

Paper presented in: Afro-American Archaeology; *Afro-Latin American Research Institute* at the Hutchins Center, Harvard University, September 15, 2017

Afro-Catholic Architecture? The *San Miguel Arcángel* chapel in Paraná, Argentina (1824-1836)

Daniel Schávelzon

Conicet-UBA Dschavelzon@fibertel.com.ar

Abstract

The only chapel created specifically by the Catholic Church for the use of the African population, as far as we know today, lies in the city of Paraná. Many churches had altars and chapels within, for use of the enslaved, but not purpose-made buildings. There is no bibliography mentioning them in Latin America, as there is for open chapels scattered throughout the continent for the use of native populations, even in Argentina, but not in this area. This would be the sole known case and is unique (or the first to be indentified) for the African population in Latin America. We shall explain this unusual architectural solution which came about at a time when there were conflicts over the freeing of slaves in a city undergoing profound social, political and urban changes.

Key words: Afro-Argentinian archaeology, Paraná, Afro chapel, open chapel

Resumen

La única capilla creada específicamente por la iglesia católica para el uso de la población Afro, al menos de la que hay noticias, está en la ciudad de Paraná. Muchas iglesias tuvieron altares y capillas en su interior para los esclavizados pero no edificios hechos al efecto. Ni siquiera hay bibliografía en América Latina de que eso existiera como sí lo hay para las capillas abiertas dispersas por todo el continente, hechas para la población indígena, incluso en Argentina pero no en esta región.

Los estudios arqueológicos iniciados por trabajos de restauración llevó a una hipótesis acerca de los rituales practicados en ella, dando misa hacia el exterior. Este sería el único caso conocido y es original para la población afro en América Latina. Explicamos esta extraña solución hecha en un momento de conflictos por la libertad de los esclavizados, en una ciudad en profundo cambio social, político y urbano.

Palabras clave

Arqueología afro-argentina, Paraná, capilla de indios, capilla abierta

Introduction

Latin America saw the construction of open chapels to say mass to the indigenous population, from Mexico to Argentina, but no developments were made to provide special Catholic services for the African population and their descendants. There were altars, chapels, brotherhoods and then the so-called *nations* with their own buildings for their services, but no Catholic buildings¹. We propose the possibility that, after Independence and at times when freedom from slavery was a concrete, controversial and political issue, a kind of open chapel for African descendants was attempted. The period of modernization of social relationships and of dismembering of communities in the early nineteenth century was so swift that what had started made no sense a generation later and was forgotten. This chapel might be an example of cases that arose with the early emancipation of the enslaved, within the context of finding a solution that would prevent integration in churches but without generating conditions that would be deemed illegal, notwithstanding the fact that they were another form of racism and discrimination. And there was no future for these cases.



Image of 1871 events in the Chapel of San Miguel Arcángel: revolutionary troops entrench themselves on the terrace using bricks from the belfry. The outside ladder that led to the pulpit-altar is still extant. The atrium was the large expanse facing it².

¹ The so called *Capilla de los Negros* at Chascomús, Argentina, was transformed in a Catholic chapel recently, in 1950. It was built by African-argentinian people but for another purpose.

² Engraving published in *El Americano*, directed by Héctor Varela, Paris, nr. 46, February 1, 1874; the events depicted took place in 1871.

Issues regarding the study of Afro elements in Argentina

History, in spite of the racism found in the origin of sciences in the past, produced reliable (though not academic) publications on slavery in the early twentieth century (Rossi 1926, Kordon 1938, Lanuza 1942). It is difficult but not impossible to ascertain whether they were later forgotten because they were politically incorrect, but it was not until the 1950s that professional publications can be found (Molinari 1944, Rodríguez Molas 1957, Studer 1958, Ortiz Oderigo 1968). Next came the difficult times of the dictatorships and governments that did not look kindly on the topic and therefore there was no reliable research on it except abroad (Andrews 1980, Lewis 1984). As time went by history moved ahead until it flourished with the change into the twenty-first century (Goldberg 1976, 1999, Cejas Minuet 1994, Picotti 1998). And slavery then became an established field of studies, a topic to be discussed and taught, and even a field of social vindication. The low rate of descendants of Africans, compared to others, is only part of the cause for this delay in research on the topic (Frigerio 2002, 2006, Geler 2010).

Archaeology in Argentina was strongly blindfolded on the subject of the African population. The first mention dates to 1980 (Rex González 1980), but nobody referred to them until 1995, when the first attempts to systematize the topic took place (Schávelzon 2001). Our 2003 publication dealt with the field of study, following the lines set in United States of America research (Zorzi 2015, Coloca and Orsi 2013), attempting to find objects related to Africa and the African Diaspora, places in homes set aside for servants, iconography and documents depicting material objects, and searching for physical spaces of Africanity to excavate in Buenos Aires (Schávelzon 2003). In the early years of the twenty-first century, Anthropology made headway into the subject finding that in areas of the country there were rites and objects that had been kept in the dark (Cirio 2007, 2009).



Towards a history of Afro-Argentinian archaeology: first objects found between 1985 and 1989

No places have yet been found that were occupied by Africans or their descendants. There have been attempts and there has been a will, and sections have been identified in large

excavated areas, but there is a strong persistence of the unyielding dichotomy native-white/creole (Schávelzon and Zorzi 2014). So much so that it has strayed from the topic, claiming that Afro archaeology equals the archaeology of poverty and marginality, which is only partly true. On the one hand, this has a political side associated with the recent Peronist government (2003-2016) and its political use of Human Rights (Frigerio 2008) and on the other it denies the complexity of a social group which developed to become property owners and the owners of their own slaves, thus sharing the white/creole class ideology (Rosal 2001). Archaeology imagines poverty to be represented by the same material culture, so that there would be no way to identify its bearers and even that attempting that identification was considered racist. On the other hand, it ignores that there was an appropriation of Afro cultural traits by other social groups spanning from dance (*candombe*) to language, although it has recently been accepted (Frigerio 1993, Cirio 2004). Traditional archaeology was so set against the identification of African and Afro traits that works were published criticizing the search as “essentialist” or “cultural-historical” and thus branding it reactionary and unscientific.



