

Archivistica. Principi e problemi. ELIO LODOLINI, Milano, Franco Angeli Editore, 1984. 296 p.

This is an important book. It is the fruit of the wide experience which the author acquired as Director of the State Archives of Rome. (Lodolini has also been, since 1976, Director of the School of Archival Science, Palaeography and Diplomatics, where he has taught archival science since 1956. He also holds the Chair in Special Archival Science at the University of Rome.) The book addresses not only archivists and students of archival science, but also historians, administrators, public officials, and jurists — anyone, in fact, whose work relies on archival research. While written in Italian and not available in translation, it was clearly conceived not only for the Italian reader, but also for an international audience.

This manual comes more than fifty years after the publication of the first Italian work on archival science by Eugenio Casanova (*Archivistica*, Siena, Lazzeri, 1928). Lodolini provides a complete and up-to-date scientific account of the discipline, although, unlike Casanova, he does not deal with conservation, buildings, or generally with what constitutes the specific field of archival technology, which is studied in Italy in a separate discipline called *Archiveconomia*. Therefore, *Archivistica. Principi e problemi* is a book of pure archival theory. It analyzes principles and illustrates their development in various countries; and it describes problems and suggests solutions.

The introduction offers an outline of archival history and a brief mention of basic archival concepts. The next chapter begins the detailed discussion of archival science. The analysis follows the life cycle of a “fonds” through current archives, archives of deposit, and historical archives. It includes an articulate and comprehensive description of the purposes of record centres and records management. After discussion of filing systems and the registration of records since the sixteenth century and the methods of arrangement of archives, Lodolini gives his attention to the nature of archives since the medieval period. Here is the most significant part of the manual for readers interested in the evolution of Italian archival theory. Until Lodolini, with some minor exceptions, all Italian archival science (and not only Italian, as the author shows with a large selection of quotations from a wide variety of sources) has upheld the view that the birth of archives coincides with the creation of records. This continuity in conventional archival theory is challenged by a definition proposed by Lodolini which considers archives as only “the documents ... which, having no interest for the activity that created them, have been selected for permanent preservation as cultural properties.” (p. 125) This means archives consist of only those documents which, since Casanova, have been called “historical archives,” rather than “current archives” and “deposit archives.”

In the next chapter the author illustrates the natural practical consequences of these theories: the only method of arrangement is the recreation of the original order through application of the “historical method” of research, “principle of provenance,” and “respect des fonds.” The origin of the principle of original order, its first applications, its meaning, the methodology, and the problems of its application, especially when the administrative organization changes, are explained with many examples.

The author then discusses finding aids: the general guide and the inventory. He points out that research, whatever its subject, is based on administrative history, so the real inventory is what is commonly called the “introduction to the inventory,” namely the history of the institution or the agency that created the archives.

Chapter eleven is devoted to more controversial questions: the authenticity of archival documents; claim and replevin of state records; the exercise of the pre-emption right on private archives and documents; the expropriation of private archives and documents for public utility; the unbroken custody as the sole guarantee of authenticity in English archives, and the refusal of claiming the State records and of accepting those stolen and found again.

There is much debate of the topics analyzed in chapters twelve and thirteen: selection, considered a compromise between the theoretical necessity and the practical impossibility of the complete preservation of archival documents, its methods and criteria; transfer of records from agencies to archives; accessibility of documents, from the ancient world to the present, and its ways and limits in the present system; secret records and records which safeguard civil rights.

Archives are then compared with libraries and museums since ancient times: the similarities and differences between these institutions are identified. At this point it was mandatory to discuss the professional training of archivists and the role of archival science in such training: Lodolini gives the subject an historical formulation which is never polemical; he clarifies the situation in different countries and puts archival science at the core of archival training, following education based preferably on juridical sciences.

The last part of the book is entirely devoted to national and international archival organizations. Lodolini's broad international experience explains the international point of view he brings to discussion of principles and problems. His analysis tends to compare different experiences and to look for solutions which should be universally valid. Lodolini does not claim to offer the definitive word on them. On the contrary, he stimulates new formulations, research, and questions.

Archivistica. Principi e problemi is a manual for archivists and a reference book for those who do archival research. For these reasons it should be translated into other languages.

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