

NEW RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES IN ECUADOR

*Jaime E. Rodríguez O., California State University, Long Beach**

The study of history in Ecuador is still in its infancy. Too few foreign scholars have ventured into the country's past and most Ecuadorean historians have failed to produce well-researched studies.¹ Consequently, generalization and bias have passed for scholarship. Although there are many reasons for the backward state of Ecuadorean historiography, perhaps the most important has been the poor condition of the nation's archives. During the last decade, however, libraries and repositories in the country have improved tremendously. While not yet the equal of research facilities in many other Latin American nations, still it is now possible to do historical research with relative ease in Ecuador.

Quito, the nation's capital, has the most extensive archives. Although Ecuador's Archivo Nacional de Historia was established in 1938, little was accomplished until it was transferred to the jurisdiction of the Casa de la Cultura Ecuatoriana, a government institution designed to foster national culture. The original holdings of the Archivo Nacional were documents of the colonial Presidency of Quito. Subsequently, papers of the Audiencia, which later became the Corte Suprema de Justicia, were made part of the national archive. The Archivo Nacional also became the repository of Quito's five notaries, which span the period from the sixteenth century to 1929. Recently other government agencies have been ordered to deposit in the national archive their files through 1929. Although the process of incorporating these documents has begun, most of the records remain in makeshift warehouses. Limitations of space and a lack of personnel to organize the new material will hamper efforts to classify the documents of the national period. Nevertheless, many sections of the Archivo Nacional have been processed and are available to scholars.

The archive is best for students of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Some of the manuscripts have been organized chronologically under the headings Audiencia de Quito, Gran Colombia, and República. Other bound groups are arranged by topics. Most of the repository's holdings, however, are ordered chronologically by topic and tied in large bundles. Licenciado Juan Freile, formerly a paleographer and investigator in the Archivo Nacional, has completed a guide to the archive. When published, it will provide a good index to the materials housed in the Archivo Nacional as of 1972. However, extensive records, such as the documents of the Ministry of Finance, are stored, unarranged, in temporary quarters. Until these papers are made available, some

* The writer spent the academic year 1971–72 in Ecuador, thanks to a grant from the Social Science Research Council.

Latin American Research Review

topics cannot be studied. The national archive is also beginning to provide other services for scholars. It has a microfilm reader and has recently acquired microfilm equipment.

Certain government agencies also operate archives. The Archivo del Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores is open to historians. However, because of the sensitive nature of its records, the Foreign Ministry requires precise statements of research goals and of the materials the investigator wishes to see. The documents are arranged chronologically by country. There are also separate classifications for international conferences. Although many sections are reasonably well organized, some papers are stored without any semblance of order.

The Ministry of Defense also maintains its own repository, not as well ordered as the archive of the Foreign Ministry. Still, the Archivo del Ministerio de Defensa Nacional contains important sources for the history of Ecuador, particularly service records. These materials are available to scholars with approved research projects. Other ministries and government agencies retain some files. But they do not, as a rule, permit investigators to use them. In special cases, with ministerial permission a researcher may be allowed limited access.

Congress maintains its own library and documents in the Biblioteca y Archivo del Poder Legislativo. The archival section contains records of all debates, reports, and resolutions of Congress, some of which were classified at the time they were written. The researcher may see these documents, providing they are not too recent, upon making a formal request to use them. Generally permission is readily extended to any scholar. (Recently, a historian used classified papers from the 1945 Congress.) The library section contains all printed government reports and laws as well as an extensive collection of published legislative debates. It also has complete holdings of the various official government newspapers, beginning with the one established in 1830.

The Catholic Church possesses several archives which are now more accessible to scholars, thanks to recent Papal instructions. The principal religious repository in Quito is the Archivo Arzobispal, housed in the former episcopal palace. Although much material has been pilfered, it does contain extensive documentation relating to church and social history. The repository is open to researchers and has a provisional catalogue. Materials were originally classified in three general sections: colonial, independence, and the republic. The holdings are now being reorganized to make them more accessible to scholars. Adjacent to the archive is a library with a good collection of nineteenth century imprints pertaining to church matters. The priests in charge of the archive and library are most helpful to researchers.

The repository of the Ecclesiastical Cabildo is also open to investigators. Its holdings, pertaining to the diocese and archdiocese of Quito, are strongest for the eighteenth century. It also contains documents on the expulsion of the Jesuits. Because Quito was the seat of the only bishopric in what is now Ecuador during the colonial period, the archive is an important source for colonial studies. Since other sees were established in the national period, the student investigating post-colonial topics should also consult episcopal archives in other cities.

