

Archival Science, Archives and Archivists Between 20th and 21th Century: an Accelerated Evolution

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ABSTRACT

The author traces what is maturing and evolving in archival science, archives and professional archivists which, even with moments of arrest and rapid recovery, are living during these years a sometimes too fast changing under the influence of forces extraneous to them, such as new technologies, administrative transparency, privacy, economic crisis, the training provided by the Schools of archival science, universities and other subjects.

Archivistica, archivi e archivisti tra XX e XXI secolo: un'evoluzione accelerata

SINTESI

L'autore ripercorre quanto sta maturando e si va evolvendo nella scienza archivistica negli archivi e nelle figure professionali degli archivisti che, anche con momenti di arresto e di rapida ripresa, vivono in questi anni un mutamento a volte troppo rapido sotto la spinta di forze a loro estranee quali le nuove tecnologie, la trasparenza amministrativa, la privacy, la crisi economica, la formazione impartita dalle Scuole di archivistica, dalle Università e da altri soggetti.

Pospešen razvoj arhivske znanosti, arhivov in arhivistov v času med 20. in 21. stoletjem

IZVLEČEK

Avtorica v svojem prispevku predstavlja stanje in razvoj arhivske znanosti, arhivov in profesionalnih arhivistov, ki pogosto doživljajo prehitre spremembe, do katerih prihaja predvsem zaradi pojava novih tehnologij, želje po transparentnem poslovanju in upravi, zasebnosti, ekonomskih kriz in izobraževanja, ki ga izvajajo arhivske šole, univerze in drugi.

Italian archival science has ancient roots and is the result of a thinking standing in the tradition of archival doctrine and its solid archival principles.

Retracing, in a short essay, its evolution from the mid-twentieth century to the present day is a difficult and unrealistic task, especially when a rich literature already offers this type of food for thought. Here the intention was to simply summarize the main points and to draw some cause for reflection, mainly addressed to future scenarios. However, the more I was moving forward in the writing of this paper, the more I was realizing that it was... impossible to write! I was becoming smaller and smaller, and inadequate to let someone know the work of the archivists who have been through the last few decades!

So, to have a firm support, I had recourse to Donato Tamblè's fine work, who in his 1993 *Italian Contemporary Archival Theory. Historical Critic Profile (1950-1990)* starts from the, alas!, always recurring debate about the scientific autonomy of archival science and the evolution of the concept of archives and archival science from 1950s to 1990s. The purpose is to dwell on the theoretical aspects of archival science indicating the most important contributions and the most important issues of our contemporary time. Pointing out the state of the art is not easy! To say that the archival science is, indeed, a science is not enough if you are not really convinced of its "theoretical freedom, of its intrinsic independence and, at the same time, of the fruitful interdisciplinary relationship in a global cultural context."

Among the central issues debated in the recent years there are the nature of the archives and the archival science, the relationship between history and archives, the legal definition of the archives, the role of information technology that we cannot really call 'new' anymore and the refinement of the principles of organization, reorganization and description. Many legislative events mark in the meantime, in Italy, the archival world, and particularly the rise in the 1970s of the Ministry of Cultural and Environmental Heritage to which passed the archival institutions until then into the structure of the Ministry of Interior. It was not a simple administrative reorganization, but the recognition of the archives as a cultural asset, and it was the result of a long and complex debate born at the moment of the Italian unification which brought to an unity the diverse framework of the different pre-unification States. It was then chosen to emphasize the cultural value of the two-faced Janus that archives are.

It was stated, therefore, that even the archival science does not end in the legal value of the archives, as not only is a practice, cannot be reduced to the knowledge of the funds kept in institutions, it is not only the methodology and the practical application of a science, but is the science itself indeed!

The reflection that we can do nowadays about the relationship between historiography and archival science recalls the need for the archival science to be independent from needs unrelated to its nature, that would objectify it and reduce it to a mere practice of service that could mistakenly consider "the archivist as a technician of historical research".

In the Italian archival science stands out the Italian Tuscan archival tradition. It highlights the historical relationship between each archival collection and their creator, the original purpose existing in the formation of the fond from which structure and content result, the relationship between the fond and the historical research.

Since the 1970s there has been much discussion about the "scientific" aspect of archival science. We start from the famous Claudio Pavone's essay "*But is so established that the archive reflects the Institute?*" in which it was stated that "the archive reflects primarily the way in which the Institute organizes its memory, i.e. its ability to make a self documentation connected to its practical purposes", a way that went on modifying "to a line of technicity and formalizing resulting in gradual detachment from other dimensions of the life of the institution itself". Here we are talking about, in fact, of "archival viscosity" and archival bound, but also of "systematic classification" of the documents that is regarded as an operation that has issues and legal-administrative and technical-scientific significance in the making of the archive. This is, of course, the classification contemporary to the production of the documents that have primary function in the process of setting up the archive and allows the logical form of organic series, therefore being the image itself of the structure of the archive.

