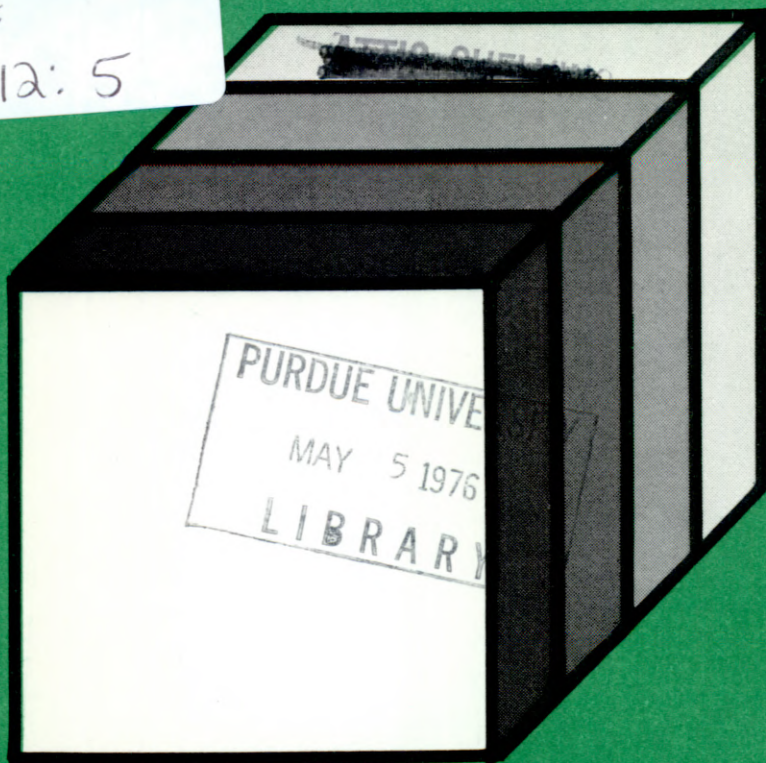


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European Archival Practices in Arranging Records

Staff Information Paper 5

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Staff Information Paper 5

EUROPEAN ARCHIVAL PRACTICES IN ARRANGING RECORDS

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Prior to the 19th century, no general principles were developed which were generally applied in arranging records received at archival institutions.¹ As records were received at such institutions they were usually incorporated into existing collections in accordance with some predetermined scheme of subject matter, as books are classified in libraries at the present time.

French Practices²

A departure from this method of arranging records occurred first in France, in which country a new system with respect to keeping the records of the départements was instituted under Guizot, Minister of Public Instruction from 1832 to 1839 and head of the Cabinet from 1840 to 1848. In contrast to the records of the Archives Nationales at Paris, which had already been arranged in a methodical though an arbitrary manner by the archivist Daunou as will be shown later, the records within the départements had been left in a disorganized state ever since the departmental organization of the provinces by a law of October 26, 1796. The various regulations prior to 1884 which pertain to the system of arranging records within the départements are found in the Lois, instructions et règlements relatifs aux archives départementales, communales et hospitalières, issued by the Ministry of Public Instruction and Fine Arts at Paris in 1884. These regulations include basic instructions for the new system of arranging the records of the départements, published originally in a circular issued on August 8, 1839, and elaborated in a circular issued by the Minister of Interior, Count Duchâtel, 2 years later on April 24, 1841. This circular, entitled "Instructions pour la mise en ordre et le classement des archives départementales et communales," established a logical scheme for grouping the records of the départements, which, though modified by two later supplements, is still in use.

The general principles that were to be observed in carrying out this scheme were the following:

1. Records are to be grouped into fonds; that is, all records which originated with any particular institution, such as an administrative authority, a corporation, or a family, are to be grouped together and are to be considered the fonds of that particular institution.

¹A summary of the literature pertaining to older archival practices is found in an article by Hans Kaiser, "Aus der Entwicklung der Archivkunde," in *Archivalische Zeitschrift*, 37: 98-109 (1928).

