

Arthur Schott: A True Renaissance Man in The Americas¹

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Abstract: To commemorate the 200th anniversary of Arthur Carl Victor Schott's birth, this article takes a holistic approach to the career of this travelling intellectual, which encompassed various natural disciplines as well as human sciences and artistic expressions. Contrary to those of other better-known *Homines Universales*, who followed the Humboldtian example to explore the Americas in an all-inclusive way, Schott's life and work has been until now only segmentally evaluated. While in Romania his ethno-linguistic contributions and rescuing of local folktales are valued, and in the United States he is regarded for his work on the Mexican-American border, his time in Colombia and in the Yucatán peninsula has been completely forgotten. As this article emphasizes, Schott's multi-faceted vocation found various forms of manifestation while in the Southeast of Mexico, leaving for us eloquent testimonies of the multi-ethnic society in which that immigrant lived and worked.

Keywords: Anthropology, archaeology, botany, zoology, boundary survey, scientific commission, explorers of the Americas, history of science, Mexico, 19th century.

Resumen: Reflexionando sobre el segundo centenario del nacimiento de Arthur Carl Victor Schott, este ensayo presenta una visión holística de las contribuciones hechas por este intelectual, cuyos intereses incluyeron diferentes aspectos de las ciencias naturales y sociales además de múltiples expresiones artísticas. Fueron varios los *Homines Universales* que durante el Siglo XIX intentaron explorar de forma integral las Américas, siguiendo las huellas de Humboldt. Si bien las trayectorias de algunos de ellos son conocidas, la vida y la carrera de Schott apenas han sido analizadas parcialmente. Sus contribuciones a la lingüística y al folklore de Rumania han sido altamente apreciadas, en tanto que en los Estados Unidos Schott es considerado como un científico y dibujante de respeto sobre todo por las exploraciones que realizó en la frontera México-americana. En contraste, los trabajos realizados por él en Colombia y en México han sido olvidados. Este artículo presenta y analiza algunas de las principales formas en que Schott dejó elocuentes testimonios de las sociedades multiculturales en las que vivió, especialmente aquellos del sureste mexicano.

Palabras clave: Antropología, arqueología, botánica, zoología, comisión de límites México-USA, comisión científica, exploradores de las Américas, historia de las ciencias, México, Siglo XIX.

1 All translations from Spanish and German into English are our responsibility. Please note that when using numerals for the dates, the format day, month, year is used.



As part of a glorification of the ideals of the Renaissance Humanism in the nineteenth century, the *Homines Universales* sought to explore various disciplines or areas of knowledge. Departing from the premise that the center of the universe was the human being and his boundless possibilities for growth, Italian *Uomini Universali*, such as Leon Batista Alberti proposed that “a man can do all things if he will”.¹ That means that, instead of our contemporary concentration on one field of science, the Renaissance men aspired to a universal understanding of the world, which united physical, social, and artistic knowledge. The term itself has been understood in different ways: sometimes to describe people who have various interests but without systematically and deeply pursuing them, on other occasions it is applied to intellectuals who have reached high visibility through their scholarly achievements. Here, however, we wish to refer to its original connotation, which is attached to the universal development of grounded knowledge in various areas of sciences linked to the Renaissance principles.

In the nineteenth century, as scholars aspired to explore what until then was the little-known territory of Latin America,² many Europeans embarked on expeditions. Following in the footsteps of Alexander von Humboldt,³ but not necessarily acquiring the reputation obtained by the highly regarded explorer, some of them remained in obscurity. One of those Renaissance men was Arthur Carl Victor Schott whose intellectual legacy includes works about engineering, botany, geography, zoology, drawing, poetry, music, anthropology and archaeology.

The objective of this contribution is two-fold. First, we aim to present holistically Schott’s contribution to science and arts, considering his various activities on both sides of the Atlantic. Given that until now he has been only partially identified, and exclusively through specialized or regional approaches, a comprehensive view is needed. Here, it must be clarified that our goal is to provide a descriptive compilation of data as conclusive as possible that can serve as the basis for future analysis. Secondly, we give

1 Leon Battista Alberti (1404-1472), according to some writers, epitomized the Renaissance scholar. Among other areas of knowledge he cultivated were architecture, poetry, and philosophy. He was an author, scientist and mathematician. For an introduction to the man and his work in general see Grafton 2002: 3-30 and/or Spencer 1956: 11-32.

2 Spanish Crown’s policies restricted access to their then colonized territories; there were, however, exceptions, such as in the case of Alexander von Humboldt. After the Latin American countries gained independence the possibilities for travelling and studying there opened up for Europeans and North Americans.

3 Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859) explored parts of Peru, Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Mexico, Cuba, and Trinidad between 1799 and 1804, partly thanks to a special permit granted by the Spanish King. The literature about Humboldt and his accomplishments is very extensive. See among others: Krätz 2000, as well as Ette 2001 and 2009.

here the first thorough consideration of his years in Yucatán.⁴ This new evaluation is especially timely because of the two hundredth anniversary of Schott's birthday.

This essay is structured in four parts, concluding with some final thoughts and a list of sources. First, we provide a short overview of Schott's work in Germany and Romania. After that, his research and life in the United States are presented; this is followed by his brief exploration in Colombia. The scientist's Mexican experience forms Part 4. We have referred to secondary literature, eight archival collections safeguarded in three countries, plus newspaper articles and information obtained through an expert interview.

In the Old Continent

Arthur Schott was born in Stuttgart, Württemberg, on February 27th, 1814, into a liberal, artistic, well-educated bourgeois family, although not necessarily rich.⁵ As a boy, his eclectic interests were fostered by several sources. On the one hand, some were promoted by his father, Christian Friedrich Albert Schott (1782-1861), an attorney, politician, philosopher, and writer who devoted his life to the cause of Württemberg's liberalism; additionally, Schott senior was considered an aesthete who belonged to several fine arts associations.⁶ Two of his brothers also turned out to be humanists: Albert Constans Lucian (1809-1847) studied Theology and Philology, and became a professor of German Language and Literature besides writing several literary works; the younger Sigmund (1818-1895) studied Philology and Politics, was an attorney and congressman, and authored historical works and poetry.⁷ On the other hand, an influential circle of friends and mentors facilitated Schott's pathways. Barely into his twenties, he was a minor member of Tübingen's circle of liberal lyricists, led by Ludwig Uhland (1787-1862). Through it he came in contact with other important Swabian poets, like the renowned physician Justinus Kerner (1786-1862) whose house was an intellectual center for scientific and literary matters, and Nikolaus Lenau (1802-1850), the Hungarian-Austrian artist. The latter wrote: "[...] as part of the small circle that we formed at that time I had the pleasure to count the amiable and genial Arthur Schott, a wonderful talented poet" (Schick 1908: 140).

4 As Yucatán we consider the geographical area understood as the Yucatecan peninsula today. The terms *Mayab* and *Maya lands* are synonymous.

5 Family Search, Deutschland Geburten und Taufen 1558-1898, Arthur Carl Victor Schott; Fox 1977: 5; Kelsey 2007: 30. Unfortunately, this last author wrongly refers to Schott as a Prussian, while he was actually from the kingdom of Württemberg.

6 Such as the Archäologische Gesellschaft, the Griechischer Verein or the Stuttgarter Liederkranz. Schneider 1891: 395-397; Fox 1977: 7; Kläger 2003: 183.

7 Arthur's mother was Auguste Sophie Hofacker; he also had a sister, Lydia (1810-1880), who wedded into an intellectual family. Family Search, Deutschland Geburten und Taufen 1558-1898, Albert Constans Lucian Schott; Various 1868: 340f; Fox 1977: 9.

