



**The knowledge, valuation and dissemination
of the documental heritage of
Latin America and the Caribbean**

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“The memory and the patrimony must be present, today more than ever before, in this global world”.

Abstract.

The riches of the Latin American and Caribbean countries' bibliographic and documental patrimony is hardly known not only at the international levels, but even in the same region. This heritage, kept in libraries, archives, film libraries, photograph libraries, and other repositories, has not been sufficiently disseminated, so that its value as a testimony of our history and our culture is not appreciated nor valued by the society. The documental heritage is not only formed by the remote or recent past, as the audiovisual documents, but also by the current documents, the digital ones, which are the patrimonial repositories that must be preserved.

Several instances invite us to work for the preservation of the documental patrimony: the use of information technologies makes easy the undertaking of this task, which should be promoted by the professional librarians' and other related professions associations. This paper intends to stimulate the interest on the knowledge of the Latin American and Caribbean documental heritage, beginning from recent actions and studies that emphasize the uniqueness of the different documents that should be considered as an heritage.

Introduction.

The concern on the preservation of the mankind documental heritage is still present in this first years of the XXI century. It insists with growing intensity, that its diversity, its destiny and its uniqueness must be known. That is why, in the present times, the concern on the documental patrimony implies its definition, its preservation, its valuation, the place it must occupy in the cultural level. "It is necessary, today more than ever before, to think the patrimony, and think it globally, without confining it into our local universe" (Y.Alix, 2008, p. 1), and taking into consideration that the heritage diversity includes manuscripts, printed materials, films, archives documents, photographs and other documents that may and must be genuinely considered as patrimonial goods.

The documental patrimony that is characteristic and identifies us is a part of this heritage. The archives, libraries, film libraries, photograph libraries, as well as other institutions, preserve a great part of this treasure.

Heritage must be understood as the whole of cultural goods inherited from the past, as well as the ones created by the present generation, since the documental heritage refers not only to old documents and books, but also to every exceptional, unique or valuable document from the present times or from the past; heritage may also consist in what we are now creating and will leave to future generations. This is the reason why the need for the preservation of digital documents arises.

Some years ago I stated, together with Clara Budnick, that Latin America and the Caribbean own a past of historical and cultural similarities, over which their patrimonial identity has been built, and that our region's bibliographic and documental heritage represents a testimony of this shared experiences blend, impossible to be overlooked: experiences during the three centuries of colonial regime in which indigenous and Iberian cultures blended. In general, the cultural life during the colonial period was rather intense, especially in the two countries – Mexico and Peru – in which two important universities were soon created, and in which printing services were required to fill the requirements of the evangelization, the education and the governmental activities.

Experiences during the XIX century, the "political and cultural" independence struggles. In that century, after their independence, many countries turned their back to the cultural heritage of the colonial period, a fact that later on proved to have negative consequences for the preservation of their cultural heritage, especially the bibliographic and documental one, as well for shared experiences during the XX and this new XXI centuries, over the unfinished search for a more fair and educated society.

In all cases, the documental production from then on is the expression of the complexity of the society and the culture that created it.

The riches of the documental and bibliographic heritage of Latin American countries is not well known. This heritage, kept in libraries, archives, photograph libraries, film libraries, has not been disseminated properly, so that its value as a testimony of our history and our culture is not appreciated nor valued by the regional society, not to mention at the international level. Few countries are interested in Latin America, while other even ignore its geographical location. For Asia, Africa, and unfortunately for Europe, America is the United States: they don't know that America

is a whole continent, and that Mexico, Costa Rica, Brazil, Chile... are a part of America. Their geographical ignorance is deplorable.

In order to stimulate the appreciation of our region's documental heritage, it becomes necessary to increase the activities related to its preservation, such as: to rise a greater awareness on the documental value, to establish preservation areas in the institutions, to stimulate programs ment to bring up qualified personnel, to promote research, standard adoptions, cooperative programs, congresses, conferences and printed and electronic publications on the subject.

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Invitations.-

During the last years the importance of the cultural heritage and the need for its knowledge have been a constant, and as a result, the rise of a new vision of the documental heritage that lay the foundations of the identity and the diversity of mankind, criteria and policies for its protection have increased. The UNESCO presence in this environment has been acknowledged by everyone, and its programs are ment to protect the mankind cultural heritage, of which the documental patrimony is its essential part.

Another instance that invites us to meditate on the documental, and especially, the bibliographical patrimony, is the "new history of the book", founded by Henri-Jean Martin and his followers, as Roger Chartier and Robert Darton, who promote an integral study of the documents aimed to show their values and singularities.

In this paper we propose to consider these instances that invite us to uncover the documents patrimonial value.

The invitation made by UNESCO in 1972 for the preservation of the cultural heritage of mankind, given the forgetful character of the present times and the destruction of a great number of patrimonial goods, was necessary to remind us of the value of the riches inherited from the past, and to participate actively in its knowledge and protection.

