

Round Table on Archives— Warsaw, 1961

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THE sixth international conference of the Round Table on Archives was held in Warsaw, Poland, May 16–20, 1961. While it is said that the idea of an archival “summit” meeting was first suggested by D. Miguel Bordonau y Mas, Central Inspector of the Archives of Spain, it was Charles Braibant, Director General of the French Archives, who conceived it as a regular annual gathering of leaders in the archival field to meet between the quadrennial conventions of the International Council on Archives and to be conducted informally *à l’anglaise* without much organizational apparatus.

From the beginning, French leadership at the Round Table has been apparent. Charles Braibant is its acknowledged and much respected principal actor, who opens and closes the conference and presides at its first meeting, and Robert-Henri Bautier of the French National Archives serves as its secretary, general manager, and *nervus rerum*. Possessed of an impressive breadth of historical, theoretical, and practical knowledge, he prepares the general report that furnishes the basis of the discussion, and he participates most frequently and vigorously in the discussion itself. French leadership and preeminence are further underlined by the fact that French is the only language used in the discussion (with no translation service provided) and that the general report and other working papers are exclusively in French.

THEME AND PARTICIPANTS

Invitations to the Sixth Round Table were issued by M. Braibant and Dr. Henryk Altman, Director General of the Polish State Archives, early in January 1961. “Archives in International Life” was to be the theme of the Round Table, and this theme was to be dealt with under the following three aspects: archives and international law, international collaboration among archivists, and

* A report to the president of the Society of American Archivists by the chairman of the International Relations Committee. Dr. Posner represented the Society “and the archival profession of the United States” at the Round Table.

archives and international organizations. An elaborate questionnaire attached to the invitation called for answers to a number of carefully thought-out problems related to the above aspects.

In the United States, invitations were received by the Archivist of the United States, the president and the secretary of the Society of American Archivists, and the chairman of its Committee on International Relations. Inasmuch as neither the Archivist of the United States nor the president of the Society was able to attend the conference, the president of the Society charged the present writer with representing "the Society and the archival profession of the United States." A generous travel grant from the American Council of Learned Societies and additional help from The American University enabled him to go to Warsaw as the first representative from the United States at an International Round Table on Archives.

The Round Table was composed of 42 delegates from 26 countries and one each from the United Nations, Unesco, and the International Federation of Documentation. As was to be expected, the countries of the Eastern orbit were well represented with two delegates each from the German Democratic Republic, Czechoslovakia, and Rumania, one delegate each from Bulgaria and Outer Mongolia, four delegates from our host country Poland, and at least four delegates from the Soviet Union, headed by N. R. Prokopenko, Adjunct Director General of the State Archives of the U.S.S.R. Most of the time, at the formal sessions and at the social affairs, the Soviet delegates appeared and functioned as a bloc. Since none of them seemed able to converse in a Western language, contacts with them were possible only through the good offices of the delegates from Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia and of Marjan Stopar-Babsek, Archivist of the United Nations.

Delegations from the Western countries included some of the most eminent members of the archival profession. To mention but a few, there were Georg Winter, Honorary Director, and Karl G. Bruchmann, present Director of the Federal Archives of the Federal Republic of Germany; Georg W. Sante, president of the Association of German Archivists; Etienne Sabbe, Director General of the Belgian Archives, and Harald Jørgensen of the Danish Archives. France was represented by Messrs. Bautier, Braibant, and Duboscq, Inspector General of the French Archives, while Italy had equally eloquent spokesmen in Antonino Lombardo, Inspector General of the Italian State Archives, and Leopoldo Sandri, Superintendent of the new Central State Archives in Rome. Other prominent members of the Round Table were S. S. Wilson, the newly

appointed Keeper of the Public Records, and Giulio Battelli of the Secret Archives of the Vatican. Antoine Roy, Archivist of the Province of Quebec, was a fellow delegate from the Western Hemisphere.

