

Today's Students, Tomorrow's Archivists: Present-Day Focus and Development as Determinants of Archival Science in the Twenty-First Century*

by CAROL COUTURE

To begin with, let us put ourselves in the context of archival science as a discipline, of the elements which are characteristic of its new reality and of the outlook for its development. My objective is to examine the state of development of archival science in order to show the relationship which exists between the level of maturity of our discipline, the degree of its autonomy in relation to other related disciplines, and the influence these factors have on our programmes and teaching. I will focus on the *subject* of our teaching, archival science, rather than the teaching as such.

First, I will look at some observations which reflect the evolution of our area of activity in order to understand the influence they have had or should have had on our teaching. Second, I will present the outlook for the development of archival science, which is necessarily also reflected in the day-to-day life of our schools.

Bases and New Reality of the Discipline

Nowadays we can assert that the environment in which archival science functions has been significantly transformed. In the areas of professional as well as scientific endeavour, archival science finds itself in a new reality which necessarily has an effect on our teaching.

First Observation: A Broader and More Solid Definition of Archives

While it has significantly extended the territory it covers, archival science much more clearly defines and circumscribes this territory than it did in the past, when it hesitated to step into the territory of the administrative value of archival documents, considering them only for their historical value. The archival approach that integrates the administrative and evidential aspects, observed with some interest by the international archives community, is founded on a definition of archives that is rather inclusive. This "global" approach allows us to arrive at three essential objectives:

- the uniformity and continuity of operations carried out by the archivist on the totality of the documents of which archives are made up;
- the elaboration of structures for archival activities within a policy for the organization of archives;
- the integration of the primary and secondary value of archives within a broad definition of these (the totality of the documents, whatever their age or nature, created or received by a person or organization within the framework of its activities).

Here we see a determining factor in the new reality of archival science. The mission society gives us of participating in the construction and management of the collective memory cannot have as its basis operations deliberately limited to either the primary or the secondary value of archives. Consequently, I am convinced that it would be beneficial to train our students in an expanded archival science which opens a much broader and much more promising job market to them.

Second Observation: The Renewal of Archival Science

The amalgamation into a single discipline of the primary and secondary value of archives is an important aspect in the renewal of archival science. As Kent Haworth asserts, “archivists will have to shift their focus from the inactive or dormant stage of the life of information to the forefront of the information continuum, ...to the creation stage.”¹ Similarly, the Spanish archivist Pedro Lopez agrees: “records and archives management are not separate disciplines but interlinked activities.”² Marcel Van Campen, a business archivist in Belgium, nicely sums up the situation in stating that “records management is an integral part of the management of archives.”³

Our discipline is likewise being renewed when it sees archives as an information resource essential to decision-making. Too often considered outdated and useless material, archives are becoming more and more an active information source essential to operations within an organization. For this to take place, however, it is crucial to go beyond just the container to consider its contents, the information essential to good decision-making. It is in this context of high-end usage of archives that the concept of strategic information is found. Strategic information can be defined as the information required by managers in an organization in order to make decisions.⁴ This concept will not be able to take root and find its place if schools of archival science do not take it into account. It is important for our students to be properly prepared to sit at a desk which is not much occupied in modern organizations, that of Strategic Information Manager.

Third Observation: Archival Science has Acquired the Status of a Discipline and a Profession

From their speech as well as their writings, it is very clear that archivists have a will to be part of a discipline which they likewise want to be more and more solid. In describing the state of American archival science in 1986, Richard Cox had some important reservations about its degree of professionalization and belonging to a true discipline.⁵ Shortly afterward, professors Louise Gagnon-Arguin⁶ and Jacques Mathieu and Martine Cardin⁷ proposed an interesting sociological analysis of our area of activity. First they examined the cognitive aspects:

- the contribution to knowledge (existence of principles and methods proper to a field);
- the development of know-how (rules and standards);
- the existence of scientific output (journals, other publications);
- participation in academic culture (specificity, symbolic value).

Later, they assessed the following professional aspects:

- the existence of associations;
- the creation of teaching programmes;
- the legal or at least professional recognition of the discipline;
- the existence of a clientele.

They conclude that although the degree to which it does so may vary, archival science meets the criteria for achieving the status of a discipline and a profession.

