
RESEARCH REPORTS AND NOTES

PILLAGE IN THE ARCHIVES

The Whereabouts of Guatemalan Documentary Treasures

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*Abstract: Like many Guatemalan documents referred to by scholars in the past, the *Libros Segundo y Tercero del Cabildo de Guatemala* (Books Two and Three of the City Council of Santiago de Guatemala) have long been thought to be missing, thereby removing from consultation key sources concerning the events and circumstances of the early colonial period. It turns out that these two tomes, which span the years between 1530 and 1553, are not missing and have been part of the holdings of the Hispanic Society of America for the past century. We discuss how other documentary treasures were taken from Guatemala or disappeared from circulation altogether, identifying the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as the period during which national patrimony was most under threat from both internal and external forces.*

We thank Sebastián van Doesburg for getting us started on this unforeseen research project, Héctor Concohá and Gabrielle Venturi for research assistance along the way, Guisela Asensio Lueg for astute secretarial know-how and translation skills, and John O'Neill for delivering the goods during our rewarding visits to the Hispanic Society of America. The director of the Hispanic Society, Mitchell Coddington, gave us a helpful lead in finding out more about Archer M. Huntington, the founder of the institution, and Ron van Meer did the same with respect to Karl W. Hiersemann, the German book dealer who made available for acquisition a remarkable array of materials a century ago. We benefited from comments and observations offered by Maureen McCallum Garvie, Jorge Luján Muñoz, Arturo Taracena Arriola, and Stephen A. Webre, as well as from three *LARR* readers who reviewed an earlier

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I am perplexed by the large number of important sixteenth-century documents from Guatemala that are known to be lost. Ethnographic treasures mentioned in later sources are missing: a report to the Crown on the condition of Guatemala prepared by [Pedro de] Alvarado, [Francisco] Marroquín's census, two descriptions of native religion prepared by [Domingo de] Vico and [Salvador] Cipriano, several *Relaciones Geográficas*, some of the Cakchiquel dictionaries, and a seventeenth-century chronicle (*Crónica Franciscana*) which referred to sixteenth-century documents. This is a complaint of all historians, but it seems an especially serious one in the Guatemalan case.

Robert M. Carmack, Quichean Civilization (1973, 85)

As researchers of one guise or other, we are all implicated in what we have to relate. Our story has a beginning but, given its nature, no end; closure is not part of the picture. There are, however, findings to report that are cause for celebration, even if some details are more cause for regret.

It began with an exchange of e-mails with the Dutch scholar Sebastián van Doesburg, who at the time we first corresponded was a Guggenheim Fellow affiliated with the American Museum of Natural History in New York. We had furnished van Doesburg with archival references to assist him in his study of the origins of the word *chocolate*, the cacao or chocolate bean being one of many Mesoamerican crop domesticates that Spaniards, in the wake of the conquest of Mexico and Guatemala, realized had enormous economic as well as status value. Van Doesburg saw fit to reciprocate, knowing of our own research interests, by informing us about materials housed at the Hispanic Society of America, in particular documents he had come across while working there during his stay in New York. Even though one of us (Lovell) had visited the Hispanic Society several years before and believed himself to be aware of the richness of its Latin American collections, especially those pertaining to Mexico and Peru, we were unprepared for what van Doesburg had to relay about early colonial Guatemala.

"Going through the holdings of the Hispanic Society," he wrote to Lutz on November 24, 2010, "I found some references to mss [manuscripts] from the Santo Domingo convent of Guatemala. You may be aware of this material, but I'll send [references to] them in case."

Of the six items van Doesburg chose to draw to our attention, the first on his list were *Libros Segundo y Tercero del Cabildo de Guatemala*, long given up as lost. These two registers cover almost a quarter century of Spanish rule in Guatemala, picking up the historical record after the last entry in the "*Libro Viejo*," the name given to the first log of minutes of the city council of Santiago de Guatemala that dates from 1524 to 1530 (Sáenz de Santa María 1991). Book Two begins that latter year on May 27 and ends on September 9, 1541, two days before the destruction of the Spanish capital in Almolonga, buried by mudslides from an adjacent volcano following a period of heavy rain. Book Three begins three days after that catastrophe and continues for the next twelve years, the last notice in it recorded on September 3, 1553, by which time the Spaniards had founded another capital not far away in the Valley of Panchoy. Dealing with more than mundane matters

draft of our work. B. Traven's *The Night Visitor* ([1928] 1993) has haunted us throughout. Research funding from the Killam Program of the Canada Council for the Arts is gratefully acknowledged.

of governance and administration, the two *Libros de Cabildo* contain valuable insights into the obstacles facing Spanish conquest and colonization and indigent resistance to the invasion. Our incredulity at such exciting finds turned to elation when, shortly after van Doesburg's communication with Lutz, we made a trip to New York to inspect the materials firsthand.

