LORENZO GATTA

The Plan of Hochelaga (1556): Indigenous Spatial Thinking and the Early Modern Transatlantic Imagination

O Plano de Hochelaga (1556): Pensamento Espacial Indígena e a Imaginação Transatlântica no início da Era Moderna

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Lorenzo se formou arquiteto na Accademia di Architettura di Mendrisio e no KTH em Estocolmo antes de completar um mestrado e PhD (2024) em História da Arte no The Courtauld Institute, em Londres. Sua dissertação sobre os confessionários produzidos no sul dos Países Baixos durante o início da era moderna recebeu o Förderpreis Kunstwissenschaft 2024 da Swiss Associations of Art Historians (VKKS). A pesquisa de Lorenzo tem sido apoiada pela Swiss National Science Foundation a pela Nederlands Interuniversitair Kunsthistorisch Instituut em Florença, e, em fevereiro de 2025, ele receberá uma bolsa de pós-doutoramento de um ano no Institute of Advanced Studies (University College London), onde investigará a recepção da arquitetura indígena norte-americana no início do Mundo Atlântico Moderno.

Lorenzo trained as an architect at the Accademia di Architettura di Mendrisio and the KTH in Stockholm before completing an MA and PhD (2024) in the history of art at The Courtauld Institute in London. His dissertation on the confessionals produced in the early modern southern Netherlands received the Förderpreis Kunstwissenschaft 2024 from the Swiss Associations of Art Historians (VKKS). Lorenzo's research has been supported by the Swiss National Science Foundation and the Nederlands Interuniversitair Kunsthistorisch Instituut in Florence, and in February 2025, he will begin a one-year post-doctoral fellowship at the Institute of Advanced Studies (University College London), where he will investigate the reception of Indigenous North American architecture in the early modern Atlantic World.

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Resumo

Baseado em um projeto de pesquisa ainda em fase inicial, o artigo esboça direções potenciais para recuperação do agenciamento da arquitetura indígena norte-americana, na formação de imaginários políticos, através do Mundo Atlântico do início da Era Moderna. O artigo concentra-se no Plano de Hochelaga, cidade dos Iroqueses de Saint Lawrence (atual Montreal), publicada na obra Navigationi et viaggi (Veneza, 1566), de Ramusio, e examina o que essa representação pode revelar sobre as práticas arquitetônicas indígenas, em oposição às perspectivas exclusivamente eurocêntricas. Ao situar essa imagem no amplo contexto das trocas diplomáticas intercoloniais que definiram o início da história da América do Norte, sugiro que o conhecimento espacial articulado na configuração de Hochelaga pode reter traços do pensamento espacial indígena que inspiraram, e continuam a inspirar, visões alternativas de liberdade.

Palavras-chave: Arquitetura *Iroquois*. Pensamento espacial indígena. Encontros transatlânticos. Pensamento político dos primórdios da modernidade. Diplomacia intercolonial.

Abstract

Based on a research project still in its early stages, this article sketches out potential directions for recovering the agency of Indigenous North American architecture in shaping political imaginaries across the early modern Atlantic world. It focuses on the plan of the Saint Lawrence Iroquois town of Hochelaga (present-day Montreal) published in Ramusio's **Navigationi et viaggi** *(Venice, 1566), and examines what this depiction might reveal about Indigenous architectural practices as opposed to solely Eurocentric perspectives. By situating this image within the broader context of intercolonial diplomatic exchanges that defined the early history of North America, I suggest that the spatial knowledge articulated in Hochelaga's layout may retain traces of Indigenous spatial thinking that have inspired, and continue to inspire, alternative visons of freedom.*

Keywords: Iroquois architecture. Indigenous spatial thinking. Transatlantic encounters. Early modern political thought. Intercolonial diplomacy.

Resumen

Basado en un proyecto de investigación aún en su fase inicial, el artículo esboza direcciones potenciales para la recuperación de la agencia de la arquitectura indígena norteamericana, en la formación de imaginarios políticos, a través del Mundo Atlántico de comienzo de la Era Moderna. El artículo se centra en el Plano de Hochelaga, ciudad de los Iroqueses de Saint Lawrence (actual Montreal), publicado en la obra **Navigationi et viaggi** *(Venecia, 1566), de Ramusio, y examina lo que esta representación puede revelar sobre las prácticas arquitectónicas indígenas, en contraposición a perspectivas exclusivamente eurocéntricas. Al ubicar esta imagen en el contexto amplio de los intercambios diplomáticos intercoloniales que definieron la historia temprana de América del Norte, sugiero que el conocimiento espacial articulado en la disposición de Hochelaga puede conservar rastros del pensamiento espacial indígena que inspiró, y continúa inspirando, visiones alternativas de libertad.*

Palabras clave: Arquitectura Iroquois. Pensamiento espacial indígena. Encuentros transatlánticos. Pensamiento político de la temprana modernidad. Diplomacia intercolonial

