

## The University-Residence Hall paradigm. Urban transformation of Alcalá de Henares in the Renaissance

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**Abstract.** *Once deployed the Bolognese University model, springs an emerging educational building typology. Due to the lack of board and lodge in the brand new Alcalá University, the Cardinal Cisneros' University-Residence Hall model is born. A changing step is unveiled, proceeding side-by-side with the climax of previous building experiences in the cities of Salamanca and Valladolid. Such new category forges the concept of "Colegio Mayor" with a greater ambition than those existing in the mainland, and able to address the new requirements of an early Modern-Age borough. The growth regime is hierarchized through new cloisters. These patios organize all the fixtures of the whole. A rising town takes up, showing off the avant-garde investigation spotlight which it (later on) proved it had become. In its town planning, the constitution of a sort of "Ensanche" -Urban Expansion Plan- of an early medieval old town is focused, overarching equally either the educational, residential or public facility buildings. This was a red-hot experience, and could be credited as the first -planned to a certain extent- University Town in the history. It had a great trend projection and international influence, having the widest reaching in South American cities. And by the recent 1998, this University Campus was admitted together with the Old Town of Alcalá de Henares in the Unesco World Heritage List.*

*Keywords:* Alcalá de Henares, urban morphology, Universitay Residence Halls, ortogonal and hierarchical cloistral system, cisneriana block.

### Introduction

The urban layout of Alcalá de Henares has changed successively throughout its history. The alcalainan region is located in the geographical center of the Iberian Peninsula. It occupies a strategic place as it is a natural crossing of the roads that cross the length and breadth of the Spanish Central Plateau. The rich vega of the Henares runs in a southwest direction from Guadalajara to its encounter with the river Jarama, which, with abundance of water and grass, has favored human settlement since prehistory. Settling these the zones plain in times of tranquility, and in the high hills in times of war.

Throughout history, there have been changes

in the urban morphology of this city, each occurring in different stages, of which, by way of summary, it is worth mentioning: Settlements in prehistory (previously mentioned), Settlements in the Roman period, Visigothic occupation, medieval Islamic Alcalá, medieval Christian Alcalá (repopulation) and Alcalá of Cisneros. The latter is the one developed in this article.

Since Roman times, the city has evolved following a reticular layout, from where the urban nucleus increases in size. At the same time, concentrations of population appear around the urban center, like "islands", but always respecting the Roman orthogonal design. These towns concentrate population mainly linked to agriculture.

The period of commercial and economic splendor that seems common denominator in the XII, XIII, XIV and XV centuries will disappear when in 1492 the Edict of Expulsion of the Jews becomes public. When this fact occurs, an important part of mercantile activity disappears, but what is still maintained is an organized urban nucleus that retains its physical structure, which will be used by Archbishop Cisneros to avoid its decadence, seeing in it the framework Ideal to create a cultural institution in Alcalá, where the new activity will be the university.

### The university beginning

The university chronology of Alcalá begins on May 20, 1293, when King Sancho IV of Castile granted to Archbishop Toledano García Gudiel to create a Studium Generale<sup>1</sup> In Alcalá de Henares. These studies linked with the “Cisnerian refoundation” on July 17, 1459, where they originated through the granting of Pope Pius II of a bull, requested by Bishop Alonso Carrillo de Acuña for the erection of three Art and Grammar Chairs in this study of Alcalá<sup>2</sup>, Which entails the creation of the University in 1499<sup>3</sup>.

Well before the papal bull was obtained, Cisneros had begun a work to buy land and construction, to create what he called Civitas Dei, City of God, under a totally innovative system, to create a university city within it Layout of the existing city.

Urban planning is based on the so-called “Cisneriana block”, characterized by occupying an area of more than 15,000m<sup>2</sup>, an urban project that Cisneros entrusts to Pedro de Gumiel, his Master of Works in the Archdiocese of Toledano. The university city, the Civitas Dei, was designed to achieve one of the objectives of its founder: to reach God through knowledge.

