

The Yale University Collection of Latin American Manuscripts: A Researcher's Overview

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One of the finest collections of early Latin American manuscripts in the United States, the Yale University Collection of Latin American Manuscripts has remained relatively unknown to scholars outside the Yale community. Now, however, with the publication of part of this collection by Primary Source Microfilm, Yale's many treasures of original and often unique historical documents from Latin America will be easily available to scholars around the world. Although materials from colonial Peru form one of the greatest strengths of the collection, the collection also includes significant documents from Mexico, Central America, Spain, and the regions covered by present-day Colombia, Bolivia, Argentina, and Paraguay.

This rich assemblage of primary documents presents more research possibilities than can be enumerated fully here. This essay will discuss the general themes covered by the materials in different geographical areas and time periods while drawing attention to some of the more significant manuscripts. Publication of this portion of the Yale University Collection of Latin American Manuscripts will allow both graduate students and undergraduates to conduct original archival research among largely unpublished manuscripts. Some of the documents may provide invaluable assistance in a research paper. Other primary sources may serve as the basis of a major research project on a variety of Mexican and South American topics, such as native culture, church history, economics, geography, art history, literature, and the wars of independence.

South America

There are a total of seventy-four manuscript volumes from South America in Yale's collection. Most of these volumes contain a single text, but some consist of various texts bound together. Forty-eight volumes contain original manuscripts from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries; the remaining twenty-six volumes consist of original manuscripts from nineteenth-century South America.

Numerous topics, such as Catholic Church history, native cultures, economics, mining, and politics are represented by the South American documents. Documents about church history in the collection include original inventories of church decorations and furnishings, account books of religious orders and the Cathedral of Lima, books of legislation, letters, and so forth. A 1773 manuscript by Francisco Antonio Gonzalez discusses the clergy of Cuzco, and an 1809 volume by the Brotherhood of the Holy Trinity describes the goals and ideals of that religious society. This latter manuscript contains a beautifully painted frontispiece. There are also numerous manuscripts concerning the Jesuits in Peru. These include a lengthy Inquisition report dated 1731, detailing the alleged "crimes" of the Jesuits in Paraguay and urging that the Society be expelled from South America. The Peruvian Inquisition's hostility to the Jesuits can be seen in a 1736 manuscript that recounts an auto-da-fé held in Lima. The Inquisition burned in effigy Father Juan Francisco de Ulloa, a Jesuit missionary in Chile who had died in 1710. Other manuscripts reveal the economic ramifications of the Jesuit expulsion from South America. For example, one (540 pages), from 1771 describes the income from Jesuit missions throughout South America; another (115 pages), from 1788, describes the wealth of the Jesuit haciendas in the Cuzco region.

The Yale collection also contains numerous documents that provide information about the lives of native peoples in South America. There are several original sixteenth-century handwritten account books recording Indian tribute payments in the Cuzco area. Two important and unknown eighteenth-century manuscripts, the Expediente sobre usurpación de tierras ... de los indios de Late y de la Rinconada (1783) and Expediente original [del] Convento de la Merced ... contra los indios del pueblo de Miraflores (1782–84), detail the original land and water rights of three Indian communities near Lima. The religion and culture of native peoples in Peru is discussed in two eighteenth-century manuscripts, one titled Manifiesto de los agravios ... que padecen los indios del Peru and one by Miguel de Cebrian, Estado actual del catolicismo ... de los naturales del Peru (1787). Among other materials concerning native peoples are nineteenth-century copies of chronicles about the Incas. One of these, Books I and II of the Memorias

antiguas historiales del Peru by Fernando de Montesinos, is the only accurate copy in existence of the now lost 1642 original manuscript.

The subjects of economics and politics are also well-represented in the Yale collection. There are isolated original documents about economic affairs from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and many more from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. For example, there is a 700-page collection of original documents dating from 1787 to 88 concerning shoemakers, tanners, and the leather industry in Lima. Many documents treat mining in the Andes. There are also viceregal reports, volumes of laws passed by the Royal Audience of Lima, original essays, and discussions of the economic state of the viceregal government in the eighteenth century. Among the various nineteenth-century manuscripts is one volume of original, signed letters from heroes of the South American wars of independence, including Simón Bolívar, Bernardo O'Higgins, Antonio Sucre, and José de San Martín. The collection also owns an unpublished commonplace book by José de San Martín from 1842.

