

CARTOGRAPHY AND POWER IN NEW SPAIN

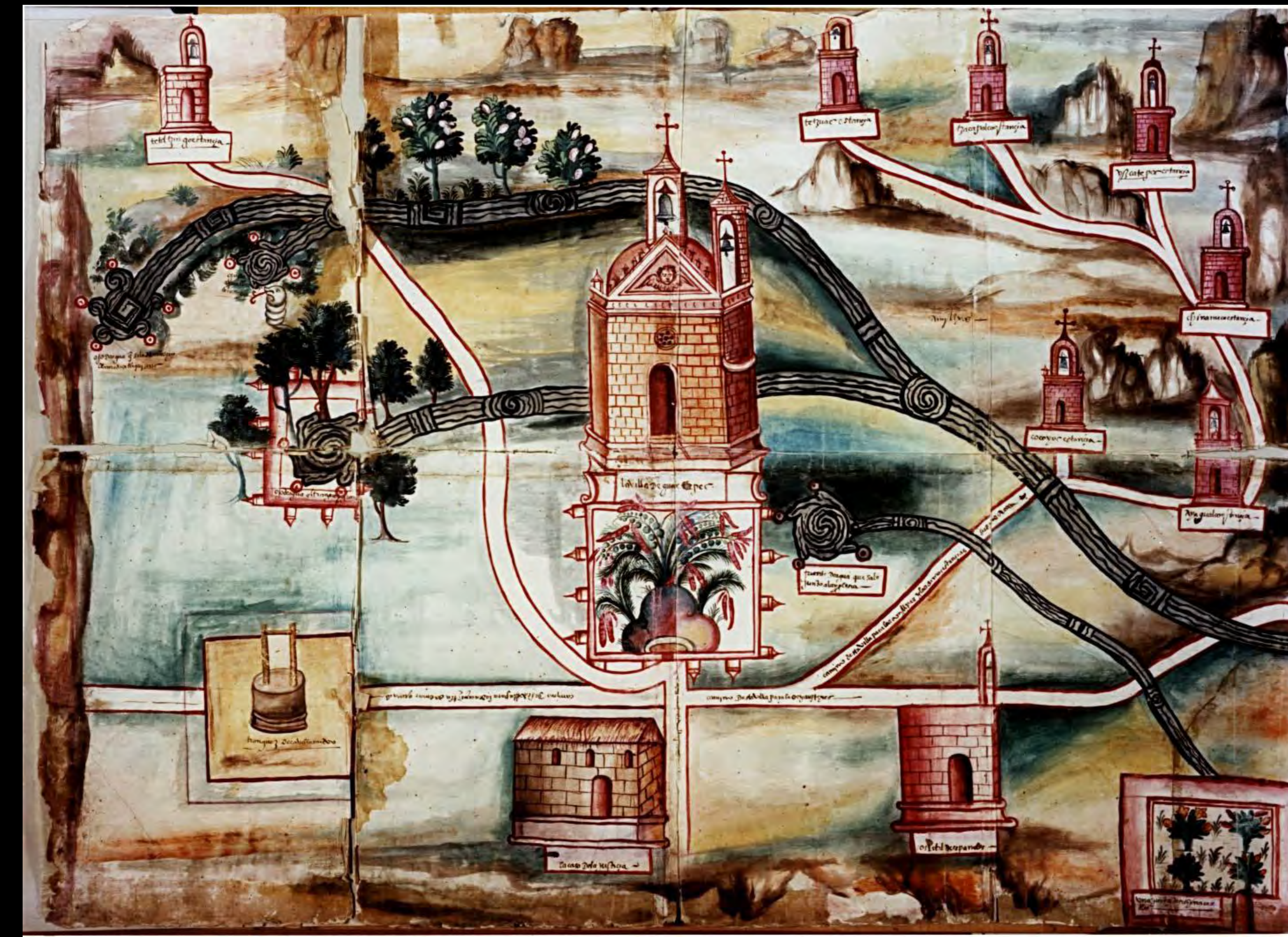
Advisors: Dr. John Gordon and
Dr. David Salisbury

Lindsey Foss, Department of International Studies

“As much as guns and warships, maps have been the weapon of imperialism.”
- J.B. Harley

