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Sources for the Ethnohistory and Afrohistory of Postconquest Yucatan

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TAKING SMUG PLEASURE in the apparent sharpness of her match-making skills, the receptionist ushered me across the colonial courtyard to one of the old high-ceilinged rooms at the back of the hotel. A young Italian woman had arrived that morning and, it turned out, she was in Mérida to do exactly the same thing I was. As she emerged from her room, the receptionist introduced us and explained the wonderful coincidence.

The Italian woman seemed pleasantly surprised. “So,” she said, switching into almost perfect English, “you also are in Yucatan looking to make a documentary about the Mayas?”

“Well, no,” I replied. “Actually, I’m looking for Maya documents.”

“Looking for Maya documents,” she repeated slowly, a confused expression on her face. “Not making a documentary film? So . . . you look for, for old books—how you say, codices?”

I tried to explain that I was combing through the various archives and libraries in Mérida in search of manuscripts written alphabetically in Yucatec Maya after the conquest. Her expression remained both one of incomprehension (she had not known such things existed, she probably still doubted that they did, nor was it clear why I was looking for them) and disappointment (I was not a fellow traveler after all, not a member of her film-makers club but part of some esoteric and possibly unsavory club of archive squirrels).

At the time—it was the first week of 1991, the first week of my dissertation research in Yucatan—I wondered if incomprehension and disappointment would regularly cloud my own face in the coming weeks as I listened to the priests, professors, and librarians who ran Mérida’s archives explaining why my quest was foolhardy and my project ill-conceived. Reflecting on the dozen or so years that have followed, I can remember plenty of disappointments and moments of incomprehension (it is easy to forget everything one has *not* found in the archives, to forget how ordinary the search for mundane materials can be). But there have also been antidotes to those low points—eureka moments when I have turned a page or a leather *legajo* cover, realized what I was looking at, and leaped to feet shouting “yes!” (before sitting back down, somewhat embarrassed).

I trust the reader will pardon me for making anecdotal use of some of these moments to describe how and where I have found sources on the history of two different sectors of the colonial Yucatec population: the Mayas, whom I pursued through the archives during the 1990s; and Africans and people of African descent, whom I have been studying this decade (while not abandoning Mayas altogether). In a second section I categorize these sources by genre and summarize their principal features. The third and final section of the essay is on methods and outlines the utility of such materials to the production of historical literature, including some mention of how I have put them to use.

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Archives

In Alejo Carpentier's novel *Los pasos perdidos*, the nameless protagonist travels into the jungles of Latin America to reach what he believes is the Valley-Where-Time-Has-Stopped. Here he sets out to write down his *magnum opus*, only to find that he has insufficient paper and must resort to erasing earlier passages in order to keep composing. Eventually, in desperation, the protagonist returns to the city for more paper and ink. But he is never again able to find the jungle refuge that is the source of his inspiration, and so his great work remains unfinished.¹

Were it not for the universality of Carpentier's metaphor of creative frustration, one might imagine that he had found his theme by plumbing the depths of a historian's nightmares. For the historian not only faces the risk of running out of paper and ink (that is, running into writer's block), but of failing to find adequate sources or, perhaps even worse, returning to retrieve sources that are no longer where they once were. Anybody who has worked in Galería IV of the AGN in Mexico City has likely had the experience of ordering a legajo containing a document seen on a previous visit (but not noted or copied, for lack of time, or perhaps not appreciated at the time), only to be told that the legajo is not available. It is "being restored," or "being microfilmed," or "lent to another reader" (someone guaranteed to hold on to the volume until the day after one has left the country). The Valley-Where-Time-Has-Stopped can be an unnervingly ephemeral place.

At least vast national archives like the AGN or the AGI in Seville can be relied upon not to disappear in their entirety, even if individual volumes can be frustratingly itinerant (and even though the AGN is under perpetual threat of flooding or, perhaps worse, relocation). But once a researcher moves out into the provinces, anything can happen. This is both good and bad; in a place like Yucatan, what we might call the hurdles and helpers of archival research become magnified.

Such hurdles fall into two categories: acts of God (or perhaps, under the circumstances, one should blame the *bacabs* or Yucatec sky deities); and acts of man (not mankind, but males, as I can think of no examples involving women). I use "acts of God" the way airlines do when they wish to avoid paying for your hotel room; it is usually a euphemism for bad weather, and the archetypal manifestation of bad weather in Yucatan is the hurricane. Most years, if a hurricane hits Yucatan, it peters out over land. But every now and then it maintains momentum across the pancake-flat peninsula, causing massive damage. Fray Diego de Landa describes one such tragedy taking place in the 1460s, which Mayas still remembered a century later.² It happened again during the 2002 hurricane season; the storm ravaged Mérida, tearing down trees, power lines, and roofs. An example of the latter was the allegedly seventeenth-century roof over the part of the cathedral that had housed, since the colonial period, the city's parish records (two small rooms called the AGAY).³ I had pored over these old deerskin-covered volumes

¹Carpentier's novel was first published in 1953, and appeared in English as *The Lost Steps*, trans. by Harriet de Onís (New York: Knopf, 1956).

²Restall and Chuchiak n.d., p. 12.

³Mérida's cathedral contains a confusing cluster of separate archives, with [*cont'd*]

in 1999, looking at everything I had time for, from the marriage records of late sixteenth-century Spaniards to books recording the baptisms of African-born adult slaves in the eighteenth century. I returned in 2003, armed with a digital camera and permission to photograph every page I could find that named an Afro-Yucatecan. But the room was a chaos of broken beams, roof tiles, and plaster dust. During the night of the hurricane the parish records had been hurriedly thrown into boxes and dumped in the basement of the old Franciscan convent; water-damaged, muddied, and jumbled up, they had become indefinitely inaccessible. The Valley had disappeared.

