Planned and unplanned towns in former Portuguese colonies in Sub-Saharan Africa: an analysis of Silveira's 'Iconografia'

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Abstract: Luis Silveira's 'Ensaio de Iconografia das Cidades Portuguesas do Ultramar', published in the 50's, is a fundamental source for the study of urban form in former Portuguese colonies. This is an often cited work and its images have been abundantly used. Nonetheless, it has not been analysed and considered in itself, as a unique and essential collection of images representing the most important Portuguese settlements outside Europe as well as noteworthy places connected to the Portuguese expansion or colonization periods. It presents a wealth of graphical information on the settlements which can be understood as town or future town centres. More than a thousand figures depict nearly two hundred towns. The second volume is dedicated to occidental and oriental Sub-Saharan Africa. This paper addresses form and content of this fundamental resource for the study of city-centres in the Portuguese ex-colonies – as seen through the eyes of a public official in the eve of the colonial wars.

Keywords: Portuguese origin; atlas; cartography; colonial planning; town planning; urban history; sources.

INTRODUCTION

Luis Silveira's 'Ensaio de Iconografia das Cidades Portuguesas do Ultramar', literally 'Essay of Iconography of Portuguese Overseas Towns', is a fundamental source for the study of urban form in former Portuguese colonies. It is a work constantly mentioned and its images have been abundantly used in local and regional historiographies. It is a unique and essential collection of graphic descriptions representing the most important Portuguese settlements outside Europe, as well as noteworthy places connected to the Portuguese expansion or colonization periods. It has so far only been used instrumentally, as support for other endeavours. Its images turn up in the literature accompanied by a laconic mandatory bibliographic reference; short notices are given by Teixeira (1993; 2008) and Gutiérrez (2001). This paper sets out to shed a more comprehensive light into this atlas, particularly its volume II, on the subject of Africa. The work is described and put in context and the author's biography is studied. Its purpose is to contribute to the understanding of African city centres that have been subject to Portuguese colonization, through the analysis of the historical precedent witnessed by the document under scrutiny.

THE ATLAS: STRUCTURE, CONTENTS AND STANDPOINTS

Silveira's initial purpose for this book was that it should be the foundation of a more ambitious project on town planning of Portuguese origin. Although it was never carried out as intended, the four albums present a wealth of graphical information on the settlements which can be understood as town or future town centres, as well as a more limited sum of related written data. It consists of the reproduction of designs, paintings and engravings representing maps, perspectives, panoramas and plans of existing or planned towns. It joined past and future side by side as pages were assembled. More than a thousand figures depict nearly two hundred towns.

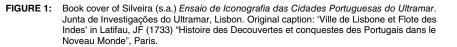
Volume 1

The first volume is dedicated to Morocco and the Adjacent Islands (the archipelagos of Madeira and Azores); the second, to occidental and oriental Sub-Saharan Africa; the third, to near and far-East Asia; and the fourth, to

Brazil. The whole *opus* broadly replicates the Portuguese voyages, conquests and effective occupation of colonial locations, from the 15th to the 20th century. The four volumes amount to 626 pages – of which are numbered 1-116 in volume 1, pages 125-302 in volume 2, pages 311-498 in volume 3 and pages 507-626 in volume 4. They are presented in an album folio size of 50cm x 37cm. The Introduction, in volume 1, is both in Portuguese and English; summaries in English appear in the other volumes. A bibliography is included in volume 4. At head of title, appears "*Ministério do Ultramar, JIU – Junta de Investigações do Ultramar*" (Ministry for the Overseas Territories – Research Board for the Overseas Territories). The illustration in the soft book cover depicts Lisbon, the political seat and symbolic source of the European movement of expansion in its early phase - the single representation of a European city in the atlas. Portugal's capital in the 16th century is portrayed as a middle ground between a first plane of the Tagus river mouth, profusely sailed by caravels and *naus*, and a large sky inhabited by an angel announcing and forwarding the Portuguese kingdom (Figure 1).

