

International Scene

Archival Training in Germany: A Balance Between Specialization in Historical Research and Administrative Needs

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Abstract: This article describes archival training as it is offered at the Archives School of Marburg, Germany. Such training is a prerequisite for posts in all German state and municipal archives. There is a long tradition of archival training in Germany, beginning with an ordinance stating that in Prussian state archives no one could be hired who had not passed certain written and oral examinations. This article describes the content and structure of the courses offered at Marburg and outlines the principles that provide the basis for the structure of training.

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IN THE LAST FEW YEARS, archival training has been a topic of constant discussion among German archivists, and the discussion has been characterized by great emotional and intellectual effort. Germany's reunification in 1990 intensified the debates and raised new questions as two archival traditions attempted to merge. One drew particular attention: Should archival science be a university discipline (as it had been in the former socialist German Democratic Republic) or a postgraduate course (as it had been in the Federal Republic)?¹

The debates have calmed down a bit. The tradition of archival science as a university discipline will stop in 1996. The Archivschule for Bavaria in Munich trains archivists as before, and the Archivschule Marburg now qualifies archivists for all other *Länder* (provinces) of the new Federal Republic and for municipal and church archives. This form of training seems likely to continue in the future. This article traces the historical development of archival training in Germany over the last one hundred years, discusses the structure and content of the training, and concludes by considering future changes that may take place in archival training in Germany.

The Mid-Nineteenth Century: Archivists as Historians

Training for archivists in Germany began in the mid-nineteenth century. Before that time, archivists usually had studied law; knowledge of the judicial system was necessary because archivists' main duties centered around maintaining their employer's rights. Archivists were guardians of

charters and they were expected to offer expert opinions when disputes arose.

With time, as the political structure of the area became more democratic, the public acquired a right to know what was contained in the various archives. As these events transpired, the nature of archives changed, and so did the qualifications for those responsible for archival administration. At the same time, history as a university discipline grew out of the study of the sources of the German legal tradition. In Germany, the history of sciences mirrors a development which led to the first great attempts at reconstructing events of the past, supported particularly by the movement of Romanticism, with its typical attitude of looking back. This development can be seen in various disciplines. This was an era of huge projects aimed at publishing important documents highlighting administrative and political history. Some of these projects, begun in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, are still not completed.

In this context, archives took on the role of ancient treasuries containing traces of all historical periods. Anyone wanting to undertake historical research had to be able to interpret ancient parchment and paper forms, understand the languages in which they were written (usually Latin), and decipher old forms of handwriting. These research requirements fostered the growth of historical auxiliary sciences like diplomatics, paleography, sigillography, and genealogy, which took form as specific bodies of knowledge. This in turn created a need for experts who could develop these disciplines and teach them to other researchers. Who would these experts be, if not the archivists? Who would be familiar enough with all forms of documents and be able to describe and classify them? So archivists became historians—or perhaps it is more precise to say that historians became archivists by specializing in the historical auxiliary sciences.

¹Hermann Rumschottel, "Professionalisierung—Differenzierung—Spezialisierung. Überlegungen zu Geschichte, Stand und Zukunft der Archivarsausbildung in Bayern," in *Bewahren und Umgestalten. Aus der Arbeit der Staatlichen Archive Bayerns. Walter Jaroschka zum 60*, edited by Hermann Rumschöttel and Erich Stahleder (Munich: Geburtstag, 1992), 93–107.

The growth of historical research marked a turning point. Now, for the first time in archival history, those who wanted to become archivists needed specialized training to do their job. In the early years of the nineteenth century in Vienna and Munich, as well as in Paris, courses were organized to provide continued training in history and specialized training devoted to preparing advanced students for archival work.