As for acts of man, my favorite examples are one from the colonial period and one from the present. The earliest extant book of marriage records from the town of Campeche, parish records equivalent to those described in the previous paragraph and now housed in the AHDC, begins in the year 1687. The cover page reads, “Book of the burials done in this holy parish church of *negros, mulatos, indios criados* of the Spaniards, and *laborios* resident in this town of Campeche, put in this book by order of the señor vicario don Diego Tello de Aguilar, from the year 1687, the preceding ones having been lost in the invasion of the enemy.” A similar cover page begins the parallel volume of baptisms, with the observation that the priest was able to copy records dating back to 1675 from the books burned by “the enemy.”⁴ The invasion, which had happened in the summer of 1685, was a massive pirate attack, led by a Frenchman and a Dutchman, captains de Grammont and Laurens de Graaf, but including English privateers in its thousand-man force. The pirates plundered the port-town for six weeks, burning what was left before sailing with their spoils to Sainte Domingue.⁵ Among the victims of the raid were all the parish and notarial records going back to the arrival of the first notaries and Catholic priests in the 1540s.

The second example likewise involves an entire archive—or at least the entire colonial and nineteenth-century portion of the province’s notarial archive (the ANEY, in Mérida), comprising over a hundred deerskin-covered volumes of testaments and land sales (in Maya and Spanish), slave sales, powers of attorney, inheritance disputes, and other notarized glimpses into quotidian life in the colony.⁶ This archive had also once held the Testaments of Tekanto, the largest single corpus of Maya-language notarial documents yet discovered. But by 1991, when I first worked in the archive, located at the back of the Poder Judicial building in Mérida, the Tekanto materials had already mysteriously

different entrances and requiring different permissions, not always from a priest or in the cathedral; the AGAY is thus not to be confused with the AHAY or the AME.

⁴AHDC, Libros 1285 and 3, respectively.

⁵Lane 1998, pp. 166–67; my notes made in the Puerta de la Tierra museum, Campeche, 1999. Partly for this reason, and partly because Campeche did not secede from Yucatan to become a state until the late nineteenth century, the earliest material in the state archive (AGEC) is late eighteenth century.

⁶One can hardly overstate the significance of the ANEY volumes to the history of Yucatan, as they are wide-ranging and unique; they have underpinned a number of important contributions to the field, from Hunt 1974 to Rugeley 1996. As part of my doctoral research, I located and noted (and in some cases, transcribed) all the [cont’d]

vanished.⁷ A few years ago it was determined that the surviving old ANEY volumes should be relocated to the state archive (AGEY), for a long time in the extremely capable hands of Dr. Piedad Peniche Rivero. En route, somehow, they were stolen. Not long after, in a suburb of Mexico City, police spotted a man loading boxes into a van in the middle of the night. Suspecting a drug haul, the police apprehended him; to their disappointment, he was lugging the missing volumes of the ANEY. Allegedly the thief's plan was to ship them to Spain, not for sale but for purposes of research—a sort of Elgin Marbles approach to the hurdles of archival work. The Mexican police, hoping perhaps to make the bust profitable in some way, impounded the volumes at the local precinct station, where they remain (as far as I know). There is little chance of the documents being made available to researchers in the near future; just one among numerous reasons for this is the fact that an unscrupulous AGN employee has claimed that the volumes went missing from that archive, a ludicrous assertion given credence in one of Mexico City's dailies.

I began with the hurdles because they make better stories; it's hard to beat hurricanes, pirates, and drug busts. But the helpers are more important and fortunately more numerous. Helpers can also be put into two categories—luck and human intervention—but the two so often go hand in hand that I shall discuss them anecdotally as one. In 1991 the Carrillo y Ancona collection (or what was left of it) was being kept in a room in the High School library in Mérida; when I asked the director at the time if he knew of any Maya-language sources in the collection or the library, he showed me a box of loose papers with Maya text on them. Typed, in red ink, the text was, among other things, erotic poetry. Underneath these papers, however, was a small book which turned out to be the Testaments of Ixil—an invaluable corpus of Maya wills that was uncataloged, unstudied, never before even mentioned in a scholarly work. I asked if I could photocopy them, and was directed to a copy shop a few blocks away; off I strolled with my booty, like my compatriots of 1685, only with a great deal more respect for the written word. In 1995 I published the wills; the originals are now well cataloged, archived, and appropriately treasured in a Mérida library called CAIHY.⁸ (The library director who had unwittingly led me to this great find held a press conference, a month after I had left the country in 1991, announcing his discovery—which, in retrospect, seems fair enough.)

A final example in the helper category highlights the role played by archive professionals, without whom none of us (ethnohistorians, etc.) would be able to do what we do. From the creation of new books in the wake of the 1685 pirate attack until 1999, Campeche's parish records piled up, appropriately shelved and

Maya-language documents in the volumes, finding some thirty wills and over 150 land sales and similar records (dated 1690–1832); the results are scattered through Restall 1997.

⁷The comprehensive analysis of the Tekanto materials is in Thompson 1999. Although the original documents have disappeared, Thompson and Victoria Bricker (his dissertation director) generously gave me access to copies of the wills in 1990, thereby enriching much of the analysis in my own dissertation, published as Restall 1997.

⁸Restall 1995. The wills are in CAIHY under Caja I/1700.

labeled, but not cataloged or kept free from dust, damp and the occasional worm. Working these records during those three centuries would have been possible, but not easy. However, in the late 1990s, Ney Antonia Canto Vega set about cleaning, restoring, organizing, boxing, and cataloging all 1,772 volumes—a heroic effort that culminated in 1999 in the publication of the catalog.⁹ Unaware of doña Ney's work or of the conditions that had preceded it, I showed up in Campeche that year, looking for archival materials. I knocked on the side door of the church just two days after the catalog saw print. Thanks to lucky timing, and the gift that Canto Vega had created for historians, I walked into a brand new archive.

