

Mapping Mexican History: LLILAS Benson Inaugurates Its New Exhibition Space

by JULIANNE GILLAND

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VISITORS TO LLILAS BENSON these days are seeing many transformations unfold in public programs as well as public spaces, but one of the most exciting recent developments inside the Benson Collection has been the revitaliza-

tion of our existing exhibition spaces and the installation of a new gallery on the Benson second floor. Inaugurating the new space, the exhibition *Mapping Mexican History: Territories in Dispute, Identities in Question* opened on October 14, 2013, and ran through January 2014. The maps presented in the exhibition, reproduced to scale from the Benson's rare books and manuscripts collection, reflect the intertwined and often contentious relationships between indigenous and European, secular and religious, and "national" and foreign identities in Mexico's evolution from colonial territory to modern state.

The exhibition highlighted one of the Benson's true gems, its collection of early Latin American maps, in particular the Mexican maps that came to us as part of the Genaro García Collection in 1921 and the Joaquín García Icazbalceta Manuscript Collection in 1937, the two foundational acquisitions that built what is today the Benson Latin American Collection. The featured maps also connected with two different courses offered by LLILAS Benson this year: the graduate seminar on the Benson's Relaciones Geográficas collection led by art history professor Julia Guernsey and Benson rare books librarian Michael Hironymous, and an undergraduate Latin American history seminar taught by LLILAS professor Lina del Castillo. Both of these courses were held in the Benson and centered on early maps from the collection. The development of this exhibition of early Mexican maps was thus a natural choice to launch our new exhibition gallery, giving visitors not only an in-depth look at some of the treasures of the Benson's map collections but also a window into the kinds of scholarly resources and innovative learning experiences that LLILAS Benson offers to UT students.

About the Exhibition: Mapping Territory and Identity

Mapping Mexican History focused on three distinct moments when maps played an integral role in the transformation of Mexico and its political geography. In the sixteenth century, early colonial pictographic maps drawn by indigenous artists reflect the growth of Spanish colonial administration. These maps show how indigenous elites adapted pre-Hispanic visual traditions to Europeanized forms of documentation to record their histories and defend claims to land and power. In the eighteenth century, new maps of Mexico's principal cities serve as both representations and instruments of the viceregal government's efforts to re-order and regulate Mexican social life and public spaces. And in the nineteenth century, maps are central to the military struggle for independence and the defense of contested national borders.

Early Colonial Maps: The Relaciones Geográficas

One of the Benson's greatest treasures, the collection of manuscript documents and maps known as the Relaciones Geográficas, consists of responses to a questionnaire issued by King Philip II of Spain in 1577 to survey Spanish American territories. The questionnaire, distributed to colonial officials in New Spain and Peru, requested basic information about the nature and characteristics of the lands and the lives of their peoples. The replies were completed by these officials with the help of indigenous notaries and scribes. The Benson's holdings, from Mexico and Guatemala, offer historical, cultural, and geographical details of communities in the sixteenth century and before the conquest. Many of the written responses included hand-drawn and painted maps, called *pinturas*. These maps were the work of indigenous artists, many of whom were educated by the Spanish but were also trained in pre-Hispanic writing and artistic practices. The artists' use of both traditions of visual representation in the

pinturas of the Relaciones Geográficas make these maps rich sources of information about the many-layered cultures of early colonial communities in New Spain.

The *relación* map of Cempoala (Hidalgo) (see Figure 1) is particularly rich in indigenous iconography marking places, people, and topography. The large hill topped by the head of a Totonac (an indigenous group) is a perfect example of the hill symbol—*tepetl* in Nahuatl—that represents place. *Atl*, water, seen here in the waterway and aqueduct at left, is another frequent visual feature of indigenous maps, and the Nahuatl word *altepetl*, akin to city-state, comes from the words *atl* and *tepetl*, because a water source and a defensive hill were integral to the founding of a settlement. Pictographs on the map also represent the complexity of Cempoala's colonial social and political order. Local Nahuatl rulers in noble *tilmahtli* (cloaks) and headgear, and Otomí natives wearing more rustic dress, are easily distinguished, as is the Spanish official seated at bottom right in his chair. The grid that underlies all of these figures suggests the division of lands that pertain to Cempoala's *altepetls* and the smaller communities they each contained.

Early Colonial Maps:

Land Grants and Legal Claims

Land maps were made to support legal claims by Spaniards and natives alike. Like the Relaciones Geográficas maps, many sixteenth-century land maps made by indigenous artists and communities responded to the demands of the Spanish colonial government in a hybrid visual style, combining distinctively Mesoamerican and European elements. Pre-Hispanic traditions of mapping land tenure and tribute relationships were well established when the Spanish arrived. But colonial indigenous maps created for legal purposes emphasized information and visual elements that would mean the most to Spanish judicial officials. They tended to highlight land use and ownership rather than history or community, identify places with words rather than pictures, and specify distances between towns and landmarks.

