

Some Treasures of Cotacollao
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The seventy-one reels of microfilm held by the Vatican Library and by that of Vanderbilt University, called the “Biblioteca Ecuatoriana ‘Aurelio Espinosa Polít,’” came into existence in late 1966. A happy coincidence of Vanderbilt Library money and interest, expertise from the Vatican Film Library at Saint Louis University, and generous cooperation by its Ecuadorian custodians, all bore fruit in bringing to the United States a rich and varied collection of documents and some imprints from Ecuador.

Writer and professor Robert H. Davis, now of Luther College, spent several days in Quito during April 1966, ordering and selecting, from the enormous troves of MSS and imprints, a generous slice of the Espinosa Polít’s late colonial and nineteenth-century holdings. These were filmed, some months later, by Father Laurie Daly, SJ, of Saint Louis University, assisted by the then-director of that university’s program in Quito, Father Harold Bradley, SJ. Physically ever-present, ever-attentive, and ever-generous was Padre Julián G. Bravo, SJ, the benign and erudite director of the Espinosa Polít Library at Cotacollao, near Quito. To Father Bravo must go the thanks of scholars who use the collection here, for he played a decisive role in suggesting and uncovering additional materials to be filmed—beyond those originally selected.

Time does not permit us here to more than a cursory glance at the contents of the seventy-one reels of microfilm. I propose, therefore to merely share a few samples drawn from only a handful of reels in the collection. What makes the Biblioteca Ecuatoriana formed by Padre Aurelio Espinosa Polít, SJ, (1894–1961) so uniquely important to students of the Ecuadorian past, as the samples below will show, I believe, is the large quantity of official documentation it contains. This is a reflection of the tardy creation of Ecuador’s National Archive—it was not in existence until after 1943—and of the strong institutional role played by the Church—notably the Society of Jesus—in Ecuadorian cultural life. Thus, a multi-dimensional savant like Espinosa Polít, concerned with literature, political history, the expansion of education in the arts and natural sciences of Ecuador, and himself the heir to several previously assembled MS collections and libraries, collected. He did so, doubtlessly, to save many records from destruction. Posterity must judge his contribution, therefore, not only on his notable published opus, but, too, on his remarkable Biblioteca—especially its MSS and rare fugitive printed materials.

Thus, glancing at Reel 1, one finds papers relating to affairs in Cuenca, 1808–1810, that contain correspondence from the bishop there to President Ruiz Castilla in Quito, concerning political affairs; to President Toribio Montes (139 items) in 1812 to 1816; and to President Melchor Aymerich from Riobamba province and others in 1820. Included are copies of reports dealing with patriot activities in neighboring New Granada, especially Popayán and Santa Fe, as well as others relating to royalist measures taken in Peru. Further along, in the same reel, one comes across several detailed descriptions of the human and economic resources of various pueblos in the Quito jurisdiction assembled in 1808. So, too, are found reports on the *donativos* to the crown made in Cuenca province in 1809. This listing hardly does the first reel justice. There is much more documentation, from 1800 to 1820, on Catholic subject matter.

Reels 2, 3, and 4 continue chronologically, in a rough way, into the Gran Colombian period down to 1827, but they also include papers—civil or military in nature— from 1816 and 1817. A sampling of Reel 5 reveals correspondence to the *Intendente* of Quito, Colonel Pedro Murgueitio in 1825 and detailed *padrones* of towns and districts in the Quito region, where in the males, their worth, age, occupation,

and location (on *haciendas* or in *obrajes*) is given as of 1827. This is followed by the *pleito* over the *hacienda* of Cotocollao's ownership (1828/29), letters from Indian governors to the Quito *Intendente* in 1828, and numerous private petitions. Then one finds a seven-folio *informe* on the Corregimiento of Ambato by the holder of that office, Don Bernardo Darquea, which is a succinct account of Ambato's ups and downs (from the earthquake of 1797 to 1802) under his rule. A little further in the film is a secret *informe* (March, 1807) by Darquea to the bishop of Quito, Monsignor Fernando Cuero y Caicedo, on the secular/regular clergy of Ambato, some six folios long, detailing their private morals as well as public conduct. As can be surmised by now, such paper should have been kept in the government archives of Quito's interior ministry (to whom the post-1821 correspondence is largely addressed). Reel 5's last section contains papers from the Gran Colombian period from 1830, again, of interior ministry cast and content, some 192 items.

