

Artl@s Bulletin

Volume 7
Issue 2 *Cartographic Styles and Discourse*

Article 9

2018

Colonial Maps and a Cartographic Reckoning in Post-Revolutionary Mexico City

Delia A. Cosentino
DePaul University, dcosent1@depaul.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/artlas>

 Part of the [History of Art, Architecture, and Archaeology Commons](#), and the [Latin American Languages and Societies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Cosentino, Delia A.. "Colonial Maps and a Cartographic Reckoning in Post-Revolutionary Mexico City." *Artl@s Bulletin* 7, no. 2 (2018): Article 9.

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

This is an Open Access journal. This means that it uses a funding model that does not charge readers or their institutions for access. Readers may freely read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of articles. This journal is covered under the [CC BY-NC-ND license](#).

Colonial Maps and a Cartographic Reckoning in Post-Revolutionary Mexico City

Cover Page Footnote

I am grateful to the journal editors, my readers, and especially to Adriana Zavala who has provided specific feedback. This is a small part of a larger project that is currently underway.

Colonial Maps and a Cartographic Reckoning in Post-Revolutionary Mexico City

Delia Cosentino *

DePaul University

Abstract

By the twentieth century, sixteenth-century maps of Mexico City were not new, but their value was renewed by an urban elite grappling with the nation's historical geography. The capital saw fresh developments, including modern architecture and industry, while early excavations offered glimpses of Aztec Tenochtitlan buried beneath. This stratigraphic tension necessitated a reckoning. Of concern here is the way that visual and intellectual cultures engaged in a particular *cartographic* reckoning. Colonial maps filled a void as artists, architects, art historians, and others worked to reconcile Mexico City's modern identity with its ancient foundations.

Resumen

En el siglo XX los mapas de la Ciudad de México del siglo XVI no eran nuevos, pero su valor fue renovado por una élite urbana lidiando con su geografía histórica. La capital vio desarrollo moderno a la vez que recientes excavaciones ofrecieron un vistazo a la Tenochtitlán azteca enterrada debajo. Esta tensión estratigráfica requería un cálculo; nos interesa la manera en que las culturas visuales e intelectuales se involucraron en un cálculo *cartográfico*. Mapas coloniales llenaron el vacío mientras artistas, arquitectos, historiadores de arte, y otros trabajaban para reconciliar la identidad de la moderna ciudad con sus antiguas fundaciones.

** Delia Cosentino is Associate Professor in History of Art and Architecture at DePaul University. This work is part of a larger project, Reckoning with Tenochtitlan, which bridges materials from sixteenth- and twentieth-century Mexico. Some of her recent publications on Mexican maps, manuscripts, and murals appear in Imago Mundi and Diálogo.*



Figure 1. Luis Covarrubias, *View of the Valley of Mexico*, ca. 1964. Collection of Museo Nacional de Antropología, Mexico City. Reproduction authorized by the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia.

An arresting view of the island of Tenochtitlan commands one wall of the Sala Azteca in the world-class National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City. The mural-sized panorama was painted around 1964 by artist Luis Covarrubias in conjunction with the debut of the museum's new modernist home, a marble-clad monumental building designed by architect Pedro Ramírez Vázquez. Covarrubias' painting presents an orthogonal vista centered on the now-lost Aztec capital city, as seen looking down from the hilly rise of Chapultepec, at the western edge of the valley (Fig. 1). Quite apart from the fact that the museum itself is located in Chapultepec, and therefore its visitors are theoretically poised to see the valley from this same viewpoint, the painting's perspective has deeper significance. It was from this powerful vantage point that the migrating Aztecs first laid eyes on the setting for their future home. From Chapultepec, they were said to have witnessed the miraculous eagle perched on a cactus which their patron deity, Huitzilopochtli, indicated would mark the great capital of their empire. Later, Spanish invaders, kings, and artists in a colonized Mexico assumed the same magisterial gaze for themselves.

¹ Barbara Mundy, *The Death of Aztec Tenochtitlan, the Life of Mexico City* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015). The author uses the image again at the start of her

In The Death of Aztec Tenochtitlan, the Life of Mexico City (2015), art historian Barbara Mundy explores the fascinating transformation of the Aztec capital city into its reincarnation as the colonial center of New Spain over the course of the sixteenth century. Even though her work provides fresh readings of a number of critical colonial materials, including both native and Spanish articulations of the urban space, the cover of the book does not feature these representations.¹ Instead, the illusionistic image on the cover is Covarrubias' commanding painting. Although this choice is not addressed in Mundy's book, which is logically concerned with other themes, it is an image that offers yet another perspective. Covarrubias' painting tells a here-to-fore unexplored story: that of the early twentieth century rediscovery of—and reckoning with—Mexico City's native origins. Covarrubias' painting marked the culmination of a half-century during which he and other thinkers articulated a new geographic consciousness that merged place and time.

In the decades following a turbulent Revolution (1910-1920), Mexican artists, architects, planners, scholars, and government officials had many reasons to ponder the historic, urban foundations

second chapter on "Water and the Sacred City," to emphasize the original capital's distinctive island setting.

of the nation's capital. In the aftermath of the civil war that engulfed the country, an educated elite of Mexico City fomented a cultural renaissance which looked to the past to redefine what it meant to be Mexican. At the same time, the nation's geography was freshly articulated through a network of related developments, including expanding railways and roads that could move goods and people across space much more efficiently than ever before. Modern architecture provided new social and aesthetic possibilities for expanding cities; concrete and steel buildings could be built efficiently at reasonable costs and would also transform the skyline during the 1930s and 40s. To boost the economy and further development, national and international tourism in Mexico was heavily promoted, especially during the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-40); at this time, visitors were encouraged to enjoy both traditional cultural attractions and the comfort of modern amenities in the capital city, including top notch hotels, restaurants, and shops. Such developments set the foundations for the so-called Mexican miracle when sustained growth would move an industrially-triumphant Mexico into the second half of the twentieth century.