Similarly, many authors agree with Norwegian archivist Liv Mykland, who believes that archival science is definitely a discipline, that archivists are in a relatively advanced state of professionalization, and that there is no doubt about the social value of our group. On the other hand, she makes a point that directly concerns teachers, when she states that the solid body of knowledge archivists should have at their disposal is far from having achieved maturity and that, consequently, the development and improvement of our teaching programmes is worthy of special consideration.⁸

Fourth Observation: Refinement and Broadening of the Archivist's Mission

We have always recognized the mission of archival science as assuring the safe-keeping of material for which it has responsibility. Thus for a long time archivists were content simply to take custody of archival documents. They practiced what Angelika Menne-Haritz calls "practical archival science." Documents archived were only done so as a function of their usefulness, based only on their legal value. It was a mission mainly concerned with passive, "instrumental," material custody. The sense we give to the word "conserve" was much more restricted than it is now. Society expected archivists to be guardians. Did it not call them "custodians or keepers?"

Today, society expects archival science to do more than just conserve. Our discipline is expected to appraise documents, whatever their support. So archivists have to think of custodianship as proactive rather than passive, just sitting there waiting. Thus the reality attached to the word custodianship has been significantly broadened to include appraisal as well as everything connected with this activity: the importance of having a deep knowledge of the archives creator and context of creation;⁹ the utilization of archives;¹⁰ and society as the main issue of the appraisal of archives.¹¹ Appraisal has even become an important aspect specific to our discipline in that it includes irreversible decisions that are essential to the proper functioning of society and the healthy management of its heritage.

Another activity as important as custody and appraisal to the mission of archival science is dissemination among our clientele, including administrators and researchers.

Our teaching should take into account this important broadening of the mission of archivists, who of course need to be prepared to be custodians, but who also need to be appraisers—scientific appraisers—and disseminators of the material of which they have custody.

Fifth Observation: Rediscovery and Reinforcement of *respect des fonds*

In order to assess the state of development of the discipline of archival science, it is useful to examine the degree of evolution and acceptance of its fundamental principle, *respect des fonds*, which according to Michel Duchein is now definitely proper to modern archival science.¹² First I will examine the broadening of its applications.

Application of the principle of *respect des fonds* and the *fonds d'archives* which develop from it are realities of archival science which we are perfectly justified in extending to activities which are strictly administrative. Just as it seems imperative that archivists not alter the order of documents determined by the administrative entity transferring them as semi-active documents or historical archives, it also seems obvious that the administrative entity must not mix documents with those of another unit during their active life. Thus, when documents have been ordered at the time of their creation because of archival or records management activity in the administrative functions of the organization, archivists need only maintain that order, which they themselves will have participated in establishing. By doing this, they will contribute to ending the practice of “crisis archiving,” only concerned with archives once the producing unit has no more resources to take care of them or no interest in keeping them.

Thus we see a broadening of the application of the principle of *respect des fonds* through its extension to the start of the life cycle of archival documents. But there is more. We are witnessing the re-discovery of the advantages of applying this principle in relation to the automation of activities in our organizations. Only a short while ago we believed that this principle was being crushed under the pressure of technological development. However, we can see now that, on the contrary, factors are coming together which strengthen this principle rather than making us discard it. I agree with Angelika Menne-Haritz, who sees no contradiction on this point between traditional and modern archival science. According to her, we are seeing the broadening and development of our theoretical foundation. She even observes that much research on the “paperless office” considers the context of creation and provenance as essential factors. In terms of operations, the principles of archival science are being re-discovered.¹³ Charles Dollar also considers the principle of *respect des fonds* as an indispensable element in automating administrative activities:

It is clear that the fundamental theory underlying archives, which I take to be the concept of the nature of records and the principles which derive from that nature, remains both valid and relevant. New information technologies have not changed and nor are they likely to change the fundamental nature of records as evidence of actions and transactions with a specific context of creation and use. [...] the concept of provenance ... is the basis for assessing the trustworthiness and reliability of electronic records. As the volume of material in electronic form grows, users increasingly will require that the information handling service community provide them with the robust indicators of trustworthiness, reliability, and validity that only archival theory offers.¹⁴

Do I have to insist on the fact that the principle of *respect des fonds* can be considered one of the important gains of modern archival science? Interestingly, fewer and fewer specialists doubt the usefulness of this principle in a digital, automated environment. On the contrary, our adherence to this principle and our belief that it is well founded are probably the best indicators of the evolution of archival science as a separate discipline, and this should be evident in our teaching.

