

International Symposium Reports

Response to the Minister's Speech at the Opening of the Maastricht Symposium "Archives and Europe Without Boundaries"

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IT IS A GREAT HONOUR for me to reply to the speech by the honourable chairman on the opening of this symposium on the first centenary of the oldest society of archivists in the world. The theme, "Archives and Europe Without Boundaries," is interesting and well chosen and it is significant that an archivist from the Third World is to respond to the speech of the chairman.

The search for a united Europe started about forty years ago as the countries of Europe began to recover from the devastation of the Second World War and to consider the prospects of their common future. From the core of a small group of countries agreeing to set up common economic institutions, the movement has grown in size and scope to encompass the whole of West-

ern Europe and now parts of Eastern Europe as well. The economic and political significance of traditional boundaries is fast disappearing and the realization of your dream of a united Europe is at hand. We rejoice with you.

Developments in the Third World, particularly in Africa, have followed a more tortuous path. The colonization of the peoples of Africa involved the destruction of pre-colonial systems, the breakdown of relationships between peoples, and the imposition of new state systems and socioeconomic linkages based on imperial interests. The boundaries of the new colonial countries were artificial creations putting communities asunder. The colonial system itself provided what new framework there

was for regional cooperation, through imperial arrangements like British West Africa, French West Africa, and the like.

Starting in the late fifties the decolonization era brought about the entrenchment of the boundaries between countries. Since independence there have been moves to create new regional economic communities, but progress has been inhibited by both the survival of old colonial allegiances and the weakness of the political will to forge a new unity. Judged by present trends, therefore, the prospect of an Africa without boundaries appears remote.

However, the new pace of global events may well force the governments and peoples of Africa to reappraise their future in the emerging world order and to recognize the need for a determined and accelerated movement towards continental unity. Such a development would surely pose serious and exciting challenges for the African archivist and I believe that we can benefit from your current experience.

Permit me to take this opportunity to make a few comments on our experience in the development of archival institutions in Africa, with particular reference to English-speaking West Africa. Although the British had a long established archival tradition, it was not until 1914 that the British Colonial Office showed any concern over public archives in the West African colonies. Even then the belated anxiety shown by the home government was not shared by all colonial administrations. It is true that the two world wars intervened at critical moments, but it is doubtful if some of the British administrators in West Africa could have done anything about their records. The archival institutions established in Nigeria in 1954 and Sierra-Leone in 1957 came about as a result of national pressures on the colonial administrators. In Ghana the decision to establish an archives in 1957 was taken spontaneously as a result of the deliberate exercise of sovereignty by an independent state.

Factors Affecting the Administration of Archives. Archival institutions in English-speaking West African countries are not islands in themselves. They are part and parcel of the society in which they exist and as such share some of the ills of these societies. Among these are low levels of public awareness and poor management. Archivists recognize the importance of archives and the role they can play and are playing in the development of our society. But do the people who pay for the maintenance of archives and sustain the archival profession see archives in the same way as we do? The answer is no. In English-speaking West African countries, archives are still largely regarded as low priority, if not luxury institutions and the reason is not far-fetched. During elections, where you have them, government archives are not usually campaign issues for politicians; you cannot use archives to catch votes. And the largely illiterate society does not appreciate the value of records. Thus in West Africa, archives are the concern of a few people, mostly academics and litigants. In these circumstances, it takes imagination, enterprise, and strong leadership to make a success of archives administration.

The Administration and Archives. The administration of national archives is usually governed by laws, laws which depend largely on the nature of the country's political organization and history. The basic archive laws in English-speaking West African countries are fossils from the colonial era and do not adequately address contemporary needs. However, there are signs of change. Ghana has renewed its laws and Nigeria is on the verge of passing a new law which will remove all the inadequacies; a law which will strengthen the records management program and open new awareness for oral tradition programs.