This transformative modernization stood in particular contrast to new revelations through Mexican archaeology. The excavations of anthropologist Manuel Gamio, whose 1916 nationalist manifesto called for the cultural assimilation of indigenous Mexico to forge the modern nation, dramatically brought the native past into the living present. His investigations at the pre-Aztec city of Teotihuacan, facilitated by a 1908 feeder train line that would soon carry droves of tourists to the area, culminated in a critical study that further helped to signal the country's foundational indigeneity.² Perhaps still more tantalizing were the early excavations at Mexico City's heart. As head of the 'Inspección general de

monumentos arqueológicos' beginning in 1910, Gamio recognized the need to take careful note of the location and depth of hundreds of objects in the city center as demolished buildings unexpectedly revealed earlier cultural material. This ultimately led to his 1913 excavations which uncovered sculpture at the base of the Templo Mayor. A gaping hole at the edge of the modern zocalo revealed a tantalizing glimpse of the 500-year old urban complex of Aztec Tenochtitlan buried beneath.³

This stratigraphic tension necessitated a reckoning; since extensive archaeological exploration at the city's historic center would not begin again until the 1980s, of concern here is the way that visual and intellectual cultures of the post-Revolutionary moment engaged in a particular *cartographic reckoning*. This article considers the way that the urban elite of Mexico City rediscovered, reproduced, and made sense of early colonial maps from the sixteenth century. Several colonial cartographic representations of the island capital served as critical documents in the articulation of a modern Mexican identity. Through their distinctive stylistic approaches, these maps shed light on specific and conceptual aspects of the capital's ancient foundations. They also allowed the city's most critical boosters to demonstrate to investors, including tourists, how this emergent landscape of industrial modernity had sprung from noble, indigenous roots. Through their reproduction and circulation, and in the absence of active, large-scale archeology in the city, the colonial maps filled a void, inspiring artists and other thinkers to imagine the spectacular ancient city, its remains resting out of their eyesight—but literally right below their feet.

Colonial Maps in Modern Mexico

In the first half of the twentieth century, sixteenth-century maps of Mexico's capital were, by their very

² The cover of Gamio's *Forjando Patria (Pro Nacionalismo)* (Mexico: Porrúa Hermanos, 1916) grounded post-revolutionary identity in the Aztec past with a depiction of the legendary eagle and cactus that marked both the foundation of Tenochtitlan and its actual place name. His studies at Teotihuacan culminated in *La población del valle de Teotihuacan* (Mexico: Dirección de Antropología, Secretaría de Agricultura y Fomento, 1922).

³ See Elizabeth Hill Boone, "Aztec Templo Mayor Research, 1521-1978" in *The Aztec Templo Mayor: A Symposium at Dumbarton Oaks, 8th and 9th October 1983*, ed. Hill Boone (Washington DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library, 1987), 43-45, and Carlos Javier González González, "Manuel Gamio y las excavaciones en las calles de Santa Teresa" in *100 años del Templo Mayor: Historia de un descubrimiento*, ed. Matos Moctezuma et al. (Mexico: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 2014), 23-51

nature, not new. But such colonial documents were infused with new value by members of the intellectual elite who were actively grappling with the nation's historical geography in the context of contemporary change. Some of Mexico's most heavily investigated post-Revolutionary artists were among those who brought artistic vision to such thoughts, including the aforementioned Luis Covarrubias, his brother Miguel Covarrubias, Diego Rivera, and Carlos Mérida, among others. Juan O'Gorman most literally foregrounds an artistic reckoning of the conceptual tensions between the past and present with his painting *Paisaje de la Ciudad de México* (1949) in which a *veduta* of the modernizing capital is juxtaposed with a depiction of a sixteenth-century map traditionally attributed to Alonso de Santa Cruz, the royal cosmographer for the Spanish King Carlos V. Art historian Adriana Zavala describes this colonial map as "the crucial element" within the composition, transforming what typically has been understood as an harmonious view of the city into what she sees as an allegorical narrative. By the date of this painting, O'Gorman had become disillusioned with the direction of urban developments and his own role in it as one of the nation's most significant early modernist architects. Therefore, Zavala argues, his constructed view of the city incorporating the colonial map is intended to draw parallels between the deteriorating Aztec Tenochtitlan under Spanish domination and the "erosion of Mexican culture" in the 1940s.⁴

This article is concerned then with how such a reckoning unfolded during the first half of the twentieth century in Mexico. How is it that artists like O'Gorman and Covarrubias became compelled to imagine the city's historic foundation and its significance in a modern context? Where and how did they come in contact with colonial maps and their compelling styles? In the decades following the Revolution, various scholarly studies, state-sanctioned publications, facsimiles, and exhibitions brought renewed consciousness to critical colonial

manuscripts, such as the so-called Cortés Map, the *Codex Mendoza*, Mapa Uppsala, *Plan llamado de papel de maguey*, *Lienzo de Tlaxcala*, and *Mapa Sigüenza*. Among these colonial images, the first three were particularly prominent and are examined here in their post-revolutionary context for the first time. Artists responded to their renewed presence with visual productions—including prints, paintings, and architectural works—thereby exalting their own spatial awakenings to Mexico's urban foundations and inviting their audience to share their constructed views. Also critical to this process by which sixteenth century depictions of the island city become visible in the twentieth century were historians of art and texts, planners, as well as other agents working in conjunction with the government who, in one way or another, promoted such works as critical documents of cultural patrimony with distinct relevance for a modernizing Mexico.

Planos and Planning

One publication in particular showcases the principal overlapping forces prompting a cartographic reckoning in post-revolutionary Mexico. *Planos de la Ciudad de México, Siglos XVI y XVII*, published in 1938, was the first serious, modern summative assessment of the capital's earliest maps; it was the work of three key academics dedicated to Mexico's art history.⁵ Chief among them was Manuel Toussaint, Mexico's preeminent scholar of viceregal art, who in 1920 had served as secretary to then-rector of the National University José Vasconcelos and in 1928, became director of the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes (INBA). Toussaint would later direct the department of colonial monuments under Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH). For the *Planos* publication, Toussaint was joined by historian Federico Gómez de Orozco, with whom he had earlier founded the Art Laboratory of the

⁴ Adriana Zavala, "Mexico City in Juan O'Gorman's Imagination," *Hispanic Research Journal*, Vol.8, No.5, (December 2007): 491-506, esp. p.493

⁵ Manuel Toussaint, Federico Gómez de Orozco and Justino Fernández, *Planos de la Ciudad de México, Siglos XVI y XVII: Estudio Histórico, Urbanístico y Bibliográfico* (Mexico: XVI Congreso Internacional de la Planificación y de la Habitación, 1938).

National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) which soon became the Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas (IIE). Their third colleague on the project was Toussaint's protégé, Justino Fernández who himself was a map maker, and founder of a publishing company—Editorial Alcanfía—with historian Edmundo O'Gorman, brother of painter and architect Juan O'Gorman. Following his mentor's death in 1955, Fernández took over as director of Estéticas, thereby cementing his own legacy as a constitutive force in the discipline of art history in Mexico.