As no volume exhibits a year of publication, the usual acknowledged timestamp is the 1950's, or, depending on librarians' criteria, any date from 1951 to 1959; the more consensual is the 1956-60 time interval and lately researchers have refined the time setting at *ca*.1956; a recent date acknowledgment is 1951. Nonetheless, 1954 should be given as the earlier possible publication date, as this year appears several times in the bibliographic list. The possibility of the books having been published in several subsequent years is contrary to their uniformity in typeface, paper and colour. Another inconsistency in the bibliographic reference field is the author's name, varyingly spelt out as Luis or as the older spelling Luiz, including or not the – in this case incorrect – preposition "da". The bibliographic records are tangled with other Luis Silveiras of the same or different centuries, as they appear in many and otherwise dependable institutional bibliographical lists.





The introduction sets out pointing out the replicative character that Silveira observes in the overseas towns relative to the towns existing in what would be called the 'European Portugal'; official doctrine was just then translating colonies into provinces, the same administrative partition that existed in Portugal. Silveira perceives a unity, a national unity, in these homogeneous patterns of town-making. This is the justification of the atlas: a collection and recollection of forms rooted in four continents, all referring to a common origin, the Portuguese discoveries enterprise. He notes the scarce number of studies on Portuguese urbanism, both on the subject of the mother country and, still more so, on the overseas towns; only military history or one or other specific aspect related to the towns had so far motivated scholarly studies. He mentions the distributed, uneven and 'painfully meagre' bibliography on the topic of Portuguese towns, as compared to the importance of the subject-matter. He explains the criteria used in this particular selection of towns, where he includes even small settlements: he raises questions of etymology, of different definitions proposed by Lavedan and Pirenne, of administrative definition and of statistics.

About the atlas' comprehensiveness, he states his base line of opting only for representations that give a picture of the whole urban settlement and not of only a part of it; this excludes a large sum of graphic material. He makes clear the utter diversity of materials and heterogeneity of sources, enumerating the resources on which he drew: Portuguese, Dutch, English, German, French, Spanish, Italian and Asian sources. He states his intention, that he meets repeatedly in the book, of presenting a systematic index where each icon will be described by the locality / the period of history of the town that the drawing presumably represents / the date of the icon / the method and material of execution / the actual size / the overall size / the reference number / the inscriptions, words written below the icon, etc. / other remarks. He establishes a number of 'classes' of sources or types of material. As to further developments, he declares his intent of writing an essay on literary sources of

these 'Portuguese towns overseas', plus a systematic bibliography. Following this triple work – the atlas, the essay of literary sources and the bibliography – an analytical and deductive book could be produced on the 'evolution of the Portuguese towns overseas'. These three further actions were to be put off for unknown motifs.

As to presentation criteria of the album, the author signals his partiality towards the best arrangement of icons in detriment of text. This helps explain the incompleteness of some references, as much as the great difficulty of obtaining them. Regarding the order of appearance of geographical places in the albums, Silveira chooses "to trace the ideal route of an imaginary traveller, … who, leaving Lisbon, before returning to his starting point, would pass through those Portuguese towns, of which I have collected icons". In this mode, he organises the group of four volumes as well as the one dedicated to Sub-Saharan Africa: he goes South from the Cape Verde archipelago and touches the mainland at various ports and a small number of inner towns, from Gorée to Cabo da Boa Esperança (Cape of Good Hope), to ultimately turn round to the Indian Ocean, resume the contact with land at the bay of Lourenço Marques (nowadays Maputo) and travel North up to the last city depicted, Mombaça (Mombasa). In each town illustrated, a chronological order sets in.