Sixth Observation: Arguments Supporting the Necessity of Archival Science

The certainty that archival science is necessary to the society in which it is found arises from the correct perception that there are needs to which it can respond:

- the phenomenal increase in information arising from the multiplication of services available in society;
- important decreases in space available to organizations;
- the scientific appraisal of information that is more and more ephemeral—consequently, precise retention periods must be established which help avoid unnecessarily keeping information which has become useless;
- rapid retrieval of strategic and operational information;
- the assurance of conformity to the many laws and regulations governing the custody of archives;
- the keeping and processing of information which allows study in retrospect;
- the systematization of operations, an essential prerequisite to automating administrative activities.

These factors mean that modern administrators can no longer do without archival and records management activities unless they are prepared to sacrifice efficiency, productivity, and competitiveness. The future archivists and records managers we are training need to be prepared to make administrators aware of this reality, and to convince them of its importance.

Seventh Observation: Structuring and Developing Archival Activity

The circumstances responsible for creating the factors just identified lead to the idea of structuring and developing a kind of archival activity that is very different from short-term crisis management. This involves policies governing the organization and processing of archives which can be defined as the considered, well-planned means to bring about the efficient and cost-effective organization and processing of the documentation produced by an organization as a result of its activities.

Thus, archival science is above all the accumulation of methods made available by the organization and processing policy, composed of:

- legislation and regulations governing archives;
- appropriate human, material, and financial resources;

- a programme grouping all the professional activities of the archivist: needs analysis; implementing the records retention schedule; rationalizing the creation of documents; protecting vital records; organization and processing of active and semi-active records, as well as those which become inactive and which are either destroyed or which are kept forever.

Of course, a policy governing archives cannot function without a schedule for managing deadlines and events involving strategic decisions concerning the order of implementation of the various elements. The archivist's professionalism and effectiveness, as well as the strength of our teaching, come to fruition in the ability to establish the appropriate relationships between the various elements of this policy and to take into consideration the particularities of the milieu where it is applied. Reconciling these needs and methods is the essential need to which we must be able to respond.

On the eve of the third millenium, archival science is taking its place in the new reality I have just described and which must be reflected in our teaching. I will now look at some factors which are characteristic of the outlook for development of our discipline and which also have an impact on our teaching.

The Outlook for Development of our Discipline

Research in Archival Science

It is no accident that research in archival science is at the top of the list of items in the outlook for development of the discipline. Jean-Pierre Wallot maintains that if it were not for research, archival science would still be a collection of methods and repetitive practices without any scientific rationale.¹⁵

In this regard, I would like to point out the excellent work done by the Australian scholar Ann Pederson for the XIIth International Congress on Archives. The vast study she conducted confirms that there is too little research activity in archival science, and it identifies the main causes of this weakness:

- the short period of time the discipline has existed;
- the limited number of teaching programmes in archival science;
- the limited number of full-time professors;
- the difficulty of access to documentation in archival science;
- the development of applied research funded by archives themselves, to the detriment of basic research.

In such a context it is easy to see just how imprudent and how unrealistic it would be to expect large-scale, rapid development of ambitious research programmes.

We should also keep in mind Ann Pederson's reaffirmation of the close and essential link between university-level training and research, since research takes place mostly in universities. In the context of the development of archival science through research, as implementing and maintaining full teaching programmes (at the bachelor's, master's, and doctoral levels) develops in the universities, so will the need increase for university-level teaching personnel, and consequently research will develop. When

the number of professors/researchers in archival science becomes great enough, and when these in turn seek enough research grants, then (but only then) we will see the elaboration of a research agenda for archival science. We teachers, therefore, need to make a greater effort to extend and improve our research work, and to get our students interested in it.

Standardization in Archival Science

Standardization is another important area of development in archival science, which has already begun to take its place in our teaching. This avenue is all the more interesting for us since it involves the pursuit of basic and applied research and because it is the basis of any serious effort in automation. Citing Val L. Verman, Richard Cox defines standardization as the:

process of formulating and applying rules for an orderly approach to a specific activity for the benefit and with the cooperation of all concerned, and in particular for the promotion of optimum overall economy taking due account of the functional conditions and safety requirements. It determines not only the basis for the present but also for the future development, and it should keep pace with progress.¹⁶

The goals of standardization—which, it should be said, must be broadened to take into account the entire life cycle of archives—are improving communication, reaching a better understanding of archival activity, reducing the costs involved in processing archives, and achieving greater and more effective cooperation among archivists.

