Migrations and Connections

Graham, Pamela M.

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Bibliographical Crossings
Introduction

The early reports by European explorers, written and widely published after the seminal voyage of Columbus in 1492, revealed an exotic New World. Vast seas and land, unusual flora and fauna and, to the foreign European eye, wild cultures peopled the terrain. The Treaty of Tordesillas divided the vast lands in the New World between Spain and Portugal. While the treaty was broadly successful for the Iberians, the expansionist policies of other European powers, especially those of the Low Countries, England, and France, allowed them to also gain footholds in the extremities of North America and the Caribbean as the age of exploration began in earnest.

European powers and their subservient local governments evolved elaborate documentary protocols to satisfy their needs for information from the New World. Diverse archival repositories today maintain records from the everyday merchant transactions to local land sales and from ecclesiastical records of birth, marriage, and death to international treaties. Maps became especially important to assure reliable sea crossings, the maintenance of political boundaries, and the understanding of man’s relationship to space and time. But interest in the New World was fortuitously linked to the invention of Gutenberg’s printing process, which announced in various languages to the European public what was happening and what was being seen on the other side of the world.

The printing press was first active in Mexico in the late 1530s. Later, printing presses were slowly introduced throughout the New World. The early works published there filled local needs. These included, for example, government decrees and forms, religious tracts and catechisms, and a variety of other works used in conversion and religious instruction (such as grammars, vocabularies, bilingual dictionaries, and sermons), the practical arts (especially medicine, mathematics, and construction), and education (particularly philosophical and theological tracts). Collecting and organizing these local publications, as well as those coming across the sea from European presses, were a necessity for both governments and religious institutions as well as for the “elite of the elites”: the reading public. Two of the great colonial period luminaries, for example, lived in Mexico. They were Bishop Juan de Palafox...
y Mendoza (1600–1659) and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1651–1695), both of whom maintained extensive personal libraries.

The New World’s vast lands and varied and numerous native peoples became the subjects of scientific study as well as sources of exploitation by providing labor to produce wealth. The infusion of Europeans and Africans into the New World created a new alchemy with evolving socio-cultural patterns and relationships. By the late eighteenth century, however, the long three-hundred-year “colonial period” was coming to an end. The destruction of European empires in the New World followed first, leading to the break-up of the former British colonies into the independent United States from 1776 to 1783. Then, from 1789–1799, the more systemic political, economic, and philosophical ramifications resulting from the French Revolution followed. By the end of the nineteenth century and after three to four centuries of foreign rule, almost forty new nations and island republics were born in the Americas.

At the nadir of Spanish hegemony in the Americas, Alexander von Humboldt’s study tour, undertaken from 1799 to 1804, provided him with copious notes that allowed him to write and publish his findings during the next two decades. He, like many before him and even more after him, added to an ever-increasing body of publications of, about, and from Latin America.

**Latin American Reference**

My work as a librarian is chiefly related to providing advanced reference services to the students and faculty of the University of Texas at Austin and to the many visitors that visit the Benson Latin American Collection. This library is regarded worldwide as one of the important libraries for Latin American research. Thus, every day it receives scholars from all parts of the world, especially those from Latin American countries. The advance of electronic data services, moreover, increases our patron base. Numerous questions arrive daily via e-mail and telephone.

For over fifty years, the Seminar on the Acquisition of Latin American Library Materials (SALALM) has fostered relationships between librarians and book vendors and publishers to improve the acquisition of Latinamericana through reliable means. Among the many foreign members of SALALM are representatives of the Bibliothek des Ibero-Amerikanisches Institut (IAI, f. 1930; part of Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz since 1962). My conversations over several years with Peter Altekrüger and Ricarda Musser convinced me that it was time to head to northern Europe to discover more about Latin America. My visit to Berlin in November 2008 included tours of seven research institutions: six libraries and one museum (see table 1).

**Impressions**

The development of library services in Germany is long. Its most recent history, however, is quite complicated given the political transformations
which occurred during the twentieth century. O para decirlo en español, la historia del desarrollo de servicios bibliotecarios es complicado ya que el pueblo alemán pasó unos trastornos políticos durante un siglo que cambió para siempre a todo Europa. A concise explanation of these developments may be found in Portals to the Past and to the Future: Libraries in Germany published by Bibliothek & Information Deutschland. This work is widely available in several languages and on the Internet. The German nation is composed of thirteen states and three city-states for a total of sixteen federally united Länder. “The federal principle allows responsibility for state-level functions to be assigned to the individual states ([that is, the] Länder) and their lower-level bodies, allowing greater emphasis to be placed on special regional factors.” Thus libraries, museums, schools, education and research centers for science and the arts are subject to, benefit from, and are the responsibility of the Länder to which they belong.

