

The Mining Industry's Archives In Spain

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1. Mining Activities and Archives

Mining activity is one of the main sectors of Spanish economic growth, starting from the mid 19th century and continuing through the first part of the 20th century. The process of economic globalization with the commerce of raw materials and manufactured products gave rise to a demand, hitherto unknown, for iron and lead to build growing towns and the railway network; for coal to fuel the railways; for copper used by the electric power grids; for mercury required by the military and the chemical industry. Supported by favorable legislation, Spanish companies who dealt with minerals export gave up their pre-industrial ways; thus multiplying and becoming commercial companies, financed by national and foreign capital that was distributed within the various mining districts of the territory. Geology and the availability of natural resources divide the Spanish territory into two large mining areas: in the North, the driving forces of industrialization are coal and iron, while in the Southern districts, the most widespread minerals are mercury and lead. The importance of this field was so great that, with the passing of time, companies such as Río Tinto and Peñarroya became industrial colossi¹.

Although historians doubt that the Spanish mining sector could have generated significant economic growth in either absolute or relative terms (let's not forget the enormous importance of the agricultural field), mining exports undoubtedly had an substantial impact on the various districts. Indeed, one of the essential features of the mining companies is their marked territorial nature. Situated in a valley or in a district, they absorbed a great deal of labor and resources from the area thus modifying its technical, economical and social conditions. This very characteristic increases the importance of the preserved business archives, because of the variety of records series which attest to the diverse nature of each territory's economy and activities.

The availability of raw materials for the electric industry and the manufacture of consumer goods continued to be features of the economic Spanish model up to the middle of the 20th century. During this period of almost a century, hundreds of companies dealing with minerals export spread throughout the territory. At present, since there are no records, the memory of most these companies has disappeared. To prove this fact, it is enough to compare the companies that appeared on *Estadística Minera* with the archives that we have actually preserved. There are many ways to explain this disappearance. First of all, mining companies are not the best place for records'

¹ P. de Perceval, M. Ángel, *et al.*, *Minería y desarrollo económico en España*, 2006.

preservation given their environmental conditions. Second, no one was interested in the preservation of this type of documents; interest in records as historical patrimony is fairly recent and research was considered extraneous to industrial priorities. Third, contemporary Spanish history has witnessed a great deal of social struggle. In mining companies, work allocation and the excessive proletarianization of workers led to class struggles that ended in violent confrontation, such as the crises of 1934 and 1936, which resulted in the destruction of the significant parts of the records patrimony. Finally, the mining sector underwent a process of concentration and reconversion. With that, the disappearance of several companies and the abandoning of plants in the 19th and 20th century, the records patrimony ran the risk of random dispersion and destruction. In fact, the transfer of these funds to public archives was quite exceptional.

When speaking about mining archives, we refer in particular to those of the mining companies since the company is the main economic actor of industrial capitalism. Before the creation of the companies, there were only farms and mines and their records sources were kept in the Central Archives of Simancas, such as the "Report" by Tomás González of 1832. The history of business archives in Spain began about twenty years ago. On one hand, the interest in economic research and, more specifically, in an entrepreneurial history that was "imported" led the researchers to look for companies who preserved their own past records. On the other hand, the modern trend of business management made sure that the organizations started to be interested in aspects formerly put aside, such as the participation in cultural activities or records management as part of the company administration. Consequently, some companies created their own archives in order to preserve their documentary memory, in the firm belief that their history comprised an essential feature of their identity. In both cultural and administrative aspects, the archives added value in terms of profitability, efficiency and effectiveness.

It is worth mentioning the First Conference on Economic Archives of Private Organizations organized by Teresa Tortella and held at the Bank of Spain with its support. The Conference Proceedings that were published in 1983 can be considered as the first attempt to unify the situation of business archives in Spain. Most of the participants were university researchers, underlining the total absence of professionals specifically linked to the archival field. As a result, references to private archives were often quite vague and sometimes the existence of some records could not be verified. As for mining companies, we can refer briefly to the Archives of Riotinto's mines, which are considered poorly organized, more as a records repository than as a proper archives².

2. The Main Mining Companies Archives

Over the last several years, the situation has changed significantly. At present, it is possible to point out several important mining company archives that are preserved in companies or in cultural foundations. These archives are now managed by specialized personnel, are open to the public, offer a service to researchers, and are involved in the sharing of their records funds, both in Spain and abroad. Here is a description of the most important ones. For those who are interested in more in-depth study, there are the detailed bibliographical indications are listed at the end of this article.

