

Introduction:

The Viceregal and Ecclesiastical Collection (VEMC)

Michael A. Polushin

The Viceregal and Ecclesiastical Collection (VEMC) is one of the most important and richest corpus of extant manuscripts devoted to Colonial Latin America found in any major research institution in the United States of America. The collection is comprised of seventy-seven *legajos* (bundles) subdivided into well over 3,000 *expedientes* (here, folders) that range from a single page to a vast legion of civil, criminal and administrative proceedings numbering several hundred folios, with one bound volume exceeding 1,000 pages of royal orders directed to imperial concerns and appointments spanning the Atlantic and Pacific Worlds. As its name suggests, the diverse types of records found in the VEMC are located within the broad and overlapping categories of Church and State and follow the cultural, ethnohistorical, socio-economic, and political contours of society from the sixteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century. Hence, the VEMC also has the potential for multidisciplinary projects spanning the social sciences and humanities, as well as research devoted specifically to gender studies, historical geography, religious studies, material culture and to scholarship that addresses the political economy of comparative empires.

The wide range of documentation found in the VEMC centers on the geographical area of New Spain and encompasses missives penned by viceroys and parish priests as well as a myriad of sources falling within the overlapping categorical boundaries of civil, criminal and ecclesiastical proceedings generated in

such important locales as *pueblos de indios* to the Council of the Indies in the Iberian Peninsula. A significant portion of the manuscripts date from the last quarter of the eighteenth century through the 1820s, long recognized by scholars of the Spanish and Mexican imperial past as a transitional period marked by the zenith of the Bourbon Reforms, the Independence period, the Empire of Iturbide and the first decade of the fledgling Mexican Republic.ⁱ Many records are directed toward developments in the Mexican regions, including the *Provincias Internas* of Mexico's northern frontier through period marking the ascendancy of José de Gálvez within imperial ranks and during his tenure as Minister of Indies.ⁱⁱ The occasional expediente listed below pertains to the Kingdom of Guatemala (*Audiencia de los Confines*) and the Philippines. The collection also is characterized by more than a few printed sources from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that range from the aforementioned royal orders to broadsides from the Empire of Iturbide. In short, this collection touches upon numerous features and legacies of colonial society in the Viceroyalty of New Spain from a vast multitude of imperial and local perspectives.

History of the Collection

In order to appreciate the complexities of this collection and to maximize its value for advanced research projects, it is prudent to consider its historical development. The VEMC should be viewed as an extension of the efforts undertaken during the 1920s and 1930s to establish Tulane as a leading center for the study of Latin America in the United States with the foundation of the Department of Middle American Research (today, the Middle American Research Institute or MARI).ⁱⁱⁱ Its

foundation coincided with the purchase of the William E. Gates Collection, a substantial array of Mexican documents and rare books. Gates then became the first director of the department and the Library. During the 1930s, Gates's successor Frans Blom continued to purchase original materials and rare books pertaining to Latin America and in 1936 the Danish archaeologist acquired the vast majority of the manuscripts that constitute the VEMC from the renowned Mexican book dealer Manuel Porrúa.^{iv}

Unfortunately, Porrúa did not include a description of the original provenance of the bundles of documents or whether or not he endeavored to organize the wide array of records himself. Nevertheless, careful examination of the extraordinarily rich, eclectic type of documentation in the VEMC that originated from equally diverse regions in Mexico, the Spanish Empire, as well as the occasional expediente from the Archdiocese of Guatemala strongly suggests that the manuscripts were in the possession of either a civil jurist or prelate whose ecclesiastical career began in a seminary during the Independence period, crystallized during either the Restored Republic of the 1860s and culminated during the Porfiriato. Select expedientes from the VEMC confirm, for example, just how prebends and bishops accumulated records from each diocese they served in as their careers unfolded in the Viceroyalty of New Spain or within the larger framework of the Spanish Empire. Meanwhile, the numerous Mexican regions represented in the VEMC manuscripts tend to mirror the ranking of dioceses consistent with the Apostolic Succession governing professional ascent for priests or dignitaries of the Catholic hierarchy, with a prelate in the Archdiocese Mexico,

the Archdiocese of Guatemala or the Diocese of Puebla serving as an ideal end to a successful career. The possibility of a Porfirian prelate or a civil magistrate intimately involved in ecclesiastical affairs in metropolitan centers and throughout the Mexican regions as the original collector of the bulk of the documentation found in the VEMC also may explain the existence of a group of sources embracing the period of the Revolution of Ayutla so important to nineteenth-century Liberal Reform and a few manuscripts originating from the Mexican Revolution, when issues of Church and State once again reached a fevered pitch.

