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IS AN ARCHIVIST MERELY A GUARDIAN OR ALSO A CREATOR OF MEMORY?

“Doing history means building bridges between the past and the present, observing both banks of the river, taking an active part on both sides...”¹

Bernhard Schlink

This paper discusses the academic profession of archivist, which has been deliberated over by a number of archival experts in Europe and further afield, particularly in the last third of the 20th century. This is undoubtedly a result of the development of archival science as a branch of science. Archival science evolved into an independent science relatively late.² Hence, the emergence of a modern archival science places the majority of archivists in the second half of 20th century. The Committee on Professional Training and Education of the International Council on Archives was established in 1979, and in subsequent years it organised a number of international colloquia on the training of archivists. A review of the training of archivists around the world was produced in 1992. The review covered 121 schools or studies of archival science, including postgraduate levels, in 43 countries on all five continents. A 1992 study entitled “Directory of Schools and Courses of Professional Training for Archivists” by the International Council on Archives (ICA) provided a general overview of the directions followed by all archival studies and schools. Later, in the autumn of 1994, a recommendation was adopted in Ljubljana which stated that a balance between history and other sciences should be established in training for this particular field. Part of archival studies should focus on the history of institutions or the history of management, while greater importance should be attached to information technology skills owing to the generally recognised risks of destroying modern documents in electronic media³.

¹ Bernhard Schlink: *The Reader*, Ljubljana 2001, p. 234-235.

² For more on this see Hermann Rumschötel: *The Development of Archival Science as a Scholarly discipline*, *Archival Science*, Volume 1, No. 2 2001, 143-155.

³ Miljenko Pandžić: *Obrazovanje arhivista – usporedni pregled školovanja u raznim zemljama svijeta* [The Training of Archivists – a Parallel Overview of Training in Various Countries of the World], *Arhivski vjesnik* (Bulletin d'archives), Year 40 (1997), p. 35-42.

In the 1990s virtually no archivist meeting or symposium avoided the discussion on the identity of the archivist, an issue which of course is directly linked to the training of archivists and their status in society.⁴

But as the previous century witnessed the development of archival studies as an independent branch of science, the new century is bringing new challenges that could enrich this field and promote its further development, while profoundly transforming the profession of archivist by increasing and enhancing its role. In late 20th century, major, or one could say outright revolutionary, changes occurred which already have influenced archival science as a branch of science, and consequently the profession of archivist, and will continue to do so in future.

Nowadays, a special Section for Archival Education and Training (SAE) within the International Council on Archives (ICA) is in charge of training and education of archivists. The mission of the Section is primarily to promote integration and cooperation among teachers of archival studies, integrate archival research, studies and training, develop teaching materials and advise on the organisation and designing of teaching programmes. All contributions highlight major changes in the respective area and voice great expectations.

Swedish archival expert Claes Granström points to four factors which in his opinion exert the strongest influence in bringing about the dramatic changes observed in archival science: the achievements of information and communication technologies, the development of democracy, internationalisation and the rapidly changing social structures.⁵ These factors undoubtedly exercise a decisive influence on archival institutions and their functioning, as well as on archival science as a branch of science, both in Europe and abroad. In addition to these general characteristics of the new era, one also has to take into account the special circumstances facing former socialist or communist countries. These should contribute more, and considerably more, to the discussions on the archivist profession in future.

New forms of archive material have appeared, since forms of documentary material and consequently office work in all three branches of power, especially in the executive and judicial branches, have changed and continue to change. There is an increasing prevalence of documents in electronic form, which consequently brings about changes in working procedures and organisational structures. Two forms of electronic records have evolved, namely, electronic text documents and computer databases. All of this has changed the

⁴ Josip Kolanoviæ: Identitet arhivista: Od zanimanja do profesije [The Identity of an Archivist: From Interest to Profession], *Arhivski vjesnik (Bulletin d'archives)*, Year 40 (1997), 7-14.

⁵ Collection of scientific papers from the supplementary training course, Maribor 4/2005, No. 1, p. 56-63.

informational value of documents as well as the methods of saving and making use of archive materials⁶.

