THE RENAISSANCE OF OAXACA CITY'S HISTORICAL ARCHIVES*

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Abstract: This research note is meant to serve as a working tool for scholars interested in pursuing archival investigations in Oaxaca City. Over the last fifteen years, the city has experienced a cultural renaissance characterized by renovation of its colonial architectural treasures and the establishment of institutions dedicated to the arts. This cultural renewal has provided the context for an equally impressive reinvigoration of the city's archives, thanks to the commitment of local historians, social scientists, and archivists to rescuing and cataloguing a wealth of historical documentation. To encourage and facilitate research, we provide a summary of the holdings and contact information for ten archives in addition to a select bibliography of secondary sources.

The city of Oaxaca's archives boast a remarkable range of written, pictorial, and photographic genres. Given these documentary treasures and the physical presence of centuries past at Monte Albán, in the Dominican monasteries of the Mixteca, and in the Porfirian architecture of the capital city, it is surprising that the city of Oaxaca has not attracted more historians. One reason may be the historic disarray of its archives. In a 1951 article on the city's archives, the late historian Woodrow Borah extolled the value of Oaxaca's documentary heritage but lamented the theft and sale of historical documents and the damage done by civil wars, dampness, fungus, vermin, and overall neglect. Borah's lamentation was soon echoed by one of the state of Oaxaca's most important twentieth-century intellectuals, Jorge Fernando Iturribarría, who condemned the pernicious effects of private collectors and a general lack of interest in historical studies of Oaxaca. Seeking to equip a new generation of students with the skills needed for historical investigation, Iturribarría called for reestablishing undergraduate and graduate programs in Oaxacan history at the state's premier educational insti-

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tution, the Universidad Autónoma Benito Juárez de Oaxaca. Unfortunately, his call has yet to be heeded, and Oaxacan students must still leave the state to receive post-secondary instruction in their own history.¹

Despite the absence of history as a discipline in the state university, within the last five years, the city's citizens and scholars as well as national and international researchers have witnessed a blossoming of historical archives in Oaxaca. This renaissance has come about largely thanks to a new generation of scholars and archivists who have dedicated great effort to cataloguing and preserving Oaxaca's wealth of documentation and integrating it into the city's public and intellectual life. Just one manifestation of the growing culture of the archive is Acervos, the publication of Oaxaca's historians and social scientists, which boasts an impressive layout with highquality reproductions of a variety of historical documentation and articles by local, national, and international scholars.² In the spring of 2000 in the Centro Cultural Santo Domingo (Oaxaca's state museum and an exquisitely restored former Dominican convent), the city's judicial archive exhibited colonial records that included sixteenth-century documents in Nahuatl and Mixteco. In the same venue, Professor Francisco José Ruiz Cervantes organizes monthly colloquiums on recent archival scholarship in Oaxaca.

The city's archives are flowering in the context of a larger cultural renaissance in Oaxaca, much of it connected to the efforts of maestro Francisco Toledo, one of Mexico's best-known contemporary artists, son of the state's Isthmus of Tehuantepec, and resident of the city of Oaxaca. Toledo has focused his energy and resources on projects as diverse as the renovation, conversion, and opening of the cultural center at Santo Domingo, the restoration and organization of the books and documents in the Biblioteca Burgoa, and the establishment of Oaxaca's international film club, "El Pochote," and the Instituto de Artes Gráficos. Beyond the city, a revival of Zapotec language, literature, and culture has taken root, centered in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, particularly in the city of Juchitán.³ Concomitant with this resurgence of Zapotec language and culture, a growing political movement has emerged among the state of Oaxaca's indigenous communities, whose economic and material conditions are some of the most dire in Mexico. This cultural and political vitality contradicts the conventional wisdom in Mexico characterizing the state of Oaxaca as the land that time forgot. Although oppressive colonial social and economic relations persist,

^{1.} Woodrow Borah, "Notes on Civil Archives in the City of Oaxaca," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 31, no. 4 (1951):723–49; and Jorge Fernando Iturribarría, "Oaxaca: La historia y sus instrumentos," *Historia Mexicana* 2, no. 7 (1953):10–25.

