

# **Recuerdo de su Hijo: Evidence of Bilingualism and Culture Mixture in a U.S.-Mexico Border Town Cemetery**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Samuel Arnold had an English-language first and surname, but his mother's name was Spanish. He was born in Texas after it became part of the United States, and he died in Laredo, Texas, yet the inscription on his headstone was in Spanish. Because it included an English surname and a Spanish inscription, Arnold's headstone (Figure 1) represents an outlier in Laredo cemeteries. But it also represents the combination of Texan and North Mexican culture that makes Laredo distinct.



**Figure 1. Arnold Headstone, Calvary Catholic Cemetery, Laredo, Texas. Photo by Zach Lindsey.**

In this article, I explore the way borderlands culture affected cemetery planning and decorative elements from the late 1800s to the present day. Specifically, I look at the inscriptions, design elements, and placement of decorations on 105 graves from the Calvary Catholic Cemetery and the Laredo City Cemetery. The two adjacent cemeteries contain burials from the late 1800s to the present (City Cemetery n.d., Appendix 1).

My hypothesis is that though the frequency of English or Spanish may change over time, the two cemeteries will continue to represent a distinct border culture. In other words, the relatives of the people entombed in the cemeteries embrace culture traits and language usage patterns from both Mexican and U.S. American culture in a way that is inherently unique (Table 1).

**Table 1. Language use on all surveyed inscriptions.**

Spanish	English	English and Spanish	English and Hebrew	English, Spanish, and Hebrew	Spanish and Latin	Not Enough Information
41	39	5	3	1	1	15

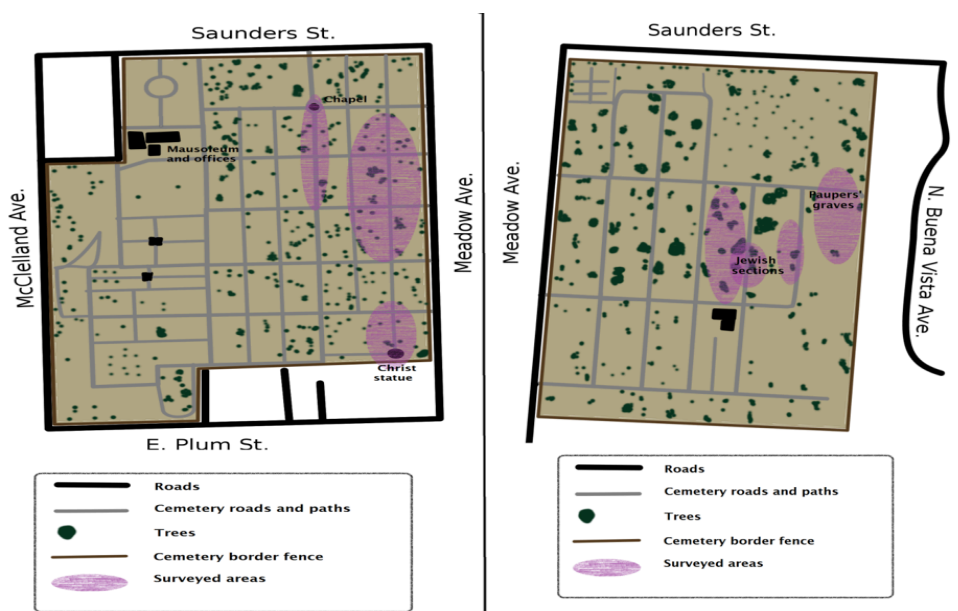
Below, I will describe the history of burials in Laredo especially as compared to similar cemeteries in Europe and the United States. After that, I will describe the theoretical assumptions underlying this article as well as my specific methodological approach. I will further present the data and note some trends. Finally, I will discuss the significance of the data and opportunities for further research.

## **BACKGROUND**

### ***Burial in Laredo***

As in Europe, prestigious colonial Laredoans were buried in San Agustin Church (City of Laredo n.d.). However, the church was rebuilt, and identities of the interred were lost. One may be Laredo's founder, Tomás Sánchez de la Barrera y de la Garza, but the location of Sánchez's resting place is disputed (City of Laredo n.d.). Sanchez's fate may be uncertain, but his descendant Tirza Garcia de Martin is in Laredo's Catholic cemetery in the first plot northwest of the chapel.

