

MEMORY OF THE WORLD REGISTER - NOMINATION FORM

Argentina - Documentary heritage of the Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata

Description: The documentation produced in the Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata was collected and archived in Buenos Aires, the city which was its administrative centre. The *Archivo General de la Nación* (The National Archives) also contain colonial documentary collections from the Republics of Uruguay, Paraguay, Bolivia and a district in Peru (*Intendencia* (Governorship) of Puno). The documentation on the ports activity of Buenos Aires and Montevideo also provides knowledge about the political and commercial relations which existed between the Viceroyalty and the other countries of America, as well as with Europe and Africa.

PART A - ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

1. Identity and location

- 1.1 Name of documentary heritage: Documentary heritage of the *Archivo General de la Nación*
- 1.2 Country: Argentina
- 1.3 State, province or region: Federal Capital
- 1.4 Address: Avenida Leandro Alem 246. C.P. 1003. Capital
- 1.5 Name of organization or institution (if appropriate): Archivo General de la Nación

2. Legal information

- 2.1 Owner (name and contact details): Archivo General de la Nación
- 2.2 Custodian (name and contact details): Archivo General de la Nación
- 2.3 Legal status
 - (a) Category of ownership (e.g. public, corporate or private): Public Archives
 - (b) Details of legal and administrative provisions for the preservation of the documentary heritage: Its functioning is governed by Law 15.930 which stipulates that the documents conserved by this institution are of both scientific and administrative importance. It makes provision for access to documents over 30 years old and empowers the Archives to supervise national administrative archives. The Law was subsequently complemented by Decrees 232/79 and 1571/81 which standardize selection criteria and establish conservation time limits.
 - (c) Accessibility: All documentary holdings of the *Archivo General de la Nación* are accessible to the public on the sole condition that the requested document not be in a poor state of preservation.
 - (d) Copyright status: Users are required to state the origin of published documents.

3. Identification

3.1 Description and inventory: The *Archivo General de la Nación's* holdings include the governmental and administrative documents of the territories of the Río de la Plata region. For the colonial period, this documentation concerns the operations of the colonial institutions of government, justice, defence, economics and religion from the seventeenth to the first decade of the nineteenth century. With the establishment of the *Reglamento de Libre Comercio* (Free Trade Regulations) of 1778, there was a large increase in the activities of the Río de la Plata ports. Traders from Chile and Peru joined in the Atlantic trade using the trade

routes which linked Upper Peru and Santiago to Buenos Aires. Starting in 1785, the Company of the Philippines linked the Río de la Plata and Asia. At that time, contacts with the West African coast were untrammelled and began to extend to the coasts of Mozambique and the islands of the Indian Ocean. The Viceroyalty's population and labour power increased with the constant arrival of African slaves, especially after 1791, when the Crown liberalized the slave trade.

3.2 Bibliographic/Registration details

Documentary heritage: 'Register of Ships'

Dates: 1619-1802

Nature of documents: official letters, records, inventories, account books.

Total number: 222 files (each comprising about 400 folios)

Description: This documentary heritage comprises official letters concerning maritime traffic in the ports of Buenos Aires and Montevideo. The records were established by the crown officials of the Captaincy of the Port, who thus registered the arrival of ships, their cargoes, crews and passage. They were also responsible for giving vessels authorization to depart for foreign ports. In the event of any irregularity in the registration process, the Judge responsible for arrivals would assume responsibility for continuing the procedure. Following the establishment of the Custom House, its officials played a complementary role in the task of registering ships. Registration officials also supervised the slave trade with the Portuguese colonies and Africa.

Documentary heritage: 'The Trade in Negroes'

Dates: 1617-1812

Nature of documents: Registers of slaves, applications for licences, registers of confiscated slaves, books of French and English *Asientos* (agreements), account books (funds, debits and dates, payment of taxes), registration records.

