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**Giving shape to the past:  
Pre-columbia in nineteenth-century Mexican literary journals**  
**Dando forma al pasado:  
América precolombina en revistas literarias Mexicanas del siglo XIX**

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**Abstract:** The literary journal "El Museo Mexicano" (1843-1845) marked a watershed in Mexican nationalism, and sought to shape aspirations of an elite segment of nineteenth-century Mexican society eager to claim a post-colonial identity by exploring the cultural and historical strands that were combined in the young Republic. The editors solicited contributions from Mexican authors on a wide range of subjects, from descriptions of contemporary provincial life to accounts of recent discoveries of pre-Hispanic monuments and artifacts. The aim was to provide a more complete and up-to-date image of Mexico, rich in anecdotal detail and lavishly illustrated. In this paper I will explore how this new literary platform argued for the validity of archaeological investigation in the American context, and ultimately shaped how Mexicans perceived their past. Though my focus is primarily on the articles in "El Museo Mexicano" I will also analyze some of the visual tropes and traditions, from the picturesque to the grotesque that inspired illustration in other Mexican journals of the same genre.

**Keywords:** Illustration. Mexico. Nineteenth century. Archaeology. Nationalism.

**Resumen:** La revista "El Museo Mexicano" (1843-1845) estableció un parte aguas en el nacionalismo mexicano, y buscaba moldear las aspiraciones de los elites mexicanos deseosos de reclamar una identidad poscolonial por medio de una exploración de los hilos históricos y culturales que se tejían en la joven nación. Los editores solicitaron contribuciones de autores sobre una diversidad de temas, desde descripciones de la vida contemporánea provincial hasta los descubrimientos arqueológicos más recientes de monumentos y artefactos prehispánicos. El propósito fue proporcionar un imagen de México actualizada y completa, rica en reflexiones anecdóticas y suntuosamente ilustrada. En este trabajo exploraré cómo esta nueva plataforma literaria argumentaba para la validez de la investigación arqueológica en el contexto americano, la cual, últimamente, dio pie a la percepción los mexicanos tenían de su pasado. Aunque el enfoque se basa principalmente en los artículos provenientes de la revista "El Museo Mexicano", también analizaré algunas de las tradiciones visuales –del pintoresco al grotesco– que inspiraron la ilustración en revistas del mismo género.

**Palabras-clave:** Ilustración. México. Siglo XIX. Arqueología. Nacionalismo.

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## INTRODUCTION

The spectrum of early archaeological illustration in Mexico is a broad one, ranging from the amateur renderings of ancient cities and temples found in works produced by the Spanish friars in the sixteenth and seventeenth century to the more informed and credible drawings of ruins and artefacts that surged at the end of the eighteenth century, motivated in part by discoveries in Pompeii and Herculaneum and to a heightened interest in antiquarianism fomented by an enlightened Spanish royalty. Guillermo Dupaix and his draughtsman Luciano Castañeda come to mind, as do the many illustrators – Bernasconi, Almendáriz, Waldeck – who vied for the best views of the famed ruins of Palenque. Soon after the liberation from the Spanish in 1810, another round of foreign explorers came in search of ruins and brought with them even more sophisticated documentary techniques, including photography: John Lloyd Stephens, Désiré Charnay, and the husband and wife team of Augustus Le Plongeon and Alice Dixon, among others, producing lavishly bound and illustrated books that had a tremendous impact on European perceptions of the New World.

Although general histories of the archaeological discipline acknowledge the importance of the pre-modern period and have extensively examined some of the explorers I have just mentioned, their coverage of Mexican observations on their own past tends to be surprisingly superficial and sketchy. Seemingly unaware of the existence of crucial primary and even published sources, many writers underestimate the extent, and the nature, of archaeological work carried out by Mexicans from Independence to the late nineteenth century. Even works by sons of Mexico on the history of archaeology will often devote more attention to the pioneering foreigners than the national or provincial views that impacted on subsequent advances in the discipline and,

more importantly, on the politics of archaeology (Bernal, 1980). Why is this so? There are many reasons, too many to consider here,<sup>1</sup> but the weight of biography – often verging on hagiography – in much of archaeological history is probably the most important single cause of this underestimation of a Mexican centered vision of the past.

These views are worth revealing, if not only as evidence of a national awakening to a rich archaeological heritage that extended over the entire country, then surely as raw data on largely forgotten archaeological discoveries. To that end, in this paper I will examine a series of articles on archaeology that appeared around the mid-nineteenth century in Mexican literary journals, a veritable collage of illustrated texts that are difficult to classify: they are at once romantic, aesthetic, scientific, patriotic, scholarly, and even whimsical. More than a hundred of these periodicals were produced over the course of the century, and while the academic literature has focused primarily on their cultural, graphic and literary merits (Rea Spell, 1937; Pérez Benavides, 2007; Pérez Salas, 2005; Garone Gravier; Brandt, 2002; Garone Gravier, 2010), we can find in these illustrated publications explicit arguments for the validity of archaeological investigation in the American context, emphasizing the need for more exploration, the expansion of the National Museum and the creation of regional museums, as well as pictorial evidence of Mexico's rich archaeological heritage. Since nationalism requires the elaboration of a real or invented remote past (Kohl, 1998), one can posit that these articles were central in fomenting early archaeological practice, and ultimately, in shaping how Mexicans perceived their own origins. Here I will explore how this new literary platform established a watershed in promoting an American archaeology (and I use the term 'American' in its most inclusive sense), and attempt to situate the illustrations that accompanied these articles in relation to the scientific, artistic and cultural traditions that inspired them.

<sup>1</sup> For a more detailed discussion on Mexican archaeological historiography see Sellen (2015, p. 54-64).

The nineteenth century was the age of archaeology, when “[...] writers and artists were embarking on a massive enterprise of retrieval which involved resurrecting extinct animals, lost languages, buried civilizations, and human prehistory [...]” (Blix, 2009, p. 1); it was a myth-making century where material worlds were often conflated through rampant speculation, obsessive collecting and sensationalistic display. In a largely western enterprise unknown regions of the earth were selectively illuminated by explorers who desired to document and obtain vestiges of ancient civilizations on a grand scale: Mexico had been largely insulated from outsiders during colonial times, but between 1810 and 1910 almost 400 chronicles and descriptions of the country were produced (Pani, 2011). These texts combined scholarly accounts of travels with an intoxicating blend of exoticism, mystery, and self-promotion, helping to forge the iconic image of the intrepid traveller and heroic archaeologist that has become a permanent fixture of Anglophone popular culture in particular.

