EUROPEAN EXPERIENCES IN TRAINING ARCHIVISTS

FOR ALMOST one hundred and fifty years "the vexed question of the appointment and training of archivists," as Hubert Hall[1] once called it very aptly, has been of no small concern to those responsible for building up archival administration in European countries. In the early nineties of the eighteenth century the University of Mainz provided for instruction in archival science[2] by devoting a special chair to it, and a little later, in 1793, a plan for teaching the auxiliary sciences of history, similar to that later adopted for the École Nationale des Chartes, was presented to the Committee on Public Instruction of the French Convention.[3] Although, for obvious reasons, no agreement has been reached as to how to breed the most efficient and enlightened type of archivist, yet, in the numerous attempts, changes, and failures in the field of archival education may be observed a number of common tendencies and experiences from which more or less lasting conclusions may be drawn.

It is now generally acknowledged that the archivist who may be expected to fulfill his duties intelligently needs special training and that this may either precede or follow his appointment to an archival position. Originally, because the peculiar character of work with archives was not recognized, it was assumed in the majority of the European countries that a university training in history or in law would fit a man to serve as an archivist and that such little professional knowledge as was needed could be easily acquired after his appointment by the method of learning work by doing it. England went even a step further and assumed that every young man with a normal university education could become a useful member of the archival family if properly guided during the first years of his service. Until 1929 the clerks of the Public Record Office were recruited from

[1] *British Archives and the Sources for the History of the World War* (London and New Haven, 1925), 283. Similarly E. Casanova in a book review in *Gli Archivi Italiani*, v, 47 ff.: ". . . the question of the training of the archivist is one of the most difficult that comes up. There is always the risk of either demanding and doing too little or presenting exaggerated pretensions."

[2] F. T. Friedemann, "École Royale des chartes zu Paris," *Zeitschrift für die Archive Deutschlands*, I (1846-1847), 153.

[3] Maurice Prou, "L'École des chartes," *Revue des deux mondes* (January to February, 1927), 373.

the register of the Civil Service Commission regardless of their having any special qualifications for their future work. Mr. A. E. Stamp, the late deputy keeper, was a mathematician by training (he had been fourth wrangler at Cambridge in 1891).[4] He and other recruits of the Public Record Office received their professional education by copying documents and preparing calendars and lists under the supervision of a more or less pedagogically inclined senior colleague. Whether or not training of this kind was appropriate was widely discussed by the Royal Commission on Public Records of 1910. In the course of its hearings the deputy keeper stated explicitly[5] that he did "not want a man to go up for the Record Office" and preferred those "whose first wish is to be in the Civil Service," but some of the witnesses strongly criticized a system under which a man would become useful only after a period of some years and, having been trained without a plan, would perhaps never get a complete knowledge of his field. No change, however, was made in the system. It was only after the World War that a number of agencies of a scholarly character became dissatisfied with this crude procedure and began contemplating another system which would permit the recruitment of university graduates with a specialized training. Among these agencies was the Public Record Office. There, since 1929, vacancies have been advertised and only applicants with an education in classics or history interviewed.[6] Thus, under the present system, it is no longer possible for a man whose intrinsic inclination is for the natural sciences or mathematics to get a bread-and-butter job in the archival profession. Still, the bulk of professional knowledge must even now be acquired after appointment by means of self-instruction supervised by older members of the staff, an in-service training of an unsystematic character. The Public Records Commission, while not recommending a preappointment training like that of some continental countries, proposed that the freshly appointed clerks be sent to a university for additional instruction,[7] but this recommendation apparently was not accepted. So the English system has become similar to that in effect in a good many countries in the nineteenth century and still in effect in the Scandinavian countries, where the study of and an academic degree in history opens up an archival career to graduates who are

[4] *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, XVI (1938-1939), 29.
[5] Royal Commission on Public Records (1910), *First Report* (London, 1912), Part I, 32.
[6] H. Walker, *Training Public Employees in Great Britain* (New York, 1935), 17.
[7] Royal Commission on Public Records (1910), *op. cit.*, Part I, 33.

either not inclined or not fit to engage in academic teaching. This system is based on the assumption that a good knowledge of history is a sufficient equipment for the archivist, but it overlooks the fact that besides this knowledge he needs some special qualifications. There are examples of archivists without such qualifications sitting among scattered heaps of records, like Marius on the ruins of Carthage, unable to master them. A good many archival institutions have had and still have members of their staffs who, although excellent historians, have never become useful in their particular profession and are "white elephants" to their colleagues.