From Cox's statement that for archivists, standardization is an instrument essential to their integration into the information age and that standards are one of the best indicators of the state of development of a discipline, we can see the importance of the standardization of our practices.¹⁷

Standardization needs to be a priority for the development of archival science. It will increase the quality of our professional work and significantly improve the foundations of our corpus of knowledge and consequently of our discipline, on condition, of course, that we take it into account in our programmes.

Taking Advantage of Information Technology

Our day-to-day existence has been profoundly transformed by the arrival of information technology on the scene. For archival science, it is both an enormous information producer we need to subdue, and a powerful ally we need to woo.

We now know that the technical means at society's disposal for producing and reproducing information are in great need of being tamed so that they will be at the service of society, not the opposite. The technologies in question produce information. If left to themselves, they could rapidly produce such quantities of information that no system, no matter how sophisticated it is and how well it performs, could process the information adequately so as to make it available at the right time, in the right place, and to the right person. It is, therefore, urgent that archivists identify and define specific areas of archival science that need to be taken into account when automating the processing of archives as well as in producing electronic archives. As

soon as possible, we must determine the parameters which will turn information technologies into an obedient servant instead of an invasive and tyrannical master. As Kent Haworth sees with such clarity,

If, at the same time, archivists can provide a set of acceptable data content standards to be used in conjunction with acceptable data structure standards, which are in turn incorporated as components of a comprehensive information system standard, their own management of archival records will be enhanced immeasurably. Rather than being isolated from the mainstream of the development and implementation of modern information management systems, they will be included as thoughtful, respected participants in the information management continuum.¹⁸

Before this can take place, however, archivists need to have professional credibility in order to be taken seriously by other information specialists. As Haworth maintains: “archivists will become an integral part of the information management process only if they are able to clearly demonstrate professional competence.”¹⁹

Previously I stated that information technologies are also an ally we need to win over. We must take full advantage of what information technologies can offer us in the way of help with various activities in archival science. For the moment, however, even with more and more software packages available for managing archives, information technology is still short on real archival science solutions to archival science problems. And what of the well-founded fears concerning conservation of most supports used by information technologies, problems caused by their legal value, and incompatibilities inherent in their use?

It has become evident that archivists will need to increase the rhythm of the conversion of their operations to the use of information technologies. However, this conversion can only be made to the advantage of the discipline and the profession if the specific needs and expectations of the discipline are respected and if those we are educating are very well prepared to use these technologies.

Appraisal

Any observer the least bit aware can see a consensus developing on the fundamental importance that appraisal is taking on in archival science. There is no hesitation in presenting it as the most important aspect, even the most noble aspect of the work of archivists, as the greatest challenge of coming developments in the discipline, and as the activity which makes archival science unique in relation to its associated disciplines. Indeed, because of the irreversible consequences of negative appraisal, namely the elimination of information with no possibility of reconstructing it, appraisal is an activity specific to archival science which distinguishes it from the other information professions.

Everyone agrees with Menne-Haritz that appraisal is the archival activity requiring the most preparation and the most knowledge—knowledge of archival theory, certainly, but also detailed knowledge of the milieu, the institution (legislation and regulations governing it) in which archival activities take place. Appraisal is probably what will most severely test the archivist’s professionalism. It is in the context of this activity that archivists will need to make their most complex and difficult decisions. In fact, in Ann Pederson’s study on the areas of teaching and research in archival

science that need developing, the participants were unanimous in putting appraisal at the top of the list, considering it the most important area for development in the teaching of archival science.²⁰ We do not have much choice about this: we need to accord appraisal its proper place in our schools.