We should be cognizant that in Mexico, for the better part of the nineteenth century, there was no such thing as an archaeologist in today’s understanding of the term, and those with an inclination to study the past were called in Spanish *anticuarios*. The word *arqueólogo* itself, probably a translation of the French *archéologue*, is not attested in peninsular usage until 1876 (Corominas, 1954).<sup>2</sup> The word *arqueología* had arrived much earlier; in 1844 it appeared in an article in the literary journal “El Museo Mexicano” that made use of a translated excerpt –probably originally French– from the “New Encyclopaedia”<sup>3</sup> in support of its advocacy of the study of antiquities, scorned by some detractors as, ‘frivolous,’

‘futile,’ and ‘arid.’ The definition –and justification– of *arqueología* offered in the article is both aesthetic and practical; the study of ancient ‘monuments’ both enhances and is enhanced by the study of literature, including poetry and ancient languages, but it must be based on the empirical sciences (as they called them in Spanish *las ciencias positivas*) in order to make possible an explanation of the objects represented on the monuments, or an identification of the materials used by the ancient artisans (Monumentos..., 1844). The excerpt from the “New Encyclopaedia” describes archaeology solely in terms of Old World antiquities –Babylon, Athens, and Rome– and cites the works of Winkelman, Klotz, and Champollion<sup>4</sup> while making specific mention of the private cabinets and public museums in Europe then spurring interest in the ancient world. But the writer who presented and embraced the arguments of the translated extract, a Catalan printer and immigrant to Mexico named Rafael de Rafael y Balart (Garone Gravier, 2010), pushed this line of thought even further, vigorously questioning why American antiquities should not also be worthy of study. For a full appreciation of Rafael de Rafael’s call for an American archaeology, however, it is essential to consider the context in which it appeared.

Soon after independence from Spain the first significant cultural journals began to appear, in a push not only to ‘mexicanize’ the culture but also to debate the significance of antiquities that were being collected, exchanged and exhibited by an enlightened *criollo* class. Still, many of the scholarly texts on archaeology consisted of Spanish translations of articles originally printed in French or English. Illustration of the archaeological past also began to briefly flower using the

<sup>2</sup> This use of the word *arqueólogo*, from the French *archéologue*, may have been influenced by the French scientific mission to Mexico during the years 1864-1867, see Schávelson (1999).

<sup>3</sup> The author of the article does not precisely cite which of the many encyclopedias in circulation he took the extract from, but it may have been “Encyclopédie nouvelle”, ou “dictionnaire philosophique, scientifique, littéraire et industriel, offrant le tableau des connaissances humaines au XIXe siècle”, published by Pierre Leroux and Jean Reynaud from 1834 through 1841.

<sup>4</sup> Presumably the art historian and archaeologist Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717-1768), the antiquarian and philologist Christian Adolph Klotz (1738-1771), and the well-known classical scholar and Egyptologist, Jean-François Champollion (1790-1832).



collections in the newly minted National Museum (1827) as inspiration. That same year Icaza and Gondra (1827) published “Colección de antigüedades que ecstisten” (sic) *en el Museo Nacional*, a monthly serial expertly illustrated by the French artist Jean-Frédéric Waldeck, but after only three issues the publication was choked off by political uncertainty (Achim, 2013). Toward the end of the 1830s this trend changed dramatically and publications with a more nationalistic agenda began to appear. Developed by Ignacio Cumplido, various publications such as “El Mosaico Mexicano”, “El Museo Mexicano”, “El Álbum Mexicano”, and “La Ilustración Mexicana” were encyclopedic in their scope and aimed at a large audience (Pérez Benavides, 2007). In the margins of the Republic regional publications such as “El Museo Yucateco” and “Registro Yucateco”, also began to appear. And while “El Museo Mexicano” was a continuation of “El Mosaico Mexicano” (1836-1842), it took its inspiration, and title, from the popular “El Museo Yucateco” published in 1841.

The journals just mentioned employed the word ‘museum’ in their titles, so we might ask, how is a publication a museum? By referencing the physical museum the editors were trying to replicate, to use Nora (1989) idea of a museum, a place of memory. By focusing largely on literature and history, they created a pedagogic memory, where text and image were inescapable reference points for anchoring national and regional identities. In a sense the journal was a ‘receptacle’ for culture, a museum on paper. We can see how this concept operated in the case of “El Museo Yucateco”. Edited by Justo Sierra O’Reilly, a politician and writer, the journal was part of a competing, separatist project to create an autonomous state in Yucatan. The expressed aim was to compile information about the region in order to consolidate a peninsular citizenry and to demonstrate to foreigners that they had all the elements to be an independent nation. Sierra O’Reilly included a call to protect the spectacular ruins that languished in the

confines of the haciendas from depredation, principally from artifact-seeking explorers and impoverished Indians seeking stone for construction. The racist underpinnings found in the pages of “El Museo Yucateco” favored a caste system that kept the state’s indigenous population firmly at the bottom rung of the social order, and their push to recuperate the glorious Mayan past as heritage for the ruling elite, was nothing more than an attempt to undermine the indigenous claim to their own past (Taracena Arriola, 2014).

The other literary journals reproduced similar nationalist claims on archaeological heritage, but without the racially charged politics of the Yucatec separatist. In particular, “El Museo Mexicano, ó miscelanea pintoresca de amenidades curiosas e instructivas” (five volumes, 1843-1845) marked a watershed in Mexican nationalism, and taken in context with the other journals of the day constituted a classic Benedict Anderson moment: the historian who argued that a surge in nationalism is directly linked to greater literary production and its dissemination through advances in the press. Founded and edited by Guillermo Prieto and Manuel Payno, and published by Ignacio Cumplido in Mexico City at irregular intervals with support from subscribers, “El Museo Mexicano” was distributed over much of the country. Its press run of just 1500 copies of each issue may seem unimpressive, given a national population of some eight million, but the overwhelming rate of illiteracy – surpassing 90% in rural areas (Staples, 1987) – and the likelihood that each exemplar had several readers should be borne in mind. By comparison, a regional journal like the “Registro Yucateco”, which served the entire Yucatan Peninsula including Campeche, had a press run of over 400 copies at the height of its success (Taracena Arriola, 2010).

Apart from their political agendas, these literary publications both gave voice to and sought to shape the cultural aspirations of an elite segment of nineteenth-century Mexican society, one consisting largely of politicians, intellectuals, clergy, military officers, and

businessmen. Having liberated themselves from Spanish domination in 1821, many such *criollos*, relishing the new freedom of the post-colonial regime and inspired by contemporary European Romantic and nationalist thinkers, were eager to claim a new, genuinely Mexican identity by exploring the various cultural and historical strands that were combined in the young Republic. To this end, the editors of “El Museo Mexicano” issued an open invitation to their countrymen, soliciting contributions on a wide range of subjects, from descriptions of contemporary provincial life to accounts of recent discoveries of pre-Hispanic monuments and artifacts. The aim was not simply to provide a more complete and up-to-date image of Mexico, rich in anecdotal detail and lavishly illustrated with hand-colored etchings, but—crucially—to portray the country from the point of view of those who lived there, in contrast to the superficial, and often erroneous, stereotypes offered by foreign visitors (Pérez Salas, 2005).