Some of the South American materials in the collection fall outside any of the categories discussed. For instance, there is an original, unpublished 1677 volume of poetry by several Mercedarian friars in Lima. One particularly beautiful and valuable manuscript is a volume by José Nacio Pombo from 1794 describing Peruvian flora; this document contains many fine colored drawings of native Peruvian plants. A manuscript describing the province of Trujillo (c. 1770) by the noted Peruvian intellectual Miguel Feyjoo de Sosa is yet another example of the worthwhile finds present in this collection. The varied and important manuscripts are of considerable interest to scholars of South America.

Mexico and Central America

There are a total of fifty-one manuscript volumes concerning Mexico and Central America in this portion of the Yale University Collection of Latin American Manuscripts. Although many of these volumes contain a single text, others include multiple documents. Twenty-eight volumes consist of texts from the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries, and the rest contain nineteenth-century manuscripts.

The topics covered by the Mexican and Central American manuscripts include economics and political history, church history, and native culture. There are numerous original texts concerning the mining industry in New Spain; for example, the oldest Mexican manuscript in the collection is an original, signed essay by Agustín de Sotomayor on silver mining (1573). Many of the Mexican volumes concern viceregal policy on economic affairs, such as laws about the royal customs house or the Casa de Moneda. There are also numerous volumes of royal decrees from the late seventeenth through the early nineteenth centuries. Political matters are addressed directly in various legal texts, letters, and essays; for instance, one volume contains original, unpublished correspondence of General Agustín de Iturbide, the self-proclaimed emperor of Mexico (1822-23). Other political documents include an original essay dating to 1816 about demonstrations at Palmilla, containing sonnets and a large watercolor of Palmilla.

The importance of the Mexican manuscripts is not limited to economic and political matters. There are numerous individual documents relating to the Roman Catholic Church in Mexico as well. For example, one volume contains correspondence and papers dating to 1649 from the bishop of Puebla, Juan Palafox y Mendoza. A later volume, from 1746, consists of a Franciscan account of missionary work in Sonora, New Spain. In addition to these and other manuscripts, there are valuable materials about native Mesoamerican culture. One volume contains a grammar of Quiché Mayan written in 1774 and used by Brasseur de Bourbourg in his 1862 work on Mayan languages. An essay from 1850 by Henri Adriene Longperiet details the Mexican and Peruvian antiquities exhibited at the Louvre that year. In a manuscript written in 1773, Eusebio Ventura Beleña discusses the devastation of the native and Creole population in Guatemala caused by a recent earthquake; a large eighteenth-century watercolor map of Guatemala accompanies this text. There are other documents about native Mesoamerican peoples, including several nineteenth-century copies of earlier Mesoamerican chronicles. Although the Mexican materials do not form the largest portion of the Yale collection, they include many documents of significance to scholars.

Spain

All of the thirty-seven volumes from Spain contain materials from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries. Twenty-two Spanish volumes consist of copies of royal decrees on different aspects of the administration of the Spanish colonies. The remaining manuscripts include essays on the role of the monarchy, a skillfully and profusely illustrated emblem book by Juan de Mora (c. 1600), and a number of manuscripts from the Spanish Inquisition and from the early Jesuits in Spain. The genealogy of the Peñaredonda family, written by Juan Alfonso del Guerra y Sandoval in 1724, boasts many original paintings of Spanish coats-of-arms along with one very fine, full-sized painting of the Virgin of the Assumption.

Finally, the Yale collection possesses twenty-two volumes of manuscripts that cannot be assigned to a particular geographic area in the Hispanic world without further research. Seven volumes are from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries and include four volumes containing a great diversity of documents. These include such assorted texts as sermons, saints' lives, and descriptions of court cases. The other general volumes from this period treat government affairs and the Catholic Church. Mining, legal cases, travel narratives, military documents, essays, poetry, and other subjects are represented in the remaining volumes of nineteenth-century manuscripts.

Conclusion

The variety of documents in the Yale University Collection of Latin American Manuscripts is quite extraordinary, spanning four centuries from Mexico to Paraguay and covering topics from mining to missions. Many of the manuscripts are original and unpublished and thus can serve as the basis for research projects possible only through this collection. Years ago, as a graduate student at Yale, I found the manuscripts in this collection to be an invaluable resource for my dissertation research on early Jesuit missions in Peru. Now, as I am preparing a critical edition of the Inca chronicles of Fernando de Montesinos, the Yale collection continues to provide me with unique and irreplaceable sources of information. Primary Source Microfilm is to be congratulated for publishing these documents in a format that will allow them to be accessed easily by scholars around the world.