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Introduction

During his second voyage to Canada in 1535, the French navigator Jacques Cartier sailed up the Saint Lawrence River in search of a passage to China and the location of the mythical kingdom of Saguenay, believed to be rich in gold and precious metals (SAYRE, 1997, p. 146–147). Despite persistent efforts, Cartier's grand quest ended only in frustration. What he did encountered, instead, was Hochelaga: a Saint Lawrence Iroquoian town which had stood since 1200 AD in what is now Montreal as part of a vast political network that connected Indigenous communities into a confederation of approximately 10.000 people (TREMBLAY, 2006, p. 36). Just over two decades later, in 1556, the Italian cosmographer Giovanni Battista Ramusio published a plan of Hochelaga in his monumental compendium of travel literature *Navigationi et viaggi* [1] (RAMUSIO, 1565; HORODOWICH, 2018, p. 63-88).
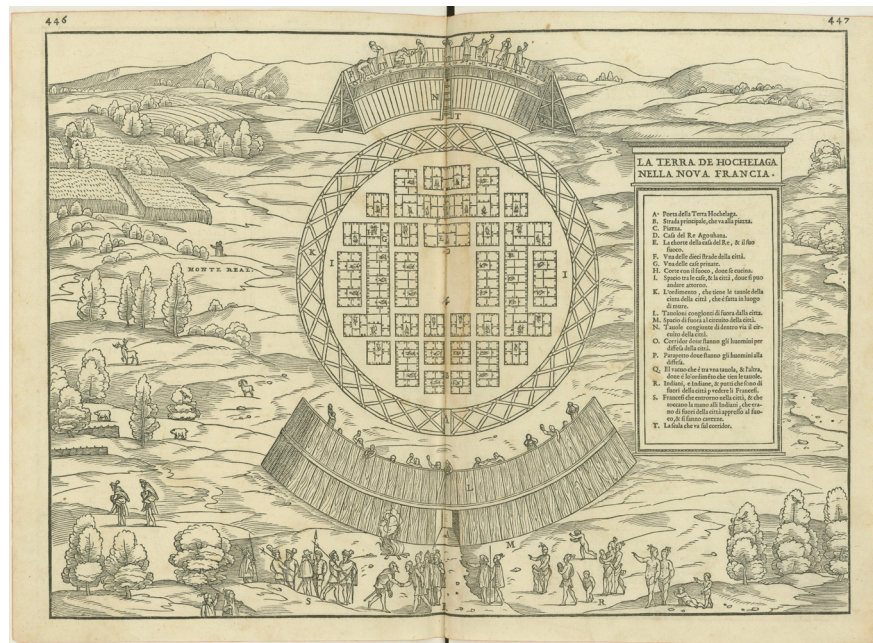

FIGURE 1 – Giacomo Gastaldi (printmaker), La Terra de Hochelaga nella Nova Francia, 1565, 31,7 x 43 cm, from Giovanni Battista Ramusio, *Terzo Volume delle navigationi et viaggi* (Venice: Giunti, [first edition 1556]1565)

Source: John Carter Brown Library (Providence, RI)

Drawn by Ramusio's collaborator Giacomo Gastaldi, the plan depicted a carefully organised settlement: a regular grid of fifty longhouses arranged around a central square and encircled by a perfect ring of fortifications, with cornfields spreading all around (KERSHAW 1993, p. 18-22). By the time another French explorer, Samuel de Champlain, arrived in Quebec in 1604, however, Hochelaga had disappeared (PENDERGAST and TRIGGER, 1972). The settlement had likely been abandoned due to its strategic role as a gateway community with privileged access to European goods flowing along the Saint Lawrence, which may have made Hochelaga a prime target for neighbouring Iroquois and Huron groups who competed for control over trade routes (TRIGGER, 1985, p. 144-148).

Ramusio's plan of Hochelaga has long been dismissed as a mere Renaissance fabrication. In a series of articles dedicated to the plan, the Swiss architectural historian André Corboz described it as "a record of a pure state of nature" and even as "a Palladian-inspired speculation" tied to Daniele Barbaro's humanist circle in sixteenth-century Venice as well as to Renaissance esoteric ideas that underpinned the reinterpretation of Polybius's description of Roman encampments, the layout of Padua's Botanical Garden, and the conception of Giulio Camillo's Memory Theatre

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(CORBOZ, 1978, p. 145-55). While the plan's symmetrical layout is undeniably idealised through Renaissance urban principles and at odds with archaeological evidence, it deserves further attention for what it might reveal about its hitherto unexplored potential to convey Indigenous spatial knowledge. Lacking any signs of 'savagery,' the plan offers a vision of civic life organised around communal living, agriculture, and town planning, yet its cultural specificity has not been examined in relation to Iroquoian spatial traditions. Archaeological and ethnohistorical evidence of Iroquoian settlements show that the extended families of Hochelaga, as Cartier observed, "shared their lives, work, and harvest as one community" under a matrilocal kinship system (BIGGAR, 1924, p. 62; DEWAR and MCBRIDE 1992, p. 227-255; WILLIAMSON, 2012, p. 273-284). Far more than mere shelters, the longhouses depicted in Ramusio's plan were the spatial expression of an ethics of reciprocity and communal living practiced among Iroquoian-speaking societies in Northeast America (RICHTER, 1992, p. 17-21). What if, I ask, the plan of Hochelaga was more than a Palladian projection, but an emblem Indigenous "survivance"? Even if inevitably refracted through European perspectives, this plan may have retained traces of Indigenous agency that channelled Iroquoian spatial ideas across the Atlantic.

