

HIST 250/455 – Deciphering Early Modern Spanish

Spring 2024 syllabus

Prof. Pablo Miguel Sierra Silva

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Class: Mondays and Wednesdays, 10:25-11:40 am, Rush Rhees 456

Office Hours: Tuesdays, 10am-12 pm

Overview

In this course, you will learn to read, analyze, and transcribe Spanish writing from the 1500s-1700s. There are no History pre-requisites for this course. To the contrary, this course will immerse you in the documents (personal letters, reports, investigations, and complaints) of the early modern period. As a result, our sessions will serve as a window into colonialism, religion, slavery, imperial conflict, but also everyday interactions, motivations, *chisme* (gossip), rumor and much more. Ultimately, will prepare you for historical research in digital databases, physical archives and specialized libraries. For this iteration of the course, students should have a strong background in Spanish or Portuguese.

Digital Paleography is designed as a practicum of sorts, a space and community in which to sharpen individual and collaborative research skills. Each week, one session will be spent reading, deciphering and transcribing Spanish and Portuguese documents from a specific moment in colonial Latin American history; the following session we will discuss scholarly articles or book chapters in English that contextualize those archival documents. There are no exams in this highly interactive four-credit class. Instead, each of you will participate in a collective transcription project and later on, identify your own digital paleography project based on a document of your choosing. Your individual project consists of three components: the transcription of the text, the production of a finding aid, and the digital packaging of this information in StoryMaps.



The specific theme and document you choose is entirely your choice, as long as the document dates to the pre-1800 period and is written in Portuguese or Spanish. You will learn to navigate a variety of digital archives that hold the records of Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking communities throughout the world. The documents we will decipher touch on a wide variety of topics, including: witchcraft, piracy, free Black communities, exploration narratives, petitions to the Crown. Whether you are interested in the fall of the Inca, or the 18th c. botanical expeditions to Mexico, or Iberian perceptions of “the enemy,” this course is for you.

Our first sessions will focus on written culture in Spanish American domains, how scribes mediated and transmitted knowledge, and how that information was preserved through the centuries. A crucial element of our discussions will be to understand how recently digitized documents affect our understanding of the past (and of our futures). The course follows a reverse chronological order, as we begin in the late 1700s. In these first weeks, your “eyes” will gradually adjust to the “hand,” techniques, spacing, and abbreviations that characterized writing in the early modern period. By the end of the semester, we will arrive at the military conquests of the early 1500s.

Methodology

Paleography is the study of ancient (*palaeo*) writing (*graphein*). As such, it is an essential skill for understanding the historical experiences of societies and individuals who wrote or who were the subject of others’ writing. This was certainly the case of the populations who today inhabit Mexico, Spain, Brazil, Puerto Rico, Colombia, Angola or the Philippines, to name but a few. Perhaps more importantly, paleography allows you (the researcher) to move beyond the printed word. From a research perspective, paleography enables you to access, analyze, and, ultimately, share, new information on the past. Before you can read about a historical figure in a book, article or Wikipedia entry, that person was necessarily studied by one or several scholars. Those scholars turned to older books, articles, primary source collections and archives. In this course, we will focus on these latter two. Your reading, transcription and analysis of documents in digital archives, will allow you to create and share primary sources for others to use.

Acquiring fluency in paleography will be an uneven process. Some of you will progress rapidly through military documentation, but struggle with Inquisition cases. Alternatively, you may find that you have a much greater command of spoken Spanish, only to be stumped by a vexing (and common) abbreviation in seventeenth-century letters. This is absolutely fine. This is why the collective aspect of our course will be so important. We will help one another, sometimes in pairs or with the collaboration of the entire class.

In this iteration of the course, we will focus on Spanish texts, but also analyze a few Portuguese documents to broaden our understanding of shared experiences and hands. The Iberian handwriting of the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries share far more commonalities than we would imagine. You will be surprised to see how many concepts, terms, and structures both languages share in their early modern incarnations.

Assignments and Grade Breakdown

Collaborative Project (20%)

All students collectively transcribe, analyze, annotate, and peer review a group document during the first half of the semester. The group will produce an introductory study on the document and prepare to share it as a digital, Open Access, primary source.