WORKING SESSIONS

At the opening session, held on May 16 in the conference room of the Ministry of Higher Education, members of the Round Table were addressed and welcomed by M. Braibant, who presided; Dr. Eugenia Krassowska, the Vice Minister of the Polish Ministry of Higher Education; and Dr. Altman, our very gracious host. Inasmuch as M. Bautier's astonishingly comprehensive report was distributed only on the afternoon preceding the opening of the conference and inasmuch as the topic "Archives in International Relations" constituted its most important and difficult part, it had been decided to devote the first session to the topic of international collaboration in matters archival. Much of the discussion centered around the problems posed by the microfilming of entire *fonds* or complete series at the request of foreign institutions. Most of the discussants seemed to adhere to the philosophy of controlling access to entire record series by the owner institutions and were reluctant to make them available indiscriminately by providing copies on a mass scale. In presenting the U. S. viewpoint of allowing and facilitating the widest possible use by the device of microfilm reproduction and publication, I found myself in the company of Mr. Jørgensen of the Danish Archives, who reported his mutually beneficial working arrangements with the emissaries of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Out of the prolonged deliberations there developed a motion, carried at the final session. It recommends that the Executive Committee of the International Council on Archives "establish a Committee specially charged with the task of studying the problems caused by the microfilming, at the demand of foreign institutions, of entire *fonds* and complete series of documents." In the course of the discussion I advised the group of the plans of the Library of Congress Manuscript Division to resume its large-scale photocopying program in European archives and libraries. I had the impression that the eventual execution of these plans will run into considerable difficulty and may possibly depend on a promise by the Manuscript Division that access to the copies will be given only with the consent of the "agency of origin."

Opinions were sharply divided on another aspect of international cooperation—the lending of original documents for exhibition pur-

poses. Sandri, Battelli, Lombardo, and Altman strongly opposed the granting of such requests, while Mr. Fino of Unesco and Dr. Jørgensen advocated a liberal lending policy. Since unanimity in the matter could not be reached, a motion carried at the closing session called upon the Executive Committee of the I.C.A. "to study the problems posed by the organization of exhibitions in foreign countries or by the dispatch of archival documents to exhibitions abroad and to eventually determine the practical norms that might possibly be adopted" in the matter.

There was complete agreement with regard to assistance, in matters archival, to newly developing countries and with regard to the necessity of obtaining for that purpose the help of Unesco. The following motion to that effect was carried at the final session:

The Sixth International Conference of the Round Table on Archives considers it a duty of the countries most advanced in the scientific and economic domain to assist, to the greatest possible extent, the states recently admitted to independence and those not yet possessed of the experience necessary for the administration of their archives. It recommends especially to Unesco to consider the necessity of proffering to these states the greatest possible assistance and, consequently, to provide the indispensable funds for missions of experts, training courses for archivists and functionaries responsible for archives, and the microfilming of sources pertaining to the history of these countries that are preserved in the archives of other nations. The Conference believes that, if the I.C.A. is to carry out this technical assistance, it would be necessary for it to have at its disposal, with the help of Unesco, a permanent and well-staffed secretariat that could especially undertake the diffusion of a technical documentation designed for the archives of these states, such as bulletins, translations of articles, manuals, and the like.

Two other matters relating to international cooperation among archivists were discussed at this first meeting and appropriate motions were carried at the closing session. The central archival administrations and the national organizations of archivists were urged to prepare lists of their published and processed inventories available for distribution, with an indication of their prices, and to send these lists to other archival depositories, to enable them to acquire the publications of interest to them. Also, archival institutions of all countries and archivists of the entire world were asked to make known automatically to the archives of other countries documents offered at public sales and likely to bear on their history "and very especially, *fonds* and documents that may be suspected of having been stolen from a public depository or fraudulently exported."

The intricate and delicate question of archives and international

law was the topic of the second and third working sessions. As a basis for discussion M. Bautier had prepared a veritable monograph of 84 pages, which represented both the replies to the questionnaire and considerable research of his own. Unfortunately, because the report had not been distributed in advance, there was too little time to study it before the opening of the second session. However, since more than 50 percent of the replies to the questionnaire had reached M. Bautier after April 15, the compilation and reproduction of so impressive a document within a matter of weeks remained an achievement much admired and sincerely applauded.

The second and third sessions were most effectively chaired by Etienne Sabbe, past master at directing a discussion and keeping it within bounds. Hardly had he called the meeting to order when Prokopenko of the Soviet Central Archives Administration asked for the floor to read a prepared statement. Referring to archives as the precious patrimony of a country's civilization he pointed out that after World War II the U.S.S.R. had, on its own initiative, returned to the governments of Poland, Czechoslovakia, Rumania, the German Democratic Republic, Norway, and other countries "a great many of the documents that had been salvaged by the Soviet Army during the war." On the other hand, "a great many of the most precious documents have been removed by the Fascist invaders of the Soviet territory." While the governments of various countries have returned, on their own initiative, to the U.S.S.R. the documents that they found in their possession, the governments of certain Western countries, according to the information available,

