solution to the pressing issue of housing in order to make the commercial exploitation of Pernambuco's valuable sugar production viable, which at the time was part of the most important sugar production area in terms of the global market [Mello 2010, 41], and to ensure profits. Recife's peninsular space was limited. Responding to the maintenance of building schemes on narrow plots, as was practised in Portuguese cities such as Porto, Guimarães and Braga, was insufficient for the human demand generated by the dynamics of the sugar trade. This was one of the reasons why, from the very beginning of the occupation, the Dutch drew up urban plans that encompassed not only the isthmus, but also Antônio Vaz Island [Cavalcanti 1977, 61], which was essential for supplying water to the population and, from a military tactical point of view, for protecting Recife [Mello 1987, 50]. The growth of the settlement, the scarcity of housing and the exorbitant rents charged by the Company left no other option but to expand the urban fabric of the isthmus towards Antônio Vaz Island [Barreto 1994, 31], which was carried out by John Maurice of Nassau (1637-1644) [Cavalcanti 1977, 151].

The planned occupation of the Antônio Vaz Island, known as Mauritius City or *Mauritsstadt*, the territory where Dutch urbanism effectively took hold [Menezes 2015, 21], took place according to the architect Pieter Post's sketch [Barreto 1994, 33; Galvão 2006, 20-21; Menezes 2015, 40 and Sette 2018, 50], dated 1639. Towards the south, from the oldest part of the city, the market square, wide, reticulated streets were designed, forming symmetrical blocks where there had previously been marshes [Costa 1983, 102]. Plots were valued more in the vicinity of the oldest and most central part [Costa 1983, 102] and less in the southern section [Barreto 1994, 34], where the parish of São José would later develop. The area between Fort Ernesto and Cinco Pontas is unified into a bastioned square, as Pereira da Costa points out [Costa 1983, 102] and ratifies the cartography of the time, which reinforces the city's defensive aspect against the hostilities of the Luso-Brazilian reconquest based on the mainland. In turn, canals were opened to drain puddles and swamps in order to clean up the territory, and flooded areas were filled in, creating new spaces for occupation. In other words, the Antônio Vaz Island, wild and almost savage, was converted by John Maurice of Nassau into a huge empty space where he could carry out new major colonisation and urbanisation programmes [Benevolo 2019, 557]. These programmes are where we see the references to Renaissance culture and the treatises by Vitruvius and Alberti mentioned by Leonardo Benevolo [Benevolo 2019, 577], given that the geometric regularity present in the Dutch plan for Mauritius, then «a common habit and a priority requirement in productive technique» [*Ibidem*] of European civilisation.

Nassau transferred the seat of the Dutch enterprise from Recife to Mauritius and had his palace, known as Freiburg or *Vrijburg*, built on the island in the far north. According to Gilberto Freyre, the building was constructed «according to the models of Palladio and Serlio» [Freyre 2007, 155] and, as well as marking the social status of the governor-general in the landscape, it took on nautical and defensive functions. In other words, forms and models from the Old World that aim to give the landscape and territory being shaped under Nassau a symbolic dimension of commercial prosperity, urban development, defensive vigour and political order.

needed spaces to assert its social prestige. At the same time, there was a need to consolidate the presence of the Catholic Church, an important arm in the Portuguese colonising process, in a territory that until recently had been occupied by Calvinists, Lutherans and Jews. Consequently, from the second half of the 17th century onwards, the work of the religious brotherhoods and the building of various churches transformed the urban landscape (most notably in the former Mauritius City, now Santo Antônio Island) [Costa 1983, 105] and contributed to the expansion of Recife's construction network, in a process that spread throughout the 18th century.

Therefore, it is in this chronology that the construction of various examples of Recife's religious architecture affiliated with the language of the Portuguese Baroque began, many of which are still present in the city today, such as the chapel of Our Lady of the Pilar (*Capela de Nossa Senhora do Pilar*), on the isthmus, built on the ruins of the Fort of St. George (*Forte de São Jorge*) between 1680 and 1683 [Guerra 1960, 11]; the church of the Jesuit School, Church of the Holy Spirit (*Igreja do Espírito Santo*), located on the Santo Antônio Island, which was born out of the extensive remodelling of the French Calvinist church between 1686 and 1689 by the priests of the Society of Jesus [Guerra 1960, 31-32]; and the church of Our Lady of the Conception of the Military (*Nossa Senhora da Conceição dos Militares*), built at the end of *Rua Nova* from 1720 onwards on an embankment to the west of the island from where the new wooden bridge to the mainland departed [Maia, Menezes 2019, 10-11; 15-16].