The persistence of ritual in a society that denies its roots (Courtesy Pablo N. Cirio).

This nearsightedness, or blindness, is the result of a strong process of denial of the existence of Africans (Schávelzon and Zorzi 2014). They were concealed, made to disappear, while the great white migration lowered their percentages. This concept of a history without an African presence spread to the collective mind through state education and the official history, until it was established that “you cannot be black and Argentinian

at the same time”³. This was a construction of the past based on a society that rejected the merits of mixed races, unlike what happened in other Latin American countries where they were extolled as part of the construction of a nationalist mythology. History has managed to emerge from that seclusion, education is in the process of emerging, but archaeology has so far been unable to do it.



The blurring of African presence in Argentina from the nineteenth to the twentieth centuries.

The city of Paraná and the African population

The city of Santa Fé was one of Spain’s first settlements in the south of the continent. Juan de Garay, travelling from Asunción to found Buenos Aires for the second time (the enterprise had failed in 1536), had the idea of creating a point of entry to South America in the south Atlantic. Half way, he founded a city on one of the banks of the Paraná River in 1573. The city grew and, in time, so did its environs, while some nearby sites took on importance. This was the case of the Bajada del Paraná, which offered limestone and clay quarries. The site was perfect because it provided a harbour on the river; it was near a large city and allowed the shipping of bulky products along the Paraná to Buenos Aires. There was no legal ceremony to mark the foundation: the place just kept growing from the early eighteenth century onwards but 1730 is considered its foundation year because that is when the building of the first church was legally authorized. The place developed its own identity through being a commercial centre and because of some administrative decisions made there, and it developed into two different present-day provinces: Santa Fe (capital of the province of Santa Fe) and Paraná (capital of the province of Entre Ríos). Land attained economic value and deeds of property were underwritten: the first documents date to 1778

³ Newspaper article August 24, 2014, Clarín, title page

(Pérez Colman 1930, 1946, Sors 1981, Reula 1963). It was acknowledged as a town in 1813 and was designated capital of its province.

There are few descriptions of the town in traveller accounts, which points to the fact that its situation was not stable. Mac Cann stated that it had been founded in 1730 but did not provide any more facts than what he was able to find out in his trip (Mac Cann 1969). Captain Aguirre, upon seeing “the town or chapel of Nuestra Señora del Rosario de la Bajada” in 1740 said:

“At the beginning of this century came the three first neighbours of Coronda afflicted by the persecution of the Abipones, sometime later came their cattle and one after the other they settled where they thought best. By the year 1740 they had a chapel, and the first huts surrounding it were of some colored ones” (Aguirre 1951:386).



African population houses at the bottom of the gully around 1880. (Archivo General de la Nación).



The city of Paraná at Argentina.

The site may have been a refuge for runaway slaves from Santa Fe (Ceruti 2010, Guillot 1961, Saguier 1995), since no initial white population is mentioned. The arrival of the Jesuits and the opening of the limestone and clay quarries must have attracted many more and they dedicated the first church, later the Cathedral, to the Virgen del Rosario (Virgin of the Rosary). The first data we have is from the 1844 census which simply states that there were “29 slaves”, representing 0.6% of the population. However, by that time there were probably few enslaved people left in the territory. Laws had been passed that prevented their importation, some had been freed either with or without conditions, and those who formed part of the armies that fought for independence were freed from personal service. Likewise, the presence of those armies left behind offspring as well as deserters. As an author wrote: “the census figures do not refer to those black people who were born free, or were freed or to their descendants” and this explains the errors in data interpretation (Ceruti 2007). The question arises whether this allows us to apply the statistics obtained elsewhere to this region. A generation before, 35% of the population of Buenos Aires was black. If we take a population of 4000 in Paraná by 1844, we might extrapolate that there could have been at least one thousand black people with the powers granted by previous governments. These may be arbitrary figures but they help to understand the power blacks had to change the dedication of the cathedral, as well as the reason why the Catholic curia and the government allowed them to build a chapel: not to favour them but to apply a new mode of racial segregation.

The origins of the San Miguel Arcángel Chapel

The first Jesuit church, a small one, was given to the Dominican order in 1807. They proposed the construction of a new building in keeping with the growth of the town. But in 1818, after years of paralysis, the front wall, which was the only one standing, was abandoned and it was decided to build the church with a larger portico facing the Plaza Mayor (main square). When the church was finished the parish priest discovered that the church was now dedicated to two saints revered by the African community: Saint Michael and Saint Rose of Lima, creating a conflict with the white-creole population. This is the origin of what would become the San Miguel Arcángel chapel under study (Grosien 1971, Segura 1964, Lurux 1938, Pérez Colman 1930). By this time, the freed African community had seen its power grow enough to put pressure on the authorities. The country had changed since its independence in 1816 and many racial traditions had been relaxed while Bernardino Rivadavia's national government was secularized to the point that religious orders were banished and churches and convents were confiscated. Later on, under Rosas, the government would use that group as a political strike force to obtain complete political power. The freeing of slaves was a crucial issue which started in 1813, when the first laws replaced slavery with servitude for between 16 and 20 years, and the deadline was drawing near. The country was in an unstable situation, there were revolutions every day, and the social and racial conflict was ever present, and it is within this context that we find the white community determined to dedicate their Cathedral to the Virgin Mary.

To solve the issue two events took place: in 1824, the priest, Antolín Gil y Obligado, decided to put an end to the conflict by creating a chapel in the *Tambor* neighbourhood, so that the African population would have their own church and at the same time the two racial groups would be separated. This settled the Cathedral dedication issue. But to this event we must add a series of measures regarding works in urban transformation taken by the municipal government. To arrive at this decision, the local government justified it through a democratic act: it called for a public opinion poll in which only the white inhabitants participated. The result was that Saint Michael and Saint Rose were moved to a new building (Pérez Colman 1930). It was out of the question to come up with a strategic plan to re-settle the African population, but there were a series of sales and donations by the Church of cheap lands surrounding the new chapel. In this way, the local government plotted out a grid system of blocks so that the new dwellings might have an urban appearance, and it even allowed for the creation of a public square, located at the back of the chapel. This might be regarded as part of the urban modernization movement, already segregationist, rather than for the benefit of the black community. Lands occupied without deeds were legalized from 1839 onwards in order to gather the black community in a certain area. Of great importance in making these decisions was the creation of the Confederation as a new political structure, which in 1854 made Paraná the capital of the

country. The whole city, in spite of its small size, saw a change in regularity, public buildings, public open spaces and private works. This process, which developed with marked speed, began precisely in 1824 and culminated in 1853.