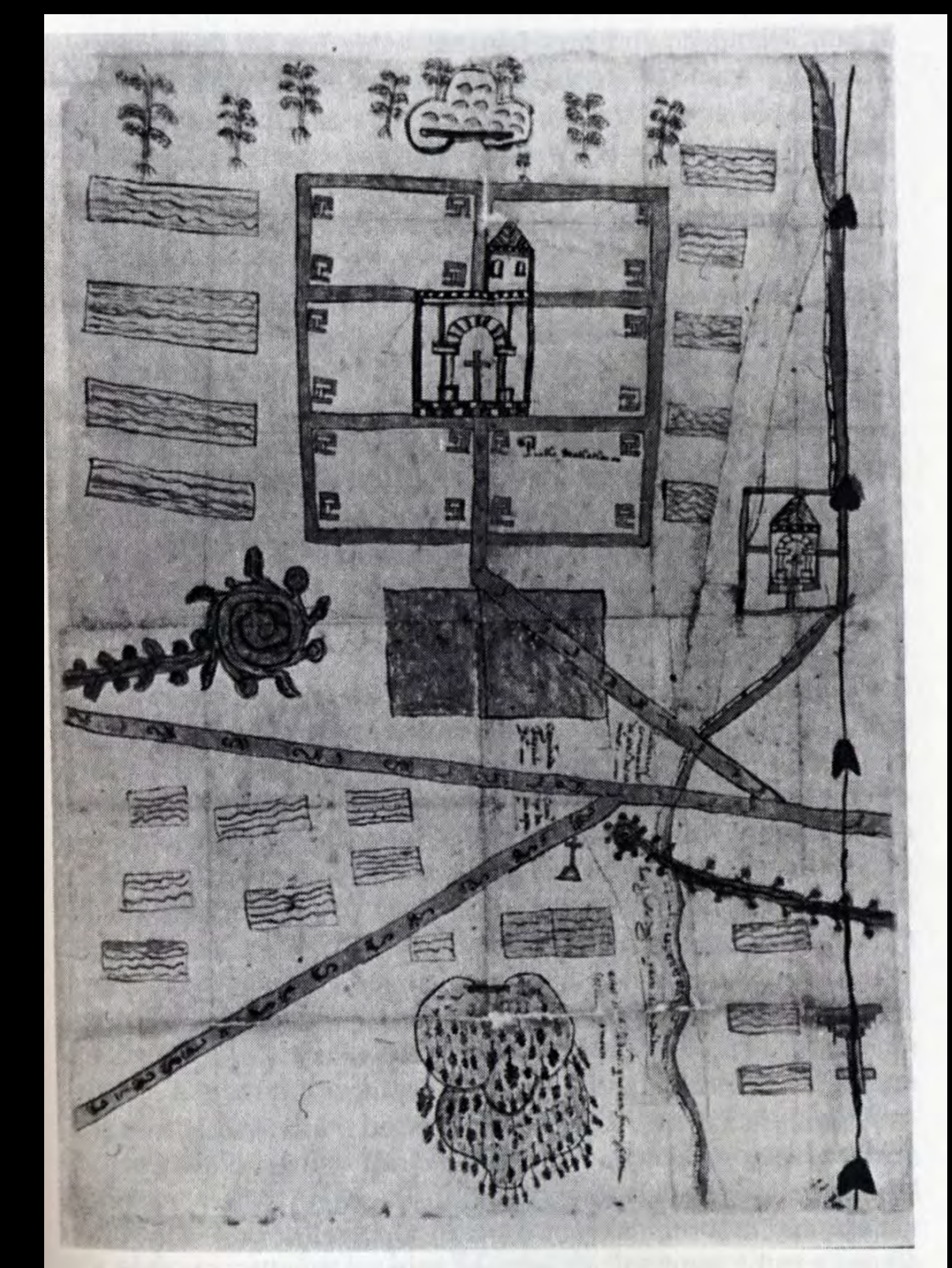
The map, created by one culture, can be a powerful tool to suppress a nation and assert power. Maps were used to “legitimize the reality of conquest and empire” through acting as a visual addition to the rhetoric of the early days of imperialism. Maps allowed for the visualization of land as well as its division, surveillance, and commodification. The European emphasis on gold, God, and glory in the New World was masqueraded in maps as objective and scientific, confirming European self-image of power and supremacy.

The first known map with intricate borders was created by Linschoten in 1594, and is demonstrative of how important decorative iconography was to European cultural perception and power. The portrayal of Africa and the Americas as naked, savage women is indicative of the mindset of explorers. Such images shaped the “reality” of the New World for those still in Europe.



