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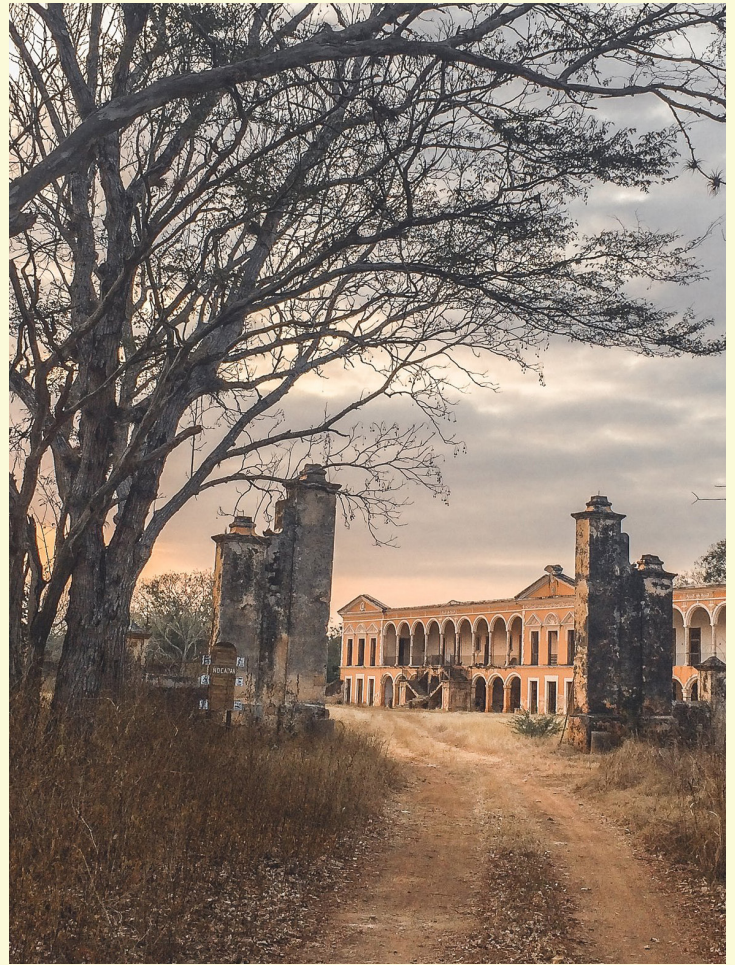


Fig. 1 Hacienda San Juan Baustista de Tabi
(Verde Guillén, 2020)

Architecture and Authority: Social Hierarchies in Colonial Mexican Haciendas

"What Role Did the Architecture of
Mexican Haciendas Play in Shaping
and Maintaining Social hierarchies in
Colonial Mexico?"

Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Introduction | 3 |
| The Hacienda System: A Historical and Socioeconomic Context | 5 |
| The Hacienda as an Architectural Typology and Spatial System of Control | 6 |
| 3.1 Architectural Typologies and Spatial Structures of Haciendas | 6 |
| 3.2 Haciendas in the Province of Yucatán | 8 |
| The Spatial Organization of Hacienda San Juan Bautista de Tabi | 11 |
| 4.1 Historical Context of Hacienda San Juan Bautista de Tabi | 11 |
| 4.2 Hierarchical Layout and Material Disparity | 12 |
| 4.3 The Hacendado's House | 15 |
| Conclusion | 18 |
| Bibliography | 20 |
| Illustrations | 21 |

Introduction

The hacienda system became one of the most enduring symbols of colonialism in Latin America after its emergence in the 16th century following the Spanish conquest and the decline of the *encomienda* system. As Spain established its power across New Spain, large amounts of land were assigned or appropriated by recognised members of the royal elites, giving rise to these commercial rural estates known as haciendas (Keith, 1977). These estates became the main means of export production throughout the colonial period and played a central role in shaping urban development in regions spanning from Mexico to Argentina (Ching et al., 2017). Derived from the Spanish verb “*hacer*,” which means “to make something,” the term hacienda reflects its function as an income-generating enterprise (Ching et al., 2017; Keith, 1977). Various scholars describe haciendas as elite-controlled agricultural estates operated by a dependent labour force, designed not only to serve regional markets but also to reinforce the owner’s social status. In addition, they emphasised that the defining characteristic of the hacienda was its ownership structure and reliance on dependent labour (Keith, 1977; Newman, 2014; Wolf & Mintz, 1957). During the 18th century, the hacienda system evolved into a network of debt peonage, keeping labourers tied to the hacienda landowners (Knight, 1986). Consequently, the hacienda transformed into a powerful institution that shaped rural life for centuries, with its social influences still visible in parts of Latin America today.

While historical research has extensively examined the economic and agricultural impact of the hacienda system, it has often analysed its importance as an entity of production and pillar of the export economy in South America; this thesis examines the hacienda system as an architectural typology that served as a spatial tool of control, analyzing how its built environment materialized colonial hierarchies. More than territories only used for production, they were also intentionally structured environments used to reinforce social stratification, power dynamics, and labour dominance, thereby always establishing the superiority of the hacendado’s class. Although haciendas appeared throughout Latin America, this thesis will focus on the analysis of the historical development and characteristics of haciendas in colonial Mexico, with an in-depth case study of the Hacienda San Juan Bautista de Tabi in the Yucatán Province for further analysis. Since Tabi was in one of the regions where debt peonage and local exploitation were most present during the Porfiriato period, it provides a valuable example of how architectural choices were used by hacendados to reinforce social hierarchies. The hacienda’s layout, material differences, and disciplinary spaces were a physical manifestation of how architecture was used to maintain colonial power structures.

To investigate social hierarchies within the hacienda typology, this thesis will review literature from a range of primary and secondary sources that combine architectural research, historical analysis, and archaeological interpretation, drawing on a variety of historical books, journal articles, and research papers. The first chapter of the thesis will examine the historical context of the emergence of the hacienda by employing texts from English, Spanish, and Latin American authors to provide a diverse perspective and avoid biased conclusions. Moreover, books and



Figure 1. Hacienda Yaxcopoil. From "JSTOR Community Collections," by Casa Gámez, n.d. (<https://www.jstor.org/stable/community.11998308>). Licensed under JSTOR Terms and Conditions.

research papers by Mexican authors, such as Wobeser (2020), Rendón (1994), and Baeza (2004), provide a closer perspective on the analysis of Mexican haciendas and their characteristics, particularly those located in the province of Yucatán. Additionally, key archaeological studies by Meyers (2012) and Sweitz (2012) offer a primary understanding of the material and spatial conditions of Hacienda San Juan Bautista de Tabi, based on their site visit investigations. This analysis will be supplemented by architectural studies in Neoclassical Architecture (Middleton & Watkin, 1987), which explore the symbolic and aesthetic choices in the hacienda. Furthermore, theoretical perspectives, including Foucault's (1995) spatial exploration as a tool of surveillance and discipline, support the analysis of how the hacienda embedded systems of control to reinforced social hierarchies. Visual materials, such as historical site plans and maps, archaeological drawings, photographic documentation, and interpretive diagrams, will support the work, providing a better visual understanding of how spatial hierarchies were strengthened.