Connections between the *Planos* project and modernizing developments are laid bare by its publication in conjunction with the International Congress of Planning and Housing, held for the first time in Mexico at Bellas Artes in 1938. At the behest of President Cárdenas, the conference was organized by Carlos Contreras, founder and chair of the National Planning Association of Mexico (1926), who also penned the volume's introduction. Earlier in the 1930s, Contreras coordinated Mexico City's development plan which focused on the preservation of the historic center as well as the controlled growth and movement of its population. As an agent of the government's Ministry of Communications and Public Works, Contreras had collaborated heavily with one of the volume's authors, Justino Fernández. According to architectural historian Alejandrina Escudero, all of the planning proposals presented by Contreras for the city of Mexico and the federal district from 1927 to 1938 were drawn by Fernández.⁶ Therefore, even as Fernández, under Toussaint, was studying the art of Mexico's past, and more specifically, the city's historic cartography including for the *Planos* project, he was drawing the maps and plans that would assist in the future development of Mexico's capital.

In his introduction to *Planos de la ciudad de México*, Contreras writes of the volume's lead author,

"Manuel Toussaint does well in signaling the resemblance of the city to a clinical case of a patient and the procedure that should be followed to analyze (him), not only from birth but in some cases even the antecedents of paternity and the causes that gave rise and being to the city."⁷ As head of the city's planning efforts supported at the highest level of government, Contreras undoubtedly saw himself as the lead doctor overseeing a growing urban body presenting various symptoms. The historic maps, in turn, were the patient's records that he and others could use to diagnose the rapidly developing civic corpus and guide it towards a healthy future.

An Island Capital: the Cortés Map

In 1524, a woodcut was made in Nuremberg to accompany the Latin version of Hernán Cortés letters to the Spanish King Carlos V. The resultant print, described as the "Plan of Mexico-Tenochtitlan Attributed to Hernán Cortés" in the *Planos* publication, was copied, colorized, reproduced and widely circulated. It presents an eye-catching view of the Aztec city that immediately captivated the Spanish interlopers who oversaw its conquest (Fig. 2). Four hundred years later, following the Revolution, government officials, scholars, and artists would look back to this original view for modern inspiration. For instance, the father of modern planning in Mexico, Carlos Contreras, recognized the need for a platform through which to share his ideas about urban development. For this reason, in 1927 Contreras established the journal *Planificación* as the principal organ of diffusion for the National Planning Association, which he had founded the year before. The inaugural edition of the magazine, which brought together contributions from key engineers, geographers, architects, and other scholars, included a reproduction of the woodcut; therefore, the very view that first introduced a transatlantic

⁶ Alejandrina Escudero Morales, "Carlos Contreras, El Urbanista y la Ciudad," in *Los Arquitectos Mexicanos de la Modernidad: Corrigiendo las omisiones y celebrando el compromiso*, ed. Catherine Ettinger, Louise Noelle, and Mich. Morelia (Mexico: Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolás de Hidalgo, 2013), 47.

⁷ My translation. Prologue, Toussaint et al, *Planos*, 1938 (page not numbered); this concept of city-as-patient parallels a concept expressed by the Scottish planner

Patrick Geddes, a decade earlier: "If town planning is to meet the needs of the city's life, to aid its growth, and advance its progress, it must surely know and understand its city. To mitigate its evils, it needs diagnosis before treatment." Geddes, *Cities in Evolution: an introduction to the town planning movement and to the study of civics* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1915), 295.



Figure 2. Unknown artist, *Nuremberg Map of Tenochtitlan*, 1524, from Hernán Cortés' Second Letter. Courtesy of the Newberry Library, Chicago, Ayer 655.51.C8 1524.

audience to the Aztec capital in the early sixteenth century would now help to introduce modern planning in Mexico's capital city.

The *Nuremberg Map of Tenochtitlan*, also commonly referred to as the Cortés Map, imaginatively codifies the city's character with a birds-eye view of an island in the middle of a circular lake, seated in a valley landscape. Framed by a mountainous basin punctuated by medieval-style towers, disproportionate scale is given to the sacred precinct at the city's center; also structurally and conceptually dominant are the waters surrounding the island's residential blocks. Although the print included a separate map of the Gulf Coast with a distinctive orientation and diminutive scale, it is the oversized view of the city that received the most embellishment in the print,

and it is that portion of the original which established a clear prototype for the Aztec center. Despite the fact that it is often overlooked, Elizabeth Boone has argued that the inclusion of the coastal map was a significant visual assertion about the expansive nature of Spain's American empire.⁸ Earlier, Barbara Mundy convincingly demonstrated how despite the city plan's clear indebtedness to the artist's familiarity with medieval town representations, its chief attributes were likely drawn from an Aztec source that had traveled from the Americans to the hands of the European woodcutter.⁹ The end result was a harmonious vision celebrating Hernán Cortés' success that might bring him appropriate rewards; a key aspect of its picturesque nature is the relationship portrayed between the sacred landscape and

⁸ Elizabeth Hill Boone, "This new world now revealed: Hernán Cortés and the presentation of Mexico to Europe," *Word & Image*, 27, 1 (2011): 31-46

⁹ Barbara Mundy, "Mapping the Aztec Capital: The 1524 Nuremberg Map of Tenochtitlan, Its Sources and Meanings," *Imago Mundi*, Vol. 50: 1998.

civilization, a notion with parallels in the modern period.