This atlas can be seen as incorporating both primary and secondary source materials – most of the 1141 icons had seen the light somewhere before. The engravings, by their very nature, had been previously published elsewhere and maps could have been widely or very sparsely distributed; the whole endeavour lies in the selection and putting together of this data under a thematic lens. But new information did get used: Silveira included many important urban planning documents that were being produced in the *Gabinete de Urbanização do Ultramar* – GUU (Town Planning Committee for the Overseas Territories), successor in 1952 of the *Gabinete de Urbanização do Ultramar* – GUU (Town Planning Committee for the Colonies), created in 1944 (Fernandes 1999). This agency was intended to study the problems of African colonial urbanism, to design plans for towns in the African colonies and to make topographical surveys; but its tasks would be extended to include planning assignments for all Portuguese colonies, designing and constructing buildings and monuments and promoting housing. In an era of strict control of information and censorship, the ministerial GUU had "allowed and advised me to reproduce here" a number of the many plans being designed by the Lisbon-based team of architects and urban planners. So, not only the "past evolution of the Portuguese towns overseas, but also their possible future development" would be recorded in this exceptional atlas. This happens a mere twenty years before the country's withdrawal from these territories, where in some places the Portuguese had stayed for four centuries.

Silveira sets the nature of Portuguese town foundation against the different traditions of Spanish and Non-Iberian extraction. He asserts the difference of setting up urban settlements by the Portuguese from those created by Spain, with the ordinances decreed by the *Leyes de Indias*: the fact that the Portuguese would be reluctant to apply the orthogonal gridiron plan and not obey a pre-defined exact plan as did its neighbouring kingdom, but did follow a cultural model, a mental and constructive scheme. Theirs were *organic* creations. From his privileged point of view, after carrying out a in-depth analysis of cartography and iconography, he thus proposes an opening viewpoint in what was later to be a debate about the contrasting character of Spanish and Portuguese urban processes, particularly in the New World; a central issue first and foremost for Brazil, concerning its initial urban settlements and territorial system. He is one of the first scholars to make a positive appraisal of Portuguese urbanism, following the positive assessment of the military engineers' contribution made in 1940, but in advance of the movement opened by the study of Pombaline Urbanism and finally epitomized by the term 'Portuguese School of Urbanism' (Correia 1997; Rossa, Araújo & Carita 2001).

While he admits present day influences by its neighbours in urban planning of Mozambique – seemingly meaning the English established in South Africa and Rhodesia, today's Zimbabwe, he has a different view on the role of precedent townships at an earlier age. On the subject of the possible use of pre-existing towns by the Portuguese in Oriental Africa, he puts forward there was no influence from the existing Arab coastal settlements nor from the big cities in the interior: instead, the Portuguese had to build and organize towns in a tropical setting through a learning process of an empirical nature.

The author

Who was the author? The short biographical note below is as yet a provisional attempt to assemble objective facts on his life and career.

Luis Silveira's education didn't make him an architect or a planner: he graduated in Germanic languages at the Faculty of Letters of the University of Lisbon. There followed a post-graduation as librarian/archivist. He was born, lived and died in Lisbon between 1912 to 2000, except for a period in Germany and the years he spent in Évora, where he was 2nd librarian of the Évora Public Library and Regional Archive, as of 1 February 1935. Subsequently, he took office as its Director, as of October 1937 until most likely 1944, when a new Director took

office. He returned to Lisbon, where he became Secretary of the JIU (*Junta de Investigações das Colónias*, later of the *Ultramar*, under the hierarchy of the Ministry of the Colonies and from 1951 up to the end of the regime, called the *Ultramar* – Overseas Provinces).

In 1954 he became Superior Inspector of Libraries and Public Archives, under the hierarchy of the General Direction of the Higher Education and Fine Arts of the Ministry of National Education (Ribeiro 2008), until his retirement in 1982. So, most of his life he held a public office, with administrative posts at the *Junta das Missões Geográficas e de Investigações Coloniais*.

