

LOOKING AFTER THE BIBLIOGRAPHIC HERITAGE OF MEXICO

Rosa María Fernandez de Zamora
Coordinator
National Library of Mexico
UNAM
rmfe@servidor.unam.mx

A glance at its origins. During the three centuries of the Spanish colonial period few countries of the New Continent had such a richness of books as the New Spain. The first books were brought to Mexico by the conquerors.. The mendicant orders monks, Franciscans, Dominicans and Augustinians, came along with new ideas and with the books that supported them.

The Renaissance, which came to Mexico under the influence of Erasmus, More, Vives, the Italian poetry and the classic authors, was spread by Fray Juan de Zumarraga, the first Mexico's bishop, as well as by the University professors, the erudite monks and the Jesuits in their colleges. As a result, a new medieval and renaissance community emerged, blended with the traits of the Mexican indigenous reality. The books of that period, both Mexican and European, held in the libraries all over the country, are witnesses of the cultural blend that ruled the colonial period in Mexico.

Through the XVI century, valuable libraries began to be established, such as the ones created in the Mexico's Cathedral, in the Colegio de Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco (Holy Cross of Tlatelolco College), and Fray Juan de Zumarraga's own library. The monastic libraries were created because of the need of the monks to provide their monasteries with the fundamental books, both for their own studies and for their instruction responsibilities. The most relevant libraries were those established by the Franciscans, the Augustinians and Dominicans. Later on, the Jesuits started to form their college libraries, in which they lectured on theology, law, and Latin language. Real y Pontificia Universidad de Mexico

No. Lat. 000767

No. Adq. _____

No. Sist. _____

Tipo de Adq. Donación

Fecha 30. Sept 2011



(The Royal and Pontifical University of Mexico) required the printing of university texts since 1554.

Accordingly, the creation of a printing house in the New Spain was a natural consequence, specially in the time when the book already had a great power and influence in the Western world. The very noble, loyal and great city of Mexico had the privilege of being the seat of the first printing house established in order to conquer the New World. The history of this city is closely related with the printed documents. During 43 years, it was the only city in the American Continent where books were printed.

Charles V granted Fray Juan de Zumarraga the right to establish the printing house in 1539, supported by the viceroy Don Antonio de Mendoza, thus the typographic workshop of Juan Cromberger, operated by the Italian Juan Pablos, started its activities with the printing of the *Breve y mas compendiosa doctrina christiana en lengua mexicana y castellana*, of which no testimony remains up to now. The first books that emerged from this printing house, and those which appeared afterwards, were oriented to provide the required readings for the evangelization of Indians, as well as for the Spanish language teaching, and for the prayers or pious books. This is how the first tools for the evangelization were created. The history mentions, not lacking of admiration, the great ability of the monks to learn so rapidly the Indian languages, as well as of the Mexicans to learn the Spanish language, a fact that made possible the writing of the first grammars and vocabularies of the New World's languages. Thus, doctrines, catechisms, and lexicons were printed, aimed both for the religion and the language instruction, and therefore the first linguistic studies appeared, providing additionally a written version of the native languages. An estimation of 38 printed documents were addressed to Indian languages: *"the printed works in vernacular languages of Mexico constitute the big innovation, the highest contribution to a world in*

*which the books written in European languages were finding their way between the Latin and Greek classics”*¹

Antonio de Espinosa, Pedro Ocharte, Pedro Balli, Antonio Ricardo, Melchor and Luis Ocharte, and Enrico Martínez, the XVI century printers who became the successors of Juan Pablos, printed not only religious books, but also medicine, law and music textbooks, as well as those devoted to the study at the University and in other existing colleges. The number of books produced in the New Spain printing houses in the XVI century is not clearly known, but nearly 200 are mentioned.