The following Reels (6 and 7) proceed with like materials and cover the years 1830 through 1831. An inspection of Reel 8 in a bit more detail shows it, indeed, to relate to official matters of 1832 and 1833, but mixed among correspondence are such gems as a list of testamentary dispositions from a Quito notary (thirty folios in length) that detail the money and goods left to the "*mandas forzosas*" (i.e. the Church) by testators between 1776 and 1832; ecclesiastical correspondence from Iscuandé (in Colombia), Cuenca, and Quito in 1832; Indian affairs in Babahoyo of 1832; and papers detailing the canonization process of the *Azucena* (Lily) of Quito, Juana Mariana de Jesús (1662–1700). There is also correspondence by the poet, José Joaquín de Olmedo (1780–1847), while he was prefect of Guayaquil department in 1832. Like so much else in the collection, it has not been published.

To jump a bit, Reels 9 through 29 contain correspondence—largely official—covering the years 1834 to 1883—that is, from the long presidencies of Generals Flores, Novoa, and Uribina through the end of that by Gabriel García Moreno (1861–1875) and beyond. Reels 30 to 32 contain special collections, such as letters by Vicente Rocafuerte, 1835–1846 (totaling more than four hundred items), as well as notarized copies of the trial of García Moreno's assassins (1875–1876) and of the trial for the poisoning of the archbishop of Quito, Monsignor Ignacio Checa y Barba in 1877.

Reels 33 to 35 contain further García Moreno papers, mostly his original correspondence, some of it printed by the late Wilfrido Loor, as well as numerous copies of his official correspondence with France and the Holy See regarding Ecuadorian affairs; MSS of some of his writings, political and didactic; and additional letters written to García Moreno, 1846–1862. Not all of these have seen publication.

From Reel 36 to Reel 54, MSS that intrinsically complement the earlier correspondence noted above are found—that is, papers at first selected out as being too bulky for a limited filming budget. Thus, a spectrum of even greater detailed study of certain subjects, through interior ministry papers, from the 1820s to 1892, especially education, as well as constitutional history and public finances, is possible, between these and earlier reels. The inclusion, too, of further pieces from the military side of the wars of independence complements the socio-economic aspects of documents in the first set of reels. Much material of a biographical nature can be found, from men prominent in the independence movement in Ecuador (and Gran Colombia & Peru) in Reels 50–54. The last-named reel (54) also contains the original manuscript of Father Juan de Velasco's important *Historia del Reino de Quito en la América Meridional* (1789), a classic of northern South American history in the late colonial period. The next nine reels (down to 63) are largely filled with colonial MSS, of geographical and educational interest, dated from 1601 to 1810, with papers by and about Francisco Javier Eugenio de Santa Cruz y Espejo. An additional accretion of materials, mostly published earlier, of MSS dealing with the events of 1809 in Quito, as well as those of 1810–1811 with various copies of important constitutional and legislative documentation,

are also found scattered in these nine reels (54–62). Reels 63 to 70 are filmed copies of mainly Quito-published official gazettes of varied completeness, starting in 1830 with the *Gaceta de Gobierno* to 1834; then the *Gaceta del Ecuador*, 1837–1845; and then *El Nacional*, 1846–1870. There is considerable duplication and many gaps in the runs, unfortunately.

Reels 70 and 71, the final reels, contain copy-books (*copiadores*) of the governors of Cuenca, from 1799 through 1830 to various authorities (civil, financial, and ecclesiastical). Also filmed were several *legajos* relating to the mint of Quito, to Bishop Fernando Cuero y Caicedo, and to General Antonio Farfán, 1821–1863.

This all-too-superficial rosary of the Aurelio Espinosa Polít film is just meant to tantalize and not to gorge the listeners. The ramble through its celluloid contents, by the way, would have been enormously more difficult had not a checklist of its contents been prepared in 1986 by Mr. John Norman Rissmandel, MA from Vanderbilt University in 1970, whose thesis “Gabriel García Moreno, 1821–1861: The Years Before Power,” drew upon some of its treasures. To film the priceless sixty-five thousand books and imprints of the Espinosa Polít must remain a goal that another university consortium—whether Vanderbilt University, Saint Louis University, or both with others may well wish to embark upon it.