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# RECOVERED VOICES, NEWFOUND QUESTIONS

FAMILY ARCHIVES AND  
HISTORICAL RESEARCH

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## THE CENSUS OF PERSONAL AND FAMILY ARCHIVES OF THE CANARY ISLANDS: ADVANCE OF RESULTS

**ABSTRACT:** The *Censo de Archivos Familiares y Personales de Canarias* (census of personal and family archives of the Canary Islands) was a project carried out by the ARCHICAN research group during the years 2016 and 2017. The general aim of the members of the research team was to promote historical research from this kind of archives. In addition, we are also interested in study the formation of these fonds, which does not seem to follow, at least in the Canary Islands, the principle of “original order” argued by classical archival theory to explain the origin of institutional archives. Through bibliographic research and the direct localization of the fonds deposited in the libraries and archive centers of the archipelago, we have detected 226 documentary collections, family fonds and personal fonds. Although, we could appreciate that an important part of these are fractions of documentary collections or fonds, that has been broken as a consequence of the hereditary partitions, before its cession or deposit to the institution where we have located it.

**Keywords:** family archives; personal archives; documentary collections; archival history; Canary Islands

**RESUMO:** O *Censo de Archivos Familiares y Personales de Canarias* foi um projeto desenvolvido pelo grupo de investigação ARCHICAN durante os anos 2016 e 2017. O objetivo geral dos membros do grupo de investigação foi impulsionar a investigação histórica sobre este tipo de arquivos. Interessou-nos também estudar a formação destes fundos, os quais parecem não seguir, pelo menos nas Ilhas Canárias, o princípio de “ordem original” aprovado pela teoria arquivística clássica para explicar a origem dos arquivos institucionais. Através da pesquisa bibliográfica e da localização direta destes fundos depositados em bibliotecas e centros de arquivo do arquipélago, identificámos 226 coleções documentais, arquivos de família e arquivos pessoais. Contudo, estimamos que uma parte importante corresponda a arquivos e coleções fragmentadas, como consequência de divisões por herança prévias à sua cedência ou depósito na instituição onde foram localizados.

**Palavras-chave:** arquivos de família; arquivos pessoais; coleções documentais; arquivística histórica; Ilhas Canárias

## Introduction

The *Censo de Archivos Familiares y Personales de Canarias* (census of personal and family archives of the Canary Islands) was a project carried out by the ARCHICAN research group during the years 2016 and 2017, financed by the University of La Laguna Research Plan 2016. The background of the research group comprises a varied array of interests that ended up shaping this project. Besides previous works on the history of the Archival Science and the genesis of the municipal archives from the old island Councils<sup>1</sup>, we must add those researches made by other members of the team on the archival field<sup>2</sup>, as well as those researches related to cultural studies and family collection of letters<sup>3</sup>. Recent research from members of the ARCHICAN group in the family archives area focused on the Lercaro-Justiniano fond. This relevant archive corresponds to a Genoese family that settled in the Canary Islands since the middle of the sixteenth century. Furthermore and above all, these recent researches aim to open an investigation line on “family archives and documentary sources in the Atlantic World”, through the seminar taught in the *Islas Atlánticas* doctoral programme since 2014<sup>4</sup>. One of the most promising results is the doctoral thesis of Judit Gutiérrez de Armas, entitled *El fondo conde de Siete Fuentes: la construcción de la memoria de linaje y la identidad aristocrática en el mundo atlántico a través de un archivo de familia (siglos XVI-XX)*, currently being conducted under joint supervision at the Universidad de La Laguna and the Universidade Nova de Lisboa<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> NÚÑEZ PESTANO *et al.*, 1999; NÚÑEZ PESTANO *et al.*, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> BELLO JIMÉNEZ, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> ARBELO GARCÍA, 2013: 81–132; ARBELO GARCÍA, 2016: 30-56.