From this new literary platform, the editor Rafael de Rafael—fervently embracing his own new identity as a Mexican and an American—argued explicitly for the validity of archaeological investigation in the American context, refuting such commonplace objections as the supposed ‘ugliness’ or ‘barbarity’ of indigenous relics and cultures with pointed references to the malformed Sphinx (not ‘a model of beauty,’ he said, but nonetheless the most studied) and the prevalence of human sacrifice among the ancient Gauls that equaled the barbarity of the Aztecs. If Egyptian hieroglyphs could be deciphered—as they had been, only recently, by Champollion—then why not also the writing systems of the ancient Mexicans? ‘What interest,’ he mused, ‘could there be in the monuments of Egypt, or other cultures, that is not found in the monuments, the statues, the bas-reliefs, and the symbolic writing of Mexico?’ (Monumentos..., 1844).

The richly illustrated cover of “El Museo Mexicano” (Figure 1) depicts the editor’s sentiments visually. It is an exotic encounter in an exuberant jungle scene: below a

quetzal bird, a coiled snake and a monkey, a man makes his way through the dense bush, gun slung over his shoulder, and on the opposite side an indian or Indian? in feathered headdress appears, with bow and arrow; at the bottom of the scene there is a curious vignette of an ornate gate (an entrance to a garden perhaps?), and below this archaeological artifacts emerge from the jungle’s undergrowth, waiting to be discovered. The illustration is a romantic blend of fantasy imbued with stereotypes, and describes a young nation that is exploring and mapping the contours of its territory and awakening to the material reality of its pre-Columbian heritage.

As one of the periodical’s editors, Rafael de Rafael’s nationalistic sentiment set the tone for many of the articles on Mexican archaeology that appeared in the volumes, a total of thirteen, with six of them illustrated (Table 1).

The articles covered archaeological discoveries in different states in Mexico, and all in the periphery of the Republic: one on the ruins of La Quemada in Zacatecas, another on several different sites in Veracruz, and even one on the ancient evidences from Jalisco, a region that even today is considered somewhat of a backwater in archeological terms. The majority of the articles focused on the archaeology of the Zapotec, a culture of great antiquity situated in the present day state of Oaxaca, in southwest Mexico, that still thrives in this area today. At that point in time little was known about the antiquities in this part of country, apart from Guillermo Dupaix’s expedition that was carried out in the early part of the nineteenth century, but whose illustrated study was not available until the 1830s, and even then, prohibitively expensive for most. Furthermore, literary journals were portable books as compared to Dupaix’s (1831) work that appeared in a cumbersome elephant folio format published in seven volumes (Kingsborough edition). Around the middle of the century the breadth, quality and availability of information on the country’s archaeology changed dramatically.



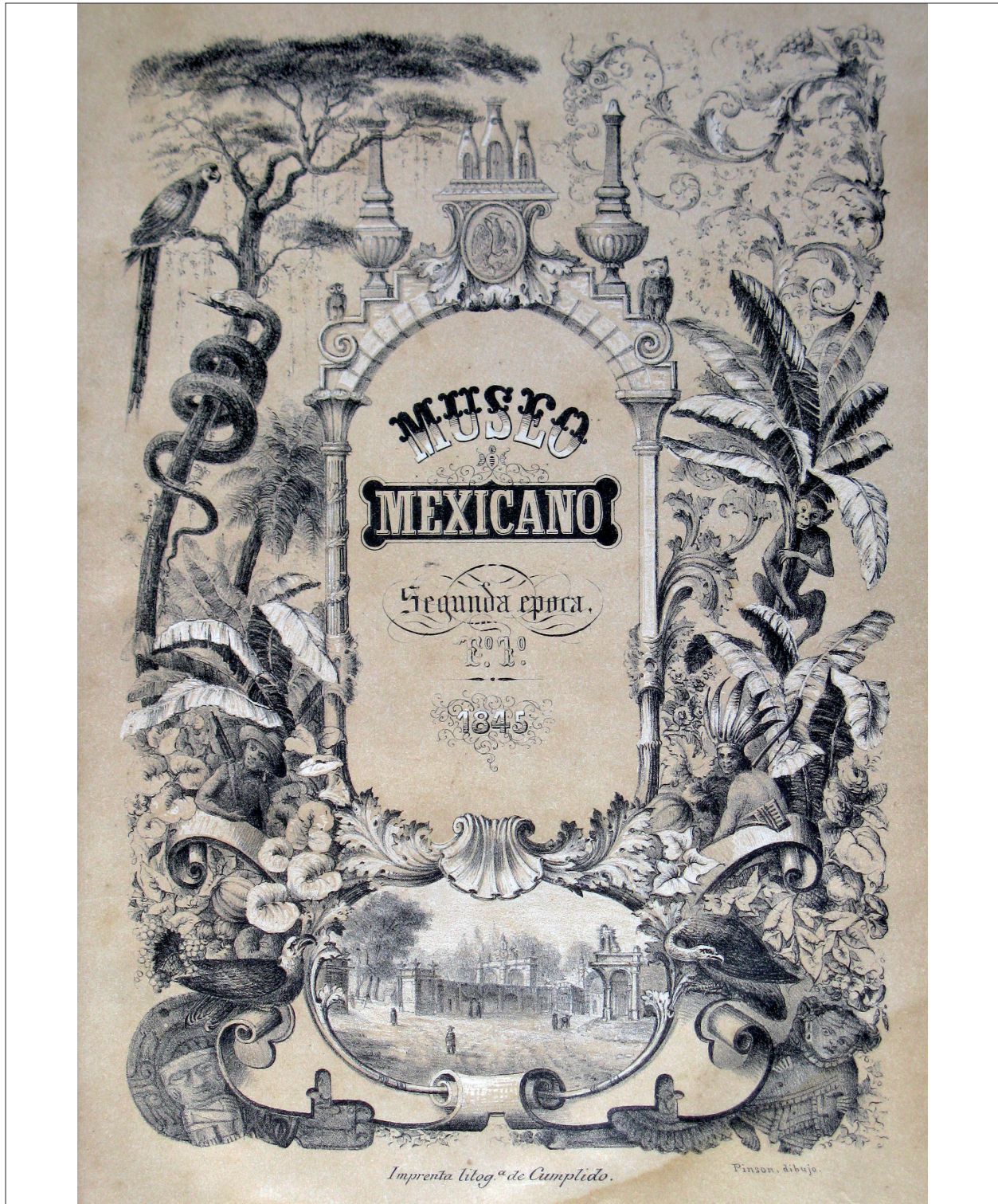


Figure 1. Frontispiece of "El Museo Mexicano", segunda época, 1845. Source: El Museo... (1845).

Table 1. Articles on archaeology published in "El Museo Mexicano".

