

# Archival Review: The Archives and Library of the Royal Galician Academy (*Real Academia Galega*)

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The project of establishing in the city of A Coruña (Galicia) an Academy for the promotion of the Galician language, the *Real Academia Galega* (RAG), came to fruition in December 1905. The participation of some intellectuals and leaders from the Galician immigrant community in Havana was decisive. It was not only the idea that came from overseas, but also the necessary financial resources that were gathered amongst the Galician emigrants in Cuba. The main objective of the Academy was to bestow upon Galician the status of a fully-fledged language, and achieve its standardisation by means of ‘publishing a Grammar and a Dictionary’ as well as promoting Galician literature, researching folklore and studying the arts, history and sciences related to the country, including its religious tradition. According to its first statutes, the Academy’s objective was to ‘cultivate the Arts in general, particularly those studies that could best contribute to the knowledge of the history, antiquities and language of Galicia’.

Moreover, from its foundation, the RAG published a monthly bulletin, which kept its members informed about the institution’s activities. The bulletin also published articles related to Galician History, Ethnography, Literature and Arts. Until 1923, most essays were published in Castilian, Galician being almost exclusively reserved for items on poetry and theatre. The influence of new members linked to the Galician national movement since the early 1920s led to the increasing use of the Galician language in the RAG’s publications and activities, which was again

replaced with Spanish during the first decades of the Francoist regime (1936–1975).<sup>1</sup> Today, the Royal Galician Academy has a board of 30 members, publishes a regular bulletin, undertakes a variety of activities concerning the promotion of Galician culture in different fields, from the humanities and the social sciences to the natural sciences, and performs its role as the highest scientific authority in all matters related to the Galician language, as expressed in the online dictionary of the language, which has been available since the early 21st century.<sup>2</sup>

The Archive is a later project of the RAG, partly because of its late organization. Unlike the Library, which has been organized and supervised by the chief Archivist-Librarian since its constitution, the documentary collections of the Archive were scattered for years throughout the different offices and rooms of the RAG. The Archive itself, understood as a section with its own space, tools, and staff, was created in 1998, and was consolidated in subsequent years. In 2000, the work was systematised, and the documentation was structured around the classification chart. The archive was divided into an administrative or management archive and a historical archive. While the former keeps the documentation produced by the Academy itself, the latter holds the documentation received or purchased by the institution.

## **The Administrative Archive**

The founding charter of the Academy states:

‘An Archivist-Librarian must be elected to perform this service and assist the secretary in his/her functions, whose position must be held by a corresponding member of the Academy. Mr. Galo Salinas Rodríguez was appointed as an academician of this class in order to carry out this position, for which he will be given an indemnity for his work and desk expenses’.

These administrative tasks were performed according to the time and availability of the different secretaries, which left different defects and gaps in the organisation of the documentation. Thus, some series have been created that are not always complete: the books of incoming and outgoing correspondence cover the periods 1905–1941 and 1993–2003, when the paper medium was abandoned to electronic format. As for the minute books of the RAG board meetings, two of them are missing, which is probably the result of a premeditated concealment, as they correspond to the duration of the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939); the records of the General Board Meetings (*Xuntas Ordinarias*) cover the periods 1905–1929 and 1939–1973, and the minute books of the Governing Board Meetings (*Xuntas de Gobierno*) cover the periods 1905–1929 and 1951–1976.

The following series have also been created: Reports and Opinions, Academic Files, Incoming Correspondence, Outgoing Correspondence, General Board Files, Governing Board Files, Bulletin Correspondence, and little else. The rest of the documentation was grouped together in various files. Since 2008, and in accordance with the classification table, the series that are held in the historical archive have been described.

## **Historical Archive**

Until 1991, the bequests from academics or figures from Galician cultural life were scattered throughout the various rooms of the Academy's headquarters or in the basement. From 1991, the RAG member Antonio Gil Merino devoted himself to gathering this documentation which, in addition to being dispersed, disordered and deteriorated due to poor storage conditions.

In his concern for the organisation of documentation, in 1992 Gil Merino created a Linguistics Section in a small room located at the back of the first floor, where he collected all documents that he found relating to

Galician: vocabularies, dictionaries, lexicons, folklore collections, proverbs, popular sayings and even a small collection of poems and other texts in Galician that he himself selected from the different collections. This section comprises 28 boxes and two files, each box being accompanied by a brief index of its contents.

The creation of this thematic section was intended to serve as a support for the Lexicography Seminar, which was located on the third floor of a building in Rúa Tabernas, A Coruña. This Seminar changed its location in 1991 to the 7th floor of the building at nos. 14-16 in the same street, where the main headquarters of the RAG are located. Although there is no record of this materials stored by the Lexicography Seminar, the slips of the first dictionary (Galician-Spanish) produced by the Academy were in that building until 2004, when the Seminary was restructured.