Traditional accounts have long framed Indigenous elimination as the dominant theme in North American history, casting Native societies as inevitably overtaken by European germs, weapons, and economic power (WOLFE, 2006, p. 387–409). Recent revisionist perspectives, however, have challenged this one-dimensional narrative, revealing instead how colonisation was a fragmented, contested, and often unsuccessful process of dispossession, where imperial ambitions and Indigenous homelands remained deeply entangled and settler colonialism failed to fully displace Indigenous peoples for much of North America's history (BLACKHAWK, 2023; WITGEN, 2023). From the Iroquois (Haudenosaunee) Confederacy in the Great Lakes regions to the Lakota in the Ohio Valley, Indigenous nations engaged in trade, diplomacy, and conflict with Europeans and retained their independence for more than three centuries after first contact, often expanding their territorial reach both by displacing other Indigenous groups and playing rival colonial powers against each other (HÄMÄLÄINEN, 2022, p. 97-144). Many Indigenous communities resettled in autonomous, relatively inaccessible fortified towns beyond colonial reach, and also due to dense forests and lack of roadways, Dutch, English, French, and other European settlers remained largely confined to isolated trade posts clustered along the Atlantic, far outnumbered by Indigenous populations who controlled much of the continent's vast interior well into the nineteenth century (LIPMAN, 2015; MCDONNELL, 2015; LENNOX, 2017; INGRAM, 2021). Whereas several Andean and Mesoamerican cities came to be integrated into the hierarchical structures of the Iberian Empire, European colonial efforts in Northeast America faced persistent resistance from Indigenous societies, whose urban configurations — such as the town constellations of the Iroquois in the Northeaster Woodlands or the Huron Nations around Georgian Bay — defied emerging European definitions of the state and frameworks of property relations. These settlements, instead, stood as assertions of what Anishinaabe scholar Gerald Vizenor calls "survivance" (1999) — the persistence of Indigenous cultural identities in the face of systematic efforts at erasure.

The limited attention given to Hochelaga's political resonance is indicative of how Indigenous architecture is still largely understood through Marc-Antoine Laugier's theory of the 'primitive hut' (1753): the archetypal shelter inspired by natural forms in a supposedly original state of nature (RYKWERT, 1997, p. 75-92; VIDLER, 1987. p. 7-22). This theoretical construct perpetuates a liner narrative of cultural evolution, where the history of architecture is seen as a single, teleological development of cultural progress: from the early caves of hunter-gatherers, through the tents of semi-nomadic shepherds, to more permanent primitive huts for sedentary agriculturalists

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that would be progressively refined through the Classical rules of proportions to culminate in the Greek temple (CAIRNS, 2012, p. 86-95). Although archaeological evidence undermines this evolutionary model and the idea of a universal origin of architecture (MOORE, 2012), Indigenous urban configurations continue to be relegated to a timeless past outside of modernity through what anthropologist Johannes Fabian described as "temporal distancing" (1983). Since the idealisation of European cities as symbols of progress has elevated permanence and monumentality as markers of cultural advancement, the periodic relocation and non-hierarchical structures of Indigenous American towns have been frequently misinterpreted as evidence of a lack of political complexity and hence dismissed as expedient architecture devoid of panning. For societies like the Hochelagans, however, a semi-nomadic existence and egalitarian spatial arrangements were not simply practical solutions, but deliberate expressions of political freedom. Far from an isolated village of "primitive huts," Hochelaga existed within a broader constellation of interconnected communities as a self-conscious political project.

Considerable scholarly attention has been devoted to the earliest depictions of the "New World" (CHIAPPELLI, 1976; HOUSEHOLDER, 2011) and the presence of Indigenous American objects in early modern European collections (FEEST, 1995; BUJOK, 2009). Surprisingly little, however, has been done to examine the reception of Indigenous North American architecture. Despite extensive archaeological and ethnohistorical research on Native American settlements, early modern illustrations of Indigenous towns and their wider circulation through travel accounts, maps, and other visual media have received only scant attention from art, architectural, and cultural historians. This gap in scholarship calls for a deeper exploration of early modern depictions of Indigenous architecture — not only for their ethnographic value, but more fundamentally, for their largely unexplored political resonance in the urban history of the Atlantic world (DANTAS and HART 2024). Most research to date has focussed on European urbanisation in the Americas as a tool of imperial expansion — whether through the imposition of authoritarian urban schemes (BAILEY, 2018; KORNWOLF, 2002; MAUDLIN and HERMAN, 2016, the violent displacement of Indigenous societies (MUMFORD, 2012), or the progressive adaptation of cities like Cuzco, Lima, Potosí, and Tenochtitlan to European models of state formation (KAGAN 2000). In this article, by extension, I seek to point out ways for recovering how the spatial knowledge articulated by the decentralised town constellations across the Indigenous Northeast may have travelled back to Europe. As important studies in early modern cartography and transatlantic print culture have shown, images of Indigenous American architecture often served as "markers of civility," crucial both to the development of political thought in early modern Europe (HORODOWICH, 2017; SCHMIDT, 2019; VAN GOESEN, 2019) and the construction of ethnographic knowledge across wider geographies (GAUDIO, 2008, p. 1-44; DAVIES, 2016, p. 217-256; LEITCH, 2010. p. 63-100). This article builds on these perspectives to reconsider outdated notions of the 'primitive hut' and the 'noble savage' in the framework of recent scholarly endeavours to reclaim the agency of Indigenous peoples in shaping the early modern world (WEAVER, 2014; BROOKS, 2018; DODDS PENNOCK, 2023) and its built environment (THRUSH, 2017; ANDERSON, 2012). By repositioning the plan of Hochelaga within the broader context of the intercolonial diplomatic exchanges that shaped the early history of North America, I suggest that this image may have itself originated as a 'cultural gift' — one that inspired, and continues to inspire, debates about alternative social arrangements. To what extent, then, did Indigenous spatial thinking prompt European observers to question fundamental ideas about property, governance, and gender roles, and to envision novel forms of freedom?