In 1838 Schott had already published his *Five Poems* (Schott 1838), which were followed more than a decade later by a complete book of poetry entitled *Gedichte* (Schott 1850). Count Alexander von Württemberg (1801-1844), who was to become a supporter of Schott, had also published some of his poems in the 1838 collection above mentioned. After completing an apprenticeship at the Royal Gardens in Stuttgart, and studying agriculture at the University of Hohenheim, Schott lived and worked several years as agronomist at the manor of the Count in Serach, today part of Esslingen.⁸ Because Württemberg was at that time the “garden of Germany, Esslingen its paradise”,⁹ the art historian Gretchen Gause Fox has advanced the idea that Serach became the perfect location where Schott was able to combine his botanical and poetic interests with an amicable social life.

In 1836 the 22 year-old accepted a position as administrator of Count Alexander's estate Bissigen, in Jam, Romania (Ududec 2008: Part 1). This historical cultural area, the Banat, is today politically part of Romania, Serbia, and Hungary. There, Schott learned Romanian, which became one of the several languages he mastered and which surely facilitated his acquiring a good command of Spanish while in Latin America.

It was during his first stay in the Banat, from 1836 until 1841, that the young man became interested in drawing local landscapes and people, as well as in collecting music, folktales and other narratives of the Wallachian population, one of the minorities of that multicultural society.¹⁰ Schott's position, recognizing this local group as independent and distinctive, Fox has noted, followed in the tradition of Karl Ritter's concept of *Erdkunde*, which highlighted the links among a people, their environment, history, and culture, that is, what we could consider as a modern approach to geography (Fox 1977: 11). It is in this context that the highly appreciated book *Wallachische Märchen* originated. Arthur compiled and wrote the narratives, partly in original language, after intensive travels and field research, while his older brother Albert assisted him by the editing of the volume and authored a large appendix. This compilation, published in 1845, also included the first ethnography of the Banat, extending 80 pages.

From 1841 until 1844 Schott was back in Stuttgart, probably to prepare the *Wallachische Märchen* for publication; afterwards he returned to Romania for a second stay. He also traveled extensively through southern Europe, Serbia, Turkey, and Arabia (Small 1929: 278f.). Contrary to what certain authors propose, that this stage lasted until up to 1854,¹¹ new studies reveal that Schott had already left Europe for good in 1850.¹²

8 Various 1868: 341; Fontana 2010; Ududec 2008: Part 1.

9 Laura Maxwell quoted in Fox 1977: 9.

10 Schneider 1999: 117f; Brednich 2007: 184; Ududec 2008: Part 1.

11 Brednich 2007: 184; Various 1868: 341.

12 Fox 1977: 4; Kelsey 2007: 30; Fontana 2010.

Why did this Renaissance man decide to leave everything behind? True, being in his mid-thirties he had already carved a good name as a botanist – who had collected a substantial herbarium –, agronomist, linguist, ethnographer, writer, and musicologist; he also counted with solid networks, had the support of reliable mentors, and a family that nurtured his professional interests. Fox has suggested that Humboldt's impulse for scientists to go out and explore the world could have been a motivation, as well as the so-called *Wanderlust*, that at the time was seen as some kind of almost genetic disposition by people of German culture to travel widely (Fox 1977: Chapters 1 and 2). Another possible factor has been advanced by Robin Kelsey, also an art historian, namely Schott's disappointment brought about by the failure of the 1848 Revolution,¹³ in which his liberal father was "a firm and eloquent spokesman for the left" (Fox 1977: 7).

True that certain supporters of the Revolution fled the German states, some of them finding a new life in the USA from where they continued their political and social commitment to what they thought as a betterment of their country.¹⁴ However, we have not so far found specific statements from Schott in this regard, or information that would lead us to believe that he was involved in circles that actively supported that agenda. Additionally, new studies propose that the migration generated by that historical event has been overestimated given that other factors such as the economic stagnation that prevailed in those days, a lack of professional prospects, and frustration with the system in general have been overlooked (Holtmann 2001). Nevertheless, looking carefully at Schott's correspondence a clear image of his disenchantment with life in the Old Continent emerges, which might support Kelsey's suggestion:

[...] All the people and nations over there, I am sorry to have this impression, are absorbed, broken down, sucked out by their political, clerical, and spiritual rulers. A general consumption has taken place and those now living or rather with some lifetime pardoned people and nations have but to die, to prepare the ground for fresh seed, which providence will procure. The estate of nations in Europe is more like a withered tree, spending its seeds to the Earth and sacrificing to the same its body. The Seed is like the eternal spirit, which never dies, whilst the material world is undergoing continually and generations after generations the alteration of creating and destruction[...].¹⁵

By trying to situate this specific individual movement into its historical and structural context, and in the absence of a clear declaration about it, it becomes obvious that,

13 Kelsey 2007: Chapter 1. This armed rebellion against aristocracy sought to increase democracy and freedom of expression. While the middle-classes desired liberal policies and forms of life, the lower strata fought for better living and working conditions. For more about the 1848 Revolution in the German states, see Hain 2007.

14 Some of the best known so-called Forty-Eighters were probably Carl Schurz, who became Secretary of Interior of the USA in 1861, Franz Siegler and Friedrich Hecker.

15 Correspondence Schott and Torrey (hereinafter CST), next to Laredo, Rio Bravo del Norte, 14.05.1852.

as recent migration studies from an anthropological perspective have proven, it is not possible to believe that there is a monocausal reason behind a relocation.¹⁶ Whatever Schott's motivation was in the end, his new goal was to develop his multi faceted career in the United States, a land that was perceived as giving scientists and intellectuals many opportunities to explore new and uncharted territory. Yet, given the readings that potentially influenced him, as well as the first-hand reports of previous travellers such as his acquaintance the poet Lenau, it is very likely that the young scientist was aware that there were large differences in lifestyle between his culture of origin and that of the USA (Fox 1977: 23). This, nonetheless, did not prepare him for a new disenchantment, as we will see ahead. He already had a good command of the English language, as evidenced by his translation into German of the *Handbook of Botany* published in 1849 (Schott 1849). In 1850 Arthur Schott crossed the Atlantic to start a new chapter in his life.

In the USA

Perhaps what attracted Schott to establish himself in Georgetown, now a historical neighborhood of Washington D.C., was the opportunity to participate in one of the many surveys carried out at that time as part of the North American expansionist policy, which was publicly and politically supported by the ideology of the Manifest Destiny. The country's capital was the hub of the Smithsonian Institution and of the U.S. Army Corps of Topographical Engineers, which handled projects that could use the versatile skills that the newcomer had.

Schott visited the distinguished botanist and chemist John Torrey (1796-1873) in Princeton during the summer of 1851. This was the beginning of a long friendship and collaboration between the two scientists. It was Torrey who apparently gave Schott, then a well-trained but poor immigrant, his first paid job by assigning him the illustrations of several newly discovered botanic specimens for a publication (Fox 1977: 27). Shortly after, Torrey recommended him as an assistant surveyor to Major William H. Emory (1811-1887), U.S. Army officer and the commissioner who completed the Mexican Boundary Survey.¹⁷ That same fall Schott was already in western Texas, accompanying Lieutenant Nathaniel Michler (1827-1881), second in command to Emory. That is how he became part of the U.S. Boundary Commission for the surveying and mapping of the border with Mexico.

