

European Archives in an Era of Change

The Vision of a European Archives Institute

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ADEQUATE PROFESSIONAL TRAINING IS obviously a prerequisite for any kind of serious archival work. Its importance, however, is appreciated all the more as today's international community of archivists faces a changing archival environment characterized by new forms of administrative documentation, new user expectations, and new possibilities in information technology. The question of how best to update archival training has secured a permanent place on the agenda of archivists' meetings and conferences. The issue transcends boundaries and has become the focus of international efforts at consensus. Though training certainly takes first place, the discussion should be enlarged to include international cooperation in archival research.

Earlier discussions sponsored by UNESCO focused on the idea of a "harmonized" training scheme for archivists, librarians, and other information special-

ists, who are identified in Europe as "documentalists." The starting point for these studies in the 1970s was UNESCO's "NATIS" concept of a "national information infrastructure." The final result of several expert meetings and voluminous working papers on "harmonization" was a more precise notion of the differences in the functions and working methods of the three professions. It was agreed that any harmonization of training curricula would require clear definitions of training objectives and content, especially for the archival profession.

To promote the work of further definition, UNESCO established an ad hoc, expert group whose charge was to establish guidelines for harmonization among archival training programs. The exchange of experiences among the group's participants was certainly important, and they reached a general agreement on basic archival qual-

ifications. Nevertheless, the expert group did not achieve any precisely defined program for a unified training scheme to use throughout Europe.

Limitations in Planning an International Curriculum

Unlike the librarian's work in cataloging book titles and the documentalist's task of analyzing texts, the archivist's work is not international in character. Any international effort to harmonize or unify training for archivists tends to encounter the obstacle of context. The archivist's work within the basic functions of appraisal, arrangement, description, and access provision is based on what Dutch archivists call *structuurbeginsel*, the principle that all archival measures must respect and reflect the forms and structures of the archival records which are determined by the official language as well as the administrative and records-keeping traditions of their countries of origin.

The importance of national traditions can be seen in the archival training in former West Germany and Yugoslavia. In the Federal Republic of Germany, in spite of its federal structure, the training of archivists for the federation and most of the member states has been concentrated for more than four decades at the archives school in Marburg. Though, for historical reasons, Bavarian archivists are trained separately in Munich, there is no basic difference because the language and the general outline of administrative and registry traditions are the same. In Yugoslavia, to the contrary, no common training has ever existed for state archivists in Serbia, Bosnia, Croatia, and Slovenia. The reasons are the differences of language and script, and even more importantly, the massive differences between the Serbian, Turkish, and Austro-Hungarian traditions of administration and records-keeping.

In theory, a harmonization of training

programs for archivists in the future member states of a more united Europe is certainly not beyond imagination, despite the current fundamental differences in levels of archival training, which extend upwards to the post-doctoral training of archivists in Germany. One might conceive of a common core of archival training based on those fundamentals of archival work which are internationally recognized. However, for those elements of an archival education which serve as the foundation for the practical work of the archivist, specific national or regional traditions will continue to shape the curriculum. The forms and structures of archival records reflect the administrative and registry traditions of their location. Methods of archival evaluation, arrangement, and description must follow these structures. Common training can only be built upon shared traditions, as in the case of the school in Dakar. This school, known as EBAD (Ecole des Bibliothécaires, Archivistes, Documentalistes du Dakar), caters to the West and Central African states of French colonial extraction.

Certain sectors of the archival enterprise are less influenced by national administrative traditions. For these sectors it is possible to envisage specialized training programs for the entire European continent. Business archivists, for example, will soon be able to rely upon textbooks written for an international readership. Audiovisual archives and scientific or technical archives can anticipate manuals to suit multinational needs.

It remains to be seen whether the invasion of electronic records in public administration and closer administrative cooperation between European governments will diminish the existing differences in the methods of administrative documentation. New commonalities would open new possibilities in training and mobility for an archival information technician. An obvious result would be a partition of the archival profession between archivists with a

"classical" training to work in historical archives, and "modern" archivist-documentalists. Up to now, archivists in Germany and elsewhere have tried to defend the uniform training of all archivists, even though specialized training may be inevitable in the long run.

The traditional profile of the archivist calls for the continuation of archival training programs which are oriented towards different historical traditions. Schools in Marburg, Paris, Rome, the Hague, Liverpool, Salamanca, and Vienna foster these distinctions. In spite of their value, and after some reflection on the question of a uniform education, I would like to give my whole-hearted support to the idea of a "European Archives Institute." The choice of words is deliberate, since I advocate an institute, not just a European Archives School.

