



The Memory of the World and Rare and Special Collections in Latin America and the Caribbean

(La Memoria del Mundo y las Colecciones de Libros Raros y Especiales en América Latina)

Rosa María Fernández de Zamora
UNAM-CUIB
México DF, Mexico

Meeting:

121 — Rare and special collections depending on history: Latin America and the Caribbean — Rare Books and Manuscripts Section with Latin America and the Caribbean

Abstract:

Latin America and the Caribbean have a long documentary story. It is the expression of the diversity and richness of their culture. The presence of the book in America is found in the pre-Hispanic pictorial productions: the beautiful and expressive Mexican codices. Besides this, Mexico was the first country outside Europe that had a printing press (1539); Peru had it later on. Also, since the XVIth Century, rich libraries were established. We may say that the rare and special collections – not necessarily only ancient collections – have a very important presence in the Latin American space and time. The aim of this paper is to confront these possible collections with the criteria of the Memory of the World Program – UNESCO.

Introduction. Let us bear in mind what we may understand by “rare books collections” and “special collections”. For the IFLA section, “rare books and manuscripts are a part of the global cultural heritage. Its meaning as intellectual creations, historical collections and artistic objects transcend the linguistic frontiers. Researchers, librarians, books and art researchers, bibliophiles, and library users all around the world read, study and admire them. The special collections carefully preserve these treasures. There are the history sources, the proofs that may be analyzed by new researchers that pose their own questions. Through archives and publications, the preceding generations speak to us in their own voice” (<http://www.ifla.org/en/rare-books-and-manuscripts>)

The general definition in the dictionaries is: “Rare book, scarce or unusual work due to its limited edition, because of its antiquity, or because of a circumstantial value due to the fact that there are few copies as a result of natural causes that have affected them, as fire, floods. Or else the ones that survived censorship actions, or

their removal because of errors in the text or in the printing. Also, those that deal with a very special subject. A special collection is made by non printed materials, which may be of images, sounds, or a different support other than paper: graphic materials; sound, videos, films, electronic documents. Their presence in libraries is considered as special collections” (Diccionario Enciclopédico..., p. 144, 175)

For Martínez de Sousa, a rare books collection is a set of bibliographic material put aside from the general collection of a library because of its rarity, fragility, value, or other causes, and a special collection is a set of rare books. Rare book: a book that due to its subject, its scarce number of printed or preserved copies, its antiquity, or any other characteristics or circumstance, is transformed in an exception (Martínez de Sousa, p. 190, 613).

However, we must remember that the name or concept of “rare book” appears in the XVIIIth Century with the revival of the bibliophilia, which takes place with a special interest on certain types of books that are designed as “rare and curious”. Around this phenomenon, a new type of bibliophilia develops, in which not only the aristocrats but also commercial and financial groups participate. With the Romanticism in the XIXth Century, the accumulation of this type of books increases, including the European incunabula and the colonial printed materials of the American countries, especially those from Mexico and Peru, being the two first countries of the American continent that had a printing press since the XVIth Century. (Fernández de Zamora, 2009, p. 202-206)

As a consequence, a great number of Latin American book collections became a part of the rare or special book collections in European libraries, as the British Library, the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, the Biblioteca Nacional de España, and in libraries of the United States as the John Carter Brown, the Huntington, and the Nattie L. Benson.

The Memory of the World and the special collections. According to the UNESCO Memory of the World Program, the seven main criteria for assessing the cultural meaning of the documentary heritage refer to the influence, the subjects, the people, the form, the style and the social value of those documents.

As secondary criteria, two more are to be considered, which must highlight the meaning of the documentary heritage: the integrity and the peculiarity. The documentary heritage value increases when it has a high integrity characteristic, or when its conservation is total; when it has not been altered or damaged. As for the peculiarity: its meaning increases when it is unique or rare, or when it is a survivor of its category or its time.

However, everybody agrees that rarity is not an absolute value criterion. For the UNESCO, these criteria are used to evaluate all type of documents that may conform the Memory of the World: manuscripts collections, archival documents, printed materials as books, magazines, journals, posters, old and contemporary leaflets, audiovisual collections: photographs, films, videos, records, and electronic and digital documents. All of these materials may be found in a library collection.

Taking into consideration the above mentioned criteria, the 238 collections or individual documents that have been registered until now as Memory of the World, the collections registered as Memory of the Regional World, and the ones registered as Memory of the National World, have been valued.

These collections include all type of documents, of all times, and are found in libraries, archives, and other public or private institutions. Latin America and the Caribbean hold 42 registers in the Memory of the World, international. Let us analyze some examples of these registers.