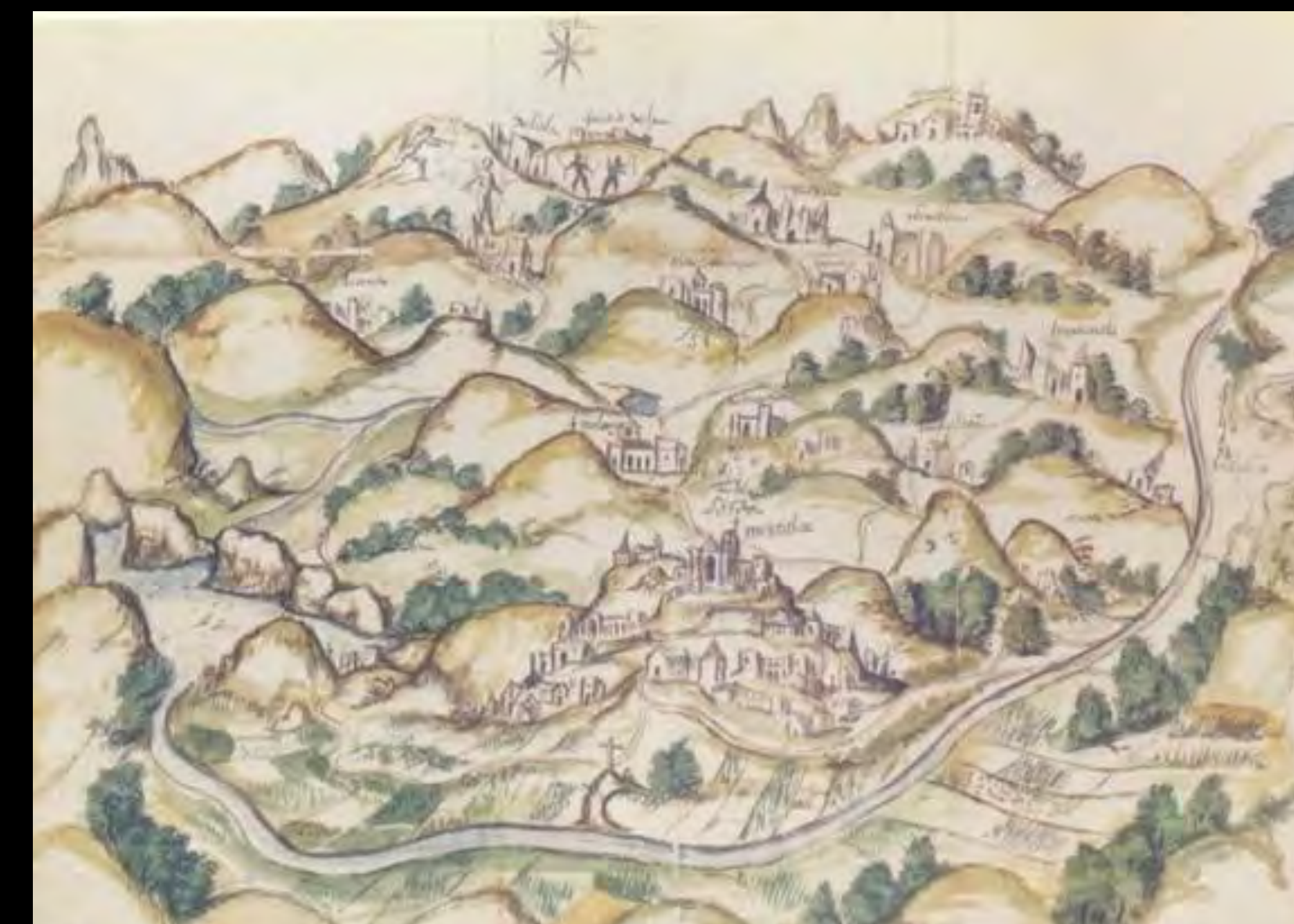
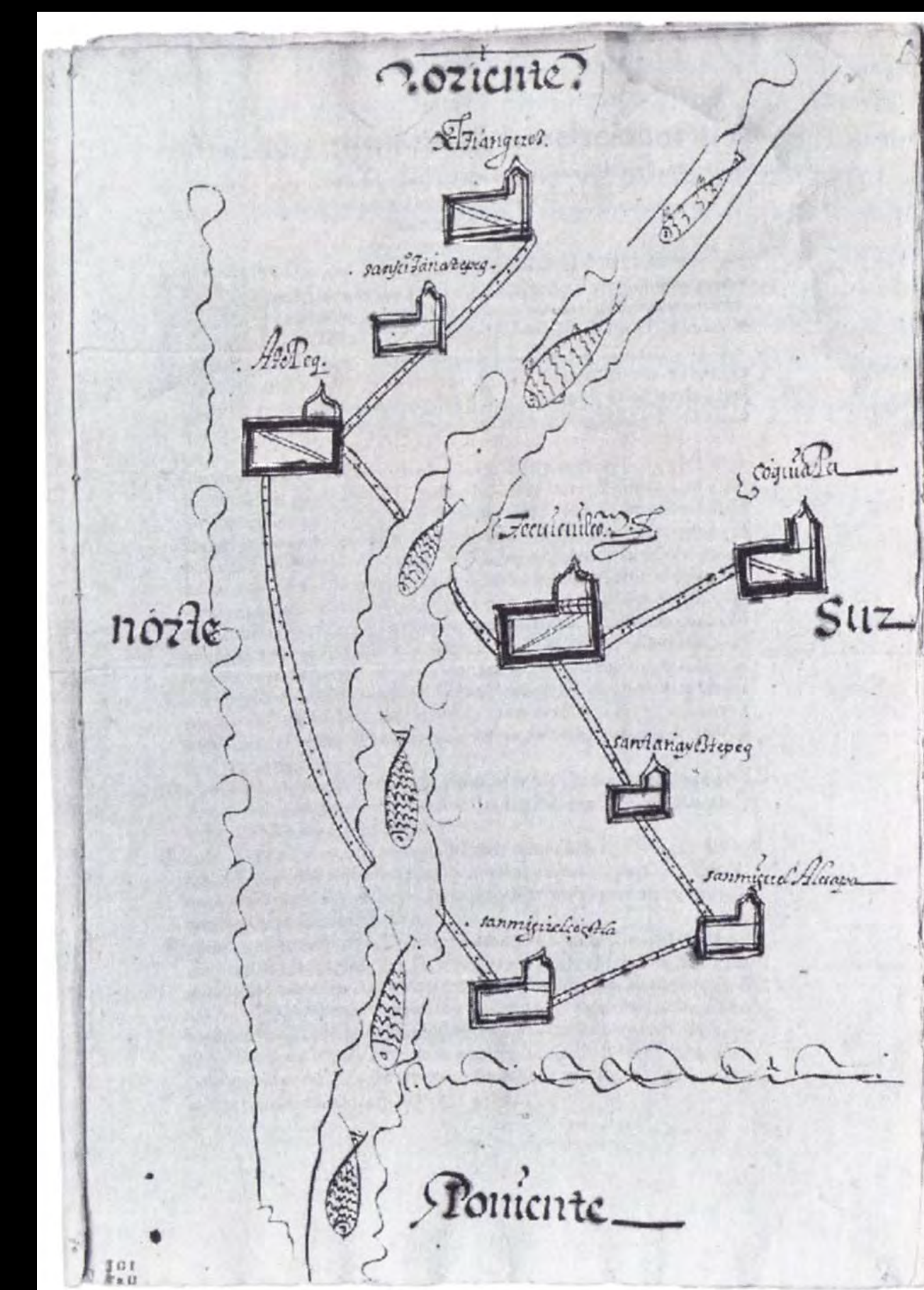
The form which the maps took was influenced both by indigenous styles of map making and the desire of elite Amerindians to present their communities as civilized to the Spanish. This led to the incorporation of many European style elements in the *Relaciones Geograficas* as a way to display indigenous communities as more European than they actually were. Merging various elements of mapping from both cultures, however, did not necessarily occur because indigenous groups had acquiesced to the Spanish. On the contrary, for some indigenous communities, “maps were part of the intellectual apparatus by which the imposition of colonial rule was resisted.”