<sup>4</sup> NÚÑEZ PESTANO; VIÑA BRITO, 2014. “Archivos de familia y fuentes documentales en el mundo atlántico. Un acercamiento multidisciplinar desde la historia social y la ciencia archivística”. Seminary in the PhD program “Atlantic Islands: History, Heritage and Legal and Institutional Framework”. [https://www.ull.es/view/doctorandos/islasatlanticas/Informacion\\_general/es](https://www.ull.es/view/doctorandos/islasatlanticas/Informacion_general/es).

<sup>5</sup> GUTIÉRREZ DE ARMAS, 2014; GUTIÉRREZ DE ARMAS, 2016a; GUTIÉRREZ DE ARMAS, 2016b.

## The objectives of the ARCHICAN project

Such background impelled us to unify our researching experience around three main objectives: 1) To give new impetus to the Canary Islands historiography encouraging the knowledge and use of the family archives as a documentary repertoire. This resource could help to overcome the overuse of the studies focused on the institutional archives of Church and State and offer a methodological and thematic renewal of regional historiography. 2) To propel reflection on the heuristics of History, which is particularly focused on the notion of “objectivity” inherited from the positivist historiography, based on the external nature of the archive document. (3) To assume the postmodern criticism on the archival concept of “original order”, in order to integrate it into the heuristics of contemporary historians as we consider that the historian must as well take into account the conservation context without detracting from the context of creation of documents. In other words, the role played by the archivist in the creation of implicit meanings is derived from the operations of conservation and documentary organization<sup>6</sup>. In essence, our set of research objectives is a continuation of the research line opened by professor Maria de Lurdes Rosa and her “historical archival group” regarding the social history of the family archives, analyzed from two angles: archival production and social meaning<sup>7</sup>.

These general objectives were summed up in a series of much more specific objectives, as we always knew that drawing up the *Censo de Archivos Familiares y Personales de Canarias* was the initial stage of this project, which would provide an overview on this topic but it would not allow us to make much progress in achieving the general objectives. The reasons were as

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<sup>6</sup> HORSMAN, 1999: 42-53. Regarding the criticism of the origin principle and other fundamental concepts of the objectivist paradigm in Archival Science, Christine Nougaret, responsible for the private archives section of the Centre Historique des Archives Nationales, asked in 2001 if we could continue accepting the “organic production of the background” or instead we should admit that this was an invention of the archivist, to end up wondering if we did not need to invent an archeology of the archives (in fourarian terms of archeology of knowledge) that allows us to understand the process of construction of the archive by the archivist. NOUGARET, 2004: 331-339. NESMITH, 2005: 35.

<sup>7</sup> ROSA, 2009: 9-24; ROSA, 2012a; ROSA, 2017: 547-586.

follows: 1) The elaboration of this census as a project will always be incomplete and in progress, as there will always be new documentary collections that need to be included. 2) The structure of a census of archives is based on a description sheet that is too simple to analyze the complex relationship between the producer of documents, the organization and selection stages, the expurgation of documents from each collection, and the use of documents at any time during the existence of the archives.

In the particular case of Spain, taking census of archives is a task generally carried out by regional governments in terms of cultural heritage management plans. This is done in coordination with the Ministry of Culture, which maintains on its web portal PARES the *Censo-Guía de Archivos de España e Iberoamérica*<sup>8</sup>. In the Canary Islands, nevertheless, the only entry included in the category *fondos personales y familiares* of the *Censo-Guía* is the *archivo personal Juan Negrín*, corresponding to the last president of the council of ministers of the second Spanish Republic, which was retrieved and inventoried by the Fundación Juan Negrín from Las Palmas de Gran Canaria and the Centro para la Recuperación de la Memoria Histórica. This delay is attributed to the lack of a true archival system in the Canary Islands, a circumstance that has led to a great delay in the inventory and document management of the documentary heritage of the Canary Islands<sup>9</sup>. For this reason, the ARCHICAN group started its joint work creating the *censo de fondos familiares y personales*, a task that, despite being commonly carried out by the archival systems of each autonomous region, has been assumed by university research teams<sup>10</sup>.