Various religious orders maintain good archives in Quito. Presently, the best organized is in the convent of Santo Domingo. Its director, historian Father José María Vargas, O.P., has arranged the documents and completed an index of the holdings. Besides Dominican records, the convent also houses copies of Spanish documents gathered by Father Enrique Vacas Galindo.² The Jesuit archives have been reorganized and contain much information. However, there are large gaps because many colonial documents, particularly hacienda records, were taken to Chile when the Society of Jesus was first expelled from the country in 1767.³ The convents of San Francisco and San Agustín also contain good repositories, although many manuscripts at San Agustín were badly damaged by a nineteenth century occupation of the monastery.

The best known and best organized archive in Quito is the municipal archive. For more than forty years, the city has been publishing its *Libros del Cabildo de Quito*. All the documents are bound and arranged chronologically by topic. Although there are some papers from the sixteenth century, the repository is strongest on the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Of particular interest to scholars is a collection of *actas* of the ayuntamiento from the date of its founding to the present. Unfortunately, the municipal archive provides only makeshift facilities for researchers.

Special mention must be made of repositories which, although not organized for research, provide data for social history. Among them are parish registries, which not only contain entries for baptisms, marriages, and deaths, but also provide information on employment and the social standing of parents and relatives. At the turn of the century, the Ecuadorean government began to keep a civil registry which records similar information. Both parish and civil registries are excellent sources for demographic and social history. The offices of the Registros de Propiedad maintain records of land ownership, transfers, and sales. The history of property may thus be traced by comparing the records of the Registro de Propiedad with notary records. The office of the Registro de Alcabalas, moreover, has tax rolls which contain important economic and demographic data.

The Universidad Central, Ecuador's principal university, has an extensive archive going back to the sixteenth century, although most documents pertain to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Materials are bound and organized chronologically by topic. The repository contains financial reports and minutes of faculty meetings. The bulk of the papers, however, consists of course outlines, lists of students and professors, and of theses and records of graduation, as well as registries of entry into professional groups, principally medicine, law, and engineering.

Although Quito has many archives, the city lacks adequate library facilities. The Biblioteca Nacional, now under the auspices of the Casa de la Cultura, has been neglected for many years. It occupies a dilapidated building which formerly housed a skating rink. Disorder reigns and countless rare works have been lost. The library has a good selection of Ecuadorean imprints, but its poor and crowded facilities discourage research. One can only hope that government plans to transfer the library to a new building will be carried out before its holdings are totally destroyed. The municipal library is much better organized and has a good corpus of Ecuadorean

books and Quito newspapers. Unfortunately, it is plagued by space and staff limitations. The city is completing a new building where the library will be housed in one wing. The proposed move should make the municipal library a good center for investigation. The Casa de Cultura has a small, well arranged library. Although not a research facility, it has a good selection of national imprints. The libraries of the Universidad Central and the Catholic University of Quito also have good holdings.

The Banco Central has an archive and library which may be used by scholars provided they receive special permission. The Central Bank has its own economic research department, but it does not carry out historical investigation. The bank library has a representative collection of Ecuadorean books and pamphlets on banking, finance, and other economic topics and it is by far the best place to use statistical publications.

Many Ecuadoreans have private libraries and archives which contain rare items. The best is the archive and library collected by the late Jacinto Jijón y Caamaño. As a descendant of General Juan José Flores, the country's first president, Jijón inherited many important documents. He also received Federico González Suárez' valuable library upon the bishop's death. Jijón, himself a distinguished scholar, gathered an extensive archive and library. Although this writer was not permitted to use the collection, he has been told by various historians that it is the best private library in Ecuador, particularly for the independence and early national period. Jijón left the collection to the people of Ecuador and appointed his widow executor. However, the library is not open to the public, although it is sometimes possible to obtain permission to use it by special introduction for well-known Ecuadorean scholars.

A few miles outside of Quito, in the suburb of Cotacollao, the Jesuits have organized the finest library of Ecuadorean imprints presently in existence. The Biblioteca de Autores Nacionales Aurelio Espinosa Pólit also contains an extensive manuscript collection. The library is well catalogued and has separate reading rooms. Its pamphlet and newspaper collections are particularly valuable. The director, Father Julián Bravo, S. J., is preparing to publish a catalogue of the Espinosa Pólit library, which should be of great assistance to researchers.