How did these extraordinary records end up in the possession of the Hispanic Society of America? Why is it that they and so many other priceless documents—the indigenous Maya texts known as the *Annals of the Cakchiquels* and the *Popol Vuh*, or the Aztec manuscript we call the *Codex Mendoza*, to name but three—are not to be found in Guatemala or Mexico but in scholarly repositories in the United States and Europe?¹ The topic is charged and complex, so the discussion that follows must of necessity be considered preliminary and discreet, cognizant above all of the factors at play between outright theft and more consensual means of collecting.

SCENES FROM THE ARCHIVE

In recent years, thanks to the establishment of university-level programs in archival and library science, along with innovative developments in data storage and management, professional training in Guatemala has improved immeasurably with respect to the safeguarding of national patrimony. Despite a chronic lack of funding, qualified personnel now assume important roles in staffing institutions like the Archivo General de Centro América (AGCA). However, when the most senior of us (Lutz) first arrived in Guatemala to work in the AGCA in 1970, the situation that prevails today was sadly not the case.

The AGCA is not just Guatemala's national archive but a repository for historical documentation for all of Central America, since the sway of Guatemala in colonial times stretched from Chiapas to Panama, embracing what today includes Belize, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica. Until his death in 1964, the man responsible for organizing and running the AGCA was José Joaquín Pardo (b. 1905), a legendary figure in the historiography of Guatemala (Luján Muñoz 1984). His eccentricities as a self-trained archivist—Pardo had living quarters set up in the archive so as always to be close to his beloved documents—could well be lifted from the pages of a novel by Miguel Ángel Asturias, the Guatemalan Nobel laureate considered a pioneer of magical realism. As director of the AGCA, Pardo dedicated himself for three decades to making an inventory of the archive's contents, which he did painstakingly by reading manuscript after manuscript, thereafter creating a *fichero* (card catalog) that records essential data of time, place, and episode for each document he consulted. His idiosyncratic referencing system, despite the advances of information technology, is still in use and remains the archive's hallmark feature, infelicities and all. By the time he died, Pardo had read and cataloged most of the 14,744 *legajos* (bundles of docu-

1. Burland (1953, 14) observes that "there are more pre-Columbian Mexican codices in England than in any other country in the world." For an inventory of Nahuatl manuscript sources held in US repositories, see Schwaller (2001).

ments) relating to the colonial period; of the estimated 50,000 or so legajos relating to post-independence times, he had managed to process little more than 4,000 (Luján Muñoz 1982).

After Pardo's death, things at the AGCA started to unravel, fueled by administrative problems and worse. Low wages, poor working conditions, lack of appropriate qualifications, and the absence of due diligence affected the morale (and the behavior) of most employees, from the head of the institution to a lowly clerk, and put the archive's contents at serious risk. Documents were not only improperly handled or left in a perilous state of repair but also pilfered by the very people charged with their safekeeping. The irregularities that Lutz observed had worsened by the time Lovell began his investigations at the AGCA six years later, when the destruction caused by the earthquake of February 4, 1976, resulted in documents routinely being removed from the premises to be photocopied at nearby facilities because the archive's own such machines had been destroyed. The security of the holdings became a major concern. We prefer to be prudent in terms of disclosures, but a more recent incident, brought to public attention in the *New York Times*, involved documents from the AGCA being put up for auction by persons with known links to the archive (Sullivan 1995).

As the *New York Times* account makes clear, documentary theft in Guatemala does not take place without international complicity. The nefarious business of supply and demand is exemplified by an American book dealer having available for purchase a few years ago two and a half manuscript pages of the *Libro Cuatro de Cabildo de Santiago de Guatemala*, dated July 24, 1556, the market allure of which is driven by the folios bearing the signature of the celebrity conquistador Bernal Díaz del Castillo.² Arnold Bauer (2009, 10), in his relentless pursuit of the *Codex Cardona*, observes pertinently that "even a casual reader of newspapers and journals knows that the arena of old documents, paintings, antiquities, and rare book dealers is a fascinating place, a world in itself, made glamorous by big money, and peopled with brilliant and cultivated experts, scoundrels, fakers, and frauds, even criminals." He also has some trenchant remarks to make about the politics of cultural repatriation:

Any rare book and manuscript dealer . . . would have to be aware of the clamor, growing louder since the 1970s, for the recovery of cultural treasures hauled away by powerful nations or sold off to rich collectors abroad. The demand for restitution of national artifacts is often inspired by nationalistic sentiment. The Greeks have long wanted the Parthenon marbles returned from the British Museum to Athens, the Egyptians want the Rosetta stone from the same institution, and recently the Peruvians have insisted that Yale University return the artifacts taken from Machu Picchu. And dealers and libraries in the United States have increasingly been questioned about holding manuscripts of doubtful provenance.³

2. See Kramer, Lovell, and Lutz (2011, 240). The "autograph" of Bernal Díaz is what put a US\$125,000 figure on the asking price.