The thesis will be structured into 3 chapters. The first chapter provides a historical context for the emergence of the hacienda system in colonial Mexico, tracing its roots in the *encomienda* system and its evolution into a private rural entity of production used for colonial domination. The second chapter examines the hacienda system as an architectural typology, with a focus on Yucatan haciendas, describing the common spatial characteristics employed in the region to embed social hierarchies, dominance, and control. Then, Chapter Three provides a closer examination of Hacienda San Juan Bautista de Tabi and analyses its layout, material distinctions, and spaces of surveillance and coercion to demonstrate how architecture was actively used to reinforce social disparities. The thesis concludes that the architecture of Mexican haciendas was a powerful tool used to maintain and reinforce social hierarchies and dominance within the estate. Finally, the thesis will address the following research questions: What role did the architecture of Mexican haciendas play in shaping and maintaining social hierarchies in colonial Mexico? How did the spatial layout of the hacienda reinforce the social hierarchy between hacendados and labourers? In what ways did architectural features, such as material choices, building scale, and visibility, symbolize authority and power within the hacienda? How did the architectural use of disciplinary spaces reinforce the hacienda's social hierarchy?

1. The Hacienda System: A Historical and Socioeconomic Context

The emergence of the hacienda system in Mexico was shaped by earlier colonial land and labour structures, which must be examined to understand its development. The hacienda did not appear by itself, nor was it a copy of an existing European institution. Instead, it developed gradually over the course of more than a century, thanks to colonial conquest, new legal frameworks, evolving labour systems, and the gradual accumulation of land and authority by colonial elites. Its roots are based on the colonial systems like *encomienda*, which shaped the earliest stages of colonial rule and provided a framework for hierarchical control embedded in Mexico's physical and social structure.

The *encomienda* system was one of the earliest labour systems established by the Spanish Empire in New Spain in the early 16th century. Inspired by the feudal system of the Iberian Peninsula, the colonial administrator Fray Nicolás Ovando first introduced it in 1502, and it later expanded quickly across the new colonies of New Spain (Wobeser, 2020). Through this system, Spanish conquerors, known as *encomenderos*, were given the right to exploit Indigenous labour and demand resources such as food, textiles, or precious materials, supposedly in exchange for receiving protection and religious education (Altman et al., 2003; Rendón, 1994). Although it was officially presented as a mutual arrangement, it quickly resembled forced labour slavery (Gibson, 1967; Lockhart & Schwartz, 1983). *Encomiendas* were not yet land grants, they allowed Spaniards elites to take control of labour and resources to their advantage in the decades following the conquest. Unlike haciendas, *encomiendas* lacked centralised estates; they imposed control through social and legal structures, not architecture.

As the *encomienda* system declined, it did not lead to a decrease in exploitation. Instead, it marked a significant shift from a tribute-based structure overseen by the state to a privatized rural system of landownership (Gonzalez, 1984). Former *encomenderos* began acquiring land through legal grants, purchases, or by informal occupation of Indigenous lands (Altman et al., 2003; Rendón, 1994). In addition, thanks to epidemics in New Spain and the rapid decline of the indigenous population, former *encomenderos* could also occupy abandoned or weakly dependent territories (Keith, 1977; Rendón, 1994). This transition led to the emergence of the hacienda, a new type of colonial system that combined economic production, social dominance, and spatial control into a single independent state.



Figure 2. Spanish cruelties on the indigenous peoples. From "*Life on the Encomienda*," by T. de Bry, 1598 (<https://wams.nyhistory.org/early-encounters/spanish-colonies/life-on-the-encomienda/>). Licensed under New-York Historical Society Terms and Conditions.

As Keith (1977) states, the hacienda was more than just a large farm; it was a large commercial state owned by the elite, commonly known as hacendados (landowners), not only to generate profit but also to reflect some aristocratic status in their possession. The fact that the hacendado did not perform manual labor in the hacienda but instead relied on the external force for its proper functioning is what distinguished the hacienda from other systems. By the late 16th and early 17th centuries, hacienda systems had become the core of the agricultural economy in colonial Mexico, particularly in regions where the *encomienda* system had either failed or declined. Haciendas often grew food and raised livestock to supply cities and export markets. This integration into a growing economic network helped haciendas endure over time and enabled them to continue growing over the years (Keith, 1977).

New labour control forms began to emerge by the mid-17th century within the hacienda system, with debt peonage (*peonaje*) being the most notable example. Indians, unlike those in the *encomienda* system, were theoretically free wage earners who worked this land; however, in practice, hacendados were able to bind Indians' labor to their haciendas through their loan system. In theory, debts were supposed to be negotiable, but in practice, they were hard to achieve, ensuring that laborers and their families remained in the hacienda (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2024). According to Katz (1974), debt peonage forced labor was justified when powerful landowners did not have enough workers for their haciendas. Even though the government officially says they did not support worker exploitation, it still quietly allows the system to run smoothly by looking the other way. Additionally, as Zavala (1944) noted, hacendados would often prevent laborers from leaving the hacienda until the debts, which were sometimes exaggerated, were fully paid. In many cases, the movement of freedom of the worker was completely weakened by these debts. For instance, in regions like Yucatan, debt peonage workers were confined to the estate, punished for escaping, and sold among different haciendas (Knight, 1986). These practices laid the foundation for how control was later embedded into the physical structure of the hacienda.

2. The Hacienda as an Architectural Typology and Spatial System of Control

2.1 Architectural Typologies and Spatial Structures of Haciendas

Haciendas across colonial Mexico could span from several hundred to thousands and millions of hectares. All these haciendas exhibit a range of both variable and invariable characteristics within their architectural design. Differences in layout and architectural features often reflected the specific productive needs of each hacienda, as well as regional materials and climatic conditions. Simultaneously, haciendas shared a consistent core infrastructure known as the “casco”, which contained the main buildings of the estate that reinforced institutional and social norms.

