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Spanish fortifications in Asia: a case study of Intramuros district in Manila – current situation and future prospects

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Abstract

This paper analyses the morphological characteristics and the historical evolution of the Spanish fortification in the city of Manila, which is known as Intramuros. In turn, an analysis for future prospectations, which leads to its revalorization, is also produced. This case study constitutes a unique example of the Spanish expansion in Asia, with strong ties to other cultures present in this territory. After the establishment of Manila as the capital city of the first Spanish colony in Asia in 1571, the construction of the permanent fortification system was approved, following the designs that the Ordinances of Phillippe II established for the Spanish settlements in the New World. This part of Manila has been the epicenter of the historical affairs that affected the whole country since the 16th century. In turn, this historical background has left a strong footprint in this fortification system as well as in its inner grid city, which, in fact, has been partially destroyed and rebuilt several times. Our study focuses on the actual condition of the fortification system in relation to its original conception and historical evolution; it was accomplished through a field study of the Intramuros district in Manila conducted in 2010, together with an analysis of available historical cartography and historical records. This up-to-date situation of the fortification leads to a proper understanding of its morphological evolution in relation to historical events, and also establishes a frame to understand the hints for its preservation and revalorization for the future.

Keywords: Philippines, Manila, Spanish fortifications, colonial cities.

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