Whatever its origins may have been prior to its acquisition by Porrúa, the metamorphosis of the VEMC following the arrival of the bundles of documents to Tulane was consistent with the changes normally found in any major manuscript or rare book collection at a leading research institution. Initial efforts were undertaken during the remainder of the Great Depression to catalogue the collection with support of the Works Progress Administration. From the 1940s through the 1950s, additional piecemeal attempts were made to identify the contents of the sets of *legajos* now comprising the first part of the collection, with a series of typed note cards serving as the basis of a finding aid for a small portion of the records. Over the next several decades the collection expanded to its current state as a result of the discovery of documents found within other holdings at Tulane, donations and further acquisitions. As a result of a National Endowment for the Humanities grant, the current collection was completely processed during the mid 1980s under the direction of Dr. Guillermo Nájuez Falcón, now Doris Stone Librarian Emeritus, The Latin American Library at Tulane. With the assistance of Ruth Olivera, the lengthy

and highly detailed card catalogue that resulted from the NEH project included the initial and subsequent attempts at identifying the documents in the collection, and also served as the basis for the database that now accompanies the VEMC microfilm. It is thus one of the most detailed finding aids available for any major microfilm collection.

The Use and Scholarly Potential of the Collection

After the VEMC was processed, the collection quickly became a conspicuous part of the published work of leading scholars found throughout North America as well as doctoral dissertations undertaken at Tulane. Many of these studies addressed topics falling within the Bourbon era as well as the Independence and early Republican periods, the major segments of Mexican history represented in the abundance of documentation in the collection. The historian William B. Taylor, for example, uses the VEMC to help illuminate the underlying socio-political, economic and cultural features of the archdiocese of Mexico and the diocese of Guadalajara for a wealth of themes that range from the introduction of rural schools to *arancel* (fee schedule) disputes that pitted Indigenous communities, district Spanish officials and parish priests against each other within the larger context of the regalist policies buttressing the Bourbon Reforms during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.^v The VEMC was one of the collections integrated by Brian Belanger into his doctoral study devoted to regional developments in Querétaro during the Bourbon period, while the historian Sonya Lipsett-Rivera marshaled select documentation from the collection to help navigate the enormous complexities surrounding water rights in Colonial Mexico for her dissertation.^{vi} In anticipation of

her forthcoming work on late Colonial and early Republican education at the crossroads of interethnic relations and ecclesiastical models for acculturation, the Mexican scholar Ileana Schmidt Díaz del León found the records of VEMC indispensable for her path-breaking research for her Ph.D. on the Colegio de San Gregorio.^{vii}

As seasoned scholars and graduate students who have used the VEMC are aware, the collection still remains largely underutilized and untapped. It thus retains enormous value and seemingly boundless potential for a wide array of advanced research projects, including seminar papers, undergraduate and graduate thesis, as well as monographs and articles that confirm and challenge existing scholarship. Even many of the mundane records found in the collection will help scholars uncover new perspectives on topics of family or the “everyday life” of religion.^{viii} Select seventeenth-century Inquisition proceedings found in the collection, moreover, corroborate well-known orthodox prescriptions of patriarchal sexual mores and the misconduct of select members of the clergy. A host of *expedientes* are comprised of notarial records charting marriage petitions from the northern frontier of New Spain and suggest the possibility for contesting the claims of scholars regarding *calidad*, estates and classes, especially when these records are measured against the Aristotelian-derived racial profiles found in contemporary *casta* paintings and parameters of “liberty” directed toward free persons of African descent.