The map from Tepexi, Puebla, pictured in Figure 2, was part of a 1584 legal petition filed by Don Joaquín de Francisco Moctezuma, a landholding cacique (indigenous local ruler), against a royal *merced*, or land grant, to be



Figure 2. Map of the lands of Don Joaquín de Francisco Moctezuma, Tepexi, Puebla, 1584



given to Doña Alonça de Sande, a Spaniard. The granting of a *merced* required legal documentation to prove that the lands in question were uncultivated and free of any other legitimate claims to ownership. The map was likely commissioned by Don Joaquín, and his lands are clearly delineated in red near the map's top, showing abundant corn and pumpkin crops. These lands were farmed for the cacique by *terrazgueros*, indigenous tenant farmers, whose own houses and plots are tightly clustered across the map. The densely represented agricultural activity emphasizes that these lands were occupied and cultivated, which would preclude their being absorbed into a new land grant.

Mapping a New Urban Order

In the late colonial period, Mexican cities expanded as Atlantic trade and a boom in mining production brought new wealth and population growth. Urban society became more complex, and increased mixing of races and greater class mobility altered traditional patterns of sociability and city life. In the eighteenth century, royal reformers influenced by the political, economic, and cultural ideals of the Enlightenment imposed a new urban order in Mexico and throughout the Spanish empire. They restructured city spaces, policed streets, and regulated public diversions in an attempt to shape not only the administration but also the morals of cities and their inhabitants.

A 1794 map of Valladolid (today Morelia) shows the imposition of the *cuartel* system, which divided the city into distinct quarters or zones for administrative and policing purposes (Figure 3). By order of the viceroy, *cuarteles* were instituted during the 1790s in Mexico City and the other major colonial cities, including Valladolid, Querétaro, Oaxaca, Puebla, San Luis Potosí, and Zacatecas.

Territory and Nation:

Defining and Defending Mexican Borders

After the wars of conquest in the sixteenth century, military conflict gave way to a colonial enterprise centered on political, social, and economic development that took root in central Mexican communities and cities and slowly extended outward. But as colonial rule ended with the wars of independence and early statehood in the nineteenth century, territorial defense and military matters