The San Miguel Arcángel Chapel

The San Miguel Arcángel Chapel⁴ is a structure atypical as far as religious architecture goes, for which there are no blueprints nor is it attributable to a specific draughtsman or builder. At this time the first architects and proficient builders were beginning to arrive in the region, mostly Italians (Gutiérrez, De Paula and Viñuales 1971), but the Italian style, an early markedly Neo Classic style that characterizes the chapel, was only just being introduced as a novelty. Its shape can be compared to a series of three cubes: the biggest one for the chapel with its dome, and two smaller ones for the sacristy and the dwelling of the priest. Or at least that is the traditional interpretation; since there is no functional evidence whatsoever. The central block measures seven metres a side; the dome has a lantern on which there is an unusual red pottery globe –the world- and now destroyed irons cross. The two lateral blocks held a roof using the system of terraces on wooden beams and bricklaying. These terraces might have been covered in the first French tiles found in the area, which have been used in later repairs, and the roofs have risen in height. On the eastern side there was a belfry which seems to have been taken apart to use the bricks as protection during the López Jordán revolution in 1871. The inside was very classical, which was still unusual for the times and place, and is marked by ornaments, framed doors, port-holes and a peculiar window-door above the entrance. It is possibly the first brick building in the city, since the Cathedral was made of adobe (sun-dried bricks). The construction of a building by a modern architect, with materials and decoration newly arrived in the area, and for the African community, was an outstanding accomplishment in a budding city. There are many interpretations for this fact, even political ones.



⁴ The Old Chapel, declared National Historical Monument, Decree Order N° 1298/00

Present day façade in its present state without the staircase to the external pulpit, and the inexplicable window-door on the upper part.



Details of the simple Neoclassic architecture and of the chapel's interior decoration.

Floors were made of brick and, according to finds, there was a small altar with tiled floor. The space could hold no more than 120 people, standing and packed tightly, intended to hear Mass and, if the women sat on the floor as was custom, about fifty people. And if, as archaeology has shown, the baptismal font was located facing the altar, the space provided for parishioners was even less. In sum, the chapel was either for a very small community or Sunday Mass was conducted in an alternative manner and the chapel interior was only used for lesser group activities such as prayers for the dead or baptisms. There are a number of Catholic Church essential furnishings which seem to be absent inside the chapel: there is no choir, no chancel or sanctuary and no pulpit. Regarding the Neoclassic and Academic architecture, the building may pertain to that description of the city presented by Aráoz, from Tucumán, who was struck by the modernity of the construction: the downsizing of bricks, the floor tile reduction (from eight to two centimetres: French imported ones), the metal buckets instead of leather ones, the limitless use of limestone, the whitewashing brushes and even the paint used on the walls. And most of all, the fact that bricklayers were well-dressed Europeans and not slaves or freed slaves (Gutiérrez, De Paula, Viñuales 1971:11).



Details of the quality of the original construction: stencilled painting on the older walls (purple-coloured background flowers) and imported French tiles for the modern terraced roofs.

Excavations

Test pit 1 was dug at the central point underneath the vault, in the centre of the main space. There is a 14-15 cm-thick sequence of floorings and subfloorings through time. The present-day floor is made of cement tiles underneath which there is a brick floor 39 by 19 by 4.5 cm which we believe is the original flooring. The bricks were laid over a subfloor of clean, black, compacted dirt, which was an old custom even if lime was available, since mud that was almost liquid was used so that it would push up into the grout joints and seal them from underneath. In the centre part, after breaking up the brick floor and the whole floor package, there was a lathe-made pottery pipe, placed upright and leading into a vault which in turn covered a pit made of split bricks. It was an absorption pit, 55 cm in depth. The pit is 28 cm in diameter and the bricks are fragments of the original ones measuring 32/34 by 15 by 4. That is, they were manufactured somewhat after the broken flooring. To build it, the central part of the chapel was altered since it was necessary to excavate a square pit to hold the walls of the pit and its vault. Given the remarkable characteristics of the find, the project decided to preserve the evidence that had been found and not continue the excavation. It is a pit to absorb liquids for a special type of baptismal font with drainage, as will be later detailed.



The four stages from the construction to the transformations: Creamware and Pearlware pottery, plaster mouldings from the nearby church of San Miguel and English teapot from the early twentieth century.

Was there a baptismal font at the centre of the nave? If so, it would have limited the amount of people capable of standing inside the chapel, provided it dated to the times of its foundation. If the font is more modern, then the chapel was used for christenings by the larger church, the only connection present today being a corridor between the two buildings which is now walled in. This layout, of a one-nave chapel with dome and double entrance (in front of and behind the altar) is replicated at least in the Belén Chapel in the House of Spiritual Exercises for Men that the Jesuits had in Buenos Aires, dating from the eighteenth century (Schávelzon 2012). There, an excavation was conducted beside a place in the floor