A need for archival training was also recognized in Prussia. After a first attempt in Marburg in 1894, the center for training was transferred to Berlin at the end of the nineteenth century. At this point, a different approach to archival training emerged. The training program of the Institut für Archivwissenschaft und Historische Forschung (IfA) was clearly separated from university training. The program's reorganization in 1917 established for the first time a postgraduate professional course of training for archivists. The program showed all the signs of professional training: applicants had to meet high entrance requirements, and they could begin their careers as archivists only by successfully passing a series of final examinations. The courses in the program differed from those offered by university history faculties, and they were oriented more toward the practical demands of archival work. At that time, of course, archival work consisted largely of historical research in specific fields and the publication of historical documents. The historical auxiliary sciences still played a predominant role in the courses that were offered.

The Twentieth Century: Archivists as Caretakers of War Records

The great wars of the twentieth century had revolutionary effects on the structure of German society and government, and these changes were reflected in the archival community. Archives were swamped with

huge masses of records that were produced for and by the administration of war. Never before had archivists experienced a comparable pressure to cope with such material—so recent and, in the view of most archivists, of so little historical interest. Archivists responded to this deluge in three ways: they addressed problems of appraisal, the level of archival training, and the form and content of that training.

Problems of appraisal. First, they began an ongoing discussion of the content of the archival profession. The German Association of Archivists devoted two annual meetings—one in 1937, twenty years after the First World War, and another in 1957, ten years after the Second World War—to the problems of appraisal. Both meetings highlighted the uneasiness of the archival profession in regard to new and unknown quantities and qualities of administrative papers. Fearful of losing their traditional role in historical research, and in response to the demand that they develop appraisal methods for contemporary records, archivists formulated (perhaps as a form of escapism) the theory of ranking records creators. They wanted the right as a profession to decide about the social importance of records creators and their materials instead of linking up with the prewar theories of appraisal based on provenance. But at the same time, the demand for purely archival criteria, derived from an analysis of the structure of the papers being appraised, was articulated. The ensuing discussion has never abated since that time. It influenced the debate about archival theory outside Germany,² and the discussion has been revived since the reunification of Germany.

Two levels of archival training. The archival community's second reaction to the

²See Theodore S. Schellenberg, *The Appraisal of Modern Records*, *Bulletins of the National Archives* no. 8, National Archives publication no. 57-5 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives, 1956), 233–78.

effects of the social and administrative events of the twentieth century was to establish a new category of professional work, which necessitated a different kind of archival training. The mass of new records relating to the wars created a need for more staff, and to meet that need a new level of employment for professional archives staff was implemented in 1936 in Prussia. (This level had existed in Bavaria since 1924.) Unlike the traditional historian-archivists who continued to occupy the senior posts in archives, these new archivists were not products of a postgraduate program, and their task was to focus on the treatment of the new materials. Seeing their traditional field of activity grow more and more restricted, the historian-archivists were attempting to maintain their hold on historical research as a professional task and were resisting the move toward a more scientific reflection on archival working methods and principles.

The debate about the division of labor and responsibilities between the two levels of the archival profession continues to rage in Germany. Archivists trained at the university level recently claimed to be better qualified in the subjects of the historical auxiliary sciences, so that in the opportunity to get posts and salary they equal their colleagues with postgraduate training. Although the two levels of training are accepted in Germany, the archival community must clarify and define the differences in duties and responsibilities for archivists from the two traditions.

Independent professional training. The third reaction took the form of continual changes of content and form of the training of professional archivists. The establishment of IfA marked the end of archival training as a postgraduate course for historians specializing in auxiliary sciences and the beginning of a purely professional preparation course for archivists. Today, archival training stands independent from the discipline studied before. Not only his-

tory but also law is a good preparation for training, providing the individual has a reasonable understanding of historical developments, especially of administrative structures. The structure and content of the courses, formed with the creation of the IfA, still characterize archival training in contemporary Germany as it is offered in the Archivschule Marburg. This school for archivists was founded in 1949 in Marburg, a town with a long tradition of archives and, at that time, the advantage of being equipped with a good supply of new buildings. Moreover, Marburg possessed archival holdings that had emerged nearly intact from the Second World War.³

Marburg Training: Specialized Qualification for a Self-Confident Profession

The Archivschule Marburg is neither a university nor a high school. It is a service institute for the archives administrations of the federal government, the Länder, and for church and municipal archives. That means that it offers courses for the theoretical training of archivists for those administrations that have posts for trainees and grant them a practical training. Besides training courses, shorter seminars for continued training are offered, and symposia and other forms of meetings treat problems of the archival sciences.