Luis Covarrubias' panoramic painting of Tenochtitlan, a glorious orthogonal view from the west, is arguably rooted in this earliest extant view of the sacred Aztec capital. As in Covarrubias' twentieth-century vista, the sixteenth-century prototype is defined by the watery basin surrounding the irregular landmass, its crowded edges contrasting with the open space at its sacred center. In both, natural mountains and the lake become mirrored in the city's man-made structures and canals. In modern Mexico, different concerns over the control of water were compounded by other challenges of development.¹⁰ Modern nostalgia for the lost city captured in the Cortés print was facilitated by a long history of its reproduction with special inflection in the post-revolutionary moment. Richard Kagan has shown how for several centuries during colonial rule—even as the actual *urbs* changed in form and nature through Spanish occupation—the view presented by the Cortés Map was not only reproduced but also adapted in later representations by subsequent artists, giving especially a European audience an outdated and stifled understanding of the now Spanish-American city—what Kagan calls “a special kind of myopia.”¹¹

Its twentieth-century resurrection was a distinctly national one. Following its publication in Contreras' *Planificación*, state-sponsored historical and cultural narratives prompted the reprint of the Cortés Map especially in the 1930s and 40s. This included articles and monographs by government officials, historians, and academics; 1938 was an especially flush year for its circulation, beyond its extensive analysis in *Planos de la Ciudad* in which Fernández outlined its likely contours within a map

of the contemporary city. For instance, that same year through Editorial Alcanía, Edmundo O'Gorman and Justino Fernández printed it with the classic anonymous conquest narrative attributed to a companion of Cortés.¹² Notably, another body of scholarship with specific architectural interests also illustrated the woodcut of Tenochtitlan, drawing specific lines between the ancient structures and modern ones. In this case, another co-author of *Planos de la Ciudad*, Gómez de Orozco together with acclaimed modern architect Carlos Obregón Santacilia reprinted the map, also in 1938, in conjunction with a close study of the history of the centrally located *Plaza de la Guardiola*; this and numerous other publications worked to emphasize the distinctive, indigenous roots of the historic center, even as this part of Mexico was rapidly changing with modern developments. For architect Enrique Guerrero, the map was a sort birth certificate for his “Para una Biografía de la Ciudad. Notas de un Arquitecto,” published in the journal *México en el Arte* in 1949, which also happened to feature Rivera's then-newish mural on the second floor of the Palacio Nacional, *La Gran Tenochtitlan* (1945), on its cover.¹³

A direct artistic nod to the “Plan of Mexico-Tenochtitlan Attributed to Hernán Cortés” appears just as the city is reoriented at midcentury towards the developing southern region of the valley, at a distance from the historic center. With the move of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) from the city center to the Pedregal area of San Ángel in the 1940s, a grand plan for the modernist campus took shape over the next decade. The most famous building would become the Central Library, where Juan O'Gorman laid out in clear iconographic terms, both universalist and nationalist symbolism underpinning the historical

¹⁰ Eg. Jeffrey Banister and Stacie Widdifield (“The debut of ‘modern water’ in early 20th century Mexico City: the Xochimilco potable waterworks,” *Journal of Historical Geography* 46 (2014): 36-52) document political and aesthetic developments surrounding the hydraulic history and tensions of the capital, concluding that “Water-control infrastructure has involved a process of grafting new objects onto old, forming a stratigraphy of approaches” (p.52).

¹¹ Richard Kagan, “The Traveler's Eye,” in *Urban Images of the Hispanic World* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1996), 93.

¹² Edmundo O'Gorman and Justino Fernández, *El Conquistador Anónimo. Relación de algunas cosas de la Nueva España escrita por un compañero de Hernán Cortés* (Mexico: Editorial Alcanía, 1938); this and other sources for the Cortés Map are found in Carrera Stampa, *Planos de la Ciudad de México: desde 1521 hasta nuestros días* (Mexico: Sociedad Mexicana de geografía y estadística, 1949).

¹³ Federico Gómez de Orozco, *La Plaza de Guardiola, Monografía histórica, con la colaboración documental de Carlos Obregón Santacilia y Mauro Aguirre* (Mexico: El Banco de México, 1942); Enrique Guerrero, “Para una Biografía de la Ciudad. Notas de un Arquitecto,” *México en el Arte*, Num.8, Mexico, 1949. Other publications include Ignacio Alcocer, *Apuntes sobre la Antigua México Tenochtitlan* (Tacubaya, DF: Instituto Panamericano de Geografía e Historia, 1935); Artemio de Valle Arizpe, *El Palacio Nacional de México* (Mexico: Impr. de la Secretaría de relaciones exteriores, 1936) and Luis González Obregón, *México Viejo, Noticias Históricas, tradiciones, leyendas, y costumbres* (Mexico, 1945). Adriana Zavala [in progress] is presently addressing Rivera's *Gran Tenochtitlan* mural and its relationship to Mexico's modern cartographic reckoning, as part of a larger collaborative project with the author.

and cultural orientation of the institution. The colorful mosaic on the Southern wall, facing the great open space unifying the campus, animates Mexico's Spanish history with conquerors, friars, churches, and manuscripts capturing a history of cultural change. Among them is a rendition of the Cortés Map, here becoming part of the literal slip cover of the otherwise functionalistic block construction of architects Gustavo Saavedra and Juan Martínez de Velasco (Fig. 3). This façade therefore helped to marry the ancient and the modern. Because the campus was situated outside of the original geographic domain of Aztec Tenochtitlan, the inclusion of a mosaic rendition of the Cortés Map in this context demonstrates a commitment to maintain connections to Mexico's deep cartographic history, even as the city expanded out and away from its roots.

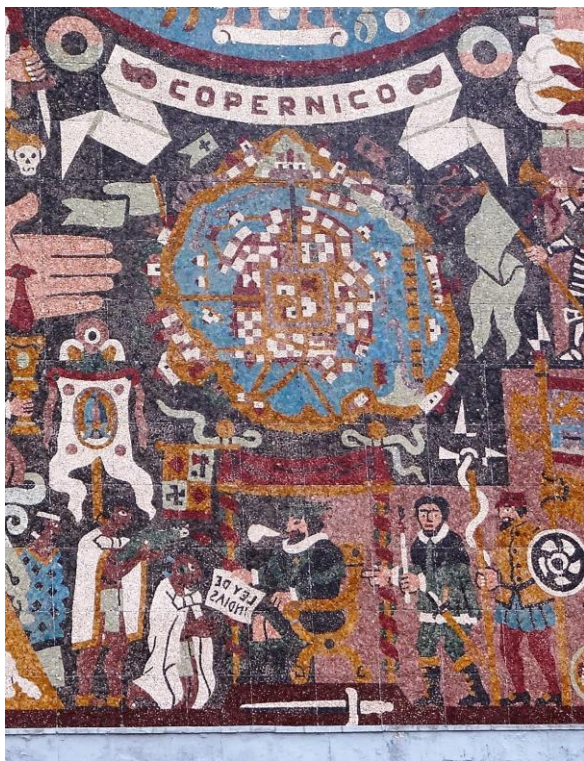


Figure 3. Juan O'Gorman, mosaic rendition of Nuremberg Map of Tenochtitlan, 1953, detail from *Representación histórica de la cultura*, South façade of National Library, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), Mexico City. Photograph courtesy of Adriana Zavala.

