

## Le Stage Technique International d'Archives: An Historical Overview and Future Prospects

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On 5 November 1951 the first Stage Technique International d'Archives (International Program on Archives) opened its doors. Its creator, Charles Braibant, then director-general of the French Archives Nationales, had set two objectives—strengthening the growing cooperation among archivists around the world, and introducing foreign professionals to the applied methods of the French archives. These goals reflect the personality of one man and a particular time. Thirty-six years later, this program is a well-recognized international institution, in which almost eight hundred archivists from nearly ninety different countries have participated. As a brief review of the history of this international program, this article intends to examine the missions which have been attributed to it, to analyze the present in order to grasp better the objectives for the future.

The first objective was to reinforce international cooperation among professional archivists. In the context of the immediate postwar years, archivists, especially those from the warring nations, felt the need to initiate an international cooperation which previously had not existed. They held a congress, open to all, in 1950 and created on this occasion the International Council on Archives, a forum for comparison of their theories and traditions. The following year, Braibant, who was the principal ini-

tiator of this new direction, decided to organize at the Archives Nationales a professional program open to foreign archivists and students.

Each participant would present the steps taken by his or her country's archives to administer documents, arrange and describe them, and make them available. The possibility of a better harmonization of definitions, principles, and methods resulting from this work was anticipated.<sup>1</sup>

During that year, six foreign *stagiaires*, or participants, from Argentina, Greece, Haiti, Lebanon, England, and Brazil, were met in Paris by a young conservator, Robert-Henri Bautier. They joined fourteen Frenchmen, all students in their last year at the Ecole des Chartes. Together, they attended about fifty sessions on the history, content, organization, and methods of French and foreign archives, and participated in exchanges of views following these sessions. They divided their free time between the Sorbonne and other scholarly establishments, where they could follow courses related to the lessons given at the Stage; museums and libraries where they could discover certain aspects of French culture; and archival repositories where they could carry out personal research or research on behalf of their home countries.

The interest of this trial year has been confirmed continually in the following years,

<sup>1</sup>See correspondence, 30 March 1951, from the director-general of the French Archives Nationales and president of the International Council on Archives in the Archives Nationales, series ABXXXII, carton 1, file 1.

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Participants in the first Stage Technique International d'Archives, 1952. At the center of the first row is Charles Braibant, director-general of the Archives de France and founder of the Stage. Photo courtesy of Archives Nationales de France.

as the foreign participation at these *stages* has increased rapidly, fluctuating from fifteen to forty archivists and averaging between twenty and twenty-five. An appropriate and useful directory of all former participants in the Stage will be published at the time of the XI International Congress on Archives in Paris in August 1988. Table 1 shows clearly how truly international the Stage has become.

In addition to the exchange of experiences among archivists from countries with long archival traditions, it is noteworthy that functionaries from new African countries and from Asia have come to Paris to search for archival principles and professional training. In Paris they have found assistance, not only for the administration of their new archives, but also for the implementation of legislation and necessary institu-

tions. The establishment, under the guidance of Unesco, of regional archival schools, notably in Africa—in Senegal for the French-speaking countries and in Ghana for anglophone countries—has modified this situation.<sup>2</sup> Now, no matter what their geographic origin, only professional archivists are selected annually to come to the Stage. See the appendix for an explanation of admissions requirements and procedures.

It would be quite pretentious to imagine that all of the results of international co-operation are from this program, since the International Council on Archives and its programs and publications are officially an inspiration and support for the Stage. But, it must be added, often the people involved in these efforts are former *stagiaires*. In the ICA they continue their debates from their time in Paris, in an ongoing spirit of har-

<sup>2</sup>These are the Ecole des Bibliothécaires, Archivistes et Documentalistes (EBAD) at the University of Dakar in Senegal, and the Department of Library and Archival Studies at the University of Ghana.