In indigenous communities, toponyms were almost always a recognizable image, icon, or symbol to cue the name of a place. In the *Relacion Geografica* of Guaxtepec (left), a hill with a tree on top stands in the middle of the map. This is a toponym for the name of the town which translates to mean “hill of the huaxin tree.”



Religious iconography played an important role in maps. The Spanish map above portrays Christopher Columbus carrying the Christ Child.

The evolution of techniques in cartography was shaped by Spanish priorities. Detailed maps of the coast line were made extremely early because of the importance of shipping routes, while maps of the interior remained vague.



The itinerary map (left), one of the few maps in the *Relaciones Geograficas* which was made by a European. Itinerary maps mirrored the physical journey that many of the Spanish governors took on their tours of the region over which they ruled. This map displays the region of Tezuicuilco with churches representing various villages and fish representing a river. Itinerary maps can be read almost like text, and follows the western love of textual representation over visual representation.

Chorographic maps in the *Relaciones Geograficas* (above) mirrored maps in books which were imported from Europe (like Muenster’s map of Florence, left). These maps generally place the major town of the region at the center of the landscape, using an “oblique” perspective, replicating the view of an observer of real landscape by making more distant towns smaller in size. Naked men are depicted with bows and arrows shooting at one another, perpetuating the perception of Amerindians as primitive and animalistic.