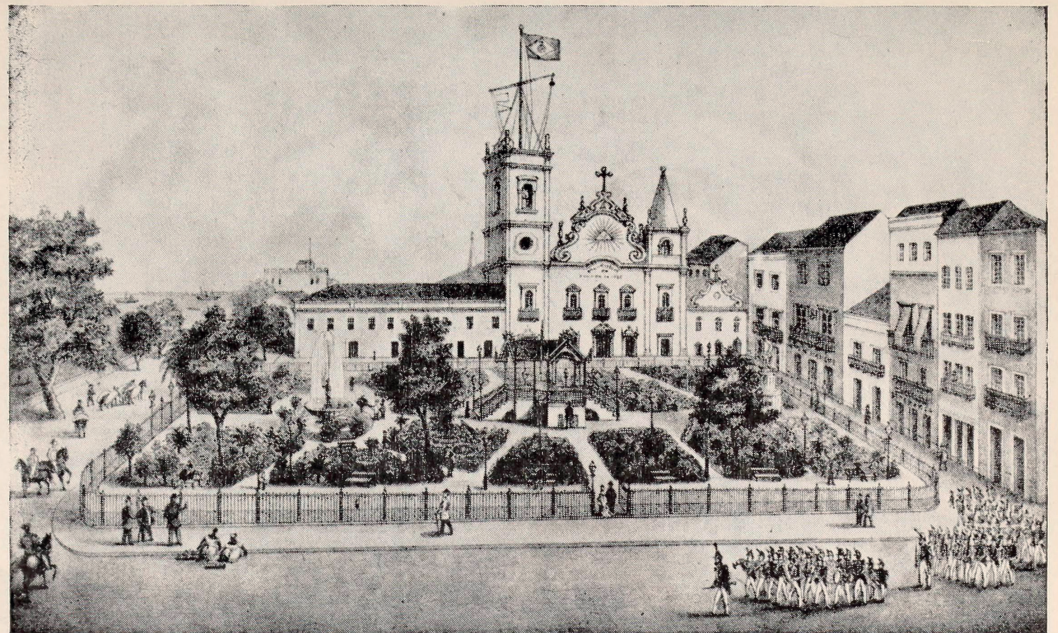


Fig. 2: Square 17 at the end of the 19th century with the church of the Holy Spirit and the old Jesuit school in the background, undated [Guerra 1960, between pages 32 and 33].

The circulation of forms and models in Recife points to a new turn in the building code and urbanism. With the arrival of the 19th century, the city faced a new phase of architectural transformation. After stretching for three centuries from the isthmus to the mainland, the city arrived in the 1800s thriving on the strength of trade and pressured by population growth. In turn, the arrival of the Portuguese court in Brazil in 1808 and the opening up of the country to international trade after the Industrial Revolution put Pernambuco, and more particularly Recife, whose port vocation was more than consolidated, in contact with the world. The commercial success resulting from this opening guaranteed the development of a bourgeois elite, the strengthening of trade-related activities in the city, as well as its territorial expansion and the stimulus for material improvements spearheaded by the public administration [Barreto 1994, 43] in the face of the city's prosperity.

For new times, a new language. A code was needed that would bring Recife into line with the great centres of the western world, particularly Paris. To this end, the neoclassical style was imposed on Recife, which wanted to overcome its old colonial neighbourhood feel and achieve the status of a top class city.

Not without reason, Francisco do Rego Barros, president of the province of Pernambuco between 1837-1844, a man from the sugar land oligarchy with academic and cultural training in the French capital, went to the *École Polytechnique* in Paris to find the technical and artistic strength to implement his ambitious agenda for transforming and organising Recife's urban space, as well as to build the apotheosis of his modernising project, the future Santa Isabel Theatre.

After his stay in this «modern Athens» [Costa 1882, 387] of the 19th century, Rego Barros wanted an engineer in charge of Public Works who embodied the vanguard of construction processes, who knew the boldest materials, who also incorporated the scientific spirit of the new times and who mastered the new architectural code he had seen in Paris: the neoclassical, a translation of modernity and representation of public power. It was within this framework that the French engineer Louis-Léger Vauthier, who worked in Pernambuco from 1840 to 1846, spread in Recife the precepts established by the treatise writer J.N.L. Durand, once a professor of Architecture at the *Polytechnique* [Lance 1872, 241], whose work *Précis des leçons d'architecture données à l'École Polytechnique* he certainly knew in depth, given his commitment to his studies as a student.