A European Archives Institute

Since its foundation in 1949, the German archives school at Marburg has had the formal title of "Institute for Archival Science." This title was taken from the predecessor institution in Berlin-Dahlem and was intended to denote the school's combined offerings of archival training and research for the development of the archival profession. However, research has never occurred in any systematic fashion because of the constraints upon personnel and material resources and the increasing teaching demands.

Most of the other countries in Western Europe also lack appropriate institutions for coordinated research in the fields of archival administration and archival techniques. Such a statement is not meant to overlook the more specialized laboratories, which by their experimental work contribute toward the development of archival restoration and conservation. Nor does it minimize the personal research of devoted archivists, both practitioners and teachers, which has enriched the professional literature on archi-

val theory and practice. The work of the technical committees of the International Council on Archives and the UNESCO Records and Archives Management Programme (RAMP) studies should also be mentioned in this context.¹

However, neither the Federal Republic of Germany nor any of the other countries in Western Europe have in the past found the resources to support a central archival research institution on the scale of the Moscow All Union Scientific-Research Institute for Documentation and Archival Affairs (VNIIDAD).² This research institute was established in 1966. When I was invited to visit it in 1986, I learned that there were about 250 full-time staff members including professional archivists, scientists, technicians, and information specialists who worked on the experimental development and testing of standards, models, and innovations in the various organizational and technical fields of archives and records administration. There are also comparable research laboratories at the Archives College of the People's Republic of China.³ Its staff includes seventy-nine full-time professors, lecturers, and researchers.

A European Archives Institute would certainly constitute an important resource for coping with the tasks shared by archivists in all countries. With adequate staff and funding, it could undertake and coor-

¹For two recent reviews of UNESCO's RAMP studies, see Richard M. Cox, "RAMP Studies and Related UNESCO Publications: An International Source for Archival Administration," *American Archivist* 53 (Summer 1990): 488-496, and Michael Cook, "UNESCO's RAMP Programme: A Pause to Reflect," *Archivaria* 31 (Winter 1990-91): 171-177.

²For additional information on VNIIDAD, see Edwin C. Bridges, "The Soviet Union's Archival Research Center: Observations of an American Visitor," *American Archivist* 51 (Fall 1988): 486-501.

³More information is provided in the report by Zhao Guojun, "The Archives College of the People's University of China," in the Proceedings of the ICA/SAE Symposium on Archival Training in Asia and Oceania (Beijing, September 1991) published in *Janus*, 1991/1992.

dinate joint research projects of a magnitude and duration beyond the capabilities of an individual archivist, a single archival institution, or even a national training institution. Such an institute could address urgent technical problems in such areas as mass restoration of modern papers and further refinement of replacement and security microfilming. Research should also be devoted to the processing of audiovisual and electronic records and to the development of standards for electronic networking on an international scale. International standards for networking have great potential for making archives and their finding aids mutually accessible.

The institute could respond to the call for a synthesis of the numerous developments in archival science and techniques by creating a comprehensive information clearinghouse. The goal would be to combine the variety of loosely coordinated efforts which exist at present such as the nucleus of the ICA library in Paris, the valuable information service of the Spanish *Boletín*, and the information center for archival techniques in Maribor which our Slovenian colleagues are working at.

Training Within a European Archives Institute

A European Archives Institute, once established along these lines, could and should be used for training purposes as well. Technical research laboratories could also serve as training facilities for archival restoration. Most Western European countries would benefit from such a shared operation, since there is a critical shortage of technical training facilities. Internships, short-term seminars, and lengthier courses would be feasible for basic and ongoing training of specialists in other technical areas. At this point, though, it is unclear whether or not these types of activities could be developed into a regular training program for a new type of archivist. As a start,

a coordinated training scheme could be limited to a basic, common core of courses on fundamental theory and practice for archival trainees from various countries. This curriculum could lead to subsequent training in national schools to familiarize students with the special problems of their respective administrative and records traditions.

The idea of a European Archives Institute may still be visionary. For the time being, there are more immediate ways to approach the idea of a common basic training which might lay the foundation for closer cooperation among archives all over Europe. The Stage Technique International d'Archives in Paris constitutes an important step in the right direction. Although it concentrates mainly on the theory and practice of archives in France, it tends to open the minds of the participants to problems which are common to most of us.⁴ It also attempts to match the needs and responsibilities of young and mid-career archivists who have already received their formal training in locations all over the globe.