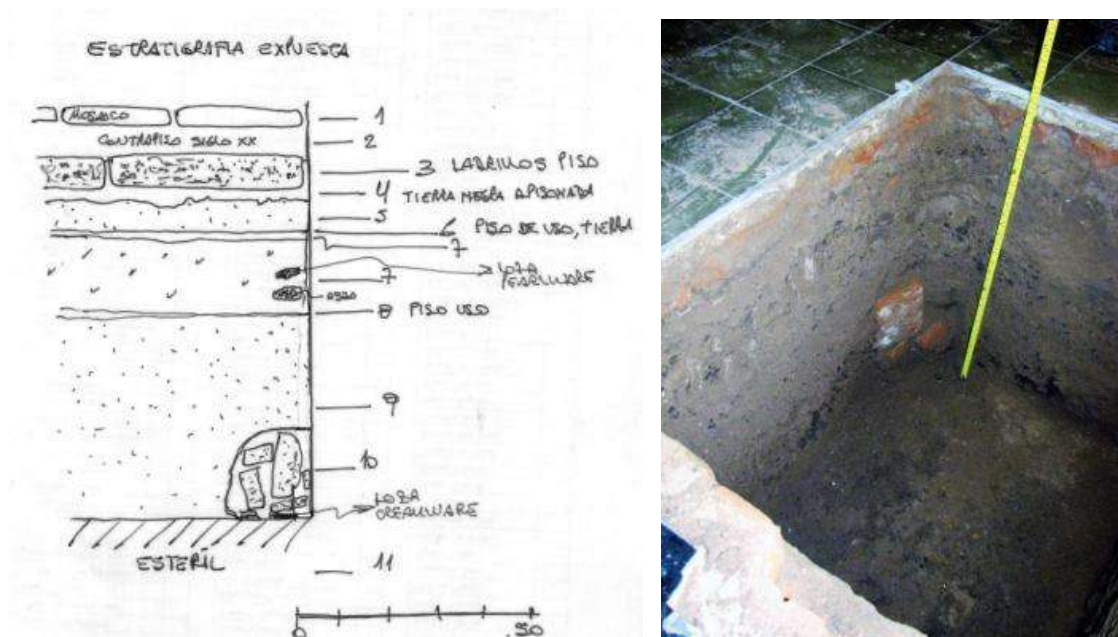
which indicated the existence of a possible altar. Underneath the present-day floor and under minor alterations we found the original brick flooring made up of 39 by 19 by 4.5cm bricks laid out over a clean, black, compact earthen subfloor. Below that, a filling two centimetres thick containing smaller pieces of brick and Ratus ratus bones. This was probably levelling filler prior to the subfloor. The sequence is 14 cm thick and forms the set of upper layers. Beneath them there is a 15-centimetre level of black compact earth, a well-constructed filling the surface of which was exposed for a long time. Above it there are fragments of lime and bricks that were trampled and buried. We believe it is a construction phase that remained uncovered for some time and corresponds with the outside part we call the foundations of the church and has been mistaken for a narrow courtyard. Findings include a shard of black and white Pearlware pottery, two bone remains of Mamalia not identified and a fish bone. Underneath it, and to a depth of up to 77 cm there is a layer of looser earth with a bunch of bricks, earth that was not compacted and served as initial filling for the extracted natural clay soil. This level lies on top of the sterile soil. Over this floor, just when the work was begun, there were two fragments of Creamware from a teapot or sugar bowl. If work to build the chapel started in 1823, this kind of pottery was being phased out and was no longer manufactured in Great Britain, but here it was still considered modern. The fragment found above it is later in time, Pearlware, and was manufactured from the early nineteenth century but it was still new here around 1820 (Schávelzon 1999).



Original brick flooring and pit to absorb water from a baptismal font placed in the centre of the construction and its inner stratigraphy.

Later surveys showed that the other two spaces in the building bore no evidence of having had a brick floor but rather a level of compacted earth, found today under the fillings from the later nineteenth to the twentieth century. Objects found match the chronology. There are small differences in depth to this original flooring, only a couple of centimetres, part of the modern alterations. In sum, the whole chapel had the same flooring level, be it brick or earth. An interesting point is that the test pit dug in the room located to the east yielded pieces of plaster mouldings belonging to capitals similar to those of the new San Miguel church, which confirms that the construction of that church took place after this one and

that the modern floorings were laid at a time when work was being conducted in both churches. Perhaps they were joined. The stratigraphic profiles were extended to the front part of the chapel and interesting connections were found. The old brick-floor level and its underfloor coincide with the entrance step seen in the old image of the front in 1871. The unusually high step from the small courtyard, which had turned into a hallway leading to the street, matches the old sterile earth level. We believe that the steps that went up the base were buried to ease access to the back part of the new church and the rest of the wooden ladder was removed. This means that the chapel was placed at the highest point and on a base. From the base of the entry drop there is a marked descent leading to the terrain facing the chapel, as can be seen in old engravings. In one of the ends you can still see that the drop is artificial and is made of an unusual set up of bricks in two alternate positions, common in the nineteenth century. Was there an outer courtyard and an open chapel-pulpit? Can the correlation in height mean there was a very different courtyard?



Stratigraphy inside the chapel. The base is original sterile earth.

The topographic structure of the Barrio del Tambor neighbourhood in Paraná is a small plateau overlooking the river, with a flood area at its foot. The Antoñico⁵ stream flows into the river Paraná forming a large shore used as a harbour, to which you had to descend from the plateau. That is the reason for the word “bajada” (descent) used to name the city. And that was where the goods and the slaves arrived, so that the surroundings saw the growth of warehouses and places where enslaved people and animals were sold. The area was important for its limestone quarries, an activity which still requires a large workforce in unsanitary conditions. Generally the quarries were not very deep and were excavated from

⁵ The name comes from Antonio Rodríguez, who had a brick factory on the banks of the stream, which bore different names until the nineteenth century when it received its present name.

