



Versión en INGLÉS



The Archivo Histórico del Museo Nacional de Antropología: A space for fraternal, work-related, and disciplinary encounters

Mónica Pérez Flores*

*Museo Nacional de Antropología
Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia

Translated by Azrid Arai Andrade Arroyo

In the documents and photographs of the Archivo Histórico del Museo Nacional de Antropología (AHMNA)¹ there are written the name of various personages such as the taxidermist Manuel S. Tapia, the archaeologist Antonio García Cubas, the guardian Juan Baltasar Chirio, the professor Jesús Galindo y Villa, the assistant Jesús Núñez, the anthropologist Eusebio Dávalos, the painter José Ma. Velasco, the artist and photographer Pedro Vigil, and the doorman José Sarmina, they were all once staff of the Museo Nacional.

We can also recognize institutions such as the Inspección y Conservación de Monumentos,² the Departamento de Antropología del Instituto Politécnico Nacional,³ the Sweden Museum of Ethnography, and the United States Library of Congress, as well as mentions to academic events such as the International Congress of Americanists, the Sociedad Americana de Antigüedades, the Congreso de Prehistoria, the Mesa Redonda de Arqueología del Caribe, the Congreso de Antropólogos, the International Congress of Folklore in Paris, the Mesa redonda en México, and the Congreso de Historia en Baja California.

The academic, political, and social interests of these personages intertwined academic institutions and events with the common theme of discoveries, purchases, exchanges, copies or reproductions, inventory cards, lists for national and international exhibitions, museum scripts, inaugurations of exhibitions of historical artifacts, codices, archaeological objects, manuscripts and printed books, ethnographic objects, maps, fossils, stamps, as well as the anthropological, zoological and mineral collections of the Museo Nacional and the Museo Nacional de Antropología (MNA).

¹ National Museum of Anthropology Historical Archive (note from the translator).

² Monuments Inspection and Conservation (note from the translator).

³ National Polytechnic Institute (note from the translator).



The AHMNA documents bear witness to this intertwined relationship. Although they are now recognized as old and valuable, they were once administrative documents, i.e., official documents that passed through many hands as they were indispensable for managing the work or academic affairs of students, professors, assistants, scribes, artists, scholarship holders, bookbinders, and molders. Thus, in the archive, we can find reports of tourist guides, censuses of officials, payrolls, project proposals, funding requests, filming permits, accounting balances, and work, academic, and commission reports. Through them, the people who worked in the different areas of the museum left isolated fragments and far-reaching narratives of their activities that, studied from a particular perspective or theme, allow to make interpretations of the history of anthropological disciplines, museology and museography, conservation, and even archival science and library science.

This brief, short, and not very fair narration of the contents of the documents, photographs, books, and documents of the AHMNA is to outline the valuable information that the archive contains and that is focused on the former MNA. The archive is in the administrative area on the first floor of the MNA building. This building –declared an artistic monument– also houses the National Library of Anthropology and History which safeguards the Historical Archive of INAH that preserves thousands of documents of the history of our institution, as well as some related to the MNA. The same happens with the INAH’s concentration archive in Iztapalapa. The documents with information about the collections are now stored in the Museo Nacional de Historia, Museo Nacional del Virreinato and Museo Nacional de las Culturas,⁴ which were once part of the Museo Nacional, are in the archives of those institutions, but the AHMNA undoubtedly safeguards the largest amount of information about that museum.

The organization of the archive’s collection follows the principle of provenance, which is why the documentary collection is divided into the National Museum of Mexico Subcollection (1831-1964), the National Museum of Anthropology Subcollection (1965-1985), and the Donations Subcollection (20th century). In the same way, the photographic collection is grouped between the mentioned above archives. All of them are divided into sections that reflect the administrative units of the museum that produced the documents.

The Moneda 13 section of the National Museum of Mexico Documentary Subcollection is completely cataloged and consists of 19305 files bound in 472 volumes. The Moneda 13 section from the National Museum of Mexico Photographic Subcollection consists of 6533 positives and negatives, among other printing methods. The Volúmenes section, so named because the photographic specimens integrating it are in the bound documents of the Subfondo documental Museo Nacional de México, total approximately 4213. Some of the sections described above are digitized and can be consulted by e-mail request. The rest of the subcollections and sections are in the process of being inventoried and cataloged.