^{2.} Acervos: Boletín de los Archivos y Bibliotecas de Oaxaca, publicación trimestral, órgano informativo de la Asociación Civil Amigos de los Archivos y Bibliotecas de Oaxaca. See the bibliography for a selection of secondary historical literature on Oaxaca.

^{3.} See Jeffrey W. Rubin, *Decentering the Regime: History, Culture, and Radical Politics in Juchitán, Mexico* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1998).

local actors are challenging them and thus providing material for researchers interested in the legacy of Oaxaca's colonial and republican past for contemporary political and social movements. Given Oaxaca's past and present and the rebirth of its archives, the city provides a vibrant and provocative setting for varied research.⁴

Research in Oaxaca's Archives

Oaxaca is a compelling research site for colonial historians for many reasons: ethnic and linguistic diversity, the cultural richness of Zapotec and Mixtec societies before the conquest, consecutive waves of Aztec and Spanish invasion, the diligence of Dominican friars in perpetrating "the spiritual conquest," and the persisting viability and solidarity of the region's numerous indigenous communities. Petitions for land titles, cases of idolatry, and libros de cofradías offer plentiful documentation for scholars interested in questions of mentalités, how indigenous peoples experienced colonialism, relations among conqueror and conquered, and colonial discourses. Many expedientes contain documents in indigenous languages, providing scholars at the crossroads of history, anthropology, and linguistics with access to rich data. Maps outlining a village's dimensions, natural resources, and spatial and social relations with its neighbors as well as lienzos narrating the history of the nobility of indigenous communities are just a few examples of nontraditional genres available to researchers.

For scholars pursuing issues of local political and economic formations, the contemporary state of Oaxaca was home to Villa Alta and Nexapa, two of the largest and best-endowed *alcaldías mayores* in New Spain. Their documentation is preserved in various archives throughout the city. Moving from the alcaldías mayores of the hinterlands to the racially and culturally diverse setting of Antequera, the colonial precursor to the modern city of Oaxaca, opportunities for colonial urban histories abound.

As with the colonial period, historians of Oaxaca's national period will thrive on the archives' seemingly inexhaustible resources and the range of the state's historical themes. Oaxaca nurtured some of Mexico's most influential political figures in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, and the city stood at the forefront of the country's drawn-out debates and battles over federalism and secularization. Benito Juárez and Porfirio Díaz, both state governors who went on to be presidents, attempted to lead Oaxaca's

4. Archival resources in Oaxaca are not limited to the capital city. Regional and municipal archives exist throughout the state. Recently, the Programa Nacional para Rescatar y Organizar los Archivos Municipales de México, directed by the Archivo General de la Nación, has been conducting archivist training workshops and preserving local collections in some of the state's districts. For more information contact Dr. Carlos Sánchez Silva (E-mail <historic@prodigy.net.mx>).

inhabitants over the rough terrain of liberal reform, seizure of church and community property, civil wars, and modernization. The Mexican Revolution, continued attempts at state sovereignty, and a relentless out-migration of workers and families to the United States punctuated the region's historical trajectory throughout the twentieth century. Ongoing efforts at political and cultural autonomy among Oaxaca's sixteen major indigenous groups underscore the historical relevance of race and class in the state. The archives, libraries, and private collections of the city of Oaxaca offer prolific avenues of inquiry into all these historical themes. The collections' greatest strength is their complementary nature. Located close to one another, the diverse archives enable researchers to approach their studies from a variety of angles.

In this research note, we will describe ten of the archives, libraries, and private collections located in the city of Oaxaca, providing a general description of their holdings, addresses, and contact information. Researchers will need a letter of introduction from their university to gain access to most of the archives and collections described. Most locations have photocopy services on the premises or nearby and permit reproductions of documents in good condition. Due to the unpredictable nature of the city administration, archive directors and policies change continually. While our information is current, some of it may change in the coming months and years.

