

European Archives in an Era of Change

The Evolution of Basic Appraisal Principles - Some Comparative Observations

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HUGE ARCHIVES AND SLENDER MEANS have been the constant headache of archivists since the dawn of their profession. However, the vast increase in the production of documents due to a rapid expansion in bureaucracy and public services during and after World War I was felt much like a quantum leap by the archivists of the day. Administrative bodies and archivists alike were forced to consider the problem in a more determined and serious way than before. The sheer bulk of modern public records seemed to be a threat to scholarly research itself. The very destruction of rec-

ords tended to be considered a service to the researcher.²

In its turn this led to a reconsideration of the role of the archivist. This reconsideration took various and, as will be seen, quite opposite directions. Some archivists feared imminent death by drowning and looked for solid ground. A quest for objective appraisal criteria started. Others shied away from the challenge and maintained

¹The article is an updated revision and translation of the author's article entitled "Massearkiver og Verdi-teori - Noen Hovedlinjer i Kassasjonsdebatten" that appeared in *Norsk Arkivforum* in 1985.

²See Ernst Müsebeck, "Der Einfluss des Weltkrieges auf die archivalische Methode" [The Influence of the World War on Archival Method], *Archivalische Zeitschrift* 38 (1929): 135-150; Reinhold Schaffer, "Das Massenproblem bei den Stadtarchiven" [The Bulk Problem in City Archives], *Archivalische Zeitschrift* 45 (1939): 208-222; and Hilary Jenkinson, *A Manual of Archive Administration* (London: Percy Lund, Humphries & Co. Ltd., 1922), 148.

that archivists ought to take no part whatsoever in the appraisal of records. England and Germany became opposite poles in this respect.

Appraisal in England

Even before World War I, there existed a traditional tendency in England to stress the destruction of the worthless more than the preservation of the valuable. Already in 1875 the Deputy Keeper claimed that "there are extant in the Public Record Department large masses of legal and government documents which are wholly useless for legal, historical, military, statistical, economical, or official purposes, and of no possible interest to any one."³ He asked to have the authority to destroy archives already in his custody and to refuse the receipt of new records which he considered worthless. He achieved this empowerment by the Public Record Office Act of 1877. Exempted from this act were documents older than 1715. Later, in 1898, this exemption was drawn further back to 1660.

Except for this criterion of age, there does not seem to have been any consideration of what constituted the lasting value of documents. However, a general warning was given against the inclusion in the destruction schedule of "any documents which can reasonably be considered as of legal, historical, genealogical or antiquarian use or interest, or which give any important information not obtained elsewhere."⁴ A sensible warning as far as it goes, but the door was of course still wide open to any personal bias one can think of. Even as late as 1912, the archivist at Oxford was of the opinion that only the end product of any administrative activity, i.e. only the final,

legally binding documents of an agency, were worth permanent preservation.⁵ Out of this tradition and out of the situation created by the First World War sprang Hilary Jenkinson's famous *Manual of Archive Administration* in 1922. The book was one of several in the series entitled "Economic and Social History of the World War."⁶

One of Jenkinson's main themes is, to put it bluntly, how to get rid of records. And his answer is astonishingly simple: by no interference on the part of archivists. He asked ". . . is destruction of any kind a proper part of the Archivist's business?" His answer was no. And the historian was no better off than the archivist. They would both be too biased and ill-informed. One consequence Jenkinson drew from this was that no destruction of records which the past had left to us was acceptable, since there would be no competent person around to do the job. But what then about modern archives? Here the archivist and the historian were even less competent. At the same time "there . . . is a real danger that in the future work upon Archives may become a task hopelessly complicated by reason of their mere bulk."⁷ The solution he found was that the destruction of records should be left to the administrative body itself:

"but for an Administrative body to destroy what it no longer needs is a matter entirely within its competence and an action which future ages (even though they may find reasons to deplore it) cannot possibly criticize as illegitimate or as af-

³This statement is cited in the *Committee on Departmental Records Report* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1954), 16. This 1954 report is otherwise known as *The Grigg Report* after the name of its chairman, Sir James Grigg.

⁴*Ibid.*, 17.