²The following analysis of French practices is based largely upon articles by Carl Gustaf Weibull, "Archivordnungsprinzipien," in *Archivalische Zeitschrift*, 42-43: 52-72 (1934); by Hans Kaiser, "Das Provenienzprinzip im französischen Archivwesen," in Hans Beschorner, ed., *Archivstudien zum siebenzigsten Geburtstage von Woldemar Lippert*, 125-130 (Dresden, 1931); and by Wilhelm Güthling, "Das französische Archivwesen," in *Archivalische Zeitschrift*, 42-43: 28-51 (1934).

2. Records within fonds are to be arranged by subject-matter groups, and each group is to be assigned a definite place in relationship to other groups.

3. Items within such subject-matter groups are to be arranged as circumstances may dictate, either chronologically, geographically, or alphabetically.

This scheme,³ as modified by later supplements, provides for the grouping of the records of the départements into the following fonds:

I. Fonds anciens (antérieurs à 1790)

Archives civiles

- A. Actes du pouvoir souverain et domaine public.
- B. Cours et juridictions.
- C. Administrations provinciales.
- D. Instruction publique, sciences et arts.
- E. Féodalité, familles, notaires, communes, état-civil et corporations.
- E. Supplément—Fonds des communes.
- F. Fonds divers se rattachant aux archives civiles.

Archives ecclésiastiques

- G. Clergé séculier.
- H. Clergé régulier.
- H. Supplément—Fonds des hospices.
- J. Fonds divers se rattachant aux archives ecclésiastiques.

II. Période intermédiaire (1790-1800)

- L. Administration de 1789 à l'an VIII.
- Q. Domaines.

III. Fonds moderne (postérieur à 1800)

- K. Lois, ordonnances et arrêtés.
- M. Personnel et administration générale.
- N. Administration et comptabilité départementales.
- O. Administration et comptabilité communales.
- P. Finances.
- R. Guerre et affaires militaires.
- S. Travaux publics.

³This scheme is found in *Annuaire des bibliothèques et des archives*, 1927, p. 7.

III. Fonds moderne (postérieur à 1800) (Con.)

- T. Instruction publique, sciences et arts.
- U. Justice.
- V. Cultes.
- X. Établissements de bienfaisance.
- Y. Établissements de répression.
- Z. Affaires diverses.

In the circular of April 24, 1841, is formulated the basic principle of respect des fonds, according to which all records originating with "an administrative authority, a corporation, or a family" are to be brought together into a fonds, within which the records are to be arranged by subject matter and thereunder either chronologically, geographically, or alphabetically. The relationship of the subject-matter groups within a fonds is to be determined by their content. The important group is to be placed before the unimportant, and the general is to precede the specific. For example, an inventory of the records within a monastery or a chartulary of a monastery containing transcripts of its most important documents is to be placed upon the shelves before the records therein are inventoried or transcribed. The arrangement of items within the subject-matter groups is to be determined by the following practical consideration: What arrangement permits an archivist to answer any possible question put either by a governmental agency or by a private searcher in the quickest and most accurate manner. "Inquiries," it is stated, "usually contain as a point of departure for searches either a date, or a place name, or the name of an individual, depending upon the nature of the inquiry. It follows, therefore, that the arranging must proceed from the chronological, geographical, or alphabetical point of view. If, for example, a collection of decrees, or of laws, or of judicial decisions is under consideration, the items should be arranged chronologically, since a searcher usually gives the date of such documents. If, on the other hand, the matters of municipalities are considered, a geographical arrangement is preferable, since searchers usually indicate the name of the municipality. . . . If records pertaining to private individuals are concerned, an alphabetical arrangement by names of the individuals obviously best facilitates searches."

The basic principle of the circular of April 24 was given a more definite statement in a meeting of the Archives Commission, created by the Minister of Interior, held later in the year on June 8. At this meeting the eminent paleographer Natalis de Wailly formulated the principle of respect des fonds in the following manner:⁴

A general classification of records by fonds and (within fonds) by subject matter is the only way properly to assure the immediate realization

⁴ Cited by Hans Kaiser in Beschoner, *Archivstudien*, 125.

of a regular and uniform order. Such a classification offers several advantages. In the first place, it is more easily put into practice than any other system, for primarily it consists of nothing more than bringing together items, only the origin of which it is necessary to determine. In a large number of cases this classification is made easier, since it involves simply the reproduction of the order of the former custodians: this order might perhaps be effected by means of existing inventories, in which case it is sufficient to collate the documents inventoried to rearrange them in their original order. If, instead of following this method, a theoretical order is proposed, based on the nature of things, all these advantages are lost.