Throughout the whole country, there are about twenty posts for trainees at the postgraduate and university level each year. Those who apply for such posts on the postgraduate level must have finished their university studies and, in most cases, also a doctorate. So the average age is rather high: 32 years at the beginning of the train-

³Fritz Wolff, "Die Wissenschaftliche Archivarsausbildung an der Archivschule Marburg als Post-universitärer Ausbildungsgang," in *Wissenschaftliche Archivarsausbildung in Europa*, edited by Wilhelm A. Eckhardt (Marburg: Marburger Vorträge, 1989), 107–14.

ing. For the lower level, it is sufficient to have passed the final examinations of a German secondary school, but trainees on this level rather often have studied some years of history or have even passed the university exams. Those who transfer from university to training courses have often been frustrated by the very theoretical way history is treated in universities and hope to approach it more directly and pragmatically by handling authentic documents, doing genealogical research, or writing chronicles for municipal communities. Only during training do they realize that the professional duties are somewhat different from their expectations.

The training at the university level takes three years, and on the postgraduate level takes two years. The structure and content of the training courses are rather similar on both levels. Exercises and the introduction to German history are more intensive at the university level.⁴ Figure 1 outlines the organization of the training.

Figure 2 shows subjects and hours of lessons only for the theoretical training in Marburg. The training is financed by the administrations that send the participants to the courses. Participation is free of charge for the trainees, who receive a salary of three-quarters of the salary paid on a new post-training position.

Future Perspectives for Marburg Training

The impression that there is a gap between professional practice and the training program has been gaining ground continuously during recent years. Common efforts have been made by the Archivschule Marburg, together with the German Association of Archivists, to create a new train-

ing program. Although experience has been gained, development is not yet finished.⁵

In the early 1980s, critics argued that Marburg's postgraduate training is outdated, neglects the new developments of the profession, and does not give adequate training for the demands of modern practical work in archives. In reaction to this criticism, fundamental modernization was attempted. One of the most essential aims of the changes at that time was to open the training courses, which are offered only to public servants, and to make them accessible to other archivists expecting working posts in archives of the print media, radio and television stations, or parliamentary administrations. But concepts that formed the basis of rather fundamental changes in the structure of the lessons given in Marburg proved inadequate to meet these aims.⁶

The 1980 reforms tried to organize all subjects of theoretical training chronologically, dividing course content into four parts, each dedicated to one historical period. Given this structure, training would start with all those subjects concerning the Middle Ages and would end with a module treating the archives of the twentieth century. It was expected that those with no need for the specific knowledge and skills to treat medieval materials could enter the course at a point relevant to their needs, but that never happened. It also turned out that a pure chronological structure of subjects was not possible. The subject of archivalistics, for instance, cannot be treated without speaking about the twentieth century, nor can it be restricted to very recent

⁴Werner Moritz, *Vorschriften zur Archivarischen Ausbildung*, Veröffentlichungen der Archivschule Marburg no. 16 (Marburg: Textausgabe, 2. Aufl., 1992).

⁵Angelika Menne-Haritz, "Adaptation of Existing Training Programmes to Modern Developments in the Archival Field," *Janus* 2 (1990): 38-43.

⁶Meanwhile, a new high school in Potsdam has started a four-year training program for archivists of these domains of private archives.