⁵David Vaisey, "The Image of the Archivist, Harmonization of Training and International Mobility" (Paper delivered at the international symposium entitled "Archives and Europe Without Boundaries," Maastricht, The Netherlands, 2-5 October 1991).

⁶Hilary Jenkinson, *A Manual of Archive Administration Including the Problem of War Archives and Archive Making* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1922). A revised edition appeared in 1937, and again in 1966. This last edition was published in London by Percy Lund, Humphries & Co. Ltd. Citations in the following notes are from the 1966 edition.

⁷*Ibid.*, 148-149.

fecting the status of the remaining Archives; provided always that the Administration proceeds only upon those grounds which alone it is competent to make a decision - the need of its own practical business; provided, that is, that it can refrain from thinking of itself as a body producing historical evidence."⁸

This is an original and unique English contribution to archival theory. It is closely linked to Jenkinson's archival philosophy in general and to the quite modest place he allows the archivist between the administrator and the researcher. The archivist's primary duty is to be the servant of those archives which the past has incidentally and haphazardly left to his custody. His secondary duty is to be the servant "of the student Public."⁹

Jenkinson's ideas have had a strong impact on archival thinking in England to this day. It was left to the administrative bodies to do as they liked with their files. And it was quite in accordance with the teaching of Jenkinson when the British, at the outbreak of World War II, cast their eyes upon archival deposits as one way to salvage paper and to manufacture munitions. When the Americans, too, during the 1930s and 1940s "turned their attention to the disposal rather than to the conservation of records," Philip C. Brooks warned against the English practice and tried instead to set down three fundamental criteria for the value of records: value to the agency of origin, value

for administrative history, and value for historical research.¹⁰

The British adopted this point of view in 1943, according to T.R. Schellenberg.¹¹ They agreed with Brooks that it was up to the administrative body itself to decide what should be preserved for business purposes, as a value to the agency of origin. They amended Brooks' list to add that records should be preserved for future research if they served "to answer technical questions regarding the operations of the organizations concerned."¹² Thus the British with assistance from the United States had developed three criteria for permanent preservation of documents. They should cast light upon the functioning of the administrative body; cast light upon the history of the administrative body; and meet scholarly needs for information in general.

In 1952, the Grigg Committee was established. Its purpose was to work out a new appraisal system in England which would be able to tackle "the bulk problem." According to the committee, ". . . it is of much greater advantage to the historians for records to be selected in a way that is administratively workable than by methods which, though theoretically offering every safeguard against the destruction of valuable material, in fact provide no safeguards at all because they cannot be operated properly."¹³ These criteria were not to be incorporated in this new system. Instead, a system closely connected to Jenkinson's teaching was introduced, whereby the administrative body was free to destroy as it pleased. The committee introduced two appraisal criteria, the administrative and the

⁸Ibid., 149.

⁹Ibid., 15 and 123. This distinction between primary and secondary duties may have crossed the Atlantic. The American Waldo G. Leland made a distinction between primary and secondary purposes as early as 1912. See his "Some Fundamental Principles in Relation to Archives," in *American Historical Association Annual Report* (1912): 264-268. See also Lester J. Cappon, "What, Then, Is There to Theorize About?" *American Archivist* 45 (1982): 19-20 and Rodney A. Ross, "Waldo Gifford Leland: Archivist by Association," *American Archivist* 46 (1983): 264-276.

¹⁰"What Records Shall Be Preserved?" *National Archives Staff Information Circular* No. 9, Washington, 1940. From Meyer H. Fishbein, "A Viewpoint on the Appraisal of National Records," *American Archivist* 33 (1970): 176.

¹¹T.R. Schellenberg, *Modern Archives* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1956), 137.

¹²Ibid.

¹³*Grigg Report*, 30.

historical. Records were to be appraised in two stages, in such a way that the administrative criterion became in effect the historical criterion in disguise, and could without too much effort be operated safely by the administrative body itself. According to the committee, “. . . if a Department decides that a paper within a short time of the completion of action on it, is not likely to be required further for the Department's own purposes, that paper is unlikely to be of any material historical significance.”¹⁴

An enormous advantage indeed. Fifty to ninety percent of the records were supposed to be destroyed without too much effort through this application of the administrative criterion at the first review after five years. At the second review after twenty-five years, the records would have been reduced to a manageable size, and the historical criterion could then be applied directly on the remaining material by a professional appraiser.