On the other hand, special facilities for training archivists previous to their appointment have been provided in numerous countries. We think of the École Nationale des Chartes in Paris, of the Austrian Institute for Historical Research in Vienna, of the Institute for Archival Science and Advanced Historical Studies in Berlin-Dahlem, of the School of Archives in Prague, of the training courses given at the Bavarian Principal State Archives, of the different schools of paleography, diplomatics, and archival economy in Italy, and of discontinued institutions such as the Archives School in The Hague, the archival courses of the Archives of the Kingdom in Brussels, and the Spanish School of Diplomatics.[8] Entrance requirements and the curricula of some of these schools have been very pertinently discussed by Samuel F. Bemis,[9] and a knowledge of his article can be taken for granted by the writer, who is concerned with the results of such varied efforts. He will deal with the subject from the standpoint of the two requirements underlying the task of training archivists in general, namely, that as a matter of organization facilities must be provided within the university or archives system of a country and that a curriculum adapted to the educational objectives must be drawn up.

Historically speaking, the numerous archival training establishments fall into two different classes. Those which developed first (of the type of the École des Chartes) were created as graduate schools for instruction in history, designed to teach historical methods with

[8] As to its character and aims, archival work and training in Russia are so different from that of the other European countries that it seems impossible to the writer to include the Russian training courses in the present report. Developments since 1918 are treated by I. Lubimenko, "La science des archives dans la Russie des Soviets, I. Enseignement," *Nederlandsch Archievenblad*, XXXIV (1926-1927), 49-53.

[9] "The Training of Archivists in the United States," THE AMERICAN ARCHIVIST, II (July, 1939), 154-161. The writer has also had the privilege of reading a paper written by Emmett J. Leahy dealing with the training of archivists in different European countries.

reference to the history of the respective countries and at the same time to train archivists and librarians. Rearing archivists, therefore, has been but one of the purposes of these institutions. The second type, that of the Dahlem institute, for instance, evolved in a number of countries that had not at first required any qualification for archival positions other than an academic education but later had introduced an archival examination and finally found it useful to establish a school where the necessary preparation could be obtained. These schools grew out of specific needs of state archives administrations and were therefore inclined to emphasize archival needs and viewpoints in their programs.

Both types of schools have one trait in common. As a rule, appointments to archival positions can only be made from among persons who have attended them and passed the final examination. This not only forces would-be archivists to go through the training process but, since admission is usually restricted, gives them a reasonable chance that after the examination they will receive an appointment of at least a probationary character. That the way to archival positions leads only through these schools has always been considered fundamental for their existence. The first École des Chartes had only an ephemeral life because "no provision had been made for the utilization of the young men at the moment when they left the École and because no positions had been reserved for them."[10] The *ordonnance* of December 31, 1846, and the decree of February 4, 1850, by dint of which appointments to the posts of *archivistes départementaux* were limited to those who had obtained the degree of archivist-paleographer at the École des Chartes, mark in the eyes of its historian the beginning of a new era.[11] This unfailing outlet for its graduates was vigorously defended by the École when, in 1906, an unrestricted examination for archives and library positions was proposed by the Commission des Archives et Bibliothèques; this, it was said, would drain its recruitment, stop its development, and cause its decline and final discontinuance.[12] Austria has an archival examination that may be taken by candidates who have not attended the courses of the

[10] École nationale des chartes, *Livre du centenaire, 1821-1921* (Paris, 1921), Part I, vi. From the close resemblance between the "Livre du centenaire" and the article by Maurice Prou in the *Revue des deux mondes*, it can be inferred that he is the author of the "Livre du centenaire."