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Architecture and Collective Governance in Iroquois Societies

Disappeared shortly after the onset of European colonisation, the Saint Lawrence Iroquois shared many cultural traits with other Iroquoian-speaking groups such as the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) and the Wendat (Huron), while also maintaining distinct identities as demonstrated by linguistic and archaeological evidence (TREMBLAY, 2016, p. 13-17). At their peak, the Saint Lawrence Iroquois population is estimated to have reached around 10,000. Today, their legacy is preserved in over 250 archaeological sites spread across New York State, Ontario, Quebec, Vermont, and even beyond their traditional territory in New Hampshire and Maine (BURGER and PRATT, 1973; HEIDENREICH, 1990, p. 475-492; CHAPDELAINE, 2016, p. 146-170). These sites include villages, camps, cemeteries, and temporary waypoints, with the oldest dating back to the early centuries of the second millennium AD, and the most recent coinciding with the time of Cartier's arrival in 1535. An important element the Saint Lawrence Iroquois shared with other Iroquoian-speaking communities was their common architectural practices. Ramusio's plan of Hochelaga, then, can be examined in relation to Iroquoian spatial traditions.

On October 3, 1535, despite repeated opposition from local Indigenous communities, Cartier and his crew, "accompanied by several [Indigenous] persons," finally reached the town of Hochelaga, located on top of what the French would later name 'Mount Royale.' As Cartier reported in his journals (BIGGAR, 1924, p. 61):

> *The village is circular and is completely enclosed by a wooden palisade in three tiers like a pyramid. The top one is built crosswise, the middle one perpendicular, and the lowest one of strips of wood placed lengthwise. The whole is well joined and lashed after their manner, and is some two lances in height. There is only one gate and entrance to this village, and that can be barred up. Over this gate and in many places about the enclosure are species of galleries with ladders for mounting to them, which galleries are provided with rocks and stones for the defence and protection of the place.*

Here Cartier offers a detailed description of Hochelaga's fortifications. In line with Iroquoian settlement patterns, the town was built on a defensible hillside rather than along a waterway, reflecting a tactical focus on visibility and defense. Surrounded by rival Indigenous groups for much of its existence, Hochelaga, like many Iroquois towns, was protected by thick palisades and a single securely barred entrance. Such formidable fortifications often impressed European observers. In the 1640s, New Amsterdam administrator Adriaen van der Donck described Oneida towns in the Hudson River Valley as "castles" (2008, p. 81-84). In turn, during his expedition into the interior regions west of the Hudson between 1634 and 1635, business agent Harmen Meyndertsz van den Bogaert marvelled at the layout of the Mohawk settlement of Onekahoncka, where "thirty-six [long]houses" were arranged "row in row in the manner of streets" (2013, p. 4). Alongside these later European perceptions, Cartier's observations bring to the fore Hochelaga's layout as evidence of a sophisticated form of political and military organisation — one grounded in foresight and strategic decisions about location and defensibility, rather than in an architecture of survival.

This political sophistication found its most vivid expression in the longhouse, the core residential unit of Iroquois communities (KAPCHES, 1989; NABOKOV and EASTON, 1989, p. 76-91). In Hochelaga, Cartier observed (BIGGAR, 1924, p. 62),

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There are some fifty houses, each about fifty or more paces long and fifteen in width, built completely of wood and covered in and bordered up with large pieces of the bark and rind of trees. And inside these houses are many rooms and chambers; and in the middle is a large space without a floor, where they light their fire and live together in common.