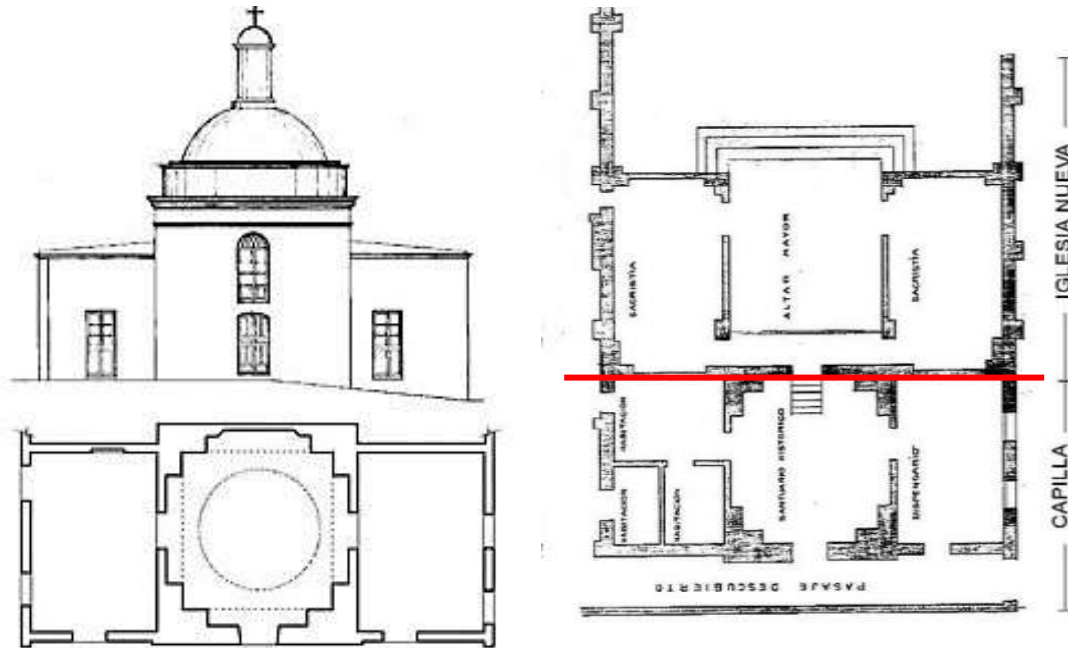
the river banks inwards. A great part of the lands in “La Bajada” belonged to the Church and had little value, which allowed for the settlement of freed blacks and explains the name of the neighbourhood: Barrio del Tambor⁶. There was a short distance to the centre of the town but that was enough to mark social differences. Topography separated them: the high, levelled grounds were for the whites, the gullies for the Africans. A British traveller who visited between 1847 and 1848 describes a city with “about 6 or 7 thousand inhabitants” but lacking public buildings except for “a mid-size church which was started some years ago but which was left unfinished”, i.e., the new San Miguel church built behind the San Miguel chapel (MacCann 1969:250). It is noteworthy that the first public building –albeit religious- to be erected after Independence, should have been for the black population. The first document regarding property involved the Church and an individual in 1838, and from that date there is a record of the division of land: blacks to the north, whites to the south. It does not seem by chance that that is where the church is located. The area sloping towards the harbour belonged to the black settlers who built their dwellings and defined an irregular neighbourhood, unlike the grid system of the town.

The new church of San Miguel and the changes in its surroundings

The year 1836 saw a systematization of the urban changes which had slowly been taking place. When the city changed its status to capital of the National Confederation, it redefined itself as a new and progressive city. The old Bajada became a tree-lined avenue which ended at the high point of the terrain, in a new public square, Echague, with a large church facing it. The church was to be built behind the chapel erected only a few years before and would bear the same name, thus making it disappear inside a city block, behind a large construction, taking away its name and rendering invisible both the chapel and its parishioners (Martínez 1919, Musich 1999, Musich et al., no date and 1998, Pérez Colman 1930 and 1946, Sors 1981). Racism had taken on a new face: instead of segregating their activities and dwellings to a different space, the black population would be diluted within society and the neighbourhoods. The move was one of the many changes set into motion to modernise the city, to order its growth through the grid system, with public spaces set apart from private ones, with new social groups no longer divided by race, with open spaces, public buildings and shops. A rich politician and industrialist donated the land for the central square in 1836 and in doing so the level of the terrain was modified, all remnants of the past were erased, trees were planted, blocks were drawn and the new church began to be built, turning the area into an urban neighbourhood. But the chapel was no longer visible. These changes took place in a short time (under fifteen years), with the speed given by political changes. In a similar short time span Paraná would become the capital of the

⁶ Traditional name given all over the country to the African population neighbourhoods, stemming from the sounds of the drum (“tambor”).

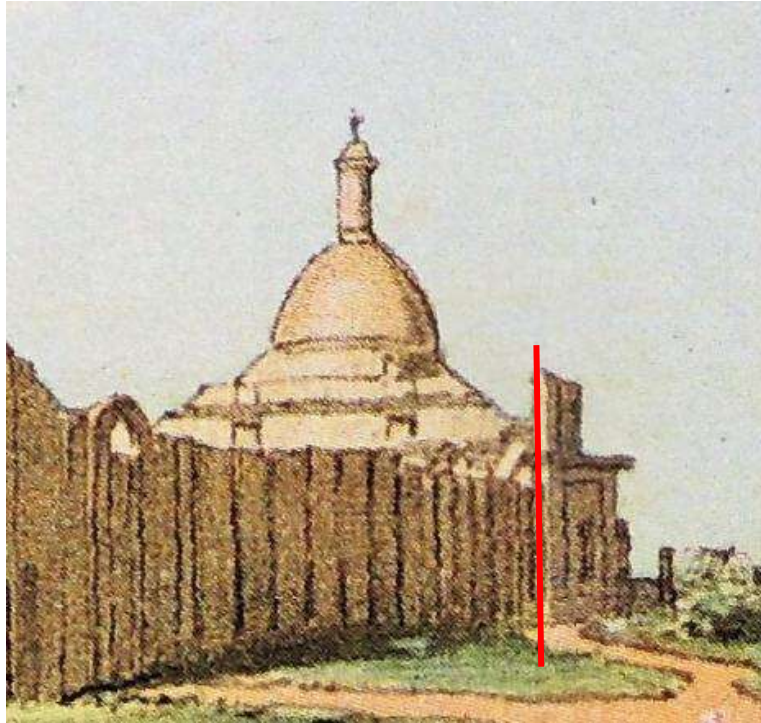
country and would then cease to be the capital. And this is how the old chapel came to rest inside a city block, which is highly unusual in religious architecture, with a house in the courtyard which removed all visibility and a base turned into an entrance. It was illogical, difficult to access and it still is today. It survived because the large San Miguel church took so long to construct that it was simpler to leave it as it was or give it an auxiliary role than to tear it down.