Individual Project (40%)

Each student will select a digitized document from PARES, AGNM, AGNSD, Roots Point Fondo Colonial, or another digital repository of their choice. This manuscript source (or a select portion of the document) will be transcribed, analyzed, and annotated. The proposed project must be discussed with the instructor during research meetings.

- Undergraduate students will produce a 3,500 word annotated transcription with introductory remarks (in total, roughly 10-12-pages of double-spaced text). This assignment is worth 30% of the final grade for the semester.
- Graduate students enrolled in the HIST 455 section of the class will produce a 5,000 word annotated transcription, with introductory remarks and a select bibliography (in total, roughly 13-15 pages of text). This assignment is worth 30% of the final grade for the semester.
- All students will produce a StoryMap during class time to accentuate key elements of the individual project, and will incorporate cartography along with visual and/or audio sources. This digital assignment is worth 10% of the final grade for the semester.

Attendance and Participation (40%)

This course requires your timely and energetic assistance. This iteration of the course is divided into Monday sessions on the practical application of paleography, while Wednesdays are designated for the discussion of History research articles. Class meets twice a week, which makes your timely and participation extremely important. One unexcused absence is allowed per semester. Subsequent unexcused absences will result in a 10% deduction of the attendance and participation grade. If ill, please notify the instructor via email before class.

Mondays: I expect your focused participation and willingness to actively discuss the documents being analyzed during our first session of the week. When stumped by a particular line of text, explain what the words look like, what letters you have been able to identify, how they differ from previous lines of text. This course requires a charitable, constructive approach to knowledge making. When working during collaborative times, assist one another. Some of you will invariably have a better grasp of early modern Spanish (or Portuguese) than others. Share your knowledge collectively.

Wednesdays: During the second session, we will have extended discussions on the assigned chapters or articles for the week. Each of you will lead two discussions during the course of the semester and facilitate conversation with your peers for that specific session. You are expected to contribute discussion questions, advance specific critiques of passages and scrutinize the sources used by each week's authors. Write down the specific page number of the materials and sections you intend to critique for discussion. These discussion weeks will be assigned during the first sessions of the semester.

Course Schedule

Week 1 – Introductions, Digital Sources and “Chained Loops”

Jan. 17

Putnam, Lara. “The Transnational and the Text-Searchable: Digitized Sources and the Shadows They Cast.” *American Historical Review* (April 2016): 376-402.

Week 2 – Contraband, clothes and power in the Spanish Pacific

Jan. 22

1777, A letter from the viceroy of Perú

<http://pares.mcu.es/ParesBusquedas20/catalogo/show/3595225?nm>

Archivo General de Indias, Lima, 655, N. 1

Jan. 24

Archer, Christon. “Spain and the Defence of the Pacific Ocean Empire.” *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* Vol. 11, No. 21 (1986): 15-41.

Kathryn Burns, “Notaries, Truths, and Consequences”, *The American Historical Review* 110, no. 2 (April 2005): 350-379.

Week 3 – Sexuality, witchcraft and the Inquisition

Jan. 29

1709-1715, Petrona de Fuentes faces the Inquisition

<http://pares.mcu.es/ParesBusquedas20/catalogo/show/1312475?nm>

Proceso de Fe de Petrona de Fuentes

Archivo Histórico Nacional (Madrid), Inquisición, 1733, Exp.34

Jan. 31

Behar, Ruth. “Sex and Sin, Witchcraft and the Devil in Late-Colonial Mexico.” *American Ethnologist* Vol. 14, No. 1 (Feb., 1987): 34-54.

Jaffary, Nora E. “Sexual Defiance and Sacred Desecration: María Gertrudis Arévalos and the Holy Office in Eighteenth-Century Mexico.” In *Sexuality and the Unnatural in Colonial Latin America*, 43-57. Edited by Zeb Tortorici.

Week 4 – Foreign, Irish, and Catholic in the Spanish Caribbean

Feb. 5

1701, Establishing residency rights for foreigners married with Spanish women

<http://pares.mcu.es/ParesBusquedas20/catalogo/description/7339973?nm>

Archivo de la Real Chancillería de Valladolid, Cédulas y Pragmáticas, Caja 18, 24

Feb. 7

Block, Kristen. "Northern European Protestants in the Spanish Caribbean." In *Ordinary Lives in the Early Caribbean*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012. pp. 65-80.

von Germeten, Nicole. "Irish Honor on the Spanish Main: Captain Cornrelío Cornelius." Chapter 4, 70-84. In *Sex, Race, and Honor in Colonial Cartagena de Indias*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2013.