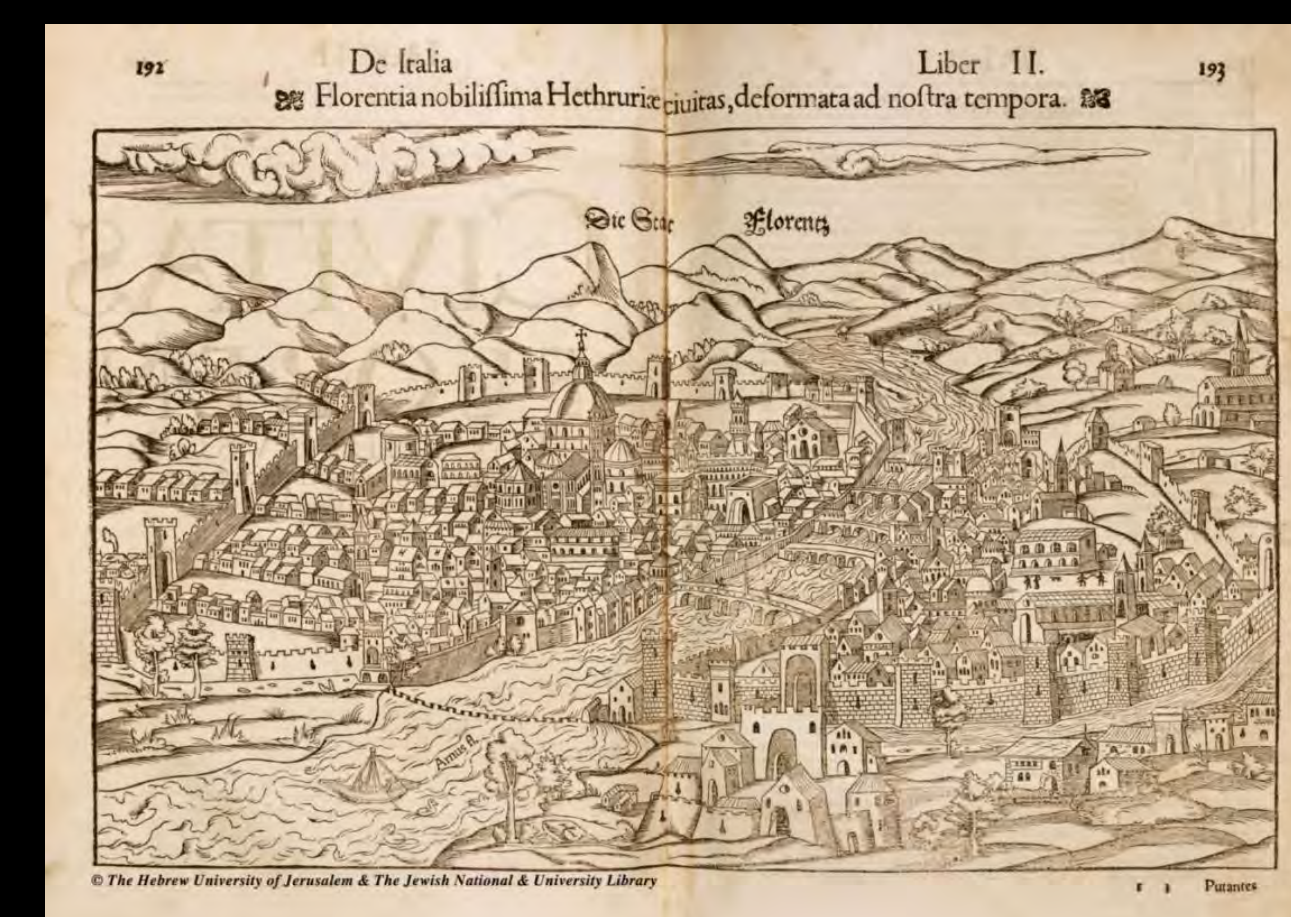
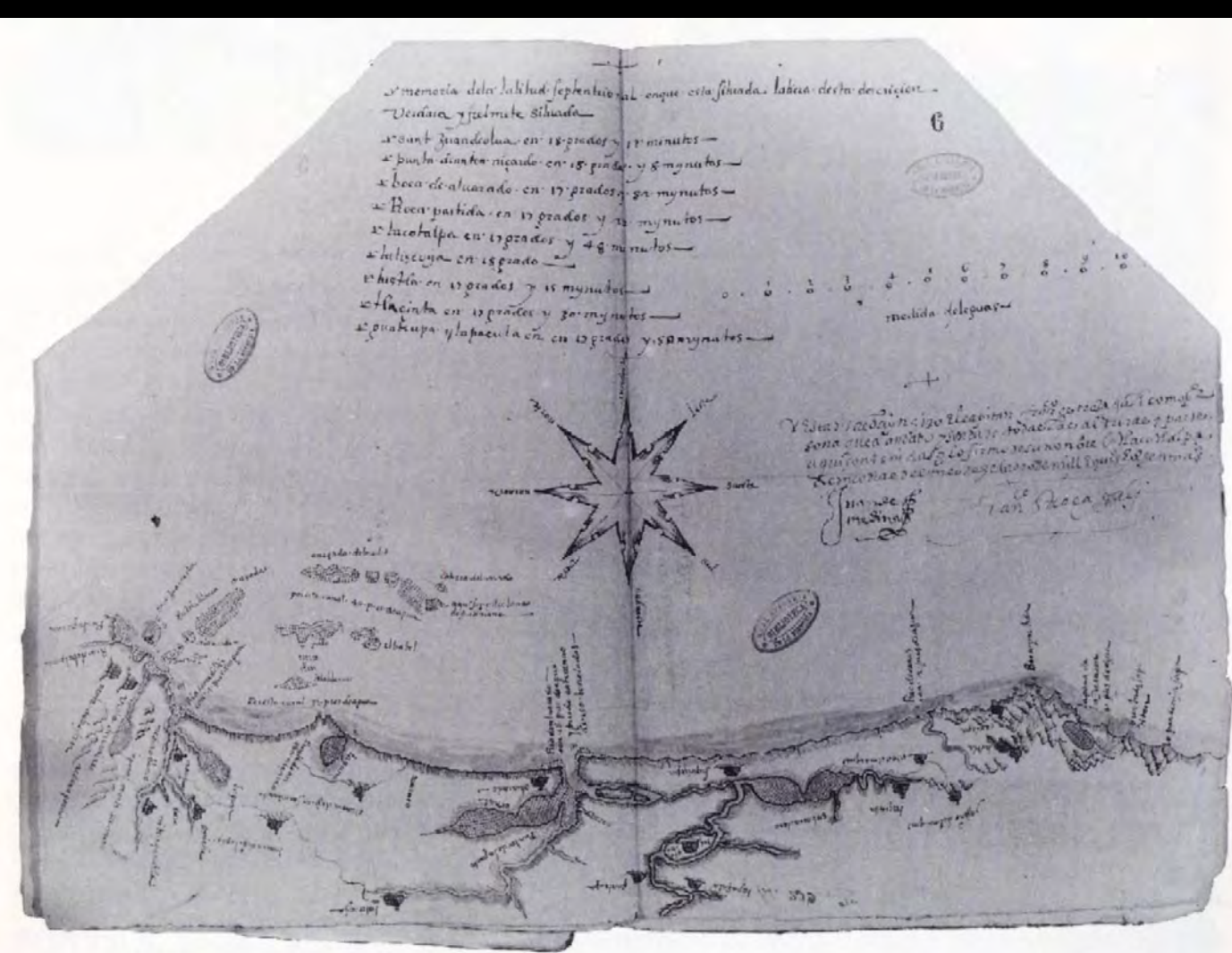