Laredo city government devoted land to the non-denominational cemetery and donated land for its Catholic neighbor in 1892 (City Cemetery n.d.) as city governments around the nation did (Mytum 2004b). The cemeteries (Figure 2) follow many North American and European cemetery trends. Across the country, for example, headstones rose to popularity in the 1800s and stayed popular. North Americans tend to prefer uprights and favor crosses over obelisks (Mytum 2004b:63), and Laredo follows suit (Table 2).



**Figure 2. Maps of the Calvary (left) and City (right) cemeteries. Renderings by Zach Lindsey from Google Maps and notes.**

**Table 2. Grave Headstone types by quantity.**

Freestanding Cross	Lawn	Ledger	Obelisk	Pillow	Sculpture	Slant	Square	Tablet	Upright
8	12	1	3	9	5	6	4	1	56

Like other late 19<sup>th</sup> century cemeteries (Mytum 2004b), the Laredo cemeteries are grid-like but offset by landscaping. Most burials face east-west, but some in the Catholic cemetery surround and face away from a Christ sculpture (Figure 3) or face roads or the cemetery chapel.

But Laredo's cemeteries buck some national trends. Nationally, ostentatious monuments were most popular in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Mytum 2004b:56; Cannon 1989:438). In Laredo, large, intricate plots such as the Jacaman plot continued into the 1970s.

Unlike many cemeteries, Laredo was not segregated by race until 1930 (City Cemetery n.d.). Religious segregation of Jews and Christians in the city cemetery and Catholics at Calvary continues (City Cemetery n.d.).

Also, footstones are rare in the burial sample, though they were popular nationally. If they existed, they may have been moved by groundskeepers or stolen, both common issues (Mytum 2004b).



**Figure 3. Architectural feature, Calvary Catholic Cemetery. Photo by Zach Lindsey.**

If wood memorials were popular in Laredo as in New Mexican *camposantos* (Mytum 2004b), most have disappeared. However, one lawn memorial was supplemented by a small wooden cross with fresh flowers and there was at least one other wooden cross without an inscription (and thus excluded from statistical analyses) in the Catholic section. One grave in the pauper's section was marked by an uninscribed cross of metal piping.

## **METHODS AND THEORY**

### ***Theoretical Assumptions***

For a number of reasons, studies of cemeteries need a multi-disciplinary approach. Mytum (2004a, 2004b) provides one of the most important starting points for this article, although he does not focus on language as much as I will. Still, some of Mytum's thoughts are worth considering.

For example, not everybody who dies is buried, not everybody who is buried gets a stone, and not every stone survives (Mytum 2004b). At the St. Margaret's Church cemetery in Leicester, 2 percent of burial records have associated stones (Cherryson et al. 2015:254). Today, many people choose cremation or other forms of body disposal (Mytum 2004b). Those who make demographic statements from cemetery profiles must tread carefully. In this sample, low-income Laredoans from the paupers' cemetery are especially poorly represented, as their graves were often marked with wood, which has since decayed.

For this reason, biographical studies help round out understandings of the population. For instance, when Raymond Martin moved to Laredo in the 1800s, he apparently intentionally adapted aspects of Laredo elite culture, even marrying a descendant of the city's founder (Piñon 1985). This perhaps explains why a French man's monument features a Spanish inscription. Biographical studies, however, can fail to notice broader trends. Processualism thus helps measure trends over time, while structuralist approaches examining "unconscious sets of rules" help understand mortuary culture (Mytum 2004b:8). Here, I combine these multiple lines of analysis to avoid unsubstantiated generalizations about the cemetery population.

But without outside evidence, a researcher should not assume, for example, that an image of the Virgen de Guadalupe means the interred person valued Mexican culture. However, Burke (2006:141) notes, "even...trivial objects may be made meaningful" when associated with death and mourning. In addition to other methods, I use a feminist study of familial relations in Laredo by Juárez and Salazar (2010) and Burke's comment to suggest key phrases in inscriptions represent social gender inequality.

Cemeteries are not exact portraits of a community. Through the lens of these theories, however, gravestone inscriptions in Laredo suggest an unequal but dynamic community where bilingualism defines culture and culture defines language.

### *Methodology*

I documented the Laredo City Cemetery and the Calvary Catholic Cemetery by exploring it on foot and taking notes and photographs. To promote randomness, I sometimes photographed in "blasts" while a friend drove the paved roads between stones. This allowed me to catch multiple stones. Other times, I documented individual graves from the sections highlighted on Figure 2.

Besides random segments, I documented gravestones in the Jewish and paupers' areas in the city cemetery and stones surrounding the statue of Christ or the chapel in the Catholic cemetery. To avoid over-emphasizing the proportion of Jewish burials, I include only four. I also excluded certain individuals in the Ortiz plot, which I discuss later.