Another example of the importance of these books for the bibliographic and cultural history of the American Continent, is provided by Lota M. Spell, a researcher of the history of music, in Austin, who mentions that in Mexico City, considered the heart of the cultural life of North America at that time, ten books were published (from 1556 to 1604) which included printed music, the greatest part of it in red and black inks, among which are the *Ordinarium sacri ordinis* (1556), the *Missale Romanum Ordinarium* (1561), the *Graduale dominicale* (1576), considered the most precious and beautiful, now is preserved at the National Library of Mexico, finally the *Liber in quattor passionibus*, the only musical printed book of the XVII century. These books, “of which no printer could be ashamed of”, constitute the first printed music books in the American Continent.²

In the same way, four medicine books can be mentioned; the first being the *Opera Medicinalia* (1570), the ones on legislation, *Ordenanzas y compilación de leyes* (1548), and the academic textbooks *Physica speculativa* and *Dialectica resolutio* (1554) for the Royal and Pontifical University - whose 450 anniversary of its establishment will be commemorated next September 21st - all of them are the first books in their field printed in the New World.

In the following centuries, the colonial society changed and “was transformed in an era of wealth and splendour, of luxury and extravagance for the creoles who, of course, already were proud of their own identity, and who believed that not everything was due to Spain. The New Spain was their country, and they considered it honorable and beautiful. They had built an original culture, extravagant in its pomp and solemnity, in its gallantry, in and its exquisite art and gastronomy, It was at the same time a pious and a highly joyful society”³ This society had already the University and other colleges, where the young creoles attended for their studies.

The society's interests are shown in the printed works of the XVII and XVIII centuries, and also in the European books that formed the colonial libraries. The outstanding libraries of that period were the Palafoxiana Library, the Turriana Library, and the one at the San Carlos Academy, this one being the first art library in Mexico.

A recent book published by the National Autonomous University of Mexico: *Memoria de Mexico y del Mundo: el Fondo Reservado de la Biblioteca Nacional* confirms the above mentioned and adds that during the XVII century, a new atmosphere revitalized the New Spain, when a golden era of material prosperity began to appear, which undoubtedly stimulated the cultural advancement of the most privileged citizens (Spaniards and creoles)... The poems of the *Grandeza Mexicana* of Bernardo de Balbuena, describe with detailed and glorified praise a city that already believed that could be compared with the most famous metropolis. Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz and Carlos de Sigüenza y Gongora flourished in this century.

Also along that century, the importance of women in the printing industry and in the book stores businesses was relevant, being the widows of Juan de Ribera and Bernardo de

Calderon, among others, who made possible the operation of the printing houses when their husbands died.⁴

Francisco Javier Clavijero, Francisco Javier Alegre, Manuel Fabri, Juan Luis Maneiro, together with other distinguished Jesuits, flourished in the XVIII century, the New Spain golden age. The Bourbon reforms also arrived to the New Spain, and are evident, among other fields, in science with the famous Jose Ignacio Bartolache, Miguel Vanegas, Jose Antonio Alzate, who enlightened the mathematics, the medicine, the zoology, the mining, the metallurgy, the physics, etc. Also, royal laws were published to guarantee the order and the good government practices, as well as linguistic works and the first printed bibliography of the New World, the *Bibliotheca Mexicana* by Juan José de Eguiara y Eguren. Books on archaeology and history of Mexico began to be published, and the University of Mexico continued to produce and to publish a great number of books.

The *Gazetas de Mexico* and the *Mercurio Volante* constitute the first expression of the Mexican journalism, which served the creoles to divulge their studies and knowledge. The *Calendarios*, highly popular during the following century, began to be published.

“Transcendent century, heir of traditions and contents revitalizer, the XVIII century makes possible the great national events of the XIX century, in many ways preparing them”⁵

Considering such a bibliographic richness, we might ask ourselves:

How many books were published during those centuries of the viceroyalty in the New Spain?

The accurate figure is unknown, but it is possible to assert that Mexico was, in the New Continent, the country with the highest number of printed documents.

The distinguished Mexican bibliographers Joaquín García Icazbalceta, Jose de Paula Andrade, and Nicolas Leon, in their well known bibliographic works, recorded the

production during the three centuries of the colonial period. This bibliographic work was compiled and enlarged by Jose Toribio Medina in his work *La imprenta en Mexico, 1539-1821*.