[11] École nationale des chartes, *op. cit.*, xxvi.

[12] *Ibid.*, lxvi.

Institute for Historical Research,[13] but practically this examination requires a training that in its complete form can only be obtained at the institute. Since 1895, simply becoming a student of the institute and passing its final examination confers a title to archival positions. Originally confined to the archives under the supervision of the Ministry of the Interior, the requirement that new members of their staffs be recruited from the institute has been extended to all the Austrian archives, although actually they had always before taken in graduates of the institute. Similarly, the Prussian regulations provide that only former students of the Dahlem institute will be used for filling vacancies. In some countries new permanent outlets for the graduates of the respective schools have been opened up. In Germany the archives administrations of the Reich and of a good many states and cities offer additional prospects for the students of the institute in Berlin-Dahlem, and even those who have failed in the examination may hope for a position in one of the smaller cities, which, with state supervision ever increasing, must have their archival depositories administered according to professional standards. In Italy, too, the *Nuovo Ordinamento degli Archivi del Regno* (Law of December 22, 1939) prescribes that, in addition to occupants of positions in the state archives, the heads of the archives of the provinces, communities, and charitable institutions possessing records prior to 1870 must have the certificate of one of the Italian archival schools.[14]

Regardless of the fact that reasonable hope for an archival position may be held by those entering one of the numerous schools, most of the schools are not limited to the education of the archival species exclusively. The older schools of Paris and Vienna and many of the Italian schools were founded with the aim of giving broad instruction in all branches of historical research, with the emphasis on the auxiliary sciences, as has been pointed out before; and it was only when it appeared that their graduates would be especially equipped for work with archives and that giving them a title to such positions would insure the maintenance of the schools that archives administration and similar specialized subjects were included in their curricula. To give but one example, of 241 members of the Vienna institute

[13] E. v. Ottenthal, *Das K. K. Institut für österreichische Geschichtsforschung*, 1854-1904 (Wien, 1904), 96.

[14] L. Signorelli, "Il nuovo ordinamento degli archivi del Regno," *Archivi*, VI (1940), 212.

during the period from 1854 to 1904, more than one-third became university teachers, less than one-third archivists, more than one-tenth librarians, and less than one-third museum officials.[15] More than in any other of the comparable institutions, strictly archival viewpoints may be said to prevail in the Dahlem institute. But there, too, the intention has been to impart professional knowledge as a part of a general program devoted to advanced historical studies, and there are always a number of students who from the beginning do not contemplate archives administration for their future but who want to prepare for a university career. To a certain degree, the idea has been that a school training persons solely for one small and specialized profession will be hard to maintain. At the bottom, however, seems to be the conviction that archival training must be part of a broader scientific education and that if it is isolated it will lose its standards. That the Archives School at The Hague and the training courses at the Archives of the Kingdom in Brussels did not flourish cannot be ascribed exclusively to the fact that an outlet wide enough to absorb the steady output of graduates was lacking. J. Huizinga, outstanding Dutch historian, points out that it was a mistake to separate the training of archivists from university instruction instead of connecting the two kinds of work as closely as possible.[16]

The tendency of the great permanent institutions to maintain their contacts with the universities is generally reflected by some organizational tie-up. The institute in Vienna and the École des Chartes are attached to and co-operate with the universities of the respective capitals, although they enjoy a considerable degree of independence as to the appointment of instructors, the planning of their programs, and the admission of members. Dahlem represents a closer connection with the central archival agency of the state, as the institute is housed in the archives building and the director general of the Prussian State Archives serves as its director; but supervision over the school is exercised jointly by the Ministry of the State and the Ministry for Science, and the participation of professors of the University of Berlin in the teaching program maintains the high scholarly level of the work and prevents it from gliding down into purely technical instruction. The archivist members of the teaching staff have to live up to the standards set by the university professors in their courses if they

[15] E. v. Ottenthal, *op. cit.*, 43 ff.