From this information, I created a spreadsheet that contained 105 burials with a full list of data and a few problematic burials (too eroded to see names or dates). Despite these difficulties, sometimes these problematic burials still provide important information about Laredo culture. That said, stones without date of death, birthday, or age, and most of the name are not included in statistical analyses. Some problematic inscriptions appear in Appendix 2. While inscriptions are not the only subject of this article, they are a major focus, so I generally ignored undecorated kerbs. I performed t-tests on the resulting 105 burials.

The Laredo City Cemetery has more than 14,000 burials (Laredo Public Library n.d.). Reliable data for Calvary are not easily available; the website Findagrave.com lists about 6,000 (Find a Grave 2017). This means my set is only a small portion of the burials--less than 1 percent. This may limit the relevancy of the article's conclusions; a larger survey would help reinforce the information.

While I am comfortable with Spanish, this project was my first experience with Hebrew. Ronald Doctor's (2008) 'Reading Hebrew Matzevot' is my primary source for Hebrew transcription, but errors in interpretation are mine, not Doctor's.

### ***Gravestone Types***

This is a simple list of terminology for gravestones in Laredo, modified from Mytum (2004b), Cannon (1989), and Wells et al. (2006:14-15):

- Lawn: flat headstone marker that is level with the ground.
- Freestanding cross: headstone in the shape of a cross sculpture, with or without a base.
- Ledger: slab parallel to the coffin.
- Obelisk: any tall, pillar-like stone regardless of slope; Pillow: ground-level marker at a slight incline to facilitate reading the inscription.
- Sculpture: any representation, from an angel to an open book, freestanding or on a small base rather than mounted on an upright.
- Slant: marker slanted at forty-five degrees.
- Square monument: any square, not tablet-shaped, monument.
- Tablet: tablet without a base, rare in the Laredo cemeteries.
- Upright: tablet affixed to base, sometimes including sculptures.
- Companion: any type of marker with more than one name on the stone; most companions include husband and wife.

### **DATA ANALYSIS: WHAT THE STONES SAY ABOUT LAREDO**

#### ***From an Outlier to the Norm***

Samuel Arnold's headstone (see Figure 1) is an upright tablet with a cross sculpture. His name is on the crossbar. The inscription reads:

NACIO  
EN RIO GRANDE CITY TEX  
ABRIL 22 DE 1895  
FALLECIO  
EN LAREDO TEX.  
JULIO 29 DE 1916  
SUS PADRES, JAMES Y JUANA  
ARNOLD LE DEDICAN ESTE  
RECUERDO A SU MEMORIA.

("Born in Rio Grande City, Tx., April 22, 1895; died in Laredo, Tex., June 29, 1916. His parents, James and Juana Arnold, dedicate this memorial to his memory.")

The inclusion of a birth date and the lack of age are typical in English-language inscriptions, but the formulaic *recuerdo* phrase is typical of Spanish inscriptions in Laredo. This comfort with Spanish and English cultural trends suggests a bilingual family for whom Spanish

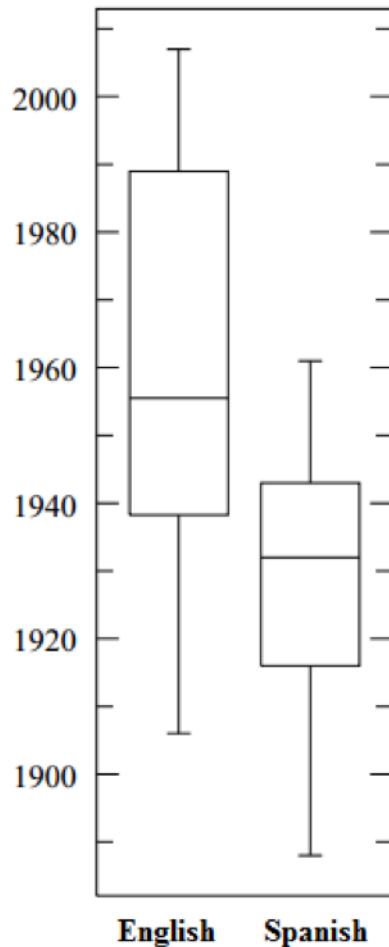
was the norm, at least in public discourse, but who followed some English conventions. In this sense, the language of Arnold's inscription is as important as the words.