3. Bauer (2009, 12). While there has been little movement on the repatriation of the Parthenon marbles and the Rosetta stone, Yale University has undertaken to return artifacts from Machu Picchu to Peru, completing the transfer in 2012.

As Bauer indicates and the case of Guatemala bears out, documents are but one element in these kinds of transactions, which also include archaeological objects and colonial art. If the trade in such goods is by now well established—indeed enhanced considerably in our day by the Internet and online commerce, the onset of eBay in particular—when did it begin? Can we discern, over the centuries, any pattern or periodicity to plunder and purchase?

NINETEENTH-CENTURY MORES

The practice of dispatching cultural artifacts from the Americas to Spain, and from Spain to other parts of the world, has a long history, one certainly with sixteenth-century precedents, and not necessarily related to spoils of conquest gained by unabashed looting. Don Antonio de Mendoza, for instance, the first viceroy of New Spain, is credited with arranging for the codex that bears his name, wrought by Aztec artists skilled in pictographic writing and the elaboration of painted books, to be prepared for presentation to Charles V. The intent behind its production was to inform the monarch, with the assistance of translations from Nahuatl into Spanish, of the splendor and worth of his Mexican dominions, in addition to basing demands for tribute on existing taxation records.⁴ Though colonial-era appropriations were not uncommon, it was after independence from Spain in 1821 that the loss of national patrimony became rampant.

The nineteenth century was open season throughout Central America, perhaps best exemplified by the American lawyer, diplomat, and travel writer John Lloyd Stephens, who in 1839 purchased the ruins of Copán in Honduras for a paltry fifty dollars. What Stephens ([1841] 1969, 1:115) envisioned was “an operation” that would “remove the monuments of a by-gone people from the desolate region in which they were buried,” relocate the “idols” to the “great commercial emporium” that was the United States, and there “found an institution to be the nucleus of a great national museum of American antiquities.” He conceded, however, that should the full-scale dismantling of Copán prove too unwieldy, “to exhibit by sample” was the next logical procedure, advocating that select monuments could be identified in order “to cut [them] up, and remove [them] in pieces, and make casts of the others.” By so doing, the United States would be able to amass, and thereafter exhibit, New World treasures in much the same way as European museums came to hold and showcase those of ancient Egypt, Greece, and Rome. On the world stage, New York and Washington might one day rival London or Paris in terms of the marvels of their museums (Aguirre 2005, 66–67).

Stephens was very much a man of his times, and his views of such matters were shared by associates within the social, political, and intellectual circles he

4. The Codex Mendoza never reached its intended recipient, as the ship carrying it to Spain was seized by French adversaries. André Thevet, cosmographer to Henri II of France, had the document in his possession in the late sixteenth century, when he sold it to his friend and associate, the English geographer Richard Hakluyt, for twenty francs. After Hakluyt's death, in 1616, the Codex Mendoza was passed on, in turn, to Samuel Purchas and John Selden, eventually ending up, as of 1659, in the Bodleian Library at Oxford.

engaged. He saw nothing wrong in what he proposed, quite the contrary: Stephens justified dismantling and then divvying up Copán because, in his mind, its bounty had been abandoned and left to deteriorate in a sparsely settled corner of a fledgling country whose government exercised little control or influence over both locals and locale. Furthermore, Stephens ([1841] 1969, 1:115–116) contended, because the few people who lived close to Copán were ignorant of its history, they could hardly claim the site as their own. The ruins, he asserted, “belonged by right to us,” and he resolved “that ours they should be.” Anarchy reigned. Civil war raged. Violence was an isthmus-wide malaise. The course of action Stephens proposed, which in the end came to naught, was regarded as commendable and responsible, the noble intentions that propelled it plain for all to see. He tells us that the very night he came up with the idea, he did so “with visions of glory and indistinct fancies of receiving the thanks of the corporation,” whereupon he fell sound asleep.

