

Bib. Nac.. 1, Cura

Biblioteca Nacional de la República de Argentina  
(Argentine National Library)

Cura, Yago  
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Zimmerman, A. (2004). Libraries in Argentina: An overview. *IFLA*, 30 (2), 108-128.

Zimmerman's article comprehensively summarizes the history of Libraries in Argentina. The section on "Buenos Aires Public Library and National Library" delves into the founding of the National Library of Argentina on "September 7, 1810 by an Executive Order of the Government Junta" (112). There is a plethora of information on political figures like Mariano Moreno, the protector of the National Library, and Domingo Sarmiento, president of Argentina from 1868 to 1874, both of whom were instrumental to the legacy of the National Library. Zimmerman does an amazingly competent job of positing the History of Argentine Libraries in the greater crux of Argentine History, in general, and makes important correlations between politics and scholarship.

Ana Maria Peruchena Zimmerman was the President of the Association of Graduate Librarians in the Republic of Argentina (Asociación de Bibliotecarios Graduados de la República Argentina, or ABGRA) in 2004; therefore, an obvious professional bias exists. In other words, what Zimmerman leaves out might be as important as what she states; this makes her article topically trustworthy. However, her "history" is more than comprehensive and overflows with historical tidbits like the fact that the National Library was founded in 1810 but that it wasn't until "March 16, 1812 [that] the library was inaugurated" (112).

Parada, Alejandro E. (2006). Towards a new history of books and libraries in Argentina: Background, history, and periods. *Library History*, 22, 55-60.

Parada's article divides the History of the Book and libraries into four periods. In addition, his article explains how immigration helped influence the economic, political, and social landscape of the History of the Book in Argentina. More importantly, Parada contends that before the 1980's library history was relegated to the historic trajectory of libraries as institutions (the empirical-positivist model). However, since then there has been a push to integrate the concepts and ideas propagated by the social sciences and qualitative systems. To this end, the research of "literary researchers, philologists, sociologists, art historians" (57) has been heavily solicited and utilized.

Whereas before scholars followed a descriptive path that ignored Argentina's cultural history, Parada's article "pays more attention than in the past to broader cultural contexts" (55). To this end, Parada incorporates the various tides of Immigration that helped to bolster the population and cultural tradition in Argentina. Of particular interest was Parada's delineation of the first period (1810 and 1892) and important bibliographic events initiated by Paul Groussac, a French immigrant himself and one of the Libraries most famous Directors. Parada's bibliography is comprehensive and focuses on sources written in Spanish; however, I found no sources listed in English or French which would have offered an interesting counterbalance to the history of the book in Argentina.

Historia. (2008). Biblioteca Nacional de la República Argentina. Retrieved March 17, 2008 from [http://www/bn.gov.ar/AC\\_Historia.aspx](http://www/bn.gov.ar/AC_Historia.aspx)

Produced by the Biblioteca Nacional de la República de Argentina, this source discusses the founding of the Library and some of its most famous directors, among them Saturnino Segurola, Fray Cayetano Rodríguez, Paul Groussac, Gustavo Martínez Zuviria, and Jorge Luis Borges. One of the key points in this source is a discussion of the collection of Foulché-Delbosc, essential to Iberian studies in Argentina. Author also discusses architectural history of the buildings in which the Library has been housed. From the “Manzana de las Luces” (the block of lights) in 1810 to its setting between the avenues of “Libertador General San Martín y Las Heras” (Liberator Generals San Martín and Heras) in 1960 to its modern-day iteration on Agüero in 1992.

The official webpage (Spanish) for the National Library of Argentina is heavy on the historic antecedents that brought about this important cultural institution. The source makes a strong correlation between Librarianship and Literature in Argentina, especially as it pertains to the National Library’s Directors. More importantly, there is little here to trace the history of the book in Argentina, or to introduce some of the quantitative theories behind the bibliographic practices prevalent at the National Library.

de Oliveira, E.F.T., & Guimaraes, J. (2004). Library professionals' education in the Mercosur countries. *Education for Information*. 22, 31-39.