A consequence of the increasing democratisation of society is the increasing demand and desire for free access to public information, which to a large extent has already been addressed in legislation (Freedom of Information Legislation), both at the national and transnational levels. The fundamental rights of EU citizens include the right of access to documents (Article 42 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union). In addition, the Council of Europe adopted the position that *a country does not become fully democratic until each one of its inhabitants has the possibility of knowing in an objective manner the elements of their history*. The right to free access to information in the public sector is an indispensable element of a democratic and open society. This primarily involves promoting trust in public administration and preventing corruption. Access to documents of public interest provides citizens with the possibility of acquainting themselves both with current developments as well as the near and distant past, and offers them an opportunity to participate more actively in public discussions. Naturally, access to information of public interest is not provided to an equal degree in all countries. Internationalisation, such as the integration within the European Union, has resulted in the drafting of transnational legislation, or more precisely directives which individual countries must transpose into their national legislations. As concerns access to public archives, all relevant actors are required to formulate legal provisions in such a way as to meet both the requirement for transparency as well as the need for protecting the privacy and rights of individuals.⁷

In the opinion of the author quoted earlier, document management in modern society has three fundamental goals:

- access to documents as part of the national cultural heritage, irrespective of their form, location and age;
- meeting the needs of public administration and the judiciary; and
- meeting the needs of the research and scientific spheres.

Of course, all of this includes archival institutions and archivists, encouraging them to abandon the traditional role of passive guardians of memory and become its active shapers.

⁶ Jože Žontar: Arhivska veda v 20. stoletju [Archival Science in the 20th Century], Arhiv Republike Slovenije (Archives of the Republic of Slovenia), Ljubljana 2003. p. 69-71.

⁷ See: Marjana Križaj: Dostop do javnega arhivskega gradiva v nekaterih državah Evropske unije [Access to Public Archives in Certain Countries of the European Union, Arhivi (Archives) 30(2007) No. 1, 71-82.

Until recently, the subject of archival science was primarily written documents, from the moment they entered a public archival institution or from the moment their authors wished or were required to hand them over. The principal role of the archivists, therefore, was to define, take over and save important documents. Archivists otherwise did not influence the production and designing of written records. Lately their role has also been changing in this particular area. The world-renowned Dutch archivist Eric Ketelaar underlines the increasing importance of and need for the archivist's input in the first phase of the lifetime of a document.⁸ In this way, archivists could facilitate the easier extraction of archive material from a body of documents, greater information potential or improved composition of documents suitable for permanent saving, and consequently the easier use of and simpler access to important information of public interest. The subject of archival science therefore is expanding and becoming increasingly integral and multifaceted.

To sum up, the recent period has been characterised by major changes in the importance of archives and archival science; consequently, these changes should be followed by revolutionising the profession of archivist and hence reforming the training for that profession. In this context, one should take into consideration the views expressed by a number of eminent archivists⁹, who underline the need to break with certain erroneous and detrimental traditions. The first among them is the Scottish archivist and former Keeper of the Records of Scotland, Patrick Cadell¹⁰, who wrote that orderly democracies should emphasise the administrative function of archives, with the view of preserving their practical aspects. Consequently, as Cadell believes, archives will also be open for cultural purposes. Cadell also warns of the disadvantageous practice of stressing only the cultural importance of public archives, referring to the case of the former socialist countries where such practice was established in order for the records services to free themselves of any responsibility for preserving certain political, judicial or other administrative documents. In spite of that, he states the following: *“But I continue to find it extraordinary that the European Commission's archives, or indeed those of a nation, are still often looked on as little more than a cultural addendum, a near useless historical appendage to our leisure activities, but without the shape, the colour, the fun or, it must be said, the public appeal of museums or galleries.*

⁸ Eric Ketelaar: Archivist Research Saving the Profession, *American Archivist* 63 (2000) 322-340.).

⁹ Terry Cook Archival Science and postmodernism, *Archival Science*, vol 1, no.1 (2000), 3-24.

