

Review Essay

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RAMP Studies and Related UNESCO Publications: An International Source for Archival Administration

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Abstract: UNESCO's Paris-based Records and Archives Management Program (RAMP), has sponsored and published many studies of archival institutions, functions, and education that provide a valuable picture of archival practice worldwide. The author reviews selected RAMP publications that have general value for North American archivists in the areas of archival education, appraisal, arrangement and description, reference and access, preservation, government archives, the relevance of other disciplines for archival work, and international archival protocol and standards.

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THE RECORDS AND ARCHIVES Management Program (RAMP), part of the Division of the General Information Program of UNESCO since 1979, exists to “promote the formulation of information policies and plans . . . , promote and disseminate methods, norms and standards for information handling . . . , contribute to the development of information infra-structures . . . , contribute to the development of specialized information systems in the fields of education, culture and communication, and the natural and social sciences . . . , and promote the training and education of specialists in and users of information.” RAMP and its predecessors have amassed a substantial body of literature on these topics since the early 1950s.¹

The focus of this review essay is on the RAMP publications that have general value for North American archivists in the administration of archival institutions, basic archival functions, and archival education. For the purpose of this evaluation, these publications have been arranged into categories of education, appraisal, arrangement and description, reference and access, preservation, government archives, the relevance of other disciplines for archival work, and international archival protocol and standards. Taken as a whole, this publication series represents a view of archival administration that has formidable breadth and depth. Although the quality of the RAMP studies is uneven—their physical presentation often detracts, the intended audience level varies considerably, and some

of the writing and content organization is uneven and confusing—there is no question that this is an extremely important source of information about archival principles and practices.² Its problems are more than offset by excellent international bibliographies and convenient descriptions of archival practice worldwide.

Unfortunately, North American archivists have made little use of these publications. The RAMP studies have been only selectively reviewed and rarely cited, except in annual bibliographies. Other than an occasional essay with an international focus, these publications have been ignored by the *American Archivist* and its contributors. There are but five citations of RAMP publications from 1981 through 1986 in essays published in this journal, and only about a quarter of the RAMP studies have been reviewed. Surprisingly, *Archivaria* has not done much better, reviewing but six of the RAMP studies over the past decade.³ More disturbing than the lack of use by practicing archivists, however, is the apparent avoid-

²Some of the content of the publications is dated, but this is more the result of looking at the series over the past decade. It is unclear how UNESCO determines when publications need to be revised; many of those mentioned here remain in their current lists. There are also, of course, many RAMP publications that serve other functions than those mentioned above. This series has included, for example, national and international archival guides, studies of national (primarily Third World) archival systems and education programs, and feasibility studies regarding the creation of international archival databases. While these publications will be useful to those seeking to understand international archival practice, they will be of less interest to archivists in North America eager to build a comprehensive set of useful primers and research studies on basic archival functions to assist their ongoing work. For a complete list of RAMP publications refer to the Evans bibliography and articles cited in the first footnote.

³I criticize myself for this as well and freely admit that I have not made adequate use of these publications; in my own recent review of American archival literature (“American Archival Literature: Expanding Horizons and Continuing Needs, 1901-1987,” *American Archivist* 50 (Summer 1987): 306-23) I should have at least paid attention to American archivists who have made major contributions to this series.

¹Frank B. Evans, *Writings on Archives Published By and With the Assistance of UNESCO: A RAMP Study, PGI-83/WS/5* (Paris: UNESCO, 1983). The quotation used here is included in the beginning of every RAMP publication. For a more detailed analysis of UNESCO archival activities, refer to Evans, “UNESCO and Archives Development,” *UJISLAA* 4 (July-September 1982): 159-76, and Evans, “Promoting Archives and Research: A Study in International Cooperation,” *American Archivist* 50 (Winter 1987): 48-65.

ance of these publications by North American archival educators, perpetuating a continuing ignorance of these publications by individuals entering the profession. In an examination of syllabi of twenty-six basic archival courses taught in 1986/87, not one listed a RAMP study as required or recommended reading. Perhaps this is due to some difficulty in acquiring these publications, even though the RAMP studies are supposedly free from UNESCO. Very few institutions in the United States even seem to own copies of them; a search on RLIN under the title phrase "RAMP Studies" resulted in only seven hits.

