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Preservation of Hispanic Memory in Rio de Janeiro and Brazil: the Local Collection of the Nélida Piñon Library of the Instituto Cervantes

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Abstract:

This work aims to present the Local Collection of the Nélida Piñon Library of Cervantes Institute in Rio de Janeiro, which objective is to gather and document works that deal with the historical and cultural relations between Brazil and Spain, between Brazil and Hispano-America. The Hispanic presence in Brazil dates back to the 16th century and Rio de Janeiro is one of the four cities marked by Spanish immigration. The Local Collection began to be developed in 2004, the year the library was created and opened to the public, having as policy the annual acquisition of titles that meet its profile. The collection has been growing over time with the arrival of donations, which led to the creation of special sections according to specific themes and aspects (linguistics, biographies, literature, etc.). Among them are the collections of the philologist Adriano da Gama Kury, of the poet Reynaldo Valinho Alvarez, and of the writer Nélida Piñon. In historical terms, the sections dedicated to Hispanic personalities who have marked the history of Brazil and the formation of Brazilian literature: the Carlota Joaquina de Borbón, Spanish queen consort of John VI, King of Portugal, and that of the Jesuit of Canary origin, José de Anchieta whose works mark the beginning of literary production on Brazilian soil. It gathers works by Hispanic personalities who came to live or to work in Brazil and in the city of Rio de Janeiro, writers such as Juan Valera (Spain), Manuel Puig (Argentina), Alfonso Reyes (Mexico) and Gabriela Mistral (Chile), Rosa Chacel (Spain). The Local Collection is a vehicle for the preservation of the Hispanic memory in Brazil. This is an experience report with a qualitative approach. It is perceived that thematic convergence in bibliographic collections is an important object of study and that research needs to be developed in this field.

Keywords: Local collection, Personal collections, Nélida Piñon Library, Memory preservation, Spanish immigration in Brazil.

Introduction

"Libraries and archives are fundamental to the memory and history of a society", says Benedetti, which allows us to say that these spaces together with museums form part of the places of memory and that Librarianship, Archivistics and Museology are fundamental auxiliary sciences in the preservation of memory and in the interpretation and reconstitution of History.

With the aim of preserving local history, in 1877, the British William H. K. Wright advocated to the Library Association the creation of a local studies collection in public libraries, which led to the emergency of local collections. These usually gather documents which refer to the locality where the library is located and are of value to know the past, the present and the future trends of its surroundings. These collections usually bring together documents on different supports, old, rare and unique, which allow (re)interpreting the identity and history of a given community. Bailac (1991, p. 163 apud Díaz Grau, 2005, p.27) defines it as "a specialized collection of the library, at the service of its community, with that material which contributes to the knowledge of the area in the past and what is news in the present", having as one of its purposes "to serve as the people's memory and install in the community's conscience a cultural historical collection". In this regard, Díaz Grau and García Gómez comment that:

"The library's conservative function on the local collection is crucial not only to preserve old, unique or rare documents that are part of the collection, but also to exercise the same action on modern, multiple and common documents which values will change over time and will undoubtedly become old, unique or rare in the future" (DÍAZ GRAU; GARCÍA GÓMEZ, 2005, p. 31).

According to Barros and Villén (2007, p. 297), "the presence of the past is a constant in human life, as a source of individual or collective identity" and is found in a large part of the cultural assets that have survived to the present day and are available in libraries, archives and museums.

It is known that libraries have always had as one of their objectives to preserve and conserve bibliographic and documentary heritage. In this sense, the Local Collection brings together an intangible heritage: the historical, social and cultural memories of a given society, among other aspects, contained in each item that makes up the collection and which constitute the links that allow us to interpret and reconstruct the past.

This work aims to present the Local Collection of the Nélida Piñon Library of Cervantes Institute in Rio de Janeiro. The purpose is to gather and document works dealing with the historical and cultural relations between Brazil and Spain, between Brazil and Hispano-America, thus preserving the memory of the Hispanic presence in Brazil and in the city of Rio de Janeiro.

