



# The Almina of Ceuta. Graphic Analysis of Its Historical Cartography

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**Abstract.** At the beginning of the XVIII century the number of military engineers who were part of the army was limited; the arrival of Felipe V to the throne of Spain, led to a clear attempt to modernize the country, its communications, cities and infrastructures. To carry out this the Royal Military Engineering Corps (created by Royal Decree on the 17th of April 1711 specifically for this purpose) supported the Monarch for the first time in the Siege of Cardona. During the next few years, the influence of this new Corp of Engineers became notorious throughout the national territory. It soon became the driving force behind the development of existing defence systems as well as the construction of new fortresses, citadels, barracks, hospitals, stores or arsenals, all of them aimed at effectively establishing a fierce and safe defence of the metropolitan territory and the Indias.

The objective of this article is the analysis of the influence on the urban development of Ceuta, of the work carried out by military engineers during the 18th century. For this, and focusing on the area called La Almina (see Fig. 1), the methodology used is based on studying the existing historical cartography both in the General Archive of Simancas and in the General Military Archive of Madrid, classifying and ordering the different actions carried out military engineers and develop a cartography that reflects the urban situation at the end of the 18th century in comparison with the current situation.

**Keywords:** Military engineers · Historical cartography · Urban development · Ceuta

## 1 Introduction

Ceuta started the XVIII century besieged by the Sultan of Morocco, Mulay Ismail, a siege that took place from 1669 to 1727. The city before this period didn't extend beyond the Plaza, where local authorities were based including military, ecclesiastical and civil buildings [1]. It was a perfectly walled city surrounded by the sea in northern and southern directions, the Campo del Moro, (the field of the moor) (enemy ground) being placed towards the West and towards the East we find the lands of The Almina.

This urban settlement and fortification took place during the reign of Manuel I (1495–1521: the consequences of which being, reduction in the number of inhabitants of the city



**Fig. 1.** Situation of the area of La Almina on the “General map of the Plaza of Ceuta located on the coast of Africa in the Strait of Gibraltar.” - Unknown author - 1794 - General Military Archives of Madrid - CE – 16/21

after the Portuguese conquest, the poor condition of the existing walls, inherited from Arab times, the high cost that would require its rehabilitation and further maintenance and the high number of troops needed in order to maintain the surveillance of the entire defensive perimeter.

Following the consequences described above, and taking into account the fact that the Moorish enemy were by then equipped with artillery, King Don Juan III commanded the design of a new defensive system with the objective of reinforcing the existing one and developing it to meet modern war requirements.



**Fig. 2.** Aerial view of the Plaza, circa 1928. Historical Military Air Service [10].

The proposal of the military engineers was, on the West front (the one that watched the Moor) the counterscarp curtain (Royal Wall) was built two bastions (The bastions of Coraza and La Bandera), and a navigational moat between the north and south bay, on the East front, it was necessary to build another construction like the one described above, counterscarp, curtain, and two bastions (Bastion of San Francisco and San Juan de Dios), with semi-dry moat, between the North and South bay and the North and South fronts, sections of the wall of the scarp.

Of all the work that took place, like the counterscarp of the east front, only 50% of it became a reality. The city was finally defined at the end of the XVII century, reduced to the extension described above. In the attached picture (see Fig. 2), dated in 1928 one can almost sense the appearance and trace what was the fortification of The Plaza.

The siege established by The Sultan, forced that the adjacent lands of La Plaza, named suburb (arrabal) of La Almina, (abandoned lands for some time, dedicated to agricultural and cattle work), were gradually occupied with urban settlements by part of the population of Ceuta, who fled from La Plaza, due to constant shelling, or to leave their dwellings to the new troops that arrived from the peninsula to undertake the defence of the city.

The Anglo-Dutch occupation of Gibraltar in 1704, the strategic importance of the city and the defence of which would become a priority objective in the defensive politics of Felipe V who would allocate the necessary resources to that end, by greatly increasing the military presence in the city.

In this scenario, the new Corp of Engineers, created at the beginning of the XVIII century [2], with the Marques Próspero de Verboom at the head, would be employed to carry out its first mission namely to ensure and broaden the defences of the terrestrial front, in order to establish a solid and fierce protection against the constant attack of the Moors.

The purpose of the present publication is to realise a detailed description of the entire defensive system built during the XVIII century, for the protection and defence of this area of the city, relying on the literal descriptions of the city made by the engineers from that period.

## 2 Discussion

La Almina, was bordering to the North, by the Atlantic Ocean, to the South by the Mediterranean Sea, to the west by the moat, and to the East by the Cortadura del Valle lands. We should add to this migration produced by the civil population from La Plaza to La Almina, the transfer of institutional, (Casa del Gobernador) and administration (Casa de las Veedurias) buildings and the constructions of new medical (Hospital Real) and religious (Iglesia de los Remedios) buildings, making more tangible the strong prominence of this area of the city in contrast to La Plaza. Besieged by enemy troops the city became ruined little by little over the years, the promise of rehabilitation becoming an impossibility.

