

# MEMORY OF THE WORLD REGISTER

## Documentary Fonds of Royal Audiencia Court of La Plata (RALP)

(Bolivia)

*Ref N° 2010-54*

### **PART A – ESSENTIAL INFORMATION**

#### *1. Summary*

The documentary fonds originated in the Royal Audiencia Court of La Plata (RALP), whose headquarters was the Villa de La Plata, since 1825 known as Sucre. The RALP is also known as the Royal Audiencia Court of Charcas, which after 1825 came to be known as Bolivia. This documentary resource spans the period 1561 -1825.

This documentation reflects the administrative, judicial and governmental functions of the RALP, which began to function on September 7, 1561 and was ended, after 264 years, with the creation of the Republic of Bolivia on August 6, 1825. To date no Royal Order has been found for the creation of the Audience Court, but the first appointments of judges date to 1558.

Its initial territorial jurisdiction, in 1561, was only 100 leagues around its headquarters; due to its expansion in 1563 it was extended from ocean to ocean, that is to say from Arica (today part of Chile) on the Pacific to Buenos Aires (Argentina) on the Atlantic, including Paraguay and the province of Tucumán (Argentina). It retained this enormous expanse for more than 200 years until the creation of the Audience Courts of Buenos Aires (1783) and Cuzco (1784).

The RALP was created as an appeals court, subordinate to the Viceroyalty of Peru (1561-1776) and (1809-1825) and that of the Rio de La Plata (1776-1809). Nevertheless, the Audiencia Court was not just a judicial and administrative body, but rather – in fact – a body with governing authority due to the great distances between Charcas and Lima – seat of the Audience Court of Lima and the Viceroyalty of Peru – as well as the problems that arose from the development of the Rich Hill of Potosí silver mine and the unique problems that affected Charcas (civil wars and constant uprisings).

As a result of the powers, the documentation related to the RALP deals with economic, military, ecclesiastical (due to Royal Patronage of the Church), cultural and social issues within its huge territorial and administrative jurisdiction. This quantitative (144 lineal meters of documentation) and qualitative wealth can be observed in the documentary series (both natural and artificial) that make up this documentation.

In view of the geographical extension of the RALP, this documentation is of direct concern to Spain and the present-day territories of Argentina, Paraguay, Chile and Peru, as well as Bolivia, regions that have a considerable quantitative and qualitative interest in this archive. In addition, since this fonds is related to the development of the silver mines of Potosí, their historical interest surpasses that of the Charcas region or even Hispanic America. The exploitation of those mines (together with those of Zacatecas in Mexico) launched complicated mechanisms that facilitated the formation of an extensive economic network that, from its basis on American soil, extended its radio of projection to the entire known world. Silver from Potosí, extracted under an effective system created by Spain for draining the mines, was exported to the Iberian Peninsula, crossed Europe and continued on to the Orient and the Asian markets. Thus, the documentation of the RALP constitutes the first link of an entire globalized commercial circuit for silver in the 16th and 17th centuries.

In 1809 the RALP, as a result of the popular uprising in La Plata, effectively assumed the role of government, giving start to the Wars of Independence in Charcas and in all of Spanish America. Once

the Republic of Bolivia was established in 1825, the judicial functions of the RALP were transferred first to the Superior Court of Chuquisaca and shortly thereafter to the national Supreme Court.

## JURISDICTION OF THE RALP

Jurisdiction of the RALP, J. M. Barnadas, Historical Dictionary of Bolivia, Sucre, 2002.

### *2. Details of the nominator*

#### **2.1 Name (person or organisation)**

The National Archive of Bolivia

Legal status: By virtue of Law Number 1670 dated October 31, 1995, the Bolivian National Archive and Library are under the direct supervision of the Culture Foundation of the Bolivian Central Bank

#### **2.2 Relationship to the documentary heritage nominated**

The documentation of the RALP was transferred to the National Archive of Bolivia in compliance with the October 18, 1883 law that created the repository.