**Table 1**

**Le Stage Technique International d'Archives  
1951-1987  
Foreign Participants Classified by Country**

Afghanistan 5	Finland 2	Nigeria 6
Albania 4	Gabon 7	Norway 1
Algeria 10	Ghana 1	The Netherlands 24
Argentina 8	Greece 5	Peru 1
Australia 2	Guinea 1	The Philippines 1
Austria 2	Haiti 6	Poland 36
Belgium 40	Hungary 8	Portugal 7
Benin 6	Iceland 1	Romania 23
Brazil 30	India 20	Rwanda 1
Bulgaria 17	Iran 4	Senegal 19
Burkina Faso 4	Ireland 5	South Africa 1
Burundi 1	Israel 5	Spain 38
Cameroon 3	Italy 40	Sudan 1
Canada 49	Ivory Coast 8	Sweden 7
Central African Republic 3	Japan 5	Switzerland 18
Chad 3	Jordan 1	Syria 6
Chile 2	Kenya 1	Thailand 2
Columbia 1	Laos 1	Togo 2
Comoros 2	Lebanon 13	Tunisia 8
Congo 2	Luxembourg 3	Turkey 8
Costa Rica 2	Madagascar 3	United Arab Emirates 1
Cuba 2	Malaysia 2	United Kingdom 1
Czechoslovakia 28	Mali 6	USSR 15
Denmark 5	Mauritius 4	Uruguay 2
Dominican Republic 2	Mexico 11	USA 5
Ecuador 2	Monaco 4	Venezuela 2
Federal Republic of Germany 89	Morocco 7	Vietnam 8
	Nepal 2	Yugoslavia 22
	Niger 2	Zaire 5
		<hr/> Total 776

mony inspired by the common training acquired at the Stage. These later encounters contribute in part to the harmonization of national archivists.

The second objective of the program is to orient foreign archivists to French archival methods. This international archival program does not have as its objective the presentation of any universal archival principle, or the presentation of a catalog of diverse doctrines and foreign techniques. Rather, the ensemble of archival matters within the French context constitutes the substance of the subjects taught.

The Stage has always taken place in Paris at the Archives Nationales. The administration of the Archives of France has assumed the responsibility for this program since its creation, and has been concerned about providing service to the international community and promoting its own archival traditions. In 1952, Dr. Johannes Papritz, director of the State Archives at Marburg and *stagiaire* that year, remarked, not without humor, that the Archives of France could “record a veritable victory—in the future, the international technical language for archives would be French and the French norms and organizations would be the point of departure for international conversations.”<sup>3</sup>

With more modesty, in 1988 it must be admitted that the exclusive use of French limits the participation of certain countries, notably anglophone countries, and it has weakened the theoretical exchanges. In addition, economics have made it difficult to invite a great number of foreign lecturers. Fortunately, the *stagiaires* are all experienced professionals, and it is fruitful for them to relate their varied backgrounds to

the body of doctrine which is developed, formalized, standardized, and implemented in the ensemble of French archival practices. It would not be at all the same if it were a matter of providing to the students an elementary orientation, which would necessarily have to relate closely to the cultural and economic situation in their home countries, where they would later practice their profession.

In a very general sense, there is inevitable evidence that the formation of archivists is diverse and uneven, and, despite the progress made since the establishment in 1976 of a committee for professional training within the ICA, “the opinions are divided when it comes to the very utility of any such formation, and among those who believe in it, there is no consensus about the duration, the content, or the level of education.”<sup>4</sup>

In France, for example, all professional-level conservators have been students at the Ecole des Chartes, which was established in 1821 to train generations of archivists and scholars. All students upon graduation have acquired a high level of expertise in diplomatics, paleography, philology in romance languages, and archaeology. If they have chosen an archival career, they must complete their apprenticeship by participating in the Stage Technique International d’Archives, which, since its inception, has provided a more direct contact with the administrative and technical realities of their future careers.<sup>5</sup> It is apparent that, even in French-speaking countries, the curriculum is most often quite different, but it must be emphasized that it is not the role of the Stage to ensure the basic education.

<sup>3</sup>See the thirteen-page report on the Stage, in the Archives Nationales, series ABXXXII, carton 1, which was published in *Das Archiv*, February 1953.

<sup>4</sup>“Rapport sur la Mise en Place d’un Comité de la Formation Professionnelle au sein du Conseil International des Archives” (1976), 1; see also Charles Kecskemeti, “Contrastes et Nuances. Réflexions sur la Formation des Archivistes,” *Miscellanea Carlos Wyffels* (Brussels, 1987), 245–53.

<sup>5</sup>This participation in the Stage has been obligatory since 1951. See the decrees of 13 October 1956 and 28 May 1969, and the decisions of 15 December 1969 and 17 November 1981.



The closing ceremony of the Stage in 1987. From right to left are Jean Favier, director-general of the Archives de France; Eckhart Franz, director of the state archives of Hesse (Federal Republic of Germany); Oscar Gauye, director of the Swiss Federal Archives; and an unidentified Stage participant from Chile. Photo courtesy of Archives Nationales de France.