As a result of diverse actions – the annexation of Texas in 1845, the Guadalupe Hidalgo Treaty of 1848 following the Mexican-American War by which Mexico lost one

16 See for example both the historical and contemporary studies by Caroline Brettel.(1995, 2003, 2008).

17 CST, next to Laredo, Rio Bravo del Norte, 14.05.1852; Kelsey 2007: 30; Rebert 2011: 433f. By this survey, the Mexicans determined that in charge of it would be a group headed by military engineers while, in contrast, the US vacillated between soldiers-engineers and civilian appointees; from 1849 to 1857 four different commissions worked subsequently to complete this task.

third of its territory to the United States, and the Gadsden Purchase of 1853 – the USA found itself in need of identifying, marking, and exploring the new lands acquired and their borderlines: the Boundary Commission took over that assignment. This was important not only to demarcate the countries, but also because the terrain was expected to hold the most efficient rail route to wealth-promising California. But: How to set clearly a border in the middle of large landscapes, some of which were desert? This is where surveyors and craftsmen put together their efforts. They attempted to draw maps and to establish limits through landmarks, usually called monuments, which would serve as delimitations.¹⁸

For the next six years, until June 1857, Schott was part of multiple expeditions that would bring him in contact with people and experiences that will be crucial for his later stay in Latin America.¹⁹ His years with the Commission were composed of field research in what he called “the wilderness” followed by periods back in Washington when he labeled specimens – many of them destined to be part of the Smithsonian Institute’s collection, worked on his notes and reports, and prepared articles for publication. Employment with the Commission, nonetheless, was not continuous, but depended on the approval of budgets; during times of unemployment, Schott apparently reverted to teaching German language and music in Georgetown. Occasionally, he got other scientific assignments, such as the opportunity to go for the first time to the tropics in 1854 to inspect part of the Isthmus of Darien, in Panama, with Lieutenant Michler. Although lasting scarcely a month, Schott wrote enthusiastically about his impressions in that area by saying, for example, that: “[...] all the gold of California is nothing to me when I compare the richness of nature in the tropics with it.”²⁰ Nevertheless, he had to wait another ten years to revisit the equatorial lands.

Working in the Mexican-American border, Schott had several encounters with various Native American peoples, such as Seminole, Kiowa, Yuma, Apache, and Comanche among others. Craftily, Kelsey²¹ has analyzed Schott’s inconsistency between his highly romanticized visualizations and his undecided written depictions of the natives. The majority of Schott’s descriptions from the 1850s reflected the view, common in the nineteenth-century, of the native people as savages and childish. For example, he wrote

18 The role of illustrations in determining the border has been thoroughly explored by Kelsey 2007.

19 Among those specialists with whom he remained in contact through decades were naturalist, ornithologist, and curator of the Smithsonian Institution, Spencer Fullerton Baird (1823-1887), German-born George Engelmann (1809-1883) and Asa Gray (1810-1888), leading botanists of their time. Of importance would also be José Salazar Ilarregui and Moritz von Hippel, who will be introduced ahead.

20 CST, San Diego, 01.11.1854.

21 Kelsey 2007: 51-53; this scholar’s inquiries dwell on the iconographic aspects of the drawings. For her part Fox 1977: 34 remarks that Schott saw certain cultural groups not as “noble savages, but as deprived and sometimes depraved hobo-like dependents”, without specifying if her interpretation refers to his reactions about original peoples or about Mexicans.

about the “sons of the desert, who like children are by their actions and omissions guided exclusively by their impressions of the moment”, and also that these were “wild tribes that living with the white man in constant feud, can only justify their existence through nothing else but predation and killing”, besides accusing them of insincerity, untrustworthiness and degeneration (Schott 1854: 376-378). Rarely are there positive comments about them, and those are found in the context of strategies to confuse or take the ‘white men’ by surprise, such as in the case of an encounter with Apache by which Schott believes to have understood how the natives communicated through body language to organize an effective offensive on the boundary’s explorers, “an admirable maneuver that speaks highly about these pagans’ art” (Schott 1854: 378).

Likewise, the travelling intellectual interacted for the first time with people of Mexican culture, understood by him as *mestizo*²² population. As other scholars have already noted, in spite of some contradictions, Schott appreciated certain aspects of the *mestizo* livelihood such as their knowledge of medicinal plants, culinary habits, and musical traditions.

Songs offered a possibility for interconnection and cultural exchange, even in the hard conditions experienced at the border. Schott gives the following vivid example: In the twilight, after a nightlong march, when everyone is exhausted “singing is what refreshes the Mexicans and their mules”. In such circumstances he heard a man from Sonora singing a *bolero*; he liked it so much that he wanted to write it down; therefore, Schott asked the Sonoran to perform it over and over again. To return the favor, he himself had to intone some of his compiled Mexican lyrics. At the end he was asked to intone repeatedly the German church-critical ballad *El Papa*, about which he explained: “This is the well-known German song *Der Papst lebt herrlich in der Welt*, which had been translated by a Mexican officer into Spanish during my stay there”. The lines were repeated many times, with men rejoicing by it and forming a chorus. “This way the German *Studentenlied* was transplanted to Sonora, where I also had to leave a manuscript of the original”.²³ This is just one of the records that shows how some transculturation processes took place.

As a boundary draftsman Schott sketched landscapes, geological diagrams, and ethnographic illustrations; furthermore he drew town views, such as that of the military plaza of San Antonio Texas – probably his best-known work (Rebert 2011: 446). The gentleman scholar developed what was first identified by Fox (1977: 47) as an original signature: an artistic style highlighting the botany, that is, paying large attention to it in

22 *Mestizo* refers here to people of mixed European and Indigenous origins. In Yucatecan oral tradition and literature, however, the term is used as a euphemism to refer to humble Maya.

23 Schott 1861: 461. *Studentenlieder* were traditional compositions, mostly sung by university students. Some of their content was political and often critical, displaying a sense of humor.

the foreground, while sketching rather widely the backgrounds.²⁴ Towards the end of his work with the Commission he started to include what would become a cliché representing the demise of the Natives in the iconography of the USA's Southwest: the buffalo skull. Regarding his portraits of the original people of the Americas, these are characterized by certain stiffness and show both sedentary as well as on-the-move figures.

Originally signed up as a topographical artist with what was considered a modest but normal salary of 1,200 dollars a year Schott, however, worked until 1856 without additional compensation. He was also a special scientific collector of geological, zoological, paleontological, and botanical specimens, which he moreover classified, analyzed, described, illustrated, and sometimes named – given that many of them were unknown to science. In addition, he wrote scholarly treatises on botany, geology, and contributed substantially to the *Report's* appendix on ethnography of Native American groups.²⁵ According to a recent examination, Schott's hard but improperly recognized work during this time represents the experience of many civilian scientists who slipped into obscurity while their supervisors enjoyed all credit, prominence, and job stability (Rebert 2011). Schott's correspondence with Torrey is full of remarks about the difficult conditions under which he researched that included irregular payments, lack of acceptance of some of his work, deficient organization of the commission as well as exploitation.²⁶ For him, the whole enterprise was from its start an “unlucky and corrupt body”, by which one could only “practice indulgence and fatalism, for the whole course of the affairs of the Commission is almost for every member as been thrown from one disappointment into another one”.²⁷

On the other hand, he expressed feeling fully free and “almost thus much at home as among good warm sincere friends” while in open nature.²⁸ He enjoyed a sense of adventure exploring remote areas in spite of the harsh conditions that forced the team, for instance, to walk 50 to 60 miles mostly during the night in order to avoid the day's heat and to keep their water consumption to a minimum (Schott 1861: 461). Certain responsibilities might have been a big challenge, but were also perceived as an adventure by the researcher. For example, barely a year and a half after leaving a traditional contained life in Württemberg he found himself leading a group through the American ‘wilderness’ in the area of the Rio Bravo del Norte, trying to avoid a robbery and possible killing of his

24 Later on, this idea was endorsed in Kelsey 2007.

25 Fox 1977: 43; Rebert 2011: 445f, 460. *The Report on the United States and Mexican Boundary Survey made under the direction of the Secretary of the Interior*, was published by William Hemsley Emory.

26 CST, next to Laredo, Rio Bravo del Norte, 14.05.1852; Fort Duncan, Texas, 20.05.1852; Washington, 05.03.1853; New Orleans, 08.05.1853.