#### **2.3 Contact person(s)**

Marcela Inch, Director of the National Archive and Library of Bolivia

#### **2.4 Contact details (include address, phone, fax, email)**

55 Plaza Yamparáez, Sucre, Bolivia

Work Telephone: 591 4 6460207 and 591 4 6452246

Cell Phone: 591- 711 66747

Work email: abnb@entelnet.bo

Personal email: marcelainch@yahoo.mx

### *3. Identity and description of the documentary heritage*

#### **3.1 Name and identification details of the items being nominated**

Documentary Fund of Royal Audiencia Court of La Plata (RALP)

#### **3.2 Description**

Level: Fund

Code (s) reference: BO ABNB, RALP

Title: Royal Audiencia Court of La Plata

Date (s): 18/12/1561/s. XVI / La Plata - 12/6/1825/s. XIX / La Plata

Producer's name: Royal Audiencia Court of La Plata

Volume and support unit description: 144 lineal meters. Paper.

Archival history: The documents of the RALP were delivered to the National Archive of Bolivia (ANB) in observance of the foundation law of this Center, on October 18th of 1883, after extensive

losses due to neglect.

According to Gunnar Mendoza, director of ABNB (1944-1994), the massive destruction of colonial documents would reach approximately 85%. The bulk of the documentation of the RALP, which had accumulated over 264 years (1561-1825) and then had been for 58 years in a precarious state of limbo, was finally transferred to the National Library of Bolivia and then to the National Archive of Bolivia for permanent preservation.

#### ***4. Justification for inclusion/ Assessment against criteria***

##### **4.1. Is authenticity established?**

In addition to the paper, the ink used in the documents, and the calligraphy of the texts, which match those used from the 16th to the 19th century, based on universal principles of provenance and order, the documents themselves authenticate this fonds. The RALP documents bear the signatures of both Spanish and Charcas authorities confirming they are original documents or official testimonial copies, and as a result all of the documents in this fonds are of unquestionable authenticity.

##### **4.2. Is world significance, uniqueness and irreplaceability established?**

The territorial and functional jurisdiction of the RALP extended to – at the time of its greatest expansion – the Peruvian territory to the south of Cuzco and the present-day territories of Bolivia, Paraguay, northern Chile and Argentina. Within those boundaries, the main emphasis of the RALP documentation focuses on present-day Bolivia and, within that, on Potosí, which became the social and economic pole of the area due to its enormous production of silver, whose influence, by the end of the 16th century, had extended not only to the Viceroyalty of Peru but to all of the Spanish Empire, becoming a decisive factor in the world's economy.

The Rich Hill of Potosí, starting from its initial development by the Spanish in 1545, became a formidable locus for all sorts of activities, and information about mines and processing mills, legislation, mining, or processing and minting, mine labor and other areas for the entire district of the RALP. The documents relate, among other things: the juridical norms of the legal system of the Indies, and the supplementary application of Castilian law; the exportation of silver to Spain; the importation of European goods; the transformation of monetary wealth into commercial capital; the transfer of capital to commerce and agriculture; the adoption of indigenous technological knowledge; the development of new mining technology; the adaptation of the indigenous obligatory system of labor, the mita, to original capital accumulation; the transformation of the pre-European tribute to the Inca and local deities into a tithe system established by the European conquerors; juridical norms for the protection of the Indians through the “defender of natives” system; the responsibilities and privileges of the Inca aristocracy as regards the functioning of the mita system; the application and later decline of the obligatory paid work regime in the mines; the labor of African slaves in the Royal Mint House; the establishments of networks for the circulation, interchange and consumption of goods among regions; the creation of mining, commercial and industrial societies; the creation of transport networks employing Andean animals such as the llama and the alpaca; norms for the acquisition, exploitation and sale of mining properties; technological limitations for refining complex silver ores containing other metals and non-metals; the role in development of the local economic, political, social and other trends in the entire jurisdiction of the RALP.