The nucleus of this one takes place in the eastern part of the town, in the space that was left between the first walled enclosure and its extension, made from 1454 by Archbishop Carrillo, where the village had been extended along the Century XV, that is to say between the market square, current of Cervantes and

the doors of Guadalajara and Tenerías. The projected “new city” divides the space into eighteen islands, following an orthogonal, con Two parallel main streets, the one of Libreros and the one of Rome (current Residence Halls), that is the extension of the streets Mayor and Santa Úrsula respectively. To obtain all the necessary space for its university city and because in the zone previous constructions existed, like the monastery of Santa Maria de Jesus or of San Diego, demolished in 1859 to construct a new building that today is known like barracks of the Prince Of Asturias, The cardinal had to carry out a number of real estate transactions to facilitate the installation in existing houses or in the majority of cases, the construction of new schools for the study and residence of students (religious and lay people of all social, Including the poor), and teachers, and all those services necessary for activities related to academic life (book trade, typographic industry, library, prison, recreational property ...). He did it quickly and with usual materials in the area, such as brick, tapial and wood, where his joined the useful and the beautiful. The basic model followed was a building of quadrangular proportions with a central courtyard around which were arranged the stays of diverse uses, including the church, except for those whose parcel was very irregular. In them the Gothic and Mudejar constructive traditions were fused with the plateresque artistic current Prevailing until the middle of the century XVI That ended up displaced, from the eighties by the classicist current of severe and simple forms imposing the most classic baroque that dominated throughout the seventeenth century. The medieval hull maintains a strangely simple trajectory between the traditional medieval traces being very marked by urban axes of direction east-west as a reflection of its own geographical position of crossing of roads. In the Baroque period, it suffers both the inclusion of collegiate-university-like institutions and the opening of new plazas with a typically Renaissance meaning.

The university city centre is located approximately in the center of the Alcalá of this time, in the present Place of the Victory.

At the beginning of the fifteenth century,

the walled enclosure was enlarged, incorporating land adjacent to the urban nucleus, and making the existing roads (Mayor and Offices) an extension of the old roads that defined two new gates of the city, those of Guadalajara and those of Tenerías (ROMAN, 1994, 404).

Cisneros participated, next to Juan López de Medina from 1476 to 1489 in the creation of the School of San Antonio de Portacoeli in Sigüenza, which finally acquired the status of University through a papal bull of Innocent III, with the Chairs of Arts, Theology and Canon Law.

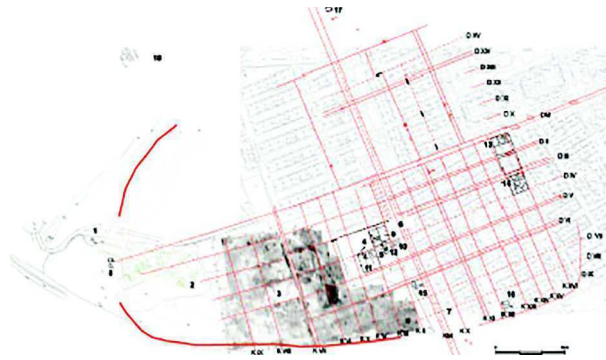
From the laying of the first stone of the University, there is an urban renewal that originates an authentic “University City” and Alcalá is populated by major and minor residence halls, convents and churches. The Residence Hall-Convent model is about to be born and will act as Residence Hall-University.

The location of these first Residence Halls-University where higher studies were carried out demands the provision and abundance of food and, in turn, the healthiness of the students. Possibly, their ideal location would have been closer to The Court and Governing Bodies, these being in Toledo, but the Cardinal preferred that the studies were far from outside influences.

### **Residence Hall of San Ildefonso and the configuration of the city.**

The first building of the performance that is constructed is the Major School of San Ildefonso, its construction will last until the year 1508, And was replaced in 1543, being Rector J. Zurbarán, by the present school, whose facade is attributed (ALVAR, 1996,20), by innumerable sources, to Rodrigo Gil de Hontañón<sup>4</sup>. It can be considered the summit building of the Spanish Renaissance, as much for its realization as for its originality, whose facade and first crust were declared Historic Artistic Monument March 19, 1910. The church was held in parallel with the Residence Hall, being concluded at 1510.