In 1993, Gil Merino created another section, that of the 'academicians' papers'. This includes the personal archives that RAG members and prominent figures from Galician cultural life since the early 20th century donated to the Academy throughout its history. The section uses part of the third floor of the so-called 'caretaker's house', which has now disappeared, as a repository for this collection. The personal papers of the Galician female writer in Spanish, Emilia Pardo Bazán, the lawyer Ramón Artaza y Malvárez, the regionalist writer Leandro Carré Alvarellos, the journalist and writer Sofía Casanova, the politician and mayor of A Coruña, Manuel Casás, the regionalist intellectuals Andrés Martínez Salazar, Antonio de la Iglesia and his brother Francisco María de la Iglesia, the journalist Manuel Mato Vizoso, the nationalist journalist and writer Gonzalo López Abente, the 19th century journalist and playwright José Puente y Brañas, and the main theorist of Galician nationalism in the interwar period, Vicente Risco, are stored there in numbered boxes with a brief inventory of their contents.

This location is still occupied by the Archive today, although it has been improved by the remodelling work which provided it with an air-conditioned storeroom, a work room and an office.

In 1994, the so-called ‘Murguía suitcase’, which contained part of the legacy of the founder of the institution, the liberal-minded regionalist historian, Manuel Martínez Murguía (1833–1923), was emptied. The medieval documents it contained were placed in boxes in the president’s office, while the other documents were added to the storage rooms on the 3rd floor.

In 1996, Gil Merino divided the documentary collections into three sections:

1. Archives of the Institution
2. Academicians’ papers (section created in 1993)
3. Historical documentation.

In 1998, this work resulted in 235 boxes with the following distribution:

1–87: The Emilia Pardo Bazán’ collection, divided into two groups: the patrimonial part, numbered from 1 to 72, and the literary part, numbered from I to XV (corresponding to 73–87).

88–235: papers pertaining to different figures, as well as produced by the Academy itself, such as magazines, pamphlets, press cuttings, parchments and, in general, a wide variety of documents.

This numbering ends here, but there are still 27 boxes in which Gil Merino deposited the private collection of the priest and writer, Enrique Chao Espiña (1908–1989), which was also divided into two groups. The first is a documentary section, comprising 18 boxes numbered A–Q (the \*Ñ is missing), and a second a group called ‘audiovisual’, consisting of 9 boxes numbered I–IX.

In 1999, a technician from the library was transferred to the Archive, and the technical processing of the collections was undertaken in accordance with current regulations. The inventory of the personal and family archives was compiled, and a table of classification of the personal and family archives drawn up, as well as an inventory of the installation units.

In 2008, through the support of the Culture Ministry of the Galician Regional Government, the RAG Archive was equipped with archival management software for the management of the collections. A year later, the private papers of the De la Iglesia brothers were digitised, and became part of the *Galiciana* digital platform.<sup>3</sup>

In November 2013, the Plenary of the Galician Royal Academy approved the archive's Regulations, which established basic procedures, implemented techniques for the treatment of documents and standardised the conditions of reception, custody, conservation and access, etc. The Regulations therefore define the role of the archive in the institution and specifies its functions. From then until the present, the archive has been working intensively in order to complete the full cataloguing of the collections and make them available to users. This means that the description of some of the well-documented collections will not be provided at a document level.



Different facilities of the RAG Archive. Foto: Royal Galician Academy.

During this time, the archive gradually found its place within the institution: it increased its holdings, established a framework to regulate its activity, increased collaboration with other departments, and gained

in accessibility and in visibility, which led to an increase in the number of users. These issues will be discussed in more detail below.

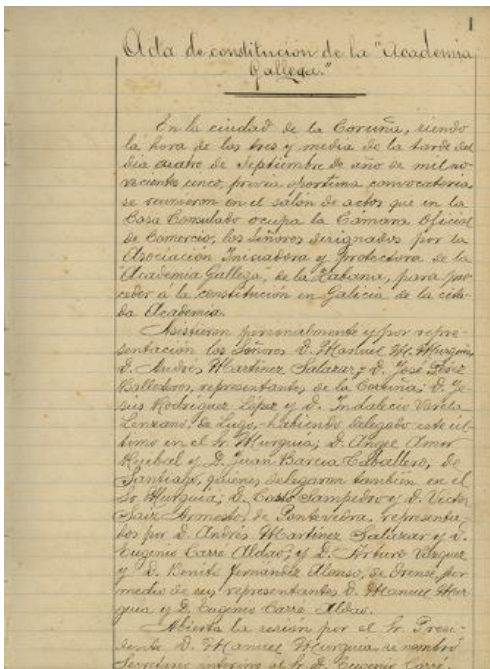
The increase in personal, association and collection holdings was mainly due to donations from private individuals. The thematic variety of the collections received during these years was remarkable: photographic, musical, cultural, literary, epistolary, trade union and political documentation, etc., all with a common denominator: an interest in Galicia. The archive also sought to expand its holdings by means of various initiatives and by keeping a watchful eye on purchases in order to obtain works of interest to the Academy.