The documentation of the series known as “Mojos and Chiquitos” is also extremely important. It is an administrative archive related to the daily activities of the Jesuit Missions of Mojos (1681-1767) and Chiquitos (1681-1767), the present-day territory of the Department of the Beni and a large part of the Department of Santa Cruz de la Sierra, in eastern Bolivia, where the evangelization of acculturation of dozens of indigenous groups occurred.

Of no lesser importance is:

- The series called “General Indian Uprising” related to the chain of indigenous revolts against the

Spanish crown that, between 1780 and 1782, was centered in the territories of the Audiencia Court of Lima (present-day Peru) and the RALP. • The series called “Correspondence” which, in addition to its intrinsic value, has the additional interest of the valuable documents that were attached to the correspondence, such as for example, the censuses of Our Lady of Talavera, San Juan Bautista de la Rivera and Santiago del Estero, cities located in present-day Argentina.

#### **4.3 Is one or more of the criteria of (a) time (b) place (c) people (d) subject and theme (e) form and style (f) social, spiritual and community significance satisfied?**

##### **Unique and Irreplaceable documentation**

The majority of the series produced by the Tribunal of the RALP are absolutely unique, without copies or duplicates in any other repository, not even in the General Archive of the Indies. Such is the case with regard to the following series: “The Books of Agreements from Royal Audience Court of La Plata” “Correspondence” and “Judicial Files”, whose thousands of documents did not go beyond the jurisdiction of the RALP. During the first half of the 20th century, the following artificial sub-series were separated from the “Judicial Files” series: “Files from Mojos and Chiquitos”, “Documentary Resources on Mining”, “The Forensic Practice Academy”, “The General Uprising of Indians” and the “University of San Francisco Xavier”. As a result, these sub-series share the same quality of uniqueness as the mother series.

##### **a. Time**

The RALP documentation relates to the period 1561 – 1825.

##### **b. Place**

The following chronology shows the different changes to which the territory under the jurisdiction of the RALP was subject, and consequently the limits of the area covered by the documentation:

- 1561 – The RALP was given jurisdiction of the area within 100 leagues of its seat.
- 1563 – To which were added: Cuzco (today Peru), the districts of Tucumán, Jurés and Diaguitas (today Argentine territory) to the Atacama region, on the Pacific (today occupied by Chile) and the territories of Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Chunchos and Mojos (present-day Bolivian and Peruvian territory).
- 1566 – The Río de la Plata region and Paraguay were added.
- 1568 – Cuzco is separated from Charcas.
- 1573 – The south-eastern territories belonging to the Audience Court of Cuzco were annexed permanently to the RALP.

##### **c. People**

The social structure of Charcas was made up of: Spaniards, Creoles, mestizos (mixed-bloods), Indians, blacks and foreigners. The documentary series of the RALP reveal the life, problems and aspirations of all of these populations.

Spaniards were the privileged stratus of society. They were the owners of mines and rural plantations; the silver merchants; the importers of mercury for the refining of silver and the senior government officials and church and major merchants.

Among the Indian groups were: the Quechuas and Aymaras in the Andean area, and the Guaranís in the eastern plains, including the rebellious Chiriguanos in the latter group. Indian society was subjected to servitude in various levels of activity, including human labor in the mines through a work levee known as the mita, above all in the Rich Hill of Potosí, and in the country through the institution known as the yanaconazgo.

The creoles, the children and other descendents of Spaniards without Indian or African blood: Except at the beginning of the colonial era, they worked in lower level administrative positions and, on rare occasions, were able to reach the highest level of government.

Socially speaking, the mestizo was the offspring of a Spaniard or another mestizo, with an Indian or another mestizo. Very quickly mestizos began to outnumber the Creoles and worked in retail commerce and the arts and crafts, and also worked in the country.

Black slaves were involved in all sorts of activities, including teaching children, dance masters, artisans, domestic workers and even farm laborers. At the beginning of the colonial era they also worked in the mines of Potosi, and their work was also very important on the sugar plantations.

Even though foreigners were prohibited from immigrating to Spanish America, they came to represent another component of the population of Charcas. They were primarily dedicated to commerce.