The Training of Archivists. In the sub-region there is no institution where archives science forms part of the curriculum for a degree. The archives in Ghana runs post

graduate and certificate courses in archives administration. In Nigeria some universities have incorporated archaeology but none has done the same for archives. A major problem of archivists in the sub-region is the lack of training in the specific skills of archives administration and records management. There are no training facilities for the technical sub-professional staff either. Unfortunately there is the general feeling that technical work is something for drop-outs. The result is that the quality of people who take to technical activities is not as high as it should be, yet it is this group of people who handle the operation and maintenance of machines.

Archives Preservation and Management. Archives preservation and management in the tropics present peculiar problems. The archivist has to wage an eternal war against the forces of destruction and fight constantly against the natural agents that destroy records, unlike his counterpart in Europe. The deterioration of paper takes place faster in higher temperatures and since paper is made of vegetable, paper deterioration is very much assisted by high humidity. West Africa is also noted for its proliferation of insects, some of which are harmful to paper. It is therefore obvious that the physical defence of records is very important to archivists in West Africa who are faced with a host of agents that are harmful to paper.

Infrastructure Inadequacy. The level of infrastructure provided for archives administration and records management is low. Among English-speaking West African countries only Nigeria has archives buildings built for that purpose. Sometimes the low technological development affects the type of the equipment. Suppliers in some cases have been less than honest in dealing with their African clients. Obsolete machines have been sold to the Third World

countries. We in Nigeria have received equipment without essential spare parts and it was only at great expense that we succeeded in obtaining the missing parts.

Conclusion. Coming finally to the collection, content, and use of records, I must confess that while significant success has been recorded in a few areas, a lot remains to be done. Thus there is need for the development of methodology for the collection of the oral tradition, as well as a need for the promotion of culture and the preservation of archives in both government and private sectors.

The need for closer cooperation among archivists on a continental scale has been recognized, but action has been mainly on a regional basis. Occasional workshops have been organized. In 1984 and 1985 archivists from East Africa were hosted by the government of Zanzibar. The East African Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives also organized regional seminars on various aspects of archives practice. The governments of the region hosted such workshops and seminars with the assistance of the International Council on Archives. In West Africa the National Archives of Senegal recently organized a workshop on conservation. In 1990 Senegal celebrated the centenary of the archives founding. The occasion brought together heads of archival institutions in West Africa to share their experiences. There is also the Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives (WARBICA) of which Nigeria is the immediate past president.

It is my hope that these various groups can come together to establish an effective Pan African archives organization, so that as Africa marches towards greater unity we may be able to meet to talk about Archives in Africa Without Boundaries.

I want to thank you for the honour done to me and wish you a happy celebration.

International Symposium Reports

Harmonization to Meet the Challenge of Change

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ON THE OCCASION OF its centennial, the Royal Netherlands Society of Archivists gave itself a birthday party in the form of an international archival symposium held in Maastricht in October 1991.¹ It is very Dutch to give your own birthday party. The symposium, "Archives and Europe Without Boundaries," was, in fact, the second such celebration. In April 1991, in the northern Dutch city of Groningen, the party was a family affair: a two-day symposium for Dutch archivists with the theme "One Hundred Years of Saving for the Future." On that occasion a representative of Queen Beatrix announced that the society had been

awarded the appellation *Koninklijke* (Royal) and could henceforth call itself the *Koninklijke Vereniging van Archivarissen in Nederland* (Royal Netherlands Society of Archivists).

The celebration in Maastricht was not a family affair, but an international gathering of four hundred archivists from thirty-eight countries. The theme was carefully chosen to allow for a broad discussion of the many archival policies and practices which will require "harmonization" if the European Community is also to be a European archival community. As stated in the conference program,

Part of the theme "Archives and Europe Without Boundaries" originates in the opening of the state borders inside the European Community following 1992. Part of it originates in the effect of recent technological innovations regarding the

¹The author wishes to thank the Bentley Historical Library, the Horace H. Rackham School of Graduate Studies, and the Office of the Vice President for Research at the University of Michigan for the support which enabled her to attend the Maastricht conference and to interview authors presented in this issue.