The Grigg Report and the Public Records Act of 1958 which followed mark a zenith so far in the struggle in England to put destruction before preservation. The English have had second thoughts, however.¹⁵ The Wilson Report of 1981 criticized the Grigg system heavily,¹⁶ and the Keeper of Public Records considered it “a complete failure.”¹⁷ The Wilson Report was no attempt to do away with the Grigg system, but it suggested that the time had come to concentrate more on preservation than on destruction. It advocated a more active part for archivists in the process of selecting material for permanent preservation. This

report could be said to be an attack on the wide application of the administrative criterion, thus heralding a turning point in this respect. The government responded negatively, however, and nothing much seems to have come out of it.¹⁸

Appraisal in Norway

It may be of interest to a foreign readership to learn that the system of appraisal introduced to this author's country in 1961 borrowed heavily from the Grigg system. The historical background was similar in many respects, too. The whole history of archives appraisal in Norway will not be recapitulated here. Suffice it to say that modern archives history in Norway is rooted in the German Occupation of 1940 to 1945 and its aftermath, which had left the archival situation at least partially chaotic. This was further complicated by the fact that by the end of 1947 dollar reserves were on the verge of running out in Norway, as in Europe as a whole. This hardship could be helped by exporting more paper pulp, among other things. A paper recirculation campaign was initiated in the Ministry of Health and Welfare and by February 1948 the ministry boasted that its archives had so far yielded twelve metric tons of paper, ready for the paper mills. The idea was that the extra money thus earned was to be earmarked for helping the suffering children of Europe, even worse off than the Norwegian ones. A noble thought, undoubtedly, but all the same it endangered a major part of the country's departmental papers from around 1850 onwards. The Norwegian National Archivist learned about it only through newspapers, but managed to apply the brakes.

This started a process of reconsideration that finally resulted in the Archives Instruc-

¹⁴Ibid., 30.

¹⁵Alfred W. Mabbs, “The Public Record Office and the Second Review,” *Archives* 8 (1967-68): 180-184.

¹⁶*The Wilson Report: Modern Public Records. Selection and Access* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1981).

¹⁷Author's conversation with Alfred W. Mabbs in Oslo, 4 September 1981.

¹⁸*Modern Public Records. The Government Response to the Report of the Wilson Report* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1982).

tion of 1961. A system for reducing files in three stages was enforced. First, strict discipline was to be shown to prevent the filing and even the creation of completely worthless papers. Much was expected to be gained by this first stage. Next came a two tier system following the English model of 1958. The first review after five years was to be the responsibility of the administrative body itself. If in doubt as to the historical significance of any material, the national archivist was then to be consulted, but only then. This is the Norwegian version of the administrative criterion and differs from the English in that it was open to the direct application of the historical criterion at even the first review. According to Jenkinson-Grigg thinking, this was strictly forbidden. The second review after twenty-five years was to be conducted by archivists in cooperation with the administrative body. This applied only to material more recent than 1945, however. The administrative body was not allowed to destroy any material from the war years or from backlogs dating from earlier years, which were abundant in Norway at the time.

Several prerequisites were meant to underpin the enactment of the system. Among other things, well-educated personnel were to be available on a high level within the administrative bodies responsible for archives, and a new, well-equipped archives building was to be constructed, long overdue. The building was finished only as recently as 1978, and it proved difficult to make the agencies create their own archival staffs with sufficient weight and authority. By royal decree a revised instruction for the selection and destruction of government papers was enacted in 1988, whereby the administrative criterion was set aside so that hereafter no destruction of archival material should take place without consultation and consent by the national archivist.¹⁹

¹⁹Ole Kolsrud, "Norsk kassasjonsproblematikk

Appraisal in Germany

Turning to Germany, we come across a totally different scenery than that in England. The German archivist has always put preservation before destruction, in the sense that he has wanted a say at an early stage in the selection of material for permanent preservation. This is as historically conditioned as his English counterpart's wish to escape the responsibility. In Prussia, selection schedules were developed as early as 1833 by, for, and of the ministries themselves. In 1858 it was decreed that archival authorities should be notified about what papers an administrative body selected for destruction, but this notification system never worked satisfactorily.²⁰