### **Project scope and methodology: family fonds, personal archives and collections**

Once the main goal of our joint project was set, our first task was to determine the scope and extent of our work. The classification established

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<sup>8</sup> FITO MANTECA, 2006: 177-198.

<sup>9</sup> NÚÑEZ PESTANO, 2008: 135-170.

<sup>10</sup> GONZÁLEZ ALCAIDE; TOLOSA ROBLEDO, 2010: 169-181.

by the Standard Archival Authority ISAAR sets three categories in order to determine the different types of archival fonds by producer: entities, individuals, and families. Although our initial interest was oriented towards family archives, the delimitation between these last two categories has always been a complex issue. In fact, both categories are grouped as “personal and family archives” by the Ministry of Culture on its classification by type of document. The reason is simple: if the delimitation of both personal and family fond is based just on a numerical criteria (one or more persons connected by family ties) it raises several problems, as the categorization of fonds as personal or family depends as well on other characteristics. Any researcher approaching this issue will encounter genuine personal archives that have been collected and preserved in family archives. On the contrary, there are archives gathered by different individuals connected by family ties that are genuine personal fonds<sup>11</sup>. In these cases, family ties were attributed as the probable cause of the common vocation of the descendants. But even when the artistic, literary and political activities of their creators are similar, the individual documentary production of each of them was not determined by collective interests of a family nature. On the contrary, a family fond is clearly oriented to accumulate documents that symbolize the trajectory of the family, as well as justify their wealth. Its heritage, social prestige, merits and services must benefit family members over time, including future and past members of the family (reformulating the symbolic value of their historical significance to the present time through adaptations)<sup>12</sup>.

Family archives allude to the specific relationship between a certain type of multigenerational documentary producer (family) and the records accumulated by its members over time (family archive). This relationship between the family and its archive was built and remodeled during the different contexts of the archive’s custodial history. At the same time, the repository of records

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<sup>11</sup> Galiana Chacón noted in 2006 the difficulty of delimiting both types of file (family and personal) because while in personal fonds it is common to find series and even sub-fonds created by other members of the family, different from the producer of the personal archive, in the family fonds is common to find the reverse situation, where the personal documentation of one of the family members is integrated in the background: GALIANA CHACÓN, 2006: 19.

<sup>12</sup> GALLEGO DOMÍNGUEZ, 1993. AGUINAGALDE, 1991. AGUINAGALDE, 2013.

that formed the family archive was rearranged, appraised or recreated to give new meanings to the narrative of the family history. However, the family archive was created by a specific type of family (the family of the Early Modern period) in a specific geographical context (it is an exclusively European product).

In recent times, research trends such as the archival turn, the documentary turn, the social history of archives or archival history have exposed the need to study archives as historical objects themselves. Family archives were not an accidental product or the result of the combination of document production and a natural accumulation over time, but organizational repositories whose value and meaning changes and modifies as time goes by, depending on the interests and strategies of each generation<sup>13</sup>.

In the meantime, the social history of the family has been developing in the last four decades a successful investigation about the changes in family structures and relationships since the appearance of the modern family from the late Middle Ages until the formation of the liberal society. The study of social genealogy has gone beyond the analysis of kinship relationships and has unraveled the social reproduction strategies implemented by families to maintain, or achieve, their economic and social status. Together with the formation and transmission of family fortune, family strategies had to confront the construction and projection of family memory, the foundation of a shared identity among its members. The creation and recreation of the symbolic capital that underpins their social status and their own internal cohesion are essential aspects for the social reproduction of the powerful families and contribute to fix that narrative in the social memory.

In the Iberian context, the social history of the family has revealed that its historiographic treatment is inseparable from the study of power, because family strategies of promotion and social reproduction are exclusive to powerful families<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> ROSA, 2017.