Old chapel and connection with the church built behind the main altar. Notice that in both blueprints the base is not included.

The new church of San Miguel has a complex history and suffered the consequences of the wars that took place in the area. It was the work of Augusto Reani at the beginning and of Jonás Larguía later on (1850 to 1865). The years between 1854 and 1859 also saw the building of the Government House, the Governor's House, the Chamber of Deputies, the Chamber of Senators, the Tres de Febrero Theatre and the La Paz market. Everything was in a flux, the Neoclassic style and European fashions became the symbols of what was new, and Italian builders, followed by architects and engineers from all over Europe, brought in new building and ornamental styles: neo-Gothic, neo-Greek or neo-Renaissance. Racial issues changed as speedily: segregation in an exclusive chapel was, a generation later, a thing of the past, an inheritance from colonial times which, as the nineteenth century developed, became blurred. A chapel for blacks made sense in a small town in 1823, not in the capital of a country. In 1857 the city had 6707 inhabitants, almost twice the number it had a generation before. And the chapel was built so late in time that it never fulfilled its

function. It later became the baptistery of the new San Miguel church and then it was abandoned.



Back of the chapel connected to the new church still under construction. Engraving by Anton Goering, 1858. See the belfry on the wall. The two buildings are different even in their ornaments, but one is behind the other one (From: Burmeister 1943).

Open courtyard and pulpit?

We know there was a curious wooden ladder placed at the front of the chapel crossing the façade diagonally, which went up to the window-door over the entrance. It took up a great part of what can be seen in the 1871 image as a base. And although it has been interpreted as a small courtyard, it was actually a base with steps and a place to prop up the staircase.

Where did the staircase lead to? Was the huge window-door an entry to the choir, as has been groundlessly claimed? Was there no place for even a winding internal staircase and so they had to build an external one, cutting across the façade, which is a situation never seen in any other American church? The answer must be found elsewhere. What is claimed to be a courtyard cannot have been one, since it is one metre wide. To access it, the 1871 engraving shows a staircase with posts, which was usual in the streets. But by that time, the church was out of use and the engraving shows military figures on the roof, barricaded behind large bricks which we believe formed part of the belfry, which can be viewed in Anton Goering's 1858 watercolour. But, returning to the 1871 engraving, it is conceivable

that the front view was cleared to highlight the military scene, which is what the engraving set out to portray, since there should have been houses in view. In 1850, the church had sold the plot of the inner courtyard to Dolores Cámara, widow of Bartolo Baster, described as “brown from the coast of Africa” (Ceruti 2007, Pérez Colman 1946). This is an assumption since, at least according to the documents, the first construction to conceal the chapel dates to 1906-08, it was reformed several times and torn down in 1970, but we doubt that the tract of land, having an owner, could have been empty for over half a century. And it even seems there were previous owners who were not recorded. It is interesting that excavations were started in the sector without taking into account the inner courtyard hypothesis (Cerutti 2007). According to the evidence, the ground level never changed, which is important when considering the grounds necessary to hear Mass. Could it have been built as an “open native chapel”, of which there were none in the Litoral region and there seems to have been one in Paraguay, in the city of Emboscada?⁷ The existing ones were located from Bolivia southwards to Mendoza and from Chile in the west to Córdoba, although the only known one is not an open chapel (Gallardo 1979). These are areas inhabited by ethnic groups of Andean and Hill tradition, far from the Litoral region and thus the closest example would be some 700 kilometres away and not meant for the African population. This might explain the outer ladder leading to an external pulpit, while the window-door might provide a connection with the main altar or perhaps with an elevated altar, since the interior shows no evidence of any kind of construction as of a choir. Mass was heard and seen from a wide open space below and in front, and what is now considered a narrow courtyard was a base. If this were to be the case, beyond the uniqueness of the solution, the main enigma would be solved: the small number of faithful the chapel could hold. The chapel was built during times of turmoil: the city became established as such, the new church was being built behind the chapel, it was the birth of the Confederation, the slaves were freed, and political changes took place continuously. And even if the new church was big enough to hold all the parishioners, it took many years to be completed and the chapel had to be used for services up to 1883 or shortly before that. Mac Cann noticed that the inhabitants of the region had the habit of living outdoors a great part of the day thanks to the good climate: “People of all conditions spend most of their time in the open air and only live indoors when they sleep or on rainy days” (Mac Cann 1964:250). An open courtyard would be neither unusual nor uncomfortable, more so if it was considered at the time a racial achievement. Internal and external wars delayed the construction of the new building but it was clear that this chapel had not been built as a “main chapel with its dome that served as provisional church” (Gutiérrez, De Paula and Viñuales 1971:20). This is what Anton Goering’s 1858 watercolour shows (Burmeister 1943). The building was conceived and built in this way and if it was later used differently it is all speculation, or denial of a possible non-traditional use. There has recently been evidence of heterogeneity in the supposed homogeneity of Catholic American colonial architecture. Ramón Gutiérrez

⁷ Personal communication from Ramón Gutiérrez.

has drawn up a list of cases in Perú and Bolivia (Gutiérrez 2018). Between the late eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century there were chapels where Mass was said facing squares and markets, places which were more attractive to the population on Sundays and holidays. He mentions the cases of Catca in 1807, Urcos after 1818, Huaro (where it adapted to orchestras and festivities), Sicuani in 1822 (where a window opens from the choir into the market adding an altar, such as what we suggest for Paraná), Pucara (with two storeys so that the chapel can be seen from afar) and Vilque (where a large regional market was held). In other words, one way or another, the Paraná experience fitted into what was already a modernizing process in other regions: the altar, speeches and Mass were carried outside. If people did not go to church, the church would go to the people.