The Hispanic presence in Brazil dates back to the 16th century and Rio de Janeiro is one of the four cities marked by Spanish immigration, along with São Paulo, Salvador and Santos. The

majority of Spaniards were Galicians whose migratory flows were destined for the Americas. Two intense flows marked the arrival of Galicians in Brazil, one from the end of the 19th century until 1929 and the other after the Second World War. The city of Rio de Janeiro became the place of refuge and passage for several representative artists and writers of Spanish and Hispanic-American Culture, as will be seen throughout this work.

Nélida Piñon Library

The Nélida Piñon Library at Cervantes Institute in Rio de Janeiro is one of the information units of Cervantes Institute Libraries Network (Red de Bibliotecas del Instituto Cervantes - RBIC) in Brazil. It is conceived as an information centre specialized in Hispanic languages, cultures and literatures, attending to all information requests related to Spain and Hispano-America. Its collection currently contains around 30,000 documents and includes some special collections such as the Local Collection and the personal collection of the Galician-Brazilian writer Nélida Piñon.

The libraries of the RBIC, the largest network of Spanish libraries in the world, are usually named after a representative writer of Hispanic letters, such as the winners of the Cervantes Award. Exceptionally, the library in Rio de Janeiro was named after Nélida Piñon, in honour of one of the greatest contemporary Brazilian Portuguese language writers.

In return for this gesture, the Galician-Brazilian writer donated her personal library to Cervantes Institute in Rio de Janeiro, which contains around 8,000 documents from the most diverse areas of knowledge, as well as art objects. This collection has enriched the documental patrimony of the network as it constitutes a testimony of the personal and literary relations of the author with the Ibero-American universe.

The Local Collection

The RBIC libraries have a primary collection with the objective of offering a complete, representative and balanced perspective of the Spanish and Hispano-American cultural reality: language, history, philosophy, science, music and cinema through its documents. Moreover, its collection development policy includes the famous "Colección Local", which parameters are to gather:

- Translations of Spanish and Hispano-American creative works into the language of the host country.
- Works on Spain and Hispano-America published in the host country.
- Works on the host country published by Hispanic authors.
- Works on relations between Spain and Hispano-America and the host country: historical relations, trade, international politics, etc.
- Literary translations into the co-official languages of Spain (Catalan, Galician and Basque) of works by authors from the host country.

In this way, the local collection is endowed with peculiarity and acquires a priceless historical, cultural and documentary value by preserving documents that reflects the historical, political,

literary, cultural and social relations between Spain and the rest of the world. At the same time, it offers the image projected by Spain in other countries and the receptiveness of its culture and literature translated into other languages.

The Local Collection of the Nélida Piñon Library started to be developed in 2004, the year in which the library was created and opened to the public, following the guidelines of the RBIC Collection Development Policy. Donations have also enriched this collection since its creation, with the receipt of Hispano-American publications from the personal library of Eduardo Albertal, a former United Nations employee in Rio de Janeiro. The donated personal collections led to the creation of special sections according to specific themes and aspects (linguistics, biographies, literature, etc.), and to the personal collections of the philologist Adriano da Gama Kury, the poet Reynaldo Valinho Alvarez and the Galician-Brazilian writer Nélida Piñon.

To illustrate the uniqueness of the Local Collection, the sections that are most representative of the historical, cultural and linguistic relations between Brazil, Spain and Hispano-America will be highlighted. It will be seen that these sections bring together items that are fragments that make it possible to learn a little about the history of the Hispanic presence in Brazil from different aspects.

Galician Collection

The linguistic diversity of Spain is a multilingual cultural heritage that must be respected and protected and the Spanish Constitution of 1978, in its article 3, recognizes Castilian as the official language of the Spanish State just as the other Spanish languages are official in their respective autonomous communities.