Spanish-language inscriptions often include information missing from English-language neighbors, such as place of death or age of the deceased, but they often lack birthdates. Spanish-language inscriptions are often complex. Eighteen English-language inscriptions include information besides a name and date of birth and death. Twenty-one do not. All forty-one Spanish-language inscriptions include additional information. Religious iconography is also more common on Spanish headstones than on English stones.

Spanish disappeared on inscriptions as the 20<sup>th</sup> century progressed. There is a statistically-significant difference between years of death on Spanish and English headstones ( $p < 0.001$ , Figure 4). This is possibly related to commercialization and standardization in mortuary culture (Mytum 2004b; Juárez and Salazar 2010), because broader cultural trends suggest the use of Spanish as a language of identity and markers for important events is increasing among Mexican-American communities (Hidalgo 1995). There are also language differences by cemetery. Spanish graves are more common in the Catholic cemetery, the only place in the survey bilingual English-Spanish graves appeared (Table 3).

**Table 3. Language use on surveyed inscriptions by cemetery.**

	Laredo City Cemetery	City Cemetery Jewish section	Calvary Catholic Cemetery
English	16	-	23
Spanish	5	-	36
English and Spanish	-	-	13
English and Hebrew	-	3	-
English, Spanish, and Hebrew	-	4	-
Spanish and Latin	-	-	1
Not Enough Information	2	-	13



**Figure 4. English-only and Spanish-only inscriptions by year, box plot from resources by Kirkman (1996).**

English-language stones rarely include relational terms of people dedicating the memorial. Three English-language stones include dedications. For example, Rene Michael Ornes's parents, wife, and brothers are mentioned on his stone. Eighteen Spanish-language graves did not include similar dedicatory information, but twenty-three did, usually as part of a *recuerdo* phrase like 'RECUERDO DE SU HIJO,' "Memorial by his/her son."

Errors in English may suggest bilingual carvers. Julia Winslow died in 1938, when Spanish-language inscriptions were common. The inscription on her headstone includes 'ERECTED BY HIS [sic] LOVING SON E.B. WINSLOW.' Spanish possession does not distinguish between third person masculine and feminine; *his son* and *her son* would both gloss in Spanish as "su hijo." If the inscription is erroneous, not a reference to personal gender choice, perhaps the carver spoke Spanish as his or her first language. If carvers of Julie Winslow's headstone were English language learners, that would also explain the inscription on another Winslow stone, 'IN MEMORY OF HIS WIFE,' a direct translation of a *recuerdo* phrase rather than "erected by" or something similar.



Some errors are likely typographical and not signs of limited English proficiency or bilingualism. One inscription includes ‘AQUI LLACEN [sic] / LOS RESTOS’ instead of *yacen*. Also, the birth month of Cayetana S. de Santos is abbreviated as ‘NOB,’ not ‘NOV,’ for *Noviembre*/‘November.’ These issues are common in Spanish in general (see Carlin [2003:166] for example of ‘virtud’ abbreviated as *btud* from 16<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> centuries).

### ***Surnames and Language***

Surnames are usually related to inscription language, but Anglo-American and Spanish families intermarried in Laredo (Piñon 1985; Villegas de Magnón 1994). In Sweden, last names can often help to identify cultural background, and variations represent deviations “from the norm” (Reimers 1999:153). This is not necessarily true that Spanish names represent an association with Mexican culture and Anglo-American names represent associations with U.S. culture in Laredo.

However, 26 percent of people in the burial sample with Spanish surnames had English or English and Hebrew inscriptions, whereas only three people with non-Spanish surnames used Spanish inscriptions. This likely indicates that more people with Spanish surnames in Laredo have a relationship with English than Anglos with Spanish.

Eight stones with non-Spanish names do not have enough information to determine inscription language. These include members of the French-descendant Bruni family, and at least one Bruni family member—Consolacion Henry de Bruni—does have Spanish naming conventions on their stone.

### ***Catholicism and Spanish***

In Louisiana, Catholic gravestones featured religious iconography more often than non-Catholic stones (Mytum 2004b:140). This seems true in Laredo, where there was a small statistical correlation between use of religious symbolism and burial in the Catholic cemetery ( $p=0.035$ ). There was a stronger correlation between use of Spanish and use of religious symbolism ( $p<0.001$ ), and every stone in the Catholic cemetery with a Spanish inscription had religious symbolism.

Inscriptions reference Catholicism, although less frequently than at Balrothery, Ireland, another cemetery associated with Catholic burials (Mytum 2004a). Spanish inscriptions typically use ‘EPD’ or ‘DEP’ (*en paz descansa* or *descansa en paz*/“rest in peace”). One bilingual inscription used Spanish and ‘R.I.P.,’ likely signifying the Latin *requiescat in pace*, not English “rest in peace,” as the dates are Spanish. Also, the headstone date is old in the Catholic cemetery where older stones are primarily Spanish.