Volume I, 1843
1. "Esculturas antiguas del nuevo-mundo"
2. "Monumentos antiguos de México"
3. "Ruinas de la Quemada, en el Departamento de Zacatecas"
4. "Antigüedades zapotecas. Descubrimientos hechos recientemente en las ruinas de Guiengola, Departamento de Oajaca"
5. "Antigüedades zapotecas. Anillos ídolos y medallones"
Volume II, 1843
6. "Arqueología. Un viejo mundo en el nuevo. Proyecto de asociación de los Príncipes de Europa, para una exploración anti-diluviana"
7. "Arqueología. Un viejo mundo en el nuevo"
8. "Apuntes arqueológicas"
Volume III, 1844
9. "Ruinas de Monte-Real. Departamento de Veracruz"
10. "Antigüedades zapotecas"
11. "Arqueología Mexicana. Monumentos de los antiguos tzapotéques"
Volume IV, 1844
12. "Del Istmo de Tehuantepec. Practicado en los años de 1842 y 1843 con el objeto de una comunicación oceánica"
Volume V, 1845 (segunda época)
13. "Apuntes de viaje. Santiago Ixcuintla (Departamento de Jalisco)"

The cultures of Oaxaca received the most ink, in part because they were in the way of progress. The decade of 1840 saw the construction of a new interstate highway and significant surveying for the promise of an interoceanic canal, and in the path of these projects previously unknown ruins and antiquities were revealed. Thus it can be argued that it was the arrival of modernity—modes of transportation and the technology required for their establishment—that uncovered the ancient remains. National infrastructure projects, such as the interoceanic canal proposal for the Isthmus of Tehuantepec and a national highway that would cut through the middle of state of Oaxaca, had an impact. Survey crews that reconnoitered the region encountered ruins and antiquities, and their reports, scrutinized by the governor of the state of Oaxaca, Antonio de León, were forwarded to his friend in Mexico City, General José María Tornel, director of the prestigious Escuela de Minería (1843-1853), who in turn had these letters and illustrations published in "El Museo Mexicano". Antonio

de León, also a military man, had an interest in exploring the archaeological heritage of his state, but it was Tornel's deep interest in antiquities and the diffusion of learning among his countrymen that led to the promotion of these discoveries to a broad Mexican public.

In a select sampling of those published reports we learn that in 1843 employees of a survey for the roadwork project of the National Highway explored extensive ruins on top of the mountain known as Cerro de las Juntas, close to the town of Quioitepec and where the rivers Salado and Papaloapan meet. Accompanied by the local Prefect, they described the hike to the top of the mountain as arduous and full of venomous insects and snakes, and on the way one of the group passed out from the heat, requiring that they retreat to the nearby town. The recommendation of the Prefect, José María Bravo, was that an exact reconnoitering of this ancient settlement be done, whose existence, he said, "no one knows of, and perhaps some objects can be retrieved for the National Museum." (Monumentos..., 1844).



The governor, Antonio de León, looked favorably upon this proposal and formed a scientific commission to explore the monuments more extensively and produce drawings of them. The precise conformation of these commissions still needs to be studied, but their published results were remarkably detailed, including measurements of all the structures as well as drawings of the main buildings (Figure 2); reportedly, nine maps were also made of the site but their present location is unknown. The drawings are understandably amateurish given the difficult conditions of the expedition and perhaps the skill level of the draughtsman, yet they nonetheless give an idea of the monumentality of the site.

Within the format of 'variedades' or 'miscellanea,' "El Museo Mexicano" dedicated a considerable amount of space to discussing the artifacts that had been found at the sites that were being excavated by the survey crews and local authorities. The objects, including types that had never been seen before by the public, were reproduced with technical precision, though it is not always clear who

made these illustrations. At times the illustrations acted as catalogues, accompanied by text that detailed size and provenance. For example, Miguel Retes, discovered numerous artifacts in his native state of Jalisco, in ruins known as Ixcuintla, and recorded an entry for each piece (Figure 3).

In a wake up call to his fellow citizens, he warned that wealthy foreigners were carrying off these materials to add to their personal collections or to enrich museums in their countries of origin. Ironically, he was unaware that his own publication was a cultural treasure map, informing would-be explorers of what routes to follow and what types of objects were available in different regions. For example Edward Seler, the German mesoamericanist and collector, included a plate from "El Museo Mexicano" in his scrapbook, evidencing not only his late nineteenth-century collecting spree that resulted in over thirty thousand objects for the Ethnographic Museum in Berlin (Sellen, 2012)<sup>5</sup>, but also the utility of the literary journal as a source of information on archaeological discoveries.

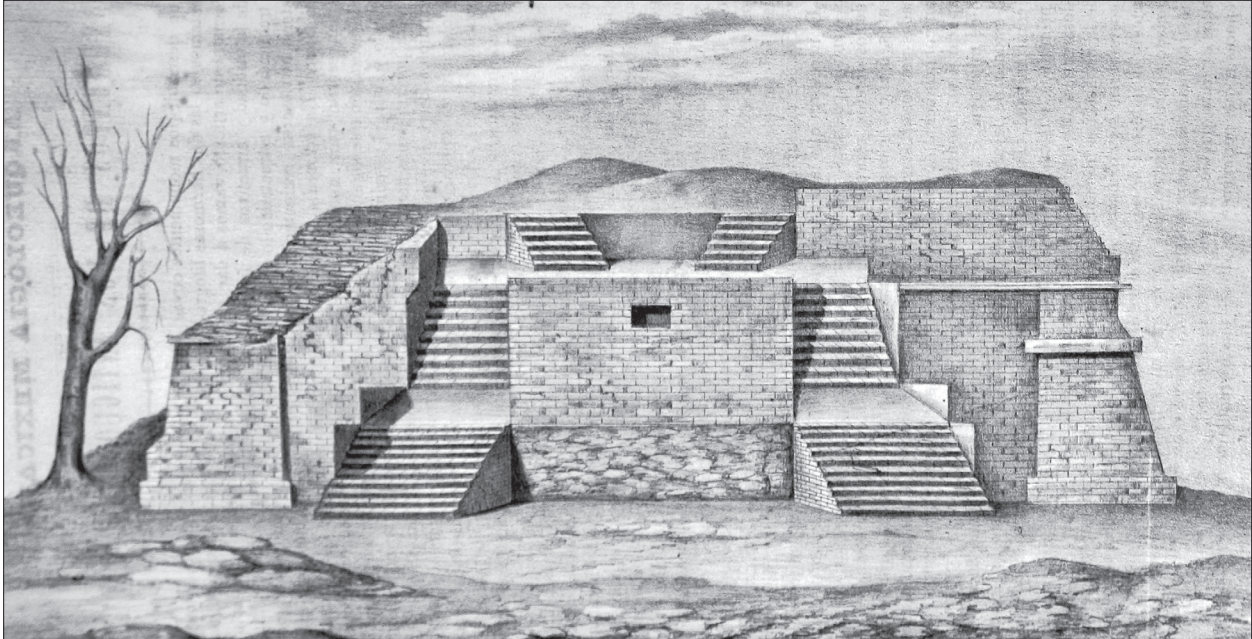


Figure 2. The ruins at Quioitepec, Oaxaca. Source: Monumentos... (1844, v. III).