In terms of variable characteristics, as Wobeser (2020) stated, haciendas could be classified into five different typologies: sugar-producing, grain-producing,

livestock-raising, pulque-producing, and tropical product-producing. These differing economic functions influenced the production infrastructure of each estate. For instance, sugar-producing haciendas had mills and refineries, while cattle haciendas prioritized ranching spaces. Therefore, the layout and specific building types within the production zones of each hacienda were closely tied to the goods they produced. At the same time, despite these regional and functional variations, most haciendas shared a set of invariable architectural features within a core area known as the casco. Commonly referred to as the heart of the estate, this area followed a more uniform architectural logic and a layout that was consistently applied across all the haciendas. This was the area of the hacienda designated for administration, storage, living quarters, communication, and religious services. In this space, buildings such as the hacendados' house or the principal's house, administrative offices, a church, and chapels were located (Barlett, 1990; Rendón, 1994; Ruiz, 2011).

Typically, the principal's house was regarded as the main building of the hacienda, where hacendados would stay during their visits. Usually, this building was configured in an L or U shape, surrounded by a rectangular patio and corridors that connected the various rooms within the house. It normally stood two stories tall and featured several gardens surrounding it (Ruiz, 2011). The primary materials used in the construction of this type of building included quarry stone for the façade and various elements within the patio. Additionally, the secondary walls typically utilised adobe masonry, characterised by high ceilings with exposed wooden beams, and made extensive use of local materials, such as adobe or brick (Ruiz, 2011). In Barlett's (1990) travels through Mexico, he notes that the façades of wealthier haciendas owned by generations of elite families displayed gothic, churrigueresque, plateresque, Islamic, baroque, and rococo styles. The building's façade generally featured grilled windows and large wooden doors with intricate carvings. Lastly, he mentions that churches and chapels contained hornacinas or stone niches, where statues of religious figures, such as saints, were typically placed. While the form, style, and scale of these elements varied from region to region, the principle of centralisation and hierarchical organisation remained a defining characteristic.

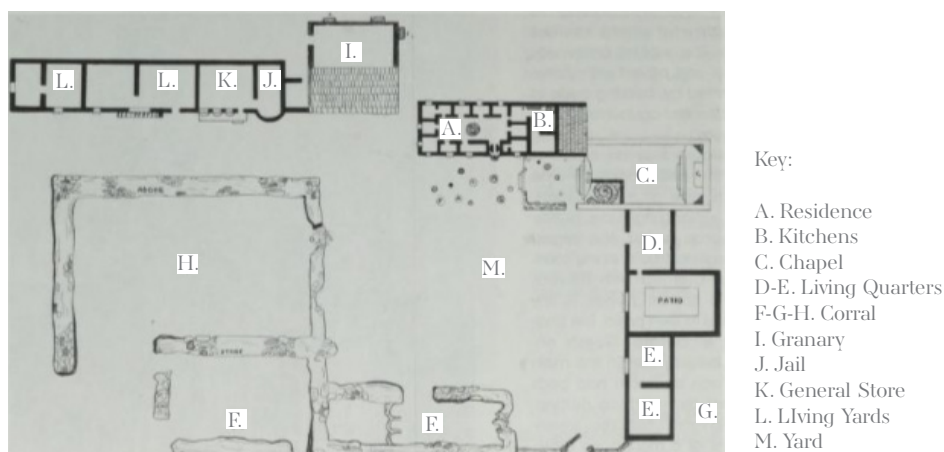


Figure 3. Floor plan of a typical casco layout at Hacienda de Cuisillo, Jalisco, showing spatial hierarchy and functional zoning. From *The Haciendas of Mexico: An Artist's Record*, by P. A. Bartlett, 1990. University of Texas Press. Copyright 1990 by Paul Alexander Bartlett.

2.2 Haciendas in the Province of Yucatan

Haciendas spread across colonial Mexico, but those in Yucatan are notable due to their expansion during the Porfiriato between 1876 and 1911. Located in southeast Mexico, according to Baeza (2004), this region is known as the “land of haciendas,” with numerous plantations flourishing at the end of the 19th century. As seen in figure 4, the region’s geographic isolation and the implementation of a debt peonage system transformed Yucatan’s economy from one based in local consumption into a commercial monoculture. As communal farming practices were disrupted during colonization, many indigenous communities were forced to seek refuge in haciendas in exchange for labor.

Yucatecan haciendas featured similar-looking cascos that were compact and resembled enclosed towns due to their centric structure surrounded by protective walls. Hacendados used this layout design so that the elite could isolate workers and reinforce the authoritarian division that was present among the hacienda. The spatial organization of the principal’s house, chapel, and industrial buildings was not only efficient but also reinforced authority through visual hierarchy, structured geometry, and imposing scale (Sweitz, 2012). As seen in the table below, a selection of significant Yucatecan haciendas is compared to highlight recurring architectural strategies, especially in terms of the casco, in reinforcing social hierarchies across the region. While many more haciendas exist throughout Yucatán, this focused sample was chosen to illustrate consistent spatial patterns without compromising the depth of analysis.



Figure 4. Map showing the location of Yucatán Peninsula.

From *A historical archaeology of the modern world*, by S. T. Sweitz (Ed.), 2012, Springer, p. 180. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-5260-0_8. Copyright may apply.





| | Name of the hacienda | Image | Casco Layout | Principal's House Style | Mechanisms of Social Control |
|----|---------------------------|---|--------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| 1. | Chunchumil |  | Centralized | Neoclassical and Eclectic Style | Elevated galleries and porticos overlooking the plaza; Separation of the elite and labour Spaces |
| 2. | San Antonio Millet |  | Centralized | Eclectic Style and Classicist style | Monumental entrance, centralized chapel and enclosed palza reinforcing social hierarchy |
| 3. | Uayalceh |  | Centralized | Colonial and Neoclassical | Enclosed plaza layout, elevated main house with arched veranda for constant visibility/control |
| 4. | San Juan Bautista de Tabi |  | Centralized | Neoclassical | Controlled access through gated compounds; surveillance via upper storey arched gallery |

Table 1. Architectural comparative analysis in selected Yucatecan haciendas.

Figure 5. Principal house of Hacienda Chunchumil

From "Hacienda en Maxcanú, Yucatán en venta," by Clasco Bienes Raíces, n.d. (https://clasco.mx/bienesraices/propiedad/hacienda-en-maxcanu-yucatan-en-venta_1172224). Licensed under site terms.

Figure 6. Principal house of Hacienda San Antonio Millet.

From "Historia," by Hacienda San Antonio Millet, n.d. (<https://www.haciendasanantoniomillet.com/historia/>). Licensed under site terms.

Figure 7. Principal house of Hacienda Uayalceh.

From "Visit Hacienda Uayalceh," by TripBucket, n.d. (<https://tripbucket.com/dreams/dream/visit-hacienda-uayalceh-yucatan-mexico/>). Licensed under site terms.