Guayaquil, Ecuador's largest city and principal port, has recently created an important regional archive. Under the direction of Dr. Julio Estrada, the Archivo Histórico del Guayas has gathered coastal documents, including municipal papers, notarial records, and the archive of the High Court of Guayas. Eventually, the archive will receive all the files from Guayas provincial agencies. The library of Dr. Carlos A. Rolando, presently in control of the city, is to be turned over to the archive. Rolando began his library at the turn of the century and it contains an excellent collection of imprints, particularly pamphlets and broadsides. Since Estrada, the archive's director, believes the repository should foster research as well as popularize history, the Archivo de Historia will sponsor four types of publications: a bulletin of the archive; a monograph series; a documentary series, beginning with the publication of the books of the cabildo of Guayaquil; and the re-edition of out-of-print classics. The first of these publications, the *Revista* of the archive, appeared at the end of 1972.

NEW RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES IN ECUADOR

The Archivo de Historia has recently acquired microfilm equipment and a reader-printer. It is also in the process of establishing its own press in order to insure the regular appearance of its publications. One of the future goals of the archive is to form a school of historical studies. All of these projects should be of great importance to the development of Ecuadorean history.

Guayaquil also has important libraries. The municipal library—not to be confused with the Rolando library—has an excellent collection of Ecuadorean imprints. Its newspaper holdings are extensive, particularly for the coast. The Guayaquil branch of the Casa de la Cultura also houses a good library. Other institutions such as the University of Guayaquil, the Catholic University of Guayaquil, and the Colegio Vicente Rocafuerte contain good reference libraries and also, in some cases, rare books. Despite the humid coastal climate and the numerous fires which have ravaged the port, Guayaquil is the major center for Ecuadorean imprints. Scholars working on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are well advised to begin their research there.

Cuenca, the nation's third largest city, is another important center for research. The Casa de Cultura has recently organized a regional archive, the Archivo Nacional de Historia: Sección del Azuay. The municipal museum and archive also have extensive documentary collections. Cuenca has long been an intellectual center with important private libraries. Although some have been purchased by foreign universities, many remain in the city. Special mention must be made of the library and archive collected by Víctor Manuel Albornoz, a distinguished historian of Cuenca, which contains many nineteenth century imprints and manuscripts for the independence period. Unfortunately, Cuenca does not possess good public libraries. The researcher is advised to consult secondary materials elsewhere. The city, however, does have substantial church archives.

The highland city of Ambato has an outstanding library, the Casa de Montalvo. This museum and library, dedicated to the great Ecuadorean writer Juan Montalvo, has a very good collection of nineteenth century publications and central highland newspapers. The Casa de Montalvo is well arranged and has a comfortable reading room for scholars.

Most provincial capitals now have a branch of the Casa de la Cultura Ecuatoriana which generally includes a library of representative local works. In some instances, regional publications can only be found in such centers. Although municipal libraries are generally found in larger cities, they vary in quality. Nevertheless, they are often useful. Many municipalities have good city archives; however, most of them are in disarray and not prepared to receive researchers. The secretary of the city is designated by law to the care of municipal records. Investigators wishing to work in towns which do not have research facilities should contact the secretary to obtain permission to use the records. Generally, provincial cities have not gathered notarial records in one place. It is common to visit notary offices and see documents dating back to the sixteenth century tied in bundles and stacked against the walls. The older records are bound in chronological order and are thus easier to consult. This writer has used

Latin American Research Review

notarial documents in various cities, including Cuenca and Ambato. In every case, the notaries were eager to help and happy to have someone study their records.

Although research facilities have improved immensely in the last few years, with the exception of a few large archives and libraries, most repositories are understaffed. Even the great Jesuit research library at Cotacollao has only one person, Father Bravo, in charge. This means that historians will have to learn when these facilities are open or who will open them for research. Historical investigation in Ecuador requires tact, patience, and willingness to work under varied conditions. Despite such inconveniences, research in Ecuador offers extensive possibilities to the historian of Latin American.

NOTES

1. Adam Szazdi, "The Historiography of the Republic of Ecuador," *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 44: 503–515 (Nov., 1964).
2. Alfonso Ortiz Bilbao is publishing an index to these documents in various issues of the *Boletín* of the Academia Nacional de Historia of Ecuador.
3. Hermes Tovar provides a guide to these records in his "Las haciendas jesuitas de México, índice de documentos existentes en el Archivo Nacional de Chile," *Historia mexicana*, 20: 563–618 (April–June, 1971); 21:135–189 (July–Sept., 1971).