In Mexico, in 1982, the UNESCO established the large concept of culture, and with it, the goal of considering all aspects of the heritage in which every cultural good must be placed.

It was in 1992 that, in order to avoid the world's increasing danger of the loss of the cultural memory, it launched its Memory of the World Program, oriented to the knowledge and dissemination of the mankind documental patrimony:

"If the stone, the paper and the parchment are the guardians of our legendary past, the audiovisual and the electronic and digital documents' message has been transformed in the testimony of our present times and of our future".

“In such a chaotic world as the one we are living in, we must have time for the preservation of those documents that define our roots, our past and our existence”.

The UNESCO point of view is that the patrimony belongs to all, that it must be preserved and protected for the benefit of mankind. In this sense, the mission of the Memory of the World is to facilitate the preservation of the documental heritage, to assure the universal access to this heritage, to rise a greatest consciousness in every level of the society on the existence and value of this patrimony, and to make an invitation to study and promote the documental patrimony with an international, regional and national perspective.

The preservation of the documental patrimony cannot be detached from the historical heritage as a whole, starting from the monumental patrimony: cathedrals and chapels, castles and palaces, public buildings and private houses, archaeological monuments... books and other documents are a part of this ocean (less known or appreciated than monuments). In order to approach more calmly the patrimonial issue, and to find a better way to manage our heritage, let us go back to the librarianship's more classical precepts: “To collect, identify, preserve, communicate” (Y. Alix, 2009, p.1).

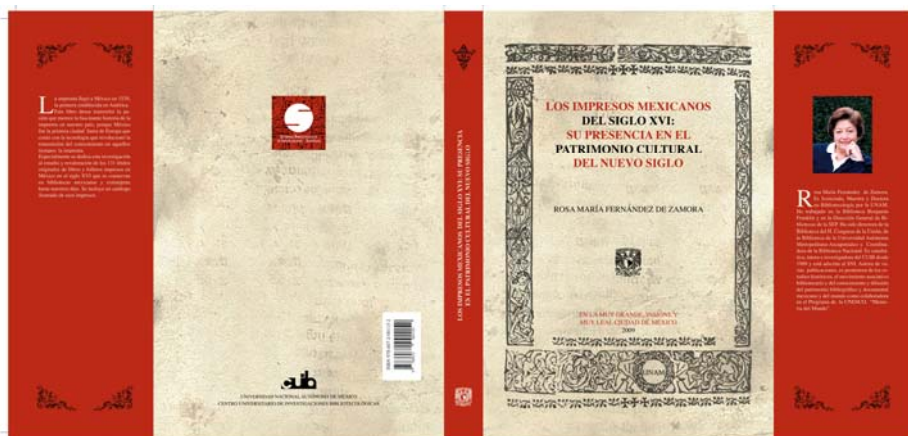
The five strategies to be accomplished are: identification of the documental heritage, sensitivity, preservation, access and dissemination. In the Memory of the World Program of UNESCO, the Latin American and Caribbean representations have not occupied the outstanding place that correspond to their documental riches; yet, it is required that many institutions cooperate to strengthen, promote and enhance, for the sake of common welfare, the consciousness, dissemination of, and approach to this patrimony. The success of the program depends on the initiative and enthusiasm of the national and regional committees. Mexico and Brazil are the countries that have the more enthusiastic committees in this region.

The acknowledgement of the heritage value that UNESCO grants is the Register in the Memory of the World. At present, 158 collections of 75 countries are in this register, approved by the UNESCO General Director.

But something of the Memory of the World that is worth standing out consist in the more important criteria that must be taken into account in order to consider a document or a collections of documents as a patrimony: **authenticity**, which means that it is original; **unique and irreplaceable**, meaning it has an international (regional or national) significance or influence; that every document is a product of its **time**; that it may represent a discovery or be the first of its type; the **place** in which it has been created, which might be of importance for the world's (regional or national) history; the **people**, the social and cultural context, the time of important changes and influences of individuals in relation to the culture, the arts, and the politics in a particular community; **subject or matter**, that may consist in an intellectual or historical contribution in any of the knowledge aspects; **shape and style**: outstanding aesthetic value due to the representation of a disappeared habit or support. Other criteria are: **rarity**, that is , its content and its external part are rare, unique; **integrity**: well preserved, complete.

The patrimonial vision of UNESCO fits the “new history of the book”, which in Henri-Jean Martin’s words, in the process of the history of the book, in any place and in any time, we must “study with rigour the technical and legal conditions of its publication, the time of its production, or its geographical circulation... the actors involved in the production of the book, the mutations, the material conformation of the text, and finally the successive peculiarities of its readability”. Chartier states that other bibliographic performers have taught us to demonstrate the value of the materiality of the book, of the document, that the meaning of a text... depends on the forms they adopt to be read, of the inherent characteristics of the written material. For instance, in relation to the printed objects: the book format, the frame of the pages, the division of the text, the presence or absence of images, the typographic conventions, and the punctuation (R. Chartier, p. 8-9). These features may be applied to all kinds of documents.