Figure 1. Structure of Archival Training in Germany (excluding Bavaria)

Requirement	University Level (3 years)	Postgraduate Level (2 years)
Practical training	9 months before and 6 months after the theoretical training	6 months before the theoretical training
Theoretical training	18 months in Marburg 3 months in administrative school	18 months in Marburg
Written examinations in Marburg	3 written examinations of 3 hours each: administrative documents from the 17th to the 20th century in: Latin French German 1 written examination of 4 hours either in German history or in archivistics	4 written examinations of 5 hours each: medieval charter in Latin language medieval charter in German language modern administrative text in German handwriting (17th–19th century) modern administrative text in French language (17th–18th century)
Oral examinations in Marburg	6 oral examinations of 15 minutes each on the 5 following subjects: archivistics regional history modern German history and administrative history modern diplomatics historical auxiliary sciences and 1 of the following: preservation social history archival legislation	6 oral examinations of 20 minutes each on the following 4 subjects: archivistics (with archival history and preservation) medieval auxiliary sciences modern auxiliary sciences administrative history and 2 of the following: regional history history of law social and economic history
Final examinations in the Länder	Description of a fonds with writing of a finding list or inventory (2 months) oral examination (varying among the Länder)	On the federal level only: Description of a fonds with writing of a finding list or inventory (6 months) For the Länder, the Marburg examinations are the final examinations

phenomena. It can be divided into logical parts, but not into chronological sections. More recently, another attempt was made with a new structure and a new formulation of the contents of theoretical

training and the final examinations. In future, practical training will take twelve months, a period equal to that devoted to theoretical courses. During the practical training phase, several practical courses of

Figure 2. Content and Hours of Lessons at the Archivschule Marburg

Subjects	Hours— University Level	Hours— Postgraduate Level
<i>Archival sciences:</i> Terminology, description, appraisal, records management, archival history, and preservation	464	546
<i>Auxiliary sciences:</i> Medieval and modern diplomatics, history of writing, and reading exercises	508	90
<i>History:</i> Administrative history, history of law, regional history, and social and economic history	424	432
<i>Archival administration:</i> Administrative science, public relations, and exposition techniques	104	234
Total	1,500	1,302

four weeks will take place in an administrative agency, in an archival institution of a different structure (municipal, press, or audiovisual), and in the federal archives in Koblenz. The hours of theoretical classes will not be reduced, but other forms of training, such as project-oriented group work, will be introduced. Subjects will be divided into four logical blocks: archival sciences, auxiliary sciences, historical sciences, and administrative sciences. There still will be four written examinations—three in the auxiliary sciences and one in archival law—but the oral examinations will be shortened to one hour, half devoted to archival sciences and half to administrative history. This new formula opens the possibility of defining priorities better, organizing the training courses in a different way, and giving the core subjects of archivistics more importance.

These reforms apply only to training on the postgraduate level. But changes are also to be made at the university level. Discussions of their form and content have just begun and will probably continue. These discussions are strengthened by the fact that municipal administrations have created many posts for archivists in the last ten

years, but they have often hired historians without archival qualification to fill these posts. The administrations expect them to prepare a celebration of an anniversary of a town or to engage in historical public relations activities, and they do not realize that archivists also have other duties. This situation has caused competition that reinforces tendencies toward change in education and training. Trainees are asking for such subjects as historical public relations, exhibition techniques, and methods of cooperation with local groups of leisure-time historians. The historians hired without specific qualifications for archival work also tend to realize their deficiencies after gaining some experience in their job and ask for specific training. Last year the German Association of Archivists replied to these demands by organizing a half-year course as an introduction to the archival profession for this group. That action was strongly criticized by trained archivists who have to spend three years to qualify for admission to the same sort of post. This situation led the Archivschule Marburg to begin organizing a network of short seminars on specific topics for nonqualified archivists to give them the opportunity to

learn at least the basic skills they need, without obtaining the same professional qualification that results from three years of training.