While issues of race, class, patriarchy and sexuality are conspicuous in the VEMC, many other manuscripts found in the collection fall within the realm of the

eighteenth-century political economy guiding the entangled destinies of Church and State during the zenith of the Bourbon Reforms as well as the Independence and early-Republican periods during the nineteenth century. Several *expedientes* contain the proceedings of ecclesiastical courts and provide additional perspectives regarding the decisive role played by cathedral chapters during the period together with the prominence of individual members of the clerical hierarchy within Mexican affairs.^{ix} In this regard, moreover, these ecclesiastical proceedings found in the VEMC can definitely expand upon the scholarly insights of leading Mexican historians with respect to such key figures as Fermín Fuero, an eighteenth-century prebend in Oaxaca and a future bishop in Chiapas or fray Ramón Casaus y Torres an early nineteenth-century Dominican prelate, member of the Holy Office in Oaxaca, and future archbishop of the Kingdom of Guatemala.^x One select *expediente* that includes an inventory of the library of the embattled Guatemalan archbishop long before his expulsion from Guatemala in the late 1820s, reveals the remarkable scope of works he retained that recounted spiritual developments in Asia. His eclectic personal collection included select “Enlightened” tomes from both the Catholic and Protestant world also found on the Roman Index for the period, a feature of the prelate’s estate (*expolio*) that poses a serious challenge to lingering notions of Spanish Catholic obscurantism and suggests new insights into the development of clerical ideology at a key juncture in the past.^{xi}

In addition to the fertile ground for research projects directed towards the political trajectories of conspicuous members of the clerical hierarchy, many manuscripts associated with the cathedral chapters further account for the

importance of ecclesiastical finance and levies for the economy of New Spain, and, as Taylor and Belanger clearly demonstrate in their respective studies, the importance of situating economic matters involving the Church in a regional context. Several sources in the VEMC, for example, underline the importance of individual chaplaincies (*capellanías*) as a source of credit on the regional level, a feature of the colonial economy of New Spain that can be derived from the occasional manuscript devoted to the expolios of prelates, as the example of Casaus y Torres clearly illustrates. Hence, the collection provides ample opportunities for understanding the regional dimension to credit relationships derived from said estates and annuities and to test assertions of leading scholars regarding the amortization of ecclesiastical loans by the Spanish Crown during the Independence period.^{xii} To be sure, the economic and fiscal component of the VEMC indicates that the entangled destinies of Church and State extended to female religious orders, including the vast loans and economic activities wielded by the Capuchins in Mexico City found in conspicuous manuscripts on the topic, an added dimension to the political economy of religion in its Colonial Mexican context.^{xiii} Many other records reveal similar connections between ecclesiastical levies, *cofradías* (confraternities) and the local economy, including credit relationships central to land and labor issues, with select documentation embracing the mining sector of New Spain's economy.^{xiv}

While the proceedings surrounding *cofradías* highlight their importance as a source of credit, these records also highlight the VEMC's potential for advanced research into socio-economic, political and cultural features of local *pueblos de indios* as Taylor's scholarship clearly demonstrates. In addition to offering regional

comparisons to the legion of topics addressed by Taylor regarding local religion, parish priests and society, many documents detailing intimate knowledge of rural communities help fill gaps in the understanding of the Mexican regions that have received considerable attention from scholars in recent times, including the dioceses of Oaxaca and Michoacán as well as Guanajuato, an important center for mining and insurgency. A worthwhile group of *expedientes*, to cite one example from amongst several others, is devoted to Irapuato (near Guanajuato and then part of the diocese of Michoacán) during the eighteenth century, when it still boasted a sizable P'urhépecha population. Many of the records associated with the community detail disputes surrounding a *hacienda* owned by the Cofradía de Nuestra Señora de la Misericordia while other manuscripts pertaining to Irapuato address issues of local religion, acculturation and power dynamics, including the relationship with the community and members of the Franciscan Order as well as the effort to introduce a school for young females (*colegio de niñas*) during the second half of the eighteenth century.