Although the first quarter of the XVII century mainly focused on the poliorcetic work of the terrestrial front, there was no impediment to the construction of the different projects across the entire territory of Ceuta.

The first urban renovation work took place in La Almina lands, thanks to brigadier Don Diego Manrique, who in 1797 ordered the opening of a path to the North front of the city. Until then occupied and used as private vegetable gardens; The path was wide enough to allow access to troops walking in a military column, allowing them to arrive from the Bastion San Sebastian grounds to the San Amaro Castle, which was armed and consolidated.

With the arrival of Don Luis Rigio to the city on the 25th of June 1791, Prince of Campoflorido, as the general captain of La Plaza, was at the front, the projective work creating a combination of defensive systems that would fortify La Almina as well as the Hacho peninsula and their perimeter.

The first outline of this huge project, whose purpose was not to be reached until the end of the XVIII century, would be the fortification of the entire South coast, and the construction of a parapet from the Boquete de la Sardina down to San Jerónimo beach, in Fuente Caballos.

The building activity on the North front, proceeded, by continuing the renovation work, initiated by his successor the Governor Ribadeo; furthermore, the construction of a superstructure that would defend the Governor Palace, which was next to the adjacent lands of the future San Sebastian Bastion, such as digging a trench from there to the Puerta de la Almina.

The transfer of population to the city towards the East [3] was not until the siege of the Sultan Mulay Ismail was well underway During the mandate of Governor Don Antonio Manso Maldonado, Field Marshall of the Royal Army (1732–1739), and his successor Don Pedro de Vargas (1739–1745), the mayor projects and further works completed would embolden the defensive system of the lands of La Almina [6]. For the analysis and study of this fortification, there are divisions according to his fronts. In this way:

### **Northern Front**

In 1707, Governor of The Plaza of Ceuta Don Juan Francisco Manrique and Arana, and acting as the Field Marshall the brigadier Don Diego Manrique, the first works on the Northern front of La Almina: were the following:

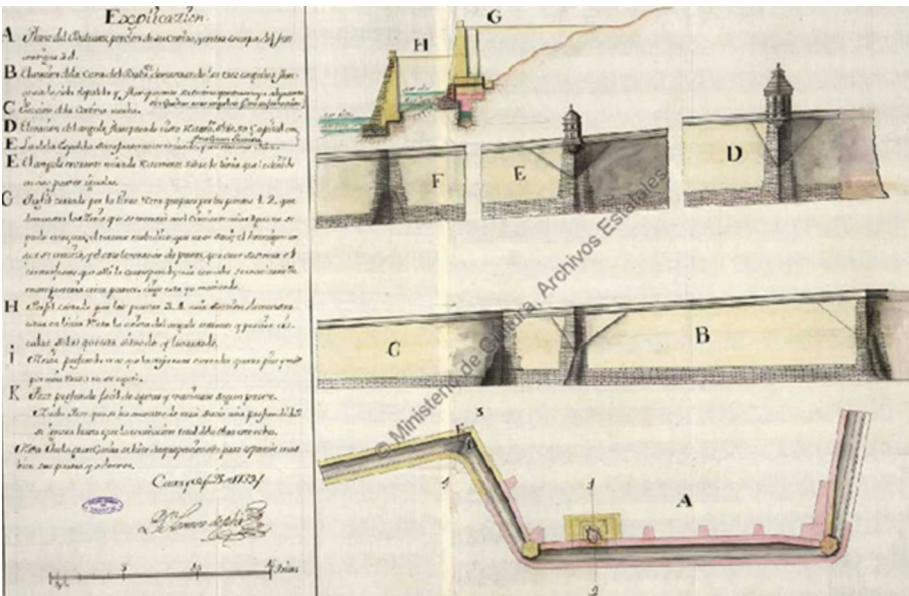
- The opening of a path to connect the adjacent lands to the Foso de la Almina with the ravelin of San Amaro, width enough to allow access to “rolling artillery” and so that “troops could walk in a column”.
- The building of the battery of San Pedro and the parapet over this beach.

In 1727, the Governor of The Plaza the Lieutenant-General Don Manuel Luis de Orleans and Watteville, commissioned the first works of reparation and consolidation of the north front of the wall of The Almina started. These were reflected by the military engineer Miguel Sanchez Taramas in 1732 in the plan entitled “Elevation plan and profiles of the coast of Ceuta that point Gibraltar from the Puerta de la Almina down to the basin with the repairs that have been made from 1728 until the present of 1732...” (see Fig. 3).