Copán was not the only archeological jewel to be thus targeted, as is evidenced by the case of Quiriguá, not far away in the Motagua Valley of Guatemala. The Scottish entrepreneur George Ure Skinner lobbied in 1842 for the British Museum to acquire the site, suggesting that Black Caribs who lived nearby should load it into their boats piece by piece, much as they did to transport mahogany, and navigate downriver to the Gulf of Honduras, where a carved-up Quiriguá would be hauled aboard ships later bound for London. Skinner was aided and abetted by none other than Lord Aberdeen, who had played a key role in procuring the Parthenon marbles. The trustees of the British Museum nixed the scheme, believing that government funds would not be forthcoming, even though Skinner estimated that the entire operation would cost a mere eight to nine hundred pounds. Frustrated but still convinced that some precious item or other could be exploited, and money made, the intrepid Scotsman turned his attention to orchids, of which Guatemala has a unique array. Orchid hunting resulted in the destruction not only of individual stands of timber but “vast tracts of forest that had been felled in the quest for orchid species that thrived only on the upper branches of the forest canopy” (Aguirre 2005, 77).

Orchids and artifacts were but two indicators of the fervent Anglo-American rivalry that saw Great Britain and the United States confront each other as the resources of Central America, country by country, were deemed up for grabs. The stakes were never higher than when contemplating the construction of an interoceanic canal that would traverse the isthmus and, in the celebrated words of another Scotsman a century and a half earlier, the prescient William Paterson, open the “door of the seas” and become the “key of the universe.”⁵ No one has captured the “colonial unconscious” as played out in the forging of “informal empire” better than Robert D. Aguirre (2005, xiii–xxix and 61–101), who conjures up the era and its excesses to giddy effect. Belief in the forward momentum of progress, alongside the advances of the industrial revolution, meant that travel-

5. William Paterson, writing in May 1695 in favor of establishing a Scottish colony in Darien, as cited in Prebble ([1968] 1970, 21).

ers, scientists, and politicians from afar carried themselves with a distinct air of superiority in relation to their Central American counterparts. Granted, certain “natives”—an umbrella term that embraced not just indigenous inhabitants but criollos and mestizos, too—were worthy of respect, choice individuals whose friendship had been curried and counsel sought. But by and large these “natives,” whether citizens of Guatemala or Honduras, Nicaragua or El Salvador, were regarded, much like their slighted governments, as weak, incompetent, and corrupt, poorly educated if not ignorant and illiterate. “Indigenous Central Americans,” writes Aguirre (2005, xvi), were seen “as hopelessly backward and unknowable, Creole elites and *mestizos* as untrustworthy, and both as incapable of appreciating or protecting the cultural riches they had inherited from their ancestors.” The attitude of foreign men of letters, whether American or European, made it easy for them to consider being in Central America a mission of rescue, to which adding manuscripts and documents to the list of endangered exotics only made common sense.

GUATEMALAN SCENARIOS

We have been unable to locate any sources that describe comprehensively the state of Guatemalan archives and libraries in the early nineteenth century. Mariano Gálvez, while serving as governor of Guatemala, declared on October 4, 1831, that a museum would be established “that might be the depository of the curiosities in which the Guatemalan soil abounds, and that to form it is of great interest and very proper for a civilized country.”⁶ Over forty years later, the German collector and explorer Karl Hermann Berendt (1817–1878) published an essay for the Smithsonian Institution titled “Collections of Historical Documents in Guatemala” (1877). Basing his comments on “a month’s sojourn in the capital,” during which time he visited five repositories, Berendt (1877, 421–422) declares that though “their extent and importance are imperfectly known, it is safe to say that they contain many rare and unique documents whose study would considerably extend our knowledge of the history of this continent, particularly regarding the periods of the conquest and of the Spanish dominion, and also of the condition of the country and people before the conquest.” He laments that “the actual government of Guatemala is strangely neglectful with regard to the preservation and utilization of those scientific treasures,” revealing that “a considerable amount of the most valuable original documents have lately been given away, with astonishing coolness, as so much waste paper.” Berendt notes that the “National Archives” were “carefully arranged and kept for many years by Don Juan Gavarrete,” but that they now languish “in incompetent hands.” Of the “Library of the University,” he observes that “a catalogue by Don Antonio Batres [Jáuregui] exists in print, which, though a poor work, full of blunders and inaccuracies, gives at least

6. Mariano Gálvez, as cited in Aguirre (2005, 98), who renders his words in English courtesy of Wilford (1972).

some ideas of the rich contents of that vast hall.”⁷ Berendt’s enthusiasm but manifest despair fit Aguirre’s trope and stereotype almost perfectly.