Cardinal Cisneros entrusts the architect



**Figure 1.**  
**Orthogonal urban planning of Complutum city.**

Pedro Gumiel with the construction of the Residence Hall of San Ildefonso in the lands recently annexed to the city after the extension of the wall on the opposite side of the Market Square. The rest of the land was cut for the construction of houses and annexes linked to the operation. Thus, the first example of University-Residence Hall is produced in a context of urban planning and with the possibility of growth.

The point of union between the University and the rest of the city was made through a large arch that was built on the side of the Market Square. It was 7.3m long and 5.30m high, being made of stone base with an upper balcony to be able to witness acts. The real estate operation based on the purchase of real estate and land serves to provide continuity and increase the economic assets of the Residence Hall.

As just pointed out, the development and growth of the University City is done by the construction of new Major and Minor Colleges. They are distributed in the urban fabric as “islands”, thus producing the first configuration of the University.

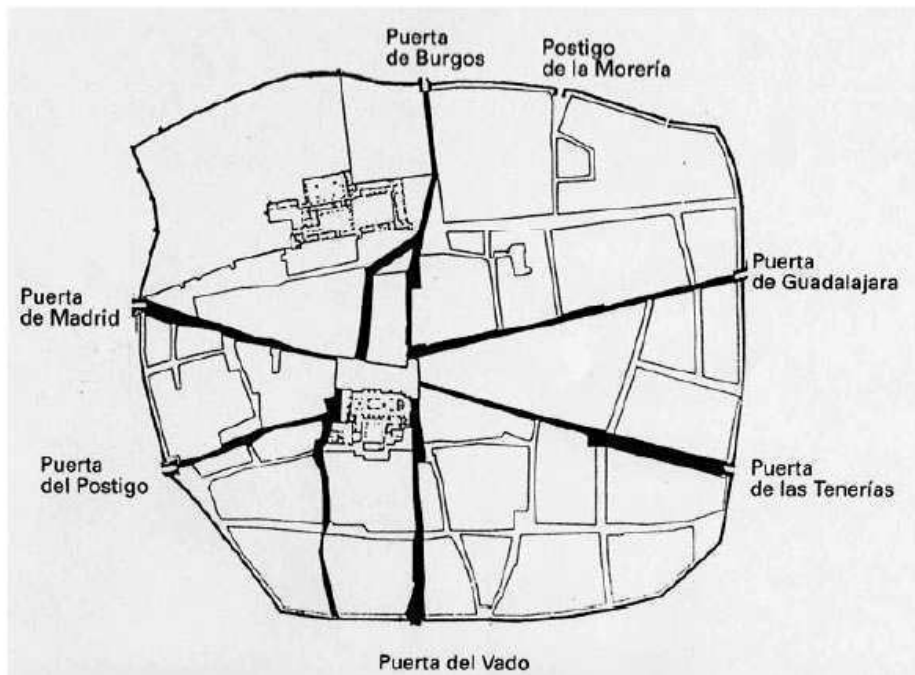
The Cisnerian University complex is composed of three institutions:

- The Residence Hall of San Ildefonso, as the core of the rest of the urban planning.

- The “minor” Residence Halls, Which serve as a preparation for schoolchildren in order to be able to enter the san Ildefonso Residence Hall.

- Buildings annexed to the Residence Halls.

On October 17, 1517, the existence of 18 Junior Colleges was approved, of which 7



**Figure 2.**  
City gates. XII-XIV centuries

were started in the life of the Cardinal Cisneros (ALVAR, 1996,21) And the rest will be built later with its funding provided with money left by the Cardinal Cisneros.

In the rest of the city, in addition to multiple arrangements and improvements such as the sanitation of the main street, change of the right feet of porches or the cobblestones of the streets adjacent to Calle Mayor, Cardinal Cisneros and his collaborators dedicated themselves to increase with more purchases of land and existing buildings to provide new services to the University, and also, to obtain income for the maintenance of the same.

Joined to these constructions, several streets were also built around the San Ildefonso Residence Hall in which residences are housed for students who did not live in the Older Residence Halls, workshops and printing presses that helped the development of the University, creating a city through and promoting new activities in the town, such as the construction of the San Lucas Hospital, which will meet the needs of members of the university community.