[16] In an interview given to the *Algemeen Handels-Blad* and published on December 24, 1937, also printed in *Nederlandsch Archievenblad*, XLV (1937-1938), 89.

want to escape from the criticism of the students. On the other side, the physical combination of the institute with the central archival depository recommends itself strongly. Very pertinently the historian of the École des Chartes said, when discussing the transfer of the École to the Sorbonne in 1897: "There is no course that will make up for the continuous handling of the documents. . . . But wise men thought otherwise."[17] Prussia has experimented more in this respect than most of the other countries. It began by requiring certain university courses and setting up an examination board of university professors with an archivist as its chairman, then it transferred the courses to the Privy State Archives and barred the university people from teaching as well as examining, and finally it provided for a mixed staff of university teachers and archivists and had the school housed in the building of the Privy State Archives.

The position of the different schools with regard to university education is not everywhere the same. It is now almost everywhere accepted that a preliminary training in the humanities, with the emphasis on history, should precede that offered at the archival school. In France the bachelor's degree in literature (*lettres*) is required of those entering the École, and in Vienna students are admitted to the main course of the institute if they have gone through a university training of two years and one year of preparatory training at the institute. Persons studying at both the École and the institute are expected at the same time to attend classes at the universities and to obtain there the higher degrees. Because of its emphasis upon things archival in its program, the Dahlem institute opens its doors only to those who have completed their university education, as evidenced by the doctor's degree in history, and who have also passed the first state examination in history and Germanic languages, or have qualified for teaching at a university. Training given in Dahlem is thus of a definitely post-doctoral character, while that given in Paris and Vienna is that of the graduate level. The training given by the numerous archival schools in Italy and by the School of Archives in Prague is also at the graduate level. At The Hague a middle course was adopted. Candidates were admitted to the school and to the examination without a complete academic education, although they could be appointed archivists of Class I only if they had acquired the degree of doctor of law or, since 1919, of doctor of literature, with the emphasis on historical

[17] École nationale des chartes, *op. cit.*, lxix.

studies, or, since 1930, of doctor of theology.[18] It was another characteristic of the Dutch school that it gave instruction not only to archivists of academic caliber, the so-called archivists of Class I, but also to young men and women with only a high school education, "birds of a very spotted plumage,"[19] as one of the Dutch archivists called them; and for them a special examination was set up, including the elements of archival economy and paleography and a basic knowledge of Dutch history and institutions.[20] This bifurcation of the archival career into a higher and a lower one takes account of the fact that archival depositories now contain a good many *fonds* that can be arranged, described, and serviced by persons of nonscholarly training, if they are properly supervised. Recently a similar policy has been adopted in Prussia, where a so-called "middle career" has been opened up in the archives. Candidates for this career must have a good high school education and undergo a training that is mostly practical, the effect of which is tested by means of an examination. It would be impossible to admit them to the courses of the Dahlem institute with its post-doctoral curriculum.

The fact that instruction is offered on either the graduate or the post-doctoral level quite naturally bears on the character and content of the training program and thus leads into a discussion of the curricula of the different schools. Since the schools of France, Austria, and Italy are designed to open up broader possibilities for their pupils, their programs necessarily differ from those of Dahlem and the exclusively professional schools. They center around a thorough training in the criticism of narrative and documentary sources, which implies special courses in all the auxiliary sciences of history. Careful instruction is also necessary in the development of the language or languages used in the sources, in the history of the public and ecclesiastical institutions of the country, and in archeology. While archives administration and library science were introduced into the curriculum of the École des Chartes comparatively early,[21] this was done at the

[18] R. Fruin, "De École des chartes en de Nederlandsche Archiefschool," *Nederlandsch Archievenblad*, XXXVII (1929-1930), 96.

[19] C. C. D. Ebell, "De Archiefwet enz., *Nederlandsch Archievenblad*, XXXIX (1931-1932), 29.

[20] The royal decree of September 2, 1919, concerning the requirements for both classes is printed in the *Nederlandsch Archievenblad*, XXVII (1919-1920), 29-32.