He took a very early position of Portuguese lectureship, in the period between 1936 and 1938, at the University of Hamburg, under the sponsorship of the *Instituto para a Alta Cultura*, a department of the Ministry of National Education in charge of the scientific and artistic relationship of Portugal with foreign nations. In this position, he used his free time from classes to search the State Library for Portuguese Manuscripts. Presumably, this was the first venture of a lifelong devotion to scholarly work. He authored a long list of books and other publications, was a frequent writer in magazines and newspapers and made small programmes for radio broadcast. At the *Rádio Clube Português*, based in the Lisbon's suburb Parede where he lived, Silveira produced the programme *Poetas de todo o Mundo* where he read German and other poetry. He encompassed very many subjects, ever expanding in a geographical scale, beginning in 1940 with Philology and Literature, Philosophy, History, Geography, Biography, Linguistics, Art, Collection Development and Cataloguing, Cartography and Urban Planning. His scope of interests led him to collect and edit different types of documents, such as drawings by Portuguese artists, sources for the history of Brazil, Portuguese sources for the history of Spain or existing sources of Portuguese history abroad. He organized with architect and theorist Raul Lino and historian A. H. de Oliveira Marques a 'General Bibliography of Portuguese Art in 16 volumes (Lino, Silveira & Marques 1969).

A keen interest in journeys and travels is made manifest by his work encompassing Guinea, Congo, Angola, India or the Far-East, through the lens of early travellers and descriptions. In addition to his many translations and prefaces, he made transcripts of long forgotten documents. The 'Obra nova de língua geral de Mina de António da Costa Peixoto' (New Book of the Common Language of Mina) portrays an African language spoken in 18th and 19th century's Brazil by part of its African population of Ghana, Togo and Benin's origin. After two centuries of oblivion, Silveira rediscovered and published this work in 1944, allowing it to be the base of on-going present day linguistic enquiries into the impact of slavery in the Atlantic world.

In his position as a high-ranking public official, he travelled outside Europe, presenting research papers at various congresses. Two congresses can be mentioned on either side of the Atlantic at the end of the 1940's: the '2^a Conferência internacional dos africanistas ocidentais' (2nd International Conference of Occidental Africanists) that took place in Guinea-Bissau in 1947 and, in 1949, the 'IV Congresso de História Nacional' (4th National History Congress) that took place in Rio de Janeiro, where he was one of the seventeen Portuguese delegates. This Congress was promoted by the Brazilian Historical and Geographical Institute to celebrate the four hundredth anniversary of the foundation of the city of Salvador and the creation of the General Government of the Brazilian territory. The mission ascribed to the important Portuguese delegation at the Congress was to develop the political agenda set the Salazar regime at the 1940 Centenary Commemorations in Portugal: according to Catroga "to glorify the present [...] in the light of a non naive interpretation of Portugal's destiny. This would be achieved by means of a 'direct exaltation of what it was most important to remember: the Discoveries. [...] The foundation and re-foundation of the Nation should be symbolized as formative and preparatory moments in the construction of the [Portuguese] Empire" (1998:268-269).

Silveira's strong commitment to spatial and geographical subject-matter brings him to his *magnum-opus*, the 'Ensaio de Iconografia das Cidades Portuguesas do Ultramar' (the atlas of the Portuguese overseas towns). Approximately at the same time, he prepares a text on the contents of toponymy of these territories (Silveira 1958). Following the atlas publication, he intends to prepare a similar work on Portuguese fortifications; but this new atlas will be published thirty years later, and only regarding a part of the Indian sub-continent (Silveira 1988).

Volume 2: Africa

The volume dedicated to Sub-Saharan Africa is divided into two parts – Occidental and Oriental Africa – and concerns the following towns and locations:

(i) in Occidental Africa: Ribeira Grande (Santo Antão) / Ribeira Grande (Santiago) / Maria Pia / Mindelo / Ribeira Brava / Tarrafal (Santiago) / Nossa Senhora da Luz / Sal Rei / Praia / São Filipe / Furna (Brava); Goreia; Cacheu / Bissau / Bolama / Buba / São Jorge da Mina / São João Baptista de Ajudá / Santo António / São Tomé; Santa Helena; Cabinda / Banana / Boma / Noqui / S. Salvador do Congo / Ambrizete / Ambriz / Caxito / Luanda / Massangano / Dondo / Punto Andongo / Malanje / Novo Redondo / Lobito / Catumbela / Belmonte / Benguela / Nova Lisboa / Caconda / Sá da Bandeira / Huíla / Capangombe / Moçâmedes / Porto Alexandre / Humbe; Cabo da Boa Esperança

(ii) in Oriental Africa: Lourenço Marques / Bazaruto / Vila de João Belo / Sofala / Beira / Nhanda / Quelimane / Marral / Sena / Tete / Ilha de Moçambique / Porto Amélia / Ibo / Quiloa / António Enes; Mombaça.