<sup>14</sup> CHACÓN JIMÉNEZ (ed.), 1990; HERNÁNDEZ FRANCO, 1998; CHACÓN JIMÉNEZ; HERNÁNDEZ FRANCO (eds.), 2007; CUNHA; HERNÁNDEZ FRANCO (dirs.), 2010.

For this reason, our research team decided that the *censo de archivos personales y familiares de Canarias* would also include documentary collections, which are very common in our archival centres. These collections generally arose from the accumulation of original documents from a variety of origins and were compiled by scholars and historians from the nineteenth and twentieth century for their research works. Interestingly enough, many of these collections belonged to historians with an extensive printed work in articles and journals, although their fonds do usually not contain personal documents of the collector (notes, working drafts, copies of their publications) and are limited to their archives, as in the case of the Rodríguez-Moure or the Emilio Hardisson Pizarroso collections<sup>15</sup>.

After setting the scope of the census, the ARCHICAN group established the methodology for gathering archival data based in two principles: 1) data gathering would strictly follow the model description of the international archival standard; and 2) tracking of fonds and collections would be done through an “indirect” observational method, searching for bibliographical references, press releases, searches in the websites of archival centres, congresses or journals, where archivists detailed the fonds available at their centres. Once the fonds and collections were identified and it was doubtless decided that they should be added to the census, we started to create the descriptive sheet via visits to the archives made by members of the research team, or asking the staff of the centre to fill them in.

Data collection was recorded in two types of descriptive sheets: the first one, referring to the archives or archives centres, and the second one, aimed at registering the information corresponding to each one of the fonds and collections included. The elements of each type of descriptive sheet are listed in the table below:

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<sup>15</sup> RODRÍGUEZ MESA; MACÍAS MARTÍN, 2000. Although the owners who delivered this collection to the parish archive of La Concepción in Santa Cruz, called this set of documents “background”, it is a true factitious collection of documents of the most varied origin. Emilio Hardisson Pizarroso collection, reference: ES.38038-APNSC-FEHP.

**Table 1**

Selected elements for the description of archive centers (ISDIAH)	Selected elements for the description of fonds-collections (ISAD G – ISAAR)
<p>IDENTITY AREA</p> <p>1.1 Identifier</p> <p>1.2 Authorized form of name</p> <p>1.3 Parallel form(s) of name</p> <p>1.5 Type of institution with archival holdings</p> <p>CONTACT AREA</p> <p>2.1 Location and address</p> <p>2.2 Telephone, fax, email</p> <p>2.3 Contact persons</p> <p>ACCESS AREA</p> <p>4.1 Opening times</p> <p>CONTROL AREA</p> <p>6.3 Dates of relationship</p>	<p>IDENTITY STATEMENT AREA</p> <p>1.1 Reference code</p> <p>1.3 Title (name of the fond or collection/parallel form of the name)</p> <p>Type of archive (personal archive, family archive, collection)</p> <p>1.4 Date (extreme dates/predominant dates)</p> <p>1.5 Extent and medium of the unit of description</p> <p>CONTEXT AREA</p> <p>2.1 Name of creator</p> <p>2.2 Administrative/Biographical history</p> <p>2.3 Archival history</p> <p>2.4 Immediate source of acquisition or transfer</p> <p>CONTENT AND STRUCTURE AREA</p> <p>3.1 Scope and content</p> <p>3.4 System of arrangement</p> <p>CONDITIONS OF ACCESS AND USE AREA</p> <p>4.1 Conditions governing Access</p> <p>4.3 Language/scripts of material</p> <p>4.5 Finding aids</p> <p>ALLIED MATERIALS AREA</p> <p>5.3 Related units of description</p> <p>5.4 Publication note</p> <p>DESCRIPTION CONTROL AREA</p> <p>7.1 Archivist's note</p> <p>7.2 Rules or conventions</p>