The frequent appearance of the various branches of the Franciscans, the other Mendicant Orders, and the Society of Jesus in a sizable portion of the VEMC provides a fitting end to any consideration of the use and potential of the collection, especially since scholars recognize that the study of the regular clergy for the eighteenth century and Independence periods represents one of the most important areas in need of advanced research. Select expedientes of the VEMC relate directly to the many activities of the Jesuits, including a document entitled "Reglas Secretas de los Jesuitas" and a set of proceedings directed towards the return of the Society

of Jesus to Durango in 1815. Meanwhile, many other manuscripts are directed towards the missionary and educational efforts of the Mendicants following the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1767, a mandate that underscores the importance of Franciscans associated with the “ultramontane” Roman congregation *Propaganda Fide*. Here, too, the VEMC can help fill the lacunae of other major archives and collections.^{xv} Furthermore, it is important to stress that the collection is certainly not limited to the Franciscans in this regard. Several other VEMC manuscripts directed to the Mercedarians and the efforts of the order’s *visitador* fray Estanislao Falero during the zenith of Spanish imperial reform suggest a central role ascribed to this order in the exercise of royal will that also presents a contrary perspective to the Bourbon assault on the Church.^{xvi}

The VEMC Finding Aid Database

The database that accompanies the VEMC microfilm is one of the most complete and detailed finding aids available for a manuscript collection. It resulted from a concerted effort to address some of the intricacies of the collection explored above regarding the original efforts to process the vast majority of the documents. As noted above, shortly after its arrival during the 1930s, a card catalogue was started for the collection and this process unfolded over the next several decades. What this meant, however, was that descriptions for the materials found in each *expediente* lacked uniformity or contained archaic or misleading information. While many of these issues were addressed when the collection was completely processed during the 1980s, the card catalogue and the archival shelf list still remained the only finding aid available for researchers. In order to facilitate the needs of scholars, the

card catalogue of the VEMC was converted into an electronic format while the database was edited and updated according to proper scholarly and archival conventions as well as the correct civil and ecclesiastical legal categories guiding the original production of the wide array of sources found in each *legajo*.

ⁱ For a superb and brief synopsis of the central issues covering ecclesiastical and civil society during this period, see William B. Taylor, *Magistrates of the Sacred: Priests and Parishioners in Eighteenth-Century Mexico* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996). A traditional Burkean interpretation of Spanish imperial developments within the overlapping categories of Church, State and political economy may be found in D. A. Brading, *Church and State in Bourbon Mexico: The Diocese of Michoacán, 1749-1810* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); and the classic work Brading, *Miners and Merchants in Bourbon Mexico 1763-1810* (Cambridge: University Press, 1971). The trajectory of recent research devoted to ecclesiastical affairs and issues of religion during the Independence period may be found in, Brian Connaughton, ed., *Religión, política e identidad en la Independencia de México* (México, D.F.: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, 2010).

ⁱⁱ For scholarly trends for the period on Mexico's northern frontier, see Ana Carolina Ibarra, *La independencia en el septentrión de la Nueva España: provincias internas e intendencias norteñas* (México, D.F.: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2010).

ⁱⁱⁱ On the early history of the institution, see William Gates, *A Gage of Honor: The Development and Disruption of the Department of Middle American Research of Tulane University at New Orleans* (March, 1926, n.p).

^{iv} Blom's contributions towards institutional development and the acquisition of materials to buttress the study of Latin America at Tulane are detailed in Robert L. Brunhouse, *Frans Blom, Maya Explorer* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1976).

^v The scholarly potential and extraordinary thematic breadth of the VEMC also become evident in Taylor's citations of the collection, especially since he used only a small fraction of its overall documentation to buttress his finding from the many other collections found in major archives that he marshaled for his study. See, for his numerous thematic examples derived from the VEMC, Taylor, *Magistrates of the Sacred*, p.549, n.4 (idolatry); p.559, n.121 ("paternalist optimism" and decree on idolatry); p. 560 Chapter 4 "Epigraph" (missionary work and martyrdom); p. 565 (Archbishop Lorenzana's mandate for secularization); p.566 n.50 "The old encomienda formula of escheatment on the death or resignation of the current holder, the gradual implementation of the two curatos pingües rule, and the periodic suspension of the reform are documented in Tulane VEMC 57 exp. 17"; p.567 n.63, n.64 (secularization), n.67 (secularization and transfer to archdiocesan administration), n.69 (resistance to secularization on local level); p.574 n.11 (viceroys and the appointment of priests); pp.574-5 (proceedings brought to the