I shall resist the temptation to list in the body of the chapter all the archive directors and librarians and staff assistants who have acted as helpers in the face of hurdles; the two named above, Peniche Rivero and Canto Vega, must stand for them all.¹⁰ Suffice to emphasize, first, that one cannot separate such professionals from the archives where they work; without the former, the latter is of no use to the researcher. Second, they are cousins to two other sets of helpers, whom I shall discuss briefly, in categorical more than individual terms, and in the context of my research on Yucatan. One set of helpers consists of mentors and intellectual influences. The most obvious of these (for most of the contributors to this volume) is Jim Lockhart, whose influence pervades our work in lasting ways that often seem more obvious to others than to us. This is because he has profoundly affected the decisions we make that relate to archives; where to look, how to look, what to look for, and how to respond to what we find. Jim has not, of course, been the sole influence on any of us; in my case, he is joined in this category by various scholars ranging from Felipe Fernández-Armesto (who influenced my view of history when I was an undergraduate) to the linguistic anthropologists and linguists who have done seminal work on colonial Yucatan (Victoria Bricker, William Hanks, and Frances Karttunen).

The final set of helpers consists of scholars who have already trod paths through the subfields in which we work. In relation to archives, such predecessors point the way to sources both in a general sense and in terms of specific archival citations, which can act as clues or markers leading us to golden needles in the archival haystacks (in my case, these range from Daniel Brinton in the 1880s to Ralph Roys in the 1930s to Marta Hunt in the 1970s to the current generation of colonial and nineteenth-century Yucatecanists, too numerous to name, who send archival leads by e-mail as well as through their publications). Put these three sets of helpers together—archive professionals, mentors, and predecessors and peers—and one can overcome the hurdles of hurricanes, pirates, and thieves.

In the context of my research, the three sets of helpers have intertwined over the years. Jim guided me to the sources published by Roys, as well as to the approach and methods of the still evolving New Philology, which together made possible the conception of a dissertation based on Maya-language sources.¹¹

⁹Canto Vega 1999.

¹⁰A related group of helpers can be the faculty at local universities.

¹¹The New Philology is well defined through this volume's introduction and the sum of the chapters in it, but see also Restall 2003.

Archival leads in the work of Nancy Farriss, Hunt, Robert Patch, Philip Thompson, and others helped guide me to and through archives. Peers doing similar work also helped. Kevin Terraciano found for me my first Maya documents in the AGN, for example, and those in turn led me to others. Archival professionals gave me access to materials and helped look for them—even when they doubted that what I sought existed. Each discovery contributed to my understanding of what kinds of sources in Maya existed, how and where they might be archived. For example, records of Spanish estates in Yucatan invariably contain within them land sales and/or wills in Maya (and estate records tend not to leave Yucatan), while *residencia* reports on Yucatan's governors often include native-language petitions or tribute records (and these reports invariably ended up in the AGI). At the same time, at the moment when one seems to have found examples of every extant genre and searched every logical location, something new pops up. By the time of the publication of my *The Maya World* in 1997, for example, I had concluded that Maya *cofradías* did not keep native-language records; only a few months later I found one in the British Library, of all places.

My focus on Maya-language sources was for many years necessarily tunnel-visioned. That focus provided limits to the quantity of materials I might conceivably work with, enabling me to actually finish and publish my dissertation and related projects. It was also justified by the fact that these sources had never been studied as a whole, and most of them never studied at all. However, I gradually became aware of the necessity to combine as many different types of sources as possible; in specific terms, this often meant reading the *whole* case, not just the Maya document in the middle of it. It was that experience that led me from Maya ethnohistory to the study of people of African descent in colonial Yucatan (hereafter I shall refer, for efficiency's sake, to Afrohistory and Afro-Yucatecans). In contrast to my path into the Maya world, one that began with other scholars and then led into the archives, my path to Afro-Yucatecans began in the archives. Turning to the usual sets of helpers, I found the usual willingness to help, but virtually no published or secondary sources—just enough to provide archival leads and convince me that an entire history was waiting to be uncovered and told.

Since 1998, then, I have been collecting and analyzing archival sources on Afro-Yucatecans. A very few are in Maya; the vast majority are in Spanish. Without the simple litmus test of language (regardless of content and genre, if it was in Maya I wanted it), I have had to re-learn how to go through an archive. Not only are Afrohistorical sources in Spanish, like sources on Spaniards in Yucatan, but the genres are the same (more on this in a moment), while very few sources are cataloged using topic-defining keywords such as *negro*, *pardo*, or *esclavo* (the sole major exception being parish records). The pursuit of Afrohistory, like ethnohistory, requires recourse to helpers—whom I found once again in the archives and libraries. And although my Afro-Yucatan project was born in the archives, and at first I believed it to be entirely the progeny of my archival discoveries, I soon realized that it too had always benefited from those other helpers—mentors, predecessors, and peers. When I revisited the work of those who had guided my entry into ethnohistory (Lockhart, Hunt, and others), I

realized that their research and ideas had left behind Afrohistorical seeds.¹²

The enterprises of ethnohistory and Afrohistory have proved similar in another respect: the initial impression of a few scattered sources soon gives way to the realization that, though scattered, the sources are extensive; indeed, so far, endless. The challenges of access and analysis tend to be inversely proportional; that is, the larger archives are easier to find and get into, but the material is overwhelming, whereas the smaller archives can be challenging to find and get into, but then reveal manageable quantities of material.¹³ Sometimes the problem is not stumbling across the Valley-Where-Time-Has-Stopped, or getting back to it, but rather finding so many Valleys of inspiration and having such an abundant supply of ink and paper than one hardly knows where to begin—or, perhaps more to the point, when to end.