The idea that archivists had a responsibility for what the past and present should preserve for posterity prevailed in Bavaria as early as 1897.²¹ In 1926, Karl Otto Müller declared appraisal to be the crucial question ("*die Schicksalsfrage*") of archives, and the necessity of denying administrative bodies the right to be the sole arbiter of the fate of records. The scholarly archivist had to be consulted at an early stage and to be given a decisive influence, both in order to save the valuable and to discard the worthless. He stated that "what is not worth preserving, shall never be allowed into an archive" ("*Was nicht archivwürdig ist, sollte gar nicht in das Archiv Eingang erhalten*"). Müller then suggested some guidelines for appraisal, of which perhaps the most interesting is his distinction between central, intermediate, and local au-

1871-1961" [Problems of Appraisal in Norway 1817-1961], *Arkiv* [Denmark] 11 (1986): 27-46.

²⁰Wilhelm Rohr, "Das Aktenwesen der preussischen Regierung" [The Records System of the Prussian Government], *Archivalische Zeitschrift* 45 (1939): 60.

²¹Ottfried Dascher, "Archivar und Historiker. Zum Standort eines Beruf im Wandel von historischen Interessen und Methoden" [Archivist and Historian. The State of a Trade Changed by Historical Interests and Methods], *Der Archivar* 36 (1983): 29.

thorities (*Zentralbehörden, Mittelbehörden, Bezirksbehörden*). As to modern archives, central and intermediate administrative bodies would create the more valuable records, while local ones were of less interest.²²

Müller's division of records according to administrative level would prove to have a lasting influence. But it turned out to be his demand for closer cooperation between administrator and archivist that won immediate acceptance, thanks to what must be considered a "classic archives scandal." National treasures had been brought to the Berlin Tegel prison as tinder for heating and were about to go up in smoke, but they were saved in the nick of time by a prison guard on the alert, who then tried to sell them. This made the Prussian Ministry of Justice elaborate new and detailed selection schedules whereby records were given lifespans of one, five, ten, twenty, or thirty years.²³

Of greater significance in our context, however, is the decree of 12 December 1927. This decree stated that the Prussian archives authorities should undertake a systematic review of all records of Prussian ministries, and select what was considered of permanent value. Such a survey was expected to take ten years. Then a new ten-year cycle would start.

This new and extended authority gave German archivists new experiences and new insights. They were forced to rethink their appraisal principles. At the annual meeting of German archivists at Gotha in 1937, Heinrich Otto Meisner declared that liberal *laissez-faire* principles and "*Fingerspitzengefühl*" were no longer sufficient. He sug-

gested that administrative bodies should review their records every five years and sort out what they no longer needed. This should be the task of the administration itself. But, and this was the important point, it should be up to archive authorities to decide what was to be preserved of the material no longer needed for administrative purposes. There was to be no destruction without the consent of archivists, Meisner protested, as Karl Otto Müller had done in 1926. He then proceeded to lay down three basic rules for appraisal (*Kassationsgrundsätze*):

1) **Age.** This would of course differ from country to country. In Germany the line ought to be drawn around 1600.

2) **Content.** Material containing information about permanent institutions should be preserved while material serving specific time-limited purposes, such as statistical surveys (census material, etc!) could be disposed of.

3) **The Administrative Body's Hierarchical Order.** Meisner adopted Müller's distinction between central, intermediate, and lower authorities. The more local the authority, the less significant its records would be. The value of the material from intermediate bodies would be defined by its degree of independent decision-making authority.²⁴

Thereafter appraisal debate among German archivists went into a period of hibernation that ended only in 1957, at the annual meeting in Koblenz. Georg Wilhelm Sante and Wilhelm Rohr revitalized the ideas of Müller and Meisner. Since the bulk of

²²Karl Otto Müller, "Fragen der Aktenausscheidung" [Questions on Appraisal], *Archivalische Zeitschrift* 36 (1926): 188-215.

²³Ernst Müller, "Die neue preussischen Kassationsbestimmungen" [The New Prussian Regulations on Records Selection], *Archivalische Zeitschrift* 38 (1929): 87-107.