[21] But even in Paris, until 1895, archives and library classification were taught in one course by A. de Montaiglon, who was more of a bibliophile than a librarian and at any rate was not an archivist. Later the course was divided into two courses of one hour each week, which even now have not advanced to equal standing with the main classes in diplomatics and the like.

Vienna institute at a far later time (1874). Generally speaking, it is safe to say that training at both places has been preponderantly concerned with medieval materials and the scholarly methods and techniques necessary for their understanding and evaluation, and this training certainly has been in line with what have been the primary interests of archival agencies and custodians of manuscript collections —the making accessible of their documents on parchment. The Italian schools, strongly influenced by the École des Chartes, followed a similar course. They, too, envisaged a training that would fit students for archives as well as library and university positions, and they, too, emphasized the exhaustive study of the auxiliary sciences. The École des Chartes and the Vienna institute found it necessary to give courses in constitutional and administrative history, because knowledge in this field became more and more indispensable to the archivist dealing with more recent records; but, on the whole, in their curricula they think of archives chiefly in terms of medieval materials. Economic history, which is a subject taught in Vienna, is unknown at the École des Chartes. The concentration of the École on methods and instruction that are especially valuable in the field of medieval history has not escaped the criticism of modern historians. A. Aulard stated that the École "has always been an institute for the history of the Middle Ages or rather for the sciences auxiliary to the history of the Middle Ages." He said: "The young men who come from there are perfectly able to classify the documents of the Middle Ages. . . . Now, the further we go, the more modern and contemporary documents accumulate in the archives, and the result is that the archivists have not learned to discharge the most considerable part of their task. Every day I encounter proofs of the ignorance of many of them in modern and contemporary history. They are obliged to spend the first years of their career in learning a part of their profession, and this the vastest part of it, and to learn it far away from useful books and tools."[22] Strangely enough, F. Lot, famous medievalist and member of the staff of the École, tried to defend its teaching program by pointing out that "the classification of modern documents presents fewer difficulties than that of the older *fonds*."[23] Objections similar to those of Aulard have come up from time to time. Charles Schmidt, discussing the necessity of preserving and protecting business archives

[22] "Chartistes et archivistes," *Revue internationale de l'enseignement*, LI (1906), 413.
[23] "Reponse a M. Aulard," *ibid.*, 417.

in France, advised the École des Chartes in 1926 to create a new certificate of "archiviste moderne!"[24]

Undoubtedly the courses at the institute in Dahlem pay more attention to modern materials and the related archival techniques, as did also the courses in Brussels and The Hague. In Dahlem and at The Hague an important place was assigned to the study of the auxiliary sciences, because they were considered an excellent training field for acquiring scientific acumen and thoroughness and an indispensable equipment for the archivist who has to handle medieval and early modern materials. The mere pedagogic value of a training in the auxiliary sciences was not underestimated. But in Dahlem, Brussels, and The Hague the program was made to converge upon archival things as the center of the training. Neglecting minor changes, we find that in Dahlem the subject of archives is approached from four different angles: One course deals with the history and administration of archives in general; another consists of a thorough study of modern documents and is a counterpart to medieval diplomatics; in a third course administrative history is treated, with the emphasis on record making procedures and the *fonds* that have been preserved; and finally the students are made acquainted with the holdings of the Privy State Archives and its finding mediums, with the technique of archival searches, and with the methods of arranging and describing records. So modern materials are in the forefront of the interest, although great care is taken to enhance the experience in the auxiliary sciences acquired by the students during their university education, which often lacks intensity.