Archivo General del Poder Ejecutivo de Oaxaca (AGPEO)

The sparse colonial holdings in Oaxaca's state archive have been organized into three sections or *fondos*: Alcaldías Mayores, Reales Intendencias, and Obispado. For the most part, these documents belong to the latecolonial period. For colonial historians, what is currently available in the state archive would serve best as a supplement rather than a documentary core for research. The AGPEO does not permit access to uncatalogued expedientes. It is to be hoped that as cataloguing moves forward, more colonial documentation will come to light.

^{5.} This research note was inspired by a research note written by Greg Grandin and René Reeves, "Archives in the Guatemalan Western Highlands," *LARR* 31, no. 1 (1996):105–12.

^{6.} In recent years, Oaxacan scholars have published several articles in local journals describing the city's archives. Our intention is not to usurp these researchers' fine work but to provide broader exposure to what we believe is a neglected region of Mexican history. Recent articles in *Acervos: Boletín de los Archivos y Bibliotecas de Oaxaca* include: "Archivos y bibliotecas de la Ciudad de Oaxaca," nos. 14–15 (Oct. 1999–Mar. 2000):24–55; María de los Angeles Romero Frizzi, "¿Conservar los archivos?" no. 1 (May–Aug. 1996):4–9; and Ronald Spores, "El Archivo General del Poder Judicial del Estado de Oaxaca," no. 2 (Sept.–Dec. 1996):4–9. See also Lucía Alcántara, "Operación rescate: Archivos y bibliotecas de Oaxaca," *La Gaceta CEHIPO* 2 (July 1998):26–28. See also the earlier survey by Francie Chassen-López, "Sobre los archivos municipales de Oaxaca," *Boletín del Sistema Nacional de Archivos*, no. 7 (1984):55–62.

Despite the limitations on opportunities for colonial scholarship, the state archive is an excellent place to research Oaxaca's incessant land struggles in the nineteenth century among indigenous communities, mestizo landowners, and the Catholic Church. As in most regions of Mexico in the century following independence, land disputes were fought in a tumultuous political landscape. Liberal and conservative battles for power, French intervention, and the waning influence of the Catholic Church highlight the archive's documentation. Ample if uneven documentation exists for each district of the state. An impressive collection of maps will help researchers trace the shifts in land division and ownership. Catalogues on the nineteenth-century conflictos por límites de tierras and repartos y adjudicaciones provide plenty of case studies of conflicts between village and state. An almost complete set of memorias del estado (1827–1996), annual reports from the governor, a collection of censos y padrones, and annual budget reports provide a synoptic view of the districts in the state.

The period following 1900 offers the best-catalogued documents of the collection. Document groups in Fomento (1900–1912), Gobernación (1900–1913), and Período Revolucionario de Oaxaca (four volumes, 1910–1930) contain rich information on the day-to-day dynamics occurring between government officials and the popular classes as the state moved into yet another period of violence and disorder. A small *fototeca* contains images taken throughout the twentieth century. A large set of documents from the nineteenth century are being catalogued to be made available to researchers by 2001. The archive's modest collection of newspapers includes an almost complete run of *El Periódico Oficial*, the state's official weekly (1847 to the present), as well as a sampling of other regional and national papers.

The Archivo General del Poder Ejecutivo is housed in the Casa de la Cultura (the former Convento de los Siete Príncipes) at Santo Degollado 400 and is open from 8 A.M. to 2:30 P.M. Monday through Friday. For more information, contact Director Eva León Vicente (telephone 5144988).

Archivo General del Poder Judicial del Estado de Oaxaca

The judicial archive contains civil and penal documentation for all of the state of Oaxaca's *juzgados*, including some documentation for the two juzgados of the municipality of Oaxaca (1893–1947).8 Unfortunately for general researchers, only two catalogues exist for the multitude of documents available. Fortunately for colonial historians, these two catalogues belong to the archives of the juzgados of Teposcolula (1550–1900) and Villa Alta

^{7.} Geopolitical division of the state accelerated in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries into ever smaller administrative units.