still retain the documents that the Germano-Fascists carried away from the territory of the U.S.S.R. which temporarily they occupied. Thus, for instance, there are preserved in the city of Goslar in the Federal German Republic the records of the municipal archives of Tallin removed from Estonia by the German occupation authorities in June 1944. In spite of repeated intercession with the government of the G.F.R., these documents have not yet been restituted to the U.S.S.R. A certain number of archival documents that have been carried away by the Fascist occupants of the Soviet territory are also to be found in the United States of North America. Like the Government of the G.F.R., the government of this country has not taken any steps so far to return these materials to the U.S.S.R.

The version of this statement that was distributed and voted on at the closing session expressed the wish that the "Round Table on Archives adopt a recommendation with regard to the restitution to their legitimate owners of the archival materials that have been displaced in the course of the Second World War." Although I was unable to understand clearly the closing recommendation as it was

read by Prokopenko, I had the impression that it was directed expressly toward the Federal Republic of Germany and the United States. At any rate, Dr. Altman quickly rose to explain that the recommendation had not been translated correctly and that it was of a general nature, calling on all countries to return archival material that had become displaced and was in their hands.

The German delegation did not reply to the Russian statement. Your reporter thought it necessary, however, to respond briefly. He explained that he was participating in the conference not as a delegate of the National Archives and Records Service but as a representative of the president of the Society of American Archivists and that he would make the appropriate report to him. Prokopenko accepted the statement by nodding his head.

The rest of the session was taken up with an exploration of the treatment of archives in connection with changes of sovereignty. There was general agreement that in the case of a cession of territory the archives within the territory itself should become the property of the acquiring power and that it should also be entitled to the records needed for the administration of the territory itself. Whether the latter would include the records not only of provincial but also of central authorities of the ceding state was not decided. It was felt that in difficult cases the microfilming of records for the benefit of the succeeding or ceding party would be a practical way of solving many problems.

At the third session the theme of archives and international law was further discussed. As a first item of business, the Russians wanted to have their resolution acted upon. Chairman Sabbe, however, asked them to submit it in writing for action at the closing session. Much time was given to the treatment of archives in connection with the Treaty of St. Germain, under which material of the Archives of the House, Court, and Dynasty had to be delivered up by Austria. The difficult problem of the archives of ceded territory from which the population has been evacuated, and implicitly the problem of the archives of Königsberg (Kaliningrad) still in Western Germany, was not brought up by the Russians. Participants agreed that whenever "archival clauses should be included in an international treaty, the responsible functionaries of the archives of the contracting states should be consulted as regards the substance (*fond*) and wording of these clauses." It was further suggested that the Executive Committee of the International Council on Archives be asked to constitute a commission charged with studying the "practical questions of the international law of ar-

chives pertaining especially to territorial changes." Motions embodying these two suggestions were carried at the closing session.

Finally, attention was called to the 1954 Code on the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, to which, according to M. Bautier, only the United States report had referred. It appeared that so far very few nations had ratified the Code.

At the opening of the fourth working session the various motions submitted were acted upon. They have been discussed in previous parts of this report. Thereafter, as customary, Dr. Altman as host to the conference chaired the last session, which was devoted to the archives of international organizations. Mr. Stopar-Babsek, Archivist of the United Nations, had submitted an elaborate report on the establishment and organization of the United Nations Archives. Special reports had also been made by Unesco, the International Bank, and the International Labor Organization. Since time was running short, discussion centered mainly on the archives of international authorities that had been abolished. Hope was expressed that the suggestions made by Solon J. Buck in 1945 might be realized; that is, that the United Nations Archives would develop into a general depository for the records of all international institutions. If the United Nations Archives is to serve in such an enlarged capacity, considerable expansion of its present facilities would be necessary.

Thought was also given to the fate of the papers of international nongovernmental organizations, associations, and movements. From the replies to the questionnaire, it had become apparent to the reporter, M. Bautier, that archivists knew even less about them than about the records of international government. In this connection, M. Bautier's summary report referred to Philip M. Hamer's *Guide to Archives and Manuscripts in the United States* (New Haven, 1961), which indicates the whereabouts of a number of nongovernmental archival *fonds*. Practically speaking, Sig. Fino suggested as a possible solution the deposit of nongovernmental international records with the Association of Nongovernmental International Organizations. However, no motion was made to pursue this idea.