27 CST, Forth McIntosh next Laredo, Rio Bravo del Norte, 14.05.1852.

28 CST, New Orleans, 08.05.1853.

people through negotiations with Lipan Apache – who at the end stole some of their horses but did not attack them.²⁹ Another excitement was to hunt and collect exotic animals, such as puma and panther (Schott 1853: 791-792). Additionally his private life appears to have been satisfactory: In 1854 Arthur Schott married Auguste Tafel (1836-1908), the in Württemberg-born daughter of an in Ohio teaching professor with whom he had six children.³⁰ Although perpetually worried about money, he was able to buy a house in 1859 on the Georgetown Heights, where he seems to have enjoyed a gratifying family life. In this context he expressed his artistic interests, as he conveyed in a letter to Torrey: “Mrs. Schott sings with me ballades, duets, etc. I occasionally write something for two voices. I am sorry, however, that musical affairs in Washington cannot make a start for a more elevated position, which truly belongs to this heavenly art”.³¹

Disillusioned by the conditions under which he had to work at the Boundary Commission, he finally quit his position in June of 1857 (Rebert 2011: 460). Only two months later he announced to his friend Torrey that soon he would leave on a new assignment to survey for an interoceanic ship canal near the Isthmus of Darien: “I will set my sail upon the tropics”.³²

Colombia

The Congress of the United States decided to send to the tropics two groups of engineers – topographers and hydrographers – each headed by an officer. Their assignment was to explore the feasibility of opening up an interoceanic route uniting the Atlantic with the Pacific oceans. This was only one of several expeditions that attempted such an enterprise,³³ carrying on Humboldt’s vision, and responding to the increasing needs and pressures of international commerce. This exploration gave Schott the opportunity to go back to Central America for a second time.

More concretely, the place surveyed was a 300 kilometer line through the area known as Chocó (Schott 1858: 652-653). in Colombian territory, directly east of Darien.³⁴ Schott was assigned as naturalist and draftsman to the unit in charge of topography, and from a certain point on the departments of Geology, Botany, and Natural History were put under his direction in the capacity of principal assistant (Michler 1861: 100, 106).

29 Schott 1854: 353-357, 377-383, 403-406.

30 Fox 1977: 36; Fontana 2010.

31 CST, Georgetown, 17.04.1860.

32 CST, Georgetown, 30.08.1857.

33 Other possible cuttings were considered by the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, Mexico, at the border between Nicaragua and Costa Rica, as well as by the Isthmus of Darien, Panama. Finally the Canal was built in Panama, between Colón and Panama City.

34 However, all official reports carry out the heading “near the Isthmus of Darien” which leads to confusion. Compare the headings in Schott 1858 and Michler 1861.

The group of which Schott was part left New York on the 16th of October 1857, and returned on the 2nd of May 1858 (Michler 1861: 99). During this seven and a half months the researcher from Württemberg collected hundreds of zoological, botanical, and geological specimens, several of them new to science. He and his two assistants, William and Charles Wood, worked under extremely adverse circumstances, both in the jungle and in the mountains. About those hardships, Schott wrote in a letter that:

it is certain that no one is able to properly appreciate the efforts of the collectors who himself never traveled under similar circumstances, through a tropical region, like the one described within these pages.³⁵

Many samples were sent to the Smithsonian for examination and classification, while Schott shipped others directly to individual scientists, for example to Torrey and Engelmann.³⁶ However, he lamented that “large portions of botanical specimens and written and sketched notes” were lost due to transportation and safety problems encountered in the field.³⁷

There were, additionally, other difficulties, the majority of which were in the leadership and organization of the expedition, and in the funding of it. With one group led by the Military and the other by the Navy, political issues took a toll on the operations, and Schott complained that the treatment people received from one of the officers “was more than injudicious” and that he felt offended not only as a professional but morally.³⁸ He also attacked publicly, through one of his articles as well as in his correspondence with other scientists, the deficient planning of the endeavors from the start, which instead of beginning from the Atlantic side should have begun from the Pacific end mostly for logistic reasons. Some of the results of this mishap were that “the whole group had to spend most of the seven months going up and down, which left only one and a half months for the real survey work”, that the food supply was under calculated, and that the risks were underestimated.³⁹ Funding and its continuity were a perennial struggle, which held back the completion of reports, inhibited planning and brought people like Schott, who depended on a salary, into difficulties.⁴⁰ This, however, seems to have been a problem in all the assignments of this nature that he obtained. For preparing the reports of the expedition, for example, he made hardly “a few hundred dollars [...] within two years’ time”.⁴¹

35 Schott quoted in Michler 1861: 253f.

36 CST, Georgetown, 16.05.1858; Correspondence Schott and Engelmann (hereinafter CSE), Georgetown, 26.10.1858.

37 CST, Georgetown, 16.05.1858.

38 CST, Georgetown, 16.05.1858, 01.07.1858.

39 Schott 1858: 652; CST, Georgetown, 16.05.1858, 01.07.1858, 19.10.1858.

40 CST, Georgetown, 24.09.1858.

41 CST, Georgetown, 17.04.1860.

But Schott also reported positive experiences. One of them was the encounter with “unexpectedly friendly Indians”, who helped the members of the expedition to guide their canoes “through otherwise insuperable rivers”, and additionally fed them from their home-produced crops – “it is thanks to them that the impossible happened: work was completed” (Schott 1858: 652). Similarly, he wrote vividly about the beauty of tropical Colombia, which inspired him. Schott completed many sketches and panoramic views “as to give to the public a most faithful representation” of an unexplored area where he lived.⁴² He carried out ethnographical work that he published, at least partly, in the German magazine *Das Ausland* (Schott 1859). Furthermore, he contributed – without getting paid for it – to the report presented by Michler to the Secretary of War: he wrote Appendix A, on the geognostic structure of Colombia, and the notes for another eight specialized appendices, among them those about botany, reptiles, mammals, and invertebrates.⁴³

After the Colombian expedition a period of official unemployment followed. Schott remained in Georgetown and used this time to complete reports, worked on his own private collections, brought up to date his extensive and intensive scholarly correspondence, and penned essays for several publications. It would take quite a few years until a new challenge would come Schott’s way.

In Yucatán

If the whereabouts and undertakings of this Renaissance man in Europe and the United States have been studied to some extent, the Yucatecan episode remains largely unknown.⁴⁴

Back in April 1855, close to Yuma in the Arizona desert, Schott had met a Mexican engineer and officer who would be of influence in his later career. José Salazar Ilarregui (1823-1892)⁴⁵ was a former professor of the Colegio de Minería⁴⁶ and the Captain of the Mexican part of the team in charge of setting the border line between the USA and Mexico, a project in which Schott worked – representing American interests –

42 See for example CST, Georgetown, 16.05.1858.

43 Michler 1861. The account presented in Fox 1977: 59 appears inexact when compared to Michler’s report.

44 A few often-inaccurate encyclopedia notes or short mentioning of his stay there compose the majority of the entries. Durán-Merk (2009) reported for the first time verifiable data about Schott in Yucatán.

45 José Salazar Ilarregui graduated as mathematical and geographical engineer. He served as congressman for Chihuahua, councilor to the Government of Mexico City, and was a member of the Junta de Notables, the group that proclaimed Mexico’s monarchy in 1863. During the preparatory phase of the Second Mexican Empire (1862-1863) he was named Minister of Development, a position he occupied until June 1864, when he was appointed Imperial Commissioner for Yucatán by Maximilian. Pani 2001: 368, 399; Durán-Merk 2009: 78.

46 Ramírez 1890: 390; Tamayo Pérez 2004.

as presented above. Although carrying out apparently opposite agendas, the two men became friends rather quickly. In a letter Schott introduced Salazar as “a son of Sonora and an expert traveller through all the new countries (who) promised to furnish me with as much as it might be in his power”.⁴⁷ And that, he did: nine years later, in 1864, when the engineer was appointed Imperial Commissioner for Yucatán, *Comisario Imperial*, he offered Schott a position in an important scientific project, the Comisión Científica of that Mexican state.⁴⁸

At that time, this Latin American country found itself in what was called the Second Mexican Empire. The Constitution of 1857 had polarized the nation, a *coup d'état* followed, and after that a civil war, the Guerra de Reforma (1857-1860). This impoverished the Republic, which was bankrupt and declared a stop payment to all foreign powers on July 1861. Between December 1861 and March 1862 Spanish, British and French fleets and troops arrived at Mexico's seaports. The representatives of the first two countries returned home in April, but the French invaded and occupied the country. Republican President Benito Juárez (1806-1872) abandoned Mexico City on May 31, and the French Interventionists steered by Emperor Napoleon III, installed a superior council, the Junta Superior. On July 10, 1862, the Junta proclaimed a Catholic Empire in Mexico, offering the crown to Archduke Maximilian, younger brother of Franz Joseph, the Sovereign of Austria. Nevertheless, the legitimacy of the Second Mexican Empire was disputed: Juárez went into exile but continued fighting for the re-instatement of the Republican government, which was accomplished in 1867.