A Symbolic Geography: the *Codex Mendoza*

Directly on the other side of the Central Library, O'Gorman simultaneously laid bare his dependence on additional colonial manuscripts—and in fact, a source that particularly inspired a symbolic cartography of the post-revolutionary period, the *Codex Mendoza*. The north façade features an homage to Mexico's pre-Hispanic past and its deities, including a central face of rain god Tlaloc with open hands. The overall composition is defined however by a symbolic geography of four blue streams which come together around the toponym of Tenochtitlan, the miraculous eagle and cactus most prominently presented on the frontispiece to the *Codex Mendoza*, known as the *Foundation of Tenochtitlan* (Fig. 4). In contrast to the Cortés Map, this was a symbolic rather than a naturalistic representation of the Aztec capital city, and one that despite its non-positivist cartographic nature, contributed to the language of Mexico's historic geography as it was constituted in the post-revolutionary moment. Despite the fact that *Mendoza*, an indigenous manuscript, first arrived in Europe in the sixteenth century and has resided at Oxford University's Bodleian Library since the seventeenth century, it was influential in promoting a modern Mexican consciousness rooted in a distinctly native approach for calling forth geographic identity through glyphic symbolism.

Codex Mendoza, commissioned by the first viceroy of New Spain but created by Aztec artists as a window onto native traditions for the Spanish king, was ultimately a history of the indigenous empire in pictures. Made in 1541-2 under colonial direction with European paper but adhering largely to pre-Hispanic pictorial conventions, the contents survey Aztec history, tribute records, and social rituals. The singularly powerful frontispiece introduces this indigenous body of knowledge through a depiction of the foundation of its capital city, with its earliest leaders occupying the four major quadrants of the island city and the miraculous image of the eagle and cactus at its center. The symbolic map of Tenochtitlan's

foundation might help us understand the sort of manuscript from decades earlier that Mundy argues was likely sent with Cortés' letters to help an artist in Nuremberg create his own view of that city, now in a Europeanized style. Just as Cortés' map was widely circulated and reproduced, Daniela Bleichmar has suggested that the *Codex Mendoza* may be the single most reproduced non-western manuscript in early modern publications.¹⁴ Even though it never made it to the Spanish king, it was almost immediately a source of notable fascination in Europe.

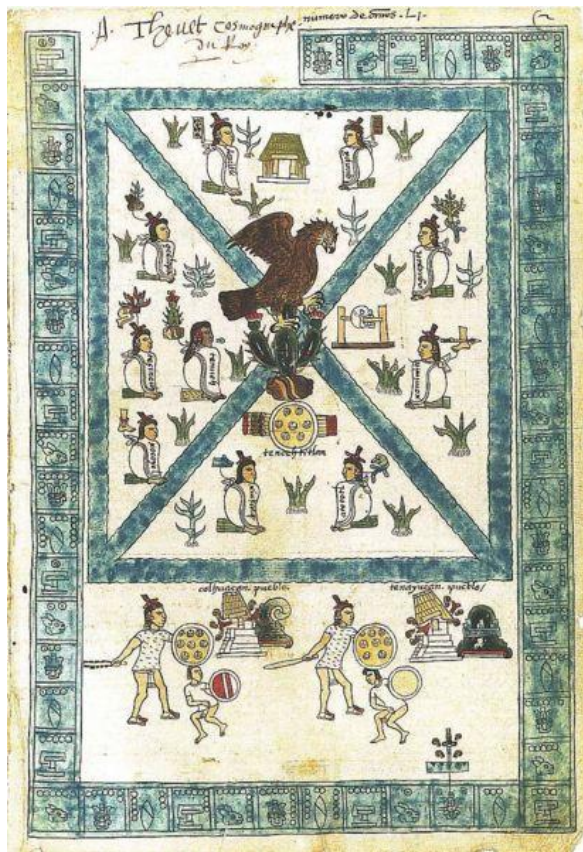


Figure 4. Unknown artist, *Foundation of Tenochtitlan*, frontispiece in *Codex Mendoza*, circa 1542. Image in the public domain. Manuscript in the collection of the Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, Ms. Arch. Selden A.1, fol.2r.

In Mexico, however, access was limited by distance from the original manuscript and its few early editions, made in Europe—until after the Revolution. The single most significant and accessible edition to ever circulate there did not exist until the facsimile produced by Jesús Galindo y Villa in 1925, at the very height of post-revolutionary fervor.¹⁵ Notably, *Planos* co-author Gómez de Orozco wrote a detailed analyses of the codex and its style in 1941. Parts 1 and 2 are particularly significant here for their survey of place glyphs and other symbolic representations that we know, for instance, that Diego Rivera relied on for Aztec imagery he incorporated into numerous murals.¹⁶ The significance of the *Codex Mendoza* grew as modern Mexicans increasingly understood that although its pictorial language was symbolic, Aztecs indeed had constructed a true city, and that Mesoamerica more generally had been made up of urban civilizations. The ongoing excavations at Teotihuacan concurrently demonstrated that ancient urban roots went even deeper than Tenochtitlan's history. David Carrasco describes the Aztec city as a religious form, a perspective also suggested by O'Gorman's mosaic on the north façade of the Central Library.¹⁷ The *Mendoza* frontispiece presents a cosmological dimension to the ancient city through its overall shape and centripetal nature, and most of all by the mythologies that underlie its symbolism.

Where the *Codex Mendoza's* symbolic cartographic language is perhaps most integrated in the modern period is through the emergent genre of commercial pictorial mapping. Elsewhere I have described how the genre of pictorial cartography, as seen for instance, in a map of Mexico City by US artist Emily Edwards, allowed for the balance of tradition and modernity, particularly urban growth and tourism.¹⁸ Edwards' map presents modern Mexico City in the shape of an Aztec eagle warrior

¹⁴ Daniela Bleichmar, "History in Pictures: Translating the Codex Mendoza," *Art History*, September 2015: 683-701.

¹⁵ *Handbook of Middle American Indians: Guide to Ethnohistorical sources*, vol.14 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1975), 160-161.

¹⁶ Enrique Vela, ed., *Diego Rivera y la arqueología mexicana*, special edition of *Arqueología Mexicana*, 47, 2012; also Stanton Catlin, "Political Iconography in the Diego Rivera Frescoes at Cuernavaca, Mexico" in *Art and Architecture in the Service of*

Politics, ed. Henry Millon and Linda Nochlin (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1978), 194-215.