The tie between Spanish and religion might suggest Catholicism’s influence on border residents; the headstone of one man in the non-denominational cemetery includes a sculpture of Jesus pointing to the Sacred Heart. In other places, such as at Balrothery, this iconography is explicitly Catholic (Mytum 2004a). Even one Jewish person, Guillermo Novigrod, had what

might be considered Catholic influence on the Spanish portion of his inscription (see *Hebrew*, below).

Though Juárez recalls going to the Laredo cemeteries and placing decorations including candles, flowers, and rosaries as part of Catholic rituals (Juárez and Salazar 2010), few of these artifacts remain. Flowers are probably not more common in the Catholic cemetery than in the city cemetery ( $p=0.7$ ). Only one grave surveyed had a candle. The occupant's headstone had a Spanish inscription and a date of 1942. The memorial was from her children.

### ***Hebrew***

All four graves documented in the Jewish cemetery contained Hebrew and English. One grave, Guillermo Novigrod's, also included a Spanish inscription on the ledger.

Two inscriptions include "son of"/ "daughter of" constructions. The grave of Elizabeth Flores included 'אלישבע בת אברהם,' ALYShBA BT ABRHM, or "Elisheba, daughter of Abraham." Guillermo Novigrod's Hebrew name was 'נחשון,' "Nachson."

Two inscriptions featured 'פינ,' PAY, YUD, NUN, an abbreviation of *po nikbar/po nikman*, "here lies" (Doctor 2008). On infant Roxanne Novigrod's headstone, this abbreviation is incorporated into the Star of David.

The most common Hebrew inscription was 'תנצבה' – TAV, NUN, TZADEE, BET, HAY—an abbreviation of Samuel 25:29, "May his soul be bound up in the bond of eternal life." (Doctor 2008). All four Jewish graves featured תנצבה. But Novigrod's inscription perhaps shows the profound influence of Catholicism on Laredo; his inscription also includes 'DESCANSA EN PAZ,' the Spanish translation of *requiescat in pace*. This phrase comes from Catholic funeral prayers (Cusó Serra 2008:270).

### ***Spanish-English Bilingual Stones***

Five individuals including the previously-mentioned Guillermo Novigrod combine Spanish and English in some way on their memorials. Although this is a small number, in U.S.-Mexico border culture, the combination of Spanish and English is noteworthy as it suggests border residents' connection to both languages (i.e., Anzaldúa 2007).

Like most English inscriptions, bilingual stones do not include age or location of birth or death. Florinda Estrada's headstone includes a Spanish *recuerdo* phrase but English dates. She died in 1942 when most stones were in Spanish, but sometimes stones are placed years after death (Mytum 2004b). The companion stone of Aurora and Teodoro Juarez is bilingual because Teodoro, who died in 1948, has a Spanish inscription (including a *recuerdo* phrase) and Aurora, who died in 1989, has English-language dates and no *recuerdo* phrase. This stone's full-color ceramic tile image of the Virgen de Guadalupe is rare but not unique in the Catholic cemetery (Figure 5).





Figure 5. Bilingual stone. Photo by Zach Lindsey.

The Guajardo companion stone includes the Spanish ‘MERO LEON DE LA SIERRA’ (“The true lion of the forest”) for Pablo and ‘LA REINA DE SU FAMILIA’ (“The queen of her family”) for Paulina but English dates. The dates associated with these inscriptions (1994 and 1979) may explain the individualized inscriptions as examples of idiosyncraticism, a trend that has become more popular in recent years (Mytum 2004b). But the inscriptions match gendering practices found on other Spanish monuments: ‘Queen’ is more fanciful than *señora*, but still references family, whereas Pablo is described as lion-like.

### *Spanish and Gender*

European gravestone epitaphs are often gendered (Cherryson et al. 2015), as are Laredo’s. Of the 105 individuals analyzed, only two names were of ambiguous gender, and one of those was not Hispanic. ‘DE’ and a husband’s surname, ‘VDA’ (*viuda*/“widow”), ‘SRA’ (*señora*/“Mrs.”), ‘SRITA’ (*señorita*/“Miss”), ‘MRS,’ and the aforementioned ‘REINA’ (‘queen’), are all terms that imply relation by marriage, not blood, and appear on inscriptions. In total, twenty women, representing 39 percent of the female sample size, use at least one term. These phrases are more common on Spanish-language inscriptions. This is consistent with similar terms in Balrothery, where about 35 percent of inscriptions on women’s gravestones include marital associations (Mytum 2004a:19).