^{8.} The remainder of the legal documentation for Oaxaca's central district can be found in the Archivo Histórico Municipal de la Ciudad de Oaxaca.

(1560–1900), some of the richest colonial documentation available outside of the Valley of Mexico. Uncatalogued colonial documentation exists for Nexapa (under the juzgado of Yautepec), and some late-colonial documents are also available for the juzgado of Miahuatlán (1769–1920). For scholars of the national period, documentation is available from the following juzgados: Coixtlahuaca (1868–1920), Juchitán (1869–1920), Huajuapan (1824–1920), Tlaxiaco (1889–1920), Ejutla (1824–1920), Ocotlán (1843–1920), Tlacolula (1848–1920), Zimatlán (1896–1920), and Teotitlán (1869–1920). Researchers are allowed further access to uncatalogued documents arranged in chronological order.

The information found in judicial documents is rich and varied. For scholars interested in "the view from below," testimony from civil and criminal documentation brims with quotidian details and biographical information of witnesses and litigants. Cases of adultery, murder, homicide, and drunkenness open windows onto gender relations and the sociology of village life. 11 Investigations of abuse of authority reveal the intricacies of political factionalism, as do idolatry cases from the colonial period. In documents on land disputes, the genre most prominent among civil cases from colonial Villa Alta and Teposcolula, litigants sometimes included genealogical trees or reales provisiones won by their ancestors. Wills, letters, and petitions in indigenous languages were also submitted as evidence in legal battles over land, providing scholars conversant in these languages with documentary access unfettered by the glosses and interpretations of judicial translators. Finally, for scholars exploring the intersection between anthropology and law, judicial documents often contain data on the interaction between village custom (usos y costumbres) and colonial or constitutional law.

The Archivo General del Poder Judicial is located at Prolongación de la Noria 500, Colonia Cinco Señores. Hours are 9:30 A.M. to 2:45 P.M. Licenciado Israel Garrido Esquivel manages the archive, and scholars must speak with him directly to obtain access (phone 5111221). Photocopying service is not available.

^{9.} To get a sense of the type of documentation available for the juzgados of Villa Alta and Teposcolula, see John Chance, *Indice del Archivo del Juzgado de Villa Alta, Oaxaca: Epoca colonial*, Vanderbilt University Publications in Anthropology, no. 21 (Nashville, Tenn: Vanderbilt University, 1978); and *Indice del Archivo del Juzgado de Teposcolula, Oaxaca: Epoca colonial*, compiled by María de los Angeles Romero Frizzi and Ronald M. Spores (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1976).

^{10.} Ronald Spores, "El Archivo General del Poder Judicial del Estado de Oaxaca," *Acervos*, no. 2 (Sept.–Dec. 1996):13–17.

^{11.} For use of judicial documents in these contexts, see Steve Stern, *The Secret History of Gender: Women, Men, and Power in Late-Colonial Mexico* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); and William B. Taylor, *Drinking, Homicide, and Rebellion in Colonial Mexican Villages* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1979).

Archivo Histórico de la Arquiodiócesis de Oaxaca

Dr. Daniela Traffano's untiring work and the financial support of the Asociación Organos Históricos de México, J. P. Morgan Bank, and the Fondo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes have together ensured the rescue and organization of the documents in the archive of the Catedral de Oaxaca. It contains documents for the colonial (largely late-colonial) and national periods classified in three fondos: Diocesano, Parroquial, and Cabildo. The types of documents include correspondence between parish priests and bishops, cofradía accounts, birth, death and marriage records, and church-related legal issues. For scholars interested in questions about the relationship between church and state, popular participation in the Catholic Church, or perception of the institution, this archive has much to offer.

The archive is adjacent to the cathedral at 700 Independencia. The hours of operation are 10 A.M. to 2 P.M. Since January 2000, the archive has not been open regularly. Consultation with the director, Padre Humberto Medina Villeres, is necessary regarding hours and access (telephone 5169150).