Genres

The written records in Maya and Spanish, on both Mayas and Afro-Yucatecs, employ distinct types of language peculiar to their genre. The determinants of such language can range from the conventions of formal oral address in pre-conquest Yucatan to Spanish legal terminology, from local variations on religious formulas set by the Roman Catholic church to language stemming from the nature of slavery in the colony. Recognizing genre is crucial to the reading and working of these sources, as it is only by categorizing each document in relation to others that one can detect the quotidian patterns of the past—the intertextual ordinariness that reveals the way things were done.

In previous publications I have listed genres of Maya-language documentation in table form.¹⁴ I do the same here, but in a simplified form, presenting these genres in four categories, with four more categories of Afrohistorical sources (see Table 1). The category numbers in parentheses (1–8) are inserted into the discussion below and also repeated in the chapter's subsequent section on methods.

The first three ethnohistorical categories consist of sources in Maya, and are presented in the table in order of their abundance. Most colonial-era documents in Yucatec Maya, therefore, fall into (1), the notarial genres wills and land sales. As the most important and valuable item in Maya wills tended to be land, the two genres could also be viewed as the two halves of a single larger one: land-related documents. Because Mayas tended to describe land not by measurements but by owners, this genre illuminates various aspects of the culture of the *cah* (Maya

¹²In addition, I have benefited greatly from the work of a new set of helpers, scholars of Afro-Spanish America, who constitute an intellectual community of support that has proved as invaluable as, say, the New Philology scholars would be to someone entering the field of postcontact Mexican ethnohistory. Their names are legion. There has been no study to date in English of Afro-Yucatecs, although some article-length studies have been published in Spanish in Yucatan.

¹³As Mark Goodale has observed (2002, p. 584), with respect to the challenges involved in archival research in the Andes. See also Salomon 1999, pp. 19–95.

¹⁴Restall 1997, pp. 237, 256. The analysis published there has its roots in an article I wrote with Kevin Terraciano (Restall and Terraciano 1992). The most recent outlet for that discussion is Chapter 2 of Restall, Sousa, and Terraciano 2005.

Table 1: A rough genre classification of sources on colonial Yucatan

Ethnohistory: sources on Mayas

- (1) Wills and land sales (in Maya)
- (2) Records of mundane cabildo business (in Maya)
- (3) Petitions (mostly in Maya)
- (4) Other sources on Mayas (i. quasi-notarial genres in Maya; and ii. sources written partially or entirely in Spanish, e.g. parish records, census records, tribute records)

Afrohistory: sources on Afro-Yucatecans

- (5) Colonial investigations (Inquisitional, criminal, etc.)
 - (6) Slavery-specific records (sales, mortgages, manumission cases, etc.)
 - (7) Parish records
 - (8) Other sources on Afro-Yucatecans (including mundane cofradía and pardo militia records, references in Maya sources, one-hit wonders, etc.)
-

municipal community), not just economic practice and material culture.¹⁵

The second most common category of Maya-language sources is that of (2), records of mundane cabildo business. Of course, wills and land sale records are also mundane cabildo business in that the town council's notary wrote them and the senior officers of the council signed them (either literally or through the notary). What distinguishes this category of material, however, is that in these cases the cabildo is performing its central duties as the community's governing body, rather than performing a legal service for community members. Examples in this category are annual election records, receipts for deposits to the central granary in Mérida or regional granaries in cabeceras like Hunucmá, and ratifications in Maya of business conducted by local Spaniards and recorded in Spanish. Less commonly found in Maya, but also in this category, are cofradía expense reports (as mentioned earlier, thus far this genre is in the category of the one-hit wonder); most cofradía records are in Spanish, as are the local (i.e. cah) portions of criminal investigations.¹⁶

The third category of Maya-language sources is that of (3), petitions. These are not rare, but by their nature tended to be generated one at a time or in small groups; they were not a byproduct of daily life as were wills and land records, or of seasonal life as were grain deposits and cabildo elections. Still, petitions in Maya follow their own formulas and conventions, rooted partly in the ancient

¹⁵See Restall 1997, Chapters 2–3 on the cah, 7–10 on the information contained in wills, and 13–17 for most of the analysis of land records. Since 1997, when the quest for Maya-language sources became a secondary concern, I have found (both in libraries in the United States and in archives in Mexico) more land sales and related records than any other genre of Maya-language notarial document.

¹⁶Records of Mérida's and Campeche's cofradías of all categories—Spaniards, Mayas, and Afro-Yucatecans—are in the Mitra archives in the each city (AME and AMC).

Maya past and partly in their own time, making them a distinct and important genre of record. As a similar syncretic discourse was developed in other regions of postconquest Mesoamerica, Maya petitions lend themselves well to comparative analysis. Finally, petitions reveal patterns of colonial life by negative example, in the same way as Inquisition and criminal records in the larger context of early Latin American history; by articulating what is unacceptable or exceptional about a particular situation (be it excessive labor or tribute demands, the withdrawal of community or family privileges, or sexual abuse by an encomendero or a priest), petitioners shed light on what was acceptable, or at least normal.¹⁷

The final category consists of (4), everything else, almost all of which can be slotted into two subcategories: (i) quasi-notarial documents, such as the well known but poorly understood Books of Chilam Balam, which effectively functioned as unofficial community libraries, incorporating a wealth of their own subgenres; and (ii) notarial records that may include Maya terms, as well as Spanish ones, which were generated in Maya communities or cahob¹⁸ and were often written by native notaries, but are not fully fledged Maya-language documents. Examples are cabildo budget accounts, records of tribute and *repartimiento* payments (the latter, in Yucatan, being forced purchases and sales of local products at below-market rates), census records, and parish records. The parish records have not survived well for rural cahob, where they were recorded by Maya notaries more often than Spanish priests, although they are well preserved for the urban cahob of Mérida and Campeche, where they appear to have been recorded by Spanish priests. (There are obviously many additional sources on colonial Maya history written by Spaniards in Spanish, but my fundamental criterion of inclusion here is that sources must be in Maya and/or generated at least in part by Mayas.)