His rationalism as an engineer guided the design and construction of the *Theatro Publico* (Public Theatre) which, according to Alberto Sousa, is based on the central idea that the building should be the result of the careful articulation of independent volumes that accurately reflect the various spatial and formal needs of the different sectors of the building, defined according to the predominant use of each one [Sousa 2000, 55]. However, as erudite and attentive to the constraints of the project as he was, Vauthier didn't close himself off from his architectural references, but rather integrated Vignola's treatises into the great novelty of the project and the architectural element for which he reserved some decorative elements: the portico with arcade. Thus, using the book *The Five Orders of Architecture* by the Renaissance master, the French technician articulates two models of different temporalities in the symbolically most outstanding building among those being erected in Recife at the time.

What's more, as determined by the theatre company's administrative committee, it uses lioz stone from Lisbon for the façades, which concretely layers the building with shapes and models, construction solutions and chronologies from the treatise.



Fig. 3.1: Front of the Santa Isabel Theatre, Recife [photo Bruno Aguiar, 19 August 2019].



Fig. 3.2: Louis-Léger Vauthier, *Theatro de Pernambuco*, 1841 [Brasília. Collection of the Instituto do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional].

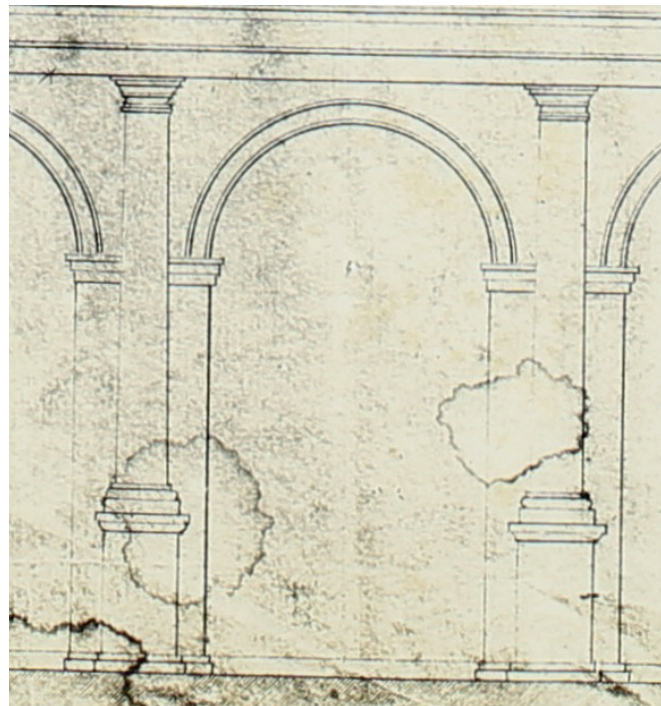


Fig. 3.3: Louis-Léger Vauthier, *Theatro de Pernambuco*, 1841, detail [Brasília. Collection of the Instituto do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional].

Fig. 3.4: Print VII in Tuscan order [Vignola 1806, 39].



Fig. 3.5: Focus on the portico with arcade of the Santa Isabel Theatre, Recife [photo: Bruno Aguiar, 6 September 2020].



Still on the subject of Vignola, it is worth pointing out that his treatise was well known in Recife and his models were already circulating in the city at the time, brought in by the Portuguese, by technicians and building craftsmen, as well as by experts. This is evidenced by the advertisement for *Livraria da Esquina do Colégio* in the newspaper *Diário Novo* on 1 March 1845:

Compendium of practical geometry, applied to the operations of Design, to serve as a basis for those who dedicate themselves to the Fine Arts, or to the mechanical arts, 1 vol, 1839, by the professor of the Academy of Fine Arts of Lisbon - Elements of theoretical and practical perspective for the preliminary instruction of architects, painters, sculptors, and all sorts of people who dedicate themselves to the arts of Design, by the professor of the Civil Architecture Design Class, 1 vol. 1842 - Theoretical notions of civil architecture, followed by a brief treatise on the 5 orders by J.B. de Vignola, by the same professor, 1839¹.

This circulation continued into the following decade, an indication of the certain popularity of the architectural principles of the Italian scholar among the local artistic class and of their inclusion in the ways of living in Recife, especially among the elite:

To artists. A treatise on architecture, containing one hundred and twenty prints by Barossio. An important work for artists: for sale at the Pateo do Colégio, home of the blue book².

¹ Rio de Janeiro. Biblioteca Nacional Digital do Brasil. Hemeroteca Digital Brasileira, «*O Diário Novo*», n.º 49, March 1, 1845, p. 4.

² Rio de Janeiro. Biblioteca Nacional Digital do Brasil. Hemeroteca Digital Brasileira, «*Diário de Pernambuco*», n.º 177, August 8, 1851, p. 4.