Fundamental aspects of the experiences of the last ten years of reform efforts in Germany will surely guide future developments in archival training. Four main criteria will determine whether a qualification program will exert a positive influence on the archival profession, give it a better awareness of its duties and rights, help it to form an identity that is recognized inside and outside the profession, and, finally, lead to a code of ethics, which is a prerequisite of a true profession.⁷ The four criteria are admission requirements, status of participants, graded examinations and recognition of achievements, and access gained by passing final examinations.

Admission requirements. The conditions a profession attaches to admission of applicants to training programs will strongly influence its professional identity and the image it presents to the outside world. These conditions are a means of comparison with and demarcation from other professions.

Status of participants. Those who participate in a qualifying course and who have not yet started work in their chosen profession need general explanations, foundations, and methodological instructions. Such courses give them a first general impression and an overview of their future profession. Periods of practical training create the awareness of problems, which is necessary for theoretical training. If training takes place before candidates enter a job, it serves to uphold professional standards by providing the means for understanding everyday problems and for anticipating the consequences of decisions.

If training is undertaken after a person begins archival work, the trainee's understanding of theory becomes utilitarian and the trainee tends to apply the new skills and knowledge directly toward pragmatic problem solving and action. Continued training courses for archivists without professional education usually concentrate on one group of problems taken from the practical experiences of the participants. No consistent image of the profession can be acquired under these conditions. Rather, they foster a pragmatic outlook while giving specialized knowledge and instruction. So the status of participants in training activities has a considerable influence on their attitude toward archival work and its theoretical foundation and, thus, has consequences for the whole profession.

Graded examinations and recognition of achievements. At the end of continued training courses certificates of attendance are usually distributed. There is no evaluation of newly gained knowledge and skills. Because participants in such courses are normally very interested in acquiring new skills for their jobs, an evaluation or assigning of grades is not necessary. Theory, the aim of which is to explain the basic concepts and the foundations of methods and principles, is often felt to be mere ballast and cannot be the subject of final examinations because the courses are too fragmented. In contrast, graded final examinations and certificates of merit are necessary when training precedes entrance to the professional career. Under these conditions, the final examinations cover not only the practical applications of rules but also the students' ability for independent problem solving within a given framework. Final examinations presuppose that a coherent idea of the desired abilities exists, against which the knowledge and skills of the individual trainee can be measured. Final examinations with rating reports uphold uniform standards for the profession, whereas certificates of participation tend to

⁷Angelika Menne-Haritz, "The Profession of the Archivist in the Information Age," *Archivum* 39 (1994): 261-83.

reinforce fragmentation into individual areas of specialized knowledge.

Access gained by passing final examinations. If training culminating in the passing of examinations is not a precondition for holding certain positions, training loses much of its attraction. A profession that does exercise this means of control over the competence of its members signals that it does not value a particular canon of knowledge and skills. It also neglects an important instrument that can support motivation and identification. A general right to access to certain positions as evidenced by passing final exams furthermore enables graduates to change positions and to gain additional experience, which will be of value for the profession as a whole. Seminars of continued training not leading to a right of access to certain positions only offer the possibility of learning certain skills. They are oriented toward a particular occupation and, thus, tend to fix the interest of the participants on the peculiarities of their individual practical experience. By doing so, they may even restrict participants' mobility.

These four criteria will remain the guidelines both for further changes in the structure and content of theoretical training

in Marburg and for future practical training in different archives on the above-mentioned levels. The admission requirements are rather high. The participants generally have the status of trainees without having automatic access to a job on completion of training. The training will be basic, with a holistic approach covering practice as well as theory, and will include final examinations. Passing the examinations will remain a prerequisite for getting a post at least on the federal level and in the Länder and also in most municipal archives.

Archival training in Germany has always been a very high level of training. Requirements for access to the profession, a qualified training, and friendly cooperation across the borders of institutions and administrative levels have resulted in a self-confident profession, aware of its capacities and values. Faced with new challenges regarding the emerging areas of professional activities, the transformation of paperwork in offices through automated working processes, and the shortage of money and personnel, the profession now must—and surely will—find adequate answers and continue to adapt its training methods and contents to the new demands of the profession.