¹⁰ Patrick Cadell: ACCESS AND INFORMATION EUROPEAN ATTITUDES AND ANXIETIES, *Archives*, XXVIII/108, April 2003, p. 3-13

Nonetheless the majority of the countries of the European Union place their archives under the charge of a ministry with cultural responsibilities”.

Canadian archivists Joan M. Schwartz and Terry Cook are even more resolute in their assertions¹¹. Their conclusions, which were published in the *Archival Science* international periodical, with the provocative title “ARCHIVES, RECORDS, AND POWER: THE MAKING OF MODERN MEMORY”, certainly apply to Slovenia, too. The two authors underline that the profession of archivist was considered in the past to be more or less servile and obliging. The role of archivist was depicted simply in the sense of an uninvolved reception of documents from their authors and handing them over to researchers. In the same way, archivists themselves saw their position as objective, unbiased collectors, editors and keepers of old records. *“From both perspectives, archivists and their materials seem to be the very antithesis of power... Certainly recent writing on cultural institutions has seldom touched upon the powerful impact of archives and records on collective memory and human identity, unlike the role now accorded to human and natural history museums, art, galleries, libraries, historical monuments, even zoos.”* In reality, however, archivists are the ones holding the past in their hands. Some events are recorded, others get lost. Some stories are idolised and revered, others stowed away and forgotten. Ignoring a number of factors that influence documents before these arrive in an archival institution – if they arrive at all – is not good. Downplaying the power which archives have over history and memory can be fatal. It is therefore unsound to place archivists on a par with librarians or museum workers.

The former socialist countries of Europe definitely cannot compare with Western European countries, either in the regulation and management of archives or in the training of archivists and the development of archival science as a branch of science. Nowadays, however, it is precisely for their historic experience that these countries can contribute crucially to establishing the academic profession of archivist. It is perhaps no coincidence that it was in fact Warsaw that hosted in 2006 the latest, 7th European conference on archives, entitled “Archivist - Profession of the Future in Europe”.

Why and how? Let us look at Slovenia. The commemoration of International Human Rights Day, on 10 December 2007, was dedicated to political prisoners in Slovenia in the period 1945-1990. Writer Drago Jančar produced the script and also selected the texts that were presented. The commemoration had a prominent title, “Lost Memory”. The opening lines were: *“In the spring of 2007, a cupboard full of files on political prisoners was discovered in the basement of the Ministry of Justice in Ljubljana. It contained more than 5475 sheets bearing names and family names, including information on residence, political offence and sentences which these people received and which they also served. However, prisoners and*

¹¹ Joan M. Schwartz and Terry Cook: ARCHIVES, RECORDS, AND POWER: THE MAKING OF MODERN MEMORY, *Archival Science* 2, 2002, p. 1-19

those whose human rights were violated number even more. Today there are around 18,000 state compensation claimants.

Who were these people? What were they guilty of? What happened to them? Where are they today? Who remembers them at all?

Only files left in a cupboard, in a basement somewhere in the middle of Ljubljana, remain of their lives. In the basement of Slovenia's historic memory, in its dark subconscious, there is silence. Files do not speak of human fates, fear or humiliations. The dead are silent, but even those who are still alive are unwilling to speak on this matter... ”

The text speaks for itself and reveals several points, two of which are most important. The first one is that public archives - the central state archive and the regional archives - do not possess or keep all important documents. The other one is that archives go beyond the importance of cultural heritage and are more than just a cultural monument, as proclaimed by the Protection of Documents and Archives and Archival Institutions Act. Many an archive is not simply an old record or a silent witness of the past. It is also an important piece of evidence and hence a valuable document. Here it should be specifically highlighted that the archive material of the former Prison Administration of the Republic of Slovenia, including the prisoners' files, which was discovered in the archives of the Ministry of Justice and which is addressed in the opening lines of the aforementioned commemoration, was discovered only in 2007 by employees of the Redress and National Reconciliation Department within the Ministry of Justice, although it should have long been kept safe in the Archives of the Republic of Slovenia.