Large, elongated buildings often over 30 meters in length, longhouses were framed with bent saplings twisted into the ground at regular intervals and arched to create a roof as high as 4 to 6 meters [2].
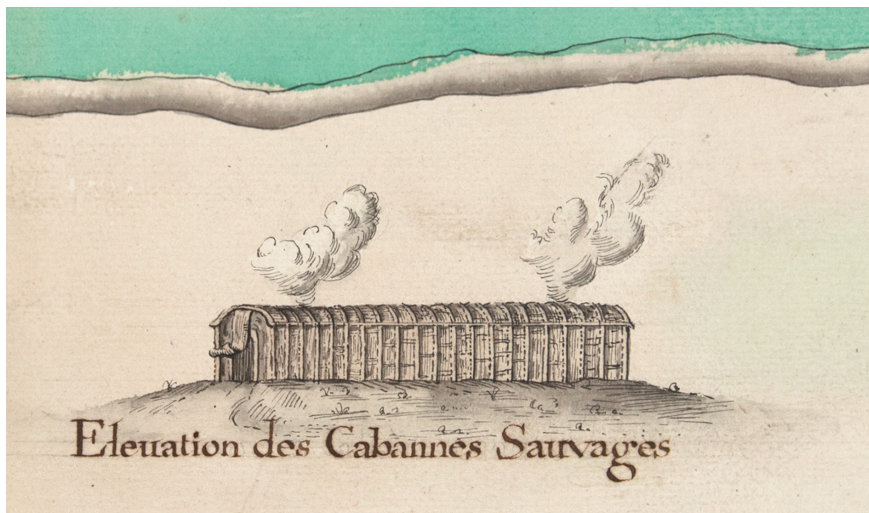
FIGURE 2 – Iroquoian (Oneida) longhouse, detail from Gaspard-Joseph Chaussegros de Léry (?), Plan of Fort Frontenac or Cataracouy, 1720, Pen-and-ink and watercolour on cloth, 489 x 687 mm

Source: Newberry Library (Chicago, IL)

The exterior walls were covered with bark sheeting, and the openings were provided by a system of sliding shutters. The cultural significance of the longhouse lay in its internal layout: a central corridor running the full length of the structure, with sleeping compartments on either side. Longhouses were designed to accommodate multiple extended families under a matrilocal structure, where lineage was traced from mother to daughter rather than from father to son, and couples would reside with the wife's family instead of the husband's (RICHTER, 1992, p. 20). As described by Cartier and depicted in Ramusio's plan, each longhouse was defined by a series of communal fires, each shared by two families — one on each side of the corridor — as the focal point for communal life and kinship bonds within the matrilocal residential system. Jean François Lafitau — a Jesuit father who lived among the Iroquois from 1712 to 1717 at the mission of Sault St. Louis (Kahnawake) on the south shore of the Saint Lawrence River — produced one of the earliest and most detailed ethnographic accounts of Iroquois matrilocal system, which he described as "a gynecocracy," underscoring the substantial political authority held by women in daily governance and economic life, particularly through their control over food supplies and housing (LAFITAU, 1724, I, p. 344; BAINE CAMPBELL, 1999, p. 285-309).

Although neither Cartier's account nor Ramusio's plan should be taken at face value, the scale of Iroquoian settlements suggests that the "fifty [long]houses" in Hochelaga might have supported a population of around 3,600 people. Archaeological excavations at Howlett Hill Site in upstate New York, for example, uncovered the floor remains of Iroquois longhouses from the fourteenth century, including a massive structure measuring 100 by 7 metres that could accommodate up to 200 people (TUCK, 1971, p. 77-90).

This communal spatial organisation was the manifestation of a political system rooted in collective governance. Iroquois societies were organised through loose,

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decentralised assemblies aimed at preserving peace among a network of autonomous towns (FENTON, 1998, p. 135-223; PARMENTER 2010, p. 3-40). There was no single ruler with executive power, but rather councils of *sachems*, or leaders, all equal in rank and with no coercive authority. Their power, in fact, was purely moral, and they could be deposed at any time. "Although [the sachems] have a real authority," Lafitau noted in his account (1724, I: p. 202-203), "they give so much respect to liberty that one would say they are all equal." "They have neither distinctive mark, nor crown, nor sceptre, nor guards, nor consular axes to differentiate them from the common people," he further remarked, because "their authority does not appear to have any trace of absolutism." Political life, then, revolved around public forums where all adult men and women held equal voting rights. Decisions were reached through negotiations, persuasion, and collective consensus, and all members were bound by a shared obligation to defend each other's freedom. This ethos of collective governance extended to economic life as well. Iroquois societies were far from the proto-communist utopias Fredrich Engels once imagined, as property did certainly exist (ENGELS, 2010 [1884], p. 83-98). Its definition, however, rested on active use rather than individual possession (RICHTER, 1992, p. 21; GREER, 2018, p. 145-188). A redistributive economy ensured that surplus goods would be shared with those in need. Social status, in turn, depended on the ability to give away rather than personal accumulation. "The chiefs are generally the poorest among them," noted the Dutch traveller David Peterson de Vries in the mid-seventeenth century (1857, p. 96-97), "for instead of their receiving anything… these Indian chiefs are made to give to the populace."