The Nélida Piñon Library, like every RBIC library, has a section dedicated to the co-official languages of the Spanish state: Basque, Catalan and Galician. However, the city of Rio de Janeiro is marked by Galician immigration, which has made this collection grow and be enriched with personal legacies that add a relevant value as testimonies of the Galician presence in Brazil. This collection is composed of the following pieces:

- **Adriano da Gama Kury (1924-2012)** - Brazilian philologist, specialist in Romance philology, having dedicated himself to the studies of the Galician and Catalan languages. This collection gathers 196 documents in Catalan and 136 about Galician philology and culture.
- **Reynaldo Valinho Alvarez (1931-2021)** - Galician-Brazilian bilingual poet, with works in Galician and Portuguese. It gathers around 400 documents, 200 of them in Spanish and 200 in Galician.
- **Nélida Piñon (1937-2022)** - Galician-Brazilian writer, first woman to preside the Brazilian Academy of Letters (ABL), whose personal library was donated to Cervantes Institute Rio de Janeiro. Nélida Piñon requested the creation of the section “Galicia de Nélida” (Galicia of Nélida), which gathers works of Galician culture and literature, in homage to her ancestral origins.
- **Rosalía de Castro Library** - Collection of the library of Casa de España (House of Spain) in Rio de Janeiro, donated to Cervantes Institute in 2018. It brings together

around 10,000 documents and it is estimated to have approximately 2,000 works on Galician culture, history and literature. Collection still to be catalogued.

The above pieces present points of intersection such as the linguistic and cultural bond with Galicia, the affective links with Galician ancestry in the diaspora, the literary relationships with Galician writers and specialists. These collections are testimonies of the Galician presence and memory in Rio de Janeiro.

Historical Relations

Historical relations between Brazil and Spain date back from the 16th century with the Iberian Union that was the union of the Crowns of Castile and Aragon and the Kingdom of Portugal (1580-1640). During that period of 60 years, all Portuguese and Spanish overseas possessions were under the power of the Habsburg monarchs Philip II, Philip III and Philip IV. In this section, there are relevant works for understanding the Portuguese-Brazilian historical relations and the Hispanic world such as the Treaty of Madrid (1750) and the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494), two documents signed to define the limits between the colonies of the kingdoms from Portugal and Spain in South America.

Migratory Relationships

The unification of the kingdoms of Spain and Portugal (1580-1640) marks the first migratory flow of Spaniards in colonial Brazil. They were mainly soldiers and adventurers who penetrated the southern region of the country, leaving traces in the formation of the São Paulo society of the 17th century and in the formation of the “gaúcho” of the Rio Grande farms during the 18th century. The great migratory flow occurred between 1880 and 1930, with the cities of São Paulo, Santos, Rio de Janeiro and Salvador de Bahia being the four cities that received the most Spanish immigrants. This section is made up of works that deal with Spanish and Hispano-American immigration to Brazil and Brazilian immigration to Spain and Hispano-America.

Artistic Relations

This section gathers works on the presence of Spanish painters who were exiled to Brazil, as well as Spanish and Hispano-American art catalogues of Hispanic Art exhibitions held in Brazil.

Literary Relations

- **Juan Valera (1824-1905)**

The Valerian Collection brings together works *by* and *about* the Spanish writer and diplomat Juan Valera, who was on a diplomatic mission in Rio de Janeiro from 1851 to 1853. He is considered the only Spanish writer of the 19th century who was interested in Portuguese-Brazilian culture and was twice a diplomat in Lisbon. In many of his works, little researched in Spain and Brazil, the author reflects the time he spent in Rio de Janeiro. He was the first European author to speak of a Brazilian literature. His essay “De la poesía de Brasil” (On the Poetry of Brazil) dates from 1855.

- **José de Anchieta (1534-1597)**

The Spanish Jesuit José de Anchieta is known as the Apostle of Brazil because he was one of the first to introduce the Christian faith in the newly discovered Brazil. Nevertheless, his importance is not restricted to the religious world. Anchieta was one of the founders of the city of São Paulo and the first playwright, the first grammarian and the first poet born in the Canary Islands. Author of the first grammar of the Tupi language, he is also considered one of the first authors of Brazilian literature with plays, poems and an epic. Beatified in 1980 by John Paul II, he was canonized in 2014 by Pope Francis. The saint is worshipped both in Brazil and in the Canary Islands.