The structure is something you have to discover, identify and study in contrast of the arrangement that is something that you give to an archival body. The study of the structure of the archives and the process through which the documents are created is critical to the arrangement, although this does not justify the use of pre-established schemas. This is the thought of Paola Carucci, a central figure in the scenario of contemporary archival science and teacher of a whole generation of archivists which have been trained through the study of her "legendary" handbooks. Her works are the fitting point on which come to coordinate many previous ideas. It is exemplary her definition of archives: *The archive is the whole of the documents produced or otherwise acquired during the conduct of their business from magistratures, organs and offices of the State, from public and private institutions, from families and from people*, definition that finds the archive at the time of origin of the documentary complex at a creator and because of the conduct of its business.

The cohesive factor that determines its cohesion comes from the legal requirements of "testimony" and "certainty" that govern the creation of documents connected by the archival bound. Arranging the archive by the principle of provenance restores the structure of the archive, not that of the institution, although it must kept in mind, particularly in the organizational aspects. A methodological discourse set on the structure leads to capitalizing the experiences, and the archivist's technique reveals itself in developing a working method that allows the verification of one's and others' work, and the possibility of checking is the fundament of science. Also Isabella Zanni Rosiello reflects about the figure and the role of the archivist, defining her/him as a "preserver of historical memory" and mediator between documentation and user by using the inventory tools better than by a personal re-

lationship. High specialisation, grueling apprenticeship, great sense of responsibility, attention to evolving technologies are all steps to become an archivist correctly “knowledge broker”. Behind this is the discourse of power, that of the “memory masters”!

The affirmation of the autonomy of archival science, while in interdisciplinarity and multidisciplinary with other disciplines, is the new frontier in which measure up: “every science not only preserve but set and evolve their methodology in a continuous refinement and adaptation to changed requirements” and is not archival science to be in need of history as better history to be in need of “archival knowledge”. The role of the archivist is the determining factor in the economy of research, whose results depend, as well as by the cleverness of the researcher, by the work of the archivist on valorizing the sources. Inventories, guides, etc. are the scientific instruments of knowledge and valorization of the archive in which the very principles of archival science merge, through the work of locating not only the original shape of the papers had, but also all the institutional transformations of creators and the material events incurred by the papers themselves together with their formal configuration.

In the 1990s archival science widens its disciplinary sphere. Information technology, that already between the 1960s and 1970s had begun to propose itself to the users as a searching tool, breaks more and more in the archives: internet, web, digital supported documents. An increasingly significant part of the documentary memory is leaving sediment in digital format in the public and private digital systems, and in the servers and our computers. Traditional archives are in the meanwhile converted to digital media and become available on the internet. Great are the potentials of this process, but also great are the perils, as it is furthermore well known to all archivists: authenticity, conservation, manipulation, hardware and software obsolescence, pitfalls of network. The supply of many data available to all is attractive, but it leaves the user alone in front of the monitor with the illusion of having an infinite power of search, but hiding to him in fact many other searching possibilities. It is important that we stay on course, not to be swept away by IT technicians, but to use this great possibility keeping up-to-date and reasonably maintained command.

These are the challenges, in the recent years, that colleagues of great competence can see and deal with: from Maria Guercio to Gianni Penzo Doria, Stefano Vitali, Giorgetta Bonfiglio Dosio and all the colleagues that play the game every day, without fear of facing the new, giving their all with enthusiasm for the future of the archives.

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Donato TAMBLÈ, *La teoria archivistica italiana contemporanea. Profilo storico critico (1950-1990)*, Roma 1993

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Isabella ZANNI ROSIELLO, *Archivi e memoria storica*, Bologna 1987

There are, in addition, the numerous writings of Gianni Penzo Doria, who dealt with issues related to the introduction of digital protocol, digital signature, classification and collation, and information systems both in public and private sector, mainly dealing with diplomatic of public documents and administrative collegialities (resolutions and memos). He was considerably active in the re-engineering of administrative procedures and workflow management systems, and has written some forty essays on the topics of digital administration, organization of archives, on-line register and PEC. He has coordinated several national archival and diplomatic projects: Titulus 97, Cartesio, Aurora, Ninfa (www.unipd.it/archivio/progetti), as well as a project for writing a proposal for a technical regulations DPCM for the online roll.

SUMMARY

Italian archival science has ancient roots and is the result of a thinking standing in the tradition of archival doctrine and its solid archival principles. Retracing, in a short essay, its evolution from the mid-twentieth century to the present day is a difficult and unrealistic task, especially when a rich literature already offers this type of food for thought. Here the intention was to simply summarize the main points and to draw some cause for reflection, mainly addressed to future scenarios. Following the path of Donato Tamblè's beautiful work *Italian Contemporary Archival Theory. Historical Critic Profile (1950-1990)*" we retrace the years that have seen great Italian archivists at work: from Cassese to Sandri, Lodolini, D'Addario, Pavone, Valenti, Carucci, Zanni Rosiello, it is a whole succession of archivists who have always been keeping a high profile! To the new colleagues, to keep high the guard and the scientific level of Italian archival science.

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