Figure 8. Principal house of Hacienda San Juan Bautista de Tabi.

From "Hacienda San Juan Bautista Tabi," by JSTOR Community Collections, n.d. (<https://www.jstor.org/stable/community.12002100>). Licensed under JSTOR Terms and Conditions

The table shows that a defining feature of Yucatecan hacienda design is the use of the casco, which centralised control through architecture and created a strong visual contrast between the hacendado's residence and the workers' dwellings. These features clearly state that the architectural shape of haciendas in Yucatan is not used merely to facilitate economic functions when producing goods, but the architecture actively reinforced social stratification and ideological control over the surrounding environment, to encode social hierarchies into the space. To further illustrate this point, the diagrams presented in Figure 9 overlay satellite imagery with highlighted cascos, visually emphasising the centralised and hierarchical layouts typical of Yucatecan haciendas.



Figure 9. Diagram overlays showing centralized casco layouts in Yucatecan haciendas (Chunchumil, San Antonio Millet, Uayalceh, and San Juan Bautista de Tabi).

Created by the author using satellite imagery from Google Earth (2024), with layout overlays added in Adobe Photoshop. Images Google.

As explained by Sweitz (2012), social stratification can be defined as a social system in which individuals do not have equal access to wealth, power, and prestige. In the hacienda system, this was materially encoded through architecture, as hacendados controlled most of the resources, and they occupied prominent elevated positions within the central casco that were ornamentally decorated and that constantly overlooked their surrounding landscape. In contrast, labourers' dwellings were placed on the outskirts of the hacienda, serving as a constant spatial reminder that they were excluded from the elite space. By doing this, the Yucatecan hacienda system ensured that political, economic, and social control was constantly in effect from hacendados to workers.

The next section will examine how these layout, spatial and architectural strategies of control and hierarchy were materialised, analysing the case study of the Hacienda San Juan Bautista de Tabi. By analysing its layout, material disparities, symbolism in architecture and spaces for surveillance and control, the following chapter will demonstrate how architectural choices were deliberately employed to reinforce social order, sustain economic exploitation, and project ideological dominance over the labour force.

3. The Spatial Organization of Hacienda San Juan Bautista Tabi: Social Hierarchy and Control in Yucatán, Mexico

“Each ‘site of assembly’ constitutes a nucleus of material and cultural conditions which regulate what may and may not be said, who may speak, how people may communicate and what importance must be given to what is said” Stallybrass and White (1986)

3.1 Historical Context of Hacienda San Juan Bautista de Tabi

The hacienda San Juan Bautista Tabi has a long pre-Columbian and colonial history. By the late 19th century, it had become one of the leading sugar-producing haciendas, as mentioned by Stephens in his records during his travels to Yucatan (Stephens, 1963, as cited in Baeza, 2004, p. 78). By the early 1900s, Hacienda Tabi was a massive estate. It produced close to 920 tons of sugar, stretched across more than 14,000 hectares, and employed around 850 workers. Looking at historical maps figure 10, the scale of the operation becomes striking, not just in economic terms, but also in how it physically dominated the surrounding landscape. According to Baeza (2004), following the political changes in the early 20th century, the hacienda was closed. In 1992, the State Government acquired the land, which was then converted into a protected natural reserve. The remaining structures of the hacienda Tabi still powerfully embody an architectural language of social hierarchies, control and colonial legacy. These relics allow us to directly examine how the hacienda was used as a physical representation of social stratification and dominance.



Figure 10. Principal residence and village at Hacienda San Juan Bautista Tabi.

From A. D. Meyers, in *The archaeology of capitalism in colonial contexts: Postcolonial historical archaeologies* (Figure 5.2), edited by S. K. Croucher, 2011, Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-1496-4_5. Copyright may apply.

3.2 Hierarchical Layout and Material Disparity

The hacienda system can be considered a great example of an architectural typology where its spatial arrangement was clearly designed to enforce a visual, physical, and authoritarian dominance from the hacendado over the workers. The layout of Hacienda San Juan Bautista de Tabi, as presented in its site plan (figure 11), shows how the spatial organisation reflects this objective. At the heart of the hacienda, the elites and the main administration headquarters were positioned, forming a strong nucleus control. On the other hand, workers' dwellings were displaced to the outskirts to emphasize their inferior status within the hacienda's social hierarchy by being physically segregated. The extreme physical division that can be seen in the layout and distances expresses the unequal distribution of power among the classes. The separation between the workers' residences and the elite-controlled core seems to have strong symbolic meaning, with greater distance from the centre signifying a lesser social rank. As mentioned by Meyers & Carlson (2002), this arrangement makes the hacienda's power structures unavoidably evident to everyone who lived there, reinforcing social inequality not only via physical space but also through material contrasts and visual prominence.

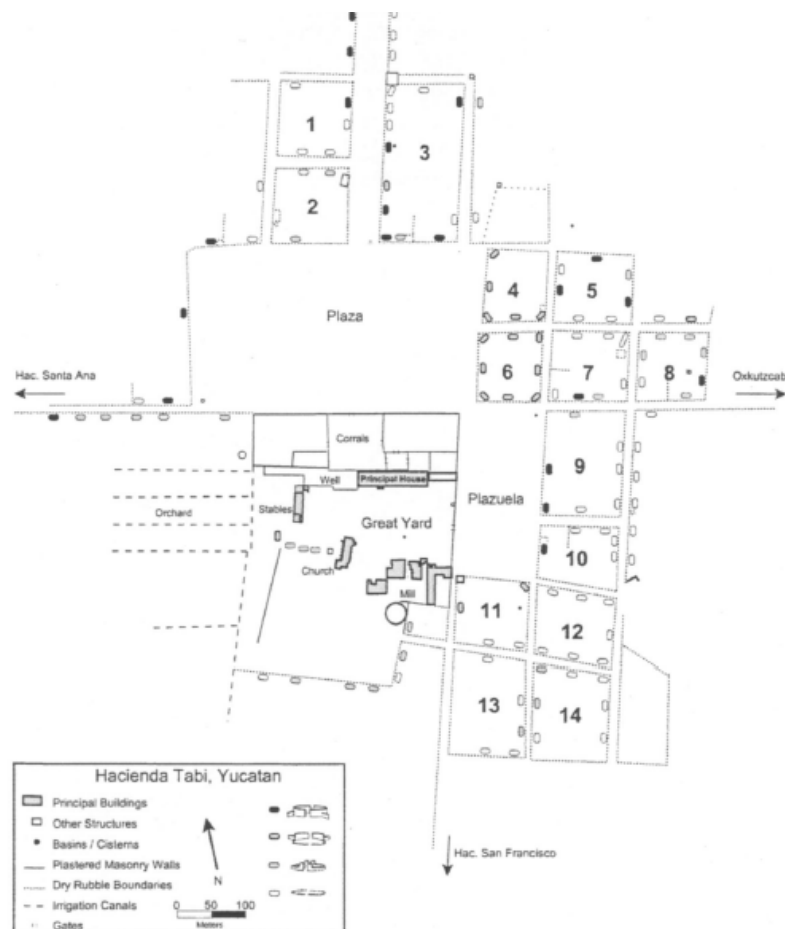


Figure 11. Site plan of Hacienda San Juan Bautista de Tabi, Yucatán. From "Peonage, Power Relations, and the Built Environment at Hacienda Tabi, Yucatán, Mexico," by A. D. Meyers & D. L. Carlson, 2002, *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 6(4), 225–252 (<https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1021106910839>). Copyright may apply.