As previously mentioned, the documentary and photographic collections are dedicated to the history of the MNA. The inaugural and oldest document of the AHMNA belongs to the Moneda 13 section and is the designation of conservator, i.e., director, of the Museo Nacional to Isidro Ignacio de Icaza and Luciano Castañeda, artist with janitor functions. This designation was made by the

⁴ National Museum of History, National Museum of Viceroyalty of New Spain and National Museum of Cultures (note from the translator).



president of that time, General Anastasio Bustamante, on November 23, 1831. Henceforth we can find the themes and situations listed above and, in many cases, the documents are accompanied by the corresponding photographs. This section culminates with the documents from 1964, their contents show what happened around the installation and inauguration activities of the Chapultepec-based MNA, among which are the following: payments in arrears, invoices for materials used in the construction of the building, work transfer, financial matters related to ticket sales, payments to companies, requests and responses from researchers about pieces, lists of works exhibited in showcases and exemptions, along with work, academic and professional activities of students and professors.

Although the origin of AHMNA has already been narrated, its configuration as an archive is a sum of fraternal, work-related, and institutional events. So far, the first documentary reference in which the archive is mentioned as such is Trinidad Lahirigoyen's work report of August 20, 1985, which reads as follows: "In January 1985, I began the selection and purging of the National Museum of Anthropology Historical Archive [...]"⁵ The report is intended for the then director of the MNA, archaeologist Marcia Castro Leal, with a copy to María Cristina Bueno de Bonfil, who headed the INAH's Archives and Library Department an area in which Trinidad was commissioned in early 1985 with the sole purpose of working on the documents to form what we know today as the AHMNA.

The arrival of the documents at the department, which was in the MNA building, was quite unexpected. The events were triggered in 1984 when Trini —as she is affectionately known— asked the then director and museographer of the MNA, Professor Mario Vázquez Ruvalcaba, for a change of location to the Moneda and Chapultepec headquarters. Although Vázquez did not verbally deny her the change, he asked the outstanding trilingual tourist guide with 20 years of an outstanding career for a new activity that consisted in reviewing the documents of the former Museo Nacional, which were kept for two decades in boxes in the Museography Division in the MNA's basement. However, at the end of 1984, Vázquez was removed from the position of director, which was occupied by Castro, who decided that the boxes of documents should be moved to the DAB for their inventory, selection, and cataloging. Trini finds out about this event she asks the new director of the museum to carry out the task that Vázquez had entrusted to her (Fonseca, 2013 and Pérez, 2016). Then, Castro sent Trini to the DAB where with the help of the staff of that department and Marva Gutiérrez,⁶ an MNA worker assigned to the DAB, analyzed, organized, and cataloged these documents.

Another crucial historical moment in this fascinating archive occurred in August 1988 when archaeologist Roberto García Moll, director of the MNA, thanked Bonfil for her support in the organization of AHMNA and informed her that the archive would be moved to the MNA facilities.⁷ García Moll determines that the headquarters for the archive will be in the MNA's Pay Office, an area adjacent to other departments and administrative offices on the first floor of the MNA, where the archive is still located (Fonseca, 2013 and Pérez, 2016). That same year García Moll gave Trini boxes of photographs, which she inventoried and cataloged, thus creating the Moneda 13 section of

⁵AHMNA, Fondo Documental Museo Nacional de Antropología, August 20, 1985. Informe de trabajo de Trinidad Lahirigoyen. Original citation: "En enero de 1985, empecé la depuración y selección del Archivo Histórico del Museo Nacional de Antropología [...]"

⁶ AHMNA, Fondo Documental Museo Nacional de Antropología, October 1st, 1986. Comisión de Marva Gutiérrez.

⁷ AHMNA, Fondo Documental Museo Nacional de Antropología, August 1st, 1988. Recuperación de documentación.



the Subfondo fotográfico Museo Nacional (Fonseca, 2013 and Pérez, 2016). In this new location and under the administrative tutelage of the MNA, the AHMNA opened its doors three years later, its first user was registered in January 1991.

For 24 years, from 1985 to 2009, Trini took training courses at the Archivo General de la Nación⁸ and, believing that she needed specialized studies for this new stage of her career, she studied a bachelor's degree in Archival Science at the Escuela Nacional de Biblioteconomía y Archivonomía.⁹ In addition, her specialized knowledge of the museum's pieces, the history of the former Museo Nacional, as well as having known the anthropology professionals who worked at the MNA during its last stage at the Moneda headquarters and those who worked at the Chapultepec headquarters, gave her a broad understanding of the organizational chart of the MNA and how the institution works specifically. This knowledge helped Trini to organize and catalog the AHMNA according to this work system, as dictated by archival science.

