Studies of French colonization in the New World rarely cover the topics of defense and fortification in detail. This is surprising, given the role of armed conflict in the expansion and contraction of France’s overseas territories during the sixteenth and early seventeenth century. Fortifications were inextricably linked with colonial settlement, administration, economy, and relations with Native Americans. They remain poorly understood because of problematic period documentation and disparate archaeological evidence, resulting in few attempts at regional synthesis.

This study reviews the physical evidence for the earliest French fortifications in the New World and explores how their design and use responded to a range of New World conditions. Before Vauban, fortification design was less formulaic and spoke directly to the imminent concerns of builders. In colonial America these included: 1) defense against both European artillery and indigenous peoples armed with traditional weapons; 2) protection of populations and structures rarely found in Europe such as trading posts, missions, and frontier settlements; 3) construction in a tabula rasa devoid of European infrastructure such as roads, quarries, and mines; 4) perennial lack of financial resources and labor. These issues are considered in this survey of

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French fortifications constructed in Canada, Brazil, Florida, and the Caribbean between 1530 and 1650.

French Post-Medieval Military Engineering

Italian military engineers were steadily employed in France, but by the 1590s they were being replaced by locals who implemented the same principles. France experienced nine separate wars of religion between 1562 and 1598 and from this period of siege warfare emerged French engineers such as Jean Errard (1554–1610) known as the ‘father’ of French fortification. Errard was author of the 1600 *La Fortification Reduite en Art et Demonstrée*.

Errard stressed that defenses should follow the terrain where they were built rather than slavishly follow the dictates of geometry. Theoretically-oriented authors included Daniel Specklin of Strasburg, who published *Architectura von Vestungen* (1589) and Jacques Perret, who wrote *Des Fortifications et Artifices, Architecture et Perspectives* (1601). Blaise Comte de Pagan (1604–1665) published in 1645 a book based on his experiences, *Les Fortifications du Comte de Pagan*. These pre-Vauban period engineers introduced systemic approaches to fortification involving use of angled bastions, walls and towers of reduced height, thick masonry and earthen features and covered ways, scarpss and counterscarps.

France’s varied topography required adapting these approaches to a variety of landforms, from coastal lowlands where the *trace Italienne* could be fully expressed, to the mountainous Massif Central, Pyrenees and Vosges where medieval fortresses were retained and modified for artillery. France did not experience a *reconquista* as did Spain and Portugal, but it had ample numbers of veterans of the religious wars to project France militarily into the New World to conquer, fortify and defend her new overseas possessions.

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