¹⁷ David Carrasco, "City as Symbol in Aztec Thought: The Clues from the *Codex Mendoza*" *History of Religions*, Vol. 20, No.3 (Feb.1981): 199-223.

¹⁸ Delia Cosentino, "Picturing American Cities in the Twentieth Century: Emily Edwards's Maps of San Antonio and Mexico City," *Imago Mundi*, Vol 65, 2, 2013: 288-299; also see Cosentino, "Unfolding Maps during the *Maximato* in Mexico," *Latin American and Latinx Visual Culture*, Volume 1, Issue 1 (forthcoming, January 2019).



Figure 5. Carlos Mérida, *Map of Mexico City and Valley*, Frances Toor Studios, Mexico, 1935. Image courtesy of the Earth Sciences and Map Library, University of California, Berkeley.

primed to defend himself; in the *Mendoza* frontispiece, similar warriors (though not in eagle garb), are likewise shown in profile actively defending Aztec imperial expansion. Also notably, the symbolic nature of Edwards' map includes a distinctive framework made up of stylized glyphs of Aztec place names, punctuated by Spanish heraldic imagery. Publicity surrounding the debut of that map in 1932 informs us that officials from the National Museum had studied the glyphic representations and formally approved of their accuracy.¹⁹ For these reasons, I have posited that Edwards' use of this glyphic framework was inspired generally by the toponyms of the *Codex*

Mendoza and by the overall stylized nature of its frontispiece. That sixteenth-century schematic plan of Tenochtitlan, which presents the island city as an axis mundi, also parallels the increasingly centrifugal nature of Mexico City in the 1930s as it became the heart of a bustling tourist economy which would benefit from a playful cartography that could exploit the government's cultural project. Edwards' fresh approach to modern Mexican geography was not unique to the historical moment as the 1930s saw a small explosion of pictorial mapping in service of the national cultural project and its Aztec revival.

¹⁹ Unidentified author, *Electra: El magazine de luz y fuerza y tranvías* 6, no.70 (January-February 1932): 15-17.

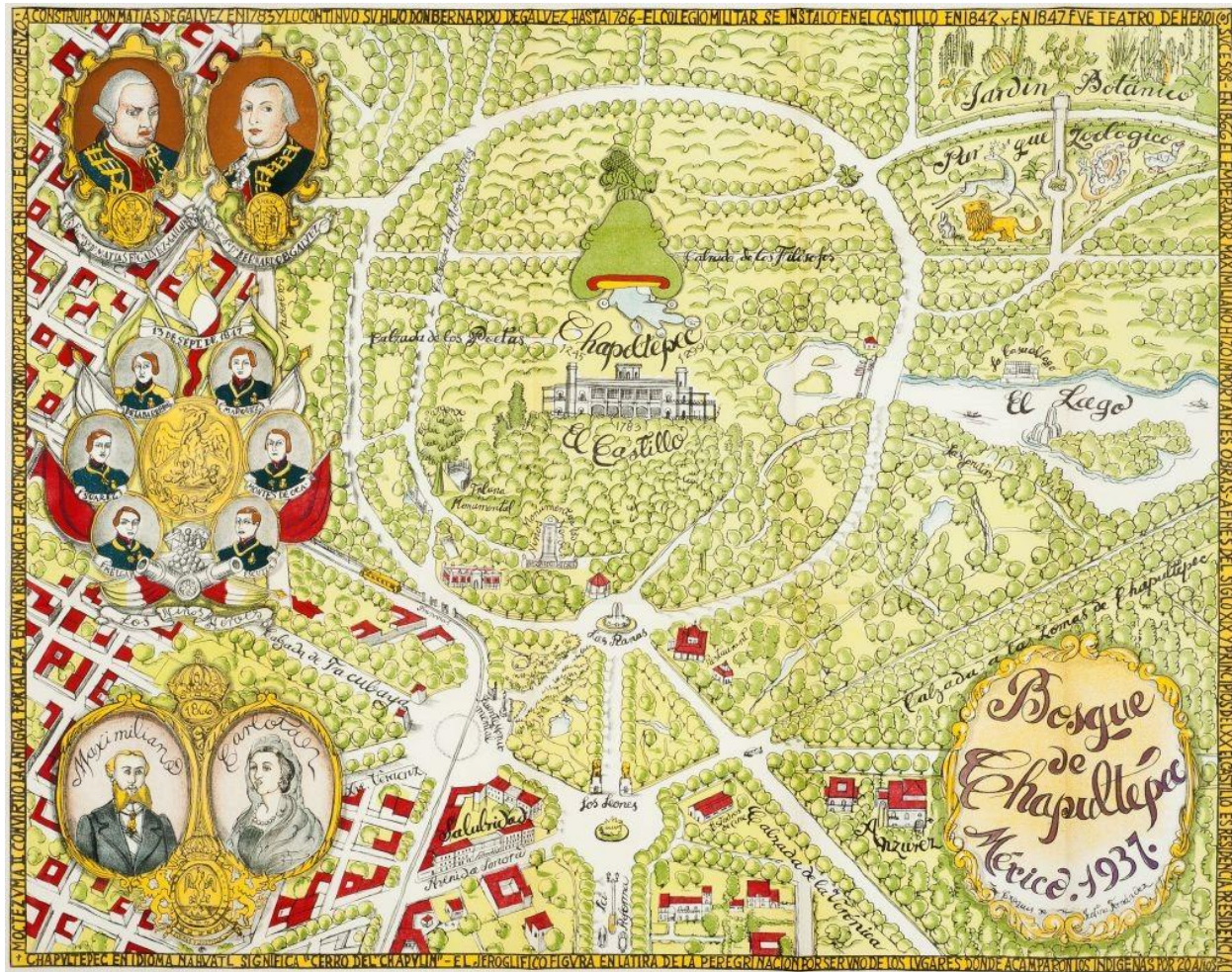


Figure 6. Justino Fernández, *Bosque de Chapultepec*, 1937, circulated in the pocket of Alfonso Teja Zabre's *Chapultepec*, La Secretaría de Hacienda y Credito Publico, Mexico: 1938. Image from copy in collection of Indiana University, Bloomington.