Total number: The documentation on the slave trade forms part of various categories of documents such as ships' registers and documents concerning customs, the Treasury, royal edicts, legal records, censuses, registers and account books. There are also documents on slave labour in the properties of the Society of Jesus and other religious orders.

Description: The trade in negro slaves passed through various stages in Spanish America and, consequently, in the Río de la Plata. The *Consejo de Indias* (Council of the Indies) assumed responsibility from the beginning in this domain, creating a special board within itself called the *Junta de Negros*. An initial stage concerned the granting of 'licences', usually to Portuguese or French traders given that, although the Spaniards used slave labour, they did not directly participate in the trade itself. The second stage comprised the regulation of the influx of slaves based on the signing of *Asiento* treaties with the French Guinea Company in 1700 and the South Sea Company, starting from 1713. The third stage started in 1789, when King Carlos IV abolished the *Asientos* and declared the freedom to trade in slaves in his American possessions. The documents show the procedures followed when the slaves were brought in, and their taxation, sale and distribution. Slaves continued to be brought into the Río de la Plata until 1812, when their import was outlawed by a Decree of the post-independence government. Slavery was later abolished by the 1853 Constitution.

Documentary heritage: 'Indigenous labour'

Dates: 1600-1810

Nature of documents: Registers, visits and renewed visits, *Encomienda* gifts, historical records, records of payments of tributes.

Total number: The documentation on indigenous labour forms part of the historical records and account books belonging to the eight *Intendencias* (governorships) into which the Viceroyalty was divided.

Description: Despite the fact that the enslavement of Indians was prohibited by the Laws of the Indies, in both the Río de la Plata and the remainder of Spanish America, there existed three types of indigenous forced labour: the *Encomienda*, the *Mita* and the *Yanaconazgo*. Under the *Encomienda* system, the Indians were placed under the guardianship of an *Encomendero* appointed by royal decree and for whom the Indians worked in exchange for protection, food, clothing and conversion to Christianity. The Indians gave their labour and also paid royal tribute for the land they held. For this purpose, periodic registers were established of the indigenous peoples and they were subjected to visits. The *Mita* was the name given to the compulsory labour for a set period imposed on the Indians in exchange for wages. It was common in the mines of Upper Peru, especially in Potosí, and the brutality of its application resulted in a very high mortality rate among the Indians in question. The *Yanaconazgo*, like the *Mita*, meant a lifetime of forced labour for indigenous people. Moreover, the Indians were considered to belong to the land and could thus be sold or rented with it. Although the Indians administered by the Society of Jesus cannot be categorized as having been under forced labour, they came under a form of closed production with a separate administration run by the monks. When the order was expelled in 1767, a total of about 90,000 Indians were working on its various estates.

3.3 Visual documentation:

Photographs belonging to the ‘Register of Ships’ heritage

- Licence and register of the cargo of the brigantine Primavera. Bahía de todos los santos (All Saints Bay), 1793.
- Invoice for the packing of merchandise and brands loaded for shipment on the *Nestra Señora de la Luz*, Buenos Aires, 1743.
- Notes concerning fruits loaded for shipment to European ports. Buenos Aires, 1797.

Photographs belonging to the ‘Trade in Negroes’ heritage

- Cargo of confiscated slaves. Buenos Aires, 1625.
- Account concerning slaves taken from the African coast. Buenos Aires, 1798.

Photographs belonging to the ‘Indigenous Labour’ heritage

- *Repartimiento* (distribution) of the inhabitants of Nuestra Señora de la Concepción village, District of Pacajes. 1786.
- *Repartimiento* of the inhabitants of Condo Condo village. 1795.
- List of chiefs of Indian nations which converted to Catholicism. Buenos Aires, 1780.
- Plans of the Jesuit *reducciones* (settlements of Indians founded by missionaries) of San Bernardo and Nuestra Señora de los Dolores. 1780 and 1781.