Around the casco, a large plaza is located to the north and a smaller Plazuela to the east, providing spaces for gatherings and economic exchanges while simultaneously reinforcing the visibility and organisation of laborers (Sweitz, 2012). These open areas appeared to have been thoughtfully placed to optimise the hacendado's capacity to supervise daily activities and keep order. The workers' village comprised 14 blocks arranged in a grid pattern at the outskirts of the casco, demonstrating an imposed order characteristic of colonial urban planning. Many Yucatecan hacendados made efforts to arrange their haciendas states similarly to old colonial towns, with plazas and rectilinear grid layouts that were instituted by the Spain's monarch, Charles V, as early as 1523 for New Spain (Wauchope, 1938, p. 6). A clear example of this can be seen in early cities such as Veracruz, which adopted a strict rectilinear layout that reinforced visual control and movement regulation (see Figure 12). The use of straight lines and right angles in urban design dictated users' movements, defining appropriate places for circulation and reinforcing controlled behavior within the space (Farriss, 1984, p. 384). This rigid spatial organisation not only helped with productive efficiency but also reinforced social hierarchy and segregation by turning the estate's layout into a mechanism of control in workers' daily lives. As Sweitz emphasises, over time, generations of hacienda workers would have internalized these spatial messages, as the landscape continuously conveyed their inferior position within a hierarchically structured society that was divided in terms of skills, occupation, power and status. In this way, the layout of the hacienda system operated as a silent but persistent mechanism of control, making labourers accept social hierarchies as part of their natural routines while acknowledging and normalising the authority of the hacendado.

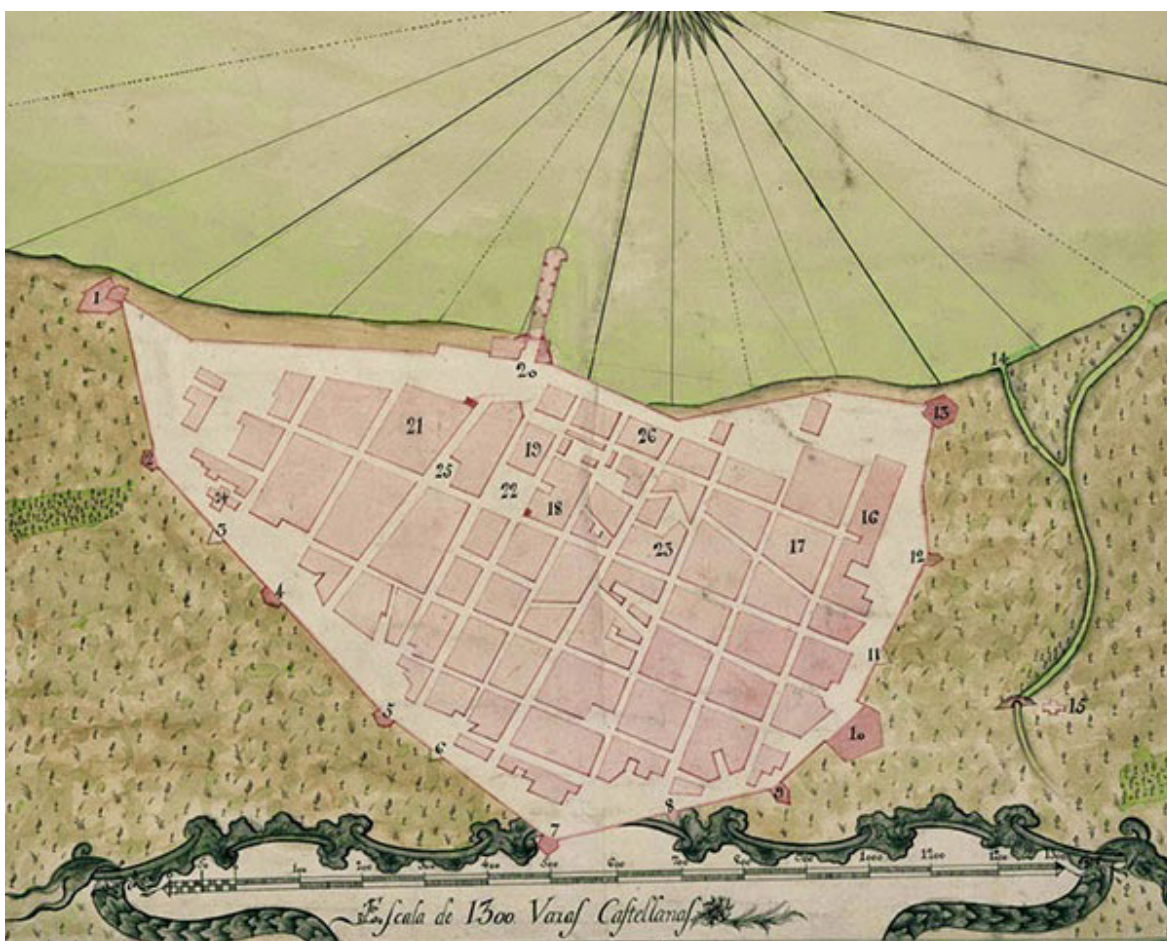


Figure 12. Map of Veracruz, Mexico (est. 1519), showing a rectilinear colonial layout inspired by Charles V's urban planning ordinances. From "The Spanish Colonial Town Planning," by P. Sendin, 2014, <https://www.patriciasendin.com/2014/06/the-spanish-colonial-town-planning.html>. Copyright by Patricia Sendin. Used for educational purposes.