Jorge Luján Muñoz, a distinguished Guatemalan historian who has also served his country as ambassador to Spain, describes the situation that then prevailed:

One can only say that the quality and professionalism of state employees was extremely variable, as it is still. In the nineteenth century there were serious, responsible, and hard-working people like Juan Gavarrete, but they were the exception. Whether through ignorance, lack of patriotism, or simply for the money, they would sell to foreigners (French, English, German, or American) what they asked for. One should remember that such a situation was common throughout Spanish America and in parts of Europe, too. Being tempted by the high prices that buyers offered proved difficult to resist. Furthermore—and there are people today who continue to believe this—the view was that if something were taken out of the country, then its chances of being preserved was improved. In this way the museums, libraries, and collections found in Germany, France, and Great Britain, the United States too, all took part in the pillage.⁸

At times the pillage was, so to speak, “self-inflicted,” as in the gesture of friendship that saw Governor Gálvez take a manuscript of Cakchiquel grammar with him on his visit in 1836 to the United States, where he presented it to the Library of the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia (Brinton 1885, 9). Far more common was the “laissez faire” approach to collecting epitomized by the French cleric Charles Étienne Brasseur de Bourbourg, who simply took the *Popol Vuh* with him to France in January 1857 when his pastoral mission in Guatemala came to an end. After his death in 1874, the “Sacred Book of the Ancient Quiché Maya” was acquired by Alphonse Pinart (1852–1911). He, in turn, sold it to Edward E. Ayer (1841–1927), who donated it, along with other valuable documents, to the Newberry Library in Chicago (Woodruff 2009, 14).⁹ Eventually, according to John M. Weeks (1990, 8), “stringent laws were passed in Mexico and Central America in response to the removal of cultural patrimony.” These “prohibitory regulations,” however, proved “generally ineffective,” as indicated time and again “by the apparent ease with which important manuscripts appeared in several great library collections in the United States and Europe.” Weeks performs a tour de force of assiduous sleuthing in tracking down the provenance and final destination of the Mesoamerican acquisitions of William E. Gates (1863–1940), who in the course of his life amassed three remarkable collections now held by Tulane, Princeton, and Brigham Young Universities.

7. Besides the “National Archives” and the “Library of the University,” Berendt also visited the “Archives of the Audiencia,” the “Archives of the Municipality,” and the “Library of the Sociedad Económica.” His kind words about Gavarrete are confirmed by the catalog prepared by the latter two years prior to Berendt’s visit (Gavarrete 1875). For discussion of the collecting prowess of Berendt, who sold his library to Daniel G. Brinton (1837–1899), and also of his notable scholarly contributions, see Weeks (1998). Brinton, whom Weeks (2002, 3) considers “one of the academic pioneers of American anthropology,” assembled the library that bears his name at the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. Among its 4,514 titles (cataloged as item 2,749) is the “Memorial de Sololá,” which Brinton translated into English as the *Annals of the Cakchiquels* (1885).

8. Jorge Luján Muñoz in correspondence with Christopher H. Lutz (February 26, 2011).

9. The best-known English-language edition of the *Popol Vuh* is that of Goetz and Morley (1950), who worked with the translation made from K’iche’ into Spanish by Recinos (1947).

HIERSEMANN, HUNTINGTON, AND THE HISPANIC SOCIETY OF AMERICA

Our investigations have yet to reveal who in Guatemala had access to the *Libros Segundo y Tercero de Cabildo* as the nineteenth century drew to a close. What we do know is that the manuscripts in question were viewed by Adolph Francis Bandelier (1840–1914) when he visited the Museo Nacional in Guatemala City in 1880, fourteen years after its creation by private, not government, initiative, with members of the Sociedad Económica de Amigos del País providing the necessary funds as well as the artifacts for Guatemala's national museum (Bandelier 1881, 24; Casaús Arzú 2012, 96).¹⁰ In 1892, a photographic copy of the *cabildo* books was made, which was then sent to Spain and exhibited in Madrid at the Exposición Hispano-Americana, organized to mark the four hundredth anniversary of the Columbus landfall.¹¹ Thereafter, we have no trace of the originals until they appear together as Item 239 in Catalogue 418 prepared in 1913 by the German bookseller and publisher Karl W. Hiersemann, who conducted his business from premises at Königstrasse 29 in Leipzig (Hiersemann 1913).¹²