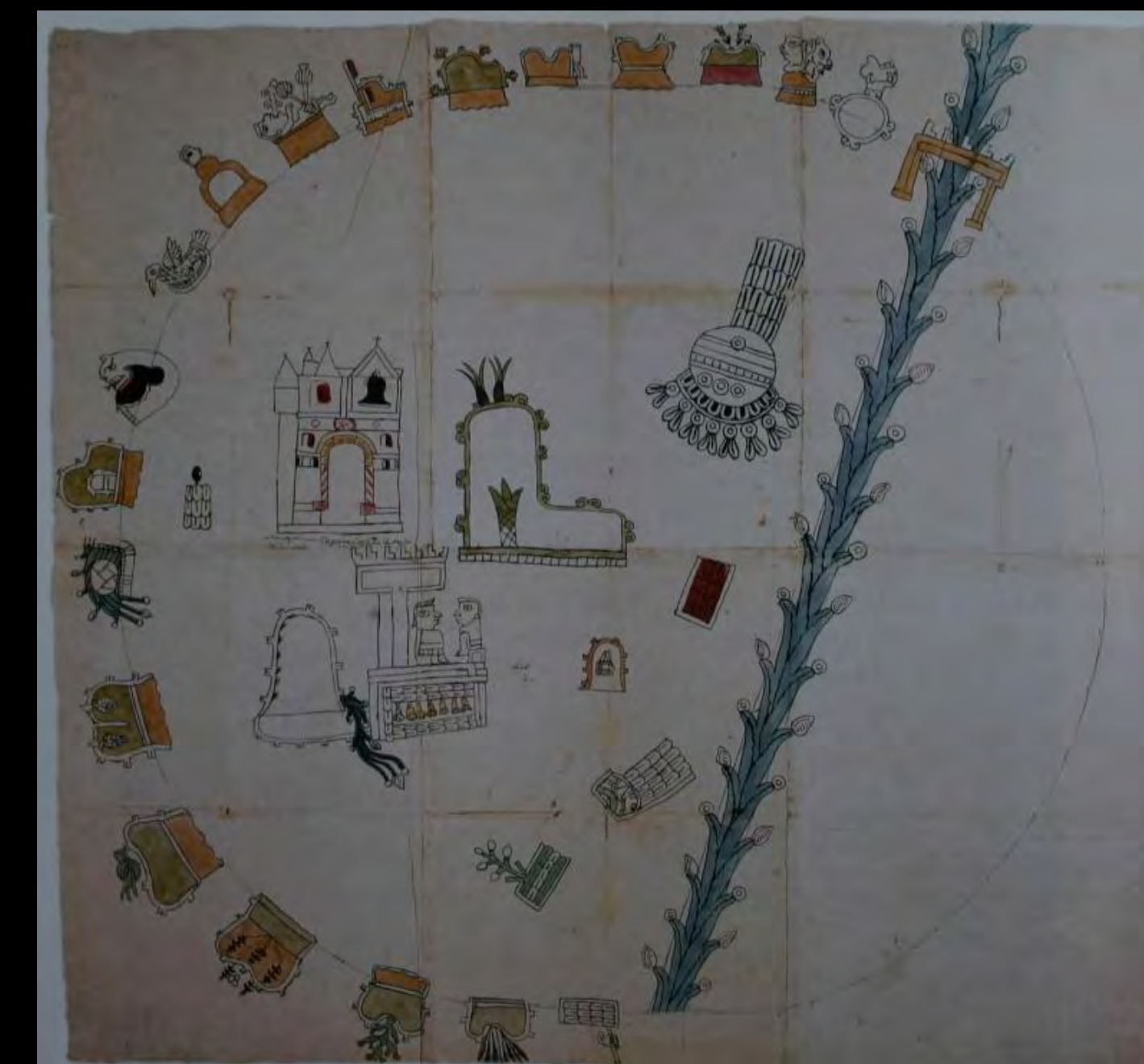