MEXICAN BIBLIOGRAPHIC PRODUCTION

1539-1821

| CENTURY | TITLES | WORK | AUTHOR |
|---------------|--------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| XVI century | 118 | Bibliografía Mexicana del Siglo XVI. | J. García Icazbalceta |
| | 179 | 2 ed. 1954 Millares Carlo | |
| XVII century | 1394 | Ensayo Bibliográfico del S. XVII | V.P. Andrade |
| XVIII century | 4000 | Bibliografía Mexicana del Siglo XVIII | Nicolás León |
| | 12412 | La imprenta en México, 1539-1821 | J. T. Medina |
| | 2864 | La imprenta en Puebla, 1620-1821 | J.T. Medina |

The history of the printing houses in Mexico, its development and dissemination, is a fascinating one, because in spite of the adverse conditions which they faced, especially due to the lack of paper, ink and tools, they were able to become stronger, and be a vehicle for the cultural collaboration with other countries. As a result, an exchange of printing houses and books was carried out with other Mexican cities, and also with other countries of the American Continent and with Spain.⁶

As shown above, the bibliographic heritage of Mexico is vast, varied and very rich, so that its preservation and dissemination is a big task.

Its destination. Which has been the destination of these Mexican printed works of the colonial period? Where are they?

61060

400282

The New Spain printed works are scattered among all kinds of libraries in Mexico, as well as in European libraries, in those of other Latin American countries, and in the United States.

From the second half of the XIX century, bibliophiles all over the world turned their attention to the Mexican printed works, and began their acquisition, since they were considered high-valued bibliographic works.

The answer to these questions is a challenge, which can only be faced by a changing attitude towards these patrimonial collections, based fundamentally on their evaluation and on a higher appraisal of this heritage, many times forgotten. This new attitude must lead to a better knowledge of this patrimony, and to struggle for its preservation, dissemination and availability.

In order to achieve the above, the Mexican libraries are working in the creation of a data base with the function of :

- a national union catalog of the bibliographic heritage
- a reference source for researchers and for the general public
- a basis for the development of other types of catalogs
- the basis for the normalization of the records in MARC format, AACR and ISBD(A) standards
- an access to patrimonial documents by digital means

With the entry into the cooperation world, and with the use of new technologies, the bibliographic heritage would no longer be "less visible" and elitist, and it could be made available, by means of substitution documents, to all those interested in it.

The research work I began last year in order to track down the Mexican printed works of the XVI century in Mexican and in foreign libraries, constitutes a first approach to this union catalog of the national heritage.

Up to now, 125 titles of original books and pamphlets have been located, and those libraries holding the highest number of documents are: the Biblioteca Cervantina of the Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey (Technological and Higher Studies Institute of Monterrey), Monterrey Campus, the Benson Library of the University of Texas at Austin, and the New York Public Library.

It certainly has not been an easy task, since several Mexican libraries have not yet catalogued these ancient documents, and foreign libraries not always have the records of these books on-line. The search for Mexican books of the XVII and XVIII centuries remains as a pending task.

The book has been present throughout our history; and today, with the new electronic products and the information technologies may allow a better approximation and knowledge of the valuable Mexican bibliographic heritage, so it may take the place it deserves within the information society, and also as a part of the cultural heritage of humanity.

Boston, August 21st, 2001

References

- ¹ A. Hernandez de Leon Portilla. Los evangelizadores del siglo XVI y sus impresos. *Mexico en el Tiempo*, No. 29, 1999, p. 20
- ² Lota M. Spell, The First Music-Books Printed in America. New York, Schirmer Inc, 19??, 6p. Illus.
- ³ Sara Sefchovich, *La suerte de la consorte...* Mexico: Oceano, 1999, p.41
- ⁴ José Pascual Buxo. Impresos e impresores mexicanos del siglo XVII. *Memoria de Mexico y el mundo: el Fondo Reservado de la Biblioteca Nacional de Mexico*. Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Mexico, 2001. P.48-75
- ⁵ Alejandro Gonzalez Acosta. Las numerosas luces de la razon. *Memoria de Mexico...* p. 80-93
- ⁶ R. M. Fernandez de Zamora and Clara Budnik. Looking after the Bibliographical Heritage of Latin America. *Alexandria*, 13(1), 2001, p. 27-34.