²⁴Heinrich Otto Meisner, "Schutz und Pflege des staatlichen Archivgutes mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Kassationsprobleme" [The Protection and Care of Public Records with a Special View to the Problems of Appraisal], *Archivalische Zeitschrift* 45 (1939): 34-51. According to Schellenberg, on page 135 of his *Modern Archives*, Meisner had put forward these propositions as early as 1901. At that time Meisner was ten years old, so there must be a misunderstanding somewhere.

modern archives made minute appraisal impossible, they decided that one ought to define whole administrative bodies as more or less worthy of permanent preservation. They also asserted that one had to take into account the agency's administrative level and the agency's degree of independent decision-making authority. It followed from this that little or nothing was to be destroyed at the cabinet or government level, but much or everything at the lowest administrative level. Ministries and departments could also be ranked according to importance. Foreign policy was more important than trade and business, and so Foreign Ministry papers would have greater value than those of the Ministry of Finance, etc.²⁵

This attempt to liberate the archivist from impossibly time-consuming appraisals by establishing a system of formal criteria of value did not win general acceptance. It was considered too rigid. But it has served well to fuel further discussion. Fritz W. Zimmermann responded with the argument that the content of documents and not their origin had to be the decisive reason for preservation or destruction. Still, the bulk problem had to be overcome. This could be done by looking at the "market value" of records, Zimmermann maintained. What demand was there for the material? What did scholars and researchers of the day ask for? "In the last analysis it is the pertinences and not the organically-connected provenances that constitute the real value

of the records," he declared.²⁶ Among German archivists today, and I believe among archivists in general, this view is not disputed.

Zimmermann's view that "market demand" should be the decisive criterion for the pertinence of records has, on the other hand, been vehemently contested. The most penetrating criticism against looking upon the value of records from the angle of social economics came from Arthur Zechel, in two articles published in 1965.²⁷ This criticism undoubtedly played a part when Zimmermann returned to the subject in 1979. He modified his views from 1958 to the point that little of them is left. Allowing that such a disputed concept as "demand" in the economic sense might lead one astray, he indicated that he meant not so much that the actual individual cases of demand decide the value of records but rather that the possibilities of an interest or a need for them did.²⁸

Arthur Zechel had higher ambitions than merely arguing with Zimmermann. He aimed at establishing the theoretical groundwork for a fully independent science of *archivistique*, and so a theory of value at once became the main problem. If the

²⁶Fritz W. Zimmermann, "Wesen und Ermittlung des Archivwertes. Zur Theorie einer archivalischer Wertlehre" [Nature and Appearance of Archival Value. On the Theory of Archival Appraisal], *Archivalische Zeitschrift* 54 (1958). This citation is according to Booms, "Gesellschaftsformen und Überlieferungsbildung," 15.

²⁷Arthur Zechel, "Wertheorie und Kassation" [Value Theory and Disposal], *Der Archivar* (1965): 1-16 and "Probleme einer Wissenschaftstheorie der Archivistik mit besondere Berücksichtigung des Archivwesens der Wirtschaft" [Problems of a Science Theory on Archivistic with a Special View to Business Archives], *Tradition. Zeitschrift für Firmengeschichte und Unternehmenbiographie* 10 (1965): 285-300.

²⁸"Nicht die konkrete Einzelfälle der Nachfrage bestimmen der Archivwert, sondern die Möglichkeiten eines Interesse, eines Bedürfnisse an den Archivalien," in Fritz W. Zimmermann, "Theorie und Praxis der archivalischen Wertlehre" [Theory and Practice for the Value of Records], *Archivalische Zeitschrift* 75 (1979): 266.

²⁵Georg Wilhelm Sante, "Behörden, Akten, Archive. Alte Taktik und neue Strategie" [Authorities, Files, Archives. Old Tactics and New Strategy], and Wilhelm Rohr, "Zur Problematik des modernen Aktenwesens" [On the Problems of Modern Records], *Archivalische Zeitschrift* 54 (1957). I have not had access to these two articles by Sante and Rohr. My rendering is based on the brilliant essay by Hans Booms, "Gesellschaftsformen und Überlieferungsbildung; Zur Problematik archivalischer Quellenbewertung" [Social Systems and the Selection of Records; On the Problems of Appraisal in Archives], *Archivalische Zeitschrift* 68 (1972): 3-40.

value of records was to be defined with no regard to (scholarly) demand, then the line had to be drawn clearly between *archivistique* and history as well. Zechel tried to do this by dividing “history” into three phases. The first one was the actual train of historical events, which continually fades into the past and out of memory, but which nonetheless leaves traces. As soon as history can be retrieved by a historical source, it enters into the next phase, which is the “memorial” phase. The third phase is the writing of history, the scholarly interpretation of sources. Zechel calls this the “reproductive” phase. *Archivistique* is linked to phase two: the memorial phase.