Before turning to Afrohistorical sources, it is worth briefly comparing Maya genres to those in Nahuatl (and, parenthetically, Mixtec)—partly because I began to study Yucatan at the turn of the 1990s hoping (to some extent, expecting) to find a body of native-language sources comparable in terms of genre and utility to the Nahuatl sources hitherto uncovered and studied, and partly because the larger Mesoamerican context allows colonial sources in any Mesoamerican language to be more fully understood. Both Nahuatl and Yucatec Maya documents start being written alphabetically within a decade or two after Spaniards founded colonies in Mexico City and Mérida, in the 1520s and 1540s respectively (while the deep roots of the Mixtec pictorial tradition meant that fully alphabetic Mixtec documents date from no earlier than the 1560s); Nahuatl sources begin to peter out after 1770 (as do Mixtec ones, only more gradually), while Maya is still being written in Yucatec villages into the late nineteenth century.

The majority of documents in all three Mesoamerican languages belong to category (1), wills and land sale records. The latter tend to be much the same in

¹⁷My main treatment of Maya petitions is Restall 1997, Chapter 19, but see too 11–12, as well as Restall 1997A and my *Maya Conquistador* (Restall 1998), Chapters 9–10.

¹⁸The Maya plural of *cah*, which I have converted to use in English texts.

all three languages, focusing simply on the business at hand, but wills exhibit some illuminating regional variations. While all written Mesoamerican wills are based on the Spanish model, including an opening religious formula, that formula varies between and even within regions (perhaps more so in Oaxaca and Yucatan than in central Mexico). All wills are invaluable sources on kinship culture, the household complex, land tenure and material culture, patterns and practices that have common (Mesoamerican) elements but are by no means identical from region to region. For example, Nahuatl land is most often measured, while Maya plots are located in relation to neighboring plots; bees and apicultural equipment are important in wills from eastern Yucatan, less common in western Yucatan, and unheard of in Nahuatl wills; inheritance between Nahuas is overwhelmingly individual, whereas Maya inheritance was a complex mix of the individual and the collective; and finally, wills in Nahuatl are more likely than those in Mixtec or Maya to contain personal asides (denouncing bad relatives, recounting misfortunes, or emotionally expressing gratitude for good fortune or the kindness of a relative).

With respect to (2), records of mundane *cabildo* business, the incidence of genres in Nahuatl and Mixtec is similar, though not identical, to that in Maya. Election records, common in Maya and Nahuatl, are rare in Mixtec. *Cofradía* records, seldom seen in native languages in Oaxaca and Yucatan, have come to light in Nahuatl. Accounts of community or municipal budgets are found in all three languages, but are very rare, as are minutes or annals of *cabildo* meetings—although there are the Tlaxcalan *Actas*, a unique but remarkably rich record of *cabildo* business from one complex Nahuatl *altepétl* of the sixteenth-century.

The remaining categories of native-language sources are very similar in Nahuatl, Maya, and Mixtec, both in terms of style and their rate of survival. For example, with category (3), petitions tend across the board to be influenced somewhat by Spanish forms but also strongly reflect deep-rooted Mesoamerican traditions of petitionary address. Other sources, (4), such as census and tribute records, exist but are not common and are usually written at least partly in Spanish. Of quasi-notarial genres, the Books of Chilam Balam are particular to Yucatan, although as compilations of many different types of information they contain sub-genres (such as medicinal remedies, calendrical schema, and community histories) that are also found in other formats elsewhere in Mesoamerica. Perhaps more significant, in comparative terms, is the quasi-notarial genre of the *título* or primordial title, which is ubiquitous in Mesoamerica from central Mexico through to highland Guatemala and Yucatan. I have previously tabulated over a hundred of these in eight Mesoamerican languages, but that list was not exhaustive and was surely only a fraction of the *títulos* that were produced from the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries—providing an extraordinarily fertile series of sources on community identity, preconquest and conquest history, land practices, indigenous responses to colonialism, and other topics.¹⁹

¹⁹The table is in Restall 1997A, pp. 262–63; for comparison of sources in Mesoamerican languages, see Restall and Terraciano 1992, and Restall, Sousa, and Terraciano 2005; on sources in Mixtec, see Terraciano's work, including his chapter in the [*cont'd*]

To turn now to sources on Afro-Yucatecans, these cannot sensibly be placed in exactly the same categories as Maya and other Mesoamerican sources (due to the contrasts in historical experience discussed below), but they can still be broadly categorized. They are listed in Table 1 (as 5–8) not in order of abundance (an evaluation I cannot comfortably make at this point), but in order of the length of each individual document within the genre. Judged in that way, the most important category of these sources is that of (5), records generated by colonial investigations—Inquisitional, criminal, militia-related, and treasury-related. Within this array of genres some are specific and follow well defined legal conventions, while others consist of little more than semi-formal correspondence between colonial officials. Examples include bigamy investigations by the Inquisition, a small minority of which featured a bigamist who was black or *pardo* (as mulattos were usually called in Yucatan, although the relationship between the two terms was never static and straightforward), and Inquisition investigations into accusations of blasphemy, heresy, idolatry, superstition, the *pecado nefando*, love magic, and witchcraft. Some cases, especially Inquisition prosecutions for bigamy or witchcraft, can run to a hundred folios or more. Other examples relate to slave escapes (usually only initiated if the escapee is accused of additional crimes), ship cargoes seized under suspicion of smuggling, reports on the capture of Belizean slaves in border raids, and a variety of criminal and internal military investigations into irregular or non-mundane activities by *pardo* militiamen.²⁰

The second Afro-Yucatecan category I have labeled slavery-specific records. These include records of slave sales, mortgages on slaves, manumission cases (centered most typically on a *carta de libertad*, a negotiated and court-approved freedom agreement), and the various subgenres of Spanish legal records that were generated in disputes over the ownership or status of slaves. Except in the case of disputes, these are notarial records that follow certain formulas and typically run from half a page to several folios in length.²¹ Further research may uncover a cache of other genres of documents in this category. For example, there may exist such a genre as brief, mundane, notarial records relating to slave escapes (as there was in the southern United States), but so far I have found only a few slave-escape cases, without the common characteristics or formulas indicating a fully developed genre. Indeed, I suspect that the genre never developed locally, due to the relative rarity of escapes and maroon communities in the colony.