The city-state of Berlin, however, presents a special case. Four of the seven research centers visited in November 2008 are administered by the Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz (the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation, or the

Table 1. Libraries Visited in Berlin (Not in Order Visited)

A. Preußischer Kulturbesitz (Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation, PK)

1. Bibliothek des Ibero-Amerikanisches Instituts, the largest Latin American library in Europe. Contacts: Peter Altekrüger, Library Director, and Dr. Ricarda Musser, Assistant Library Director. http://www.iai.spk-berlin.de/


B. University Libraries


C. Central and Regional Library (public library)

PK). The foundation’s primary function is to protect the cultural institutions, almost all presently in Berlin, which developed in the territories once under the former Prussian state. All the sixteen Länder that comprise modern Germany contribute to the PK. Moreover, all the former Prussian territories that are now separate Länder in Germany contribute more funds than the other Länder to the foundation. It should also be stressed that while Berlin is the capital city of Germany, one should not necessarily equate these four and many other cultural centers in Berlin as being necessarily “national” institutions. Some may be, but most are institutions supported directly by the “city-state” of Berlin or the PK.

It is useful to note that the ethnological collections regarding Middle and Latin America at the Ethnologisches Museum, near the Free University, are not a library per se. Aside from the selective, spectacular pieces on display, I was allowed to walk through and observe the research collections in the vaults. Here, drawers of pre-Columbian ceramics, ceremonial pieces, jewelry, pipes and flutes, and perhaps the largest collection of ancient Inca quipus, (which number some four hundred) are maintained. One paper-based record, the mainstay of libraries until contemporary time, is the stunning Codex Lienzo Seler II, mounted on a wall in the exhibition area. This work is a giant pintura of Mixtec culture, the community of Coixtlahuaca, in the Mexican state of Oaxaca. Dated between 1570 and 1590, it measures 383 cm in height and 435 cm in width.

Two other types of libraries were also visited. Two of the most important universities in Berlin are the Humboldt University of Berlin and the Free University. Both have large student bodies; however, the Humboldt is characterized by a dispersed, central-city campus, while the Free University is set in an affluent area in the former West Berlin with a more or less unified campus interspersed with some residential houses. The Humboldt’s library for Romance Studies is located in the Branch Library of Foreign Languages (August-Boeckh-Haus), a modern, urban building humming with students going to and from classes and in and out of the library in downtown Berlin. The Philology Library of the Free University is also a modern building, an architectural marvel designed by Lord Norman Foster. Included in the collections of the two libraries are sections devoted to Latin American literature and to the study of Spanish and Portuguese languages. The purpose of both is quite similar: to support the teaching of university students.

On the advice of BI International staff, I also visited the unit of the Central and Regional Library of Berlin formerly known as the American Memorial Library. Quite obviously, the purpose of this library is its function as a public institution, quite distinct from that of university and research-oriented collections that were visited. This public library is extremely active with adults and children streaming in and out continuously, totaling into thousands of visitors per day. Information sheets published in several languages, including Spanish, are available to the public. Collections include music CDs, videos, books, and
children’s books in Spanish. Visitors can request both casual reading and specialized services. Material related to Latin America has a general focus and is not geared to advanced research.

What follows are perhaps facile observations based on conversations with the librarians whose collections offer research materials in Berlin useful to understand and interpret Latin America. I do not intend to give a catalog description of each of the libraries visited. Rather, this is an exercise to provide some perspective on the libraries’ expectations to fulfill their mission and how their materials may help determine a researcher’s interest to study Latin America in Berlin.

“We rely on the Ibero” was frequently said by the librarians interviewed. This was stated with both pride and relief. Relief because the acquisition of library materials, especially on the part of the university libraries, is determined by faculty, student, and course requirements in addition to standard reference sources. As the shift to electronic-based information accelerates, library budgets at the universities can be devoted to those acquisitions as well as the most popular literature and frequently used reference works. Researchers requiring in-depth collections for research, therefore, are referred to the Ibero.