This is not the only such case in recent years, and a number of documents which should have been kept safe in public archival institutions were even found at waste dumps or other inappropriate locations. These examples point to an increasing and indispensable need for archivists to be familiarised with the basics of law and organisation of the state. The law defines the state as an organisation through its norms and rules. It determines the structure and operating principles not only of the state but also of other core groups of public life, such as various organisations within the state framework on the one hand, and broader groups or organisations on the other. The law is a means for the organisation and development of human society and an instrument of its social control. The law, or legal order, is a historical phenomenon which, being part of social reality, is influenced by the socioeconomic, cultural and civilisational factors of that reality. The law is also an assemblage of rules delimiting the

outward behaviour and conduct of the members of an individual social community, among themselves and in relation to the superior holders of power, and ensures their peaceful coexistence by stipulating the means of resolving disputes. Since it is he who preserves as accurate as possible an account of a social community in time and space, an archivist should know the law, for otherwise he cannot orient himself; much less can he evaluate the documents that are produced as a result of the operation of the organisations and bodies of that society. A state cannot be imagined without the law. It is hence impossible to know a state and also the narrower social groups or organisations without knowing the law. However, the archivist should also know the law in order to provide appropriate and effective **protection** of archives. Unfavourable experiences in that very area of archive law call for training archivists in a way to provide for greater involvement of archivists in the process of protecting documents, from production to their use in archival institutions.

The above statements are further endorsed by the fact that important documents in post-socialist countries encompass not only those produced by state authorities, which should be handed over to archival institutions as part of regular practice, but also those produced by other bodies during the transition from one state system to another. These should be detected, found and acquired. Appraisal of documents is not and cannot be merely a routine procedure. It requires thorough familiarity with the social circumstances and the functioning of public administration.

Let us take a look at how the training of archivists was organised in Slovenia and how it should, in our opinion, be organised in future, from the viewpoint of past and recent experiences.

The efforts to organise the training of archivists have a long tradition in Slovenia.¹² First there were attempts to introduce a single training programme for the whole of the former Yugoslavia, yet these failed, however, owing to the major differences in languages, script, and most especially historical traditions. What was offered were more or less occasional courses and seminars. Later there were also individual training programmes for people working in archives. Lectures in archival science began in the 1978/79 academic year, at the Department of History of the Faculty of Arts of the University of Ljubljana, specifically within the single-discipline and non-teacher-training programme. The following academic year saw the introduction of an independent postgraduate course in archival science, both at master's and

¹² For more on this see Jože Žontar: Arhivsko šolanje v Sloveniji [The Training of Archivists in Slovenia], Arhivski vjesnik (Bulletin d'archives), Year 40 (1997), p. 111-117.

doctoral levels. In the 2004/2005 academic year, archival sciences were also introduced at the University of Maribor, first at the Faculty of Education and subsequently at the Department of History of the Faculty of Arts, as a non-teacher-training programme. In contrast to Ljubljana, archival science at the University of Maribor is more comprehensive, and in addition to disseminating knowledge on archives, archiving and archive materials, it includes the history of archival science and archival institutions, as well as modern archives legislation plus the basics of law and the state. Unlike in Ljubljana, in Maribor the lecturers on archival science have to be archivists themselves. Unfortunately, for the time being, the University of Maribor does not offer studies at the master's or doctoral level. It is more than obvious that in such form archival studies do not meet the demand. Not only are practical requirements not met but also the progress of archival science as an independent branch of science is impaired. All attempts to improve the situation - and there were no small number of them - failed. Currently there is one retired professor of archival science in Slovenia and two assistant professors lecturing at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Maribor. Efforts to introduce archival science as an independent subject in law, administration or other social or humanist faculties were unsuccessful, as were the endeavours to organise an appropriate postgraduate course. We may only hope that the new archives legislation (comprising the Protection of Documents and Archives and Archival Institutions Act and the Decree on documentary and archival material custody of 2006), which brought some fundamental innovations and improvements, will eventually ameliorate the situation. Apart from the protection of documents, two issues should be specifically highlighted here. In the past only documents of lasting importance for culture and science were considered archives. Nowadays, archive material also involves legal certainty. The other innovation is the legally enshrined cooperation of representatives of public entities (state authorities, bearers of public authority, public service contractors and local self-government bodies) in the selection of archive material from a body of documents. This implies that jurists and various administrative officers should be familiar with at least the basics of archival science.