² A. Bernal, *Archivos familiares y empresariales en Andalucía y Canarias* in *Actas del Primer Congreso sobre Archivos Económicos de entidades Privadas (Madrid 3-4 June 1982)*, 1983.

2.1 Hullera Vasco-Leonesa Archives

The Hullera Vasco-Leonesa Archives³ was created in 1989 within the mining company of the same name in the province of Leon working in the extraction and selling of coal. Hullera Vasco-Leonesa was established in 1893 and, in the course of its history, gathered up many fonds from various mining companies among which the records collection of the Palencia mining district, dating back to the half of the 19th century, stands out. Since 1996, the archives has been managed by the private cultural Foundation Hullera Vasco-Leonesa.

This archives is particularly relevant among Spanish mining archives for two outstanding reasons: first, it is an administrative archives of the company itself, and is used as a link to the records in the administrative management. For this reason, some rules regarding the transfer of the records from the offices have been established: a Regulation was approved and an internet connection between the archives and the various secretariats has been set up. Second, in 2001, the Hullera Vasco-Leonesa Foundation published, together with the Department for Cultural Assets, the Archives Guide⁴, an important instrument to communicate knowledge of the business archives. The Guide clarifies and explains the origin and the characteristics of the various records fonds as well as the evolution of the main records typologies that can be found in the mining archives. This guide is part of a broader role of transmission which can be consulted in our website⁵. This work of transmission seeks to hand on, besides basic archival work, the usefulness of the business records patrimony for historical research and for the retrieval of the memory of the Leon and Palencia mining regions. The archives can be consulted for research and also provides reference rooms.

2.2 Riotinto Foundation Mining Historical Archives

The organization of the archives of this important company that worked the copper mines of the Huelva Province, began in 1990, and is now an agglomeration of very important fonds comprising a mining industry records patrimony, and also reconstructs the history of the company which, in 1912, extracted 44% of the worldwide demands for pyrite. The company Rio Tinto Co. Ltd. was set up in London in 1873 after having found many partners within the Spanish government. Foreign capital was added in 1954 and included the Rothschild company among its main shareholders. The Riotinto Foundation mining historical archives preserves 28.500 installations and the records are available to researchers⁶.

³ Hullera Vasco-Leonesa Archives. Hullera Vasco-Leonesa Foundation. Director: Ramón y Cajal, 103, 24640 La Robla (León). Telephone 987 572 164. E-mail: archivo@fhvl.es. Website: www.fhvl.es

⁴ Fundación Hullera Vasco-Leonesa. *Guía del Archivo de Hullera Vasco-Leonesa* (text by José Andrés González Pedraza), 2001.

⁵ A recent example can be seen in José Andrés González Pedraza, *Organización y difusión en archivos de empresa. Boletín de ANABAD*, nº 3, 2005, p.49-75.

⁶ Archivo Histórico Minero de la Fundación Riotinto. Direction: Plaza Ernest Lluch s/n Minas de Riotinto (Huelva). Telephone: 959 591 915. See also J. M. Pérez López, *Archivo Histórico Minero de Fundación Riotinto in Actas del VIII Congreso de la Asociación Española de Historia Económica (Santiago de Compostela (13-16 September 2005), 2005.*

2.3 Hunosa Archives

Hunosa is a public mining company extracting and selling coal in the mining valleys of the Asturias region since 1967 when it was set up as a consequence of the merger of some private companies that were facing a crisis at the time. At the end of 1994, Hunosa collected all the records in the Pozo Fondón in Langreo, so that this important records collection could be put at scholars' disposal. These records are part of the historical patrimony of the company and of the Asturias mining valleys. The most important fonds are three: the fond of the Sociedad Metalúrgica Duro-Felguera, the company set up by Pedro Duro in 1857; the fond of the Fábrica de Mieres, set up in 1873; and the fond of the Sociedad Hullera Española, set up in 1892 by Claudio López Bru, the second marquis of Comillas. At present the archives is accessible to researchers⁷.

2.4 Minas de Almadén Historical Archives

The history of these unique mercury mines, which were worked uninterruptedly for more than 2 thousand years, made it possible for the records of the Minas de Almadén to be currently split among various national archives. For example, the National Historical Archives preserves a relevant part of the fond, a transfer carried out by the Almadén Archives in 1962 and 1963 by Matilla Tascón. In Almadén, in 1999 the Almadén-Francisco Javier de Villegas Foundation was created which, among its goals, had the retrieval of the records patrimony which was in a state of severe disarray in the Hospital de Mineros de San Rafael. Finally, in 2004 the Minas de Almadén Historical Archives was created with more than 2 km of records which form a fundamental source for the memory of the company and the study of the industrial patrimony of the region⁸.