A research paper whose locus involves the education of librarians in sovereign states participating in “Mercosur—the Common Market of South America—established on March 29, 1991” (31), a free-trade zone not unlike NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement). The paper discusses how Mercosur has affected the rates of Education, especially as they relate to enrollment in Library Science programs. They enumerate the number of Library Science programs offered at colleges and universities in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Uruguay, and Paraguay; also, they discuss the history and inception of Library Science scholarship programs in Mercosur countries.

According to the authors, their paper “aims at presenting a picture of the graduation courses for library professionals in the Mercosur countries, their trends, and some challenges that they are facing now” (32). To that end, the authors discuss Mercosur’s goals, especially as they relate to improving the lives of citizens by offering “a perspective for a more dignified life for the populations of its region” (32). However, the research is topical at best and there is little quantitative data present. The paper intends to be specific but does not provide the data or research to substantiate this endeavor; however, the history of Argentina and Brazil, as countries that train librarians, lends some credibility.

Presentación. Retrieved March 22, 2008, from Biblioteca Nacional de la República de Argentina. <http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/portal/bna/presentacion.shtml>.

This concise history of the Biblioteca Nacional de la República Argentina is maintained by the Miguel D. Cervantes virtual port. As such, it is part of the larger web site, but is a portal unto itself because of the stature of the Argentine National Library in the greater realm of Iberian studies in Latin America. The history delves into great detail with concern to volumes in collection according to year. For example, in 1823 there were “17,000 volumes” (par. 1) and in 1893 there were “62,707 volumes” (par. 2). The web page also discusses architectural history of the National Library and mentions the architects that were involved.

The web page discusses the history and inception of the venerable institute. The web page portal has photographs of various, high-profile sections of the library like the reading rooms, main entrance, and view from Aguero street (with bust of Borges). In terms of history, this source offers an objective opinion of the history of the National Library of Argentina because the website is maintained by the Miguel D. Cervantes Institute (which is in Spain) but most of the information can be found on the official page of the National Library.

Christian, S. (1990, Jan. 18). Buenos Aires journal: Where the Perons lived, inertia has a monument. *The New York Times*, Retrieved Mar 22, 2008, from Gale Cengage Learning.

Christian's article highlights the municipal inertia that surrounded the final stages of construction of Argentina's National Library. In the late 1980's to early 1990's, the mismanagement of funds almost completely stopped the progress of the construction. The work of one private company in particular, Antorchas Foundation, proved instrumental in finding the funds to complete the construction. Prompted by a member of Menem's (the president at the time) cabinet, they intervened and offered logistical assistance. Christian recounts the process by which Paul Hirsch, the owner of Antorchas, "obtained a library expert from Unesco in Paris to come to determine whether the layout and space allotments could be adapted to modern library needs" (par. 8).

There is little in this article in the way of historical background or municipal context; there is little explanation of the cultural history of the Biblioteca Nacional. However, the article does present a snapshot of the institute at a crossroads in its expansion. Indeed, the article begs readers to contemplate Ranganathan's fifth law which compares Libraries to Organisms, and to ponder the budgetary costs and immense manpower required to make sure libraries are treated like the Organisms Ranganathan believed they were.

Piper, P. (2001). For Jorge Luis Borges, paradise was not a garden but a library. *American Libraries*. 32 (7), 56-59.

Piper discusses Borges' role as Director of the National Library, from 1955-1973, and how his post there influenced short stories like "El Sur" (The South) and "La Biblioteca de Babel" (The Library of Babel). According to Piper, Borges started out as a "first assistant in the Miguel Cane branch of the Buenos Aires Municipal Library, classifying and cataloging the collection" (56) and rose to the position of Director, "In 1955, [when] the Cordoba revolution overthrew Peron, and the new government appointed Borges director of the Argentine National Library" (57). Piper's article contains a section called "The library as setting and reality," which illuminates how technical ideas and notions about the Library as a physical setting informed the premises and contentions of Borges' short stories.