What is our desire? Where should we invest our efforts?

Experience shows our foremost priority should be to organise postgraduate studies. Archival science was and remains an interdisciplinary field. Its interdisciplinary character is gaining increasing prominence. However, a rapid development of science in all areas calls for clearly defined roles. Archival institutions require both information scientists as well as jurists and historians. The need for good cooperation among archivists with different higher education

qualifications is much greater and more rational than the need to train archivists to master different fields. Slovenia therefore needs appropriate postgraduate studies which would provide for good mutual communication, cooperation and creative actions. Consequently, this would increase the reputation of archivists in society, particularly if experts from the executive and judicial branches could be persuaded to study archival science at postgraduate levels in order to contribute to good office work in public administration. Jurists should acquire experience in the field of history and information technology, information scientists in the field of law and history, and historians in the field of law and information technology. In addition, of course, archival science as a subject should be introduced to faculties educating students to work in archival or other public institutions; this includes studies of law, administration, information technology and history. Unfortunately, for the time being these are just pieces of wishful thinking. Perhaps our wishes could be realised with the help of recommendations from joint endeavours by European archivists.

Let us conclude our thoughts. The path that brought archival science to the status of an independent branch of science was a long one. In the beginning, archival science was a supplementary field of law and administration, and later it became an auxiliary branch of history. Nowadays, it is an independent, modern and complex field, classified among sciences such as history, administration and information technology. Its future existence requires continuous new actions, checking old paradigms and keeping pace with development. As documents change in their design, so do methods of communication and the exchange and transmission of records. The protection of human rights is gaining increasing importance. Once a field of marked national character, for both the production of documents as well as the determination of those with permanent value depended on cultural, political and economic conditions, archival science is slowly developing to become a trans- and international field. As such it crosses borders which until recently seemed normal and reasonable. Archival science is becoming a comparative science. All of this naturally contributes to new, more efficient methods of preserving and making use of documents, since experience from abroad always enriches home practice. In the event that archives succeed in acquiring a prominent, indispensable and vital place in society and preserving the most authentic possible record of the past, archival science will further develop as an interdisciplinary field and work in

archival institutions will no longer be reserved for and attractive to historians, but also to jurists and information scientists.¹³

I shall conclude by quoting a few thoughts put forward by Tony Judt in *An Essay on Modern European Memory*.¹⁴ Judt underlines the need to distinguish between memory and history. Memory is safeguarded, more or less effectively, by monuments and museums. *“Memory is inherently contentious and partisan: one man’s acknowledgement is another’s omission. And it is a poor guide to the past.”* A completely different matter, however, is history *“in both its meanings: as the passage of time and as the professional study of the past – the latter above all... All the same, the rigorous investigation and interrogation of Europe’s competing pasts - and the place occupied by those pasts in Europeans’ collective sense of themselves - has been one of the unsung achievements and sources of European unity in recent decades. It is, however, an achievement that will surely lapse unless ceaselessly renewed.”*¹⁵

Let us add our own thoughts to Judt's views. The effort can only be sustained by means of archives with well-preserved documents. To ensure that, we need archivists with broad education and independent thinking, and for this particular goal all of us will have to strive together.

¹³ Herman Rumschöttel: *The Development of Archival Science: General Tendencies*, *Archival Science*, volume 1 No.2 2001 143-155; Patrik Wallin: *The multidisciplinary character of archival science*, <http://www.info.uta.fi/tutkimus/regim/seminars/Wallin.pdf>, Matevž Košir, *Arhivistika – pot do samostojne znanstvene discipline* [Archival Science – the Path to an Independent Branch of Science], *Arhivi (Archives)* XXV/1, 2002, 295-302.

¹⁴ Tony Judt, *Postwar: A history of Europe Since 1945*, 2nd book, *Mladinska knjiga* 2007 p. 909-940.

¹⁵ Tony Judt, *Postwar: A history of Europe Since 1945*, 2nd book, *Mladinska knjiga* 2007 p. 939-940.