A small number of these locations is related to places once connected to the Portuguese cycle of Discoveries or/and early occupation or alliances – Goreia, S. Salvador do Congo, Santa Helena, Cabo da Boa Esperança (Cape of Good Hope) and Mombaça (Mombasa).

The 351 figures it contains are characterized, as the other volumes, by heterogeneity – of scale, of type and origin of document, of geography of places depicted, of dates, of status vis-à-vis the standing of their representation as existent or planned reality and of status vis-à-vis their prior diffusion – either already published or unpublished. The wealth of the contents is an invitation to fulfil its potential as an instrument for knowledge – of which the author himself was aware of, as already pointed out – as to incompleteness in data, lack of context and absence of critical reflection.

In a first characterization of the comparative presence of different territories, we can point out the contrast between Occidental and Oriental Africa: while in the western part 248 icons are presented, only a mere 103 represent the eastern part; while Luanda has 29 icons, Lourenço Marques (Maputo) only has 20. This asymmetry reflects the longer and closer contact between the Portuguese and the western board of Africa, duplicated yet by the appropriation of the American land of Brazil in the other side of the Atlantic.

The foundation of new towns by the Portuguese is very much present in this album, where the context and existing conditions – such as the appropriation of former African settlements – has to be seen as indirect information.

Many of its plans and perspectives make us see a landscape that obeys the logic of what Murillo Marx (1996:172) calls the binomial of 'defence/to dock': the approach to the land and all that relates to this critical moment, on the one hand, and the possibility of security, on the other hand. Evidently the sea-land divide is privileged.

The time in which the drawings were gathered by Silveira precede the urbanization and architectural drive of the last twenty years of Portuguese rule (Fernandes 2002), but as regards urbanism, the main forces were already in action and a number of plans for new towns or city expansions had already been designed.

The selection of the then planned cities whose plans have been reproduced here has been subject to a specific 'approval and advice' by the Town-Planning Committee for the Overseas Territories. These constitute *hors-text* colour plates, which, despite visual prominence in the materialization of the album, present no accompanying records of any type such as a short text or even a descriptive caption. When compared to the presentation arrangement of the other icons and when judged against Silveira's customary meticulousness, this want is significant. The discrepancy of criteria points more to the source than to the author. The source is located in the Ministry of the Overseas Territories; the regime places a harsh censorship on all printed matter and upholding of the African territories is a critical issue at the time; Tunisia, Morocco and Sudan gain their independence in 1956 and Ghana in 1957, initiating the then fast-moving decolonisation of sub-Saharan Africa.

Two engravings of the late 19th century show us Luanda and Lourenço Marques/Maputo as peaceful and almost pastoral, tropicalized coastal towns burgeoning into the hills surrounding them, from which each view is drawn (Figure 2). This portrays one of the main features of Portuguese urban settlement – the preference for the littoral location and foretells another consistent feature – the duality of urban fabric between the *Baixa* (low) and the *Alta* (high) parts of a city. The same declivity, the same viewpoint, the same calm sea sailed by boats, the same single storey, large buildings viewed at an angle, the same low density: the similarity between these two views, by different artists and from different dates, conveys the political symmetry finally wanted for these immense territories outside Portugal at the end of the cycle of spatially discontinuous occupation of the land: Angola and Mozambique.

AFRICAN PERSPECTIVES 2009. The African Inner City: [Re]sourced

The serene, rather idealized atmosphere each of these views conveys is made possible by the distance between subject and object of representation and by the nature of the discontinuous occupation of the land. As political determination sets in, the exploitation becomes more intense and as the towns acquire signs and infrastructures of capitality in the following 50 years, the ambiance changes and the urban fabric invades the whole viewpoint's background. The era of unplanned urban growth was coming to an end.