‘SR’ (*señor*/“sir”) is rare in the sample, but the one inscription using ‘SR’ also mentions a wife. If ‘SR’ represents assumption of marriage like ‘DE,’ ‘VDA,’ ‘SRA,’ ‘MRS,’ and ‘REINA’ do (an assumption ‘SRITA’ denies), only one of 52 males are defined by his relationship to a woman, and no men use *viudo* or its abbreviation.

‘VDA’ is particularly telling; mourning rituals in border culture were once heavily gendered (Juárez and Salazar 2010; Anzaldúa 2007). Even outside Laredo, Mytum (2004b:40) notes, “widows suffered the longest.” From 1916 to 1942, the marker of mourning followed four Laredo women to the grave. But gravestones are not biographies. Women with ‘VDA’ inscriptions were not necessarily victims of more domineering husbands than peers without such inscriptions. However, differences in usage among women and men suggest a social view of women as subjects of their husbands and defined by their families even if individual biographies may have differed. For example, tile flower iconography appears on a few graves. This iconography is rare, but exclusive to female graves; its connection to female burial is difficult to suggest from three examples, but two individuals have ‘DE’ inscriptions and the third has ‘SRA.’ Tile in general is rare in Laredo graves and only occurs in the mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century; two other monuments feature tile images of the Virgen de Guadalupe.

In the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, family members became distanced from the funeral process; this commercialization disrupted Mexican-American burial customs, but also may have relaxed gender norms (Juárez and Salazar 2010). As mourning culture required less direct participation, use of terms like ‘VDA’ decreased.



### *Large Plots*

In most of the United States, socioeconomic status is not related to “differential mortuary treatment” (Cannon 1989:437). Yet in Laredo, the largest plots belong to well-known families. The previously-mentioned Arnold plot, for example, is small, and its inhabitant was not well-known. Samuel Arnold’s father James possibly received an insurance claim from a railroad company (Cease 1912), but no accessible sources mention Samuel. The Martin family, on the other hand, is well-known enough to be the subject of a book on Laredo politics, *Patron Democracy* by Fernando Piñon (1985).

The three plots below represent some of Laredo’s most powerful families (Piñon 1985; Young 1994). If ostentatious graves were uncommon in the United States and the marks of actors in European cemeteries, if most wealthy individuals preferred subtlety as “masking ideology” (Cherryson et al. 2015:258), nobody informed Laredo’s upper class.

#### **Large plots: the Ortiz plot**

Merchant and landowner Juan Ortiz “had known Laredo when it belonged to Mexico, the Republic of Texas, the Confederate State of Texas and the State of Texas,” according to his obituary, which also notes his daughter married into the Puig family (Obituary Index 2017). Puigs still utilize the burial plot he occupies.

Of the large plots close to the chapel, Ortiz’s is the most visually complex. It has four distinct memorials surrounded by the type of kerb Mytum (2004b:127) might describe as “a real deterrent to entry.” The memorial to Juan Ortiz has a ledger with a stylized ‘IHS’ (Figure 6), a popular symbol in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, conveying either the first three letters of Jesus in Greek or the Latin phrase *In Hoc Signo*, “In His Service” (Mytum 2004b:139).



**Figure 6. The ‘IHS’ from Juan Ortiz’s ledger, drawing by Zach Lindsey.**

The ledger draws the eye to three stone stairs. The second stair features Ortiz’s surname. A well-preserved angel sculpture stands on the stair looking down at the ledger. On the third step, there is a slope-style memorial header with Ortiz’s name and a Spanish inscription (Appendix 3), but this is set to the side in favor of a large, rough-hewn cross.

Ortiz shares his plot with Isidro Ortiz, whose obelisk-style monument is eroded but portrays a hand holding an open book and fabric with tassels. Isidro died in 1888 at the age of 11, possibly a victim of smallpox (City Cemetery n.d.). The inscription on another monument is badly damaged; only fragments suggesting ‘ORTIZ,’ ‘NACIO,’ and ‘TEXAS’ remain.

The Ortiz plot also contains a monument to 15 Puigs, a number large enough to alter statistical information and thus was excluded from analyses. Two Puigs died after 2000, and there is space on the Puig monument for additional inscriptions. The Puig monument features a large stone cross. Beneath it, the family crest, a ‘P’ in a wreath with a falling ribbon, appears twice.