In the circular of April 24 and in the statement upon this circular by de Wailly on June 8 are thus found the origins of the basic principle of respect des fonds.

Though the principle of respect des fonds was thus formulated as early as 1841 and was thereafter generally observed in France with regard to the larger archival collections, it would be a mistake to conclude that the system of "classement général par fonds" was applied to the records of the various smaller administrative bodies. In the case of the records of the départements, for example, the principle of respect des fonds was not applied with equal strictness to the three main groups indicated in the scheme reproduced above. From this scheme it is evident that records prior to 1790 were organized into fonds by agencies of origin, each of which was assigned a definite letter symbol. Records of the Revolutionary years from 1790 to 1800 were simply grouped together into one fonds, a procedure justified by the special political and administrative developments of that period. Records after 1800, however, were grouped not by agencies of origin but by general subject categories, such as financial records, judicial records, public works records, and the like, without taking into account whether such records might have originated in a prefecture or in some other administrative body within a particular département. In the case of the records of municipalities, 15 subject categories were again set up, into which the records were grouped without taking the slightest account of their origins. It is, therefore, noteworthy that only a part of the records of départements were organized by agencies of origin and that in the arrangement of the records of municipalities the principle of the respect des fonds was entirely neglected.

In the Archives Nationales of Paris, which became the central archival institution of France by a decree of June 25, 1795, a schematic arrangement of records was adopted by Daunou. Unfortunately, Daunou, who succeeded Camus as head of the Archives Nationales in 1804, applied to the records under his jurisdiction a subject-matter scheme of classification, which he carried over from his library experience. To the 4 groups of records organized by his predecessor, which had been assigned the letter symbols A, B, C, and D, Daunou added 20

categories, to each of which he assigned an alphabetical symbol and into which he organized the records under his jurisdiction. But few of the archival collections of older administrative organs were preserved intact, among them the records of the Trésor des chartes, the Parlement, and the Châtelet, and, to a certain extent, the records of the Chambre des comptes. The other records were arranged in accordance with an arbitrarily devised, "methodical" scheme, which left out of account their origins. It is, therefore, noteworthy that the principle of respect des fonds, the validity of which the French archivists have particularly emphasized, did not receive recognition in the original arranging of the records in the Archives Nationales and was first applied there only when the records were rearranged later in the century.

While the principle of respect des fonds was not consistently followed in France after its formulation in 1841, nonetheless an important step forward had been taken. The old system of arranging records according to some arbitrary scheme of subject matter had been abandoned, at least theoretically, and had been replaced by a system based upon a rational and generally applicable principle.

Prussian Practices⁵

Another development with respect to practices of arranging records occurred in Prussia, where the principle of respect des fonds was given a more extensive and intensive application. When the eminent historian Heinrich von Sybel became director of the Prussian State Archives in 1874, he initiated a number of changes in the rather obsolete methods of preserving records. In the "Regulative für die Ordnungsarbeiten im Geheimen Staatsarchiv,"⁶ which he issued on July 1, 1881, he instituted a new system for the organization of the records in the Prussian State Archives. These regulations, which were drawn up by the archivist Max Lehmann, were discussed in a conference of the officials of the Prussian State Archives on July 1 and were unanimously approved. In paragraph 2 of these regulations the fundamental principle was stated, based upon the French principle of respect des fonds, that "the arrangement of records in the Secret State Archives is to proceed according to the provenance of their constituent parts." This Provenienzprinzip simply provided that the main divisions within the State Archives were to be formed by separating the records originating with the various administrative units of the Government. The grouping of records of different agencies into various subject-matter categories was thus recognized as an impractical procedure, particularly since the volume of

⁵The following analysis of Prussian practices is based largely on articles by Weibull, cited above, and by Johannes Schultze, "Gedanken zum Provenienzgrundsatz," in Beschorner, *Archivstudien*, 224-236.

