

Álvarez Gila, Óscar; Angulo Morales, Alberto (dirs.) (2016). *From the Records of my Deepest Memory. Personal Sources and the Study of European Migration, 18<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> centuries*. Basque Country: University of the Basque Country Editorial Service. 259 pp.

This book studies the links between writing practices and human mobility. The principal aim is to examine the potential of private or personal sources when analysing the historical phenomenon of highly concentrated European migration. Researchers from several countries in Europe and the Americas have participated in the book. They presented a wide range of origins, destinations and personal documents of the emigrants and stressed the importance of people representing their own lives and relationships. Their articles provide a wide chronological scope, from the Early Modern Age, specifically the last century of colonial rule in Spanish America, to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the age of mass migrations from Europe overseas.

Human mobility emerges as a fundamental factor for change in the Atlantic societies of this historical period. The usual approaches have centred the analysis on traditional questions such as socio-economic theories or the role of legislative backgrounds in the explanations for the causes of migration. However, the focus of this book deals with the question of how to make proper use of documentary sources for a better understanding and richer interpretation of the historical phenomena linked to mobility processes. The main sources for the analyses have been the personal writings — memoirs, diaries, autobiographies, travel logs and, particularly, correspondence in the form of letters and photographs — of the migrants themselves, combining theoretical reflections with case studies. The capacity of these documents to reveal the more subjective side of history is one of the strongest arguments in favour of this renewed interest in first-person writings. The relevance of these types of documents lies above all in its ability to preserve and nurture and active migratory culture.

The first study, by Alberto Angulo, deals with research on correspondence sent and received by emigrants spread all throughout the Spanish empire, but mainly in the Americas, from a little region of the mainland: the Basque Country. This chapter provides a more accurate and global view of the impact of organized migrations by regional groups and their own religious identity from a cultural perspective, forming ethnic associations. The second text, by Adolfo Arbelo,

focuses specifically on the field of private correspondence between the Canary Islands and America in the eighteenth century. Analysing letters is, for this author, another way of gaining knowledge about the degree to which the archipelago was known on the other side of the Atlantic and the reciprocal influence on the Spanish Crown of both sides of the ocean.

Alejandro Cardoso, for his part, turns around the direction of the epistolary bridge that connected both sides of the empire, when studying the early correspondence of a young Simón Bolívar, the future liberator of several South American countries from Spanish rule, while he was living in Madrid and other parts of Spain.

Oscar Álvarez reflects on the difficulties set by the stereotypes assumed by the immigrants themselves when trying to find and collect personal autobiographies. On the other hand, the author seeks to answer how these kinds of documents can open new ways to study migratory movements, like the one that departed from Basque Country, which because of its characteristics is not properly reflected in the – previously more often used – official and public documents. Álvarez affirms that migrations made a powerful contribution to the rise in literacy during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Matteo Sanfilippo focuses on the Italian debate on letters, journals and other autobiographical writings by migrants. The author emphasises the relevance of letters as a source for both emigration history and the history of the lower class. He therefore highlights that nineteenth century letters should not be interpreted by modern standards: they were usually written to be read aloud to a large audience and therefore followed cadences and rhythms of orality. Gur Alroey makes use of the very rich archive of letters sent by prospective Jewish emigrants to the information bureaus created by the international Jewish associations to provide advice and assistance to Jewish migrants in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Raúl Soutelo presents some reflections derived from several case studies of Galician families and the use of private exchanges of documentation — mainly letters and photographs — to ensure the continuity of family ties overseas. His goal was to understand the development of the life projects of those emigrants who did not return and the affairs of the epistolary relationship they had with relatives and acquaintances.

Two different approaches to the use of personal letters for the study of Spanish immigration to Brazil are presented by Maria Izilda Santos de Matos' article, a more general

view, and Erica Sarmiento, in contrast, a micro-historical case study. Izilda Santos proposes to unfold a range of reflections, incorporate the analysis of displacement themes following a cultural perspective. Erica tells the story that unfolds belongs to the memories collected in the family archive of Francisco Mouro, and Galego emigrant to Rio the Janeiro in the first half of the twentieth century.

Lená M. de Menezes, for her part, presents a very unconventional chapter on the letters of immigrant prostitutes in the city of Rio de Janeiro, also based on a very unusual source from the archives of the tribunals. The letters were annexed to lawsuits for the expulsion of foreigners in Brazil because of the practice of pimping.

The book is closed with a general reflection on the issue by Marcelino Iriani who analyses several documents left by immigrants in a space of formation in the province of Buenos Aires in the mid-nineteenth century.

Finally, this is a good endeavour to reflect on the proper use of private documents taking account their main weaknesses of being a product of the innermost aspects of the lives of the protagonists of the past, the representativeness, completeness and utility of this documents.

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