The RAMP Studies

Education. A major focus of the RAMP studies is education, and these studies tend to be the broadest in scope of the series' tomes and a logical place to begin their review. Most of the publications in this category concern the international "harmonization" (their term for unification) of archival education and related curricula and assessments of educational practices and needs in various countries. Regardless of their actual impact on archival education worldwide, these studies represent a valuable source for North American archivists for placing education in a broader international and professional context. North American archivists, especially those in the United States, have tended to write about various aspects of archival education with little sense of, or regard for, international trends. A decade ago, Michael Cook wrote that "though the archivists of the USA and Canada often complain of their failure to produce a professional training institute on the European model, or a regular full-time course on the British model, their achievements are not negligible in the field of archival training." Cook goes on to note that it is "interesting that it [this system] has not been copied abroad at all despite the fact that of all the alternative models this

is the one which could be set up with the least input of full-time teaching staff and capital investment."⁴ While an international archivist can bring such a perspective to our educational programs, American archivists seemingly lack sufficient knowledge of foreign archival education and training to be able to make such comparisons.

In these publications there are also useful projections of needs in education and training, descriptions of available curriculum materials, discussions about archival educators, characterizations of how such education and training is handled internationally, comparisons between archives and records management education, and model curricula for educating archivists in preservation and automation.⁵

Appraisal. It is perhaps in the area of appraisal that RAMP studies have made the most significant contribution to international archival literature. The RAMP publications constitute an excellent source for the definition and description of this important archival function; they also provide

⁴*The Education and Training of Archivists—Status Report of Archival Training Programmes and Assessment of Manpower Needs*, PGI/E.T./HARM/5 (Paris: UNESCO, August 1979), 5-6. See also Cook, *Guidelines for Curriculum Development in Records Management and the Administration of Modern Archives: A RAMP Study*, PGI-82/WS/16 (Paris: UNESCO, 1982).

⁵Cook, *Education and Training*; Bruno Delmas, *The Training of Archivists: Analysis of the Study Programmes of Different Countries and Thoughts on the Possibilities of Harmonization*, PGI/E.T./HARM/6 (Paris: UNESCO, 15 October 1979); Cook, *Guidelines for Curriculum Development in Records Management and the Administration of Modern Archives: A RAMP Study*, PGI-82/WS/16 (Paris: UNESCO, 1982); Brenda White, comp., *Directory of Audiovisual Materials for Use in Records Management and Archives Administration Training*, PGI-82/WS/8 (Paris: UNESCO, May 1982); Yash Pal Kathpalia, *A Model Curriculum for the Training of Specialists in Document Preservation and Restoration: A RAMP Study with Guidelines*, PGI-84/WS/2 (Paris: UNESCO, 1984); Meyer H. Fishbein, *A Model Curriculum for the Education and Training of Archivists in Automation* (Paris: UNESCO, 1983).

useful appraisal guidelines for specific types of records. Harold Naugler's manual on machine-readable records, for example, is one of the most informative regarding the appraisal of computerized statistical files. The core of this publication consists of two lengthy chapters on the appraisal of these records, which describe the "evaluation of the information contained in the records (content analysis), as well as an evaluation of the technical aspects of the records (technical analysis)."⁶ Content analysis is similar to traditional appraisal, but technical analysis—looking at such issues as record readability, accompanying textual documentation of the system, and hardware/software implications for acquisition, processing, and preservation—is peculiar to these kinds of records and complicates their appraisal.

Sam Kula's manual on the appraisal of moving images is one of the few available publications on this subject. Among its strengths is a section on appraisal standards and archival theory, wrestling with the thorny issue of the selection of moving images in the light of serious neglect of this matter. He writes that "despite its comparative youth as a means of human communication . . . , moving images have suffered so extensively from 'benign neglect' by archivists, librarians and museum curators, that all moving images produced before 1930 can be regarded as incunabula." He describes how "moving images seldom possess evidentiary value . . . but they always possess some informational value." As he summarizes, the "appraisal of moving image records is a contentious issue," but he provides a useful base for developing more consistent standards.⁷