The session, and therewith the conference, was closed by M. Braibant. He thanked Dr. Altman for the splendid organization of the conference and for the hospitality its participants had enjoyed, expressed his appreciation to M. Bautier for his excellent report, and stated his gratification at seeing the United States rep-

resented at the conference. He hoped that from now on the United States would always send a delegate to the Round Table.

THE CONFERENCE: NONPROFESSIONAL ASPECTS

Understandably, your reporter had been looking forward with certain misgivings to participating in a conference held in a country of the Eastern orbit. They proved unwarranted. A visa was granted without difficulty, and entrance and exit formalities were not particularly cumbersome. Your reporter and a number of German members arriving on the same plane were greeted by Dr. Altman at the airport and taken to the Bristol Hotel, where, conveniently, all the members of the Round Table were housed. Buses parked in front of the hotel took us to the various meeting places—the Ministry of Higher Education on the first and fourth days, the Radziwill Palace in Nieborow on the third, and the Poniatowsky Palace in Jabłonna on the fourth. Elaborate luncheons were served at Nieborow and Jabłonna and a cocktail party in the Ministry, on the first day of the conference, facilitated the process of getting acquainted with our hosts and fellow delegates. On our return trip from Nieborow, we visited the rather unimpressive District Archives, the museum in Lowiez, and Chopin's birthplace in Zelozowa Wola. Other activities included a concert of Chopin piano pieces, brilliantly executed by Mr. R. Bakst, at which time there was an opportunity, all too short I felt, to meet the rank and file of the Warsaw archivists; a visit to an exhibit of archival documents on Poland's relations with foreign countries at the Central Archives of Ancient Records; a drink offered by the president of the Committee on Historical Sciences of the Polish Academy of Sciences in an old wine restaurant on the ancient market square; and a tour of the city. Your reporter, who had been in Warsaw in 1916, found much of the city—including the market square and many of the baroque churches and palaces—faithfully reconstructed, but the business district has been rebuilt with modern architecture. Much building is going on and parts of the city are still in ruins. The architectural scene is dominated by the Palace of Culture, donated by Stalin to the city of Warsaw (though built with Polish money, according to the taxi driver who volunteered this explanation).

There can be nothing but praise for the hospitality and friendliness of our Polish hosts, especially Dr. Altman. They did their utmost to contribute to our comfort.

Before leaving for Warsaw, your reporter had called at the Department of State to explain the purpose of his trip to Poland and to receive appropriate advice. As suggested by Mr. Frank

Siscoe, Director, Soviet and Eastern Europe Exchange Staff, he called on Mr. Yale Richmond, cultural affairs officer at the U.S. Embassy in Warsaw, where his impending visit had been announced. Although the Embassy was officially closed when he went there on Saturday, May 21, Mr. Richmond came to the office in the forenoon and expressed considerable interest in the activities of the conference. At the Embassy, it was a heart-warming experience to see things courteously and efficiently managed by a United States Marine guard on duty.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Round Table on Archives is the most important and actually the only international group that meets to discuss matters of common concern to the archival profession. The conventions of the International Council on Archives are gatherings far too large to contribute effectively to that purpose, and the Executive Committee must concern itself with organizing and supervising the work of the Council's various commissions, with preparations for conventions, and with similar administrative tasks. It cannot discuss and deal substantively with professional problems. Also the Round Table, composed as it is of leaders in the profession, is ideally suited to establish working contacts between archivists of the world and to facilitate the exchange of viewpoints and experience.

The presence for the first time of a U.S. delegate to attend the Round Table was received with apparent satisfaction by its members and particularly by MM. Braibant and Bautier. It would seem indeed strange that a conference of this kind and on this level should take place without participation from the United States. It is therefore recommended

(1) that from now on one delegate each from the National Archives and Records Service and from the Society of American Archivists participate in the Round Table and that, if for budgetary reasons no representative from the National Archives and Records Service can attend, at least the Society be represented;

(2) that delegates selected be able to converse in French, this being the official language of the Round Table, or else that the services of a competent translator be obtained from the United States Embassy *in situ*;

(3) that, at an early time, plans be made for U.S. participation in the Seventh International Conference of the Round Table on Archives, which will meet in Madrid in May 1962.

(4) that, if for financial reasons participation of an American archivist is not possible, the Department of State be asked to have the cultural affairs officer of the appropriate U.S. Embassy attend the conference in the capacity of an observer.