Week 5 – Maroons, imperial competition, and free Black communities

Feb. 12

1677, Freedom in San Lorenzo de los Mina

<http://pares.mcu.es/ParesBusquedas20/catalogo/show/397730?nm>

Archivo General de Indias, Santo Domingo, 63, R. 3, N. 62

Feb. 14

Landers, Jane. "Maroon Women in Colonial Spanish America: Case Studies in the Circum-Caribbean from the Sixteenth through the Eighteenth Centuries." In *Beyond Bondage: Free Women of Color in the Americas*. Edited by David Barry Gaspar and Darlene Clark Hine. University of Illinois Press, 2004. pp. 3-18.

Sierra Silva, Pablo Miguel. "Performing Refugees: Asylum, Blackness, and Piracy in Santo Domingo/Saint-Domingue, 1675-1700." Unpublished paper presented at UCLA Atlantic Series Seminar, 2021 November.

(optional) Apodaca Valdez, Manuel. "Cofradías afrodominicanas: historia y religiosidad popular, siglos XVII y XVIII." In *Cofradías Afrohispanicas*, Capítulo 5, 176-196. Leiden: Brill, 2022.

Week 6 – The Inquisition in the Caribbean: The case of Cartagena de Indias

Feb. 19

1668, Juan de Saavedra and his blasphemies

<http://pares.mcu.es/ParesBusquedas20/catalogo/show/1683194?nm>

Archivo Histórico Nacional, Inquisición, L. 1023, IMG 451-455

Feb. 21

Vargas Valdés, Andrés. "Illicit reassertions of the faith: blasphemy and the early Cartagena Inquisition, 1612-1660." *Colonial Latin American Review* Vol. 29, No. 3 (2020): 414-433.

Silva Campo, Ana María. "Fragile Fortunes: Afrodescendant women, witchcraft, and the remaking of urban Cartagena." *Colonial Latin American Review* Vol. 30, No. 2 (2021): 197-213.

Week 7 – Collective research week

Feb. 26 and 28

*Advance your section of the collective transcription project.
Send your transcription to pablo.sierra@rochester.edu by noon on Friday, March 1*

Week 8 – The Iberian Union: Spanish Brazil & Portuguese Mexico?

March 4

1648, Marcos de Vallecillo and his military resumé

<http://pares.mcu.es/ParesBusquedas20/catalogo/show/243755?nm>

Archivo General de Indias, Indiferente, 161, N.255

March 6

Stuart Schwartz, 'The Voyage of the Vassals: Royal Power, Noble Obligations, and Merchant Capital before the Portuguese Restoration of Independence, 1624–1640', *American Historical Review*, 96, 3 (1991): 735-762

Weststeijn, Arthur, "Empire in Fragments: Transatlantic News and Print Media in the Iberian World, 1600-1640." *Renaissance Quarterly* 74 (2021): 528–70.

(optional) Iglesias Magalhães, Pablo Antonio. "Frei Francisco de San Juan: Um missionário espanhol na Bahia em 1624." *Hispania Sacra* LXIII, No. 127 (enero-junio 2011): 155-184.

Send your peer reviews to pablo.sierra@rochester.edu by noon on Friday, March 8

Week 9 – Spring Break (no class)

Week 10 – Transatlantic slaving during the Iberian Union

March 18

1631, The death of a ship pilot

<http://pares.mcu.es/ParesBusquedas20/catalogo/show/97844?nm>

Archivo General de Indias, Contratación, 957, N. 2, R. 6

March 20

Studnicki-Gizbert, Daviken. "Setting Upon the Seas." In *A Nation Upon the Sea: Portugal's Atlantic Diaspora and the Crisis of the Spanish*, 41-66. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.

Lokken, Paul. "From the 'Kingdoms of Angola' to Santiago de Guatemala: The Portuguese Asientos and Spanish Central America, 1595-1640." *Hispanic American Historical Review* Vol. 93, No. 2 (2013): 171-203.

Send collective introductory study to pablo.sierra@rochester.edu by noon on Friday, March 22.