As it has been established above, Schott's upbringing and personal correspondence contains plenty of remarks that define him as a liberal. Here, a question arises: How to explain that he accepted a position working for a contested monarchy? First, Schott was unemployed and had a large family to support. Besides, for years he had not obtained any other scientific assignments. In such a situation a job opportunity, even if given by representatives of an ideology he opposed, might have appeared acceptable. This certain opportunism appears in some of his writings in Yucatán in which he criticized Republican thinking⁴⁹ – defending the interest and ideology of Mexico's invaders. Another possible reason for accepting the assignment was that Salazar Ilarregui, whom he trusted, offered it to him. Lastly, this exploration might have seemed compatible with the Humboldtian program.

47 CST, twenty miles below the junction of Gila and Colorado, 14.04.1855.

48 Schott 1865a: 178. In a publication this is presented as a recommendation from that institution, see Smithsonian 1866: 62.

49 See for example Schott 1866a: 472, where he writes about “the poison of Republican imposture”.



Figure 1. Arthur Carl Victor Schott (foto: Courtesy by the Smithsonian Institution Archives, Image # 84-11387).

In contrast to most regions, Yucatán supported the Second Empire. Additionally, the peninsula played an important role in the expansionist plans of Maximilian, who considered that in case of a US invasion he would move his capital to Yucatán, and also wished to extend his domains throughout Central America.⁵⁰ Therefore, Salazar arrived in the *Mayab* in September 1864 with a special agenda, plenty of power, and a good budget. Besides putting an end to the so-called Caste War,⁵¹ a movement also known as the *cruxo'ob* uprising, the Commissioner wanted to improve the living conditions of the population through 'scientific measurements', and to attract European migration. Among his companions were four members of the *Comisión Científica de Yucatán*, which offered testimony to the importance given by the Empire to public works and the systematic exploration of the peninsula.

50 Durán-Merk 2009: 57, 78. About Yucatán's favorable reaction to the Empire see Sánchez Novelo 1983 and Canto Mayén 2006.

51 This armed conflict (1847-1901) was fashioned by contemporary authors as a race motivated war. In the last decades, it has been reinterpreted as occasioned by a mix of political, social, and economic disparities between large landowners and dispossessed farmers. See Rugeley 1996, and Gabbert 2004.

In 1864 Napoleon III had ordered the creation of the Commission Scientifique du Mexique, in order to “regenerate” and “civilize” the new acquired territories by cataloging and exploiting their resources.⁵² The Yucatecan division, though, appears to have been independently managed by Salazar Ilarregui probably for two reasons. First, that he came to the peninsula with a *carte blanche* to govern the then considered a remote and isolated region. A second argument is that he had ample experience in several natural disciplines, besides holding a position as member of the above-mentioned French delegation,⁵³ and was a member of the Comisión Científica de México (Tamayo Pérez 2004: 172). This should have provided him with the status necessary to head the Yucatecan endeavors. The Sonoran politician, moreover, implemented the peninsular works independently from those of his French counterparts. Salazar selected and brought along his own collaborators, among whom there were some German-speaking former colleagues from the Mexican-American Boundary Survey as well as nationals who resided in Mexico City. Another indicator is that the results of the local team’s endeavors were reported directly to the Commissioner.⁵⁴

On September 16th of 1864 Schott signed up for the Commission, as one of its last members, while still in the USA.⁵⁵ It is thanks to his application for a US Passport, given that he had taken the North American nationality, that we have a physical description of how Schott looked as he came to the Maya land: He was 1.78 meters high and of fair complexion. His hair was light, and his face oval-shaped. Schott’s forehead was of medium size, and his eyes blue. He had a thick nose, a medium-sized mouth and a pointed chin.⁵⁶ The other visual source that allows us to picture this scholar is a photograph safe-kept by the Smithsonian Institution, which shows a younger Schott dressed in a historical costume (Figure 1).

On the 10th of November 1864 Arthur Schott arrived in Sisal in Yucatán on board the ship *Barcelona*.⁵⁷ From there he went to Mérida where the Comisión Científica had their offices, partly in a rented house in the old Santa Ana neighborhood, partly in the

52 For more about the Scientific Commission of Mexico see Pichardo 2001; Edison 2003.

53 That commission, imitating the French institute, consisted of ten independent sections; their areas of interest included among others zoology, botany, and architecture. See Rosas 2012: 21f.

54 The only traces of French scientific presence in Yucatán during the Second Empire are those left by Abbé Charles Étienne Brasseur de Bourbourg (1814-1874). A well-established scholar known mostly because of his publication of the *Popol Vuh*, the clergyman arrived simultaneously in the same ship as Arthur Schott to Sisal, see Schott 1865c: 1041. Brasseur’s travels in Yucatán and Guatemala had as objective to collect manuscripts and books, centered on linguistics. Brunhouse 1973: Chapter 6.

55 Biblioteca Yucatenense, Fondo Reservado, CCA-MAN-XLVIII-1864/1865, 1-4-029 (hereinafter BY, FR, 1864/1865): 7.

56 Ancestry, US-Passport Applications 1861-1867, Roll 125, Image 1051, Arthur Schott.

57 Staatsarchiv Hamburg, Quellensammlung zur Geschichte des Deutschtums auf der Insel Cuba, 743-2, no. 7b, 1864, folio 15; Schott 1865b: 994.

large residence occupied by Salazar Ilarregui on the corner of 60 with 57 street, where today the main building of the Universidad Autónoma de Yucatán is located.⁵⁸

At least 16 engineers and several skilled and unskilled local helpers worked in this commission.⁵⁹ It had two divisions: Topographical Works and Natural History. Engineer Agustín Díaz (1830-1893) also a former member of the Boundary Survey (Tamayo Pérez 2004: 231-232) served as director of the Commission himself, likewise heading the Topographical Section. This entity was responsible, among other projects, for numbering the streets and making the first map of the city of Mérida, opening public water wells, establishing a meteorological observatory, and for installing the telegraphic line between Mérida and the port of Sisal. Schott commanded the Natural History unit from November 1864 to May 1866, during which time he collected botanical, zoological, and fossil specimens, besides exploring archaeological Maya sites and the peninsula's coast line. The scientist was assisted in his undertakings by a minimum of three people at different points in time: Carlos Moya, data-collector who joined the group coming from Mexico City, together with Agustín Montalvo and Felipe May.⁶⁰

The Renaissance man travelled intensively through the northwestern, northern and central parts of the peninsula; wherever he went, he seems to have worked on whatever kind of research possibilities he found. He continued to sketch, to carry out ethnographical work, and to preserve native oral history. Additionally, one more unexpected assignment would come Schott's way, namely the Villa Carlota colonization project, which will be addressed ahead.