The third category of Afrohistorical genres, that of (7), parish records, is particularly important because most Africans in the colony lived in either Mérida or Campeche, where parish record survival is relatively good (despite pirates and hurricanes, urban parish records have survived better than parish records in rural cahob). Records of baptisms (both infant and adult), marriages, and deaths include

present volume; on títulos in Nahuatl, see Stephanie Wood's work as in the bibliography of the chapter here by Robert Haskett, and that chapter itself.

²⁰All Inquisition cases are in the AGN, but other genres in this category are not only in the AGN but also in AGEY, AGI, and possibly in several archives in Madrid that I have yet to explore.

²¹As notarial records, these genres are found primarily in the ANEY, AGEY, and AGECE.

biographical information, such as *calidad* or racial category, with enough consistency to be reliably useful to researchers (I shall elaborate below on baptism records).

The final Afrohistorical category, like the final ethnohistorical category, contains (8), everything else. I include in this category mundane records of Afro-Yucatecan *cofradías* and *pardo* militias,²² as well as one-hit wonders—rich sources that appear to be unique, meaning that so far I have only found a single extant example. One of these is the sixteenth-century *probanza* of a black conquistador, petitioning for a royal pension as reward for his services in the invasion and settlement of Yucatan (preserved in the AGI); another is an early nineteenth-century petition by a slave to the governor of the province, requesting a compassionate response to a pending legal case over his manumission (preserved in the AGEY). Both are “wonders” because they feature Afro-Yucatecan voices (more below on authorship); they are one-hits for now, but there may yet emerge more Afro-Yucatecan *probanzas* in the AGI (there is certainly more evidence of black conquistadors in the *probanzas* of Spaniards) and more personal petitions by slaves among the manumission cases in the regional archives.

Also in the one-hit wonder category are small clusters of documents relating to particular events in Yucatec history. One such event is the founding in the 1790s of a community of Africans who had been slaves in Sainte Domingue and fought in the losing Spanish army in the Haitian independence wars; the community, named San Fernando de los Negros, was placed amidst the ruins of an ancient Maya city named Ake. In this case, the utility of the written record is compounded by the existence of archaeological evidence. Another event that gave rise to a cluster of relevant sources was the abolition of slavery in the 1829; the resulting event-specific subgenres of documents include records of the registration of manumitted slaves and anti-abolition petitions.

This has been a fairly superficial survey of genre; to move below the surface is to begin to discuss methodology, to which I now turn.

Methods

In her small but classic interpretation of the inventiveness of the tales and testimony given by “ordinary” people in sixteenth-century France, Natalie Zemon Davis quotes Montaigne’s comment (in his essay “Of Cannibals”) on the difficulty of finding a “true witness.” “For clever people,” remarks the French philosopher, “observe more things and more curiously, but they interpret them; and to lend weight and conviction to their interpretation, they cannot help altering history a little. They never show you things the way they are . . . We need a man either very honest, or so simple that he has not the stuff to build up false inventions and give them plausibility.”²³

²²So far I have found these to be sparse and formulaic, but further research may reveal richer and more numerous sources; with respect to *cofradías*, I have not yet fully explored the AME and AMC, and with respect to the militia, I have now made preliminary forays into the military archives and other archives in Madrid, where there is a wealth of untapped material on colonial military matters of all kinds (note that I have placed mundane militia records, such as company lists, in a category apart from militia-related disputes, criminal investigations, etc.).

²³Davis 1987, p. 111.

The challenge for the historian is not, of course, to avoid “clever people” in the archival sources and find only “honest” or “simple” ones, but to understand how *all* witnesses are “clever” in Montaigne’s sense. None of the documents described above were composed in a vacuum; they all have social and historical contexts that determined why the documents were written and how their composers chose to “interpret” or “alter” things. In addition, we ourselves remain “clever” in this sense. This is not necessarily a problem to be avoided or a hurdle to be jumped over; on the contrary, the historian’s role as interpreter is crucial to the process of production.

If the first principle of method is interpretation, the second is coherence. There was an inner logic both to how Mayas and Spaniards wrote notarial records in the colonial period, and to how they were subsequently archived, all of which permits the kind of genre classification sketched out above; yet, as that classification cannot disguise, the sources remain highly disparate. Christopher Johnson recently called Lévi-Strauss’s life work “the result of a remarkable will to coherence.”²⁴ The same might be said of Lockhart’s contributions to the study of early Mexico, both through his own work and through the influence he has exerted on his students and others.²⁵ Such a will to coherence is also necessary for every project that is built upon the seeking, collecting, reading of, and ruminating upon, diverse and disparate sources. As the project moves towards the moment of production, interpretation and coherence are extracted from the raw materials of the archive.

For the remainder of this section, I shall discuss this imposition of interpretation and coherence in a comparative ethnohistory/Afrohistory context, and through a series of methodological issues that are rooted in genre (while referring to genres with the numbered categories presented above). By this I mean that I work from the assumption that the genre or nature of a source determines in large part what can be done with it.