Following these suggestions – of the Memory of the World and of the “new history of the book” – I carried out a study of the New Spain printed materials of the XVI century, for the processing or research of documents as a patrimony, entitled **“Los impresos mexicanos del siglo XVI: su presencia en el patrimonio cultural del nuevo siglo”**, that has been recently published by the National University of Mexico.



The research was focused on books and pamphlets printed in that century. I considered the actors involved in their publication: authorities, printers, authors; I also analysed the political, religious and social prevailing environment, as well as the languages used for a more efficient communication for evangelisation, governmental or educational purposes. I examined the content of the documents, and the objectives that defined their writing and printing; all of the above to consolidate an integral vision of this cultural phenomenon of the first New Spain century. At the same time, it was necessary to evaluate the availability of the basic resources for this activities: paper, ink, types. While studying the makers of this singular bibliographic patrimony, and everything that induced its production, the configuration and characteristics of those printed materials was revealed, as the specific response to space and time requirements. The research on the destiny of Mexican printed materials in the XVI century was fundamental, because in order to consider them as a patrimony, its existence had to be confirmed. I believe that the valuable contribution

of this study is the illustrated catalog of the 131 original titles of the XVI century books and pamphlets that have arrived to us in these days, preserved in Mexican and foreign libraries. It wasn't an easy task to locate them and to obtain the digital copies I needed for the catalog. It took time and money, and it is an experience I wish to share with you, pointing out two basic principles. It is said that today everything can be done with the use of information technologies, since everything can be digitalized, duplicated, transmitted and consulted on the screen; that the digitalization saves claims on the pillage if works in other countries. But the fact is that it is not as easy as that, because of the following facts: in the first place, since the libraries that preserve these Mexican printed materials of the XVI century do not register them in their on-line catalog, it was necessary to ask for the list of the materials they kept, as was the case for the Library of Congress, the Hispanic Society of America, the Lilly Library, to mention only a few; and in the second place, the cost of the digital copies is very high, not only for the copy in itself, but also for the exclusivity rights that they claim for, but aren't justified, since there are no royalties, and those libraries do not disseminate those documents, not even through their public catalog. On the contrary, every Mexican library and some of other countries, as the Benson Latin American Collection Library, at Austin, Texas, and the Historical Library of the University of Salamanca in Spain, had the gentleness to provide the images as well as the right to publish them free of charge; to them, my deepest gratitude.

In the study of the XVI century 131 printed materials, I pointed out their value, uncovering singularities such as the following: outside Europe, only in Mexico were music books published, all of them extremely beautiful, text books to be used in the Royal University, a navigation book and a military arts book; the grammar and vocabulary books in native languages, that constitute a paradigm and a great contribution for the knowledge of these languages, and because of the time they were published. The artistic value of these printed materials is confirmed by the illustrations used in a great part of them, using engravings from Europe, but also those created in the New Spain.

As a by-product of this study, I carried out a research on the destiny of some loose sheets printed in Mexico in the XVI century: the "theses" presented at the Royal University of Mexico. The outcomes of this study are published in the article ***"Las excepcionales 'tesis' impresas en el siglo XVI presentadas en la Real Universidad y resguardadas en el AGN"***. This research helped me to confirm that the New Spain printed theses in the XVI century are the only ones that exist in the whole world, since in the European universities they weren't saved, and thus these Mexican printed materials must be considered a mankind documental heritage (Fernández de Zamora, 2008).



Printed theses in Mexico in the XVI century

These two studies are an example of what we can accomplish through the research of any type of document or a series of documents, from an integral patrimonial and historical vision.

As a conclusion, let us recall the insistence that UNESCO has sustained oriented to draw the attention on the world heritage, in which the immaterial meets the material: its Memory of the World program allows this organization to act in the documental sphere. It is a pity that the statements on this patrimony are less known and scarcely quoted than those concerning the public reading activity (Manuel du patrimoine... p.19), and that “the concept that the patrimony is sacred must be cast aside, pulling it out from its stocks so as to transmit it to the public, so as to create new readers”.

The fundamental tasks that we all must undertake are to emphasize its relevance, to confer a sense of belonging within the society, to establish the proper dissemination mechanisms to stimulate the recognition of the documental patrimony as a part of our identity, to encourage its revaluation, and to regulate its preservation.

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Nota: a partir del siglo XVII si se conservan “tesis” impresas en países europeos y en otros países americanos como Guatemala. Junto con el Dr. Héctor Guillermo Alfaro López estoy realizando una investigación sobre “Las tesis universitarias en México, siglo XVI a siglo XXI, una tradición a punto de perderse”.
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