#### **d. Subject and theme**

All aspects of life, social, economic, political, military and religion.

#### **4.4 Are there issues of rarity, integrity, threat and management that relate to this nomination?**

##### **a. Rarity**

The documentary fonds of the RALP is a unique testimony of the administrative, judicial and governmental workings of said colonial institution (1561-1825).

##### **b. Integrity**

Since its incorporation into the National Archive of Bolivia in 1883, the RALP fonds, with its 144 lineal meters of documentation, has remained intact and well preserved under strict measures of preventative conservation.

It is worthy of note that, according to a former director of the National Archive of Bolivia, prior to their incorporation into the institution, at least 85 percent of the total documentation produced by the RALP was lost.

##### **c. Threat**

Two threats are of great concern: 1) environmental contamination produced by the high level of motor vehicle traffic, since the institution is located in the center of the city 2) the danger represented the gall ink for certain documents.

##### **d. Management**

Since 2002 the institution is housed in a new building, with an area of more that 7,000 square meters. Although the building was specifically designed to serve as the headquarters of the National Archive and Library of Bolivia, the building has some functional difficulties, which we have dealt with in the best manner possible. The building has an ample, comfortable Researchers Room with 37 work stations, all of which have computer connections. It also has a Conservation and Restoration Workshop, informatics and copying services, archival processing, spacious storage facilities, an auditorium, an exhibition hall, classrooms, a bookstore, a cafeteria and other areas.

The move to the new building has given rise to a modification in conservation policies, adopting them to the new spaces. We have achieved levels of humidity and temperature similar to those under which,

since their incorporation into the National Archive in 1883, the documents were stored. Atmospheric conditions are now rigorously controlled by digital hydrometers and temperature gauges, programmed for monthly readings of humidity and temperature levels. The building also has air conditioning systems. With regard to illumination, the storage areas were designed to prevent the entry of direct sunlight and excess heat; although in the latter case sometimes we are obliged to use ventilating fans in addition to the air conditioning. Through these measures the temperature and relative humidity of the storage areas are generally kept at 18 to 20 degrees Celsius and between 45 and 55 percent, respectively. Both the employees and researchers use cotton or latex gloves to handle documents.

The colonial documentation, including that produced by the RALP, is housed on the first underground level, the zócalo, on metal shelving in standard-sized cardboard cartons, covered with acid-free paper. Fireproof materials have been employed throughout the structure, the floors and the furnishings of the storage areas.

It is worthy of mention that the institution has provided training in preventative conservation for its personnel, both within country and abroad. In addition, 70 percent of the staff has taken courses in fire management and is capable of using the numerous ready fire extinguishers located throughout the building.

The institution also has fixed and mobile security cameras located throughout the building, which are in use 24 hours a day, along with motion sensors and smoke detectors.

Routine thorough cleaning of the storage areas is carried out on a monthly basis.

Finally we should point out that, since 2004, the National Archive of Bolivia is undertaking the digitalization of the colonial documentation, beginning with the documentary series that are most frequently consulted.

## ***5. Legal information***

### **5.1 Owner of the documentary heritage (name and contact details)**

The Bolivian State, through the National Archive of Bolivia  
4 Dalence Street  
Post Office Box 793  
Telephone: 591-4-646-0207  
Cell phone: 591-4-71166747  
Fax: 591-4646-1208  
Institutional email: abnb@entelnet.bo  
Personal email: marcelainch@yahoo.com.mx  
Sucre, Bolivia

### **5.2 Custodian of the documentary heritage (name and contact details, if different to owner)**

National Archive of Bolivia

### **5.3 Legal status**

#### **a. Category of ownership:**

The National Archive of Bolivia is a national public institution. It was created by the government of General Narciso Campero by a law enacted on October 18, 1883, which declares: "The General Archive of the Nation to the Archive of the former Royal Audiencia Court of La Plata". A law dated November 28, 1898 expands its role to that of receiving and holding historical documentation of the Executive and Legislative branches of the Republic of Bolivia. Law number 1670 of October 31, 1995 further decrees that the National Archive and Library of Bolivia (two institutions that operate under

one management and in the same building) are under the management of the Cultural Foundation of the Central Bank of Bolivia.

