Hannah Alpert-Abrams
2014

Tinker Project Proposal

After centuries spent locked up in the special collections of European and North American libraries, the first books ever printed in the Americas are coming home – in digital form. The first printing press in the Americas was established by Juan Pablos in a nascent Mexico City in about 1538 – less than twenty years after the Spaniards conquered Tenochtitlan and built their capital city on its ruins. After Mexico achieved independence, however, those foundational books left the Mexican archives for the private collections of bibliophiles abroad. Now, thanks to the Primeros Libros project (founded in 2010), these books have returned to Mexico in the form of scanned digital files. Primeros Libros is a transnational effort to digitize America's incunables—books printed before 1601—that have never before been gathered in a single (albeit digital) space. Through the collaborative efforts of institutions in Mexico and the United States (including the University of Texas), 81 percent of the surviving titles, and 232 out of 336 surviving works, can be accessed online on the Primeros Libros website.

The Primeros Libros project is an exciting example of the democratizing potential of the internet, bringing historical artifacts into public light and expanding research possibilities. It is also an example of digital repatriation, a process by which foundational artifacts that were once removed (or stolen) from their site of origin are returned as digital facsimiles. At the same time, however, the Primeros Libros project represents a reconstitution of the archive, the site of historical knowledge that for scholars like Michel Foucault has long been seen as the center of discursive power and national identity construction. My project, which is part historiography, part archival anthropology, focuses on the transformations that the Primeros Libros project has wrought on the structure of the Mexican colonial archive. I will

investigate this transformation through an analysis of the physical and digital editions of a single text, the "Advertencias para los confesores de los naturales." By visiting the archives that house this text, and by conducting a material analysis of its seven extant editions, I will document an unprecedented moment in modern archival history, and analyze the consequences of that transformation for national archival construction.

With the generous support of the Tinker Award, I will be able to spend the month of July, 2014, in Puebla, Mexico, home of three of the founding institutions for the Primeros Libros project. While there, I will be able to examine the "Advertencias" and other incunables from the Universidad de Las Américas Puebla, the Biblioteca Palafoxiana, and the Biblioteca Lafragua. The "Advertencias" is significant for my project because it is one of the few works to be held simultaneously by five of the seven founding libraries of the Primeros Libros project: the three Mexican libraries listed above, as well as The Benson Latin American Collection at the University of Texas at Austin and the Cushing Memorial Library at Texas A&M University. This spring, I have scheduled visits to study editions of the "Advertencias" held at the Benson Collection and the Cushing Library. I intend to complete the project this summer with visits to the three archives in Puebla.

An interesting but little-studied text, the "Advertencias para los confesores de los naturales" was written by the Franciscan friar Juan Bautista de Viseo. Born in New Spain in 1555, Bautista was a missionary concerned primarily with the adaptations of the Catholic faith to the American context. As Verónica Murillo Gallegos has written, his "Advertencias" – or "Warnings for the Confessors of Natives" – is a semi-plagiarized contemplation of the recognition and interpretation of native superstitions and idolatry. As such, it gives insight

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into the adaptation of Christian theology to an American context, and into the interpretation of indigenous practices by missionary workers. Printed by Melchior Ocharte in 1601, the work is also interesting for its material properties. Melchior Ocharte was the fifth printer in Mexico; he inherited his press from his father, Pablo Ocharte, who was the successor of the first America printer Juan Pablos. An analysis of the material aspects of the "Advertencias" thus gives access to the history of early printing practices in this family business.

By comparing the multiple editions of the "Advertencias" via the digital viewer Cobre, it is possible to see precisely how they differ materially. These differences give us information about the role of these texts in seventeenth-century colonial Mexico: who printed them, who owned them, and how they may have been read. But my project is equally concerned with the archival positioning of these texts. At the Benson collection, the "Advertencias" is part of the Joaquín García Icazbalceta collection, the private library of a nineteenth century Mexican intellectual. (Icazbalceta, interestingly, often bemoaned the loss of Mexican colonial documents to archives abroad). At the Cushing library, in contrast, the work is part of a "Mexican Colonial Collection" carefully curated by archivists to provide a broad overview of Mexican history. My project asks how these different organizational schemes imply different interpretations of the text. At the same time, I consider the physical context for the five editions of the "Advertencia." For example: the Biblioteca Palafoxiana was founded in 1646 as one of the first public libraries in the Americas, and is now a popular tourist destination. The Benson collection, in contrast, is housed in a small, modern library at the University of Texas at Austin. By comparing physical location and organizational schemes between the archives, I contextualize the Primeros Libros project with the archival history of American incunables.

During my time in Puebla, I also intend to conduct interviews with a number of archivists and other participants in the Primeros Libros project. I am currently in contact with Manuel Santiago and Ivan Perez, the project representatives from the Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, who will help me to orient in the city and arrange meetings with other participants. My interviews with Kent Norsworthy from the Benson Latin American Collection, and Anton Duplessis from Texas A&M, have given me insight into the project's history and future from the perspective of the United States, including the difficulties of maneuvering national borders and the problem of cultural patrimony and data ownership and collection. Interviews with the project representatives in Mexico will provide an essential perspective on this history.

Before arriving in Puebla, I plan to spend one week of June Mexico City, where the Biblioteca Nacional de México has an edition of the "Advertencias" with *marcas del fuego* – marks of ownership burned into the pages of the book – from three different former owners. Because this library is not currently a participating member of the Primeros Libros project, it serves as an interesting counterexample, illustrating the material gaps in the digital record.

The current members of the Primeros Libros project are planning an annual meeting to be held this June in Oaxaca, Mexico. I have been invited by Kent Norsworthy to participate in this meeting, to present my preliminary research and to meet other project participants. With support from the Tinker Award, I look forward to this unique opportunity to be a

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participant-observer in the best sense: to document, analyze, and discuss the Primeros Libros

project with the participants themselves.

BUDGET

PLACE	days	item	cost/day	total	
OAXACA	7	bus		40	
		hotel	80	560	
		food	40	280	880
DF	7	Bus		50	
		hotels	100	700	
		Food	40	280	1030
PUEBLA	30	taxi: austin		60	
		flight		700	
		taxi: puebla		22	
		food	30	900	
		Bus daily	1	30	
		apartment		1200	2912
		TOTAL		**4822**	

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Costs Breakdown.

PUEBLA

Taxi to Austin: $60 roundtrip

Flight (roundtrip Austin – Puebla): $700 usd

From airport to downtown, roundtrip: taxi, 300p/$22

Apartment (5 weeks): $1500

Food: $30/day, or $630

Daily bus transportation: $1/ day = $30/month

3740

OAXACA

Bus Puebla -> Oaxaca: roundtrip, $40

Taxi from bus station to hotel:

Hotel: $80 per day/ one week $560

Food: $280

= 880

Mexico City

Bus Mexico/Oaxaca: $50 rt

Hotels in Mexico City: $100/day: $700 total

Food: $280

= 1030