

# THE IMPORTANCE OF CORPORATE ARCHIVES TO ECONOMIC AND BUSINESS HISTORY: A CASE STUDY

To a historian, there are at least, two possibilities of research on Corporate Archives: first, if the researcher has a contract with the corporation to write its history or some aspect of it; second, if the researcher as a scholar, is developing an academic project and is interested in Corporate Archives to support its hypothesis. Other possibilities can happen but they are not addressed now. In the first and second situations, the archives offer sources that are interpreted by the historians, without which they cannot work. Herein, the second alternative is reported.

## 1 – THE HYPOTHESIS

The hypothesis is that the changes in the agrarian structure of Brazil and Mexico, from the colonial era to the recent past were not linear, progressive and continuous. They are the result of a complex combination of multiple aspects and expressed in a long-term transformation, in terms of historical structures, full of conjunctures and events.

## 2 – COMPARATIVE METHOD IN HISTORY

Inside the field of Economic History, the research aims the understanding of agriculture changes: its origins, contexts, causes, instruments, paths and consequences. Specifically, it is a comparative perspective of time and space, which defines the object: “Brazil and Mexico – decades of 1960 and 1970”. The comparisons are not just between these two countries, but also between two historical situations of agriculture activities (in the far past and in the more recent past): the colonial era founded the system of production that existed for more than three centuries; on the other side, in the contemporary era, radical transformations occurred with the advent of Industrial Revolution.

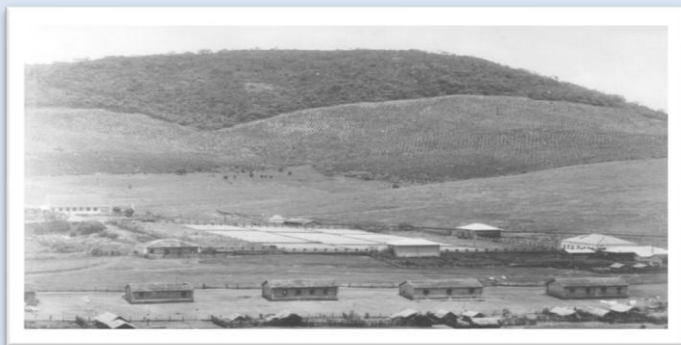


Figure 1 – Brazilian farm in the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century (Courtesy of São Paulo State Archives – fond “House of Immigrant”)



Figure 2 – Typical Mexican *hacienda* from the 19th century (Courtesy of *Archivo General de la Nación* – book of Mexican *Haciendas*).

The research tries to demonstrate the passage from a pre-capitalist unity of production in agriculture to the capitalistic one. In Brazil, it was common the “plantation system” – large land properties with slaves, monoculture (sugar cane, coffee, cocoa, cotton etc.) and production focused on exportation. In view of the slavery abolition, in 1888, there were other forms of labor exploitation, still rarely wage-earner. In Mexico, there was no “plantation system”, but an adapted labor system that comes from the ancient past, in the pre-Colombian era. Mines had a very well-known, strong, economical role, mainly with the silver extraction. At the Mexican hinterlands, there was the consolidation of agriculture units of production called *haciendas*, with large land properties, a labor system of *peonaje*, sorted cultures, focused on the internal market.

Within this past, in which it is possible to recognize several parallel features in Brazil and Mexico, it is also relevant to understand the persistence, in both countries, of a predominant agrarian structure derived from the old colonial conditions, until the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In this new context, those former ways of production, were replaced by advanced, modern agriculture units of production; in other words, the capitalistic one, the agroindustry: not just large land properties, but the best ones; with amounts of capital inversions and mechanization; wage-earning labor; turned towards any market, multi and transnational capitals, aiming large profits etc.

### **3 – THE CASE STUDY**

The Cargill Incorporated was the choice because it is a significant and relevant agroindustry model, based on many countries, but, also, in Brazil and Mexico. Besides the interest in Cargill's history, particularly, it highlights as an example of these transformations mentioned above, and it is a profitable case study about the characteristics of the entire capitalistic agriculture unit of production and the establishment of the current agribusiness.

In this way, this poster examines the possibilities to begin with a researching subject in Economic History, discussing its necessary sources and how they can appear at the corporation's records. This discussion fortunately, already has strong pillars to support it, interfacing Business History and Corporate Archives.

### **4 – REFERENCES TO THE POSTER**

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Richard Berner, "Business Archives in Perspective", *Journal of Forest History* 18, no. ½ (April, 1974): 32-34.

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If you are interested in this discussion or any other similar content, please, contact me by e-mail [caiograco.ppghe@usp.br](mailto:caiograco.ppghe@usp.br) . It will be a pleasure to exchange ideas and information. Thank you!

CaioGraco Valle Cobério is a PhD student at São Paulo University, in the Post-Graduation Program of Economic History. He has a scholarship offered by CAPES, the Brazilian Commission to the Improvement of Postgraduate Studies. His research is about the changes in the agrarian structures of Brazil and Mexico, between the years of 1960 and 1979, within there is a case study about Cargill Incorporated.