**Personal and family archives in the Canary Islands: computation of cases and detected archivistic problems**

The gathering of archival data was done within seven months, although we are still waiting for the submission of some descriptive sheets of fonds and collections requested to the people in charge of some of the centres. The results of the data gathering are summarized below, regardless of various incidents detected during the data-gathering stage. In total, we identified 47 archival centres storing personal and family fonds and factitious collections, including ten private owners that still kept their documentary family fonds. Of all these centres, we contacted 36 archives centres, all belonging to public

institutions, cultural and scientific entities or parishes, convents and diocesan archives of the Catholic Church. In general, the research team chose to make a descriptive sheet of those family fonds belonging to private owners without trying to access these archives, being aware that the project of carrying out this census would require the initiative of the cultural administration in archival policy in order to facilitate the accessibility for the research team in making this census. This means that the census made by the ARCHICAN group has left aside some of the oldest and most important family archives of the Canary Islands. Therefore, this work shall be completed in the future.

**Table 2.** Census of family and personal archives of the Canary Islands

Type	Censéd	Contacted	Identified	TOTAL	%
Family archives	21	17	15	<b>53</b>	23.45
Personal archives	70	54	11	<b>135</b>	59.73
Documentary collections	18	17	3	<b>38</b>	16.81
TOTAL	109	88	29	226	100.00
%	48.23	38.94	12.83	100.00	

Results about the 226 identified fonds and collections have been classified in three different categories. The fonds and collections *registered* in the census are those that have their descriptive sheet completely filled out with the compulsory elements dictated by the ISAD G standard, as well as with the rest of fields of which we found reliable information in the archive. The fonds *contacted* are those where we have maintained contact with the responsables for the centres, we have included some mandatory elements and we are waiting for some cataloguing works in order to finish the census sheets. The fonds *identified* are those we are aware of their existence and its nature as collections or fonds, either personal or family, from bibliographical citations or contact with the institutions, but the ARCHICAN group has not had access to them.

In general, it can be noted that both the visibility and accessibility to the cultural heritage is a quite recent phenomenon. Studying the census records,

we are able to verify that during the last decades this documentary heritage has been made publicly available in municipal, island and provincial archives, or in private centres as in the case of the Catholic Church. In the case of fonds that have been donated or deposited in the archives centres on oldest dates it is unknown the way and year of acquisition, but looking at the 107 cases where we have been able to confirm the record of acquisition, we can observe an accelerating trend, especially since the 1990s.

**Table 3.** New entries of family fonds, personal archives and collections in archival centers of the Canary Islands

<b>Decades</b>	<b>New entries</b>
1880-1889	1
1890-1899	0
1900-1909	1
1910-1919	0
1930-1929	0
1930-1939	5
1940-1949	1
1950-1959	4
1960-1969	1
1970-1979	6
1980-1989	10
1990-1999	18
2000-2009	35
2010-2017	25
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>107</b>

The inclusion of this type of fonds and collections on the archives centres of the Canary Islands cannot be explained without including the history of the cultural institutions from the Canaries. The creation of the first libraries and scientific and cultural societies in the main towns of the island during the last third of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries favored the inclusion of documentary and bibliographical legacies on their fonds, which were delivered by their promoters or by distinguished figures of politics and local culture. That was particularly the case for the Municipal Library of Santa Cruz

and the Francisco María de León Guardia personal fond<sup>16</sup>, for the Millares fond of the Canarian Museum<sup>17</sup>, the Cosmeli y Sotomayor fond of the Sociedad Cosmológica de La Palma<sup>18</sup>, or the Rodríguez Moure collection of the Real Sociedad Económica de Amigos del País de Tenerife. Integrated together with their bibliographical collections, these personal fonds were inventoried as manuscript collections using the system of bibliographical cataloguing. This fact has hindered the reconstruction of the original fond in accordance with the archival standard.

It was not until the second half of the twentieth century that the inclusion of the first family archives took place, as in the case of the archive of the Canarian Museum Archive or the Provincial Historical Archives of Las Palmas and Tenerife. Since 1990, the practice of ceding and depositing personal and family archives at archive centres became widespread, coinciding with the opening of numerous new centres: diocesan, municipal and eventually island archives<sup>19</sup>.