There are other publications on the appraisal of specific types of records. The volume on the appraisal of sound recordings makes a major contribution to the archival literature, starting with the observation that "there is little formal background in the way of recommendations, published guidelines, or criteria on which this work can be based," and noting that the archival "literature does not concentrate on problems of sound archives to any marked extent." As the authors note, most archival functions including appraisal of audiovisual materials "are different to the extent that they require modification or adaptation of traditional archival practices. . . . Many of the fundamental differences relate to the content of the record and how it is acquired and organized."⁸ William H. Leary's contribution to appraisal literature with his study on photographs is noteworthy because it deftly handles a record type that most archivists have tried to save comprehensively. "Photo archivists have developed an unusually strong impulse to avoid thinking about the need for selection. After all, we have told each other, the most urgent task is to save what remains of the early photographic legacy. . . . Increasingly, however, the enormous bulk of twentieth century photography will force photo archivists to confront the necessity of appraisal, meaning selection." Leary's volume includes specific appraisal criteria for photographs (age, subject, uniqueness, identification, quality, quantity, accessibility, and the photographer), and special features and needs of government and non-government photographs.⁹

In addition to studies on the appraisal of

⁶Harold Naugler, *The Archival Appraisal of Machine-Readable Records: A RAMP Study with Guidelines*, PGI-84/WS/27 (Paris: UNESCO, November 1984), 37.

⁷Sam Kula, *The Archival Appraisal of Moving Images: A RAMP Study with Guidelines*, PGI-83/WS/18 (Paris: UNESCO, 1983), 35-36, 92.

⁸Helen P. Harrison, with a contribution from Rolf L. Schuurmsma, *The Archival Appraisal of Sound Recordings and Related Materials: A RAMP Study with Guidelines*, PGI-87/WS/1 (Paris: UNESCO, February 1987), 1, 22.

⁹*The Archival Appraisal of Photographs: A RAMP Study With Guidelines*, PGI-85/WS/10 (Paris: UNESCO, 1985), iii.

specific record types, the RAMP series includes some publications devoted to the use of certain methodologies for identification and selection of records with archival value. Felix Hull's brief writing on sampling is typical of this RAMP genre, providing a theoretical framework for the method along with some international case studies of its application. The scope of this publication also includes cartographic, audio-visual, and machine-readable records.¹⁰

Arrangement and Description. If there is any gap in archival administration in the RAMP studies it is the arrangement and description of archival records. Whereas appraisal has been accorded a large number of publications, only a few have appeared on this topic. Françoise Hildesheimer's study on the processing of French architectural records devotes as much attention to other basic archival functions as it does to arrangement and description because it is mainly an effort to ensure that such records are better used.¹¹ Archivists looking for guidance on this topic will be better served by the Society of American Archivists' publications and the reports of the Canadian and American working groups on descriptive standards.

Preservation. Preservation, not surprisingly, is another basic feature of the RAMP publications. The major entry here is a 1984 volume on the preservation and restoration of paper records and books, conveniently summarizing a large international literature. This publication describes the nature and variety of paper, characteristics of inks, the causes and effects of deterioration, methods of preventive conservation, and restoration.¹² The increasing concern of ar-

chivists for preserving photographic materials is assisted by Klaus Hendriks' highly technical and useful volume. As he states in his introduction, this publication summarizes the "currently available knowledge" on this subject in order to "serve as a reference guide to maintaining, preserving and restoring photographic collections" and it compares favorably with other well-known publications on this subject.¹³ The RAMP emphasis on preservation is rounded off with two volumes on disaster planning and response, a recent major area of concern for archivists. Sally Buchanan, an authority in library preservation, has written a basic comprehensive manual on disaster planning that can be used effectively by any archival program to develop such a plan.¹⁴ An excellent companion piece is John M. McCleary's study on vacuum freeze-drying as a method to deal with water-damaged archival materials.¹⁵

Reference and Use. As all archivists are aware, their ultimate mission is to see that archival materials are accessible for use and are actually used. A small portion of the RAMP publications has been devoted to this theme. The prominent European archivist, Michel Duchein, has contributed a study on

vation and Restoration of Paper Records and Books: A RAMP Study With Guidelines, PGI-84/WS/25 (Paris: UNESCO, 1984).

¹³*The Preservation Restoration of Photographic Materials in Archives and Libraries: A RAMP Study with Guidelines*, PGI-84/WS/1 (Paris: UNESCO, 1984), viii.