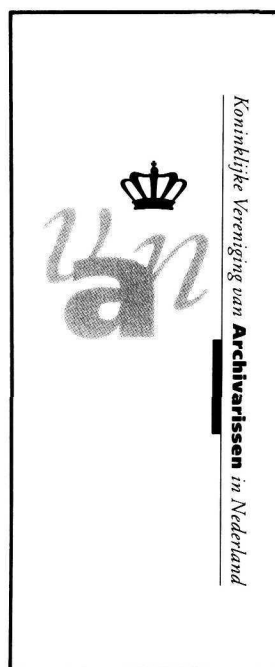
control and use of archives. Central to all this will be the impact of post-1992 Europe on both the historical and cultural identity of regions and nations and on the local and national archive services and their staff and users.

Maastricht was an ideal site—it is situated in a narrow peninsula of the Netherlands which extends south, with Germany to the east and Belgium to the south and west. In Maastricht nationality is blurred. The conference was trilingual, Dutch not included. Probably only the Dutch and the Scandinavians could flaunt their linguistic abilities to such an extent. The symposium was in the “new” style of Dutch professional meetings, frequently used in the Netherlands since a contingent of Dutch archivists came back from the Society of American Archivists meeting in Austin, Texas in 1985 impressed by the advantages of parallel sessions and open discussion. They grafted that New World conference structure onto the Old World congresses of plenary sessions and formal interventions.

The Old World style was apparent in the civilized morning starting time of 9:30, in the ample mid-morning and mid-afternoon pauses, in a leisurely lunch, and in planned evening entertainments. Such a schedule recognizes that important contacts and exchanges of ideas take place in the informality of pauses, in lunch and dinner discussions, in the more relaxed atmosphere of a reception, a concert, a tour.

What was in the air in the formal plenary sessions, in the less formal parallel sessions and discussions, and in the conversations of the pauses and meal times, was change. Change in the form of modification, compromise, amalgamation, or the favored word, “harmonization”: harmonization of archives legislation, procedures, education, access, and professional recognition, a harmonization that would build on the strengths of national archival traditions and expertise.

The Conference Sessions. The first



Logo of the Royal Netherlands Society of Archivists which since April 1991 includes a crown signifying the appellation “Royal” awarded to the society by the Queen on the occasion of their centennial.

plenary and its six subsequent parallel sessions dealt with the archival implications of the changing relationships between citizens and their governments. Hedy d’Ancona, the Dutch Minister of Welfare, Health, and Cultural Affairs, under whose jurisdiction the National Archives of the Netherlands falls, was one of the plenary speakers. She echoed the statement made at the opening session of the conference by the acting national archivist of Nigeria, Comfort Ukwu, who had characterized the boundaries of colonial countries as “artificial creations putting communities asunder.” D’Ancona affirmed that in Europe too, political boundaries may be artificial and less stable than cultural boundaries. She affirmed that it was the duty of archives to document cultures as well as political entities. She drew a further lesson from the Europe of

today: that the democratic control of governments depends on record keeping.

The first set of parallel sessions, also on changing relationships between citizens and government, included sessions on privacy versus freedom of information; the ethics of appraisal; the free flow and loss of information; the role of the creator of records in future research; and the role of archivists of political parties. Trudy Huskamp-Peterson of the United States National Archives and Records Administration and past president of the Society of American Archivists was one of two speakers discussing personal privacy versus freedom of information. Other North American archivists who addressed the symposium included: Francis X. Blouin, Jr., Bentley Historical Library; David Bearman, *Archives & Museum Informatics*; and Frank Evans, National Archives and Records Administration.

The serious dichotomy which European archives face—that of providing archival service to antiquated documents and also to modern records—was the topic of the second plenary, “Antiquarianism or Information Service.” Friedrich P. Kahlenberg, president of the German Bundesarchiv, was chair of the plenary session which introduced these topics. He took the opportunity to remind the conference that it was exactly one year ago to the day that Germany was reunited. He thanked his European colleagues who, he said, had shown interest and support for Germany for forty years. The plenary speakers pointed to the enormous changes in archives during the past half century: changes in the numbers of archival institutions, in the differentiation of documentation, and in the specialization of researcher interests as genealogists, amateur historians, and journalists joined the academics who had been archives’ largest clientele.