<sup>5</sup> See figure 7.3 in (Sellen, 2012, p. 211).

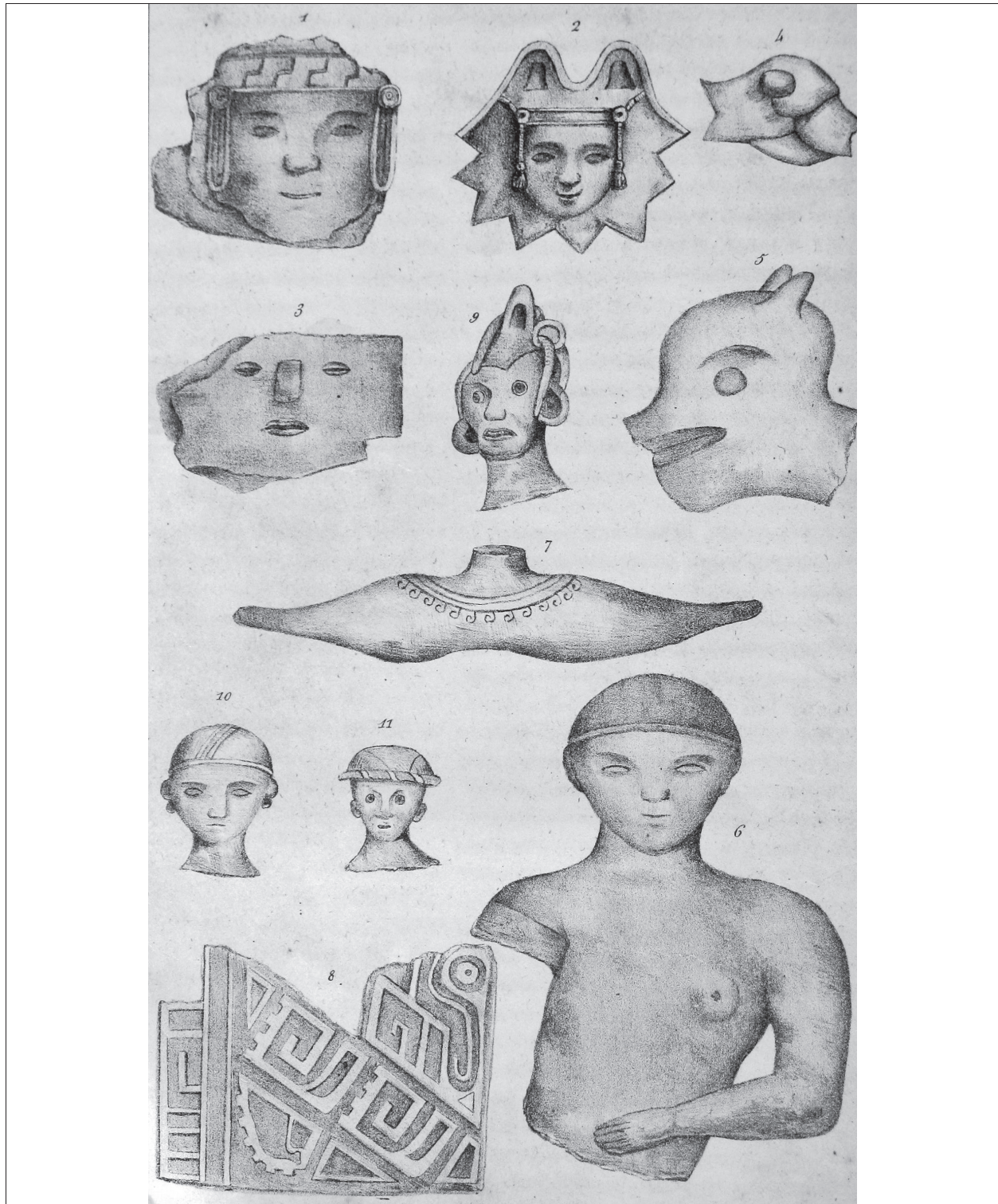


Figure 3. Antigüedades del Departamento de Jalisco. Source: Ixcuintla (1845, v. I).



## THE EFFIGIES FROM MANOPOSTIAC

The illustration of ancient material evidence throughout the pages of the literary journals was not just to show what was obtainable in distinct regions of the country, but also to graphically excite the imagination of the readership with exotic, strange and abnormal categories. In this sense the pages of “El Museo Mexicano” are reminiscent of a ‘Wunderkammeren’ –a collection of objects whose categories are unknown and undefined– that is meant to arouse a sense of wonder in the viewer. In the third article in the series on Zapotec antiquities, the editors published several pre-Hispanic ceramic artifacts from the state of Oaxaca that had been supplied by General Tornel. After Dupaix’s (1831) publication these are some of the first ancient objects from Oaxaca to be illustrated for a broad public. The first one is clearly a Zapotec urn, showing an old man with a wrinkled face whose hands cross over his chest, a commonplace gesture in such effigies (Figure 4). Rafael de Rafael attempted to interpret the object and suggested that it might represent a prisoner because of the expression of torment on the effigy’s face, but then –citing lack of evidence– wisely warned the reader that his view was pure speculation and that it was up to antiquarians to reveal the mystery behind the figure (*Antigüedades...*, 1844).

Included in the same article, under the heading of ‘Zapotec antiquities,’ the Catalan editor also briefly discussed a pair of tubular ceramic effigies with fierce features, each with a fanged mouth and rings around their eyes (Figure 5). The two sculptures are currently on exhibit in the Oaxaca section of the Museo Nacional de Antropología in Mexico City.

When they were published in 1844 their cultural affiliation was vigorously questioned by Pedro de Garay y Garay, a naval officer who was both secretary and treasurer for a scientific commission that spent eleven months

surveying the Isthmus of Tehuantepec for the proposed Atlantic-Pacific canal. He was present when the objects were found and became a self-appointed ‘expert’ on their origin.<sup>6</sup> Shortly after the article in the “El Museo Mexicano” appeared he wrote a letter to the newspaper complaining that they should not be affiliated with the Zapotec, because they differed stylistically from the materials from that area and because they were found on an island sacred to the Huaves, known as Manopostiac, located in the Laguna Superior<sup>7</sup> of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, near Juchitan, Oaxaca (De Garay y Garay, 1844).

The story the naval officer tells of the discovery of the statues informs us of the lengths that were expended to



Figure 4. Zapotec effigy vessel published in “El Museo Mexicano”. Source: *Antigüedades...* (1844, v. III, p. 135).