Undoubtedly, the character of this city is strongly marked by the presence of the University, as occurs in a similar way in Oxford

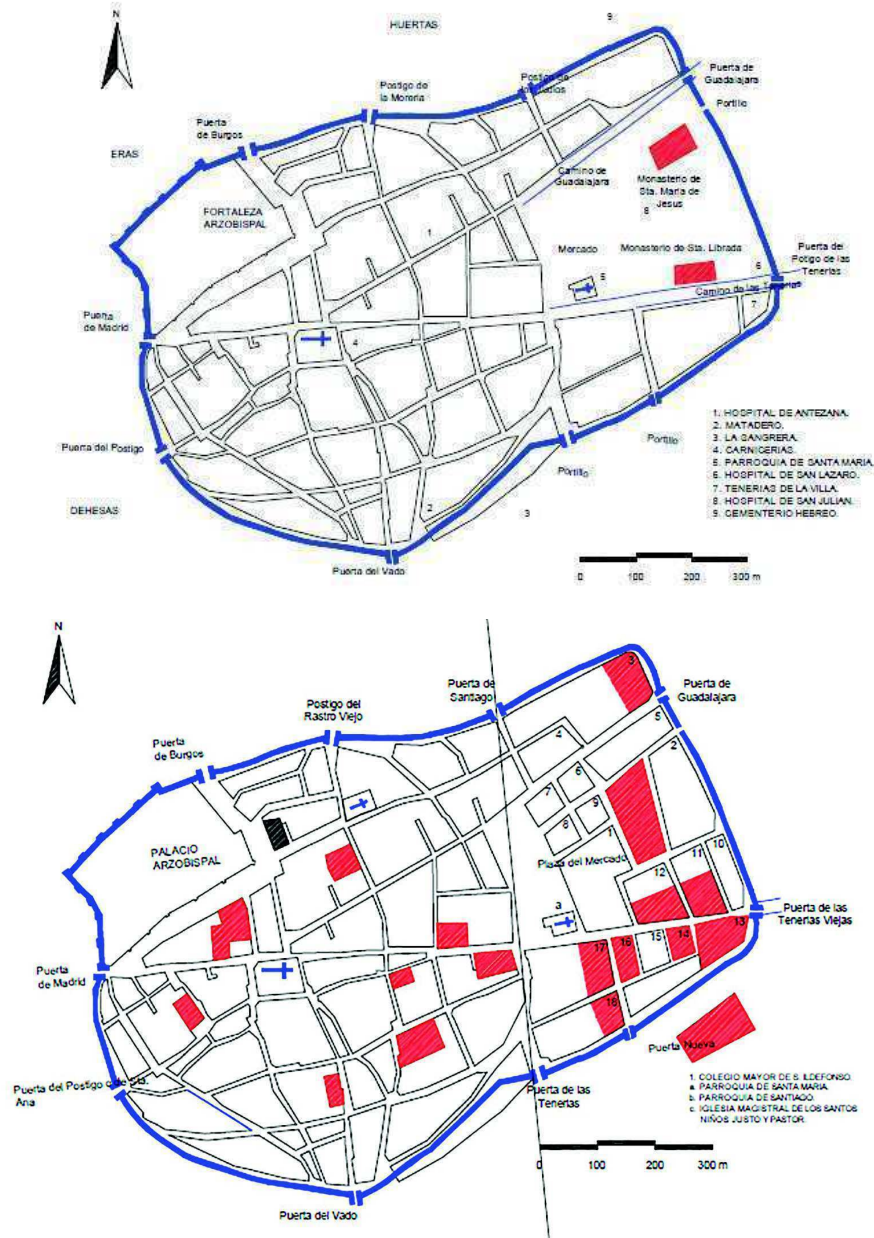
and Cambridge, where the identity of the city is the image of the University. In this case, religious symbolism is closely related to the University Foundation, assimilating the figure of Jesus Christ to the San Ildefonso Residence Hall, And the first Christian community to Minor Residence Halls, A total of 12 in honor of the twelve apostles, and the other 6 minor colleges, in honor of the 72 disciples, a total of 6 per apostle.

The university success of Cardinal Cisneros is due, in large part, to the solid financial structure that allows to give stability, in front of other Spanish universities that ended up disappearing due to the extinction of its resources.