Far more than an architecture of survival, then, Iroquois town planning was part of a political project defined by consensus, redistributive economics, and a collective commitment to freedom. As archaeological evidence shows, Iroquois societies displayed remarkable adaptability in response to European encroachment, shifting from densely nucleated towns to more dispersed settlements through careful deliberations over location, defensibility, and internal layout (JORDAN, 2018). Such flexibility shatters the stereotype of a static, 'primitive' culture, revealing instead a society that reconfigured its settlements through collective decision-making and strategic planning. Contrary to the outdate notion of the "primitive hut," Iroquois towns were organised around an egalitarian residential system, where the longhouse, much more than a simple shelter, became the spatial expression of an ethics of reciprocity and communal living. Free from aggrandising symbols of authority like palaces and temples, the plan Hochelaga can therefore be understood as the embodiment of a political project where every aspect of the built environment — from the choice of location to the design of defensive structures and the organisation of residential units — reflected principles of equality, reciprocity, and collective decision-making. Hochelaga was, above all, a political space of consent.

Spatial Knowledge and Intercolonial Diplomacy

Throughout his voyages, Cartier relied heavily on Indigenous knowledge and informants, or as he wrote, "the immense number of peoples" his crew encountered along the way (BIGGAR, 1924, p. 37-38). Among his early guides were the Mi'kmaq Taignoagny and Agaya, captives taken at Gaspé and brought to France in 1536, and later, four unnamed Iroquoians who created a map of the Lachine Rapids on the Saint Lawrence River, using, as Cartier reported, "little sticks and branches" placed "upon the ground at certain distances" to represent the different waterways (BIGGAR, 1924, p. 104). Though undeniably imbalanced, these interactions underscore the indispensable

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contributions of Indigenous spatial knowledge to European territorial understanding of the American Continent. The French encounter with the Hochelagans was further marked by sustained diplomatic exchanges carried out to establish trade and political alliances that made Hochelaga one of the earliest sites of cross-cultural interaction. Upon his arrival, Cartier and his crew were welcomed with elaborate speeches from Indigenous chiefs as part of a broader effort at mutual recognition. Cartier was also presented with numerous gifts, including *esnoguy* — shell necklaces — that he described as "their most precious worldly possessions, because they valued them more than gold or silver" (BIGGAR, 1924, p. 85). These gifts — much like the wampum belts later used by the Iroquois Confederacy in diplomatic negotiations with colonial powers during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries — were central to the politics of recognition and alliance-building between Indigenous and settler societies (DELMANS, 2016). As Cartier witnessed first-hand, gift-giving among the Saint Lawrence Iroquois was not simply a symbolic gesture of respect but a powerful tool to assert political authority and territorial claims (FENTON, 1985).

Such cross-cultural exchanges invite deeper investigation into how Indigenous contributions might have shaped the representation of Hochelaga and its political resonance. We now know that many Indigenous individuals crossed the Atlantic, not only as captives or "exotic curiosities" but often as diplomatic envoys to European courts (VAUGHAN, 2006). These transatlantic journeys positioned Indigenous societies as central actors in early modern geopolitics, with notable examples such as a Wendat delegation to Paris in 1691 and the famous Mohawk (Iroquois) diplomatic mission of the so-called "Four Indian Kings" to London in 1710 (AQUILA, 1983; SHANNON, 2008). Perhaps even more significantly, the intercolonial diplomatic exchanges between Indigenous and European societies in North America were profoundly shaped by Indigenous spatial knowledge (LEWIS, 1998 and 1987; DE VORSEY, 1978 and 1992). Natives often drew maps on tree bark, animal skins, or directly on the ground to mark territorial boundaries, trade networks, and political alliances. Due to their ephemeral nature, only a few of these maps have survived. One famous example is the so-called Powhatan's Mantle, a deer-hide hanging adorned with shell beadwork now held at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford [3] (FEEST, 1983).
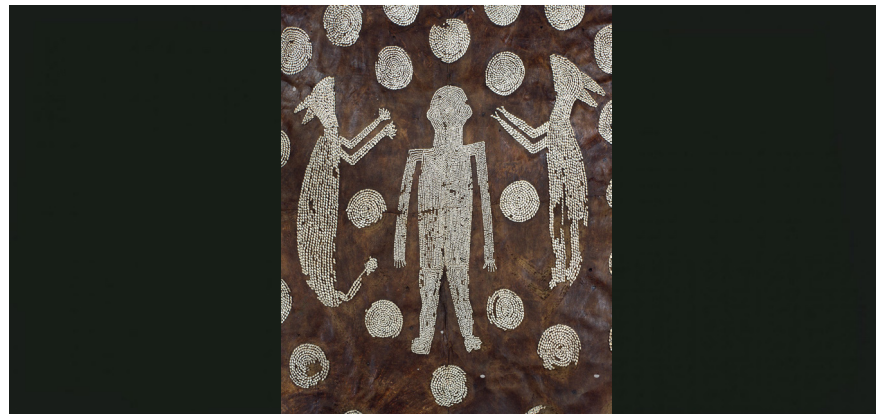

FIGURE 4 – Catawba Deerskin Map, given to South Carolina colonial Governor Francis Nicholson in 1721, 79 x 117 cm

Source: Library of Congress, Washington DC

First recorded in the John Tradescant's collection in London in July 1638, the mantle is believed to have been one of the gifts presented by Powhatan in 1608 to Captain Newport for King James I, with the thirty-four circles surrounding the central figure thought to represent a map of the Algonquian towns of the Powhatan Confederacy in Virginia. Another surviving example is the deerskin map presented by the Catawba to English Colonial Governor Francis Nicholson in 1721 and now preserved in two copies at the British Museum and the National Archives in London [4] (WASELKOV, 1989).