<sup>6</sup> ‘Reconocimiento del Istmo de Tehuantepec,’ reprinted in “El Museo Mexicano”. See “El Museo Mexicano” (1844, v. III, p. 234-252).

<sup>7</sup> In the article Garay y Garay refers to the lagoon as ‘Divenamer’ and ‘Diveguiator’, variations on an alternative name.



Figure 5. Ceramic effigies from Manopostiac published in “El Museo Mexicano”. Source: Antigüedades... (1844, v. III, p. 136).

obtain archaeological materials for the National Museum, and reveals the attitudes of the dominant *criollos* towards the indigenous peoples and their archaeological heritage. The island was a significant geographical point for the survey mission because its peak is 200 meters above sea level and a marker placed on the summit could be seen from a great distance. It also had a great significance for the indigenous people in the vicinity because it was said to be ‘enchanted,’ an idea reinforced by its unusual geological formations composed of great blocks of green stone that are chaotically piled upon one another, and that have the peculiarity that when hit together they create the metallic sound of a bell, lending a particular aura to the place. Today the large rock outcrop on the island is known as *Cerro Venado* (Deer Mountain). To reach the island and place the survey marker for the canal project the Commission had employed Huaves from the nearby town of San Dionisio del Mar, but had to resort to threats to gain their cooperation because the townspeople were nervous about taking ‘white men’ to their sacred site. The large effigies were found perched on

a ledge of the mountain, completely intact, and associated with the assemblage were a number of glazed ceramic vessels with vestiges of plants and candles, indicating that the site had been used for rituals in relatively recent times. When they were removed and placed in a canoe for the crossing to the mainland, the choppy waters between the island and the mainland so violently rocked the vessel that many of the prized pieces were shattered.

Fortunately two of the large effigies from Manopostiac arrived to Mexico City relatively intact. With long fangs and goggle masks, the figures’ attributes easily identify them as the central Mexican storm-god known as Tlaloc, but at the time Rafael de Rafael had none of this information, and his attempt to locate the figures in a broader context revealed a partial view of his conceptual framework:

And what can we say about this other masked figure, without hands or feet? We have seen large collections of these figures that are commonly called idols; we have found that many of them wear masks, like the figures from Carnaval, and that some of these masks represent animals; but we have found nothing similar to the figure that is before us now, horribly adorned with animal teeth, making it appear so strange [Y qué diremos de este otro figurín enmascarado, sin pies ni manos? Hemos visto grandes colecciones de estas figurines que comúnmente se llaman ídolos: hemos hallado que muchas de ellas están enmascaradas, como figurines de Carnaval, y que algunas de sus mascararas representan animales; pero nada habíamos hallado semejante a la figura que ahora tenemos a la vista, tan horriblemente adornada con esa dentadura de animal que le hace tan extraña.] (Antigüedades..., 1844, v. III, p. 136, my translation).

The peculiar features of these pre-Hispanic figures repelled and fascinated the writer of these archaeological notes. Their distortion and exaggeration were reflections of the grotesquerie associated with Indian art at the time, perhaps because they visually contradicted the natural world of which we are all a part (Kayser, 1981). The effigies were embodiments of the monstrous and the anomalous, concepts with deep roots in nineteenth-century literature.



There was an unusual parallel with the way these artifacts were presented –somewhere between freak and specimen– that coincided with the descriptions of spectacular deformities that appeared in the same literary-scientific context. Natural anomalies and ‘freaks,’ a common feature of nineteenth century discourse, conflated concepts of theatre, journalism, pathology and ethnology, but also have oblique links to the early roots of collecting and archaeology (Aguirre, 2005). Referred to as ‘monstrosities,’ several illustrated studies of conjoined twins appeared among the pages of “El Museo Mexicano”, alongside the archeological studies. In one of the articles ‘Un fenomeno raro,’ Dr. Manuel Ortega, a well-known physician in Oaxaca with an important archaeological cabinet, described dissected conjoined twins who had died at birth (Figure 6). The article was accompanied by a long footnote written by Rafael de Rafael warning the reader that the subject matter should only be read by ‘men of science’ (in a journal also geared towards women). He added that no one should be scandalized, as the subject had been treated with the greatest decency, and that in Mexico there were no other appropriate scientific journals that could publish such findings with the accompanying graphics. After the autopsy the twin’s heads were added to Ortega’s museum collection, one that also included ancient skulls and other human remains. The medical examination of the children and the graphic evidence of their dissection fed a nineteenth-century fascination with natural deviance, both as phenomena itself and a sign of its other: normalcy. The disturbing images of human specimens intersected with the archaeological artifacts in an almost nightmarish way, and ultimately helped define the overall esthetic of this literary format.

### LO PINTORESCO

The exotic included not only man and his abnormalities but also nature. The nineteenth-century artist/explorer was fascinated with the extremes the natural

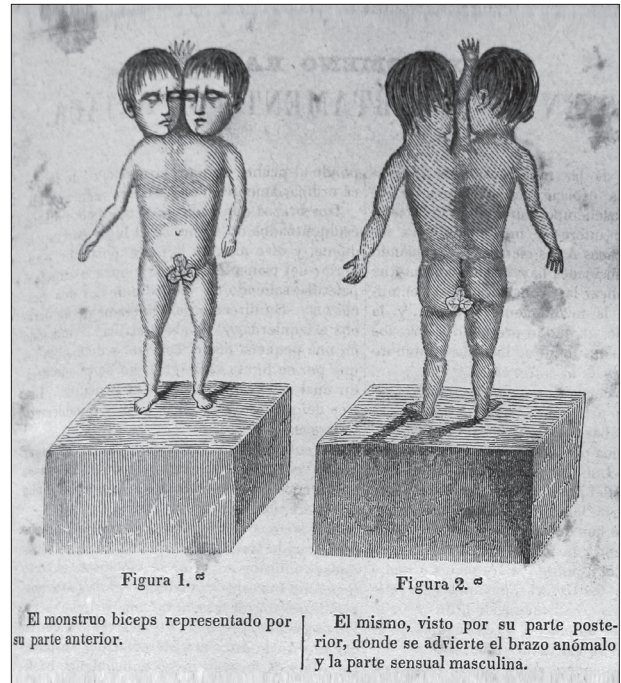


Figure 6. Conjoined twins from Oaxaca, published in “El Museo Mexicano”. A) El monstruo biceps representado por su parte anterior; B) El mismo, visto por su parte posterior, donde se advierte el brazo anómalo y la parte sensual masculina. Source: Un Fenomeno... (1844, v. III).

world produced beyond the temperate zones: active volcanoes, majestic waterfalls and strange plants and animals (Pasztory, 2010). The New World was teeming with life and landscapes that seemed to defy explanation but at the same time required minute description in both text and illustration. The esthetic tradition that characterized much of this literary thrust is the concept of *pintoresco* (or ‘picturesque’). In the eighteenth and nineteenth century it was common to see books published with the title ‘picturesque voyages,’ where travellers would graphically and textually give an idea of realities of distant and strange lands to a public of mostly European extraction (Depetris, 2010). This specific contemplation of nature through a voyage, susceptible to be painted as pictorial composition, was rendered in images that were often exaggerated and highly romanticized, such as Jean-Frédéric Waldeck’s

well-known views of Palenque, or images of the ruins of Uxmal, Yucatan, from Benjamin Moore Norman's travels through Yucatan in 1840. Nature appears in these scenes as a background that is traveled, and graphically it was common to see people moving through the compositions, lending them scale in the process. The taste for ruins in Romantic art penetrated Europe in a significant way in the nineteenth century, changing pictorial conventions and even how English gardens were composed. Ruins are depicted overgrown with plants and trees, even though in many cases the artist may have significantly altered the vegetation before drawing the scene; and in an apparent contradiction, the irregularity of nature was forced to conform to pictorial conventions.

