

# YUCATAN ON MICROFILM: Existing Collections and Finding Aids\*

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Over the past two decades, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, the University of Alabama, the University of Texas at Arlington, and the Universidad de Yucatán have produced microfilm copies of primary source materials in the Yucatán. While their films only begin to tap the rich documentary resources of the peninsula, the combined holdings put a large corpus of materials for reconstructing the Yucatecan past within the reach of scholars in the United States. This brief essay will describe the four microfilm collections as they existed in the fall of 1984 as well as the finding aids that have been developed to assist researchers in accessing them.

## *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints*

For doctrinal reasons, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS) supports a microfilming program that has concentrated on copying vital records throughout the world and preserving them in an underground vault at Little Cottonwood Canyon, Utah. Servicing this burgeoning program is the responsibility of the LDS's Genealogical Society of Utah, whose declared intention is nothing less than "to gather records on everyone who has ever lived."<sup>1</sup> The library of the Genealogical Society of Utah, a pioneer in developing programs of outreach and access, is the main link between the archive and the research public. With headquarters near Temple Square in Salt Lake City and some four hundred branches worldwide, the Genealogical Library develops access tools, provides reference services, and enables researchers to borrow microfilm at a nominal charge.

The LDS Church began filming in northern Mexico in 1958 and

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in Yucatán in the early 1960s. Published counts total some four thousand reels of Yucatecan documents, and the staff at the Genealogical Library confirms that camera crews continue to operate in the area. The films concentrate on parish records and civil registers, the core components of past vital statistics. Both these sources provide information on long-term trends in rates of birth, marriage, fertility, and death in Yucatán. The peninsula's historic record, which consists of three hundred years of semiautonomous Indian community life followed by the onset of a rapid capitalist expansion and resultant breakdown of the status quo, offers interesting possibilities for testing demographic hypotheses.

Vital records are not the only documents filmed by the LDS Church. For a variety of reasons, including demands by archivists as a condition for entry, LDS holdings include materials of no direct genealogical significance. Such areas create pockets of unexpected information such as the church records, wills, and *cofradía* documents noted for the Yucatán.<sup>2</sup> But whatever they may lack in variety, the films recoup in chronological depth and geographic dispersion. Dates of Yucatecan materials range from the 1586 parish counts for the church at Conkal to civil registers reaching into the mid-1970s in many areas. The records include some 146 cities and towns spread throughout the entire peninsula.

Access to the LDS films is greatly facilitated by published and in-house finding aids. The most widely distributed of the published aids is the series edited by Roger M. Haigh, *Finding Aids to the Microfilmed Manuscript Collection of the Genealogical Society of Utah*. Thus far nine volumes have appeared in the series, three of which are useful to researchers of the Yucatán. The first two, *Preliminary Survey of the Mexican Collection* and its supplement, provide a broad outline of the scope of the Mexican films, including geographic and chronological distributions and the types of material included. The third, David J. Robinson's *Research Inventory of the Mexican Collection of Colonial Parish Registers*, provides a more detailed approach to the colonial component, including those of thirty-three Yucatecan *municipios*.

In an article published in *Library Trends*, David Mayfield describes the finding aids developed for use in the Genealogical Library.<sup>3</sup> Although these aids were designed with the genealogist in mind, they furnish valuable access points to any investigator who has developed a list of personal names for searching. Researchers should be aware of the Genealogical Library's work in developing two machine-readable databases, the International Genealogical Index (IGI) and the Genealogical Library Catalog. Both databases provide information on individuals arranged by the geographic locality in which their vital statistics appear. In Salt Lake City, researchers can utilize the databases to search their thousands of entries at computer speed. The contents of both the IGI

and the Genealogical Library Catalog are periodically transferred to microfiche for distribution to the library's branch system.

The Library also produces three series of focused finding aids. These "Reference Aids," "Research Outlines," and "Genealogical Research Papers" are intended to introduce the genealogist to a particular problem or group of records. But if the research paper *Major Genealogical Record Sources in Mexico* is representative of the genre, these in-house aids will be of help to those conducting research on the Yucatán in providing explanations of record types, descriptions of agencies that produced the records, and the agencies' locations across the peninsula.