The archives works for its public company, Minas de Almadén y Arrayanes S.A. granting loans to the departments with the aim of locating and retrieving the patrimony dispersed in various archives.

In addition, there are three extremely important records fonds. We are not sure that they changed from simple records collections into organized archives, nor are we sure that they are accessible to the public. Despite this, we wish to share the references through which we became aware of their existence.

For example, the records of a real mining trader in the Cordoba Province starting from the exploitation and the transformation of lead and also the exploitation of coal: the Société Minière et Metallurgique Peñarroya. According to the data brought in during the industrial architecture congress held in Peñarroya in 2004, the archives of the company can be found divided into two large parts. The first one refers to the coal extraction and it is preserved by Encasur. The second one deals with metal mines and it is preserved in La Carolina (Jaén). It seems that, when the company moved to Cartagena thus creating the Fábrica de Santa Lucía, it deposited there a large part of its

⁷ Mines Historical Archives. Direction Pozo Fondón C/ La Nalona, s/n, 33900 Langreo (Asturias) Telephone: 985 678 062. See also M. Mateos Martínez, *Archivo storico de Hunosa in Estudio básico sobre el patrimonio industrial asturiano* (Eduardo Núñez coordinador), 2000.

⁸ Archivo Histórico de Minas de Almadén. Fundación Almadén-Francisco Javier de Villegas. Direction: Cerco de San Teodoro s/n 13400 Almadén (Ciudad Real). Telephone: 926 264 520. E-mail: fundacion@mayasa.es. See also C. Villar Díez, *El Archivo Histórico de Minas de Almadén in Actas del VIII Congreso de la Asociación Española de Historia Económica (Santiago de Compostela (13-16 September 2005), 2005.*

archives, which would later be deposited in the Spanish Geominerary Institute in Madrid where it is currently being organized⁹.

There are also references to the Mina La Camocha Archives in the Asturias, a symbolic place for the Spanish trade unionism, where the Comisiones Obreras was established. The retrieval of these records started in 1998, thanks to the recovery program of the industrial patrimony organized by the Ferrocarril Museum in Gijón¹⁰. The archives has already reached an advanced stage of organization. We still have no idea of the final destination of these records; whether they will be given back to their original company or preserved outside of it.

Finally, we can report the news of the Real Compañía Asturiana de Minas-Asturiana de Zinc Archives which appears to be under construction. The company was set up in 1833 for the coal extraction; in the following years, it changed and became a company for the extraction and the selling of zinc. A large part of the records are preserved in 203 large zinc boxes¹¹.

3. Conclusion

The situation of the Spanish mining archives has changed for the better over the last ten years. To date, there are several noteworthy projects including those of Hullera Vasco-Leonesa, Riotinto, Minas de Almadén and Hunosa Archives, accessible to the researchers, and with a high level of organization, managed by professionals and kept in adequate repositories. These archives preserve the documentary memory of the mining sector, which was central to Spanish historical development and permanently transformed some regions. It is clear that mining industry archives must be protected because they are priceless sources for the knowledge of technical processes that have now disappeared.

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J.A. González Pedraza, *Organización y difusión en archivos de empresa* in *Boletín de Anabad*, n.3, 2005, pp. 49-75.

M. Mateos, *Archivo Histórico de Hunosa*, in *Estudio básico sobre el patrimonio industrial asturiano (Eduardo Núñez coordinador)*, Gijón, Trea, 2000, pp. 89-99.

⁹ The news come from Rafael Hernando Luna, professor of the Escuela Universitaria Politécnica de Bélmez (University of Cordoba) during the industrial architecture congress held in Peñarroya (6th March 2004).

¹⁰ E. Núñez Fernández, *Los archivos de empresa en Asturias, Cantabria y Galicia* in *TST Revista de Historia*, nº 6, 2003, p. 128-129. I'm thankful for this information received by Eduardo Núñez, municipal archivist of Gijón and Javier Fernández, director of the Ferrocarril Museum in Gijón.

¹¹ A. García Rodríguez, *El Archivo de la Real Compañía Asturiana de Minas-Asturiana de Zinc* in *Estudio básico sobre el patrimonio industrial asturiano (Eduardo Núñez coordinador)*, 2000.

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M.A Pérez De Perceval, M. Ángel *et al.*, *Minería y desarrollo económico en España*, Madrid, Síntesis, 2006. ISBN 978-84-975645-2-6.

C. Villar Díez, *El Archivo Histórico de Minas de Almadén* in *Actas del VIII Congreso de la Asociación Española de Historia Económica (Santiago de Compostela (13-16 September 2005))*, 2005 (CD Rom).