Competence in producing a faithful record is often in conflict with aesthetic concerns, and one feature of early antiquarianism is the quest to achieve a graphic style that was maximally informative. So while the esthetic precepts of the picturesque were solidly part of the Mexican literary journals graphic and textual design, new ways of seeing and rendering gradually crept in. Frederick Catherwood, John Lloyd Stephens' draughtsman during the pair's epic journey through the peninsula of Yucatan in search of archaeological ruins, painted in the picturesque tradition, but he was also passionate about reproducing his subject matter with great fidelity. The images of ruins that accompanied the articles on archaeology in "El Repertorio Pintoresco", published in Yucatan between 1861-1863, were heavily influenced by Catherwood's illustrations from the 1840s, and some are just copies. Others, however, were locally produced. In March of 1862 Crescencio Carrillo y Ancona, a priest with an antiquarian interests and editor of "El Repertorio Pintoresco", made a trip to Motul in the company of friends to see a mound that was located in this town, a short distance from Merida. He made a sketch of the structure and in perfect picturesque prose described the moment when they first set eyes on the ruin:

Figuraos un cuadro pintoresco en que el sol naciente lanza sus primeros rayos a través de un bosque extenso de ramonales y palmas, surgiendo sobre un fondo semejante y bajo un cielo de azul limpio y sereno, un pirámide cuyo o asentamiento de misteriosas ruinas; y habréis tenido idea de lo que aquella mañana estuvimos contemplando por largo rato con excitación vehemente [...] [Behold a picturesque scene where the rising sun throws its first rays of light through an extensive forest of palms and breadnut trees, and emerging against the backdrop of a clear blue and serene sky a pyramid or settlement of mysterious ruins; and you will have an idea what we contemplated that morning with intense excitement [...]] (Arqueología..., 1863, p. 298, my translation ).

The rendering he made of the ruin may seem amateurish (Figure 7), but in fact it is rich in many details that can only be revealed by a close reading of the accompanying narrative to which it was tied. We learn from his text that the romantic serenity of the scene he described quickly disappeared when the priest discovered several 'jícara' of 'sacá' hanging from the tree that was growing on top of the pyramid. ('Jícaras' are dried gourd shells and 'sacá' is a drink of maize gruel commonly known as 'atole' in the rest of Mexico.) The Indians, who continued to hold the mound sacred, were offering the 'sacá' in a rite known as 'ticch', or 'passing,' which symbolically imparts knowledge from one generation to the next. Carrillo y Ancona was infuriated with the presence of the offerings and felt that the Indians were immersed in superstition and barbarity. This narrative, referred to in the drawing by the presence of the 'jícara' hanging in the tree, lends richness to the scene it otherwise might not have: that of the Mayan ritual described by the priest, and his violent opposition to these practices.

The poetic picturesqueness of the ruins, represented both graphically and textually, began to fade and was gradually replaced by other types of images. In an edition of "Ilustración Mexicana", published in 1852 by Ignacio Cumplido, Juan Bautista Carriedo presented some very simple line drawings of the ruins of Mitla, Oaxaca (Figure 8). These images were still clinging to a



picturesque tradition, but the human figure is inserted for scale, and the drawing simplified so we can appreciate the complex greca-designs of the famed palaces. On the same page there were two line drawings of artifacts found at the site of Cuilapan, executed in a style that is identical to how many artifacts are still presented in archaeological studies today. Archaeological illustration was entering a phase of reduced detail.

Advances in archaeology as a discipline coincide –unevenly– with the gradual acceptance of new ways of seeing and representing antiquities, and of course with technical developments in publishing, such as printmaking technologies and eventually photography. Naturally, no amount of rigor in constructing a graphic language with ‘scientific’ images would overcome the fact that it was still a language with specific conventions that relied on others being versed in those codes and conventions (Smiles; Moser, 2005). But it is also important to understand that

these processes are also subject to the politics of identity and how people wanted to perceive their past.

The illustrated articles the Mexican literary journals produced around the middle of the nineteenth century represent the first flowering of a nationalistic archaeology. From a close reading of the articles in this journal, we have evidenced that what started out as projects to improve national infrastructure, such as highways and the interoceanic canal, morphed into a side campaign to document the largely unknown ruins discovered in their path, and became an opportunity to collect antiquities for the National Museum. The findings were brought to the public via the new literary format, enabled by publishers anxious not only to sell books but also to create a new national agenda. Through these ‘literary museums’ readers could experience the pre-Columbian past from different views: the grotesque, represented by strange and exotic objects seemingly impenetrable to