There are three pillars on which supports the Alcalainan University,

- Legislative regulation of the Foundation
- Economic resources
- Purchase of physical space and the possibility of acting in it with a regulated urban plan.

The University founded by Cisneros causes a new city to emerge, becoming a research focus of the first magnitude. This city is planned in a way that constitutes a kind of “expansion” in early times, of the medieval center, comprising



**Figure 3.**  
University cration and extension of the walled area. XV century

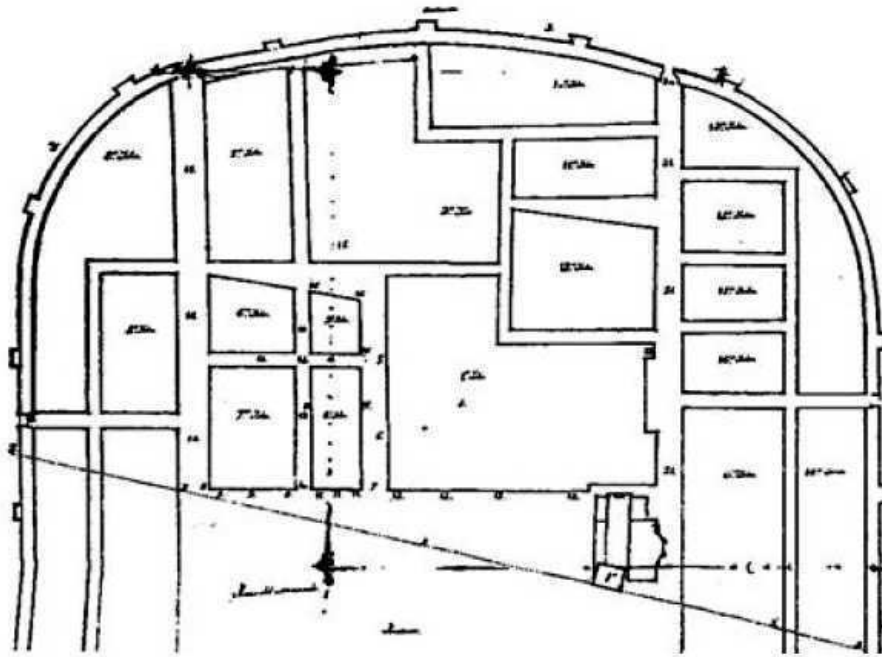
both the educational and residential buildings as well as of the equipment, which is a totally new experience, the first university city planned in the history.

Cisneros turns the town into a modern city, paving entire streets, drawing the first sewer network and designing the place of residence to be occupied by students, professors and complementary services, making Alcalá a reference model where the intellectual level and urban practise are effectively combined.

### Repercussions of the cisnerian model.

There are repercussions of this model in other national as well as international.

As we have seen throughout the text, the University City of Alcalá can be defined as a unique example in the history of Spain of the sixteenth century, and which will serve as a fundamental model for other later university foundations. Alcalá gave splendor to a new university organizational system: the Residence Hall-University. Following this



**Figure 4.**  
**Initial university configuration. Urban planning of the colleges.**

pattern, many other university centers, such as Toledo in 1520, Baeza in 1538, Oñate in 1542, Burgo de Osma and Almagro in 1550, emerged in Spain throughout the sixteenth century. And, stressing the tremendous operational value it represented for Culture and society of America the formula college-University or convent University, can present a long list of American universities that acquire this practice of organizational novelty.

The University of Santo Domingo (1538), the first and dean of America, wanted to stand in the image and likeness of Alcalá de Henares. Following its wake others were founded; Universidad Pontificia de Ntra. Sra. Del Rosario - after Santo Tomás- de Santa Fe (1580), San Francisco Javier University (1621) and San Nicolás University (1694) in Bogotá; Pontifical University of San Fulgencio de Quito (1586), Royal Pontifical University of Santo Tomas (1681) and University of San Gregorio (1621) in Quito; Santiago de la Paz University (1558), in the Dominican Republic; Universidad Ntra. Sra. Del Rosario (1619) and Universidad San Miguel (1621), in Santiago, Chile; San Antonio University (1629) and San Ignacio University (1621) in Cuzco; University San Ignacio (1621) in Cordova and the Real

University of Merida of the Yucatán in Mexico, of which it is said that it granted degrees in the XVII.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries continued using the Model that Alcalá had created and consolidated in the s. XVI. In this way, adapting in a way that formula and contributing its peculiarities, the University of Havana (1721), University of Caracas (1721), University of Popayan (1744), San Francisco Javier of Panama (1749) Chile (1749), University of the Assumption in Paraguay (1779), University of Guadalajara in Mexico (1791), University of Merida in Venezuela (1806), and University of León in Nicaragua (1812).