Biblioteca Burgoa

Scholars who have the good fortune to work in the Biblioteca Burgoa, housed in the beautiful Centro Cultural Santo Domingo, will find themselves enjoying the most elegant surroundings afforded by any archive in Oaxaca. The library is in excellent condition, and its impressive collection of books and small documentary archive are catalogued on compact disc. Most of the library's collection consists of works written by Dominicans, but it also encompasses the writings of Franciscans, Jesuits, Carmelites, Augustinians, and Diocesans. Some of the more recognizable names on the shelf are Francisco Burgoa, Bartolomé de las Casas, and Juan de Zumárraga. Among the theological treatises, researchers also have access to the more ethnographic strain of writing produced by Oaxacan clergy describing the languages, peoples, customs, and geography they encountered in evangelization. Finally, the library holds a substantial number of primary and secondary sources from the national period.

The Biblioteca Burgoa is open from 9 A.M. to 3 P.M. For more information, consult the director, Dr. María Isabel Grañen Porrúa (telephone 5142559).

Archivo Histórico Municipal de la Ciudad de Oaxaca

The photograph of Concepción García, an indigenous woman from a neighboring *pueblo*, in the 1890 registry for prostitutes in Oaxaca City concludes the long trail of documents that typify the scope and complexity of the holdings at the Archivo Histórico Municipal de la Ciudad de Oaxaca (AHMCO). García's petitions to the *ayuntamiento* (city council), the records of her arrest and trial, a series of city regulations on prostitution, and the registry itself demonstrate some of the many ways that popular classes and the city government have interacted along racial and class lines throughout Oaxaca City's history. The AHMCO's main strength lies in its repository of different types of material from both the national and colonial periods. Ayuntamiento reports, judicial records, laws, maps, broadsheets, and photographs provide a rich and complementary resource for researchers.

A general guide to the AHMCO divides the holdings into twenty-three document groups. Many of the archive's individual files are also recorded in detail on a computer database. While most of the material pertains to the city itself, some record groups include information on neighboring populations in the central district (such as El Marquesado, San Martín Jalatlaco, and San Felipe del Agua). In the late Porfiriato (1876–1911), the city's boundaries began to expand to encompass some of the surrounding municipalities. A document group unrelated to the city contains information on Chimalapas (1958–1964), a region located in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec.

The actas de cabildo (city council minutes) represent the longest running and most detailed document group in the archive, with records from 1564 to 1994. Judicial records detailing homicides, government corruption, crimes against families, public peace, honor, and city hygiene span the years 1683 to 1970 (partially catalogued). Protests and petitions from city inhabitants like Concepción García, ranging from requests for water to contracts for new buildings and public works, can be found in the municipal secretary documents (1773-1973). Records from three document groups—civil registries, padrones, and elections ranging from 1828 to 1966—provide ample documentation of demographic shifts in the city. In concert with similar records from the Archivo General del Poder Ejecutivo de Oaxaca, these records chart trends in occupations, marriages, births, and deaths. Budget sheets from the municipal treasury track the city's income and expenses from 1780 to 1970. Finally, nineteenth- and twentieth-century documents on city markets, prisons, cemeteries, hotels, and sanitation highlight the remainder of the diverse collection.

The Archivo Histórico Municipal de la Ciudad de Oaxaca is located on the northern fringe of the city's Centro Histórico, at Privada de Reforma 107. The archive is open to the general public from 9 A.M. to 3 P.M. Monday through Friday. For further information, contact the director, Dr. Carlos Sánchez Silva (telephone 5131260, E-mail address < historic@prodigy.net.mx >).

Archivo de la Dirección General de Notarías del Estado

Thanks to the work of Licenciada Rosalba Montiel, the notary archive is being thoroughly overhauled and reorganized, spearheaded by classification of hundreds of bound volumes of all documentation that required a notary public (*escribano público*). The type of documentation available for the colonial period includes records of the sale of houses and slaves as well as contracts for church construction. Colonial holdings include the juzgados of Choapam, Huahuapam, Miahuatlán, Yautepec (Nexapa), Teposcolula, and Tlacolula. For the national period, similar information exists for most of the jurisdictions of the state of Oaxaca.