viceroy regarding the exchange of parishes by priests); p.575 n.18 (problems with Indian parishioners and possibly corrupt priest in Huazalingo following his transfer there), n.21 (letters to viceroy seeking appeal regarding the appointment of priests and problems with corruption); p.577 n. 36 (merits and services of priests re: building projects); p. 585-86 n.30 (viceregal financial contribution for building a church; tithe and local church construction); p. 587 n.47 (local clerical fees); p. 588 n. 52 (clerical fees), n. 53 (viceroy's letter to bishop of Guadalajara re: local sale of indulgences); p. 592 n. 98 (clerical income in select towns from birth, marriage, and funeral fees); p. 593 (clerical fees not paid in kind); p.595 n.142 (Viceroy Bucareli to bishop on parish poverty and stipend of priest); p. 596 n. 144 (parish income reports by *alcaldes mayores* and *tenientes*); p. 597 n. 155 (payments to visiting priests), n. 163 (parish poverty, clerical emoluments and benevolence); pp. 607-8 n.73 ("cura of Huejutla defended Indian interests at court over underpayment for transporting tobacco and mail"); p. 627 n. 71 (deacons and subdeacons engaged in unpriestly conduct); pp. 635-6 n. 144 (honor and reputation of priest of Atlistaca in dispute with Indians); p.649 n.141 (Indian confessions and petition of priest to viceroy for schools in Tlaola, Veracruz); p. 650 n. 158 ("fear and horror" as clerical coercion); p.651-2 n.170 (material culture, deference, gesture and hats), n. 172 ("brouhaha" involving hat, *bastón*-wielding cura and local magistrate); p. 653 n. 173 (priest kicked parishioner for supposed lack of deference), n. 176 (cura of Cuautitlan and his *bastón*); p. 654 n. 185, n. 186 (cura's *bastón* in Querétaro); p. 657 n.30 (case involving overzealous priest, confession and Indian inhabitants of Tlaola); p. 658 n. 32 (accusation that priest of Zumpango overcharged for mass), n. 33 (female attendance of mass); p.659 n.34 (midwife baptisms); p.660 n.38 (fiesta expenses for the Day of the Dead); p.664 n.84 (expenses of a Congregation of Our Lady of Guadalupe), n.108 ("sacrilegious and irreverent abuses" during Holy Week); p.670 n.23 (Saint Joseph feast day of *gente de razón*, Pachuca); p.680 n.103 (investiture of viceroys at Villa de Guadalupe); p.682 n.117 (unauthorized sanctuary for Virgin of Guadalupe, Chihuahua); p.689 n.9, n.11 (*cofradías*); p.690 n.14 (*cofradías*, Pachuca and Yahualica); p.692 n.39 (*cofradía* administrative costs); p.694 n.72 (*cofradía* dispute Real de Huautla); p.698 n.118 (Indian resistance and *cofradía* affairs); p.701 n.15 (transporting prisoners); p.702 n.30 (Indian *fiscales*), n.39 (archbishop's instruction on schools); p. 704 n.67 (Indian *sacristán* appointment dispute La Cañada, Querétaro); p.705 n.78 (*sacristán* delivers prisoners to *alcalde mayor*); p.710 n.135 (school and maestro in Zitácuaro), n.144 (Indian education); p.714 n.36 (Indian Spanish language ability and eligibility for office); p.718 n.84 (*caja de comunidad* expenditures and *contador*), n.88 (caja funds); p.358 n.93, n.94 (caja funds and local expenditures); p.722 n.135 (Indian notables and litigation as revenge against priests); pp.723-4 n.150 (political flight of entire Indian communities); p.728 n.181 (Indian litigants and "principle of limited freedom"); p.733 n.47 (Indian power and knowledge of legal forms; authenticity of signatures); p.738 n.109 (*caudillo* "despotism"); p.739 n.1 (relations between district governors, priests and members of *pueblos de indios*); p.741 (Ibid. litigation); p.747 n.66 (Ibid. "armonía, paz, y quietud"); p.748 n.69 (priest/subdelegate dispute); p.753 n.110, n.115 (Ibid.); pp.756-7 n.146 (customary rights of priests questioned and