Figure 3. Plan, o mapa de la nobilissima ciudad de Valladolid, 1794

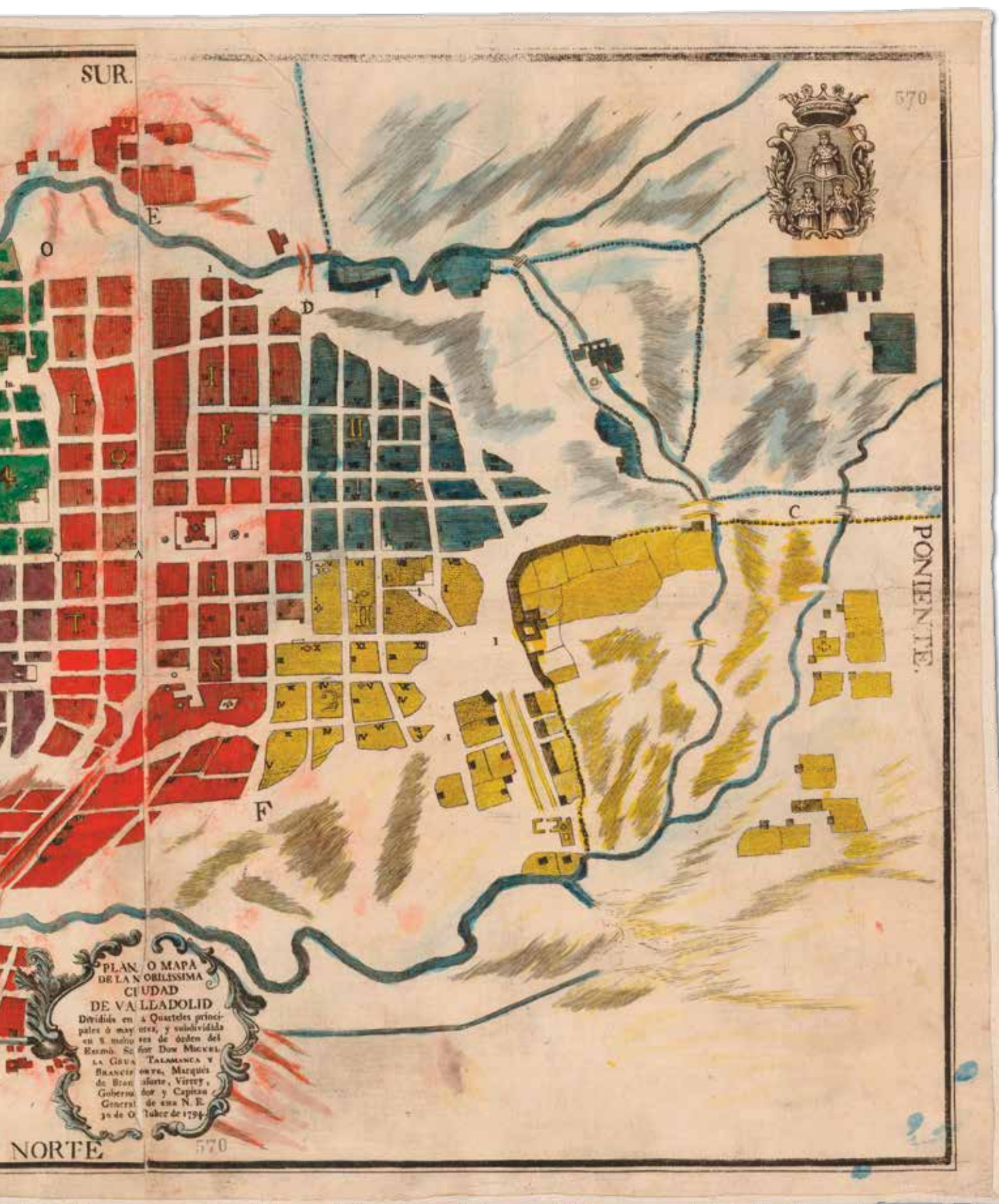




Figure 4. José Juan Sánchez, Map of Northeastern Mexico for General Reyes, Cadereyta, Nuevo León, 1840



Mapping Mexican History in the LLILAS Benson exhibition space, 2013

once again became central concerns. A new Mexican state confronted political instability and competing claims to its national territory, particularly along the sparsely settled northern borders.

Two nineteenth-century maps in the Benson Collection share a connection that helped shape modern Mexican history. Before maps were mass-printed, military draftsmen routinely copied field maps by hand. In 1840, General Mariano Arista, commander of the Mexican Army of the North, ordered Colonel José Juan Sánchez to copy a field map of northeastern Mexico (see Figure 4) for his second-in-command, General Isidro Reyes, from a larger original (which Sánchez, an accomplished draftsman, is also believed to

have helped create). Sánchez's map was a categorical improvement over existing maps of northeastern Mexico. It offered unprecedented detail and extreme accuracy in its identification of every settlement, path, landmark, and water source in its boundaries, reflecting the draftsman's deep knowledge of the territory. In addition to topographical features, the map recorded sites of conflict with both Comanches and Tamaulipas federalist rebels, and affirmed Mexico's historic claim to its northeastern border at the Nueces River—a claim in dispute with independent Texas at the time.

On May 8 and 9, 1847, in one of the first conflicts of the U.S.–Mexico war, General Zachary Taylor and his troops delivered a

humiliating defeat to General Arista at Resaca de la Palma, near present-day Brownsville, Texas. The U.S. troops overtook Arista's encampment and seized his personal belongings, including his papers and maps. One map in particular, the hand-drawn field map created by José Juan Sánchez and others, offered the U.S. army detailed topographical and travel information that far surpassed any knowledge they possessed—an intelligence coup that likely changed the course of the war.

A copy of the Mexican map quickly found its way to the East Coast, where mapmaker J.G. Bruff designed a version that printer John Disturnell published and sold (see Figure 5). This version of Arista's map along with

Disturnell's 1847 map of the United States of Mexico—known as the “treaty map” for its use in negotiating the peace in 1848—became two of the most important maps of the U.S.–Mexico war. Their quick production and success reflect public interest in the details of the war and mark the emergence of printed maps as a new mass medium.

New Audiences

Taken together, the maps featured in the Benson exhibition tell a story of Mexican territory as it was defined, redefined, and contested through three centuries. They also demonstrate the power of maps themselves to shape history and identity. This is the message that LLILAS Benson has shared with the local community through its exhibits during the

past year. *Mapping Mexican History* not only inaugurated the new LLILAS Benson gallery space but has also been integral to the launch of our collaborative public engagement program and joint effort to bring our resources to new audiences.

In October 2013, Relaciones Geográficas maps from the exhibition served as the basis for a highly successful K–16 educator workshop. Staff experts and LLILAS graduate students engaged with teachers from across Texas in an exploration of mapmaking as a source of community expression and a discussion of how maps can represent histories and points of view outside the bounds of traditional cartography. The enthusiasm generated by the workshop led to several onsite presentations in Austin schools this

spring to share Benson maps with local students and have them tell their own stories through hand-drawn maps they created. And this summer, *Mapping Mexican History* will travel to Austin’s Faulk Central Library as part of a new partnership that LLILAS Benson has initiated with Austin Public Libraries to share Benson exhibitions and host related events that further enhance the reach of our public programming to the local community. ☀

Julianne Gilland is curator at the Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection.

Figure 5. John Disturnell, A Correct Map of the Seat of War in Mexico, being a Copy of Gral. Arista's map taken at Resaca de la Palma . . . New York, 1847