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FIGURE 3 – Powhatan's Mantle, Southern Chesapeake Bay region, Virginia, United States of America; said to have been owned by Wahunsunacock, 1600–38, deer hide with shell bead decoration and sinew, 235 x 160 cm

Source: Ashmolean Museum (University of Oxford)
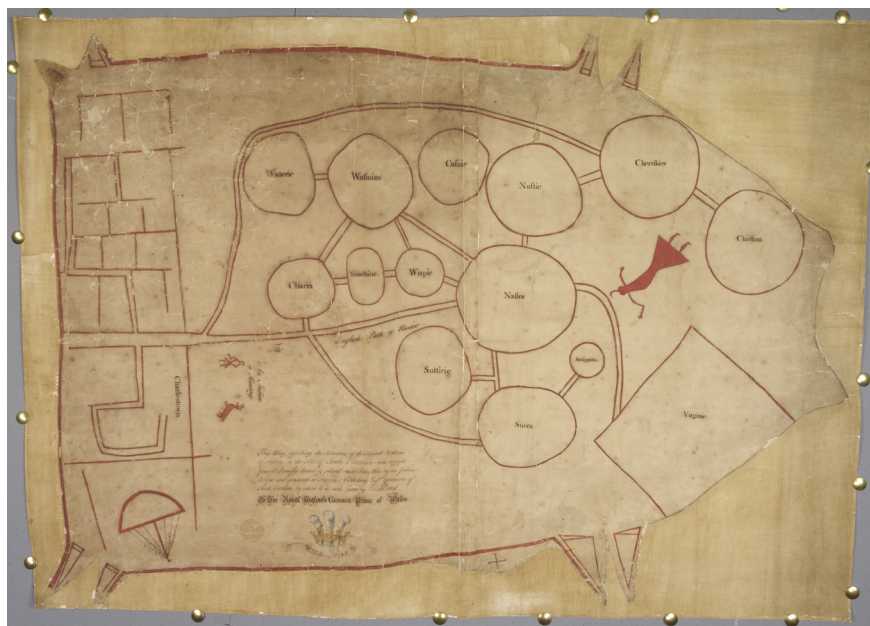
Here, the squares on the left illustrate European settlements, with Charleston at one end and Virginia at the other, while the circles and double lines at the centre represent the commercial and political alliances between Indigenous societies.

These maps illustrate not only the extent to which European understanding of America was indebted to Indigenous territorial knowledge, but more importantly, the inherently political nature of such representations. By conflating physical and social spaces into a network of 'sociograms,' these maps ultimately served as geopolitical statements of intercolonial relations (GALLOWAY; 1998). From this perspective, Hochelaga may similarly have exposed Cartier and his crew to an alternative conception of space — one rooted in the ancestral landscapes the Saint Lawrence Iroquois had inhabited and shaped over millennia before the arrival of the French. As archaeology shows, Iroquois towns would be periodically relocated every ten to twenty years due to soil depletion, wood scarcity, and the natural decay of longhouse structures (RICHETER; 1992, p. 23-24). This semi-nomadic existence, however, was not only a practical solution, but reflected a deeper commitment to political freedom that enabled distant communities to reconnect and ground their cultural identity in migration. Shaped by a long history of movements, the extensive homeland of Iroquois societies became a living anthropological record, where communities endured even as specific sites were left behind. Iroquois spatial practices, then, might have offered European observers a topological, non-Euclidean understanding of land — not as a commodity to be exploited, but as a lived experience where physical and social spaces were deeply interconnected, and where communities were bound as much by political alliances as by overland trails and waterways (CRONON, 1983).

Some reflections for future developments

The European encounter with Indigenous cultures in North America was marked by a complex interplay of projection and exchange (Zerubavel, 2003). It is undeniable that European observers often imposed their own cultural frameworks and interpreted unfamiliar cultures through the lens of classical antiquity. It is equally true, however, that what we now call the Renaissance emerged not only as a result of the rediscovery

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of Greek and Roman texts, but also because of an ever-expanding world of cross-cultural exchange (JARDINE, 1996; FARAGO, 1995). Recognising this dynamic, scholars have increasingly shifted their focus from the Western origins of the Renaissance to the circulation of ideas across different cultures.