Although most of the workers' houses resembled similar shapes, there still existed some size and material disparities among them, all of which reflected and reinforced the existing social hierarchies rooted within the hacienda. Archaeologist Allan Meyers (2012) identified and classified four different types of dwellings for hacienda laborers during his visit to Tabi, ranging from the most durable Type A to the most perishable Type D. Type A had six-foot-high walls of limestone rubble and mortar built up, Type B had a masonry façade, Type C had a masonry base and door-like structures, and Type D was the most basic consisting only of just a circular ring with loose stones. As Meyers (2012, figure 13) illustrates, the most common dwelling type was D, clearly indicating that most of the workforce occupied the lowest rank within the hacienda hierarchy, a typical pattern observed in Yucatean haciendas. Supporting this, Sosa (1985, as cited in Meyer & Carlson, 2002) conducted a comparative study of different Yucatean haciendas and found that salaried workers occupied houses that were materially superior to those of jornaleros, reflecting a higher social status compared to the rest of the workforce. The link between the quality of materials used in the dwelling's design and its social function highlights how architecture can physically play an active role in sustaining social differences within the hacienda estate. The selection of materials, scale and placement of dwellings collectively changed housing into a visible and tangible manifestation of inequality, integrating the power dynamics of the hacienda system into the daily lives of its labourers.

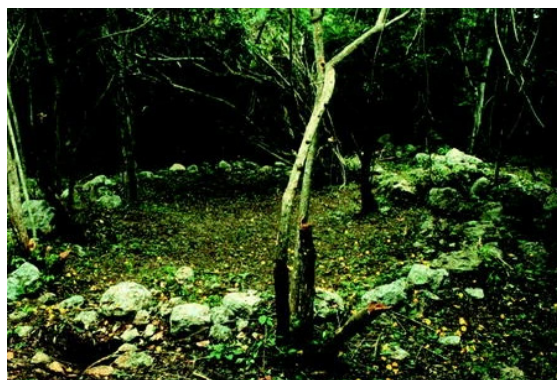
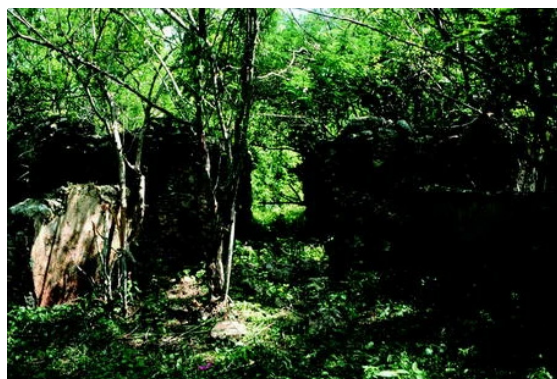
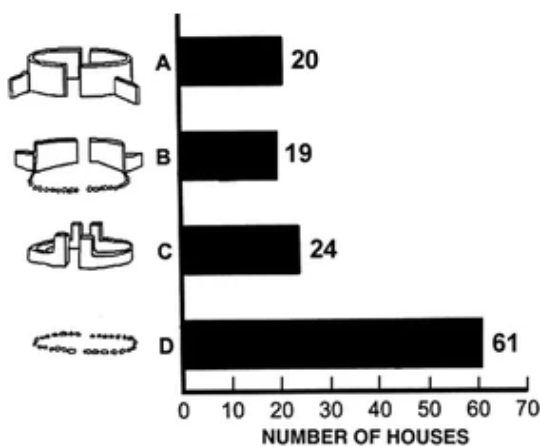


Fig 13. Dwelling types and distribution at Hacienda San Juan Bautista de Tabi.

Left: Bar graph showing the frequency of four identified dwelling types (A–D), with diagrams illustrating each architectural form.

Top right: Remains of a Type A masonry structure.

Bottom right: Circular stone foundation typical of Type D dwellings, the most numerous and least durable.

From "Hacienda Landscape and Community in Yucatán: A GIS and Archaeological Analysis of San Juan Bautista Tabi," by A. D. Meyers, 2012, in S. T. Sweitz (Ed.), *A historical archaeology of the modern world* (Figure 6.8). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-1496-4_6. Copyright 2012 Springer.

1. Jornaleros refers to day labourers, typically landless rural workers hired on a temporary basis for agricultural tasks. In the context of Yucatecan haciendas, jornaleros occupied the lowest position within the labour hierarchy, receiving minimal wages and possessing limited access to material resources or social mobility. See: Patch, R. W. (1976). *Henequen: Struggles of a Yucatecan plantation labor force*. Syracuse University Press, p. 32.

In addition, Meyers also discovered that the average dwelling area was 32 sqm, but that Type A dwellings were approximately 15% bigger than the other dwellings identified (figure 14). This not only made them more spacious but also more expensive to build, indicating a higher level of privilege. Significantly, further findings support this hierarchical interpretation of space. Type A houses were located closer to the casco, symbolizing the higher status of occupants through their proximity to the elite centre of the estate (Sweitz, 2012 , figure 15). This clearly stated that being closer to the hacienda's casco not only facilitated work but also visually confirmed social status within the community. This deliberate spatial hierarchy in the hacienda resembled broader planning strategies used in colonial Spain, where residences of higher social classes were located closest to main plazas, civic buildings, and religious centers (Kagan, 2000). In this way, the layout of Hacienda Tabi actively reinforced social divisions by embedding colonial power structures directly into the built environment and the everyday life of its labourers.

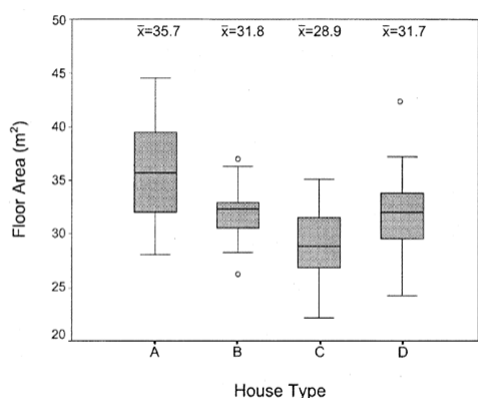


Fig. 8. Relative sizes of house types in the Tabi village (N = 101).

Table II. Frequency of House Types Adjacent to the Plazas and Principal Roads (N = 125)

| House type | Bordering | Not bordering | Bordering (%) |
|------------|-----------|---------------|---------------|
| A | 15 | 5 | 75.0 |
| B | 13 | 6 | 68.4 |
| C | 9 | 15 | 37.5 |
| D | 11 | 51 | 17.7 |

Figure 14. Relative sizes of house types in the Tabi village (N = 101).

From *Peonage, power relations, and the built environment at Hacienda Tabi, Yucatán, Mexico*, by A. D. Meyers & D. L. Carlson, 2002, *International Journal of Historical Archaeology*, 6(4), p. 244. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1021106910839>. © 2002 Springer.

Figure 15. Frequency of house types adjacent to plazas and principal roads at Hacienda Tabi (N = 125).