Hiersemann (1913, 1) attributes his having the *Libros de Cabildo* for sale in Catalogue 418 to the fact that they formed part of the library of "Don Alejandro Marure, the eminent geographer, historian, and politician of Guatemala" who "had collected a considerable number of documents, manuscripts, and books relating to the history of Central America."¹³ How Hiersemann acquired Marure's library, if indeed that is where the 563 titles listed in Catalogue 418 came from, is not divulged, nor how Marure himself came to own them, if in fact he did. Blanks and uncertainties abound, but there is no doubt that Hiersemann well understood the extraordinary richness of the material he showcased. "Of exceptional importance and value," he states, are "'Libro 2° y 3° del Cabildo de la ciudad de Guatemala de 1530–53', an original manuscript in two volumes containing official records with the autographs of all the celebrities of the time, conquistadors, governors, bishops, lawyers, etc." (Hiersemann 1913, 1). The *Libros de Cabildo* are given honorable first mention in Hiersemann's preface to the catalog, the dealer also singling out that "the signature of the Conquistador Pedro de Alvarado, the companion and friend of Hernán Cortés, occurs 38 times" in Book Two (Hiersemann 1913, 1). He dedicates almost three pages to describing the contents of the two manuscripts, for which he was asking 80,000 marks, a substantial sum in 1913 (Hiersemann 1913, 30–33). Though the *Libros de Cabildo* were clearly the

10. The *Libros de Cabildo* are listed in the catalog prepared by Gavarrete (1875, 6) in his capacity as head of the Sección Etnográfica of the Museo Nacional.

11. The photographic copy of the *Libros de Cabildo* is described in the *Catálogo General de la Exposición Hispano-Americana de Madrid, 1892*, Tomo 1, Sección I, Guatemala, 24–25 (Madrid, 1893). What happened to the copy after the exhibition was over we have been unable to ascertain. Such exhibitions attracted the interest of collectors and book dealers from far and wide, not just the curiosity of scholars.

12. See Olbrich (1984) for a business history of Hiersemann and Sons, a company still in operation. Though its headquarters are now located in Stuttgart, the original Hiersemann premises in Leipzig remain, having survived the aerial bombardment that obliterated neighboring buildings and districts as World War II came to an end. Königstrasse has been renamed Goldschmidtstrasse. The Hiersemann files of the period may be consulted in the special collections of the Hauptbibliothek "Bibliotheca Albertina" of the Universität Leipzig.

13. Marure (1803–1851) died some sixty years before Hiersemann published his catalog.

prize catch and are by far the most expensive listing in the catalog, more than eighty other items that pertain to Central America are also of singular historical significance. Item 242, for instance, sixty-nine folios in total, is listed as “Mapas de varias provincias de la República de Guatemala.” Hiersemann believed these to be the work of “un agrimensor o ingeniero á principios del siglo XIX”—maps produced by “a surveyor or engineer in the early nineteenth century.” Upon inspection, they turn out to be elaborate drafts, in pen and ink, for what would later become the stunning watercolor cartography of Archbishop Pedro Cortés y Larraz’s *Descripción geográfico-moral de la diócesis de Goathemala* (1768–1770), a cornerstone of Guatemalan historiography. Perhaps, had he realized what the sketch maps really were, Hiersemann would have asked far more than the 600 marks of his listing. The entire catalog, in any event, was purchased at a generous discount of 85 percent by Archer Milton Huntington (1870–1955), the founder, grand patron, and philanthropic visionary of the Hispanic Society of America, with whom Hiersemann first conducted business in 1905, a year after Huntington had established the institution.¹⁴

The Hiersemann–Huntington relationship is pivotal to understanding how the library of the Hispanic Society, a teeming collection of over 600,000 books, documents, and manuscripts, came to be. Huntington, the only son of railroad and shipping magnate Collis Porter Huntington (1821–1900) and the younger cousin of another notable collector, Henry Edwards Huntington (1850–1927), is recorded as having made his first purchase of a noteworthy book—George Borrow’s rendering of gypsy life in Spain, *The Zincoli* (1841)—in Liverpool on July 2, 1882, at age twelve (Coddling 2006, 11).¹⁵ By the time he was in his twenties, knowing that the lion’s share of his father’s fortune would one day be his, even though he declined to take over as head of the family firm, Huntington began to focus his book-buying attention not on individual titles but on famous collections. In Seville in

14. See Proske (1963) and Coddling (2002) for a discussion of Huntington and his passion for all things Hispanic. On March 8, 1913, Hiersemann wrote to Huntington from the Waldorf Astoria Hotel, his quarters in New York while doing business there. He states: “My dear Sir: I beg to confirm our verbal agreement as follows: I sold you the Contents of my catalogues 417 and 418 (Mexico and South America) with a discount of 85%, to be shipped [from Hamburg] December next.” This manner of buying and selling, involving face-to-face contact and hard bargaining, dates at least to 1906, when the two men met in Paris; Hiersemann records Huntington, lodging at the Hotel Ritz, as having been “kind enough to give me an order for the whole of my catalogue number 326 (Americana) and for the whole of my catalogue number 327 (America),” subject to “a discount of 60 percent.” In a letter to his librarian, Dr. W. R. Martin, written on March 28, 1913, Huntington explained: “Hiersemann has received for a long time my order to buy in groups or heads, and has done so. He has been able to give us very large discounts because we do not buy in single items. Neither he nor anyone else can give large discounts on single items. He makes his profit on the whole catalogue and often loses on many individual books. It is on the costly books that he makes the least, but by selling often and in quantity he turns over his capital, saves his interest, avoids the office work of sending out catalogues, and distributing a large number of single books by mail at added expense for postage and wrappers, and for his own profit gains enormously by having no competitors in the field.” See the Hiersemann–Huntington correspondence, housed at the Hispanic Society of America.