Take, for example, the question of initiative: that is, who initiated the creation of a source in a particular genre? Almost all genres of Maya-language document originated in colonial imperatives, such as Franciscans initiating the practice of (1) will-dictating in the cahob. But Mayas took the initiative in generating individual wills, with individuals represented corporately by the *cabildo*; likewise (1) land sales and (2) records of mundane *cabildo* business; and even more so, (3) petitions, which as a genre are as much rooted in precolonial practice as they are in Spanish precedents. Furthermore, they altered the Spanish genre templates to suit their own needs and to conform to their own cultural concerns, creating new—colonial Maya—genres. In contrast, the vast majority of documents about Afro-Yucatecans, or in any way relating to their history, were generated by Spaniards. In very few cases did the initiative lie with people of African descent, which is why those exceptions are in the (8) one-hit wonder category and are privileged in the interpretive process.

²⁴Johnson 2003, p. 191.

²⁵See Lockhart 1999, especially Chapter 12; Lockhart’s introduction to this volume; and Restall 2003.

Indeed, the simple circumstance of language indicates that sources in Yucatec Maya are primarily native initiatives—whereas sources on Afro-Yucatecans are never in African languages or even in the dialects of creole Spanish that Spaniards disparagingly claimed Afro-Yucatecans spoke; they are always in standard Spanish. This means that while on the one hand Maya sources virtually demand to be subjected to the kind of philological analysis that underpinned my work on them (work which represents the tip of the iceberg of what might ultimately be done with such materials by scholars of various disciplines), sources on Afro-Yucatecans cannot so obviously be analyzed in this way. I suspect that vernacular Spanish spoken by *castas* in colonial Yucatan included slang terms derived from West African languages, but I have looked in vain for such terms in the written record (5–8). I have begun to list—and eventually may be able to analyze—Spanish terms used to describe Afro-Yucatecans in general as well as specific categories of them, such as pardo militiamen or slave women. But I doubt that such endeavors can equal the insight into Maya culture derived from studying such things as kinship terminology, the language of land description, petitionary discourse, and loanwords.²⁶

Nevertheless, attention to language is a crucial component of the methodology of both ethnohistory and Afrohistory, not least because of the obvious fact (so obvious that it is easy to overlook) that we primarily write in English. Working in English has its advantages. Philology has always tended to be polyglot; it is best to analyze expression in a medium distinct from that of the expression itself. Furthermore, scholarship in English on colonial Latin American history generally and on philological ethnohistory in particular has developed a series of analytical concepts that to date are most at home in English. Yet we must be as critical about concepts in English as about concepts in the original texts studied, so as not to be led unwittingly in unintended directions.

In working with Yucatec Maya sources three languages are relevant: the English in which we write; the Maya in which the sources are composed, and the Spanish which influences and penetrates them in some cases very slightly, in other cases deeply (not to mention the Spanish in which the same matters are often discussed in legajos containing the Maya documents). Maya sources have an ostensible author or speaker as well as a writer who records what is said. The particular contributions of each participant must therefore be identified. Getting to know the writer's general style helps; recognizing formulas of the genre helps; but in the end we often may be left in considerable uncertainty about whether a particular statement came from the original speaker or the writer. Fortunately, either way it is the statement of a local indigenous person in an authentic idiom, and thus of equal value to us.

With Afro-Yucatecan sources the same writer-speaker distinction exists but is exacerbated by the fact that writer and speaker may not share, or at least fully share, language and culture, so that the recasting of the original statement is more blatant. Maya-language sources (especially 1–3) are usually in the first person, while sources on Afro-Yucatecans (especially 5–7) are almost always third per-

²⁶See Restall 1997, 1998, 1998A, 2001, and 2004.

son, like transcriptions of testimony in Spanish in general. The difference relates both to conventions of the two languages and to documentary genre. We must not forget, however, that some Afro-Yucatecans were located deep within Spanish society, and its language and ways had become to a larger or smaller extent their own. And while some notaries made all testimony sound like they themselves were speaking, others followed the flow of the witnesses's words more closely, and with enough practice and sensitivity we can sometimes detect it, as will be seen below.

In practice, the contrast between Maya sources and Afro-Yucatecan ones is less stark than it initially seems. The first-person singular of Maya wills and land sales (1) permits the *potential* for first-person voices, if asides or discursive comments are made, but that potential remains unrealized when a document does not digress from the formulas of its genre. Furthermore, in the case of cabildo business and petitions (2–3), the first person is either the collective singular of the *batab* (cah governor) or the plural of the cabildo (batab included). With very few exceptions indeed, then, Maya sources are corporate products. This means that the extrapolation and analysis of individual voices in the text must be offset by such considerations as factional politics and the functioning of the cabildo as an institution. On the other hand, at the level of studying concepts, language, practices, everything is equally local community expression. Where documents stick rigorously to formula, they only become truly useful in quantity—the more the better. This can be true of wills (for example, the Tekanto corpus is much larger than the Ixil corpus, but the relative paucity of non-formulaic commentary renders the Tekanto wills primarily suitable for quantitative analysis only), and is always true of (4) cahob parish records.