While direct evidence of Indigenous influence on the plan of Hochelaga may never be fully retrieved, the town's layout can still be interpreted as a faint echo of an original cross-cultural exchange that took place centuries ago. Understood through the sustained diplomatic negotiations that shaped the early history of North America, the plan of Hochelaga may one day be reframed as the trace of a geopolitical statement of intercolonial exchanges. Considering how deeply the European charting of America was informed by Indigenous knowledge, the plan of Hochelaga could even be seen as the result of an original 'cultural gift' — distorted through Eurocentric perspectives yet never fully erased. Rather than viewing Ramusio's plan as a mere Renaissance invention or an object of ethnographic curiosity, I suggest, we should work to recover its lost political resonance and interpret it as a challenge to established notions of governance and urban planning. The spatial knowledge carried within Hochelaga's layout prompts us to reconsider how Indigenous architectural practices may have shaped the early modern political imagination beyond the authority of classical texts. Whatever its original source, the plan of Hochelaga remains an invitation to rethink the history of architecture beyond the confines of the classical tradition. Why, for example, do we revere the ideal cities envisioned by Renaissance architects as the foundations of modern urbanism, yet fail to recognise the potential significance of Hochelaga in the development of egalitarian urban models? Only by interrogating dominant narratives can we fully appreciate how ideas of space, social organisation, and political authority were transmitted across Transatlantic networks of knowledge. Then as now, Hochelaga confronts us with a compelling vision of freedom — a 'cultural gift' left by long-forgotten Saint Lawrence Iroquois to challenge our ability to imagine alternative social arrangements.

Although Hochelaga was abandoned in the early seventeenth century, the spatial thinking articulated in Ramusio's plan might have continued to captivate the early modern Transatlantic imagination — not merely as an idealised depiction of an 'uncontaminated' state of nature or a 'preurban' stage of civilisation, but as a striking expression of social creativity, where property was defined by active use rather than mere possession, social status by the ability to give rather than accumulate, and political authority by consensus and gender equality rather than coercion. Devoid of symbols of authority like palaces and temples and grounded in principles of communal living, Hochelaga's spatial organisation would have exposed European audiences to a radical alternative to the major socio-political developments underway in Europe at the time: the centralisation of state power; the rise of commercial empires built on usury, slavery, and resource extraction; the massive proletarisation driven by the enclosure of common lands; and the growing subjugation of women through the exploitation of their socially reproductive labour, not to mention their persecution through the witch-hunts.

The Enlightenment is often seen as the period that laid the foundations for the rise of capitalism, nation-states, and the ruthless resource extraction that has led to our current ecological crisis. This is certainly true, but the Enlightenment was also a time marked by the most piercing critiques of colonialism and profound cultural exchanges between previously distant societies MUTHU, 2003). One of the most radical critics of European colonialism was Louis Armand Baron de Lahontan, a French military deserter and radical libertine who travelled extensively through Canada and North America between 1683 and 1694, forming deep connections with several Indigenous communities. *In Dialogue with Adario*, published in 1702 as part of his *New Voyages*

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to North America, Lahontan draws on Indigenous perspectives to deliver a lapidary critique of European society (LAHONTAN, 1702). Adario — an anagram of the Wendat chief Kondiaronk — was known for his role in the negotiations of the Great Peace of Montreal (1701) and widely regarded in European sources as one of the most respected orators in North America (STECKLEY, 1981, p. 41-52). Through eloquent argumentation in his dialogues with Lahontan, Adario dismantles the authority of the Church, the logic behind colonisation, and foundational European beliefs about freedom, justice, and punishment (LAUNEY, 1997, p. 146-170). Some historians (OUELLET, 1986) have dismissed Adario as a convenient literary device in line with the Enlightenment tradition of using fictionalised "Noble Savages" or "Orientalised" characters to question European societies — as in the case of Montesquieu's *Persian Letters* (1721) or Voltaire's *L'Ingenu* (1767). Whereas these *philosophes* speculated about non-European perspectives without ever leaving the continent (DUCHET, 1971; GAGNON, 1984), Lahontan spent eleven years in North America, forging lasting relationships with Indigenous peoples like Kandarionk. Decolonial perspectives have since reconsidered the depth of Adario's arguments as reflective of documented Wendat diplomatic missions at the court of Louis XIV in 1691 (SIOUI, 1989, p. 83-109). Unlike fictional 'noble savages' imagined from afar, figures like Kondiaronk and other Indigenous leaders had direct, first-hand knowledge of French society and its sheer inequalities.

Democracy, David Graeber suggested (2007, p. 329-374), emerges in the spaces in between. If the origins of Enlightenment ideals of freedom and equality are now recognised to extend beyond what we usually call the 'Western tradition,' and if many European thinkers like Lahontan, from Aphra Behn to Denis Diderot, often turned to Indigenous cultures to question the inequalities of their own societies, then we might as well ask: what role did Indigenous North American architecture hold in inspiring new visions of freedom? This is the question that drives my current research. Though this project is still in its early stages, it does not seek to establish a direct or formal connection between Indigenous and European architectural practices. Europeans did not suddenly decide to live in longhouses, nor is it likely they ever will. What I aim to point out, instead, is how the encounter with Indigenous spatial organisations may have prompted Europeans to reconsider their own conceptions of dwelling and governances. With no definitive answer yet, I leave it to words of Baron Lahontan (1704, xii):

> *I envy the fate of a poor Savage, who knows neither laws nor sceptres, and I wish I could spend the rest of my life in his longhouse, so that I would no longer be forced to bend the knee before those who sacrifice the public good for their own private interest.*

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