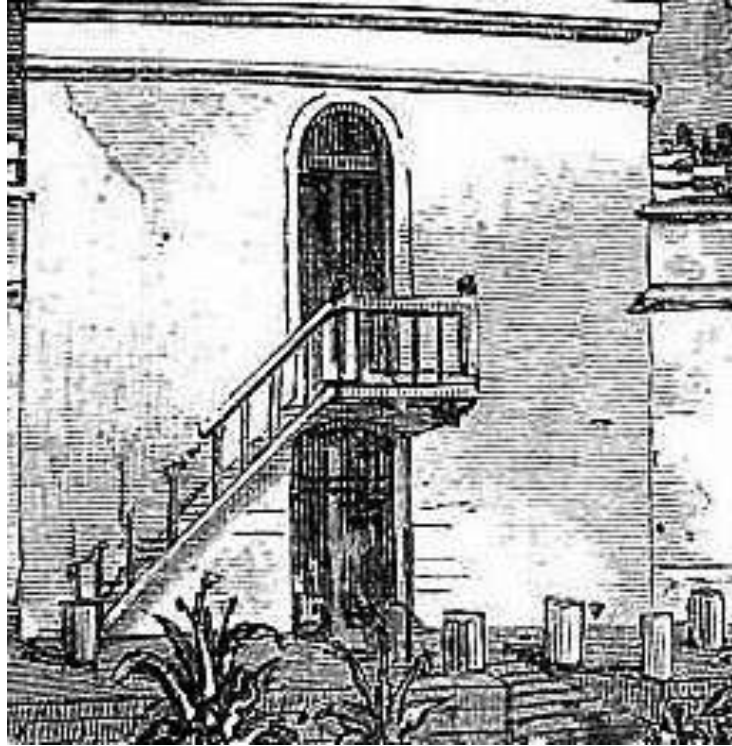
Baptismal fonts with a water-draining pit beneath

The Christian liturgical tradition of baptism specifies that running water be used; only if there is none available can other kinds of water be used, but if the baptismal font water can be drained, at least it appears to be running water (Testini 1958). Logic points to the placing of a pipe draining the water to an underground pit. We have not managed to find a rule or a description of this practise to enable us to determine if this is an unusual occurrence or if, conversely, it was so common that it did not need to be mentioned. But there are three cases that prove it. In the case of the Goya Cathedral, two churches were superimposed. The first one, built between 1806 and 1809, was so simple that it could not have had such a large well as the one discovered though never studied. It was only in the times of the Confederation that resources were obtained to undertake such a construction, upon Goya being declared a city in 1852, when its harbour was structured and urban plans developed. This is why the second church, which was begun in 1823, had to be reconstructed in 1861, leaving some elements in place. The church was finished in 1892. The cathedral in Morón was built over the remains of a previous chapel dating to the eighteenth century but reconstructed in 1823. The church was built in 1854, but the great work was carried out in 1868 and finished in 1885. From what can be seen it is possible that the font's drainage dates to the last construction period. This has led us to think that there might have been a habitual drainage system that was never described because it was not considered important, and that was considered an unusual discovery in Paraná and in Goya because of its position.

Conclusions

The great changes in society resulting from the process of ending slavery in a city which was rapidly growing produced an unprecedented experience: the creation of a chapel for African-Americans based on the old experience of the Open Chapels for the native

populations. It was a case of syncretism of architectural modernity and functionality taken from the past or from faraway places which did not last long.



Detail of the ladder leading to the pulpit which opened to the inner courtyard; below, the base with its staircase and the usual posts to hold back the horses.

This chapel did not have a built atrium but a platform or open space facing the place where Mass was said and where the parish priest addressed the faithful from above. It lasted few years, but due to the delays in finishing the new church behind it, the inner courtyard and the urban transformation process made it invisible. The opening of the big new church, the disappearance of the need for a religious space racially differentiated, a fall in the numbers of Africans to very low figures and their invisibility to the State sentenced the experience to oblivion.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful for the possibility to conduct this research, as well as for a great part of the historical facts and the photographs, to Alejandro Yonson, Walter Music, Mariana Melhem, Gabriel Toranzo, Francisco Gireli and Maximiliano Martínez. We wish to thank Ramón Gutiérrez for forwarding his studies which help to support this daring hypothesis.

References

- Aguirre, J. F. 1951 Diario. *Revista de la Biblioteca Nacional*, III: 386, Buenos Aires.
- Andrews, George R. 1980. *Los Afro-Argentinos de Buenos Aires: 1800-1900*. Buenos Aires: Ediciones de la Flor.
- Burmeister, H. 1943 *Viaje por los Estados del Plata 1857-1860*, 3 T. Buenos Aires: Unión Germánica de la Argentina.
- Cejas Minut, M. y M. Pieroni. 1994. Mujeres en las Naciones Afroargentinas de Buenos Aires. *América Negra* 8: 133-145.
- Cirio, N. P. 2004. La desaparición del candombe argentino. Los muertos que vos matáis gozan de buena salud. *Música e Investigación* 12-13: 181-202.
- 2007. Del sueño de la Argentina blancaeuropea a la realidad de la Argentina americana: la asunción del componente étnico-cultural afro y su (nuestro) patrimonio musical. In: *Musiques d'émancipation et mouvements de libération en Afrique et dans la diaspora*. Brazzaville.
- 2009. De Eurindia a Bakongo: El viraje identitario argentino tras la asunción de nuestra raíz afro. *Silabario* 12: 65-78.
- Ceruti, C. 2010. Los esclavos africanos en Santa Fe la Vieja. En *Actas del XVII Congreso Nacional de Arqueología Argentina*. (J. R. Bárcena y H. Chiavazza Eds.) III: 1011-1016. Mendoza: Universidad Nacional de Cuyo.
- 2007. Investigaciones histórico-arqueológicas en el entorno de la capilla vieja de San Miguel Arcángel, Paraná. In: *IV Congreso Nacional de Arqueología Argentina*. Rosario: Universidad Nacional de Rosario. I: 385-393.
-
- Coloca, F. y Orsi J. P. 2013. Las ciencias sociales y las construcciones culturales. Los grupos Afro de Buenos Aires y su visibilización/ invisibilización desde la Arqueología Histórica. *Kula. Antropólogos del Atlántico Sur* 8: 15-27.
- Frigerio, A. 1993. El Candombe Argentino: Crónica de una Muerte Anunciada. *Revista de Investigaciones Folklóricas* 8: 50-60.
- 2002. Outside the nation, outside the diaspora: Accomodating race and religion in Argentina. *Sociology of Religion* 63: 291-315.
- 2006. Negros y Blancos en Buenos Aires: Repensando nuestras categorías raciales. *Temas de Patrimonio Cultural* 16: 77 a 98.
- 2008. De la desaparición de los negros a la reaparición de los afrodescendientes: Comprendiendo la política de las identidades negras, las clasificaciones raciales y de su estudio en la Argentina. En: G. Lechini (Comp.): *Los estudios aforamericanos y africanos en Latinoamérica: herencia, presencia y visiones del otro*. Buenos Aires: CLACSO.
- Gallardo, R. 1979. Capilla de indios, Córdoba, *Documentos de arquitectura nacional y americana* 7: 56-58.
- Geler, L. 2010. *Andares negros, caminos blancos. Afroporteños, Estado y Nación Argentina a fines del siglo XIX*. Rosario: Prohistoria.