### **Large plots: the Zaffirini plot**

The Zaffirini family is still prominent in Laredo; one member, Judith, is a Texas State Senator as of 2020, and she has served more than 30 years in the position. The family plot appears to be a large-scale version of a typical plot. The stone is upright with a freestanding cross sculpture on top and a ledger. Like Ortiz’s ledger, the cross contains ‘IHS,’ but less stylized. The tablet inscription is ‘GRATITUD / ZAFFIRINI.’ *Gratitud* is Spanish for ‘gratitude.’ Individual names are listed on the ledger with attention to capitalization. The inscriptions are in Spanish, and a star stands for *nacio*/‘born’ and a cross stands for *fallecio*/‘died.’ Only one other stone in the sample, also in the Catholic cemetery, utilizes this custom.

Regardless of order of death in European-inspired burials, the family’s patriarch is typically listed first (Cherryson et al. 2015; Mytum 2004b). Miguel Cantu died in 1892 and Rodolfo Zaffirini in 1952. The Cantu family was undoubtedly important for anchoring the Zaffirini name to the border region, but the famous name is Zaffirini; thus, Rodolfo comes first on the inscription.

The inscription also includes location of birth and death. Four family members died in Laredo, listed as Laredo, Tex. Three family members were born in Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas. But the city is named ‘Laredo, Mex,’ even on the birthdates listed after the two cities on the banks of the Rio Grande became permanently distinct--in other words, even after it became “Nuevo Laredo,” not just the part of Laredo across the river. It is perhaps a reference to the unity of families with members on both sides of the river, as demonstrated by writers such as Leonor Villegas de Magnón (1994).

### **Large plots: the Martin plot**

Raymond and Tirza, the French man and South Texan woman whose marriage formed a political dynasty, have a companion headstone near the chapel. Despite being the oldest interments with flowers, the inscription of Raymond Martin’s name is heavily worn. The plot is less ostentatious than the other large plots, but a close look reveals intricate plant carvings, some of the most detailed columns in the cemetery, and an organic floriated cross as a cap. This iconography may reference the idealized past of Europe with its neo-Gothic and neo-Grecian stylizations (Holtorf and Williams 2010). “Inscribed kerbs are rare” (Mytum 2004b:126) in the

United States, but the Martins have their surname inscribed on their otherwise-simple kerb, perhaps reflecting Raymond's European ancestry.

Many large-scale graves contain multiple family members, but the Martin plot includes only Raymond and Tirza. The Raymond/Tirza marriage is an example of Laredo elitism: an outsider from France married an insider from the oldest family in Laredo in the late 1800s, and the resulting power couple spawned a political dynasty lasting until the mayoral election of 1978 (Piñon 1985). The plot fits Parker-Pearson's masking ideology (Cherryson et al. 2015) more than other large monuments; while it seems simpler than its neighbors, its proximity to the chapel and the detailed engravings only apparent close-up suggest the Martin memorial was expensive.

## CONCLUSIONS

### *Suggestions for further research*

The most important aspect of the Laredo cemeteries overlooked in this study was social race. African-Americans and Asians are minorities in Laredo and thus hidden in much of the research about the region. Because this study focused on bilingualism among the general cemetery population and contained such a small percentage of the total cemetery, both of these minority groups are overlooked.

Future studies, then, should determine how burials of African-Americans and Asians vary from observed trends such as Spanish usage and Catholic religious iconography. It is also worth considering if African-Americans continue to be segregated in the cemetery, whether by choice or social pressure, without laws requiring it. Examining the often-forgotten evidence of African-Americans and Asian-Americans in the border region should be a high priority.

In this article, I also did not discuss layout of family plots, an important aspect of cemetery design. However, while studying family plot layout compared to the use of 'VDA' and other gendered terms would be valuable, I believe the focus on language over aspects such as layouts and kerbs is important to a study of Laredo cemeteries. For example, Spanish usage among specific social networks such as the Woodmen of the World members or the Sociedad de Obreros could reveal other important trends in bilingualism. Unfortunately, there are few surviving stones in the pauper's graveyard, but an in-depth study of this region may help to show the relation between language and class dynamics in the cemetery as well.

### *Change in Laredo*

Many cultures have two or more languages, and the use of these languages in formal or informal contexts can greatly change the cultural value of those languages (Crystal 1965). Because a gravestone uses a certain type of formalized language, it can reflect a limited amount of personal information. But Laredo's stones in general indicate a changing, conflicting, relationship between Laredo residents and language, especially in mortuary culture.