In the transition to the 20th century, Recife saw a new diffusion of models and forms brought by European technicians or those trained in the Old World and the consequent cultural updating of tastes.

Recife, the important capital of a now republican Brazil, longed for a new, modern, healthy, planned version of itself, in line with the cutting-edge urbanism of the time emanating from the European centres of diffusion (once again Paris), which would symbolise its socioeconomic and cultural development and the effective overcoming of the nineteenth-century and somewhat colonial city. It was the *New Recife* that was on the horizon, freed from the «blind cult of the old» that deformed the spirit of the people of the land and of an old-fashioned and bad architecture that «was bad for the nerves»³.

Thus, marked until then by narrow, winding streets and by the «thin, tall and long» houses, as Gilberto Freyre put it, that dominated the landscape of these same streets [Aguiar 2020, 114-115], the city's primitive centre underwent profound transformations in the second decade of the 19th century with a view to boosting port activity and increasing the economy of Pernambuco's capital. These transformations led, among other things, to the reorganisation of the streets, the razing of a large part of its old 19th century houses and their replacement by buildings that would find in French eclecticism the building code for the affirmation of modernity and the overcoming of the old 19th century city, still punctuated by colonial architectural landmarks and shrouded in the fog of the insalubrity of its *sobrados* (two-storey buildings with a balcony). It is in this chronology that we will find the work of foreign technicians in the city who will materialise this ideology of progress propagated by the elites and reverberated by the Recife

Fig. 4: Partial aerial view of the parishes of Recife and Santo Antônio, undated [Rio de Janeiro. Collection of the National Archives of Brazil].



³ Rio de Janeiro. Biblioteca Nacional Digital do Brasil. Hemeroteca Digital Brasileira, «*Diario de Pernambuco*», n.º 55, March 9, 1904, «*O Recife Novo*», p. 1.

media. Among them was Fabio Tancredi, an «architectural engineer»⁴, as he appears in newspaper adverts, with a degree from the University of Rome and the author of the design for the Western Telegraph Company building, now the *Paço do Frevo* museum, and the mansion of the capitalist José Pessoa de Queiroz, which no longer exists.

4 | Conclusion

The development of research into the circulation of forms and models from Europe/Portugal to Brazil is leading to a historiographical revision. The break with the paradigm of Brazilian scientific tradition about the non-planning of cities during colonisation, founded in Brazil during Portuguese rule, points to new perspectives in the field of the history of urbanism, as we outline in this work. As far as architecture is concerned, even the so-called «Frenchism», in other words, the unthinking, decontextualised, pure and simple importation of models and forms from the diffusing centres (France, in this case) to their areas of influence, such as Recife itself, is being called into question [Aguar 2020, 190]. There are assimilations, symbioses, of course, with the local context from both a constructive and symbolic point of view. The framing of these examples ensures a particular context, not alienated from its historical circumstances. After all, to paraphrase Norbert Elias, architecture does not exist in a vacuum. There are countless examples, but we prefer to return to a landmark of Recife's civil architecture to support our argument and bring up the case of the Santa Isabel Theatre. In terms of the most important architecture, as we have seen, of the modernising project under the management of Francisco do Rego Barros, the Frenchman Vauthier, despite taking as his model the «most modern and most appropriate theatres in France»⁵, took into account «the changes needed by the heat of this climate» [*Ibidem*] for the theatre's risk. A strictly French theatre in a tropical climate would not be feasible, even more so in the hands of a technician with cutting-edge knowledge of the art/science of building. And we can also refer to a certain «popularity» of Vignola's treatises that circulated in the capital of Pernambuco.

Finally, it is important to mention in this brief overview of diachrony how the historical context ideologically guides the circulating models and forms, as well as their implementation: sometimes as signs of the vigour of the Dutch exploratory mechanism; sometimes as a reaffirmation of territorial control and the Lusitanian presence in its colonial emporium; sometimes as ratification of a modernisation project for an important regional hub in a newly independent Brazil; sometimes as the overcoming of the old colonial city by a Recife that seeks to build itself as a synonym for modernisation and progress.

⁴ Rio de Janeiro. Biblioteca Nacional Digital do Brasil. Hemeroteca Digital Brasileira, «*A Provincia*», n.º 367, December 18, 1911, «*Empresa Constructora Pernambucana*», p. 2.

⁵ Rio de Janeiro. Biblioteca Nacional Digital do Brasil. Hemeroteca Digital Brasileira, «*Diario de Pernambuco*», n.º 184, August 25, 1841, «*A PEDIDO*», p. 2.

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