¹⁴*Disaster Planning: Preparedness and Recovery for Libraries and Archives*, PGI-88/WS/6 (Paris: UNESCO, 1988). A full review of this study appeared in the Spring 1990 issue of the *American Archivist*.

¹⁵*Vacuum Freeze-Drying, a Method Used to Salvage Water-Damaged Archival and Library Materials: A RAMP Study with Guidelines*, PGI-87/WS/7 (Paris: UNESCO, 1987). There is also a basic volume on the administration of document reprographic services, ranging from general management of such services to costs-analysis and technical considerations; see James A. Keene and Michael Roper, *Planning, Equipping and Staffing a Document Reprographic Service: A RAMP Study with Guidelines*, PGI-84/WS/8 (Paris: UNESCO, 1984).

¹⁰Felix Hull, *The Use of Sampling Techniques in the Retention of Records: A RAMP Study with Guidelines*, PGI-81/WS/26 (Paris: UNESCO, 1981).

¹¹*The Processing of Architects' Records: A Case-Study; France*, PGI-86/WS/13 (Paris: UNESCO, March 1987).

¹²Carmen Crespo and Vicente Vinas, *The Preser-*

obstacles to the use of historical records. Duchein has included chapters on the origin and development of access to archives, the right to information in archives and its limits, "material obstacles" (such as providing for their physical protection) blocking use of archives, and means of diffusing archival information (removal, reproduction, and publication).¹⁶ There is another RAMP publication on the use of archives in education, summarizing the objectives for using archives for teaching, the various roles that archival repositories can play in this area, and methods for using archival materials for educational purposes.¹⁷

Government Archives and Records. A number of the RAMP publications are specifically intended to assist in strengthening government archival repositories and programs. There is the survey instrument published not only to gather information on archival and records management systems and services worldwide but also "to promote and encourage adoption of the concepts and terminology, the definitions and activities, and the units of measurement they incorporate."¹⁸ Another study examines current archival legislation and regulations in more than one hundred nations. It includes a "set of guidelines to assist in planning or reviewing the legal and administrative instruments essential for viable systems and services." This is a valuable international supplement to the guidelines and principles issued by the National Association of Government Archives

and Records Administrators familiar to archivists in North America. Unlike some of the RAMP publications that provide lengthy country-by-country lists, this publication is more interpretative and easier to use.¹⁹

An archivist familiar to North Americans, James B. Rhoads, has written a brief study intended "to provide information to decision makers about the essential character and value of archives, and about the procedures and programmes that should govern the management of both archives and current records." He includes chapters on the value of archival materials, the "economic and social utility of records management systems and services," other aspects of archives and records management programs such as administrative placement and relationships to non-government records creators, and how archives and records management fit into the information professions.²⁰

And, finally, the RAMP studies include a volume on the administration of scientific and technological information in government records. Except for its international focus on government records, this publication is less useful than the final report of the Joint Committee on the Archives of Science and Technology and some subsequent publications on these records.²¹

Other Disciplines and Countries. Another group of RAMP publications considers principles, practices, and perspectives from other disciplines and nations that are valuable for archivists and their repository

¹⁶*Obstacles to the Access, Use and Transfer of Information from Archives: A RAMP Study*, PGI-83/WS/20 (Paris: UNESCO, 1983).

¹⁷Eckhart G. Franz, *Archives and Education: A RAMP Study With Guidelines*, PGI-86/WS/18 (Paris: UNESCO, 1986), 6.

¹⁸This publication seeks information on legislation and regulations, personnel, budget, buildings and equipment, holdings, operations, services and records centers. Frank B. Evans and Eric Ketelaar, *A Guide for Surveying Archival and Records Management Systems and Services: A RAMP Study*, PGI-83/WS/6 (Paris: UNESCO, 1983).

¹⁹Eric Ketelaar, *Archival and Records Management Legislation and Regulations: A RAMP Study With Guidelines*, PGI-85/WS/9 (Paris: UNESCO, 1985).

²⁰*The Role of Archives and Records Management in National Information Systems: A RAMP Study*, PGI-83/WS/21 (Paris: UNESCO, 1983), 1.