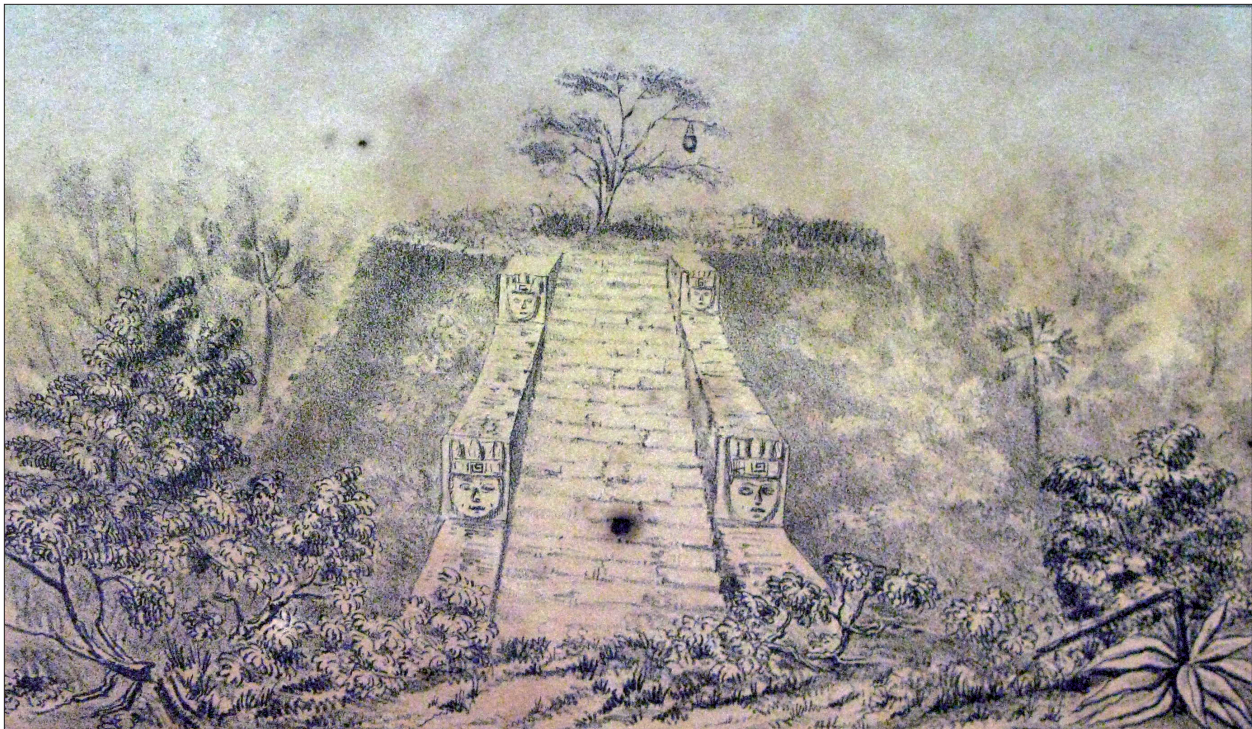


Figure 7. 'Antiguo adoratorio de Motul,' lithograph used by Carrillo y Ancona to illustrate his article in "El Repertorio Pintoresco". Source: Redon (1863).



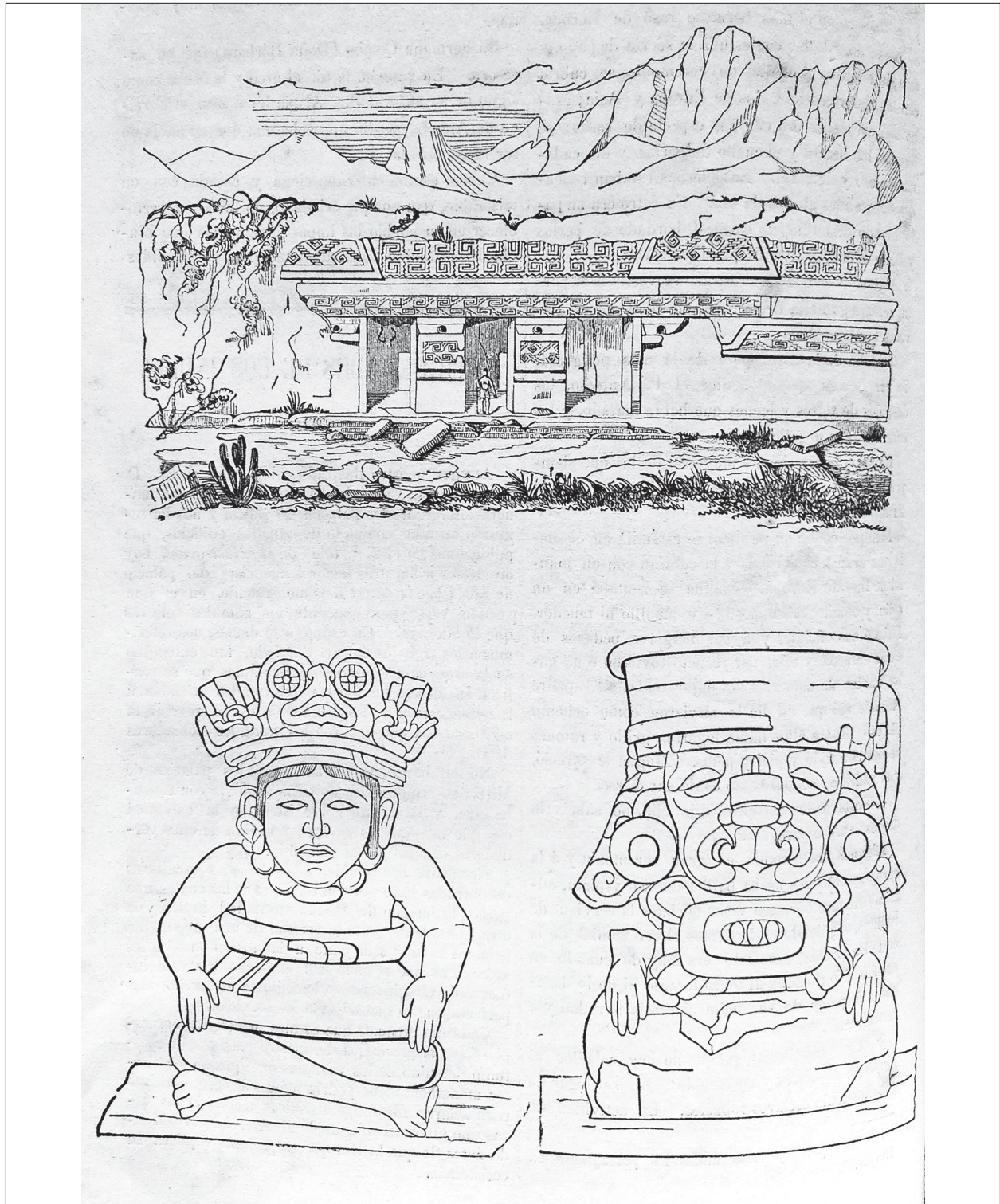


Figure 8. Line drawings of the ruins of Mitla and archaeological artifacts. Source: Antigüedades... (1852, p. 368).

interpretation, and the picturesque, illustrated by romantic scenes of ruins overrun by vegetation; intoxicating texts and images that continue to inform our understanding and feed our imagination of the ancient American past (Pino-Díaz; Riviale, 2009).

“El Museo Mexicano”, the maximum expression of that burst in nationalistic sentiment, but not the only venue, was soon choked off by the turmoil attendant on the Mexican-American War of 1846-1848, a gruesome two-year conflict in which nearly fourteen thousand U.S. citizens and as many as twenty-five thousand Mexicans were killed. Even after the war ended, with the definitive annexation by the United States of a substantial portion of previously Mexican territory, politics and society continued to be dominated by conflict –often bloody. The political realities and conflicts of that time meant that there would be at least two lost decades before Mexicans could redirect their efforts and resources to the uncovering of their archaeological heritage, and begin another chapter under the thirty-year rule of Porfirio Díaz. But the seed had already been planted. In this article we have demonstrated how some Mexicans were beginning to comprehend their antiquities, not only as a heritage to be explored and protected but also as a catalyst to shape their nation and forge a sense of their past and present selves.

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