⁶These regulations are to be found in *Mitteilungen der K. Preussischen Archivverwaltung*, Pamphlet 10, 16ff. (Leipzig, 1908).

records being transferred was greatly increasing. The principle set forth in paragraph 2 was made retroactive in that records of the Cabinet Council and of the Foreign Ministry which had been incorporated into those of the privy councilor were to be segregated, according to paragraph 7 of the regulations, and were to be maintained as separate collections. Similarly, bodies of records of the Central Government of the Kingdom of Westphalia, which had been taken over by the Prussian State Archives, were to be consistently separated from the records with which they had been merged.

While the French considered it necessary to arrange records within the fonds according to schemes devised by the archivists, the Prussians in the above regulations went one step further than the French with respect to preserving intact the original arrangement. Official records in Prussia, it should be stated by way of explanation, were organized prior to their transfer to the State Archives in registry offices (offices concerned with the sorting, arranging, and preserving of the current files of governmental agencies), and the records in their entirety thus organized are often referred to as registries. In paragraph 4 of the regulations a new principle was developed, which provided that the records of a particular agency should be maintained in the archival institution in the order in which they had been placed in the registry office of that agency and should not be organized, as stipulated in the French circular of 1841, by subject-matter groups. The fourth paragraph of the regulations, which contains the statement of the Registraturprinzip, reads in part:

Each agency, as soon as it begins to release records, is to be assigned a stack area (Repositor) intended exclusively for the records of that agency. Within this area, the official papers are to be maintained in the order and with the designations they received in the course of the official activity of the agency concerned.

Related to this principle is the statement contained in paragraph 13 that no records bound by an agency should be unbound, though it is also provided by paragraph 8 that "official papers of varying provenance ought not to remain combined in any single file."

On October 12, 1896, the various provincial archives in Prussia were urged to adopt the regulations prescribed for the central archives in Berlin in 1881. On July 6, 1907, definite instructions were issued for the organization of the records in these provincial archives. These instructions pertained in part to the disposition of records which, as a result of territorial changes, had come into the archives of provinces in which they did not belong. In general, such misplaced records were to be left in the provincial archives which had custody of them, even though they might have originated with agencies of different provinces. Only records "from the registries of the central agencies of the Brandenburg-Prussian State" were to be segregated and transferred to the Prussian State

Archives. In all other cases, records which had been taken over by provincial archives were to be left in their custody if such records had been systematically incorporated into the records of such archives and had been covered by registers created by them. If such records were not arranged in accordance with the principle of provenance, the existing order was to be maintained so long as more pressing work in organizing records had to be accomplished.

As is evident from the above analysis of the regulations of 1881, the principle of respect des fonds developed in France received a peculiar extension through its application to Prussian archival economy. In Prussian archives, records were to be arranged by registries, and within any particular registry the order originally given the records by the recordkeeping officials was to be maintained intact. The whole system was, therefore, based upon the fact that before records were released to an archival institution they were properly arranged within the registry offices of the agencies which created them. In contrast to the French system, under which records within a fonds were substantially reorganized to meet research needs, the Prussian system provided for the maintenance of registries to conform to the administrative functioning of governmental agencies. In contrast to the French instructions of 1841, which refer to a "rearrangement" (*disposer*) of the fonds of any particular agency "according to a certain order" and to a "classification" of records "according to their contents," the Prussian instructions of 1881 provide for the maintenance of "archival bodies" or "entities" (*Archivkörpern*) in the order in which they were created. The arrangement of records in Prussian archival institutions therefore reflects to a far greater degree than that in France the administrative organization of the Government. The emphasis in Prussia, in a word, has been upon a functional arrangement, designed to meet primarily the official needs of the Government, while in France it has been upon a rational or logical arrangement, designed primarily to meet the needs of historical investigators and only secondarily the needs of Government officials.

Dutch Practices⁷

The Provenienzprinzip, as developed in Prussia, was immediately accepted in the Netherlands, where it was most consistently applied and where it was given a theoretical justification in a manual issued by three Dutch archivists. The principle was given official sanction by the Dutch Government in a regulation issued by the Minister of Interior on July 10, 1897. A year later, the Dutch archivists Muller, Feith, and Fruin published their well-known manual, which became a bible for modern archivists, being translated into German in 1905, into Italian in 1908, and into French in 1910.

⁷The following analysis of Dutch practices is based on the article by Weibull cited above and on the chapter on "The Arrangement of Archival Documents," in S. Muller, J. A. Feith, and R. Fruin, *Handleiding voor het ordenen en beschrijven van archieven* (Groningen, 1898; 2d ed., 1920), translated from the Dutch by Arthur H. Leavitt, who kindly made the translation available.