The Kunstbibliothek of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin is principally devoted to the preservation of collections developed and owned by the former Prussian state. These books and the museum’s art collections were long separated following the division of Berlin into the western and eastern sectors after WWII. These are now united in a state-of-the art facility. The Kunstbibliothek is arguably the most important art library in Germany. Moreover, it is a depository library for all the publications produced by Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, members of the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation. The Kunstbibliothek receives two copies of these publications. Since only one copy is added to the library, the second copy is used in an active exchange program. It also occasionally receives research materials and publications accumulated by art historians through bequests. In recent years, this has led to a sizable collection of duplicate materials. Its Latin American holdings, however, are undergoing development to broaden and deepen its coverage. Contact between the Kunstbibliothek and the Ibero underscores the collaboration between them to avoid unnecessary duplication, especially when acquiring expensive publications. Aside from both belonging to the PK, their close proximity to one another (a scant two blocks) aids in making decisions to rely on only one copy between them.

One of the most important map collections worldwide is the Map Department of the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin. It is divided between two buildings based on stock dated to 1939. The older material is in the building at Unter den Linden, and includes many treasures, including some thirty thousand manuscript maps. Among these is the famous 1572 Portulan atlas of Battista Agnese as well as the curiosity of the largest book in the world, one of three
copies. This last is an atlas of the world, about six feet in height, and weighing about one thousand pounds. Together, both parts of the Staatsbibliothek Map Collection include more than one million maps. Modern maps, including topographical maps and electronic cartography, are maintained in the building at Potsdamer Strasse, next door to the Ibero. The Map Collection’s Internet home page provides links to extremely useful map sites, including IKAR-Database of Old Printed Maps. This site includes full cataloging and digitized versions of maps printed up to 1850, held in six of the most important collections in Germany. More than one-quarter million maps are represented. These are fully searchable and include many Latin American items, all available without restriction through the Internet. In July 2009, the Ibero-Amerikanisches Institut library began including its maps in this database.

And, finally, we come to the gorilla in the corner, the Ibero-Amerikanisches Institut library—to mix metaphors, the Ibero is the fairy godmother who has turned this SALALM meeting into Cinderella’s successful ball through hard work, generosity, and kindness. Worldwide there are several very good, indeed remarkable, libraries for Latinamericana. There is no one of these that is “the best.” Rather, these several “very good” libraries are all among “the best.” And the Ibero is among them. These “very good” libraries have strengths that others may not have, and it is those strengths that a good library collection development plan plays to and to which knowledgeable researchers flock. I speak only of strengths, not weaknesses. For the Ibero, then, I would note the following:

• A bedrock Argentine collection and additions to it for eighty years
• An unparalleled growth in contemporary acquisitions for all Latin American regions and countries
• Deep documentation on the German presence in Latin America
• Strong financial support, the envy of all libraries who work in this field
• Staff dedicated to the mission of the library
• Leadership at the forefront of library electronic technology but unwavering in collecting traditional library sources and materials in all formats
• Sharing of sources with local, national, and international partners

There are many other points that could be mentioned, but these are the ones that seem most important. While no one institution anywhere can “get it all,” there is a definite spirit of optimism at the Ibero that it just might do it!

Libraries and other research centers in Berlin offer an array of sources for studying Latin America. The seven institutions cited here are not exhaustive, but they are representative of the most important ones that needed to be
considered in a preliminary review to determine the possibilities for research regarding Latin America.

Post Data

As a result of my study tour in 2008, a large program to exchange duplicates between the Ibero-Amerikanisches Institut Bibliothek and the Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Library was greatly expanded. Moreover, the Kunsthbibliothek offered to participate in an exchange program with the University of Texas at Austin Libraries. These overtures of friendship will strengthen the collections of the libraries involved and will deepen the cultural ties between German library institutions and the University of Texas at Austin.

NOTES

1. The author wishes to thank Bibliothek & Information International (BI-International), a standing committee of the Bibliothek & Information Deutschland (BID, Library and Information in Germany–Federal Union of German Library and Information Associations). Both BI-International and the University of Texas at Austin Libraries provided financial assistance for the study tour conducted from 30 October to 23 November 2008 in libraries and research centers in Berlin. BID is the umbrella organization of the German library associations which had its last reorganization in 2004. I am indebted also to Peter Altekrüger, Deputy Director and Library Director of the Ibero-Amerikanisches Institut, and Ricarda Musser, IAI Assistant Library Director. Dr. Musser greatly facilitated the logistics for visiting the libraries and made appointments to interview appropriate staff as well as unstintingly served as simultaneous translator on more than one occasion.


3. Ibid., 23.