Unfortunately the German-speaking explorer did not keep a detailed diary of his activities. By careful comparison and contrasting of several sources, however, it is possible to reconstruct, at least partially, the locations, dates, and likely objectives of some of his undertakings.⁶¹

Mérida was the base to which Arthur Schott always returned at the end of his excursions. There the gentleman scholar classified and described his samples, some of which he sent carefully packed to Cuba or to the United States – especially to the Smithsonian in Washington. This institution reported enthusiastically that by the end of his first year in Yucatán Schott's labors had been so productive that “many packages have already reached” it and that it will soon issue a “publication of an account of the

58 BY, FR-CCA-MAN-XLVIII-1865-1-4-030 (hereinafter BY, FR, 1865): 14, 32, 38.

59 This estimate was done by analyzing the contents of BY, FR, 1864/1865 and *idem*, 1865.

60 BY, FR, 1864/1865; BY, FR, 1865; Sánchez Novelo 1983; Tamayo Pérez 2004: 225. Felipe May was probably of Maya origin.

61 The sources used for this reconstruction are: BY, FR 1864/1865-1-4-029 and BY, FR 1865; Smithsonian Institution 2014: Search in all collection records under “Schott”; Millsbaugh 1898; Durán-Merk 2009.

results obtained” (Smithsonian 1866: 62). As far as we know this never came true. Nevertheless, Schott wrote independently several articles for various magazines about his work, collections, and experiences in the Maya lands.⁶²

Specifically, Schott’s Yucatecan plant assembly was the “first really comprehensive attempt to collect the flora of this region”. As usual he allocated the collected specimens in three different directions. One set with at least 900 samples was sent to herbaria of London and Washington, from where “they were distributed without a specific classification or study”.⁶³ A second shipment was sent to selected scientists directly. The third part he kept for his own herbarium, which “contained the original set of specimens”, and was acquired by the Field Museum in Chicago directly from Schott’s widow⁶⁴ in 1897 for “a very modest sum”.⁶⁵ The complete study of Schott’s donation – among which there were many new species like the *Ceiba schottii*, *Hechtia schottii* and *Citharexylum schotti* – would not be issued until 1898 (Millspaugh 1896, 1898).

Schott’s zoological and fossil compendiums and their assemblage would necessitate an individual monograph. The archival documents show that the scholar gathered specimens during his entire time in the Yucatán. In spite of the importance of Schott’s contribution to making the peninsular fauna known to the world, until now only isolated mentions of some aspects of his work have been highlighted. Part of his collection of amphibians was safe-kept, at least until the 1930s, by the United States National Museum in Washington D.C. (Kellogg 1932: 8). Only a few of his snakes have been studied in detail.⁶⁶ To the Smithsonian he submitted samples for five sub-collections: to Invertebrate Zoology, Amphibians, Fish, Birds, and Mammals. The most prolific were the last two. Among other fowl he gathered were Red-winged Blackbirds, Cinnamon-Hummingbirds, Yellow-lored Parrots, and Olive-throated Parakeets. Regarding mammals, he captured many examples of skunks, bats, rodents, and carnivores – including some leopards.⁶⁷

Through his ways and travels in the *Mayab* the worldly scholar also visited and documented several ancient Maya ruin sites. His work in archaeology should be seen as one of the pioneer contributions, given that at that time only John Lloyd Stephens and Frederick Catherwood had explored the peninsula intensively (Stephens 1841 and 1843). Among other reports he provided us with what is probably the first description

62 Sole in German language, 17 articles were published. See Schott 1865a-1865c, 1866a-1866e, 1867a-1867b, 1868a-1868b, 1870a-1870c, 1871a-1871b.

63 Millspaugh 1898: 345. Already in 1835 the Belgian Jean Jules Linden collected 25 Yucatecan samples. Starting in the 1880s, Dr. George Franklin Gaumer (1850-1929) obtained the largest series ever assembled by any one collector in that region.

64 Millspaugh 1898: 345; Standley 1930: 167; Small 1929: 280f.

65 Taylor cited by Fox 1877: 78.

66 Schmidt 1936; The Reptile Database.

67 Smithsonian Institution 2014: searches conducted in all Collection Records.

of the ruins of Dzibilchaltun, that he named Labcah.⁶⁸ Because of his previous experience in the south of the United States observing and describing ancient ruins like the Casa Blanca site, Schott already had a certain practice approaching pre-Colombian material culture.⁶⁹ He also submitted to the Smithsonian at least one Maya sculpture, a small skull made out of stone from Chichen Itza, that was given to him in Valladolid.⁷⁰ Purposely, in the case of the Giant Mask of Izamal he compared his impressions with those of Stephens and Catherwood by criticizing the accuracy of both text and drawing of the latter.⁷¹ The relevance of these impressions resides in the fact that since then that architectural stucco-mask has been destroyed.

Also the contemporary Maya were of Schott's interest. Not only based on his own observations, but also talking to the locals – Maya and *mestizo* – he approached different aspects of everyday practices, discourses, and imagery. Schott reported on marriage and other rites of passage (Schott 1868b), clothing (Schott 1865b), housing in rural and urban areas (Schott 1865a, 1865b), transportation (Schott 1865a, 1871a), plant cultivation by the Maya, and working conditions of the indigenous people in light of an increasing commercialization of the *henequen* plant.⁷² He reflected too on the causes and effects of the Caste War (Schott 1866a), as well as on mythological beings – such as *balams*, *aluxes*, or the *x'tabay* – and the rituals linked to them (Schott 1871b).

As briefly stated, one important assignment given by Emperor Maximilian to his Yucatecan Imperial Commissioner was to explore and map the coastline of the peninsula due to its strategic and economic significance. In this effort several specialists were involved. It is possible to deduce from an analysis of his whereabouts in the scientist's schedules that the German-American expert explored exclusively the northwestern and northern coast, between Celestún and probably Rio Lagartos. During the months of April and May 1865 some of Schott's activities were registered in that area. As early as August of that same year he submitted a preliminary report in the form of an article to a specialized German magazine (Schott 1866f.). Although in certain publications it is reported that as a result of the work carried out in this matter by the Comisión Científica a map of the Yucatecan peninsula coast was published, as of yet we have not been able to locate it unequivocally.

What it has been possible to track down are the series of sketches dedicated to Mérida's churches authored by Schott, which deserve special attention. There were

68 Schott 1866c and 1866d. He was also an early visitor of the ruins of Nohpat and Uxmal.

69 The reports about Casa Blanca, which include notes about the Pueblo architecture, can be seen in Schott 1860.

70 Schott 1873: 423-425. This material was processed, with slight variations, also in Schott 1870a. It was not unusual for the scholar to publish the same findings through different venues.

71 Compare Schott 1868a, 1871c. This article was reused, as in the case above.

72 Schott 1865b, 1870b, 1870c, 1871a.

12 illustrations picturing Mérida's Cathedral and the neighborhoods' corresponding churches along with their squares; at a certain point during the 1960's a Yucatecan editorial house sold inexpensive reproductions of these.⁷³ According to the captions, Ch. Walter did the lithographic work, while Destouches in Paris was in charge of the impression; the name of the author appears as "Arth. Schott". The illustrations that circulate until now are about 22 by 14 centimeters in size, and they retain their black and white quality. Unfortunately, these are mostly used without giving credit to Schott or wildly and wrongly attributed to other draftsmen, such as to the French explorer Désiré Charnay (1828-1915).

Schott's illustrations are composed around a central motif: the religious building. These edifices are illustrated from a side perspective, and with great attention to detail. Nevertheless, the composition does not necessarily favor the architectural elements, but displays people in the foreground whose presence and activities represent a window through which we can take a glimpse of daily life in that society. In Figure 2, for example, we appreciate not only the different socio-economic classes that existed in Yucatán at the time, but also witness some of the visual markers with which that difference was demonstrated. We see males wearing traditional Maya outfits, that is, $\frac{3}{4}$ white pants: these either carry firewood on their backs or clean the then unpaved main square. A mestizo – dressed as such with full pants, a long-sleeved colored shirt and a wide hat – is riding a horse, a privilege that only those with certain economic means could afford. Women of the upper classes clothed as what the Yucatecans called *gente de vestido*, that is, in European-inspired attire, appear to talk among themselves while at the plaza. In Figure 3, the status differentials are also clearly displayed. While a woman, presumably because of her outfit belonging to the better classes, walks out of the church, men dressed in Maya outfits either work or take a short break from their physical activities.