In a similar vein is *Map of Mexico City and Valley of 1935* by Carlos Mérida, a bright lithograph which articulates Mexico City's coalescing identity as a cultural and economic center (Fig. 5). Like Edwards' prototype, this contemporary street map has a glyphic framework; here, though, the Aztec cartouches are treated with modernist abstraction, experimentations in form for which Mérida had already become well-known. Although at this point they are quite distant in style from the *Codex Mendoza*, in concept the symbolic glyphs demonstrate a functional integration of the Aztec

past into the modern, industrialized cityscape. *Planos* co-author Fernández likewise produced multiple pictorial maps, including three in conjunction with his series of books on cities in Michoacán, and one for a monograph on the historic area of Chapultepec (Fig. 6). This series of books and their coordinate pictorial maps were part of an initiative by President Cárdenas to promote a regional tourism, steeped in cultural history.²⁰ Although I would not suggest that the books specifically model the *Codex Mendoza* or its frontispiece, in concept, they are perhaps not so

²⁰ Fernández's trio of books (*Uruapan, Morelia, Patzcuaro*, México: Talleres de Impresión de Estampillas y Valores, 1936), all use the glyphic sign for Michoacan (place of the fish) on the cover; also Alfonso Teja Zabre, *Chapultepec*, Mexico: La Secretaría de Hacienda y Credito Publico, 1938; see Jennifer Jolly, *Creating Patzcuaro, Creating Mexico: Art, Tourism, and Nation Building under Lázaro Cárdenas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2018).

different, offering discrete cultural histories of place, employing a revitalized Aztec visual language of symbolic geography. Moreover, like the *Mendoza* frontispiece with its axial toponym of Tenochtitlan, Fernández's 1937 pictorial map of Chapultepec revolves around its distinctive place glyph—a hill topped by a grasshopper, the pictorial translation of its Nahuatl name.

The frontispiece to the *Codex Mendoza* was not included in the *Planos* compendium of 1938, which is focused on more positivist cartographic treatments. A color reprint of it was however included amongst both other historic maps and statistical charts in a book entitled *Historia Grafica de la Nueva Espania*, by engineer Jos R. Benitez which was published by the Spanish Chamber of Commerce in Mexico. Most interestingly, a reproduction of the *Mendoza* frontispiece was featured as the earliest map—and the only sixteenth-century example—in a 1949 exhibition of artworks at a venue in Chapultepec, sponsored by the newspaper *Excelsior* entitled “La Ciudad de México interpretada por sus Pintores.” Over 30,000 people are reported to have visited in just a few short weeks, no doubt compelled by the fact that also were on display were contemporary artworks competing in a related contest.²¹ This competition was the one for which O’Gorman’s painted *Paisaje* would take first place. Among the small group of jurors who also organized the exhibition are a couple of very familiar names: Manuel Toussaint and Justino Fernández, long-term cartographic scholars clearly invested in the various ways that an informed public might be compelled to reckon with the modern city’s foundational geography.²²

A Hybrid City: the Uppsala Map

The last of the three colonial cartographic representations explored here may be

chronologically the latest, but in some ways was the one that proved the most ideal for a post-revolutionary resurrection—and coordinately, it appears to have been the most widely republished of the time. It is the map which was formerly erroneously attributed to Spanish cartographer Alonso de Santa Cruz, also referred to as the ‘Map of Mexico of 1550’ (Mapa de México de 1550), or the Uppsala Map for its location in Sweden since the seventeenth century.²³ The polychrome work on parchment is much larger than the two previously described works, both of which were manuscript size; this in contrast, is 75 x 144cm (roughly 2.5 x 4.5ft) and offers a lively presentation of a birds-eye view of the island and surrounding landscape in the mid-sixteenth century. Oriented with East at the bottom, we see an emergent Mexico City with buildings, roads, people, and still largely visible water bodies just decades after the fall of Tenochtitlan to Spanish control. It is the very first known map of the culturally hybrid city, since the Cortés Map and the *Mendoza* frontispiece seek to represent the Aztec city rather than a place that was already transforming under Spanish rule. This is of course the map that O’Gorman famously juxtaposed with the modernizing cityscape in his 1949 *Paisaje*, but it is also a map which many post-revolutionary cultural movers had been boosting in word and image for decades leading up to midcentury.

The Uppsala Map had enjoyed some attention at the start of the twentieth century with several prominent intellectuals publishing it in conjunction with their collections of Mexican historical documents.²⁴ The most significant reproduction of the map for subsequent studies was a lithograph made in conjunction with an English edition of Bernal Díaz del Castillo’s *History* published by British archaeologist Alfred Maudslay in 1910; as a full-sized color reproduction of the map, this was the best reproduction that had been made to date,

²¹ Ana Isabel Pérez Gavilán, “Chávez Morado, destructor de mitos. Silencios y aniquilaciones de *La ciudad* (1949),” *Anales del Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas*, 27 (87), México, September 2005.

²² We know about the *Codex Mendoza*’s inclusion since it is noted by Fernández, who authored the catalogue that documented this and other exhibitions that year. See *Catalogo de las exposiciones de arte en 1949* (Mexico: *Anales del Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas*, 1950), 36. In that entry, the *Codex* is referred to by its other name, *el Códice Mendocino*.

²³ See essay in this volume on this map, by Jennifer Saracino, who has argued for an earlier date of circa 1540.

²⁴ Mexican scholars Antonio Peñafiel and Luis González Obregón included it in their historical collections of 1900, as did British archaeologist Alfred Maudslay in 1910; these and other sources for the Uppsala Map are noted in Carrera Stampa, *Planos de la Ciudad de México: desde 1521 hasta nuestros días* (México, D.F., Sociedad Mexicana de geografía y estadística, 1949).

and in this way, it was truly revelatory. Immediately after the close of the civil war, scholars scrutinized the reproduction and reprinted the map abundantly—at least a dozen different publications included the print over the next couple of decades. A 1921 municipal bulletin republished the map under the banner “Our First Print,” marking a clear post-revolutionary claim to the sixteenth-century city.²⁵

Like the Cortés Map, the Uppsala Map is afforded ample space in the *Planos* publication of 1938, where Toussaint made a significant pronouncement. For the first time, its association in name and concept with the Spanish Santa Cruz was distanced and its *indigenous* authorship was validated.²⁶ Meanwhile in the same volume, Fernández demonstrated its contours within a map of the contemporary city, as had been done with the Cortés Map. Whereas with that 1524 view Toussaint could only really discuss the relationship of the causeways to its modern correlates, with the Uppsala Map, he was able to use Fernández’s interpretive schema overlaying the geography of that map over a modern image to discuss much more concrete parallels between the historic map’s plazas, churches, hospitals, principal roads, and other built features, some of which were still extant, to one degree or another. Toussaint praises “the unmistakable aspect offered by the Mexican capital in the middle of the XVI century” which he and others studied from Maudslay lithograph of 1910.