15. In 1913, the widow of Collis Huntington, Arabella Duval, married Collis’s nephew, Henry, with whom she established the Huntington Library, Art Gallery, and Botanical Gardens in San Marino, California. Henry had inherited, on the death of his uncle, one-third of his estate. See Coddling (2002) for further details of the Huntington family fortune and philanthropic activities.

1898 he learned that the library of Don Manuel Pérez de Guzmán, the Marqués of Jeréz de los Caballeros, might be available for purchase. Four years later he bought it, knowing that the acquisition “would save me years of hunting.”¹⁶ Soon thereafter, “having realized the enormous efficiency of buying entire libraries or collections,” Huntington struck an arrangement with Hiersemann whereby the Leipzig book dealer would “assist him in further expanding the Hispanic Society’s already exceptional library” (Coddington 2006, 17–18).¹⁷ Between 1905 and the outbreak of World War I in 1914, when hostilities “forced Huntington to terminate the exclusive relationship,” Hiersemann prepared some thirty catalogs for his loyal client, the contents of which Huntington bought if not on first then on subsequent offer, over 200,000 titles in all, approximately one-third of present Hispanic Society holdings (Coddington 2006, 18).¹⁸

How did Hiersemann find out about, and get hold of, the goods that passed through his hands? We know that he embarked on journeys of acquisition in Europe, but he must also have had a network of contacts that foraged for him, informed of Huntington’s tastes, especially with respect to Latin America, where Hiersemann himself may never have ventured. When accumulating books and manuscripts for Huntington’s consideration, Hiersemann sought the counsel of at least one great German scholar of Mesoamerica then in his prime, Eduard Seler (1849–1922), who advised him (among other dealings) on the authenticity of a Mexican codex that was up for sale. Hiersemann may also have been in touch, via the likes of Seler, with well-educated but entrepreneurially minded Germans who mixed the pursuit of knowledge with running coffee farms and cattle ranches in Guatemala, among them Erwin Paul Dieseldorff (1868–1940) or his contemporary Gustav Kanter, both ardent bibliophiles and collectors.¹⁹ At Chaculá, near the border with Chiapas, for instance, Kanter “maintained a museum with specially

16. Diary entry of Archer M. Huntington, as cited in Coddington (2006, 12). O’Neill (2009, 341) informs us that Huntington paid Pérez de Guzmán 592,000 francs for his library, the sale and loss of which upset the Spanish intelligentsia greatly.

17. In his letter to Dr. Martin (see note 14, above), Huntington spells out his philosophy of acquisition. “This system of buying I have worked out on very simple business and common sense lines, just as I have made it a rule [not] to buy any other article from one firm. Long before I began this method of buying from Hiersemann, I had followed the usual one of collectors and my personal library was thus built up. I then bought collections not for my own use but for completion. The Hiersemann method is the last. At no very distant date that method will not be possible to us, owing to the increase of the collection. It is not that of the booklover or collector, but of an institution using every endeavor to present to the public all available material on a given subject. Hiersemann knows what books we have. No one else does. He alone can buy or refuse books intelligently among booksellers without consulting us. He alone can thus make up a catalogue from which we will have the least to reject and the greatest advantage in price.” Huntington, a savvy bibliophile as well as a hard-nosed businessman, ends in typically grounded, practical fashion. “And last, but not least, Hiersemann’s collections, each bought as whole, become our temporary catalogues.” Hiersemann’s “temporary catalogues,” one century on, are today still in use at the Hispanic Society of America.