Like the Prussians, the Dutch archivists adhered to a system of arranging records based upon the original order devised within registry offices. The fundamental principle adopted by the Dutch archivists, which was considered "the most important of all," reads as follows:

The system of arrangement must be based upon the original organization of the registry (Archief), which in its essentials corresponds to the organization of the administrative body that produced it.

In formulating this principle, the relative merits of two alternative systems were considered. The first was an arrangement of records under various arbitrary subject headings, such as are ordinarily found in library classifications; the second was an arrangement of records corresponding to the administrative organization of the government which created them. A system of subject headings, it is pointed out, cannot be all inclusive. It must be arbitrarily imposed from without and does not arise from the order or content within a collection. It thus forces an archival collection into "an alien mold." While it may help a searcher to consult a particular heading for a particular subject, it may turn him from the right path, since other headings may contain records on the same subject and since, indeed, a single document may treat a score of subjects. Records, in fact, cannot be consistently organized under subject headings, because of the variety of subjects with which a single document or a single volume may treat. On the other hand, it is contended that a system of arranging records based upon the organization existing in the registry provides a satisfactory basis for making searches on an innumerable variety of subjects and can be consistently applied. Such a system, it is pointed out, is based upon the work of secretaries, who either consciously or unconsciously follow definite rules in preserving and arranging records within the registries—rules which are based on the character of the records and on the official demands for service upon them. It is neither possible nor desirable, therefore, to destroy the original organization of a registry and to replace it with another, based upon what might appear to be a more logical scheme of subject headings.

In stating this principle, the Dutch archivists emphasized the necessity of maintaining the "original organization" of a registry. This original organization, they pointed out, corresponds to the administrative organization of the agency which created the records. "The original organization of a registry," they stated, "was not created arbitrarily; it is not the result of chance, but the logical consequence of the organization of the administrative body, from the functioning of which the registry is a product." It is the "original organization" developed in the registry office, however, and not a scheme designed by archivists to reflect the administrative structure of the governmental agency, that is to be applied in the arrangement of the records.

If the "original organization" of a registry has not been maintained, however, the prime objective to be accomplished in arranging the records is the

reconstruction of this original order. To accomplish this reconstruction, the Dutch archivists suggested certain definite rules. Since in the course of time records are maintained by succeeding groups of recordkeeping officials, changes may have been made in the original plans under which they were organized. If such changes accord with the organic development of the administrative body which produced the registry, they are to be maintained; but, if they are the result of errors or thoughtlessness on the part of later recordkeeping officials, the records are to be restored to their original order "to carry out the main idea from which the old organization developed." The main series containing the proceedings of the administrative body, such as memorandums, letters, and the like, are to form the skeleton of the organization, since such records indicate the organic structure of the collection. Just as a paleontologist handles the bones of a prehistoric animal, restoring them to their original order, so archivists are to restore the constituent parts of a registry to their original order. A paleontologist joins together the skeleton of such an animal, placing each bone in its proper position though it may have been separated from the rest or may be partly missing; so also an archivist is to reconstruct the skeletal organization of a registry, correcting minor deviations and errors in its structure which might be attributable to the thoughtlessness or incompetence of recordkeeping officials. Only in exceptional cases are changes to be made in the "original organization," as, for instance, in cases of inconsequential irregularities attributable to recordkeeping officials, such as faulty insertions, occasional deviations from the general plan of the registry, or the filing of older documents with more recent ones for purposes of easy consultation.

After the skeleton of the organization has been reconstructed through reference to the main series created in the registry office, the loose materials are to be combined in a definite order. In contrast to the arrangement of such loose items recommended by the French, either chronological, geographical, or alphabetical, the Dutch archivists prefer that they be arranged in an order exactly corresponding to the order in which the main series are organized. No arbitrary groupings are to be made if the main series developed in the registry offices can be determined. A definite and thorough relationship, they emphasize, ought to exist between loose items and the organic units of a registry. Loose items which appear previously to have formed parts of series or dossiers are to be combined again, if possible, into series or dossiers. If it is not possible to determine the original order of such loose items, they may be organized either according to the dossier system of grouping records by subject matter or according to the series system of grouping records by organic units, depending upon the system followed in the registry offices in which they originated. If no reasons exist for the preference of either of the systems, the application of the dossier system is recommended.