The Genealogical Library employs a Latin American specialist, Lyman Platt, who knows a great deal about the Library's Latin American activities and services. He has inaugurated two projects of special interest to investigators of the Yucatán. The first is a bibliography of publications on Latin American family history with three thousand entries, which is scheduled for publication in 1985. Platt's dissertation in progress, tentatively titled "Genealogical Research in Spanish America," will examine the institutions that produced vital records in Spanish-speaking America.<sup>4</sup>

### *The University of Alabama*

The University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa possesses extensive holdings of Yucatecan archival materials, manuscripts, printed books, pamphlets and broadsides, and 164 periodical runs—some thirty thousand items in all on 119 rolls of microfilm. The materials are housed in the Gorgas Library, which assumes responsibility for their preservation and access.

The Alabama materials were filmed in 1967–68 and comprise most of the Cepeda Peraza archive, now housed in the Agora Fonapaz complex in Mérida. While some colonial materials appear—mostly official documents from the late eighteenth century—the core of the collection is a set of books, periodicals, and manuscripts documenting the economic transformation and native revolt of mid-nineteenth-century Yucatán that have been analyzed in the recent studies of Gilbert Joseph and Allen Wells.<sup>5</sup> The films include extensive series of official documents for the state of Yucatán and the city of Mérida, including deliberations, correspondence, and financial accounts, as well as runs of the robust periodical production of Mérida and Campeche from the 1830s to the 1910s. The filmed materials contain information on the establishment of new corporations under Mexican law, their legal status, their capitalization, and their ties to local elites. The films also contain correspondence, both printed and manuscript, between Yucatán authorities

and the principal Maya *caciques* of the Caste War, including Jacinto Pat, Juan Pío Poot, and Paulino Pech.

The range of subject matter available goes beyond the Caste War, government and politics, and economics to treat virtually every aspect of Yucatecan life in the mid-nineteenth century: education, language and literature, scientific expeditions, church activities, and public health conditions among them. In addition to the ample records from Mérida's municipal government, other official documents come from the army, the electoral college, the 1824 Constitutional Congress, and the legislature.

A description of holdings, *A Catalog of the Yucatecan Collection on Microfilm in the University of Alabama Libraries*, was compiled by Marie B. Bingham and published in 1972. This guide provides access to the 2,246 unique titles filmed. By using the catalog, researchers can request microfilm from the University of Alabama through the OCLC interlibrary loan system. Alabama's University Bibliographer, Martin Faigel, may be contacted for further information on use of currently held Yucatecan materials.

#### *The University of Texas at Arlington*

In 1973, following a plan organized by the Library Committee of the Interuniversity Council of the North Texas Area, the University of Texas at Arlington filmed materials from three of Mérida's principal archives. The collection currently includes eighteen of the groups of documents from the Archivo de la Mitra (Archivo Histórico de la Arquidiócesis de Yucatán) in their entirety, the Archivo Notarial del Estado from its earliest records until 1900, and complete runs of fifty-five newspaper titles from the Hemeroteca del Estado (newspaper archive). In addition, UT Arlington began the filming of the rich documentation of the Archivo del Estado de Yucatán by fully filming two sections, Documentos Coloniales and Documentos del Congreso.

The materials from the Archivo de la Mitra cluster in the late colonial and early national years. Its holdings highlight the activities of the church's central hierarchy—decisions and correspondence of the bishops, ordinations of clergy, and royal decrees concerning the church. Two record groups of special interest to social historians are Group 16, which gives the reports of the pastoral visits of the bishops and their representatives, and Group 18, which gathers information on lay brotherhoods (*cofradías*) across the peninsula.

Spanish colonial judicial institutions depended on the notary (*escribano*) to record public and private documents such as wills, bequests, mortgages, and powers of attorney and to archive them for future use.