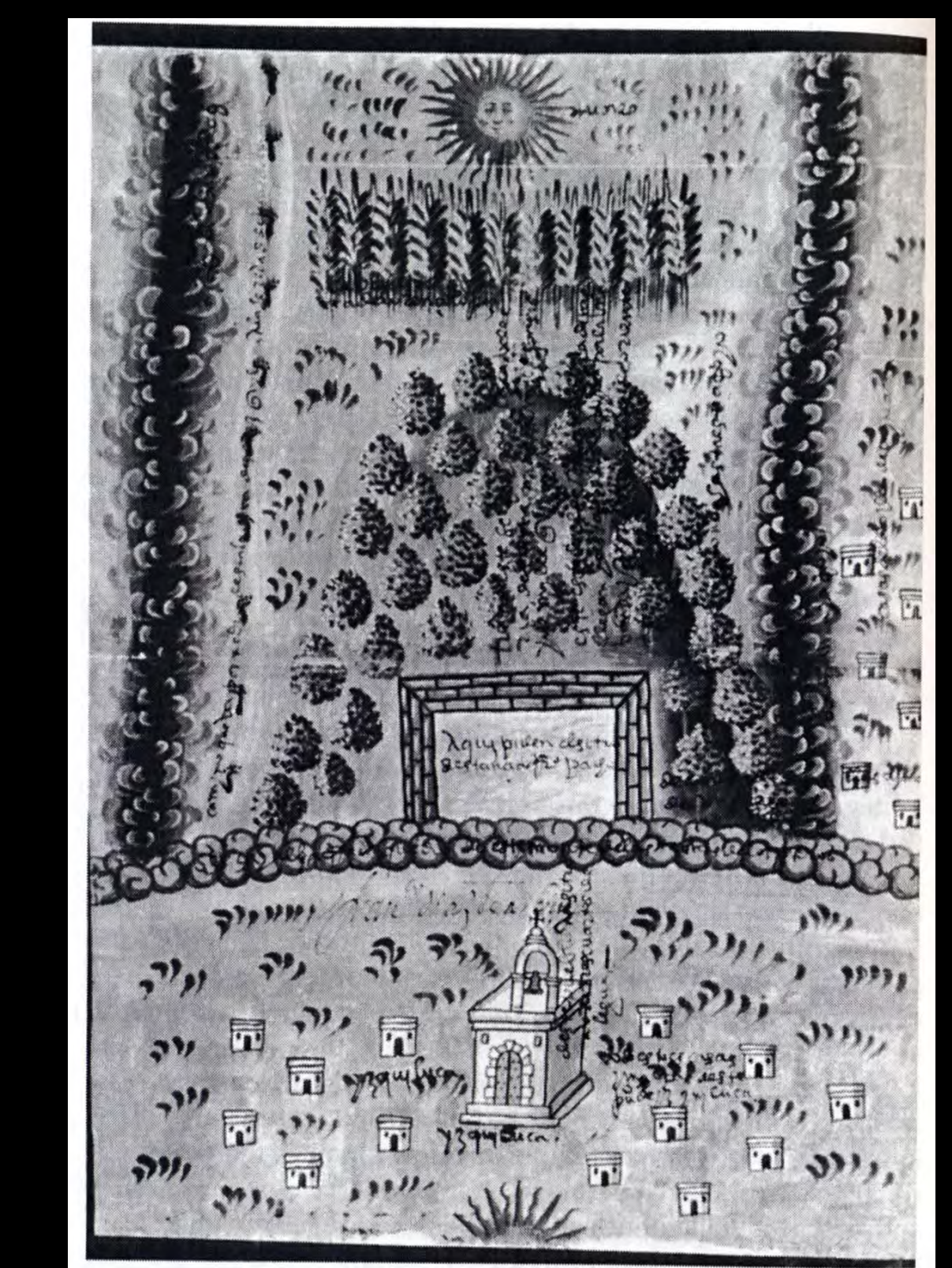
Figura 10. El Mapa de Tezacoalco, que se encuentra en la Colección Benson Latin American, University of Texas en Austin.



By creating maps with features from both European and indigenous styles, “Amerindians, rather than being passive recipients of imposed spatial and temporal perspectives, were active participants in imagining and creating a colonial reality,” through maintaining their own cultural traditions and also using Spanish traditions to show that the communities are “civilized”. (right and above)



The *Relacion Geografica* of Tezacoalco (above) has a royal genealogy on the side, and is one of the maps most styled in indigenous form. The *Relacion Geografica* of Amoltepec circa 1580 shows the boundaries of the town with toponyms that represent sites within Amoltepec’s territory. A circular shape shows the indigenous emphasis on community over domination.



Merced maps (above) stand as “material records of cross-cultural transactions—transactions carried out through travel, speech, writing, and painting.” Both Amerindians and Spaniards used Merced maps to aid in administration of the colonies and to settle boundary disputes and requests for land grants. “Silent spaces” are conspicuous in these maps.