Latin American documentary collections registered in the Memory of the World:

1997:

-Collection of Mexican Codices. Protected in the Biblioteca Nacional de Antropología e Historia. Mexico

-Techaloyan Codex of Cuajimalpa. Archivo General de la Nación. Mexico

-Latin American Photographs. Collection of the XIXth Century. Special collection of the Biblioteca Nacional de Venezuela. It includes photographs on urban development, ports, landscapes, rural life, important persons, etc., of all Latin American countries.

-Documents of Viceroyalty of Rio de la Plata. Archivo General de la Nación. Argentina.

2003:

-Jesuits of America Fonds. Archivo Nacional. Collection of more than 125 thousand manuscript and printed leafs related to the presence of the Jesuits in the Antilles, Argentina, Colombia, Mexico, Peru, Bolivia and Chile, among other countries. Chilean proposal.

-Original records of Carlos Gardel. Horacio Loriente Collection (1913-1935). Uruguay

-Los Olvidados. Original negative of Luis Buñuel film. Filmoteca de la UNAM - Televisa. Mexico

2005:

-Negros and Esclavos Archives. Proposal of the Archivo General de la Nación. Colombia.

-José Martí Pérez Fonds (1883-1895). Collection of the written works of this important person of the political and literary history of Cuba and America. Proposal of Cuba.

-Biblioteca Palafoxiana. Collection XVth to XVIIIth Centuries. Secretaria de Cultura, Puebla, Mexico.

2007:

-American Colonial Music: a Sample of its Documentary Richness. Proposal of Bolivia, Colombia, Mexico and Peru.

2009:

-Collection of the Ashkenazi Documentary and Research Center. XVIth to XXth centuries. Mexico

-Original Negative of the Noticiero ICAIC Latinoamericano. Cuba.

-Documentary Heritage of the Resistance and Struggle for Human Rights in the Dominican Republic, 1930-1961. Museo de la Resistencia

2011:

-Documentary Fonds of Royal Audience of La Plata. Archivo Nacional. Bolivia

-Information and Countable Information Network of the Military Regime in Brazil (1964-1985). Arquivo Nacional. Brazil.

-Silver Men. West Indies workers in the Panama Canal. Panama and other countries.

Latin American documentary collections registered in the Memory of the World of Latin American and the Caribbean

-American incunabula. Mexican printed works of the XVIth Century in the Biblioteca Nacional and the Biblioteca Cervantina of the ITESM. Mexico.2003

-National Literacy Crusade. IHN and UCN. Nicaragua. 2007

Mexican documentary collections registered in the Memory of the World of Mexico

-Voz Viva de Mexico. UNAM. Dirección de Literatura. Records collection of the voice of important persons of Mexican culture.2005

-Aquí nos tocó vivir. TV series of Cristina Pacheco. Video tapes 1978-2009.

Canal Once. Mexico. 2010

These samples show the diversity of documents that constitute the special collections or rare materials, not only of books, in public and private libraries and archives that have been distinguished as a cultural heritage of the humanity.

A way to show the meaning, the value, the message of a special collection, is to underline the reason for which it is registered in the Memory of the World. As a sample:

-Collections of Mexican Codices. Registered in 1997. Proposal of the Biblioteca Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Mexico. It is a collection of 92 colonial codices, especially of the XVIth century. They represent the pictographic written materials of the prehispanic Middle American culture. This region is the only one in which “written documents” were present before the Spaniards arrival.

-Negros and Esclavos Archives. Registered in 2005. Proposal of the Archivo General de la Nacion, Colombia. A collection of 55 files that inform about the African slaves trade during the XVIth and the XIXth centuries. It represents the slavery culture that during four centuries was very important in the construction of the South American nations. The influence of the Africans in the cultural, artistic, and musical culture of this region is still present.

-The American Colonial Music. A Sample of its Documentary Richness. Registered in 2007. Proposal of Bolivia, Colombia, Mexico and Peru. Musical documents of the XVIth and XVIIIth centuries, essential for the history of the culture of the New World. It represents the development of the musical tendencies existing in cathedrals, theaters, public spaces, as well as the mixture of the European, indigenous and African cultures. They constitute the roots of the present American music. It includes the original manuscripts of: the Libro del Coro of Gutierre Fernandez Hidalgo of the Bogota cathedral; the Púrpura de la Rosa, the only American opera preserved during those centuries (BN, Peru); Villancicos of sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, with music of Juan de Araujo and Antonio Duran (A and BN, Bolivia); Cancionero Musical of Gaspar Fernandes. Oaxaca Cathedral archive, Mexico. It includes songs in indigenous languages.