Besides this cycle of lectures concentrating on archives and modern records, other courses of the Dahlem institute are aimed at enlarging the general historical background of the students in order to enable them to handle recent *fonds* with greater competence. Not only is administrative history treated with full appreciation of social and economic developments but it is also realized that the archivist of our times needs a knowledge of economic history and of political economy and that modern records can only be sagaciously weeded and intelli-

[24] "Les archives économiques modernes," *Revue de Paris*, May-June, 1926, 383 ff. When the problem of the training of archivists came up at the Brussels Congress in 1910, H. Stein admitted that the knowledge of the graduates of the École in the field of administrative law was insufficient and that "sometimes it will take them one or two years to get acquainted with the administration that periodically sends them modern records." So far only those students of the École who had taken courses at the École du droit had received an adequate preparation in this respect. *Cf.* Congrès international des archivistes et bibliothécaires, 1910, *Actes* (Bruxelles, 1912), 675.

gently described if the archivist is able to understand the written products of the ever-expanding activity of the state. The emphasis on the documentary and archival problems connected with modern materials and on a broader conception of history, embracing not only political but also social and economic developments, characterizes the work of the institute in Berlin-Dahlem.

The role assigned to the study of modern records in the training program is closely related to the problem of practical training or laboratory work. Among the courses of a narrower professional scope, in those given at Brussels practice was considered as important as any other part of the curriculum. The *Cours Pratique d'Archivéconomie* devoted thirty lessons to archival theory and the same amount of time to practical exercises. M. J. Cuvelier, the late director of the Belgian Archives of the Kingdom, who created this school, insisted strongly on the importance of practical training, because arranging and describing "forms the veritable mission of the archivist" and because a certain uniformity in this respect is badly needed if there are not to be as many systems as there are archival depositories or even archivists.[25] Dahlem has obviously moved in the same direction. Originally the program of the institute called for practical training only during the last six months of its two-year program and only after the examination. Experience, however, proved that practice must be combined with theory at the very beginning of the instruction, not only to make archival theory more easily understood and more palatable but also to satisfy an urgent desire on the part of the students, who, after years of scholarly work at the university, yearn for some practical activity. So it has become customary to assign to them small *fonds* which they are required to arrange and describe under proper supervision. This is done chiefly during the summer months when there are no classes. In France it has been considered impracticable to devote a share of the program to the actual "classification" of archives and libraries. M. Prou remarked that a student of the École would never be able to apply perfectly and at once the rules taught to him. An apprenticeship at an archival depository or library seemed to him to be the only means of inuring an *archiviste-paléographe* to his functions, of enabling him to acquire experience.[26] The writer is inclined to question the truth of this statement. The inventories that have been prepared

[25] In the preface to Archives générales du Royaume, *Travaux du cours pratique d'archivéconomie, donné pendant les années 1920-1925* (Bruxelles, 1926), iii.

[26] "L'École des chartes," *Revue des deux mondes, loc. cit.*, 394.

by the students in the Brussels courses and published by the Belgian archives administration show that, on the contrary, a great amount of experience can be obtained in an archival school. But practical exercises can only be fitted into the curriculum of the archival school if the latter is not geographically separated from an archival depository.

Considering the variety of archival schools established and programs offered, any attempt at generalization may seem presumptuous; moreover, the writer of this report must be on his guard lest he be partial to the institute to which he devoted part of his work or consider it representative of a common European development. If, nevertheless, he tries to summarize the results of so much experimenting in the field of archival education, the following conclusions appear particularly noteworthy to him:

1. Training courses are needed because otherwise soundness and uniformity of archival procedure cannot be reached in a given country.

2. Postappointment training, generally less desirable because the professional fitness of the appointee remains untested, should at least by systematic and planned.

3. An archival school designed for preappointment training will hardly flourish unless it has some kind of educational monopoly or, at least, conveys upon its graduates a definite advantage with regard to future appointments.

4. Archival schools should not confine their curricula to strictly archival matters but should combine them with broad training in advanced methods of research in history and related fields.

5. The social sciences should be included in the training program to a larger extent than has been done in most European countries in order that archivists may be better equipped to deal with modern records.

6. Study of and instruction in the history of record making and record administration are as necessary for the archivist of our times as was diplomatics for our predecessors.

7. Archival training should include laboratory work and, in order to make this possible, the schools should be established in or near an archives building.

8. On the other hand, teaching should be carried on in co-operation with a university in order to promote the maintenance of high scholarly standards.

ERNST POSNER