²¹This publication provides a few pages on each basic archival and records management function in the administration of these records. K. D. G. Wimalaratne, *Scientific and Technological Information in Transactional Files in Government Records and Archives: A RAMP Study*, PGI-84/WS/7 (Paris: UNESCO, 1984).

ries. The publication on oral history and oral tradition is a cogent introduction to these topics for archivists and the most important of this variety of UNESCO volume. The authors present an intriguing hierarchy of source materials—transactional records, selective records, recollections, reflections, and analysis and conclusions—that fix oral history and tradition as “selective records. . . highly valued as historical evidence for their contemporary character, but. . . [with] evidential value. . . somewhat less than that of transactional records.”²²

Not surprisingly, RAMP studies and other UNESCO publications have also emphasized international archival protocol and standards. One publication describes agreements for resolving international archival claims and providing for the transfer of archival materials.²³ Another examines the relevance of international standards and guidelines for archival administration and records management in a broad array of management concerns and archival functions.²⁴ There is also a country-by-country survey of the admissibility of microforms as evidence,²⁵ and a survey of the nature of archives journals worldwide.²⁶ Finally, Charles Dollar has added a study on the management of electronic records in international organizations. Dollar includes a description of trends and opportunities that

these technologies provide for archivists and records managers. The study also includes a lengthy assessment of the “status of electronic records management and archives in international organizations,” concluding that in these organizations “virtually no attention has been paid to the consequence of an inevitable increasing use of computers that will initially duplicate and eventually displace most paper-based information systems.”²⁷

Conclusion

By now, the many values of these publications for North American archivists should be evident. The strengths and weaknesses of the RAMP series can be seen in its basic reader on archival and records management, which provides a fitting place for concluding this brief essay. This anthology was published “to help meet the basic need for instructional material in both introductory and advanced courses for archivists, records managers, and other information specialists.” The compiler strives to reflect the diversity of practices and policies, while stressing the “basic principles, practices and problems which unite all archivists and records managers in a common profession.”²⁸ The volume includes forty-one previously published essays by prominent archivists on the role of archives, basic principles, legal problems, professional training, the relationship between archives and records management, appraisal and disposal, arrangement and description, access and reference service, public programs, conservation, the impact of modern technology on archives, and international archival developments.

²²William W. Moss and Peter C. Mazikana, *Archives, Oral History and Oral Tradition: A RAMP Study*, PGI-86/WS/2 (Paris: UNESCO, January 1986), 6.

²³Charles Kecskeméti and Evert Van Laar, *Model Bilateral and Multilateral Agreements and Conventions Concerning the Transfer of Archives*, PGI-81/WS/3 (Paris: UNESCO, 4 May 1981).

²⁴James B. Rhoads, *The Applicability of UNISIST Guidelines and ISO International Standards to Archives Administration and Records Management: A RAMP Study*, PGI-82/WS/4 (Paris: UNESCO, 1982).

²⁵Georges Weill, *The Admissibility of Microforms As Evidence: A RAMP Study*, PGI-81/WS/25 (Paris: UNESCO, 31 January 1982).

²⁶Brenda White, *Archives Journals: A Study of Their Coverage by Primary and Secondary Sources*, PGI-81/WS/10 (Paris: UNESCO, 1981).

²⁷*Electronic Records Management and Archives in International Organizations: A RAMP Study With Guidelines*, PGI-86/WS/12 (Paris: UNESCO, 1986), 112.

²⁸Peter Walne, comp., *Modern Archives Administration and Records Management: A RAMP Reader*, PGI-85/WS/32 (Paris: UNESCO, December 1985).

North American archivists long have lamented the absence of a basic text on archival administration, many relying on the complete SAA Basic Manual Series or, more indicative of the problem, a reader recently produced by the Society of Australian Archivists. The main contribution of this RAMP reader is its international focus, its coverage of the full range of archival principles and practices, and its blending of North American writings into the international literature. This is, of course, typical of the strengths of the RAMP series. The weaknesses of the reader are the inclusion

of some antiquated essays and the too-brief attention given to some major issues.²⁹ Still, if North American archivists neglect to acquire copies of the other RAMP studies, this RAMP reader will enhance their basic bookshelf.

²⁹A couple of examples will suffice to support my point. In the section on modern technology and archival administration, a nearly forty-year-old essay on microfilm is included. The section on archival training only includes Michael Cook's essay on an international standard, missing the opportunity to contrast various national approaches to archival education.