The parallel sessions were built around the question, “Is it the role of archives administrations to be guardians of the past or servants of the future?” Separate ses-

sions addressed this topic at both the local and national level of archives services, and for business records and presidential records. The parallel sessions also addressed standardization and new technology from the point of view of archivists and technicians. It was during the parallel session focusing on the national archives service that a contradictory vision became apparent. From the podium there was a plea for the archivist as historical interpreter, not records manager, and for the separation of “classical” archivist from documentalist or records manager. However, from the audience several archivists made the point that future history rests not on documents already in the archives, but on documents in bureaucratic offices, and therefore archivists must also be records managers. They stated that archivists are asked to be professors of culture *and* professionals of information; we may be generalists or specialists, but we are all archivists.

The third series of sessions again explored the image of the archivist, past, present, and future, and related topics, such as the harmonization of archival training within Europe; the focus of archival training for the “generalist” and the “specialist”; accreditation of archival education programs and certification of archivists; and the integration of training with other professions. The plenary session opened with a plea from Ernest Persoons, national archivist of Belgium, for the harmonization of training even beyond the European Community. He advocated a European manual and a global system of records management. Other speakers talked of the difficulty that archivists, at least in the English-speaking world, have had in defining their role and of the lack of harmonization of archival training within the European Community countries.

The parallel sessions discussed the progress which seems to have been made in the training of specialist archivists, for instance archivists working with audio-visual ma-

terials. It was also pointed out that there could be many different ways of looking at specialist training: according to the type of organization creating the records; according to the time period of documents; according to the disciplines creating records; or according to the medium of the records. From the audience came the comment that the best archivist has a mobile spirit, intellectual curiosity, and is a mediator. To this observer from the New World it seemed obvious that the controversy over the image of the archivist and over appropriate archival training to suit differing images was even more strident in the Old World than in the New.

The conference was nearing its end by the fourth series of sessions which dealt with the archivist and archival Europe and which included sessions on the significance of Europe's archival heritage at the local and national levels; the archives of the parliaments of Europe; the European technology industry and archival heritage; safeguarding the archival heritage through legislation, prescription, or persuasion; and preservation/conservation policies, strategies, and implementation. In the plenary session, Eric Ketelaar, national archivist of the Netherlands, discussed the evolving archives policy for the European Community.²

The speakers discussing the archives of the parliaments of Europe tackled some difficult questions: What should the relationship be between the archives of the parliaments of Europe and the archives of the European parliament? Will printed proceedings of the European parliament make archives of that body superfluous? Will all members of the European Community have equal access to records of the parliament through copies in multiple formats? Should the parliament of Europe guarantee co-

administration of records to regional state archives and to national archives? Will freedom of information and national security acts have to be harmonized in order to assure equal access between the archives of European parliaments and the parliament of Europe?

The "Archives and Europe Without Boundaries" symposium transcended its name during the last plenary session "Archival Europe and the Archival World." In this session the boundary of Europe was breached. The session was addressed by Joshua Enwere, former national archivist of Nigeria, and Michael Roper, keeper of the public records of Great Britain. Enwere outlined the plight of archives in developing countries. He characterized African culture as being found in dance, music, painting, and sculpture. Consequently, museums and libraries which chronicle these art forms are the institutions receiving the greatest resources. He reported that many developing countries do not feel it is appropriate to support archives which contain mainly colonial records; they would rather develop strong oral history programs.

Enwere outlined archival relations between metropolitan (colonizing) and ex-colonial countries rather frankly. Archives in developing countries, many of them ex-colonies, are forced to request aid from abroad, but they are reluctant to appear as mendicants. Developing countries feel that increased interest in the archives of a united Europe detracts from interest in the archives of developing countries. Archives in developing countries feel the lack of support from UNESCO acutely. He reported rather bitterly that the question of the replevin of records which migrated to metropolitan countries before independence is no longer a problem—the developing countries have bowed to the wishes of Europe and are copying records tearfully, using money needed more urgently for health and education. Besides welcoming European assistance in paying for the

²See Eric Ketelaar, "The European Community and Its Archives" in this issue.

microfilming of migrated records, developing countries would welcome assistance in the construction of archives buildings and the training of personnel. However, they do not feel that the best way to receive this aid is through consultants visiting from Europe. Developing countries appreciate the help given by the International Council on Archives and the regional ICA committees, and especially the help provided by the Records and Archives Management Programme (RAMP) studies.