Afro-Yucatecan parish records (7) likewise require quantitative analysis. A single record of a few lines is little more than a curiosity; that of an adult slave baptized in Mérida, for example, only shows (in addition to the names of the slave, his or her owner, and the godparent) that at least one African-born adult was sold in the colony and brought by the purchaser to the cathedral for baptism. However, the complete run of baptism records from Mérida's Afro-Yucatecan parish of Jesús reveals numerous significant patterns about slavery and Afro-Yucatecan culture. I recently read, noted, and created data sets and tables from the eleven thousand baptisms recorded in the parish between 1710 and 1797. About five percent of these were of black adults (almost all born either in Africa or the British Empire, both enslaved and free), and my data focuses on them—both because *casta* and birth-place information is consistently provided for them, and in order to have a manageable data set (creating research parameters is after all an important aspect of achieving coherence). However, between 1756 and 1774 priests recorded *casta* information for the parents of every child baptized in the parish, permitting the creation of an additional data set of some 2,500 non-Spanish couples. Among the topics and types of information that have emerged from all this analysis are: patterns of marriage and miscegenation among black slaves, free Afro-Yucatecans, and Mérida's mestizo and Maya population; the gender and slave/free balances of incoming black adults; fluctuating patterns in the slave trade, including a shift from African-born to British-Empire-born

Africans that makes Yucatan unusual in Spanish America; slave naming patterns relative to the names that Afro-Yucatecans gave their own children; and the gender balance of slave owners, as well as the individual identities of prominent owners in Merida, and the role played by the governor, the bishop, and other clergy in slave-holding.²⁷

Parish records are important to Afrohistory for another reason. They are one of three genres of documents (all in 7–8) in which Afro-Yucatecans are placed in a distinct juridical category; the others are *cofradía* records (there were separate brotherhoods for *negros y mulatos* in Mérida, Campeche, and Valladolid) and militia records (the militias were divided into *blanco* and *pardo* companies). But, unlike the indigenous population, people of African descent did not live in separate settlements and were not granted their own *repúblicas*, and so there were no black *cabildos* to generate mundane notarial records on Afro-Yucatecan life. Nevertheless, in other Afro-Yucatecan sources, particularly Inquisition, criminal, militia, and slave-specific records (5–6), the third-person voice of the text does not remove Afro-Yucatecan individuals as far from the reader as might at first be expected. Certainly some quantitative data can (perhaps must) be compiled from some of these genres, most obviously slave sale and parish records, but there are also individual biographies that emerge in the testimonies and details of many of these cases. Indeed, alleged bigamists and witches are obliged to tell their life stories; although Inquisition and criminal investigations tended to be structured according to procedural conventions, complete with predetermined questions, it is clear that notaries often wrote down the replies of witnesses and the accused word for word, simply substituting third-person for first-person pronouns.

Naturally, there remain gaps or “silences” in all these sources. But, as with the issue of the cultural filters through which we all inevitably sift material in the course of producing historical literature, these should be seen less as problems and more as some of the many stimulating dimensions to the challenge of interpretation and coherence.

ANY READER who has been paying attention will have spotted the truck-sized hole in the plot of one of my research narratives. At the start of the chapter, I described how in recent years the dozens of volumes of the AGAY have ended up as a soggy mess in a convent basement, while the scores of the ANEY’s invaluable notarial volumes have become equally inaccessible—in the back of a Mexico City *barrio* cop shop. How, therefore, have I been able to read and analyze the Afro-Yucatecan parish records in the AGAY and notarial documents such as slave bills of sale from the ANEY? The answer lies in another example of archival helpers. In the summer of 1964 (when I was but a few months old), the AGAY was microfilmed as part of the ongoing project by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints to film parish records throughout the world. The project’s

²⁷AGAY, Jesús María, *Bautismos* vols. 1–5. These data, along with data derived from marriage and burial records from the same parish, as well as Afro-Yucatecan baptism, marriage, and burial records from mid-to-late-colonial Campeche, are to be presented in various chapters of Restall, *The Black Middle*.

official purpose is not to aid ethnohistorians or Afrohistorians, but it has nevertheless been invaluable to historians for decades—and enabled me to read eighteenth-century Yucatec baptism records in a church in State College, Pennsylvania. Likewise, also decades ago, the University of Texas at Arlington microfilmed various archival collections in Mexico, including—thank the bacabs!—Mérida’s ANEY.

The fact that one can easily scan microfilmed pages into a computer, creating one’s own digital and portable version of the archive, at the very least obliges us to expand our definition of archive. But perhaps it also raises questions as to whether the customary conditions of archival research remain a necessary part of the process. That is, does one’s reading of colonial materials become enhanced by sitting in a poorly lit room in ninety-eight degree humid heat, swatting mosquitoes off one’s ankles or politely declining solicitations from beggars who have wandered in off the street, trying to ignore a tinny radio playing a mix of *ranchera* and Carpenters tunes, inhaling the toxic powder used to kill bookworms, or breathing diesel fumes from the buses that thunder past the broken windows (all conditions I have experienced in Yucatan, but which are slowly disappearing)? I suspect that we may *need* to inhale archival dust every now and then.

This essay has been full of references to what I have done with sources, and at the same time I have argued that the end product of historical research is inextricably bound up in the processes and circumstances of document and archive creation, survival, and access. It seems only fitting, therefore, to end by reiterating that archives are not simply inanimate locations containing inert objects written by long-dead subjects; they are kept alive by those who have created them, those who maintain them, and those who grant us access to them—enabling us to make our own small contributions to their vitality.

Archival abbreviations

AGAY	Archivo General y Notaría Eclesiástica de la Arquidiócesis de Yucatán, Mérida
AGEC	Archivo General del Estado de Campeche, Campeche
AGEY	Archivo General del Estado de Yucatán, Mérida
AGN	Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City
AGI	Archivo General de Indias, Seville
AHAY	Archivo Histórico de la Arquidiócesis de Yucatán, Mérida
AHDC	Archivo Histórico de la Diócesis de Campeche, Campeche
AMC	Archivo de la Mitra de Campeche, Campeche
AME	Archivo de la Mitra Emeritense, Mérida
ANEY	Archivo Notarial del Estado de Yucatán, Mérida
AHN	Archivo Histórico Nacional, Madrid
BL	British Library (Rare Manuscript Room), London
CAIHY	Centro de Apoyo a la Investigación Histórica de Yucatán, Mérida

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