From *Peonage, power relations, and the built environment at Hacienda Tabi, Yucatán, Mexico*, by A. D. Meyers & D. L. Carlson, 2002, *International Journal of Historical Archaeology*, 6(4), p. 245. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1021106910839>. © 2002 Springer.

3.3 The Hacendado's House

After analysing the deliberate spatial layout of the hacienda and the existing spatial strategies used among workers' dwellings to reinforce social division, it is important to also zoom in and examine what is considered one of the most important buildings of the casco, the hacendados' house. As the biggest building of the hacienda, the principal's house structure was a physical symbol of social dominance, authority and economic wealth of the landowning elite. The principal house at Hacienda San Juan Bautista de Tabi was not only a residence for the landowners but also worked as an architectural statement of control over labourers, reinforcing a visual manifesto of superiority. Its large scale and strategic positioning within the casco reinforced the elevated status of the hacendado by imposing dominance over both the surrounding landscape and the daily lives of the workers.

Although it was mentioned previously in chapter 2 that many Mexican haciendas used a U-L shaped layout for the principal's house to enclose private patios, the Hacienda Tabi presents a different variation (figure 16 and figure 17). The principal's house at Tabi follows a linear layout, defined by long rows of arches along the façade that open directly onto the main courtyard. Rather than enclosing a private space inward, this design pushes outward, projecting authority and creating an architecture of visibility rather than shelter. Its openness allowed the hacendado to keep constant watch over the surrounding functional areas of the casco, reinforcing control over the labor force. This focus on visibility reflects Foucault's (1977) argument that architecture can serve as a mechanism of surveillance and control. In Tabi, the principal's house not only works as the residence of the hacendado but also as a constant surveillance tower over the daily routines of workers, transforming the visibility into an active tool of discipline incorporated within the architecture. Furthermore, the house was two stories high in a planar landscape, claiming its dominance over the single-storey dwellings of workers and the hacienda's skyline (Meyers & Carlson, 2002). The façade constructed of durable stone also created a clear economic contrast to the workers' dwellings analyzed previously. Also, as Sosa (1990) stated, the second storey was exclusive for the hacendado and its elite guests, creating a physical and symbolic separation from the laboring class. This upper level reinforced the idea that elite spaces remained private and inaccessible, visually and spatially confirming the rooted social hierarchy of the estate.

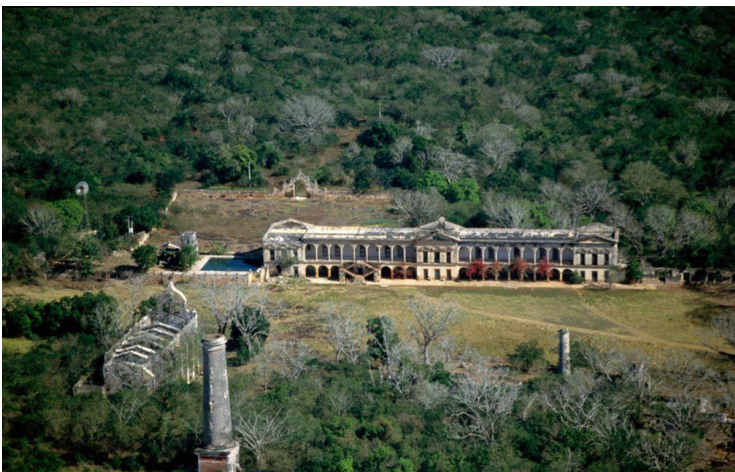


Figure 16. Aerial view of the hacienda complex. From *JSTOR Community Collections*, n.d. (<https://www.jstor.org/stable/community.12027475>).



Fig 17. Façade of the neoclassical principal house. From *JSTOR Community Collections*, n.d. (<https://www.jstor.org/stable/community.12011328>). All images © respective rights holders, used under JSTOR Community Collection terms.

Also, the architectural composition of the principal's house not only showcased the architectural strategies typically used in Yucatean haciendas but also referenced neoclassical architectural statements in its design as a way of reinforcing social hierarchies and authority. As seen in the previous figure 17, a double colonnade emphasised the south façade, which had a carefully balanced arrangement of three pediments with three upper and three lower openings each. Nine arches lined both above and below the pediments, giving the facade a balanced and symmetrical rhythm. Large stone staircases, once built on both sides, though only the western one survives, added to the building's imposing presence and reflected neoclassical influences tied to wealth and status. Neoclassical architecture was a perfect stylistic choice for the hacendado's home at Tabi because, as Middleton and Watkin (1987) note, it aimed to reflect notions that reflected not just aesthetic order but ideological authority through its emphasis on symmetry, clarity, and scale. By adopting Neoclassical forms, the hacendado brought the estate into line with European architectural traditions that symbolised civilisation, stability, and hierarchical authority. This architectural language of power can also be seen in the South of the United States, where plantation houses also employed Neoclassical facades to exert dominance visually over enslaved labourers, showing that classical architecture was used in both Mexico and the United States to express control and maintain systems of exploitation (Upton, 1998). The façade aesthetics were important, but the spatial layout of the house also reinforced control over the hacienda. Meyer and Clarkson (2002) noted that hacendados' houses were situated near the sugar mill, stables, and yard where key economic activities occurred, allowing constant observation by the hacendado. This constant surveillance over the workforce and its resources ensured that discipline and productivity were constantly maintained, confirming again Foucault's (1995) ideas that visibility is a key mechanism of power within architecture design. In this way, both the architectural style of the hacienda's house and its orientation worked as active instruments of control, materializing the hacendados' authority over the workforce operations.

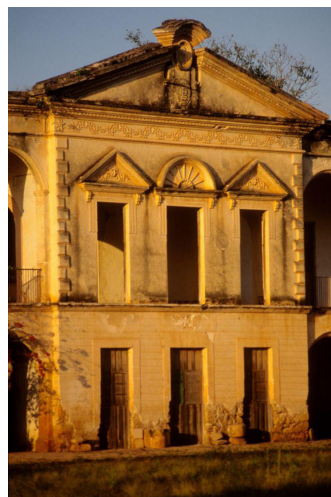
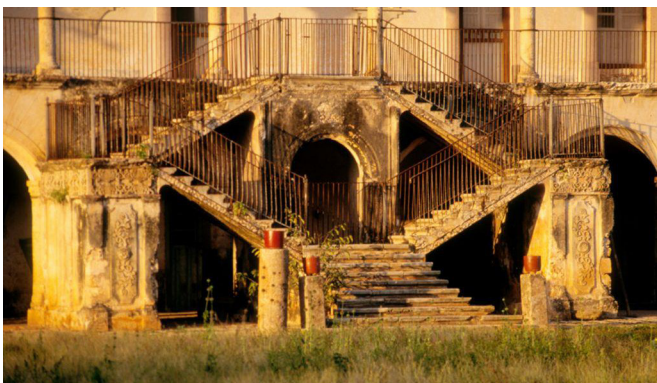


Figure 18. Comparative analysis of Neoclassical architectural elements.
Top left and right: South façade and upper pediment of the principal house at Hacienda San Juan Bautista de Tabi, Yucatán, Mexico. From *JSTOR Community Collections*, n.d. (<https://www.jstor.org/stable/community.12002100>; <https://www.jstor.org/stable/community.12011328>).
Bottom: Front façade of Nottoway Plantation, Louisiana, USA. From *"Nottoway Plantation Historical"* by J.T. Campo Architects, n.d. (<https://www.jtcampo.com/project-nottoway-plantation-historical>). Licensed under site terms.