Danish Practices⁸

In Denmark, the principles set forth in the manual of Muller, Feith, and Fruin were accepted as the basis of archival work in arranging records. In 1903, V. A. Secher, the Archivist of Denmark, issued "Directions for Organizing, Registering, and Arranging Records,"⁹ which followed those of the Dutch manual. In these directions, Secher stated that the order which governmental agencies "found usable and satisfactory" ought to be maintained. "If it were possible," he concluded, "to find every single item for official purposes during the period while the records were still active, it should also be possible to find them after such records have been deposited in archival repositories. It is only a matter of acquainting oneself with the official arrangement given the records in the past, of ascertaining the jurisdiction and competence of the various individuals or offices" concerned with the records. Following the Dutch, Secher insisted that an archivist should restrict himself "to perfecting the existing order, to bringing misplaced documents into their proper places, to correcting any errors." Only in case the original order cannot be ascertained, he added, should the archivist dare to organize records by subject matter, and even in such an event the system of arranging by series, with inventories and registers covering each series, might be preferable to a subject-matter system, for the adoption of a subject-matter system might create the illusion that records can be placed in a proper order in accordance with an arbitrarily determined scheme.

Swedish Practices

In Sweden, as in Denmark, the rules formulated by the Dutch were accepted as the basis for work in arranging records and were given official recognition in an imperial order issued on May 22 and in a circular of the Archivist of the Kingdom issued on June 22, 1903.

In the imperial order of May 22 considerable freedom was allowed both the registry officials and the archives officials in organizing records. Registry officials might organize the records either into series or into dossiers. If such records were transferred to archival institutions, those of each registry office were to be maintained as separate collections, and the arrangement given them was to conform as closely as possible to that given them in the office which created them. "In arranging and registering the records of an agency, the practices adopted by the agency itself are to be followed generally, so far as these practices appear to be well-considered. . . . If records are in complete disorder, an attempt should be made to reestablish the original order, in which

⁸The following analyses of Danish and Swedish practices are based on Weibull's article cited above.

⁹The directions are contained in an article by V. A. Secher, "Om Proveniens-Principet som Ordningsregel i de danske Statsarkiver og om andre der gældende Ordningsregler," in *Meddelelser fra det danske Rigsarkiv*, 1: 191ff. (1907).

case the archivist is to be guided by the character and functions of the agency concerned." "It is advisable," it is further stated in the decree, "to acquire a general knowledge of the main series. Then it is necessary to decide whether within a particular series records can be most suitably arranged by subject or by the writers of letters." Items are not to be unsystematically removed from series and grouped by subject into dossiers. Dossiers, on the other hand, are not to be torn apart and the records scattered among various series.

In the circular which the Archivist of the Kingdom issued on June 22 to implement the imperial decree, the basic rules developed by the Dutch were also followed. "In every small archival group," the circular read, "the original order, if such an order existed, should generally be maintained, or should be reconstituted, since it can be assumed for good reasons that this order is the one which best fulfilled the current needs of an agency and which, therefore, can best serve to facilitate searches of various kinds in the long run. If no other guiding principle can be found for arranging disorganized materials, cognizance should be taken of the usual series developed in the course of the official activity of Swedish governmental agencies and of any other general principles having a bearing."

English Practices

On English archival practices in arranging records, Hilary Jenkinson in his *Manual of Archive Administration*, which was first issued in 1922 and appeared in a revised edition in 1937, provides rather complete information. In organizing records, Jenkinson states that the object clearly is "to establish or reestablish the original arrangement." Records are to be arranged into "archive groups," which he defines as accumulations "resulting from the work of an Administration which was an organic whole, complete in itself, capable of dealing independently, without any added or external authority, with every side of any business which could normally be presented to it." Within these "archive groups," records are to be arranged in their original order. Jenkinson questions whether the method suggested by the Dutch archivists Muller, Feith, and Fruin for organizing records goes far enough. According to this method, records were to be grouped by main series, which were to form the skeleton of the organization and to which the loose items were to be made subsidiary. What about the invertebrates, asks Jenkinson, "archive groups" which have no main series? Jenkinson therefore suggests a functional analysis of an "archive group," by which the functions of the administration that produced the group are to be determined. These functions are to be the general headings under which groups or classes of records are to be organized. If loose items cannot be grouped into such functional classes, they may be arranged under any system, according to Jenkinson—"alphabetical, chronological, formal, or what not"—provided that the accession number of the materials is retained and that no "original file, fastening, or binding is broken up." An archivist is justified in breaking up a