It is likely that it was this same Maudslay reproduction of the Uppsala Map that was also presented at several transnational conferences, including by Toussaint at the International Congress of Art History in Buenos Aires in 1937. The Swedish ethnographer Sigvald Linné also discussed the map at the Congress of Americanists in 1939 which included a subject area on “bibliography, cartography, organization of

archives and methods of investigation”²⁷; the resultant 1942 publication which identifies the map in its title as ‘the oldest of the valley’ helped to secure a place for this particular image in hemispheric history. In 1948, Linné went on to publish a full color facsimile and study identified as the first fully reliable reproduction of the map to date. Although the volume was produced in Stockholm, its Spanish text was clearly geared to the Mexican scholarly audience with which Linné engaged.²⁸ Well before then, a British civil engineer Robert Conway working in Mexico had used a copy as a frontispiece to his 1927 publication of his collection of colonial documents. A number of additional Mexican historians, architects, and others used it to provide a vision of the city’s bygone foundations that were nonetheless clearly looming large in the national consciousness.

References to the Uppsala Map in government-aligned newspapers reveal how the early colonial document could satisfy the modern Mexican imagination by drawing connections between contemporary populism and perceived early parallels. Well before the *Excelsior*-sponsored contest for which O’Gorman took first prize, that same paper celebrated the debut of a pictorial map—the 1932 print of Mexico City by Emily Edwards—precisely because it was, as the headline declared, “made in the manner of those in the sixteenth century.”²⁹ Associated publicity names specifically the Uppsala Map (then, still attributed to Santa Cruz) as the colonial prototype for the pictorial map, celebrating the sixteenth-century cartographic image for its visual accessibility, unlike the impenetrable conventionalism of modern mapping, deemed too complicated for the uninitiated. Some of the key features that made it so seductive include its ‘infantile style’ and disregard for ‘the conventionality of modern engineering.’ These stylistic aspects are understood to make the

²⁵“Nuestro Primero Grabado,” *Boletín Municipal*, Abril 1921, p.309, as noted in Carrera Stampa, *Planos de la Ciudad de México*.

²⁶ Toussaint, *Planos*, 142.

²⁷ *American Journal of Physical Anthropology*, vol. XXV, no.1 and Supplement April-June 1939: 133.

²⁸ Linné, *El Valle y la ciudad de México en 1550* (Stockholm: The Ethnographical Museum of Sweden, 1948); for a contemporaneous book review, see George Kubler, *American Antiquity*, vol. 16, no.3 (1951): 268.

²⁹ *Excelsior*, 17 April 1932, 8; *El Universal*, 17 April 1932, 11. *Electra: El magazine de luz y fuerza y tranvías* 6, no.70 (January-February 1932): 15-17; information from this monthly publicity magazine of the energy company that funded the Edwards map was fed directly to the government-affiliated newspapers that promoted its debut.

cartographic view of the sixteenth century city ‘easy and understandable for all.’ The article explains that ‘where there is a house, it presents us with a house, where there is a canal, we see a canal’; it is clear that in this time and space, for these boosters, the Uppsala Map and its ‘objective representations’ showed the deep roots of a distinctively Mexican, populist cartographic tradition.

Conclusion

When Luis Covarrubias painted his panoramic view of the valley of Mexico, he materialized a vision that had been fomenting in the capital city for decades. The large painting was set against the wall above archeologist Ignacio Marquina’s model of imperial Tenochtitlan in the heavily-lauded modernist museum. Although the orientation in Covarrubias’ panorama is different from that first European vision of the island city (as well as that of the *Mendoza* and Uppsala maps), the viewer standing in front of Covarrubias’ work partakes in the sense of wonder embodied by both Cortés descriptive letters and the accompanying woodcut map that had, by the first half of the twentieth century, fully inspired Mexico’s cultural elite. In fact, Covarrubias’ painting manages to reconcile both information about the island city gleaned from colonial maps with the early twentieth century realization of Marquina and others that, contrary to previous understanding, the Templo Mayor and other elements of the Aztec sacred precinct were westward facing, and therefore their facades greeted the view from Chapultepec.

Even though excavations of Tenochtitlan’s central precinct, spawned by the surprise uncovering of a massive circular relief sculpture, the *Coyolxauhqui Stone* in 1978, would not begin in earnest for another couple of decades, I have argued here that another set of visual forms helped to spark popular imagination in the twentieth century about the Aztec origins of Mexico’s capital city. While greater

amounts of material evidence of the capital’s foundations remained hidden under centuries of destruction and construction, early maps filled a void. Their resurrection is linked to the post-revolutionary moment, when the cultural program celebrated a reappraisal of indigenous contributions to Mexican identity. The maps were therefore not only historical records of the foundational city; they were also aesthetic objects whose visual contents preserved native spatial character and architectural structures of the ancient city—something that particularly contrasted with but gave meaning to a transformative modern landscape.

In 1934, remarks by Aarón Sáenz the governor of the State of Mexico, appointed by President Cárdenas, might shed a final light on how the governing agenda for developing a sense of Mexico City’s identity was a complex process implicating many players. Of the planning agenda that followed the Revolution, Sáenz wrote, “The embellishment of a major city, capital of a Nation, is not an issue of academic or abstract beauty, but suggests a cultural element with which to assert our national identity.”³⁰ His words reveal some of the ways that the government understood how planning was not so much of a scientific process, but rather required work in conjunction with artists and architects, art historians and other scholars to construct a meaningful urban fabric of the modern city. It explains a vision of twentieth century modernity that, among other things, prompted a reckoning with the capital’s sixteenth-century foundations through cartographic representations. Among those, the Cortés Map, the frontispiece to the *Codex Mendoza*, and the Uppsala Map presented various aesthetic and conceptual models with which scholars and creative producers actively engaged as they made sense of and helped to forge the post-revolutionary capital. A truly integrated conception of modern Mexico City, Sáenz and others argued, would successfully meld history, cartography, culture, nationalism, and aesthetics.

³⁰ As cited in Alfonso Valenzuela Aguilera, “Green and Modern: Planning Mexico City, 1900-1940” in *Greening the City: Urban Landscapes in the Twentieth Century*, ed.

Dorothee Brantz and Sonja Dümpelmann (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2011).