18. Olbrich (1984, 26) places the number of catalogs at twenty-three.

19. See Weeks (1998, 621) for mention of both Dieseldorff and Kanter, and see Seler ([1901] 2003) and Navarrete (1979, 11–15) for more extended discussion of the latter’s remarkable collection of Maya ceramics, sculptures, and hieroglyphic carvings. Concerning the authenticity of the Mexican codex, or lack thereof, correspondence between Hiersemann and Huntington dated February 20, 1911, on file at the Hispanic Society of America, indicates that Seler considered it a fake, prompting Hiersemann to abandon the purchase he had been pursuing with Huntington in mind.

constructed display cases in a large room at his plantation house," where "larger pieces were positioned on the porch." The premises also boasted "a large library with books on geography, history, travel, and natural sciences, with special emphasis on Guatemala and adjacent Chiapas." Kanter arrived in Guatemala "during the last third of the nineteenth century" and hosted Selser at Chaculá during the eminent scholar's second expedition to Mexico and Central America in 1895–1897. His three-month sojourn at Chaculá, and what he saw, excavated, and grappled with intellectually there, inspired Selser ([1901] 2003) to produce one of his finest works. As for Kanter, he ran afoul of the Guatemalan authorities in 1915, when he had to flee for his life to Mexico, "never to return," having been "accused of selling firearms and harboring revolutionaries at Chaculá" who fought to overthrow the regime of Porfirio Díaz in Mexico. Local legend has it that Kanter discarded his most precious artifacts into a nearby *cenote*, a huge limestone sink hole called El Cimarrón, as he fled his aggressors. He kept up "extensive business dealings with Germany," however, and corresponded with the Museum für Völkerkunde in Berlin, now the Ethnologisches Museum, of which Selser was a director and for which "he brought back to Europe a rich collection of antiquities."²⁰ Did someone like Kanter act as an agent or go-between for Hiersemann? The ten-year period when the Leipzig book merchant plied his trade for Huntington, furnishing him with two or three catalogs annually, must surely have involved other notable and strategic players besides Selser.

While we await illumination of these and myriad other questions, work on transcribing the *Libros de Cabildo* moves forward, our efforts in that regard facilitated by John O'Neill, curator of rare books and manuscripts at the Hispanic Society. We are collaborating with Jorge Luján Muñoz of the Universidad del Valle in Guatemala, resolving paleographic problems and contextualizing content, counting from time to time also on the expertise of our Spanish colleagues Consuelo Varela and Juan Gil. The Academia de Geografía e Historia de Guatemala, in cooperation with the Centro de Investigaciones Regionales de Mesoamérica and the

20. See Weeks, in Selser ([1901] 2003, 16–17), concerning the latter's visit to Chaculá. The Ethnologisches Museum houses a stunning array of artifacts from Chaculá, dispatched to Berlin as a result of the Selser–Kanter relationship. Selser ([1901] 2003, 1) states that "Kanter, a German citizen of Marienwerder in West Prussia, rules here as a petty prince over a wide kingdom." For more on Kanter, see Piedrasanta (2009, 243–81) and Schávelzon ([1983] 2010), who reveals that the Guatemalan army, by order of President Manuel Estrada Cabrera, with whom Kanter previously enjoyed hospitable relations, "looted and burned everything" at Chaculá, even "taking books to the town of Nentón," where the library's contents "were used to make rockets." Troops were stationed at Chaculá, notes Weeks (Selser [1901] 2003, 17), "for several months," and "used many of the archaeological objects for target practice." For Selser's exploits as both collector and scholar, see Heyn (1902), who writes: "In 1891, Prof. Selser was commissioned by the German Government to attend the American historical exhibition in Madrid," at which the photographic copy of the *Libros de Cabildo* was on display. Heyn continues: "Prof. Selser's visit to Guatemala is also of great interest. He brought back from there large collections of antiquities, which were divided between the Berlin Museum and the New York Museum of Natural History," including prize pieces from Chaculá. Perhaps the originals of the *Libros de Cabildo* also left Guatemala with him, or with another visitor from Germany, and made their way to Berlin before ending up in Leipzig. Francis Gall (see Ximénez [1722] 1970, xxi) seemed to think so, having written as president of the Sociedad de Geografía e Historia de Guatemala to the Instituto Iberoamericano in Berlin asking if it had the "segundo tomo" of the "Actas del Ayuntamiento de la Ciudad de Santiago de Guatemala" among its holdings, only for Dra. Gertrud Quack, Directora de la Biblioteca, to respond in the negative.

Universidad del Valle, are set to publish the finished product, which Luján Muñoz will bring to fruition with the assistance of Edgar F. Chután and Guisela Asensio Lueg. Books Two and Three of the City Council of Santiago de Guatemala have been located and engaged. But where, we wonder, are the manuscript copies of Books Five, Six, and Eight? Or, for that matter, the documents that Robert Carmack refers to in the epigraph that served as our point of departure?

The search goes on. What we conclude from our investigations thus far is that “lost” or “missing” documents do show up, not necessarily in the most unlikely of places but in venerable repositories where they have been held for some time, had we only known or thought to look more closely.

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