### The Program and Schedule of the Annual Sessions

The students of the *Ecole des Chartes* participate in a three-month internship in a provincial archive in France. Foreign *stagiaires* who wish to complement the theoretical content of the Stage with a practicum join the students of the *Ecole des Chartes* in this internship program, which takes place either before or after the Stage itself. For the majority of the foreigners, however, the dates of the Stage are set within the second trimester of the calendar year, at present from the beginning of April to the end of June.<sup>6</sup>

The organization of the Stage is flexible, in order to enable each participant to engage in the program à la carte according to his expertise and interests. As a general rule, the sessions take place in the morning, fol-

lowed by discussions during which participants may relate professional experiences or experiences of colleagues in the home country. The summaries of all of the papers are collected and duplicated for each year. Field trips to various public and private archival repositories in major research and business establishments complement the theoretical lectures.

During the past few years, the general trend in pedagogy has led to a reduction in the number and length of formal lectures, replaced by newer types of sessions. This newer format focuses the attention of the audience and presents the information in summary. The formal lecture is limited to one hour to allow time, after a break, for an organized debate among participants who specialize in the topic of the day. It has also seemed necessary to increase the num-

<sup>6</sup>This arrangement began in 1988; previous sessions met from January through March.

ber of practicums in areas such as appraisal, arrangement and description, text analysis, indexing, and automation. More and more, there will be invitations to archivists with specialized expertise to come to the Stage to present their services. These adjustments reflect the concerns in current archival education, which demonstrate that professional knowledge is not academic knowledge, that it concerns not only theoretical knowledge but also must include a *savoir-faire* and *savoir-vivre*. What is more, the definition of professional competence is eminently evolutionary; in accordance, the program of the Stage has evolved considerably since 1951, following the changes in society and according to the needs of the profession.

For example, in 1987 the entire program was divided into three-week periods, each comprised of formal lectures, practicums, and field trips. The first period concerned the management of records, from the acquisition by the records office to the preparation and promotion for their use, including the following topics: classification principles, appraisal, preparation of traditional finding aids, content analysis and indexing, documentary data-processing in records centers, provision of access in French archives, and records management.

The second period concerned the organization of types of archival offices and their missions in the public as well as the private sectors. These included archives in French territories, municipal archives, business archives, labor and business archives, the international organization of historical research, archives in developing countries, the administrative organization of the French archives, and the archival control, acquisition, and management of archives in central administrations and in national, public establishments.

The third group of sessions addressed records which have special requirements either because of their physical characteristics or of their institutional origin. These included audio-visual archives, sound archives, machine-readable records, and archives of former colonies.

The theme of the fourth set of sessions was current and essential techniques. Topics have been archives buildings, duplication by microfilm, seals, conservation workshops, and information management.

A fifth and final series of working meetings focused on the multiple administrative and cultural tasks of the archivist, including administrative responsibilities and personal interaction in an archival setting, cultural programs in local archives, archival museums and historical exhibits, public relations, and public lectures by archivists.

Finally, within the course of the Stage, a three-day study trip is offered, which enables the participants to observe first-hand the operation of diverse types of archives. Thus, in 1987 the *stagiaires* traveled to the south of France, where they visited departmental archivists at the Archives of Vaucluse in Avignon, the central repository for microfilm in the castle of Espéran, and the overseas archives in Aix-en-Provence. The participants gained exposure to both the most traditional repositories and those which use the most advanced forms of technology and recent historical concepts.

This ensemble of sessions traditionally is enriched by lectures delivered by directors of foreign archives, who speak on aspects of archival experiences in their own countries. Unfortunately, however, these sessions have been few in number.<sup>7</sup>

With the origin of the Stage Technique International d'Archives dating from World War II, a new phase in the focus of the

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<sup>7</sup>In 1987 lectures were given on "Archives, Bibliothèque, et Documentation: l'Expérience Allemande" by Eckhart Franz, director of the state archives of Hesse, and on the Swiss archival system by Oscar Gauye, director of the Swiss Federal Archives.



Stage now seems to be within reach, thanks to new techniques in communication and in accompanying changes in human interaction, be they simultaneous translation or

mobility. In particular, an increase in the number of English-speaking participants would certainly result in enhanced productivity of the Stage.

## **Appendix**

### **Qualifications for Admission**

Admission into the Stage Technique International d'Archives is restricted to archivists who have already acquired some years of archival experience. A knowledge of French is indispensable, since the entire program is conducted in this language.

Applicants should address their request for admission into the program to the Direction des Archives de France, at the following address: Archives Nationales, 60, rue des Francs-Bourgeois, 75141 Paris Cedex 03 France. They should include a curriculum vitae, describing their current responsibilities and their principal interests. The application deadline for each year is January 1.

There are no participation fees. Only the costs of travel, accommodations and meals, and the trip at the end of the Stage are the responsibility of the participants. A certain number of study scholarships are granted to foreign functionaries by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, after the candidates have been approved by the Archives de France.