Conclusion

Archival science has evolved greatly and, as we have seen, several observations have demonstrated that it is part of a new reality: an extended definition of its goals; the challenge of strategic information; the status of a discipline and a profession; broadening its traditional mission; reinforcement of its basic principle; a more focused rationale for its existence; and the structuring and definition of its activities. In short, from an auxiliary branch of history, archival science has become an autonomous discipline with all the advantages this brings, but also with the responsibilities inherent in such a status. In addition, the outlook for development of the field is extremely interesting and offers an important challenge. Establish research programmes, aim toward completion of standardization of practices, take advantage of the possibilities information technologies offer, make an investment in the appraisal function: all this presupposes considerable effort on the part of archivists already in the field but also (and especially) full, effective, adequate preparation of future archivists. And that is exactly what I am writing about: the teaching of archival science. Existing schools and new schools which will come into existence must undertake or continue their work of teaching archival science. They must do it by constantly adapting their teaching programmes to the changing realities of the modern world, to emerging needs in contemporary society. The archivists who are in schools now will be competent only if they are able to adapt to every situation. For this to take place, we need to train them to learn things more than we need to train them to do things. When they leave our care, they should have more questions than answers. We must hope they will be able to extend the limits of knowledge in our discipline in order to assure for archival science a committed presence well-anchored in the society of the twenty-first century.

Notes

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- 2 Pedro Lopez Gomez, "Archival Education: Specialist and Generalist Training," *Archivum* 39 (Proceedings of the 12th International Congress on Archives, Montreal, 6-11 September 1992) (1994), p. 302.
- 3 Marcel Van Campen, "The Archivist in the University Environment," *Archivum* 39 (Proceedings of the 12th International Congress on Archives, Montreal, 6-11 September 1992) (1994), p. 128.
- 4 Richard Loranger, "L'information stratégique. Un nouveau champ d'intervention," *Archives* 23, no. 4, (printemps 1992), p. 55.
- 5 Richard J. Cox, "Professionalism and Archivists in the United States," *American Archivist* 49 (Summer 1986), p. 229-47.
- 6 Louise Gagnon-Arguin, *L'archivistique. Son histoire, ses acteurs depuis 1960* (Québec, 1992), pp. 103-72.

- 7 Jacques Mathieu and Martine Cardin, "Jalons pour le positionnement de l'archivistique," in Groupe interdisciplinaire de recherche en archivistique (GIRA), *La place de l'archivistique dans la gestion de l'information: perspectives de recherche. Symposium en archivistique* (Montréal, 1990), p. 103-104.
- 8 Liv Mykland, "Protection and Integrity. The Archivist's Identity and Professionalism," *Archivum* 39 (Proceedings of the 12th International Congress on Archives, Montreal, 6-11 September 1992) (1994), p. 104-107.
- 9 Terry Cook, "Many are Called but Few are Chosen: Appraisal Guidelines for Sampling and Selecting Case Files," *Archivaria* 32 (Summer 1991), p. 25-50; Terry Cook, *The Archival Appraisal of Records Containing Personnel Information: A RAMP Study with Guidelines* (Paris, 1991); Terry Cook, "Mind Over Matter: Towards a New Theory of Archival Appraisal," in Barbara L. Craig, ed., *The Archival Imagination: Essays in Honour of Hugh A. Taylor* (Ottawa, 1992), p.38-70.
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- 13 Angelika Menne-Haritz, "Archivfachliche Ausbildung: Den Anforderungen Der Gesellschaft Des 21. Jahrhunderts Gerechwerden," *Archivum* 39 (Proceedings of the 12th International Congress on Archives, Montreal, 6-11 September 1992) (1994), p. 270.
- 14 Charles M. Dolla, "Seizing the Opportunity: Archivists in the Information Age," *Archivum* 39 (Proceedings of the 12th International Congress on Archives, Montreal, 6-11 September 1992) (1994), p. 449.
- 15 Jean-Pierre Wallot, "Les Archives nationales du Canada et l'aide à la recherche en archivistique," in Groupe interdisciplinaire de recherche en archivistique (GIRA), *La place de l'archivistique dans la gestion de l'information: perspectives de recherche. Symposium en archivistique* (Montréal, 1990), p. 276.
- 16 Richard J. Cox, "Standardizing Archival Practices: A Tool for the Information Age," *Archivum* 39 (Proceedings of the 12th International Congress on Archives, Montreal, 6-11 September 1992) (1994) p. 167.
- 17 *Ibid.*, p. 167.
- 18 Haworth, "Standardizing Archival Description," p. 192.
- 19 *Ibid.*, p. 193.
- 20 Ann E. Pederson, "Development of Research Programs," *Archivum* 39 (Proceedings of the 12th International Congress on Archives, Montreal, 6-11 September 1992) (1994), p. 312-59.