FIGURE 2: [A] Plate 314, p.207: "Porto da Cidade de Loanda"/ Port of Town of Loanda; [B] Plate 396, p.249: "Cidade de Lourenço Marques"/ Town of Lourenço Marques. Source: Silveira (s.a.).

The undated, printed urbanization plans of these same cities – capital cities of what is going to be defined in 1951 as overseas 'provinces' of Portugal – show an immense ambition of turning them into modern metropoli: huge expansion areas, in the case of Lourenço Marques/Maputo drawn to city-beautiful and garden-city principles (Matos & Ramos 2008; 2006) and in the case of Luanda, to zoning principles (Martins 2000); infrastructure, such as airports, port facilities and railway-lines terminals materialize at leading roles in the urban structure. These plans can be dated to the early 1950's; the Lourenço Marques's plan matches up to the *Plano Geral de Urbanização* designed in 1952 in Lisbon by the *Gabinete de Urbanização do Ultramar* – GUU (Overseas Urban Planning Agency), whose Director was the architect João António Aguiar (Morais 2001) (Figure 3).

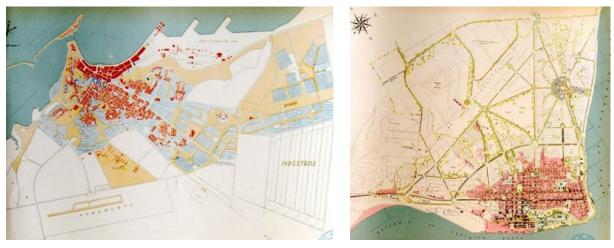


FIGURE 3: [A] Plate 317, p.209: "Planta de Urbanização de Luanda"/ Urban Plan of Luanda; [B] Plate 408, p.255: "Plano de Urbanização de Lourenço Marques"/ Urban Plan of Lourenço Marques. Source: Silveira (s.a.)

It would take some ten and fifteen years respectively to transfer the capacity of designing layout plan for the capital cities of Angola and Mozambique to local planning agencies. Next to the Lourenço Marques's general plan, a detailed area is shown accompanied by the laconic caption 'Sector of inner dense urban zone'. This corresponds to the same district in other sources called the 'indigenous neighbourhood' and which, in the case of the Indian Ocean city, is presented as a showcase of harmonious urban planning. The lack of straightforward words to describe what was intended to be a racially segregated, but spatially unsegregated garden-city quarter, is yet another sign of uneasiness of the official bodies of the administration. It was difficult to assume a, then, increasingly contested power division in the territory.

CONCLUSION

The production of a colonial territory requires the essential tool of cartography; the creation of new landscapes and townscapes for economic exploitation, social existence and symbolic purposes, needs the implementation of planning instruments; and the knowledge of a territory calls for various forms of iconography. All these were met by the atlas devised by Luis Silveira. As such, he participated in the colonial endeavour; but he also contributed to the understanding of both the physical geography and the human interaction with this geography in the *longue durée* scale.

Whether for the Portuguese or for the African nationals, this atlas is an invaluable aid to the formulation of a territorial and urban history. It is a fundamental resource for the study of design and construction of city-centres in the Portuguese ex-colonies – as seen through the eyes of a Portuguese public official in the eve of the colonial wars in Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau.

It can be seen as having played the role of the baton at a relay race, between remote generations and our own; between long deceased intrepid explorers and our crisis-ridden world of overpopulation, between the colonials and nationalists centred upon themselves and our unsure uncentred views. It was one of very few documents of relatively easy access that permitted a scholarly interest to be kept alive throughout decades of denial, dissent and violent conflict. Slowly, new researchers in the fields of planning history and urban morphology are rediscovering the important chapter of Africa's city-planning in the Portuguese-colonized territories. Urban development in the new independent States would be incomprehensible without the colonial period. Urban history of Portugal is incomplete without it.

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