We find additional evidence of this recent process of massive incorporation of personal and family archives into the archival centres by comparing the figures produced by the ARCHICAN project with the results of the count made by Dr. A. Viera three decades ago. After a thorough review of the research resources in the Macaronesian Islands, A. Viera identified twenty personal and family archives in the Canarian archives, whereas twenty years later the ARCHICAN group identified on the census of archives a volume of fonds and collections ten times larger<sup>20</sup>. However, analysis of the causes of this avalanche of new donations and deposits does not present a positive explanation as it might seem at first sight. The data supplied by many centres about the origin of the fonds show that their arrival to these centres was the last step of a lengthy process of abandonment, to a point where much documentation has been delivered to the archives after appearing during demolitions or the

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<sup>16</sup> GUIMERÁ PERAZA, 1963: 493-634 (Appendix:165-233). CIORANESCU, 1979: vol. 4, 231.

<sup>17</sup> BETANCOR PÉREZ, 2012; GONZÁLEZ CACHAFEIRO, 2012: 117-124.

<sup>18</sup> LÓPEZ MEDEROS, 2004: 433-445.

<sup>19</sup> An overview of the process of creating these local and island archives in recent times can be seen in: BELLO JIMÉNEZ, 2005.

<sup>20</sup> VIEIRA, 1995.

rehabilitation of old buildings, inside which sets of papers are found and they either did not have any value for their owners, or they were just not aware of their existence, since they came from a shared inheritance and were offered for sale by distant relatives. The abandonment of the old family house, which sometimes remains empty for many years due to the costly rehabilitation and maintenance, has also involved the abandonment of the archive, or at least some part of it. A parallel phenomenon to the abandonment of family and personal archives is the fragmentation of fonds, that arrive to the archives centres gradually, as their owners take the decision of getting rid of them. This is reason why many family and personal fonds we have taken census of are spread over different archive centres divided in two or three parts.

It is clear that this phenomenon has its origin in the disintegration of the traditional family model that prevailed among the Canarian elites up until a few decades ago. The family or personal archive bequeathed by ancestors had, until then, a cultural and emotional value for their owners and inheritors, but as these social identities have been vanishing and the archive need constant care, cleaning and installation, the archive ends up becoming a bother, especially when the new generations lose their ties of identity with the “house”. These ties of identity were the reason that upheld the value of the family heritage.

Even with all that, this would not be that negative from an archival point of view, if it were not for the fact that the abandonment and fragmentation of fonds implies “breaking the chain of custody”. Traditionally, administration archivists have appreciated more this principle, inasmuch as the “unbroken chain of custody in archives” serves to prove the “reliability” of the information contained within the documents. In other words, it determines its value as documentary evidence<sup>21</sup>. But despite the family and personal fonds tend not to be analyzed from the perspective of the informative reliability of the documents, the ability of the archivist to appropriately associate the document producer, the archival history of the fond and its documents, remains an essential resource in the heuristics of the historian, who uses these documents as a source of research.

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<sup>21</sup> ANDRÉS DÍAZ, 2015: 81-100.

In the case of the Canary Islands, we not only appreciate among the elites the effect of dissolution of the old family model in the preservation of family and personal archives, but we suffer from the lack of an archives regional system that guides and supervises the management of fonds, coordinating the tasks of the numerous archive centres created over the last years<sup>22</sup>. The Canaries is the only autonomous community in Spain that lacks a regional archival system, reason why there is not a minimally structured protocol for the receipt of fonds. Furthermore, all different centres incorporate donations and deposits of new fonds without creating any registration sheet that records its archival history. Under these circumstances, we have even detected the delivery of documents under reservation, which is a total aberration that should be eradicated.

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<sup>22</sup> SANTANA JUBELLS, 2006: 269-306. NÚÑEZ PESTANO, 2008: 135-170.

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