Most importantly, Spanish-language inscriptions have grown less common with time, but Spanish surnames have not. This may suggest an Anglicization of Laredo as the influence of

United States policies grows on the border town; it may also show the standardization of mortuary culture across the nation (Juárez and Salazar 2010). Yet elements of Mexican culture, especially Catholic iconography, continue to dominate the cemeteries aesthetically, and some traits, such as a love of ostentatious family plots by Laredo's wealthiest, seem to come from neither Mexican nor U.S. mortuary culture. Bilingualism (the mark of a border culture), English stylistic decisions, and Spanish religious expressions all suggest the same thing about Laredo gravestones that Anzaldúa (2007:100) said of the living individuals on the border: they are "[c]radled in one culture, sandwiched between two cultures, straddling all three cultures and their value systems."

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**APPENDIX 1,**  
**LAREDO CITY CEMETERY TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION**  
**MARKER TRANSCRIPT**

The earliest burial grounds in Laredo were known as *camposantos* (saints' fields) by Spanish settlers. Laredo's first *camposanto* was probably the one at San Agustin church: in 1892 the Laredo City Council decreed that the cemeteries then in use were full. The city dedicated four blocks for a burial ground, and half was conveyed to the local bishop for use of the Catholic Church.

The original plan included a Jewish section and a potters' field for indigent citizens. Large private plots were set aside for local church groups, such as the Ladies' Guild of Christ Episcopal Church, and for fraternal, civic, and labor organizations including *mutualistas*, Mexican-American benevolent groups essential to the Mexican labor movement in the United States. A deadly smallpox epidemic in 1898-1899 caused the daily burials of small children and the closure of public places such as churches and schools.

In 1926, bodies from an earlier city cemetery on Scott Street were reinterred here and at the Catholic Calvary Cemetery. By the 1930s, an African American section and an infants' section had been added. Through the 1950s, Laredo citizens honored the Mexican custom of *Dia de Los Muertos* (day of the dead), also known as All Souls' Day, with the eating and offering of food and cemetery decoration. A veteran's section was added in 1974, and the cemetery continued to grow throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Grave decoration and funerary art reflect Mexican-American traditions. The lack of formal shrubbery and landscaping is offset by highly elaborate floral displays. The Laredo City Cemetery is a chronicle of the city's ethnic and religious diversity.

## APPENDIX 2, PROBLEMATIC INSCRIPTIONS OF NOTE

### *Problematic Inscription 1: Shannon?*

Poem inscription includes the name Shannon, but no other information about the interred. Find-a-Grave lists it as Shannon Jordan, 1968-1991. If correct, the poem, which I could not find online, was presumably written by Jordan herself.

There is a magic power  
stronger than time  
which shall keep us together  
no matter how far we wander  
into dark forests and  
drift upon distant and stormy seas.  
It lies deep within our hearts,  
eternally feeding,  
eternally growing.  
Ever does it strengthen us,  
never can it be taken from us,  
and never can it die.  
You will find me  
in the light of the moon,  
in the place of prayer,  
above the field of dreams,  
among the works of man,  
and the ancient trees.  
Shannon

### *Problematic Inscription 2: Vidala, viuda de Patiño?*

VDA phrase, location of birth, 'RECUERDO' phrase, but the date of death is obscured.

VIDALA VDA DE PATIÑO  
NACIO EN CRUILLAS  
TAMAULIPAS MEXICO  
EL AÑO DE 1870  
FALLECIO EN  
DE 191\*  
UN RECUERDO DE  
SUS HIJAS

***Problematic Inscription 3: Andrea S. Mon\*?***

EPD, dates and surname are obscured.

ANDREA S. MON\*  
FALLECIO EL DIA 16 DE  
NO \* DE \*  
\*  
EPD

**APPENDIX 3,**  
**JUAN ORTIZ INSCRIPTION AND TRANSLATION**

JUAN ORTIZ  
NACIO EL DIA  
24 DE NOVIEMBRE DE 1825  
FALLECIO EL DIA  
24 DE ENERO DE 1898  
A LA EDAD DE 72 AÑOS 2 MESES.  
SUS HIJOS CONSAGRAN ESTE RECUERDO A SU  
MEMORIA Y RUEGAN AL SER SUPREMO POR  
EL ETERNO DESCANSO DE SU ALMA EN LA  
MANSION DE LOS JUSTOS.

“His children consecrate this memorial in his memory and pray to the Supreme Being that his soul rest eternally in the mansion of the just.”