These somewhat bucolic and slightly romanticized compositions, however, correspond in spirit and tone to contemporary narratives that described a bleary and calm, but also socially stratified, Mérida towards the middle of the nineteenth century.⁷⁴

Just as in some of the images that he sketched at the Mexican-American border, we have in Schott's drawings a combination of human figures that appear to be in movements with static ones. Vegetation, one of Schott's main interests, is also displayed in all of the images of the series: trees, palms and bushes were incorporated into the compositions. In contrast to his representations of the Mexican-American border, Yucatecan flora is not prominent in the foreground. We could advance, thus, that in the *Mayab* the travelling scholar's sketches took more interest in humans and a more social tone.

73 Juan de Jesús Castro, interview by Alma Durán-Merk, Mérida, 20.09.2009.

74 Such as those presented in Barbachano 1951.



Figure 2. Mérida's Cathedral by Arthur Schott (1864-1866)
(image: Private collection).

Making use of ethnographical methods, Schott observed carefully the relationships between ‘whites’ and Maya, spoke to the parties involved in the Caste War. He considered this as a result of the abuse inflicted by the upper class mestizos upon a large Maya population. In contrast to the view of the contemporary Yucatecan intellectuals who demonized the living Maya, Schott perceived them as an oppressed and exploited people who deserved better.⁷⁵ When writing, he describes them as a “poor subjugated” people who are “condemned to eternal slavery” as subordinates to the ‘white’, whether they do this voluntarily or not.⁷⁶ He explains the unfortunate situation of the original inhabitants of the *Mayab* as the result of the Spanish colonization and the imposition of Catholicism in hyperbolic language, clearly seeing also that the social stratification in the peninsula was based on just a nuance in color: the exploiters are not ‘white’, as they wanted to be seen, but barely slightly lighter – meaning that the reasons creating a difference are linked to Colonial distribution of power and property.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Nevertheless, Schott's perception of the Maya showed certain incongruities, occasionally calling them “half-civilized”. The prevalent local thinking went along the lines of that expressed by Justo Sierra O'Reilly (1814-1861), who idealized and valued ancient Maya culture but saw the contemporary Maya as having nothing to do with their ancestors. This ideology got reinforced in light of the Caste War.

⁷⁶ Schott 1865b: 997. See also Schott 1866d: 900.

⁷⁷ “Krummstab und Schwert brachten ihnen das Kreuz und heute sind sie die verachteten Lasttiere ihrer lichter gefärbten Herren [...]”, Schott 1865c: 1044. Although wrong in his understanding of the origin of the *cruczo'ob* uprising, he understood correctly the ethnic-economic reasons for the war, see Schott 1866a: 472.

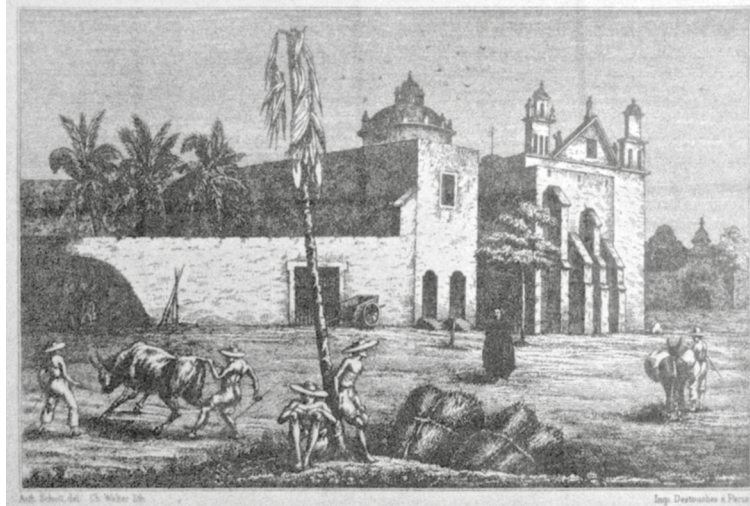


Figure 3. Church of La Mejorada, Mérida, by Arthur Schott (1864-1866)
(image: Private collection).

Reflecting upon the living conditions of the Maya, the travelling intellectual made use of what would become also one of the markers of anthropology: comparison. He wrote, for example, that “bearing, bearing, and always bearing appears to have been, and it is still, the destiny of the rural Maya as well as of other indigenous people”. Additionally he demonstrated the anthropological practice of observation, for instance, as he noted that the Maya whenever they saw a carriage with mestizo passing by humbly retreated: this reaction, according to Schott, clearly expressed the hierarchical relationships between the ethnic groups in Yucatán.⁷⁸ Another form in which Schott was, without knowing, a pioneer of anthropological thinking is found in his careful consideration of what is overseen usually as simple routine, but reflects the immaterial culture of a group, what we now call *Lebenswelten*.

By dealing with the upper classes he remained critical. Schott deconstructed in his writings popular phrases, such as those referring to the Maya as people who were intrinsically “born without honor, live without love and die without fear”, as discourses that rationalize exploitation (Schott 1865c: 1044; 1866d: 900).

78 Schott 1865c: 1044. Other ethnographic descriptions about housing, transportation, clothing, mythology and religious practices can be found in Schott 1865c, 1866c, 1867b. He also used his multi-cultural experience by reflecting about similarities and differences of the customs he observed in Germany, Hungary, Wallachia, Serbia, Italy, North- and South America, and Mexico; see for instance Schott 1861: 462.

As insinuated above, in the *Mayab* a new area of experience opened up for the researcher, which at the end turned out to show some of the limits of his knowledge and/or his inability to contradict expectations: the selection of the location for the Villa Carlota settlement program.⁷⁹ This was the first governmentally sponsored colonization project that sought to establish Europeans in what was wrongly considered as ‘empty’ lands. An initiative of Emperor Maximilian that turned out to be in line with the expectations of certain Mexican elites, this endeavor originally was intended to attract thousands of German-speaking families. The social roles assigned to the newcomers, according to the Darwinist contemporary imaginary, were to ‘civilize’, ‘whiten’, and ‘teach’ the local mestizo, while at the same time they should serve as a form of human barrier protecting the capital from *cruzo’ob* attacks.

The Habsburger prince decided to trust José Salazar Ilarregui by assigning him among his responsibilities in Yucatán the establishment of a pilot colony. In honor of the Empress the settlements would carry the name Villa Carlota. Immediately after his arrival the commissioner started to work on this project: he requested an inventory of lands available for colonization, attempted to gain the support of the elites,⁸⁰ and sent Moritz von Hippel to Germany in order to recruit settlers.⁸¹ Almost simultaneously he named Arthur Schott and the German-Yucatecan engineer Joaquín Hübbe García Rejón⁸² to head the Commission that would be responsible for deciding the best location for the outposts. Two of the priorities for the selection were that the weather and health conditions should be appropriate for Europeans, and that the quality of the land should allow the colonists to farm various crops for commercial purposes – such as tobacco, cotton, and *henequen* – besides being able to cover their own nutritional needs completely.⁸³

Apparently facing disinterest and perhaps opposition from the Yucatecan landed-elites, Schott and Hübbe explored the few lots open for colonization, *terrenos baldios*, that were available in the central part of the peninsula. After several failed attempts, and under great time pressure because the first part of the 443 recruited settlers was already

79 All notes referring to the Villa Carlota settlements in Yucatán proceed from Durán-Merk 2009, unless otherwise marked.

80 In Yucatán power was disputed and negotiated by several local elites: religious, military, landed, and political semi-formal groups. Additionally, we must distinguish between a regionalist tendency and a centralist one.

81 Moritz von Hippel (1818-1895) worked as topographical engineer, together with Schott, for the Boundary Commission. In 1865 he became director of the Villa Carlota project.

82 Anonymous 1865; Joaquín Hübbe y García Rejón (1832-1859) studied in the US and in Germany, and worked in India and Egypt, before returning to settle definitively in Mérida in the 1860’s.