- Golberg, M. B. 1976. La población negra-mulata de la ciudad de Buenos Aires, 1810-1840. *Desarrollo Económico* 61: 75-99.
- 1999. Nuestros negros: ¿desaparecidos o ignorados? *Todo es historia* 393: 24- 37.
- Groisean, A. F. 1971 *La Iglesia de San Miguel Arcángel y de Todos los Angeles. El Santo Patrono de Entre Ríos. Orígenes del Barrio de la Plaza. El Cura Álvarez, S/D.*
- Guillot, C. F. 1961. *Negros rebeldes y negros cimarrones.* Buenos Aires: Fariña.
- Gutiérrez, R. 2017. *Nuevas modalidades de sacralización del espacio externo en el sur peruano.* CEDODAL. Inédito
- Gutiérrez, R., A. de Paula y G. Viñuales, 1971. La arquitectura de la confederación en el litoral fluvial. Resistencia: Instituto Argentino de Historia de la Arquitectura y el Urbanismo.
- Kordon, B. 1938. *Candombe: Contribución al Estudio de la Raza Negra en el Río de la Plata.* Continente: Buenos Aires.
- Laurux, A. 1983. Notas sobre la catedral de Paraná. Manuscrito inédito. 5 pags. Paraná.
- Lanuz, J. L. 1942. *Los Morenos.* Buenos Aires: Emecé.
- Lewis, M. 1984. *Afro-Argentine Discourse, Another Dimension of the Black Diaspora.* Columbia: University of Missouri Press.
- Mac Cann, W. 1969. *Viaje a caballo por las provincias argentinas.* Buenos Aires: Solar.
- Molinari, D. L. 1944. *La trata de negros: datos para su estudio en el Río de la Plata.* Buenos Aires: Facultad de Ciencias Económicas.
- Ortiz Oderigo, N. 1969. *Calunga: Croquis del Candombe.* Buenos Aires: Eudeba.
- Pérez Colman, C. B. 1930. *La Parroquia y la ciudad de Paraná en su segundo Centenario 1730-1930. Paraná.*
- 1946. *Paraná, 1810-1860. Los primeros cincuenta años de la vida nacional.* Ed. del Autor. Rosario.
- Picotti, D. 1998. *La presencia africana en nuestra identidad.* Buenos Aires: Ediciones del Sol.
- Reula, F. 1963 *Historia de Entre Ríos.* Santa Fe: Castellví.
- Rodríguez Molas, R. 1957. *Algunos aspectos del negro en la sociedad rioplatense.* Rosario: *Anuario del Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas de Rosario.*
- Rosal, M. A. 2001. Negros y pardos propietarios de bienes raíces y de esclavos en el Buenos Aires de fines del periodo hispánico. *Anuario de Estudios Americanos* 58: 495-512.
- Rossi, V. 1958 [1926]. *Cosas de Negros.* Buenos Aires: Hachette.
- Saguier, E. 1995. La fuga esclava como resistencia rutinaria y cotidiana en el Buenos Aires del siglo XVIII. *Revista de Humanidades y Ciencias Sociales* 1: 115-184.

Schavelzon, D. 2001 (1995). La cerámica de la población africana de Buenos Aires y Santa Fe (siglos XVIII y XIX). La Plata: *Actas del Congreso Nacional de Arqueología I*: 501-508.

- 2003. *Buenos Aires Negra. Arqueología de una ciudad silenciada*. Emecé: Buenos Aires.
- 2012. [Dejá que se caiga solo: de Retiro Espiritual a Cárcel, el edificio de los jesuitas en San Telmo como metáfora del patrimonio porteño](http://www.iaa.fadu.uba.ar/cau/?tag=carcel-de-mujeres)”, <http://www.iaa.fadu.uba.ar/cau/?tag=carcel-de-mujeres>
- 2017. Observaciones arqueológicas en sondeos de la Capilla de San Miguel Arcángel, Paraná (Informe preliminar). Manuscrito.

Schávelzon, D. y F. Zorzi. 2014. Arqueología Afro-Argentina: Un caso de miopía racista en el mundo académico al inicio del siglo veinte. *The Journal of Pan African Studies*. 7- 7: 93-107

Segura, J. J. A. 1964. *Historia Eclesiástica de Entre Ríos*, Nogoyá: Edición del Autor.

Senatore, M. X y A. Zarankin, 196. Un clavo es un clavo: limitaciones de los enfoques esencialistas en arqueología, *Arqueología histórica en América Latina*. II: 105- 11.

Sors, O. 1981. *Paraná, dos siglos y cuarto de su evolución urbana 1730-1955*. Santa Fe: Colmegna.

Studer, E. F. S. 1958. *La Trata de Negros en el Río de la Plata durante el siglo XVIII*. Instituto de Historia Argentina. Buenos Aires: Universidad de Buenos Aires.

P. Testini, 1958. *Archeologia Cristiana: nozione generali dalle origini ala fine del seclo VI*. Roma: Desclerc & Co. Editori Pontifici.

Zorzi, F. 2015. La Arqueología de la diáspora africana en la Argentina. Desarrollo, problemáticas y perspectivas. *Revista de Arqueología Histórica Argentina y Latinoamericana*: 9 (2): 5-26.