-Original Records of Carlos Gardel. Horacio Loriente Collection, 1913-1935. Registered in 2003. Proposal of the Archivo General de la República del Uruguay. A collection of 770 songs performed by Carlos Gardel recorded in Buenos Aires, Paris, and New York. Each record has its original cover, and it includes the original record players with their corresponding needles. It represents the worldwide importance of this great interpreter that made known the songs of tango. The texts are a testimony of that migrants age, expressing their nostalgia, their loneliness, their tragic love relations and a particular language.

-“Los Olvidados”. Original negative of the film. Registered in 2003. Proposal of the Filmoteca de la UNAM and the Cineteca Nacional. It is a property of TELEVISA. Film produced in 1950 by Luis Buñuel, representing the life of children forgotten and

living in the fringe of society, In large cities. The crude and realistic vision of this part of the society is still valid, it is still a reality.

-Collection of the Documentary and Research Center of the Ashkenazi Community of Mexico. XVIth to XXth centuries. Registered in 2009. Proposal of the CDICA, Mexico. Collection of documents from the libraries that survived the holocaust, sent to the migrants in Latin America, especially in Mexico and Argentina. This collection represents the Ashkenazi culture of Central and Eastern Europe, and the one created by its community in Mexico. It has been recognized as Memory of the World of Mexico (2007), as Memory of the World of Latin America and the Caribbean (2008), and as Memory of the International World (2009).

-National Literacy Crusade. Registered in 2009. Nicaragua. The archives of this national campaign carried out in Nicaragua in 1980 are unique; they constitute the memory of those activities in which more than 60 thousand young boys and girls carried out against illiteracy, which diminished in one year from 50 to 12%. It became a unique international experiment distinguished and rewarded by UNESCO.

-Men of Silver. West Indies or Antilles workers in the Panama Canal. Registered in 2011. Proposal of Barbados, Jamaica, Panama, Saint Lucia, United Kingdom and United States. The movement of nearly 100,000 West Indies' workers the voluntarily migrated to Panama to work in the construction of the Canal, represented an incredible promise of economic welfare. Among many other documents, in the Bank Depositors Ledgers 1853-1918, the deposits made by these workers in "panamanian money" are registered, which undoubtedly meant an economic freedom conquest, unthinkable in their original countries.

These examples clearly show the representativity and the value of the documentary heritage in its different manifestations, in its different expressions as format, ages, spaces and technologies. The problem still is how to bring the patrimony near the society, the authorities, the librarians, and other information professionals, with the aim of involving them in its knowledge, its conservations, its diffusion, and its use. How to increase the consciousness that the documentary heritage represents specific historical or contemporary moments - political, artistic, social, economic, etc. - of a community that requires to be known, appreciated and preserved by and for the society.

The task of the Rare and Manuscript Books of IFLA is fundamental in this sense. However, I suggest a different name: Rare and Special Documents Section, that may include all documents of these characteristics held in a library. The Latin America and Caribbean Section should promote a greater participation of the countries in these regions in the Memory of the World Program of UNESCO.

Bibliography

-Alix, Yves. À la conquête du patrimoine. *BBF*, 2008, v.53, no 6 p. 1

-Darton, Robert. ¿Qué es la historia del libro?, en *Historias*, no. 44, sep/dic. 1999, p. 3-24

-*Diccionario Enciclopédico de Ciencias de la Documentación*. Ed. José López Yepes. Madrid: Síntesis, 2004.

-Fernández de Zamora, Rosa María. *Los impresos mexicanos del siglo XVI: su presencia en el patrimonio cultural del nuevo siglo*. México: UNAM-CUIB, 2009.

-Fernández de Zamora, Rosa María y Héctor Guillermo Alfaro López. Reflexiones en torno de la bibliofilia y el patrimonio cultural: el caso de los impresos mexicanos del siglo XVI, en *Infodiversidad*, v. 11, 2007 p. 41-64

-Fernández de Zamora, Rosa María y Manuel Rojas Villarreal. Cultura bibliotecaria y preservación del patrimonio documental de México, en *Memoria del XXIV Coloquio de Investigación Bibliotecológica*. México: UNAM. CUIB, 2007.

-IFLA. Sección de Libros Raros y Manuscritos (<http://www.ifla.org/en/rare-books-and-manuscripts>)

-Martínez de Sousa, José. *Diccionario de bibliología y ciencias afines*. 3 ed. Gijón: Trea, 2004.

-Osten, Manfred. *Memoria robada. Los sistemas digitales y destrucción de la cultura del recuerdo. Breve historia del olvido*. Madrid: Siruela, 2008. (Biblioteca de Ensayo 63. Serie mayor)

- Programa Memoria del Mundo UNESCO <http://portal.unesco.org/webworld/mdm>

San Juan, Puerto Rico, agosto 2011