On the other hand, and as a measure for the evaluation of the quality of our service, since 2015, the archive's users have been giving their opinion on the attention received, the courtesy and professionalism of the staff, and the kindness and speed of the service. The results obtained in this survey allow us to determine the user's perception and the points that require improvement.

Therefore, it can be concluded that since 2000, when the archive was first set up, achievements have been made — in terms of personnel, space, technical tools, and use of professional criteria — that have normalised this section, enabling it to undertake its work freely and to take on future challenges that may arise. Thus, in just over 20 years, it has gone from being almost non-existent to being organised, described, and classified: it has a classification chart and standardised archival procedures and, physically, both the installation and the repository meet the necessary requirements to preserve the documentation from deterioration. In this way, the Academy's archive — of exceptional interest for the study of our culture — is prepared for optimal operation, both now and in the future.

## Archival Collections

The exceptional range of the RAG archives means that it is an essential resource for researchers, as it preserves documentation relating to all fields of Galician culture since the early modern and particularly the modern period, as well as the development of Galician politics and culture since its first regionalist stage. These collections contain the most extensive documentary heritage of Galicia, which, due to its recognised cultural value, contribute to the permanence and cultural identity of Galicia over time. The 136 collections, the over 30,000 paper documents and the 100,000 photographs make this an outstanding reference among Galician archives.



The most important collection is that of the Royal Galician Academy, which, founded in 1905, is one of the oldest institutions of its kind on Iberian soil. The RAG files reflect more than a century of cultural activity and linguistic studies in Galicia. However, the collections do not just cover Galicia: they also highlight the relationships established by the RAG throughout its history with similar institutions in other countries, as well as the cultural exchanges that have taken place among them, document such relationships and enlarge its collections, where they are preserved.

The charter of the Galician Royal Academy.  
Archive of the Royal Galician Academy.



The Academy also holds the exceptional collection of the Pardo Bazán family, which includes that of the writer Emilia Pardo Bazán (1851–1921). Her literary manuscripts, as well as the galley proofs and corrections of her works, are kept in the archive, the only reference in the world for the study of the writer. This collection, which has a significant relevance, is also of great interest for the study of the everyday life of the bourgeoisie and aristocracy in late 19th century Galicia.

The archives of the most significant figures of Galician culture since the mid-19th century also form part of the Academy's archives. Many of them were also linked to the development of the Galician national movement since its early origins in the 1880s: the regionalist writer Eduardo Pondal, the historian Manuel Murguía, the nationalist poet Ramón Cabanillas, Vicente Risco, the nationalist lawyer and writer Fermín Bouza-Brey, the trade-union leader, Galician nationalist politician and exile Ramón Suárez Picallo, the composer Marcial del Adalid, Sofía Casanova, the Republican politician and exile César Alvajar, and many others. These collections cover a wide range of subjects, from music and politics, to literature, science, photography and history. Therefore, they constitute a rich source for approaching the history of Galicia over the last two centuries, particularly through the prism of its cultural elites. The preserved works are mostly literary works but also include science books.

Furthermore, the Galician people has also regarded the institution as the ideal place to preserve and store the private collections donated by families and individuals. The RAG archive has therefore received and preserved a broad diversity of documents, from private correspondence to family photographs, drawings and identity cards. All of them highlight the life and actions of ordinary Galician individuals over the past two centuries.



Family documents. Archive of the Royal Galician Academy.

Some other papers stored at the RAG archive also include miscellaneous collections of photographs, postcards and manuscripts: 25 collections that bring together documents of great relevance due, in many cases, to their ephemeral nature, which makes them documentary rarities.



Images of Galician women. Archive of the Royal Galician Academy.

In terms of dissemination and accessibility, the Archive of the Royal Galician Academy participates, together with the rest of the archives of the Galician Archive Network, in the construction of *Galician*, the Galician Digital Archive, which is managed by the Galician Government. *Galician* is a valuable tool that facilitates the description of documents, the creation of digital objects, their consultation and downloading and, in short, the dissemination of documentary heritage in a standardised environment. In this way, the archive can enable remote consultation of almost all its holdings, which include:

- 90 personal and family collections
- 17 institutional, company and association collections
- 29 collections

This documentation represents a total of 38,006 documentary records in *Galician*, of which 8,913 are accompanied by a digital reproduction that allows them to be fully consulted.