3.4 History

The *Archivo General de la Nación* derives from the *Archivo General* of the province of Buenos Aires, established during the government of Martín Rodríguez on 28 August 1821. During the presidency of Julio Argentino Roca, the national government, considering that ‘the General Public Archives of the Capital are essentially a national institution, given their origin and constituent documents’, decreed, on 30 January 1884, the creation of a commission composed of Mr Bartolomé Mitre, Mr Andrés Lamas and Mr Amancio Alcorta. Its task was to decide, in concert with the government of the province of Buenos Aires, how to distribute the documentary heritage on the basis of its origins. The signing took place on 19 July of the agreement on the transfer of heritage collections and physical property, and the nationalization Decree was proclaimed on 29 August. Law 1520 gave the new institution its own organization chart and budget.

3.5 Bibliography

- Bulletin of the Inter-American Centre for the Development of Archives (CIDA)
- Journal of the *Archivo General de la Nación*
- Descriptive aids of the Department of Written Documents
- *Archivo General de la Nación, 1821-1996*

3.6 Names, qualifications and contact details of independent people...

The significance of the documentary heritage described above has been widely recognized by the national and international academic community.

4. Management plan

Evaluation of the documentary heritage to be included in the Memory of the World Register is carried out on the basis of the selection criteria in Annex 2 of the Nomination Form. The city of Buenos Aires, which was the capital and administrative centre of the Viceroyalty, had documents sent to it from what are now the Republics of Argentina, Uruguay, Bolivia and Paraguay, and one of the districts of Peru (Puno). Indeed, this *Archivo General de Argentina* is now the most comprehensive depository for the study of the history of the Mercosur countries.

5. Assessment against the selection criteria

5.1 Assessment of the documentary heritage against each criterion described in Annex 2.

5.2 Contextual assessment including an assessment of the importance of a series of documents, the importance of a series of documents in a particular setting, and the assessment against other documentary heritage.

The documentation concerning the ports activities of Buenos Aires and Montevideo provides us with knowledge about the political and commercial relations that existed between the Viceroyalty and the other lands of America, Europe and Africa. The establishment of the *Reglamento de Libre Comercio* led to the increased growth of activities in the ports and consequently, in the entire trade network from Lima, Peru and Santiago (Chile) to Buenos Aires. From 1785 onwards, the Royal Company of the Philippines linked the Río de la Plata with Asia. During the same period, contacts with the West African coast were untrammelled, and began to extend to the coasts of Mozambique and the islands of the Indian Ocean. The Viceroyalty's population and labour power increased with the constant arrival of slaves. At the same time, throughout the colonial period the northern provinces made use of indigenous labour, especially in the mines of Upper Peru and the plantations of the Jesuit missions of Paraguay. The registers of Indians who were in constant revolt provide us with knowledge about the composition of the indigenous population of the Viceroyalty.

5.3 An evaluation of authenticity: An evaluation of the authenticity of the individual documents is unnecessary in the case of the *Archivo General de la Nación*, given that they are originals produced by official colonial bodies.

5.4 An assessment of rarity (if appropriate): These are unique documents in every case, although they have characteristics shared with all the documentation produced by the Spanish colonial Administration.

6. Consultation

6.1 Details of consultation about the nomination with the

- (a) owner
- (b) custodian
- (c) relevant Regional or National Memory of the World Committee (if appropriate)

Consultation of the documentation takes place in the Department of Written Documents at the headquarters of the *Archivo General de la Nación*. As these are original documents, the person doing the consulting should be at least 18 years old. Documents can only be taken out on loan from the Archives if a presidential Decree is obtained to that effect.

7. Nominator

7.1 Name: *Archivo General de la Nación*

7.2 Relationship to documentary heritage: Custodian and establishment in charge of the conservation and dissemination of the nation's historical heritage.

7.3 Contact person: Don Miguel Unamuno, Interventor del Archivo General de la Nación, Av. Leandro Alem 246, C.P. 1003, Capital; T.E. fax 0 54 1 3316642 and 3310065.