- **Rosa Chacel (1898-1994)**

The great Spanish writer of the Generation of '27 went into exile with her husband, the painter Timoteo Pérez Rubio, in Rio de Janeiro, where she continued her literary work until returning to Spain for good in 1977. With the arrival of democracy, her work was rediscovered in Spain and many of her titles were republished. Despite having lived in Rio de Janeiro for nearly 30 years, Rosa Chacel is unknown in Brazil. In his latest novel "Varados en Río" (Stranded in Rio) (2016), Spanish writer Javier Montes attempts to reconstruct her exile in Brazil.

Biographies Section

This section contains biographies and other texts about personalities from the Hispanic world who lived in the city of Rio de Janeiro and in Brazil. It also includes "Luso-Brazilian" personalities who lived in Hispanic countries. The following can be highlighted.

- **Alfonso Reyes (1889-1959)**

The Mexican diplomat, essayist, critic, poet and narrator Alfonso Reyes was on a diplomatic mission in Brazil, living in Rio de Janeiro where he wrote "Romances del Río de Enero" (1932). This section brings together his works.

- **Carlota Joaquina (1775-1830)**

Princess of Brazil between 1788 and 1816, Carlota Joaquina de Borbón was the Queen consort of John VI, King of Portugal. First-born daughter of King Charles IV of Spain and mother of Pedro I, Emperor of Brazil. Because of her ambitious nature, Carlota Joaquina meddled in affairs of state both in Portugal and in Brazil, where she landed in 1808, accompanying the Portuguese royal family. Her proximity to the viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata led to the creation of political movement called Carlotism (1808-1812). Carlota Joaquina intended to gain independence for the Río de la Plata territory and secure a throne for herself in South America, but her plan was unsuccessful and she lost all the support she had won in Buenos Aires. This section includes biographies published in Portugal and in Brazil.

- **Gabriela Mistral (1889-1957)**

The great Chilean writer Gabriela Mistral, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1954, was appointed Chilean ambassador to Brazil, living in Rio de Janeiro where she

befriended Stefan Zweig. This section brings together works *by* and *about* Gabriela Mistral.

- **Manuel Puig (1932-1990)**

The Argentinian novelist Manuel Puig chose the city of Rio de Janeiro to live in and stayed there for nearly 10 years. This section brings together works *by* and *about* Manuel Puig. Some of his novels are set in Rio de Janeiro (*Tropical Night Falling*) and others have been adapted into films like the “Kiss of the Spider Woman” (1985), based on the same title novel “El beso de la mujer araña”. Directed by Argentine-Brazilian filmmaker Héctor Babenco, the film won the Oscar of Best Actor 1986, William Hurt.

- **Oscarito (1906-1970)**

Oscar Lorenzo Jacinto de la Inmaculada Concepción Teresa Díaz, better known as Oscarito, grew up in Brazil where he became one of the most popular comedian actors in Brazilian cinema. He became famous for pairing with Grande Otelo in ‘chanchadas’ (comedies), acting in nearly 50 films. Brazilian playwright Flávio Marinho is the author of his first biography. Launched in 2007, the centenary of Oscarito's birth, Marinho's work traces the comedian's career through interviews, statements and press reports.

Sorôa Family Collection

Donated by relatives in Rio de Janeiro in 2005. This collection stands out for having belonged to Luiz de Sorôa y García Goyena, attaché to the Brazilian Embassy in Madrid from 1937 to the 1960s approximately. He was a diplomat, lawyer, journalist and translator from Portuguese into Spanish. This collection is basically his personal library, with some copies belonging to other members of the family. It has very particular features that were only possible to identify and evaluate during the cataloguing of his copies. The handwritten signatures and dedications on the covers show that this personal library was inherited by four generations since the mid-19th century and crossed the Atlantic several times, from Spain to Cuba, from Cuba to Brazil, from Brazil to Spain and back to Brazil. It brings together antique books, rare books, first editions, special bindings, illustrations, bookplates, etc.

Final Considerations

It is observed that these sections that form the Local Collection are fragments of memories that have points of intersection in common and that dialog with each other in different aspects. They thus make it possible to know and discover facets that provide new perspectives on the trajectory of the Hispanic presence in Brazil.

It is perceived that thematic convergence in bibliographic collections is an important object of study and that research needs to be developed in this field.

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