Michael Roper acknowledged the shortcomings of metropolitan administrations and of metropolitan archives in relation to developing countries. He admitted that metropolitan administrations did not leave a good record in the building of nation states, especially not with regard to training programs. The removal of records at the time of independence varied, but all metropolitan countries removed some records.

Roper talked about the dichotomy between developed/metropolitan/northern countries and underdeveloped/post-colonial/southern countries. We have failed our colleagues in the southern world, he said, but we can rectify that situation. We can now continue our cooperation with empathy; foster self-help and south/south cooperation; support the work of the ICA regional branches; develop appropriate training courses to help developing countries set up

their own training schools; disseminate literature to the developing world to continue the excellent work of the RAMP studies; develop an international microfilming program to cope with migrating archives; and offer workshops on records management. Roper proposed an extra ICA member payment for northern/developed countries to go to the support of developing archives.

The remarks of the two Nigerian speakers, Ukwu, who spoke at the opening session, and Enwere, who spoke at the last plenary session, were among the highlights of the conference. In both cases they reminded the audience rather forcefully that archives without boundaries must include the Third World and that a rectification of past colonial errors was due.

"Archives and Europe Without Boundaries" provided an insightful and refreshing archival experience. It gave a perspective on the archival experience through time and across geographical boundaries. It evoked archival roots and presaged the archival future. Its participants represented a community of colleagues which is indeed worldwide. The conference presented the challenges the community faces, challenges which will require an accumulated wisdom not available within a single nation. The future of archives must indeed be a future without boundaries.

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Introspection and Forecast at the Meeting in Maastricht

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"MESDAMES, MESSIEURS, MES CONGRESSISTES" were the opening words of welcome for the hundreds of archivists gathered in Maastricht, The Netherlands.¹ The elegant introduction established a certain Continental refinement for the conference entitled "Archives and Europe Without Boundaries." Acquaintances in the audience could nod at one another in recognition, as badges were attached to lapels and headphones for translation were either adjusted or left in the laps of those comfortable in any language of the moment. For those just arriving from the Society of American Archivists conference held the previous week in Philadelphia, the contrasts were fresh: the formality of an exuberant display of Dutch flowers, a schedule

with no committee meetings, and a focus of one theme for the entire four days. No delegates were harried by task force obligations. All could indulge in leisurely conversation during breaks from sessions at the ultra-modern conference site, which was far enough up river from the historic center of Maastricht to discourage any significant attrition. Out of the formal agenda and the after-hours discussions over the local beer emerged impressions of a European effort to overcome both political and professional boundaries in *archivistique*.

Unlike the most formal of international meetings, this conference did not end in a proclamation of resolutions. Nor could its participants claim any resulting collective research initiative or professional agenda akin to that of the Society of American Archivist's Committee on Goals and Priorities. After all, most participants had no current professional ties to one another beyond membership in the International Council on Archives, if that. And many were meeting each other for the first time.

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Variations on German, French, and English were employed to overcome the barrier of decades of little communication between East, West, and Middle Europe.

From their individual presentations, it was evident that the European archivists' sense of change carries with it a heightened introspection which is just as much without precisely defined ambitions for the future as without melancholy. (Scottish archivist Alan Cameron remarked at one session that "even nostalgia is not what it used to be.") The expression of this introspection was the substance of the meeting.

In its most general terms, this European "status report" would resonate with familiarity for American archivists. Speakers from throughout the continent expressed an appreciation for self-reliance in a profession overshadowed by others' large-scale bibliographic databases, a disassociation from the historical profession and an alliance with fellow "information managers," an *esprit critique* towards automated systems, a focus on unity rather than uniformity from region to region within Europe, and an admission that the archivist must be successful at personal influence and cannot be "administratively neutral." The rhetoric used to summarize the needs of today's European archivist could just as easily be the slogan of American colleagues: "laws without law enforcement are just window dressing" was one phrase pronounced by Michel Duchein of the Archives de France. Still, there were other issues particular to the Old World. At one point Eckhart Franz, of the Hessian State Archives, reminded his fellow Europeans that "old language illiteracy is just as bad as computer illiteracy."