As several studies of the colonial period demonstrate, notary archives hold a wealth of information for reconstructing the Yucatecan past.<sup>6</sup> UT Arlington's films of the Archivo Notarial copy all notary records for the city of Mérida from 1689 to 1900. Both the archive and UT Arlington's catalog are arranged by the name of the notary and then by record dates.

The Archivo General del Estado is, as its name suggests, the principal repository of the state of Yucatán. Housed in new quarters near Mérida's international airport, the archive consists of six major record groups: Documentos Coloniales, Poder Ejecutivo, Municipios, Congresos del Estado, Poder Judicial, and Estado Civil. These divisions correspond to the major activities of state government, and with the exception of the first section, all of the groups continue to receive records as they are deaccessioned by state agencies.

The UT Arlington films consist of the first and fourth of these major record divisions. The holdings of the Congresos del Estado are the documents—session papers, agreements, and correspondence—of the state legislature from its first session in 1823 up to 1933, the last records open to the public at the time of filming.

Documentos Coloniales is an ad hoc arrangement of those secular colonial papers that remain in public hands.<sup>7</sup> Dates of the collection range from 1683 to 1824, but significant clusters of material appear for only the last fifty years of the colony. Despite its chronological compactness (the whole division fits on twenty roles of microfilm) and the large lacunae that leap from the guide entries, Documentos Coloniales contains materials of interest: manuscript census fragments for the first decade of the nineteenth century for Mérida and the complete manuscripts for the city of Campeche and the municipios of Tizimín, Calkiní, Valladolid, Sotuta, Tecoh, Tekax, Izamal, Champotón, and Bolonchecauich; copybooks of early-nineteenth-century gubernatorial correspondence for *ayuntamientos* throughout the peninsula; and a series of *hojas de servicio* and formal testaments that contain valuable information on social relationships of the Indian population of Yucatán at the end of the colonial period.

Unlike the LDS and Alabama filming, UT Arlington's filming followed archival arrangement rather than selective criteria. While the films cover only a small part of the peninsula's archival holdings, UT Arlington's approach enables the researcher to examine entire sections of material, which eliminates doubt as to whether other related items might also be present in the holding repository.

Access to the films is provided through a recent publication, *Catálogo de las fotocopias de los documentos y periódicos yucatecos en la Biblioteca de la Universidad de Texas en Arlington*. This work offers introductory essays on the contents of each of the sections filmed and a detailed

breakdown, often at the document level, of the holdings, with roll numbers. As with the Alabama materials, these films are available for borrowing through the OCLC interlibrary loan system. Maritza Arringunaga Coello, author of the *Catálogo*, handles inquiries about the UT Arlington collection.

### *The Universidad de Yucatán*

In 1977 the Departamento de Estudios Económicos y Sociales of the Universidad de Yucatán established, with financial assistance from the Ford Foundation, the Banco de Información, which is devoted exclusively to Yucatecan studies. Among the facilities of the information bank are a library, a newspaper indexing center, and an archival collection of photographs. Three years ago, the banco began to locate, film, and catalog the extant printed literature on the Yucatán, using sixteen millimeter equipment provided by a Ford Foundation grant. To date the most successful offshoot of this project has been the filming of private libraries in Mérida. The work of Francisco Anda, director of the Banco de Información, and his colleagues at the university has removed the considerable obstacles inherent in filming private collections. Their energies and diplomacy have been rewarded with microfilms of some two thousand books, pamphlets, and periodicals held in the libraries of such notable Yucatecan savants as Alfredo Barrera Vázquez, Humberto Lara y Lara, and Pedro Castro de Aguilar. Although most of the films hold secondary literature, primary sources also appear, such as Barrera Vázquez's notes for his *Diccionario Maya*.<sup>8</sup> The banco's library has produced typescripts of the contents of the films, and these guides are available in Mérida and at the University of Alabama. Anda has expressed a willingness to provide copies of the films at the cost of their reproduction.<sup>9</sup>

### *Prospects and Conclusions*

Prospects for expanding Yucatecan microfilm resources seem bright. Lyman Platt affirms that the Genealogical Library has been authorized to expand its filming parameters to include more than vital records. His own work and that of his institution promise to enhance the efficiency of investigators in the LDS's impressive and growing collections. In the past fiscal year, the University of Alabama proposed expansion of its Yucatecan films through a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). Their project, a joint effort with the Universidad de Yucatán, envisioned an extension of UT Arlington's filming of the Archivo del Estado, section by section, and the entry of current film holdings into OCLC for increased access nationwide. De-

spite an enthusiastic response from the NEH, Alabama was forced to postpone its project. In Mérida the Universidad de Yucatán's Banco de Información continues its project of filming private libraries and making these films available to local researchers.