Piper's article for *American Libraries* was written for the magazine's "Literature" section, therefore, it is heavy on Borges' literary accomplishments and light on the institution's history. There is much discussion about Borges' blindness and the splendid irony that Borges spoke about when he gave his acceptance speech, "I speak of God's splendid irony in granting me at one time 800, 000 books and darkness" (57). This article would prove ultimately useful in a discourse about the Directors of the National Library, but is not so useful when it comes to thinking about the historical trajectory of the Library as a whole.



Bazán, C. (2003). Legal deposit and the collection of national publications in Argentina. *IFLA*. 29 , 227-230.

This article concerns the sanctity of Legal Deposit system in Argentina, but especially at the National Library of Argentina in Buenos Aires. Bazan explicates the concept of Legal Deposit, “This legislation forces all publishers in a county to deposit copies of their publications in the care of a designated institution” (227). More importantly, Bazan includes 14 observations about this process at the National Library; her observations are clarifications of the Legal Deposit’s mandates or concern the disparity between the law and its practice. The findings are cause for concern, given the stature of the National Library.

Bazan advocates for uniform practices at institutes acting as Legal Deposits; her findings support the assertion that “Argentinean legislation on legal deposit does not properly observe international recommendations” (228). Bazan sees this as the largest contributor “for the lack of a collection of Argentinean publications which is complete and well preserved by the National Library” (228). But, she offers very little in the way of solutions and this leaves the reader questioning her motives. However, there is little doubt in my mind that her motives are to induce the National Library to reassess their Legal Deposit systems.

Groussac, P. (1938). *Noticia histórica sobre la Biblioteca nacional de Buenos Aires (1810-1901) y discurso pronunciado en la inauguración del actual edificio*. Buenos Aires: Jesus Menendez.

This “historic discourse” written in Spanish by Paul Groussac, Director of the Argentine National Library from 1885-1929, recounts the history of the National Library from its conception in 1810 to its establishment in 1812. A section of it was read by him at the inauguration of the building at 564 Mexico Avenue, which used to house the National Lottery. Groussac’s text meanders through the history of early 19<sup>th</sup> century Argentina, his prose rife with literary flourishes and phrases in Latin and French. Groussac covers the conception of the National Library, created by decree of the May Junta by its secretary Mariano Moreno, to his own tenure (Groussac’s), which marked the institute’s modernization.

Groussac’s discourse is more than comprehensive; it is almost exhausting, and therein lies the problem; Groussac’s discourse is not intended for the lay person, and his prose is anachronistic and byzantine. Indeed, students of Literature and Philosophy might find his prose flattering, but the lay person might find Groussac’s text almost indecipherable. However, Groussac is often credited with bringing the National Library into its modern iteration, therefore, efforts should be made to comprehend and internalize his theories, ideas, and asides.

Picabea, M. (2005, Oct., 19). La Biblioteca acompaña el gran drama de la Argentina. *Clarín*, Retrieved March 17, 2008, from <http://www.clarin.com/diario/2005/10/19/sociedad/s-0371.htm>

This interview of Horacio González, the Assistant Director of the National Library in 2005, is frank and candid. The reporter, María Picabea, asks the Asst. Director many difficult questions, especially those pertaining to an internal memo sent to the secretariat of the Culture which questioned González's ascension within the National Library. The interview also brings to light the political nature of the National Library, and González admits that the National Library is a polemic entity where several currents (cultural, ideological, and symbolic) are put into play. This interview is most useful to a contemporary discussion of the problems that currently plague the National Library.

This interview is a snapshot of the National Library's current polemic regarding Horacio González and his policies. González makes many interesting points about the nature of the National Library and compares running it to running a small state model where relations can become strained by problems with salaries, politics, ideology, and technical appointments. The interview is a little on the slim side, but it does provide a contemporary view of the National Library and the problems that plague the venerable institute. Therefore, this interview might do well to round out a history of the National Library and provide some insight into its future.

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