Trini also participated and carried out empirical practices of documents and photographs conservation, one of these practices was the binding of documents maintaining archival order, protecting them, preventing their loss, and making their consultation possible. In addition, she repaired tears and missing areas of the documents using a wide variety of materials such as kraft paper to tea bags. Advised by INAH's Fototeca staff, Trini placed the Moneda 13 section of the Subfondo fotográfico Museo Nacional in white polypropylene boxes to maintain relative humidity, and placed silica gel inside the boxes and sealed them on the outside with adhesive tape. Thanks to these practices, the documentary and photographic collections of the AHMNA are in a good condition, which has made it easier for interested researchers to develop their specialized studies that have led to hundreds of research studies that provide us with information about different aspects of the institution. Furthermore, Trini created the five catalogs corresponding to the Subfondo documental Museo Nacional, where the chronological and thematic organization of the documents can be identified, as well as a brief description of their contents, and the file number, and the archive series.

Ana Madrigal assumed responsibility for the AHMNA in 2009. Even if this led to a series of changes, the AHMNA maintains one of its recognizable characteristics: it can be consulted by anyone interested in the history of the museum without the need for any institutional procedure or recommendation. Her first task was to review the cataloging of the Subfondo Museo Nacional de México, she also assigned me as an archive conservator, and then hired catalogers, who have usually graduated with a degree in History.

In a similar way to what happened between Mario Vázquez and Trinidad Lahirigoyen, fraternity and work-related issues intertwined so that both, Ana Madrigal and Mónica Pérez, the author, worked at AHMNA. On one hand, Ana Madrigal has a degree in History, with knowledge of archival science taught by the BNAH, the experience of being in charge of the archives of the Subdirección de Arqueología, and having worked in the Subdirección de Arqueología for several years. On the other hand, the author has a degree in Conservation and took specialized courses in graphic documents conservation. Both professional profiles met AHMNA's requirements.

⁸ General Archive of the Nation (note from the translator).

⁹ National School of Library Science and Archival Science (note from the translator).



The consultation, conservation, archival and restoration needs of the collections have led us to provide multidisciplinary solutions such as training—both for catalogers and users—for the proper handling and consultation of the collections, guidelines for users, transfer and health emergency protocols, as well as conservation and preventive conservation projects, and projects in which conservation and cataloging converge.

Within this framework, the unbinding of volume 1, which its binding was collapsed, has been completed and all the pages have been restored and are now separated by files, stored in conservative folders, as well as the unbinding of three volumes containing architectural plans on albanene paper, which had been folded and were therefore deteriorating. These plans were intervened to flatten them and repair the tears and missing areas.

Humidity and temperature are permanently monitored in the storage, consultation, and cataloging areas of the AHMNA. In the Jesús Galindo y Villa section of the Subfondo donaciones, the glass slide collection has been secured. The conservation aimed to remove dirt by a physical-chemical cleaning, the adhesion of paper frames, and the elaboration of endsheets.

An example of an emerging intervention of photographic collections was what had to be undertaken with the specimens shown in the exhibition “La Invención de la Memoria en el MNA”.¹⁰ As a result of this conservation project, a comprehensive and multidisciplinary project has been proposed for the cataloging and restoration of the Moneda 13 section of the Subfondo fotográfico Museo Nacional.

In addition, the AHMNA documents were the backbone of the NanoforArt Paper Project, which allowed the evaluation of nanometric formulations for pH control in 20th century documents.

In short, the archival documents that discuss the history of the Museo Nacional are useful to any apprentice researcher, independent researcher, academic, or anyone interested in the subject. Data, information, and traces to make interpretations, according to different frameworks and interests, of the former Museo Nacional located at Moneda 13, the predecessor of the Museo Nacional de Antropología in Chapultepec, are available.

In this space, history, conservation, and archival science cross paths. Their meeting point is the documents, photographs, books, and museum pieces, which lead to discussions and dialogues, agreements and tensions, final decisions and negotiations among its guardians, whose main purpose is to conserve the property that the AHMNA safeguards for its users to consult freely, respectfully and carefully, so that in the immediate future all those interested may continue to delight in its handwritten, printed or typescript writings, in its materiality and content, which is so vast that there is not enough time and space to unravel it.

*

¹⁰ The invention of Memory at the MNA (note from the translator).



References

Archivo Histórico del Museo Nacional de Antropología (AHMNA), Mexico City, Mexico.

Fonseca, Vanessa (2013) Interview to Trinidad Lahirigoyen, February.

Pérez, Mónica (2016) Interview to Trinidad Lahirigoyen, December.