**b. Accessibility:**

The documentary is not subject to reserves, confidentiality or other restrictions, and as such is open to general access under the conditions established by the Bolivian National Archives and Library for all the documents it guards.

**c. Copyright status:**

None

**d. Responsible administration:**

National Archive of Bolivia

**e. Other factors**

**6. Management plan**

**6.1 Is there a management plan in existence for this documentary heritage? Yes, see section 4.4, Management.**

**7. Consultation**

**7.1 Provide details of consultation about this nomination with (a) the owner of the heritage (b) the custodian (c) your national or regional Memory of the World committee**

None.

**PART B – SUBSIDIARY INFORMATION**

**8. Assessment of risk**

**8.1 Detail the nature and scope of threats to this documentary heritage**

The city of Sucre, seat of the National Archive of Bolivia, is located in the southern region of the country, at an altitude of 2,750 meters above sea level. Its climate is temperate, favorable for document conservation and, at the same time, inauspicious for the growth of insects and other kinds of microorganisms. The documentation that dates from the 16th century is in very good condition. In general, the climate of Sucre does not require extreme measures to maintain the documentation in good condition, which does not mean that the institution does not take every precaution, through the use of appropriate equipment, to achieve optimum controls of temperature and humidity. Therefore, we are in a position to declare that the documentation of the RALP, thanks to the good quality of the paper and the climactic conditions of the city, are well preserved.

Nevertheless, we cannot say the same for the locale in which the National Archive and Library of Bolivia is located. Being located in the center of the city, one block from the main square with its intense motor vehicle traffic, where the main government buildings are located, and where religious festivities and other activities are carried out, the documentation is not entirely safe from environmental contamination produced by said traffic.

**9. Assessment of preservation**

a The documentary fonds of the RALP is organized in accordance with the principle of provenance. It has an overall guide; all 13 series in the fonds have inventories; and 8 of the 13 series

also have catalogues.

b The documents are stored in standardized cardboard boxes, each one with its topographic label, so that it is very easy to locate the documents.

c The boxes are stored on fireproof metal shelving. The walls and floors are also fireproof.

d In order to control the preventative conservation and restoration of the documents, each document has its own in-out registry sheet.

e The storage area that houses the colonial documents (along with all the storage facilities in the institution) has a temperature that fluctuates between 18 and 20 degrees Celsius and 45 to 55 percent relative humidity and the documents are not exposed to direct sunlight.

f f. In order to achieve optimum ventilation of these areas, small windows are opened when needed, augmented when necessary by fans and air conditioning, in order to promote air circulation.

g Various security measures have been adopted for these areas, as well as for other areas of the institution. Each area is fitted with surveillance cameras and motion sensors to control access. In addition, each storage area has fire extinguishers and smoke detectors.

h The entire building is controlled 24 hours a day by security guards.

i Regular and thorough cleaning of the storage areas is carried on a monthly basis.

j On a random basis, the documents are examined in order to detect possible variations in the state of conservation of the paper and the ink used in the writing.

k Both the employees of the institution and researchers use latex or cotton gloves to handle the documents.

l In order to protect the original documents from excessive use, they are being digitized, so that researchers can consult them using computers. Photocopying of these documents is now prohibited

m The National Archive of Bolivia seeks to provide permanent on-going training for its personnel in the area of preventive conservation. Since there is currently no local training available in this area, the institution looks for courses abroad. In recent years personnel have received training in the General Archive of Colombia, in the General Archive of Peru (in cooperation with UNESCO), in the National Library of Brazil, and in the General Archive of Venezuela.

## **Problems**

a. There are documents which have been written in ferrous ink and others that are much deteriorated. A lack of adequate personnel prevents us from restoring them with all necessary speed.

b. We lack microfilming equipment, so we have had to resort to digitization, although we are aware that this is perhaps not the best way to preserve the documentation.