

Paula Covington:
Opening Access to Afro-Colombian and Indigenous Voices: Manuel Zapata Olivella's
Recordings of Marginalized
Cultures and Traditions

The Library wishes to digitize and preserve 1,248 of Manuel Zapata Olivella's audio cassette tapes that comprise the bulk of his ethnographic work on Afro-Colombian and indigenous peoples.

The external service provider we plan to use is George Blood Audio/Video/Film Data.

Critic Richard Jackson writes that Manuel Zapata Olivella was "perhaps the most outstanding black novelist writing in Spanish" at the end of the twentieth century. Zapata Olivella, Afro-Colombian novelist, anthropologist, and physician, had a passion for oral history and for recording and preserving the heritage of Colombia, particularly Afro-Colombia. In addition to all of his literary manuscripts, both published and unpublished, which focus largely on the African diaspora and the enslaved in Latin America, the collection also includes ethnographic interviews with individuals from all regions of Colombia. As founder and Director of the Fundación Colombiana de Investigaciones Folclóricas he and his team of researchers conducted these interviews in various regions from 1973-1975 and in La Guajira in 1985. The topics covered are wide-ranging: traditional medicine, popular religion, gender, marriage and death rituals, regional music, dance, and traditional handicrafts and food ways.

Ultimately, the goal of the project is to have all of the interviews, recordings, transcriptions and corresponding photographs for each region linked and fully searchable in this digital archive. This proposal intends to digitize and preserve a significant portion of the audiotapes and link them to the metadata and transcripts where available.

The collection has already attracted a number of visiting researchers from Colombia and the US. Currently, there are five doctoral students who have also visited to use the collection and are working on dissertations on Zapata Olivella. The collection is currently the most heavily used collection in Special Collections and has become a "destination" collection.

The website has also generated many inquiries regarding the collection. While largely from Colombia as one might expect, we have also assisted scholars in the US, UK, France, Ecuador, Argentina, and Israel who are engaged in a variety of fields, including literature, cultural studies, history, folklore, and anthropology.

The audio cassettes were created in the field in the 1970s-80s and housed in Colombia in an unstable non-humidity controlled environment with variable temperature. Since they have been at Vanderbilt they have been housed in archival conditions. These are singular unique recordings with no other copies known to exist and, frequently, there is no printed equivalent.

The average cost is approximately \$35 for a 60-minute tape (426 tapes). The records and the majority of the [metadata](#) are already available on the website. The Center for Latin American Studies and the library supports a student who will add the remainder of the metadata of the ethnographic interviews, review for quality control, and add links for the digital data to the website. Spanish subjects were added to the interviews by the team of original researchers and depended upon the focus of the interviews. Library of Congress subjects were added to enhance the metadata. Both are fully searchable.

One of the two vendors we contacted will digitize 1248 audio cassette tapes, creating raw WAV format archival copies and access MP3 copies at a mid-level bitrate. They will ensure the digital files have accompanying technical metadata and associative filenames for tracking existing metadata. Recordings are considered in fair condition. The company has built in costs to cover conservation including splicing and cleaning, speed variation and any "baking" needed.

Once we receive the digital files, they will be ingested into our digital collection platform, Islandora for streaming publicly online. We will also link to the audio streams in our MZO website where transcripts are already available for many of the audio recordings. Once in Islandora, the digital files will be managed along with our other digital collections which includes standard security, backups, and integrity checks maintained on all our electronic assets in library collections. As part of the purchase agreement, the university is committed to its stewardship and long-term sustainability. Islandora is an open source digital repository system based on applications including Fedora Commons and Drupal.

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