well-established original order only "on paper," in the opinion of Jenkinson, "leaving the physical arrangement, where there is definite arrangement," in the state in which it is found. Jenkinson, however, admits that there may be special circumstances in which the fundamental principle of preserving the original order might be compromised, but he states that the archivist who undertakes such a rearrangement "is taking a very grave responsibility."

Conclusions

In the development of principles which were to govern the organization of records within archives, the French thus made the initial contribution. Their principle of respect des fonds provided a rational basis for such work, substituting for the old system of arranging records by subject-matter groups a system of preserving records by organic units or fonds. Within fonds, the French arranged records "according to their contents" to meet research needs. In Prussia the principle of respect des fonds had its counterpart in the Provenienzprinzip or principle of provenance, according to which Archivkörpern, or bodies of records, originally organized in registry offices, were to be maintained as separate entities. Through the development of the Registraturprinzip, or principle of registry, the organization given the records in registry offices was to be maintained and was not to be disturbed to conform to a new subject scheme, as was the case with respect to the fonds in France. The Prussian system of maintaining records in archives, therefore, presupposed that they were properly organized in registry offices before they were released to archival institutions and that the organization given them would best meet official needs. In the Netherlands, the Prussian Provenienzprinzip was given a theoretical justification in the archival manual issued by Muller, Feith, and Fruin. These archivists emphasized the necessity of maintaining the "original organization" given records in a registry office and stated that the primary work of archivists was restorative in case the "original organization" had been disturbed. In this restorative work, the main series of records maintained in a registry office were to constitute the skeleton around which the records of an organic unit were to be built up. The Dutch manual was accepted as the basis for archival work in organizing records in Denmark, Sweden, and England, though in England Jenkinson found the suggestion of carrying on restorative work around a skeleton composed of main series of records inapplicable to "invertebrate" archival groups, which had no main series.

Upon the rather elementary principle of respect des fonds, the archivists of one country after another built up an elaborate theoretical structure, which achieved its greatest refinements in the Dutch manual of Muller, Feith, and Fruin. The original principle that the records of each organic unit should be maintained separately and should not be merged with the records of other organic units provided a firm foundation. It is beyond doubt a *first* principle of

archival economy. But some of the theoretical superstructures are of questionable utility and recently have been subjected to a critical examination by Carl Gustaf Weibull, the Swedish archivist in Lund, in an article published originally in *Scandia Tidschrift for historisk forskning*, 3: 52-77 (1930), and republished in German in the *Archivalische Zeitschrift*, 42-43: 52-72 (1934).

Weibull questioned the validity of the thesis of the Dutch archivists that the "original organization" of the records by a registry office must be accepted as a norm for their arrangement in the archival institution. "It is not to be denied that the original organization of a registry determines its arrangement to a certain extent and indicates its main outlines. A registry arranged according to the series system can hardly be reorganized into one arranged according to the dossier system. . . . But this position is a long way removed from the position that the activity in organizing archives is to be primarily restorative in character, and only secondarily should take into account the interests of historical research. The justification—that the original order adequately served official purposes and still serves these purposes—is hardly tenable. In most instances, officials in the beginning allowed documents to accumulate without arranging them according to a well-thought-out system, in a manner that appeared most simple, chronologically as they came in, or possibly arranged them into one or two groups, as, for example, letters separately, or papers regarding various protocols separately, and so forth. The successors adopted the same mechanics, eventually probably creating still further groups or subdivisions."