protected); pp.760-1 n.6, p.763-4 n.23, p.767 n.61, n.64, (*arancel* disputes); p.771 n.96 (Archbishop Rubio y Salinas and the foundation of 228 schools); p.777 n. 21 (“a cura concerned about just wages for Indian labor), n. 25 (Independence insurgency and a “disorderly” loyalist priest); p.778, n.36 (clerical insurgents), p.793 n. 19 (Indigenous languages and the confessional); p.795 n. 32 (*arancel* disputes and labour demands); p.801 n.81 (priest and civil official conflict); p.802, n. 802 (conflict at Yautepec).

^{vi} Brian C. Belanger, “Secularization and the Laity in Colonial Mexico: Queretaro, 1598-1821” (Ph.D. diss., Tulane University, 1990); Sonya A. Lipsett, “Water and Social Conflict in Colonial Mexico: Puebla, 1680-1810” (Ph.D. diss., Tulane University, 1988).

^{vii} Ileana Schmidt Díaz, de León, “El Colegio Seminario de Indios de San Gregorio y el Desarrollo de la Indianidad en el Valle de México, 1586—1856” (Ph.D. diss., Tulane University, 2001).

^{viii} For leading scholarly trends in study of the “everyday life” of religion see, Alicia Mayer, et. al., *El historiador frente a la historia: religión y vida cotidiana* (México, D.F.: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2008).

^{ix} For major trends in scholarship for the period in the regard, see Ana Carolina Ibarra, *El clero de la Nueva España: durante el proceso de independencia, 1808-1821* (México, D.F.: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2010); Carlos Juárez Nieto, *El proceso político de la independencia en Valladolid de Michoacán 1808-1821* (Morelia, Michoacán: Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolás de Hidalgo, Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas, INAH Michoacán, 2008).

^x Ana Carolina Ibarra, *El Cabildo Catedral de Antequera, Oaxaca y el movimiento insurgente* (Zamora, Michoacán: El Colegio de Michoacán, 2000); and, for additional insight into Casaus y Torres, see Marco Antonio Landavazo Arias,

, *1808-1822* (México, D.F.: Colegio de México, Centro de Estudios Históricos, 2001).

^{xi} The study of clerical ideology during the period must begin with a reading of Brian Connaughton, *Clerical Ideology in a Revolutionary Age: The Guadalajara Church and the Idea of the Mexican Nation, 1788-1853* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2003).

^{xii} The regional dimension of ecclesiastical credit found in the VEMC should be measured against the following leading scholarship on the topic: Gisela von Wobeser, *El crédito eclesiástico en la Nueva España, siglo XVIII* (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas, 1994); von Wobeser, *Vida eterna y preocupaciones terrenales: las capellanías de misas en la Nueva España, 1600-1821* (México, D.F.: Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas, UNAM, 2005); von Wobeser, *Dominación colonial: la consolidación de vales reales en Nueva España, 1804-1812* (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas, 2003).

^{xiii} See, for examples, Asunción Lavrín, *Brides of Christ: Conventual Life in Colonial Mexico* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008).

^{xiv} As most Colonial scholars keenly aware, *cofradías* comprise part of the model of “broker institutions” first developed by the scholar Murdo MacLeod as part of his interpretation of the resistance and accommodation strategies employed by pueblos de indios throughout Mexico and Central during the Colonial period. See also the excellent treatment of *cofradías* in María Dolores Palomo Infante *Juntos y congregados: historia de las cofradías en los pueblos de indios tzotziles y tzeltales de Chiapas (siglos XVI al XIX)* (México, D.F.: CIESAS, 2009).

^{xv} The VEMC, for example, could be easily used in conjunction with the *Archivo Franciscano* as found at: <http://www.coleccionesmexicanas.unam.mx/francis.html>.

^{xvi} The VEMC *expedientes* definitely clarify aspects of Falero’s activities and mandates as found in original documentation available in Spanish archives. See, for example, the *Portal de Archivos Españoles* (PARES) as found at: http://pares.mcu.es/ParesBusquedas/servlets/Control_servlet.