In addition, the principal's house at Hacienda Tabi also incorporated spaces within its interior building used to exert discipline over workers. According to Meyers (2012), two confinement cells were located on the ground floor of the west side of the house. The following area was designed to punish workers who disobeyed the orders given by the hacendado. This shows that the house functioned not only as the estate owner's residence but also as a centre of authority, where punishment and control were incorporated into the hacienda's daily environment. The presence of these cells highlights how the hacendado's power extended beyond visual surveillance to include direct physical enforcement of order. Workers were constantly reminded that disobedience created consequences, reinforcing the hacendados as the higher and ultimate authority of the hacienda. This physical enforcement also aligns with Michel Foucault's (1977) arguments that architectural spaces shape behavior by making authority visible and inescapable. At Tabi, the integration of confinement cells within the main house was a constant reminder of authority, combining surveillance, punishment and spatial control to maintain the social hierarchy of the hacienda.

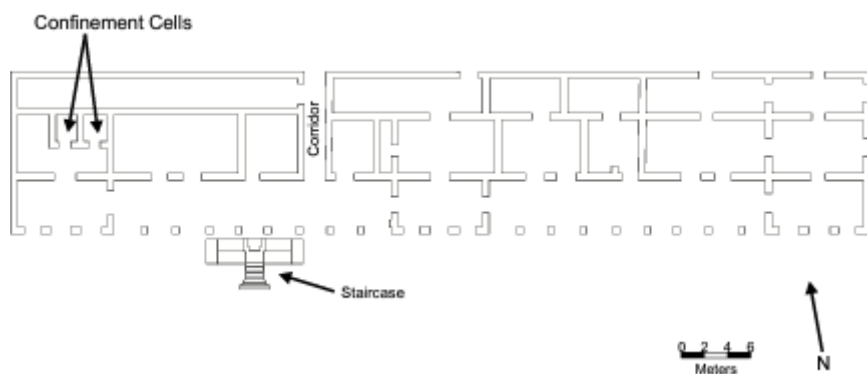


Figure 19. Floor plan of the principal house at Hacienda San Juan Bautista de Tabi, indicating confinement cells and staircase. From Peonage, Power Relations, and the Built Environment at Hacienda Tabi, Yucatán, Mexico, by A. D. Meyers & D. L. Carlson, 2002, *International Journal of Historical Archaeology*, 6(4), p. 240. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1021106910839>. 2002 Springer.

Conclusion

This thesis has examined how the architecture of Mexican haciendas, particularly those in the province of Yucatán, with an in-depth analysis of Hacienda San Juan Bautista de Tabi, played an active role in physically embodying social hierarchies and sustaining colonial control. By first examining earlier colonial systems, such as the *encomienda* and the debt peonage system, this research explained how legal frameworks of labour exploitation were physically manifested in the built environment. This system did not exist abstractly; it translated directly into spatial inequalities brought by colonialism. The thesis first explored the general architectural and spatial characteristics of Mexican haciendas before focusing on the haciendas systems located in Yucatan, where its geographical isolation and intensified peonage practice were most present, leading to more social disparity in the architecture of the hacienda in that region. This deeper focus led to the discovery of the repeated use of the *casco* as an architectural centre of power, strategically used to materialise the hacendados' dominance over the estate and its labourers.

Throughout this analysis, it has become clear that haciendas were more than just economic spaces for production and commerce; they were deliberately structured spaces of control. Spatial layout, material differentiation, and symbolic architectural features were not carefully planned tools used within the space to reinforce social division. The study of the hacienda San Juan Bautista de Tabi showcases how material disparities in workers' dwellings, as well as their proximity to the casco, were carefully planned to show social status like models used in colonial Spain urban planning design. These findings confirm that the architecture at Tabi functioned only as a shelter for workers, but there was a constant physical remainder of social order installed in the layout of the space. In addition, the aesthetic features of Neoclassical architecture in the hacendados' houses, their elevated positions and monumental scales, were purposely made to enable continuous surveillance from the hacendado to the workers and to remind them constantly of the economic superiority that the elite had. The integration of confinement cells within the house of the hacendados provides concrete evidence of how the architecture at Tabi incorporated the mechanism of discipline and punishment, ensuring that control was not only visual from the house but also physically enforced.

The architecture of hacienda Tabi, therefore, strongly supports the argument that the architecture of the hacienda system in colonial Mexico was a powerful tool used to maintain social order and reinforce social hierarchies. The analysis explains that the architecture of the space was not just done merely because of aesthetic reasons; it acted as an active strategy to reinforce authority and dominance. This confirms Foucault's theory of space and surveillance, where in Tabi, visibility and closeness to the hacendados' houses shaped workers' behaviour, incorporating social inequalities into the spatial translations of the hacienda's life. Also, the comparative analysis between hacienda and the slavery plantations in the USA suggests that this was not something that only occurred in Mexico but is part of a wider architectural language of colonial domination and control that has been repeated through history.

The following research opens opportunities for further investigation about social disparities in hacienda architecture. While this thesis has concentrated on the analysis of Yucatan haciendas in Mexico, further research could be done by making a comparative analysis between haciendas across another Mexican regions or Latin American countries where the typology was also present, to see the similarities and differences among the architecture and labour organisation in these regions. Also, considering that hacienda structures are still present in today's landscape, some of them functioning and some of them not, further research might be needed to examine how these colonial architectural legacies still influence patterns of inequality and collective memory in postcolonial Mexico. In the end, the case of Hacienda San Juan Bautista de Tabi shows that architecture during colonial rule was never neutral; it actively shaped systems of power and control. It was an active agent in shaping human relations and sustaining systems of oppression. This legacy remains

not only in the ruins of these estates but also in the ongoing social structures and cultural narratives that continue to reflect the enduring impact of colonialism in Mexico and Latin America today.

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