MAPS = Geographic Knowledge

“analysis of spatial representations based on maps produced over a period of approximately 120 years (1783-1902) in and about the territory of what is today Belize.”

source:
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British Honduras: The invention of a colonial territory
Mapping and spatial knowledge in the 19th century
Benedict Anderson (1991) brilliantly exposed the *mechanisms shaping national construction, emphasising the circulation of printed symbols that forge the collective imaginaries and configure the “communities” that identify themselves as a part of the nation.* These images include maps, which obviously have a preponderant place in that they provide material support for such constructions which are equally social, cultural and political (Dym & Offen, 2011). The analysis of the maps reveals the articulation between the imaginaries, the subjectivities and spatial practices. Maps inform us of the differential spatialities that together form the nation’s “geographic knowledge.”
This map shows the gradual arrival of European (BRITISH) Settlers moving West and South following the exploitation and depletion of forestry resources; this movement was then validated by the signature of a succession of international treaties at the end of the 18th century, finally offering the possibility of exploiting, then settling...
African and Maya Resistance to British and Spanish Colonisation

This settlement occurred in an already populated area, and throughout history it met with resistance from the Maya population. The sparse evidence that remains, relates more specifically to the 16th and 19th centuries (Figure 4), as attested by Maya attacks against woodcutters on the New River in 1788 and the march by the Maya led by Marcos Canul all the way to towns and villages: Qualm Hill in 1866, Corozal in 1870, and finally Orange Walk in 1872, where Canul is killed. Resistance also came from slaves, often fleeing to the Peten or Yucatan, and the mention in 1816 and 1820 of two “slave towns” in the Blue Mountains.

As a result, we find antagonistic visions expressed, even if they may solicit similar arguments (periphery, centre) and make reference to the same times, places and even events.

Other variants insist on Belize as a land of hospitality, usually but not always following forced migrations: starting in the 17th century with the Baymen; soon “accompanied” in the late 18th century by large numbers of slaves as well as refugees from the Mosquito Coast (British and their slaves, Creoles and Miskitos); in the 19th century Yucatecan (Maya and Mestizo) fleeing the Caste War; Garifuna following their exile from Saint Vincent; Lebanese, Palestinians, Jordanians as well as Chinese, Indian and Caribbean workers; and in the late 20th century, Salvadorans, Hondurans and Guatemalans fleeing war in their countries. Ironically, those missing from these narratives were the original Maya (Chol, Q’eqchi, Mopan), whose “disappearance” was said to have been due to decimation or historical displacement, mainly to Guatemala (Peten).
Interest in strategic resources of difficult access undoubtedly explains why spatial representation of the interior began taking shape after the signature of the Treaty of Versailles in 1783, and especially after the Convention of London in 1786, which for the first time recognised the right of the Settlers to extract mahogany from certain very clearly delimited mapped portions, thereby giving some stability to the British Settlement of the Bay of Honduras.

This map served for the Plenipotentiaries of both contracting Crowns to set out the District Project, or the English establishment agreed to in Article 6 of the Final Peace Treaty signed in Versailles on the 3rd of the month of September 1783. And so the respective Commissioners who will place Boundary stones in the intermediate pieces of Land, which will not be watered by the Rivers mentioned in this Article, can draw the Demarcation lines on the Directions and capitals indicated on this Map. It being required to proceed in all good faith, and fulfil the purpose of the Treaty according to the idea as set out by the exact name of the Rivers.
A series of three maps illustrates the process of gradual construction of land tenure knowledge. The first, from 1814, (Figures 9a and 9b) mentions Settlers’ names; the second, from 1819, (Figures 10a and 10b) shows a few lots or polygons; while the third, from 1859 (Figures 11a and 11b) presents almost a complete coverage of the territory.

The map of 1814 also features a crest already bearing the motto Sub Umbra Floreo (on the national flag today) and a red flag with an insert of an English flag in a corner above a tree (probably mahogany), a forerunner of the one figuring on the Belize flag today. Logging was indeed the territory’s raison d’être.

Analysed together, these maps reveal a fundamental paradigm shift in the history of land tenure from a personalised approach to a geographic rationale. In the country’s history of land ownership, this alternative—qualifying property by its owner or its location—would remain unresolved for many decades and partly explains the administrative and institutional complexity still evident today in this domain.
This map is of special value to us, since it is the first to reveal the beginnings of the system of land division still in use today. The morphology of the parcel plan is surprisingly geometric, apparently not affected by topographic features other than the rivers running along the lot.

The regulation of property law became increasingly necessary for the “landowners” and possessors in these post-slavery years of transition, between the abolition of the slave trade in 1807 and of slavery in 1833, to the actual liberation of slaves in 1838.

Indeed, whereas formerly slaves made up the bulk of private property, during this period real estate became the main source of individual wealth. Furthermore, the programmed liberation of the slaves would theoretically expand access to land grants for the newly freed population.

The competition for space had begun.