The address of the Archivo de Notarías is Avenida Cinco de Mayo 200. It is open Monday through Friday 8 A.M. to 4 P.M. For more information, contact Rosalba Montiel (no telephone).

Archivo del Registro Agrario Nacional (RAN)

The archive of the RAN has maps, land titles, and lienzos from various regions in the state of Oaxaca. All these resources are catalogued. Historians interested in tracing the process of entitlement, growth, and reduction of land in an indigenous community over the *longue durée* can consult a petition for land title, which might include documents spanning four hundred years. One example is the case of a 1940s petition from Zoogocho (a community in the Sierra Juárez) containing a real provisión from the 1580s and litigation from the ensuing centuries. Maps and lienzos provide another angle of vision into the dynamic between land and community identity, relationships among indigenous communities, and conflicts among villages.

The archive is located at Eucalyptos 325, Colonia Reforma. It is open from 9 A.M. to 3 P.M. For more information, consult Director Fidela Cruz Martínez (telephone 5137717).

Hemeroteca General de la Universidad Benito Juárez de Oaxaca

Professors Carlos Sánchez Silva and Francisco José Ruiz Cervantes have made a heroic effort to rescue the inestimable collection of newspapers at the Hemeroteca General de la Universidad Benito Juárez de Oaxaca. The newspaper archive's vast collection of local, state, national, and international papers enables researchers to gauge historical change with the spontaneity that only daily and weekly periodicals can provide. Hundreds of different papers with varying publication runs from the nineteenth and twentieth century populate the collection. The second half of the nineteenth century witnessed a flourishing of independent papers covering a wide range of topics from religion, business, and politics to annual celebrations and secular societies. 12

12. The newspaper collection of the Hemeroteca Pública de Oaxaca contains a few nineteenth-century papers but has a stronger collection of more contemporary periodicals. This hemeroteca is adjacent to the Santo Domingo Church. It is open weekdays from 9 A.M. to 8 P.M. and Saturdays from 9 A.M. to 3 P.M.

The hemeroteca is housed in the Biblioteca General de la Universidad Benito Juárez de Oaxaca on the university's central campus on Avenida Universidad. For hours of operation and more information, contact Francisco José Ruiz Cervantes (telephone 5142559).

Fundación Bustamante Vasconcelos

In 1986 the Bustamante Vasconcelos family united its collection of historical literature, documents, and esoterica in the Fundación Bustamante Vasconcelos. The Fundación's strength lies in its collection of newspapers unavailable in the city's other archives and nineteenth- and twentieth-century rare books (such as Andrés Portillo's *Oaxaca en el centenario* and J. R. Southworth's *Oaxaca ilustrada*). Ample holdings of contemporary secondary historical works provide researchers with an invaluable reference library. All materials are catalogued on computer.

The Fundación is located at 117 Plazuela Labastida and is open Monday through Friday 10:30 A.M. to 2 P.M. and 4:30 P.M. to 8 P.M. Contact Director Rosalba Montiel for more information (telephone 5141674).

Fondo Luis Castañeda Guzmán

The private Fondo Luis Castañeda Guzmán has an abundant and eclectic collection from both the colonial and national periods. Licenciado Castañeda Guzmán, a respected local historian, recently allowed his collection to be catalogued. The handsome guide, however, is unfortunately devoid of any chronological or thematic order. Materials are listed in their random shelf order. Despite these challenges, the fondo is well worth a visit. It is divided into groups of original documents, books, newspapers, pamphlets, periodicals, photographs, and maps. Highlights in the original documents include records from the founding of the city of Oaxaca (Antequera) in the sixteenth century, correspondence from insurgents during the war of independence, and circulars and reports from some of the state's secular and religious societies in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Finally, researchers who have the good fortune to meet Licenciado Castañeda Guzmán may find that his knowledge and direct experience of Oaxacan history takes their work in new directions.

The Fondo is located in the Licenciado's house in San Martín Mexicapan to the south of Oaxaca City. For directions to the Fondo and more information, contact Lic. Castañeda Guzmán (telephone 5120597).

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