Time and again, speakers inferred that the primary beneficiary of advances in European archives is to be the European *citizen*, rather than the historian of Europe. Two sessions were devoted to "The Citizen and Administration" and "Informational and Juridical Aspects of the

Relationship between Citizen and Local and National Government," but the word "historian" appeared nowhere in the thirty-three session titles. None addressed scholarly trends in historical research methodology nor did any speakers focus on the archivist's personal alienation from historical research. The current relevance of records to the needs of the public outweighed their academic value at this conference, where British archivist Michael Roper encouraged his audience to shed any "antiquarian identity."

Research by European archivists should center on the profession itself, according to Franz, rather than on historical topics. Eric Ketelaar, National Archivist of the Netherlands, proposed a variety of research topics for the profession ranging from the effects of acid rain to the compatibility of various countries' automated systems.

With perhaps the exception of the British, the European self confidence in the role of the archives and the identity of the archivist was disengaged from North American concerns for better relations with the public through outreach and user studies, or relevance in a "postliterate" culture. Maybe these concerns were minor because most of the European participants were securely stationed in government archives, where there seems to be no doubt about purpose despite scarce funding. The validity of these archives hardly needed any legitimization given the convincing accounts of archives at the center of democratization.

"A new taste" for the importance of archives has been experienced in particular in Germany, according to the head of the Bundesarchiv, Friedrich P. Kahlenberg. In a ninety-minute interview, he related the fascinating *dénouement* before the merging of the two strikingly different archival systems of the former East and West Germany. In directing a process of integration that will take at least a decade, he recognizes that he must somehow find a way to

overcome the suspicions of the West and the isolationism of the East. Acknowledging that East German archivists functioned under a system with "public distrust as the basic system to govern," he has had the difficult challenge of determining how to retain professional archivists while removing purely political appointments. Among the most urgent crises after unification was the rescue of the records of the former "Stasi" ministry which were put under the custody of a Special Commissioner of the federal government. Staff members of the Bundesarchiv and of the State Archives assisted in the examination of 17,000 bags of shredded documents from the secret service of the former GDR.

Other informal conversations revealed a similarly profound commitment to archives under adverse conditions. Imre Ress of the National Archives of Hungary described through anecdote the amazing obstacles of socialist control. For decades he and his colleagues struggled with the absurd irony of an archival system forced to impede information dissemination. His skill at comic relief came through as he related, in German, stories of archival students drafted to help with the harvest and professional archivists ordered to go to great lengths to communicate procedure stopped short of substance. Hungarian archivists learned to improvise among themselves since they lost a generation of senior archivists who emigrated as a result of events of 1956. Those who remained held fast to a pride of as-

sociation with centuries of Hungarian history. A few were able to expand their professional horizons by serving at the Hungarian archives in Vienna, maintained long after the end of the Empire.

Witty anecdotes, grim reports, and accounts of small progress led Danish archivist Henrik Didier Gautier, of Copenhagen's city archives, to record in his notes that archival banalities in the West can indeed be prized novelties in the East. He also recorded less dramatic distinctions between neighboring countries within the EC. For example, the achievements of the Dutch city archives are the envy of municipal archivists elsewhere in Europe. The conference was filled with such comparisons. Reference was even made to the United States, called "an archival giant" by Amadou Buosso of Senegal. Automated records, presidential archives, and freedom of information legislation were featured as American contributions.

After the close of the meeting, participants were free to wander through Maastricht, perhaps to continue their introspection. In this Dutch city formerly occupied by Roman, Frankish, Spanish, French, and German powers, the complexities of European history were visually evident and their archival implications could be readily imagined. The challenge in a setting such as Europe will be to see beyond the historical boundaries, both real and perceived.