Whatever may lie ahead, the libraries of the LDS Church and the Universities of Alabama, UT Arlington, and Yucatán hold microfilms of great value to Yucatán research. The films lend themselves to use by a variety of investigators: those interested in in-depth research on the peninsula, those seeking a comparative focus for research on other regions, and those seeking a corpus of primary material for the purpose of honing analytical skills. Each collection occupies a particular niche in the documentary universe: the LDS collection covers vital records, Alabama offers a nineteenth-century emphasis, UT Arlington holds the complete records of particular archives, and the Universidad de Yucatán covers private library collections. Each institution has developed aids to facilitate research and has expressed a willingness to share its resources with investigators in all parts of the United States. In times of shrinking travel budgets, such collections are indeed a boon to researchers.

#### NOTES

1. Quoted from the Preface to the *Preliminary Survey of the Mexican Collection* (Salt Lake City: Genealogical Society of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 1978), xiii.
2. See the summary of Yucatecan records, *ibid.*, 142–54.
3. David M. Mayfield, "The Genealogical Library of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints," *Library Trends* 32, no. 1 (Summer 1983):116–20.
4. For a sample of Platt's published work on these topics, see his "Hispanic American Records and Research," *World Conference on Records* 9 (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1980), series no. 708.
5. Gilbert Joseph, *Revolution from Without: Yucatán, Mexico, and the United States, 1880–1924* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982). Allen Wells, "Family Elites in a Boom-and-Bust Economy: Molinas and Peóns of Porfirian Yucatán," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 62, no. 2 (May 1982):224–53.
6. The social history of colonial Yucatán has enjoyed a recent boomlet. Three examples of the high-quality work appearing are: Nancy M. Farriss, *Maya Society under Colonial Rule* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984); Marta Espejo-Ponce Hunt, "Processes of the Development of Yucatán, 1600–1700," in *Provinces of Early Mexico*, edited by Ida Altman and James Lockhart (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976), 33–62; and Robert W. Patch, "La formación de estancias y haciendas en Yucatán durante la colonia," *Boletín de la Escuela de Ciencias Antropológicas de la Universidad de Yucatán* 4 (1976):21–61.
7. The complete filmed groups are as follows: Documentos de los Ayuntamientos, 1683–1824; Bandos y Ordenanzas, 1683–1821; Censos y Padrones, 1809–1811; Correspondencia de Gobernadores, 1807–1822; Correspondencia de Diversas Autoridades, 1800–1820; Procedimientos de Ramo Criminal, 1790–1821; Documentos de Gobernación, 1790–1821; Documentos de la Iglesia, 1794–1822; Fondo Judicial, 1790–1824; Fondo Militar, 1790–1820; Impuestos Propios y Arbitrios, 1813–1820; Reales Cédulas, 1747–1823; Servicios Militares, 1787–1821; Sucesiones Testamentarias, 1763–1821;

- Sucesiones Intestadas, 1789–1820; Testamentos Militares, 1780–1824; Tierras, 1730–1823; Varios, 1786–1821.
8. For a description of this truly monumental work, see Edward H. Moseley, "The *Diccionario Maya Cordemex: A Cooperative Project in Mayan Linguistics*," *LARR* 18, no. 2 (1983):113–17.
  9. Francisco Anda can be reached at the Centro de Investigaciones Regionales "Dr. Hideyo Noguchi," Universidad de Yucatán, Avenida Itzáez No. 499, C. P. 97000, Mérida, Yucatán.

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