8. Assessment of risk

8.1 Nature and scope of threats to the documentary heritage

- Political climate - voluntary information: The conservation of Argentina's documentary heritage entails no risk in this respect. Nevertheless, attention should be drawn to the fact that its physical proximity to the centre of political decision-making puts it at risk, as it may be unduly threatened by possible conflicts.
- Environmental conditions: The physical location of the *Archivo General de la Nación* implies serious problems for the conservation of the documents, because the siting of the building in the most central part of the city and its closeness to the port mean that it faces atmospheric pollution which is mostly caused by traffic. The humidity resulting from its proximity to the Río de la Plata favours the proliferation of fungi and insects, and the presence of rodents, which are characteristic of port areas and old buildings. This latter aspect carries the risk of fire. In the last few years, a marked tendency has been observed in the city of Buenos Aires towards the tropicalization of the climate, with a corresponding increase in humidity and temperature. This tends to occur even during the winter season. With respect to lighting, fluorescent tubes are used in almost all the storerooms. It is during the consultation of the originals and their reproduction by photocopying that the most inadequate handling and exposure take place. Lastly, security measures against robbery and vandalism exist in the building in the form of a round-the-clock surveillance by police officers and fire fighters.
- Physical conditions: The present headquarters of the *Archivo General de la Nación* is a building which dates back to 1904, and which was not constructed for archival purposes. In 1995, renovation and remodelling was accordingly carried out.
- Preservation budget: US \$60,000, in addition to the allocations for remodelling work.
- Extent and nature of use: The sole condition for consulting documents in the *Archivo General de la Nación* is to have attained one's majority, given that the documents are unique and separate spaces do not exist in which young people can work. The new opening has attracted a varied clientele of historians, lawyers, notaries, genealogists, geographers, architects, journalists, ordinary citizens looking for documentary proof of their rights and obligations, students, institutions, the written press, radio, television and film directors.

9. Preservation assessment

- Present physical state: Taking into account, first, the different kinds of media and their characteristic problems and material conditions, and, second, the causes of both intrinsic and extrinsic damage, we can say that the overall state of conservation of the

documentary heritage of Argentina is good, and can be improved if the necessary steps are taken.

- History of preservation: During the last few years, studies have been carried out with a view to implementing general preservation measures, some of whose objectives have been achieved, while others have not, because of the lack of funding and appropriate personnel. A comprehensive preservation programme was set up to remedy this situation, and one of the objectives achieved has been the restoration of the building, and its disinfection and systematic cleaning. However, the capacity to identify specific instances of damage has to be established, as well as the policy of applying specific solutions.
- Current preservation policy in relation to proposed nominated documentary heritage: This comprises the following: (a) In regard to conservation and preservation, intensive courses and training scholarships abroad for the personnel in general and, more particularly, for document handlers; (b) Dry cleaning of the storerooms and documents (about 12,000 linear metres); (c) Systematic disinfection once a month; (d) Establishment of data sheets on the problems affecting the archival units of the Fondo Contaduría Colonial (colonial accounting archive) (4,000 bequests). This task is to be extended to other storage facilities; (e) Rehabilitation of photographic glass plates belonging to the Witcomb Collection, for public consultation; (f) Changing of the containers of photographic material; (g) Adoption of a U-matic video format totalling 350 hours of film; (h) Evaluation and analysis of the possibility of changing to other media (microfilms and magnetic) of paper-based and modern documents (films, photographs, open-reel video-tape recorders, cassettes and discs); (i) Provision of dehumidifiers to stabilize the relative humidity in the document storerooms; (j) Agreement with the Genealogical Society of Utah for the micro-filming of documentary holdings of mutual interest; (k) Project to create a specific sector for conservation and preservation, with the appropriate equipment and personnel.
- Person or organization responsible for preservation: *Archivo General de la Nación*.