Alcalá exported its prestige and organizational way of making the University profitable: a microcosm where services, population, the academic world, education and Knowledge coexisted. It exported its system of studies, academic degrees, its legislation and its operation.

Therefore we are in Alcalá with a new model of city, prolongation and continuation of the existing one. We are facing a Church University, before a City of God that has to function as a light of cultural redemption. The specific

cultural values of humanistic philosophy (knowledge of the bible, vernacular languages to know the truth, integral theological study, natural philosophy) transformed the city. With the Cisneriana University City a structural urbanization was fixed, and its technical and juridical functionality was projected identified with its Convents and Colleges. One of the great contributions of the Alcalá University to the creation of the scientific culture of the language, with universal characteristics, was the creation of the Trilingüe Residence Hall, a unique institution and assumed by other Universities of recognized fame. For example, the Salamanca University sent Professors delegates of its Cloister to observe the operation and performance of this New educational institution, and later to implant it in its own Salamanca University.

## Conclusion

The University founded by Cisneros causes a new city to emerge, becoming a research focus of the first magnitude. This city is planned in a way that constitutes a kind of “expansion” in early times, of the medieval center, comprising both the educational and residential buildings as well as of the equipment, which is a totally new experience, the first university city planned in the history.

Cisneros turns the town into a modern court city, paving the streets, tracing the first sewer network and designing the place of residence for students, teachers and complementary services, making Alcalá a reference model where Intellectual level with urbanismo.

The University created by Cisneros became the focus of Spanish Humanism and later in the center of the Golden Age. It attracted great intellectuals, linguists, literati, doctors, historians, and religious for centuries.

The very organic and functional configuration of the University of Alcalá, constituted by a Major School around which emerged a constellation of Lesser Colleges, favored in a decisive way the participation of all the social estates in the great university work of Complutense. Ecclesiastical University By becoming a prominent focus of

religious reform, first, and then counterreform, numerous orders.

The significance of the University is reflected in the UNESCO Declaration on the recognition of the University of Alcalá as a World Heritage Site, which shows that unlike other universities in Europe, such as those in Bologna, Oxford, Paris and Salamanca, Alcalá de Henares did not develop slowly, adapting to its urban environment. On the contrary, Cisneros conceives it from the beginning as an entity that invades the partially abandoned medieval city and converts it into another whose end is the university. All this involved the construction of accommodation for teachers and students, the provision of different services such as sewer systems and street paving.

The profound social change that occurs in the cities in which the University is embedded has a positive revitalizing part of the same, and a negative part, in terms of supply problems, or the conflict that was caused by the fact that only men came And there was considerable disproportion between the sexes, proliferating fights, and degrade areas.

## Notes

1 Studium Generale (Estudio General) como se llamaba a la universidades en la época. Real Carta de sancho de Sancho IV el Bravo al arzobispo Gonzalo García de Gudiel. Archivo Histórico Nacioanl, sección de universidades, legajo 1 y libro 1151-F.

2 Bula Cum aliarum verum distributio. Archivo Histórico Nacional, sección universidades, libro 1095-F, pp.9v-11r.

3 La Obra de la Políglota. La Universidad Complutense a través de los libros: 500 años de la bula Cisneriana. 1999.

4 Rodrigo Gil de Hontañón (Rascafría, Madrid; 1500 - Segovia; 1577) fue un arquitecto renacentista, considerado como uno de los mejores arquitectos españoles del siglo XVI. Su estilo personal ha influido en la obra de arquitectos modernos como Antonio Palacios. Su obra simboliza la coexistencia entre el gótico tardío y el clasicismo renacentista, y al mismo tiempo, la superación en España del medievalismo.

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