The objective in organizing archives, Weibull intimated, is hardly that of a paleontologist, motivated by the traditions of a museum, to restore records in an order which is an end in itself. The objective, he insisted, is to make it possible to answer questions put by official and unofficial searchers as rapidly and as accurately as possible—an objective emphasized by the French as early as the 4th decade of the 19th century, when they formulated their principle of respect des fonds. The research point of view, which has been obscured by theoretical considerations, must again receive the emphasis which it deserves, Weibull insisted, whether the searches be undertaken to answer questions of an administrative nature or to prosecute historical studies in the true sense of the word. If one recognizes the validity of this point of view in organizing records, it follows that they should be logically grouped by subject matter within fonds or archival groups, so far as such a grouping is possible and practicable. In doing this, Weibull pointed out, the archivist would be doing work that is not merely restorative but is actually creative in character.

In the *Nederlandsch Archievenblad*, Fruin, the only member then surviving of the Dutch triumvirate which compiled the manual, stated his objections to Weibull's position, insisting that the "archives are designed in the first place to clarify the administrative activities of government agencies" and pointing out that the archivist cannot anticipate the research needs of scholars, that any

subject grouping of the records of any organic unit might facilitate the searches of one group to the disadvantage of others.

Similarly, Georg Winter, the Director of the Prussian State Archives, gave his views on the strictures of Weibull in the *Korrespondenzblatt des Gesamtvereins der deutschen Geschichts- und Altertumsvereine*, 138-147 (1930). His views are substantially the same as those expressed by Fruin. In an earlier article on "The Principle of Provenance in the Prussian State Archives," published in the *Revista de la Biblioteca, Archivo y Museo del Ayuntamiento de Madrid*, 10: 187, he admitted, however, that the organization of records in a registry office prior to their release to an archival institution was "preliminary to preserving the fonds in their organic structure." He wrote as follows:

Admittedly--and with this admission we wish to take into consideration a few fundamental restrictions upon and anomalies from the principle of provenance--admittedly the existence of a usable and reasonable arrangement of registries, or the possibility of reestablishing such an arrangement, is the preliminary to preserving fonds in their organic structure. There existed, particularly in earlier periods, registries in which the grouping and maintaining of records was without system, foolish, and impractical. In such cases, the archivist should not--as every one with insight will admit--literally ride the principle to death, but instead he must attempt an entirely new arrangement.

When considering archival conditions in the Federal Government of the United States, the principle developed by the Prussian archivists and elaborated by the Dutch, that the original order developed in registry offices must be maintained, appears to have in the main an academic interest only. While the greater proportion of records developed by European governments are organized in registry offices before their release to archival institutions, the greater proportion of the records of the Federal Government of the United States are left in a disorganized state. This is true because, in the course of our national history, records were not organized with the view to their transference to an archival institution, since no such institution existed. For generations, in fact, records were simply allowed to accumulate and, after having been moved from building to building with the expansion of Federal activities, were finally relegated to attics and basements. The basic condition, therefore, is generally lacking by which the principles of the German and Dutch archivists concerning the preservation of the original order created by a registry office can be made to apply.

The reconstruction of the original order, likewise, is very difficult and in many cases is not desirable. The original organization, in many instances, is not determinable. In other instances, the original organization--to use the words of the Director of the Prussian State Archives in describing older registries--is

“without system, foolish, and impractical.” While several attempts on a national scale have been made to bring about uniformity in the recordkeeping procedure of the several executive departments, the result has been the adoption of successive systems which have tended to complicate rather than to simplify the organization of the records of any particular department. No records, not even those at present being accumulated, are organized with the consideration in mind that they may be eventually transferred to an archival institution. And if records are organized by recordkeeping units at the present time, it is generally according to a modification of the Dewey decimal system of subject classification, which does not clearly reflect the administrative organization or development of the agency that produced them.

It is therefore evident that no archival principles should be “ridden to death,” literally to become fetishes which will prevent a commonsense arrangement of records designed to promote the research needs of scholars and government officials. Since European archival principles cannot be applied indiscriminately without becoming fetishes, it therefore may be necessary that there be evolved, with respect to the arranging of records, rules that will be the result of a cognizance of American record conditions, such as were evolved collaboratively by the archivists of the Prussian State Archives and such as were formulated in the manual of Muller, Feith, and Fruin by the Dutch Association of Archivists. Since European archival conditions have made necessary numerous exceptions to the application of any principles that were developed, certainly no rigid adoption of abstract principles in the United States, where records are infinitely more complex and disorganized than those in Europe, would be justified without a consideration of the actual record conditions.

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