83 Although without hands-on experience about organizing colonies abroad, Schott was interested in the theme since the 1840s. At that time there was a moderate wave of migration of poor Swabians into Transylvania. In 1846 Schott criticized this movement in a letter published by the *Allgemeine Zeitung* in Augsburg. Writing from the close-by Orawitz, he brought up to the attention of the readers that soil’s quality was poor and land prices too high. See: Kroner 1997: 131.

on its way to the Maya lands, a last-minute decision was made for Santa Elena. This was an economically depressed village, 80 kilometers south of Mérida, that had suffered much during the Caste War and was at that time mostly inhabited by Maya.⁸⁴ To what degree Schott was able to properly and in advance inspect the terrain is unclear. What is sure from reading his reports is that he appraised wrongly the characteristics of the peninsula in at least two ways: First, he wrote that the “dangerous yellow fever occurs only by the coastline”;⁸⁵ which was inaccurate: as an example, the area by the Maya ruins of Uxmal, twelve kilometers west of Santa Elena, was already amply documented as an infectious zone. And, second, he asserted that good quality crops could be cultivated in commercial proportions in the peninsula, among them tobacco – in reality, the whole area was unsuitable for such purposes because of its geographical conditions (Dunning 1992).

Schott enthusiastically portrayed the October 23rd 1865’s arrival of the first 228 colonists in an article; this is still the most detailed description about this event. In it, he praised uncritically the project and presented the conditions offered by the Government as extremely generous. He also sketched positively the first contacts between the newcomers and their hosts. Moreover the documental base shows that he was part of the Commission that accompanied the immigrants to Mérida (Schott 1866a) and that a few days afterwards he visited them in Santa Elena; unfortunately he did not leave notes about the latter encounter.

By August 1866 it became clear that the selection of Santa Elena had been wrong, as a group of colonists legally requested a relocation given that they were not able to survive in that site. The newcomers had experienced the health and weather conditions as incompatible with their lifestyle. Moreover, the main problem was that the land was inadequate for growing what they supposed to be cultivating, given its calcareous grounds, lack of water, and the existence of large and numerous stones that made the extensions unplowable. By that time however, Schott was already back in the United States after having fulfilled his contract with the Second Empire.⁸⁶ The colonization project Villa Carlota disintegrated along with the collapse of the Second Empire in 1867. The Comisión Científica of Yucatán followed the same fate. Under Republican government again, its instruments and materials were given that same year to the Colegio Civil Universitario.⁸⁷

84 The second colony was established in the village of Pustunich in 1866. Schott was not involved in that process.

85 Schott 1865a: 179. Various foreign contemporary explorers reported in detail about the dangers found in the area. See also McCrea 2010.

86 CSE, Georgetown, 12.06.1866.

87 For an inventory and a letter from Salazar about the transfer of these materials see UTAL 1867. The Colegio Universitario existed until 1922, turned into the Universidad Nacional del Sureste, and is now the University of Yucatán. See: Universidad Autónoma de Yucatán 2004.

The Yucatecan adventure appears to have been the last scientific exploration in Arthur Schott's life. Back in Georgetown he processed much of the information obtained in the Maya lands in several articles, as can be seen in the bibliography here included; it is unknown if he got any financial compensation for them. Around 1870, when his sixth child was born, the Schott household apparently had problems making ends meet. According to Fox, Schott's requests of other well-positioned scientists such as Torrey, Gray, and Baird to recommend him for jobs were not fruitful – although colleagues, these 'blue-blooded' scholars never saw Schott professionally as an equal (Fox 1977: 29), perhaps because he was not specialized and did not hold a PhD.⁸⁸ In order to make a living the immigrant had to work as a clerk in the Coast Survey office and gave music, mathematics, and German lessons (Fox 1977: 62). He also did translations, among others for the Smithsonian Institution (Smithsonian Institution 1874: 390-405). Arthur Schott passed away the 26th of July 1875 in Georgetown.

Last reflections

As presented above, Arthur Schott was a multi-talented and well-educated travelling scholar; 25 out of his 61 years of life were spent exploring the Americas. Here, however, he was almost always in a precarious economic situation, was highly dissatisfied with the working conditions he found himself in, and remained unable to gain professional stability and prestige. Why didn't he go back to Germany?

At least at the beginning, Schott conceived of the possibility of returning: he wrote to a friend in 1860 that he had “commenced to work out long years of personal narrative about (his) travels outside of civilization” that he wished to publish “once in Germany”.⁸⁹ As demonstrated, Schott conceptualized Europe as a place where it was not desirable for a sophisticated humanist like him to live, especially after the even more conservative tendencies that followed the failed 1848 revolution solidified in his homeland. This might explain also why he took American citizenship. Taking into consideration the extent and intensity with which he pursued his research activities, although he was chronically underpaid, seems to show that for him the Humboldtian aspiration to create a holistic view of the Americas was of utmost importance. His love for his work and for the areas that he felt had the privilege to explore is shown, for instance, in the names he gave to two of his children: Sonora, Mexican border state where he spent many months, and Colón, after the Panamanian city at the Caribbean Sea. However difficult the situation was for Schott in the United States, he formed a family there and found some friends he trusted; we can contrast this with the fact that nothing is

⁸⁸ According to Fox he reported in 1858 that some people have undeservingly already begun to refer to him as doctor. Schott himself misappropriated the title from 1866 on in his publications.

⁸⁹ CST, Georgetown, 17.04.1860.

known about how his relationships were with his family of birth and friends after he left Württemberg in 1850.

And now, 200 years after his birth, what is the material legacy of Arthur Schott? Although numerous of his sketches, letters, and notes were either destroyed or never published, many are nowadays available for researchers, even on the World Wide Web. We know of a minimum of 78 articles of Schott's authorship,⁹⁰ most of them in German language and without a translation into English or Spanish – among them some early reports about Maya and American Southwest archaeology. While a considerable part of this work is written in a rather dry scientific style, other parts are composed of highly vivid narratives that most probably influenced writers of Western fiction, like Karl May (1842-1912).⁹¹

His botanical and zoological collections are safe-kept by several well-established institutions and even today represent a valuable resource. Many vegetal species carry the name of their discoverer as the suffix *schottii*. While the knowledge about him and his work slipped into obscurity in Latin America, in the last decades a few North American scholars have inquired about Schott's activities either as a sketch artist or as a surveyor at the border. Romania, where his ethnographical interest begun, pays homage to him this year by issuing a special postage stamp and organizing a series of events around his Wallachian folktales (Tigla 2014).

To study Schott's work more closely is relevant in different ways for diverse disciplines. For historians of science, his work shows some of the forms in which Germany and the Americas were connected and how some discursive representations of various peoples, cultures, and geographies were constructed, refuted or solidified. For example, at a time when for many Europeans and most Mexicans the Yucatan peninsula was unknown and wrongly imagined as the 'tropics', Schott gave us the first elements for its systematic study, showing a great differentiation of flora and fauna. Mayanists should count him as one of the pioneers in the discovery and study of that ancient culture. For naturalists this scholar's work is of importance because of his on-site observations of organisms and their interactions with specific environments. Among the first scientific travellers in Colombia and Mexico, he created highly valuable reports for anthropologists in which the traditional forms of life of different groups were presented. His iconographic production contributed to the generation of a visual discourse, a form of representation. Schott's press publications in Germany about his impressions of the

90 Among them several contributions about Wallachian folktales and ethnography published between 1857 and 1859 in the German magazine *Hausblätter*.

91 Karl May was a popular German writer of fiction. His most noted works play in the American Southwest, area about which he wrote before being there. He was inspired by narratives from travelling authors, like Friedrich Gerstäcker (1816-1872) and Balduin Möllhausen (1825-1905), the latter was also a member of the US-Mexico Boundary Survey.

countries where he worked refuted sometimes, others confirmed, knowledge and stereotypes that were common among Europeans about Latin America. Of special interest from the perspective of cultural anthropology will be the study of his *Lebenswelt*, that is, the common experiences of a scientist who did not reach fame and wealth.

Arthur Schott, one of the last true renaissance men, aspired to universal knowledge, was drawn powerfully to diverse countries and was determined – in spite its cost – to faithfully follow what he thought was his essence: “A sailor has always to regard the wind and thus am I”.⁹²

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⁹² CST, Fort Duncan, Texas, 20.05.1852.

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