The reproduction conditions of the images accompanying the description comply with the following parameters: 24-bit chromatic resolution, JPG file format, 400 pp resolution and automatic image enhancement processes. This means that they cannot be considered electronic facsimile copies.

Considering the work schedule of the archive, as well as the needs of its users, the images of the most requested documentation were uploaded to the programme, in addition to the sets already reproduced in their entirety: photographs corresponding to the personal collections, complete collections, collections of parchments, family photographs, etc. In the near future, the aim is to make it possible to consult, from anywhere in the world, the description and image of all documents. The documentary description follows, in accordance with international archival standards, a tree structure, so that one descends from the most general to the most specific. The search system is user-friendly and

allows both the researcher and the curious to browse through the different levels of description or to go directly to the document.

At the same time, the institution's website is another powerful dissemination tool which, alongside *Galiciana*, supports and facilitates knowledge of the archive and its collections, providing them with the necessary visibility. The archive offers online consultation of its collections, which are organised into five main groups: institutional, private, and family, companies, associations and collections.

## **The Library and the periodicals collection**

The library of the Royal Galician Academy holds over 70,000 books and leaflets. It specialises in the humanities, mainly in the fields of history, ethnography, Galician language and literature, and is a must for any researcher of nineteenth- and twentieth century Galician culture. The collection began in December 1905 with donations made by members of the institution and by authors who sent in their works.

In 1919, part of the library of the Montefaro monastery (Ferrol) was donated to the Academy; it is the RAG Library's oldest collection. In that same year, the private library of Xosé Fontenla Leal (1864–1919), a typographer who had settled in Cuba in the late 19th century, and who had been the most active promoter of the foundation of the institution, as well as an exceptional bibliophile, was also added. Subsequently, the Library continued to grow with the incorporation of new donations, such as those of its founder and first President, the historian Manuel Murguía, the writer Emilia Pardo Bazán, the musician and musicologist Marcial del Adalid (1826–1861), and the painter and writer exiled in Argentina after 1936, Luis Seoane (1910–1979), among others. The RAG library increases its collections through purchases, donations from authors and publishers, and exchanges with several Galician institutions. The

digitized collections of the library of the Royal Galician Academy are incorporated into *Galiciana*, the Galician digital library.

The periodicals collection of the Royal Galician Academy holds over 3,000 titles of magazines, weekly journals, and newspapers published over a period of two hundred years. The Historical Collection of Galician publications, which includes such relevant titles as *El Idólatra de Galicia* (1841–1842) and *O Vello do Pico-Sagro* (1860), the first periodical publication in Galician that dates to the mid-19th century, is of particular relevance. Also of great interest is the large collection of American magazines published by the Galician migrant communities in Cuba, Uruguay and Argentina from the 1880s to the 1930s and beyond. Some of these journals, such as *Nova Galicia* (Buenos Aires, 1904–1936), are only available at the RAG archive.

The origins of the periodicals collection are diverse. Some publications were acquired by the RAG during its first year of existence. Some others, in particular the Galician journals published overseas, were sent to the institution directly by their promoters. Most of them, however, were included in the donations made to the institution by several outstanding figures. This category includes magazines and newspapers that belonged to Manuel Murguía or the De la Iglesia brothers. The most recent periodicals — mostly Galician journals published in and outside Galicia — are currently received through exchanges, donations and subscriptions.

Finally, the Galician Academy is currently working on the digitization of its periodical collections, with the objective of making them available for a broader audience. Part of the RAG collections can be consulted directly in its Virtual Newspaper Library (<https://academia.gal/hemeroteca/hemeroteca-virtual>). Other titles are accessible in the aforementioned digital library *Galiciana*, where a microsite is available that provides access to all digitized publications of the RAG periodicals library:

<http://biblioteca.galiciana.gal/rag/es/micrositios/inicio.do>

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> For a general overview, see Xosé Manoel Núñez Seixas & Alfonso Iglesias Amorín, 'Language, Cultural Associations, and the Origins of Galician Nationalism, 1840–1919', in *The Matica and Beyond. Cultural Associations and Nationalism in Europe*, ed. by Krisztina Lajosi and Adreas Stynen (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2020), 162–180; as well as Henrique Monteagudo, 'A Academia, o idioma e o nacionalismo, 1906–1930: Notas para unha historia', *Grial*, 171 (1999), 26–37; and Elisardo López Varela, *Unha casa para a lingua: A Real Academia Galega baixo a presidencia de Manuel Murguía (1905–1923)* (A Coruña: Espiral Maior, 2001).

<sup>2</sup> See <https://academia.gal/inicio>

<sup>3</sup> <https://biblioteca.galiciiana.gal/gl/inicio/inicio.do>.