**Fig. 3.** Elevation plan and profiles of the coast of Ceuta that point Gibraltar from the Puerta de la Almina down to the basin with the repairs that have been made from 1728 until 1732... - Miguel Sánchez Taramas – 1732 – General Archives of Simancas - MPD, 60, 054 [9]

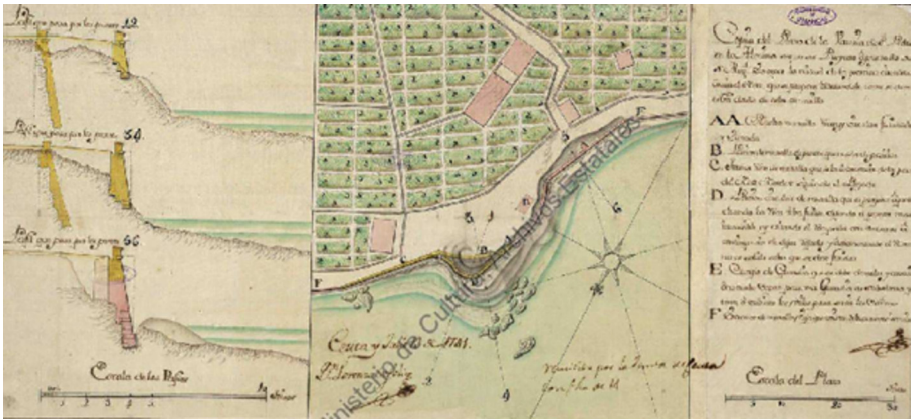
The repair works made and those not yet executed are shown. It is also noted, how small modifications of the layout of the wall exist with regards to the original. The condition of the conservation of the wall was a result of the weather conditions over the years, and the lack of maintenance. That is why repairs reached 32% of what was expected modifying the first outline by another 28%.



**Fig. 4.** Elevation plan of the bastion of San Sebastian - Lorenzo de Solís - 1739 - General Archives of Simancas - MPD, 07, 173 [9]

While different works were undertaken from the beginning of the century, the big push to fortify and to improve this section of the wall came from the hand of the Governor of The Plaza Don Pedro de Vargas Maldonado. He named the engineer Don Lorenzo de Solís (Oviedo, (Asturias) f.s. XVII – Veracruz (México), 16.XI.1761) for the management of this works, leading and accomplishing the following projects to expand and fortify the defences of the north:

- Bastion of San Sebastian with its curtain and ramp, represented in the “Elevation and plan of the bastion of San Sebastian” made by Lorenzo de Solis. (1739) (see Fig. 4).
- The battery of San Pedro with its two collateral curtains, represented in the plan “the battery of San Pedro in La Almina according to his project approved by S. Magd, except for half of the circular portion towards the North proposed as shown in yellow” made by Lorenzo de Solis. (1741) (see Fig. 5).



**Fig. 5.** Copy of the plan of the battery of San Pedro in La Almina according to his project approved by S. Magd, except for half of the circular portion towards the North proposed as shown in yellow - Lorenzo de Solis – 1741 - General Archive of Simancas - MPD, 07, 171 [9]

These two projects were finally built as proposed; a wall and a thickened structure in the first stretch topped with a masterly cordon and followed by a parapet.

### **Southern Front**

The southern side of La Almina is principally characterised by the land, constituting a slope steep from the Torreón de San Jerónimo, until the Rastrillo Nuevo. For this reason, for the analysis of this front, we should identify two clear sections based on the existing topography:

- The first, which goes from the Bastion of San José to the Torreón de San Jerónimo.
- The second, from the Torreón to the Nuevo Rastrillo.

The first drafts of the big project of Mr Luis Rigio, to delimit the perimeter with a fortification on the south of The Almina would reflect in the construction of an entrenchment defence. Going from the battery of San Jerónimo down to the Rastrillo Nuevo, with some garitons and the construction of a parapet from the Agujero de la Sardina until the beach of San Jerónimo, in Fuente Caballos.

With the arrival of Don Lorenzo de Solis to the city, at the same time the bastion of San Sebastian was in construction on the northern side of the city as the defences on the southern side to replace the existing.

In this way, Solís would design a defensive system consisting of four batteries, represented on the plans “Project of Fuente Caballos, showing the condition that will have the work once concluded, the finished work in red and the work in progress in yellow “ and “Elevation of the work seen from the sea; Profile passing through point 1 and 2; Profile passing through point 5 and 6; Profile passing through point 7 and 8” (see Fig. 6 and Fig. 7), all connected by panels of wall with a strengthened structure. From East to West, the elements that shape this system were:

- The Battery of San José, with the capacity to house ten cannons, whose main function consists in defending the beach of The Ribera up to the new spike.
- The Battery, platform or Bastion of San Carlos, with the capacity to house nine cannons.
- The Battery of Fuente Caballos, with the capacity to house two cannons, its main function relies on defending the entry or exit to the city.
- The Door of Fuente Caballos with its two tambours.
- The Battery San Geronimo, situated at the beginning of the steep terrain that had the capacity to house two cannons.