Week 11 – The global Iberian empire: Letters from Macau

March 25

1639, The people of Macao and the King of Japan

<http://pares.mcu.es/ParesBusquedas20/catalogo/show/423159?nm>

Archivo General de Indias, Filipinas, 41, N. 64

March 27

de Sousa, Lúcio. "Judaeo-Converto Merchants in the Private Trade Between Macao and Manila in the Early Modern Period." *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Economic History* Vol. 38, No. 3 (2019): 519-552.

Cañeque, Alejandro. "In the Shadow of Francis Xavier: Martyrdom and Colonialism in the Jesuit Asian Missions." *Journal of Jesuit Studies* Vol. 9 (2022): 438-458.

Identify two possible pre-1800 documents for your individual project. Send 150-word transcription of each document to pablo.sierra@rochester.edu by noon on Friday, Mar. 29

Week 12 – The Spanish Pacific and the English challenge

April 1

1588, English pirates and Spanish ships in China

<http://pares.mcu.es/ParesBusquedas20/catalogo/show/127367?nm>

Archivo General de Indias, Patronato, 265, R.51

April 3

Shutz, J. Travis. "Limahong's Pirates, Ming Mariners, and Early Sino-Spanish Relations." *Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints* Vol. 67, No. 3-4 (September-December 2019): 315-342.

Send additional 500-word transcription for chosen document to pablo.sierra@rochester.edu by noon on Friday, April 5

Week 12 – French corsairs on the Havana-Seville route

April 8

1583, Martín Ochoa de Lacayo and the “French” corsairs

<http://pares.mcu.es/ParesBusquedas20/catalogo/show/127517?nm>

AGI, Patronato, 267, N. 1, R. 82

In-class StoryMaps session: set your templates

April 10

Adams, Eleanor B. “The Franciscan Inquisition in Yucatán: French Seamen, 1560.” *The Americas* Vol. 25, No. 4 (April 1969): 331-359.

Lane, Kris. *Pillaging the Empire: Global Piracy on the High Seas*. New York: Routledge, 2016. Chapters 1-2, pp. 7-55.

Send additional 500-word transc. to pablo.sierra@rochester.edu by noon on Friday, April 12

Week 13 – The afterlife of Moctezuma, the Mexica emperor

April 15

1557, Moctezuma’s petition for a coat of arms

<http://pares.mcu.es/ParesBusquedas20/catalogo/show/130420?nm>

“Concesión de escudo de armas”

Archivo General de Indias, Patronato, 284, N. 1, R. 64

In-class StoryMaps session: incorporate visual documents related to your document

April 17

Connell, William F. “After Moctezuma: Indigenous Politics and Self-Government in Mexico City, 1524-1730.” Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2011. Chapter 2, pp. 55-89.

Castañeda de la Paz, María. “The Texcoco Coat of Arms.” *Ethnohistory* Vol. 69 No. 2 (April 2022): 163-195.

In-class StoryMaps session: incorporate audio or video clips related to your document

Send 1000-word introductory study to pablo.sierra@rochester.edu by noon on Friday, April 12

Week 14 – Conflict and captivity in early Brazil

April 22

1549, Blas Arias describes early Brazil

<http://pares.mcu.es/ParesBusquedas20/catalogo/show/121751?nm>

Archivo General de Indias, Patronato, 23, R. 13

In-class StoryMaps session: incorporate cartographic elements using mapping tools

April 24

Voigt, Lisa and Elio Brancaforte. "The Traveling Illustrations of Sixteenth-Century Travel Narratives." *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, Vol. 129, No. 3 (2014): 365-398.

Based on your introductory study, annotate your document using Chicago-style footnotes. Send revised study to pablo.sierra@rochester.edu by noon on Friday, April 26.

Week 15 – Ending with Puerto Rican beginnings (Monday only)

April 29

1532, Memories of the Island of Borinken

<http://pares.mcu.es/ParesBusquedas20/catalogo/show/367742?nm>

- "Informaciones: Juan González Ponce de León"

De la Luz Rodríguez, Gabriel. "Ethnological: Hermeneutics for an Early Colonial Encounter on the Island of San Juan: The 1532 Probanza of Juan González." *Ethnohistory* Vol. 64, No. 2 (April 2017): 217-239.

In-class StoryMaps session: informal presentations of your StoryMaps to peers

Finals Week

Complete, proofread and submit your 3,500- or 5,000-word transcription and study. Send the final project to pablo.sierra@rochester.edu by noon on Monday, May 6