Under the banner of "Archives and Europe Without Boundaries" it is not very difficult to imagine another, more European "Stage."⁵ This international program could be taught at various places including Paris, Strasbourg, Brussels, Luxembourg, or Florence. Ideally, it should not be restricted to an exercise of parallel presentations on the various national developments and experiences. The new European "Stage" would be an attempt to create a

⁴The current director of the "Stage," Paule René-Bazin, has provided a description of this program in the article "Le Stage Technique International d'Archives: An Historical Overview and Future Prospects," *American Archivist* 51 (Summer 1988): 356-362. (The article was co-authored with Françoise Tammaro).

⁵Editors' note: the author delivered a version of this paper at the conference "Archives and Europe Without Boundaries," Maastricht, the Netherlands, 2-5 October 1991. The paper will be published in an issue of *Janus* during 1992.

truly European archival science. It could serve as a forum for exploring the commonalities and differences in the history of archives, the traditions of documents and records keeping, the habitual methods of archival arrangement and description, archival law, and the rules for access and use. In addition, this context would allow for a critical analysis of records-keeping practices in supra-national organizations, which tend to merge elements from various national traditions.

A "Stage" of this kind could raise an awareness about the shared responsibility

of archivists in Europe. It could promote a sense of common duty towards the continent's documentary heritage. It could also convince archivists of the necessity to cooperate in finding solutions for the benefit of both international and individual institutions. This type of mid-career "Stage" would also help to transfer the discussion from the directors alone who prevail at most international conferences, to the succeeding generation of junior archivists, who will be called upon to continue our work under the changing conditions of the future.

The Vision of a European Archives Institute

Abstract: National traditions which determine the nature of archives and archival work (*structuurbeginssel*) would prevent the merging of the existing training institutions in Europe into a uniform training scheme. But a European Archives Institute with the primary task of undertaking technical and theoretical studies in the archival field would fill a gap, since most European countries lack appropriate research centers on archives. Experienced mid-career archivists could be detached to the Institute to undertake research on issues of common interest. Short term training courses on common elements and comparative studies could lead to the development of a truly European archival science.

Vision d'un institut européen d'archives

Résumé: Les traditions nationales, qui définissent la nature des archives (*structuurbeginssel*) éviteraient l'intégration totale des pratiques archivistiques européennes dans un seul institut. Les archivistes européens bénéficieraient d'un Institut international de recherche pour l'avancement des études techniques et théoriques au sein de leur profession. Les archivistes de carrière seraient encouragées à faire partie de cet institut, autant pour obtenir plus de formation dans des domaines spécialisés que pour collaborer au développement d'une véritable science archivistique européenne.

Die Vision eines Europäischen Archiv-Institut

Abstrakt: Einer einheitlichen Ausbildung für alle Archivare der Länder Europas stehen die unterschiedlichen nationalen Traditionen archivarischer Arbeit entgegen, die sich an der Struktur der Archive orientieren muss (*structuurbeginself*). Dennoch wäre ein “Europäisches Archiv-Institut” wichtig und wertvoll, wenn es vorrangig für die gemeinsame Erforschung archivarischer Fachprobleme dienen würde, die allen Ländern gemeinsam sind. Forschungszentren für Archivwesen fehlen in den meisten europäischen Ländern. Abordnung von Archivaren für spezifische Forschungsvorhaben und die Einrichtung von auf Gemeinsamkeiten und Vergleich ausgerichteten Fortbildungslehrgängen nach Art des Stage technique international in Paris könnten die Grundlage für eine wirklich “europäische” Archivwissenschaft legen.

La imagen de un instituto europeo de archivos

Resumen: Las tradiciones nacionales que definen la naturaleza de los archivos (*structuurbeginself*) podrían prevenir la total integración de las prácticas de la archivología europea en un solo instituto. Los archiveros europeos se beneficiarían con el establecimiento de un instituto internacional de investigaciones para el avance de los estudios técnicos y teóricos dentro de su profesión. Los archiveros que se encuentran en medio de sus estudios se les animaría a formar parte del instituto y ambos recibirían un entrenamiento posterior en áreas especializadas para trabajar y desarrollar en colaboración una verdadera ciencia archivológica europea.