**Fig. 6.** Plan of the Project of Fuente Caballos, showing the condition that will have the work once concluded, the finished work in red and the work in progress in yellow - Lorenzo de Solís - 1743 - General Archives of Simancas - MPD, 19, 180 [9]



**Fig. 7.** Elevation of the work seen from the sea; Profile passing through point 1 and 2; Profile passing through point 5 and 6; Profile passing through point 7 and 8 - Lorenzo de Solís - 1743 - General Archives of Simancas - MPD, 12, 057 [9]

At the beginning of the last quarter of the century and according to Martin Gabriel, the existent “very poor and useless entrenchment” would be replaced by the construction of

a masonry parapet with a banquette, 9-foot tall (2,50 m aprox.) and 3-foot bulk (0,385 m aprox.) At the same time, with the construction of the Batería Nueva, and along with the Castillo del Sarchal and the Batería del Quemadero, in construction, would constitute a strong defensive line, it would prevent the enemy from disembarking on the beach of Sarchal, called at that time, Playa Hermosa.

In this sketch stretch of the south wall, La Batería del Molino del Viento with capacity to house three cannons is also shown. In this attached picture (see Fig. 8), from 1928, it is clear and precisely depicts the section of the wall, partially lost nowadays.



**Fig. 8.** Aerial view of the defences in the south front - 1928 - Historical Military Air Service [10]

### **Western Front**

The west front has the unfinished counterscarp inherited from Portuguese engineering. We add to this stretch, the drawbridge of two arches that connected La Plaza with the suburb (arrabal) of La Almina reaching the existent semi-dry moat between the two areas of the city.

In this scenario, the key objective in this front was to finish fortifying the defensive line, an aim accomplished with the realisation of the project and further construction of Fuente Caballos by engineer Don Lorenzo de Solis (see Fig. 6 and Fig. 7).

### **Eastern Front**

La Almina limited on the west with a deep depression from the North to the South separating it from the foothill of Monte Hacho, called “El Valle”. According to the description of military engineer Martin Gabriel, around 1773 already existed an old wall that worked a provisional entrenchment in this area of the city. It protected the city from possible enemy attacks. This poor defence, (was in a nearly dilapidated state) from the North to the South connected through the bazaars of Balsas Nuevas y Rayo and Rastrillo Nuevo.

Within city walls, next to this defence was the Iglesia Nuestra Señora del Valle connected to the cemetery used for the pariah. In September of 1775 the military engineer



Martin Gabriel and Vilanova published a report about the state and the circumstances of Ceuta where he detailed geographical, strategical, economic, porliortetic and urban aspects [7].



**Fig. 9.** Plan of the population of the Almina of Ceuta that reveal his actual state and in two flying papers the projects to close it in the Vally area... - 1777 – Martin Gabriel - General Archives of Simancas - MPD, 64, 104 [9].

In 1777 and already General Engineer of The plaza, Martin Gabriel worked extensively on the project of the fortification of this front. He made several proposals, being reflected in the “Plane of the population of the Almina of Ceuta that reveal his actual state and in two flying papers the projects to close it in the Vally area...” (see Fig. 9), and that were rejected in terms of constructive scale or for its high costs despite the interest shown by the technicians. A covered path and a weapon square were completed as proposed the 12 July under the order of Carlos III the 18 August [4].

With the construction of this defence, the fortification and the defensive system concluded after nearly sixty years since Luis Rigio started this great project.

### 3 Conclusions

The most suitable way to study and to analyse the urban development of a city should be through its historical cartography supported by documents based on the knowledge of the history itself [5]. Indispensable element to be able to comprehend with graphic analysis its historical path.

The defensive system was strengthened and shaping nearly 3700 m of fortification. The physical limits of the city changed creating a new image of itself.

The historical path of this military construction, due to urban interventions during the XX century and its abandonment by part of the local authorities due to the cost of maintenance (even having the necessary architectonical resources to do it. This led to the disappearance of a large part of the Historical Ensemble, remaining visible (not very recognizable) is only 22% of the original construction (see Fig. 10).



**Fig. 10.** Ceuta XVIII century (1794) - Ceuta XXI century - own elaboration

This present study was carried out in the context of a larger investigation denominated THE URBAN DEVELOPMENT OF CEUTA IN THE XVIII CENTURY – Graphic Analysis of its Historical Cartography- in its development phase. The main objective of this study is to focus on performing an analysis from a graphic point of view of the historical cartography from that time to the actual day creating and re-drawing new cartographical (re)constructions where present and future come together. It is necessary to highlight the importance of military engineering and subsequent repercussions in the urban development of The Almina and hence in the city of Ceuta.

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