How is Zechel to be interpreted? I would like to think that his concepts are related to the traditional Scandinavian distinction, as far as historical sources are concerned, between their faculties as being part “remnant” and part “narration.”²⁹ To an archivist as such, any historical source is of concern to him only as a remnant from its producer. If this be so, three aims are attained: 1) the terminology of historians and archivists is brought into closer contact at the same time as the nature of their trades becomes more distinctly separated; 2) the imminent consequence for appraisal will be that the interest of the historian shall have no influence on the archivist’s selection of records; 3) and last but not least, maybe this formula will help conclude the seemingly endless debate about whether the archivist ought to be an historian or not. When an archivist appraises, he looks upon records solely from the point of view of *archivistique*. When records are to be made

available to the public, however, he will have to look upon them as an historian.

These are difficult matters indeed, and here only touched upon rather perfunctorily. Zechel is a rare bird among archivists, however, and well worth listening to, as I see it.

Ideology and Appraisal

The Prussian administrative-hierarchical tradition from K.O. Müller in 1926 to Sante and Rohr in 1956 was to be developed further in the socialist countries, especially in East Germany, the Soviet Union, and Bulgaria, through an ingenious and well-developed Marxist-Leninist theory of value.³⁰ The Soviet “Basic Working Rules in State Archives in the USSR” from 1964 and the East German “Basic Principles of Appraisal” from 1965 created a unique and logical appraisal system simply by stating that documents got their value through their importance for “the fulfilling of the manifold tasks a socialist society sets itself for carrying through the historic mission of the working class.” Furthermore it was declared that “the function and the place of an administrative body defines essentially the information potential and relevance of its documents . . . and thereby their value.”³¹

From this the East German Joachim Schrechenbach concluded in 1969 that archivists in capitalist countries could have no “genuine” solutions to the problem of

²⁹The Norwegian words are *levning* and *beretning*. These concepts were introduced by the Danish historian and archivist Kristian Erslev (1852-1930). These concepts are related to but not identical with J.G. Droysen’s (1808-1884) distinction between *Überreste* and *Quellen* and R.G. Collingwood’s (1889-1943) distinction between “source” and “evidence.” See R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), 249–282.

³⁰Elisabeth Brachmann-Taubner, Lieselott Enders, Ulrich Hess, and Siegfried Kuntsche, “Prinzipien für die Auswahl von Dokumenten mit Informationswiederholung als Archivgut” [Principles for the Selection of Documents with Informational Value for Permanent Preservation], *Archivmitteilungen* (1980): 17–24.

³¹“... die Erfüllung der vielfältigen Aufgaben ... die sich die sozialistische Gesellschaft zur Durchsetzung der historischen Mission der Arbeiterklasse stellt”; “Funktion und Stellung des Registraturbildners bestimmen wesentlich die Aussagefähigkeit und Aussagekraft seiner Dokumente ... und damit deren Wert,” *Lexicon Archivwesen der DDR* (Berlin: Staatsverlag, 1979), 291, 94.

the value of records, and furthermore that a genuine solution was possible only under the conditions of a socialist society.³² This became official wisdom in the DDR. One of the theses in the *Lexicon Archivwesen der DDR* from 1979 stated that “capitalist ownership and the organization of archives which thereof follows prevent a comprehensive and systematic appraisal based on unifying scientific laws and methods.”³³

This provoked Hans Booms to write his much-acclaimed (and rightly so) essay on “Gesellschaftsformen und Überlieferungsbildung,” published in 1972.³⁴ He found that genuine solutions to the problem of archival value were lacking in the East as in the West. Booms rejected the Sante-Rohr model and he rejected Zimmermann’s market demand criterion. Instead, he would let free public opinion on what at any given time was considered to be important social processes decide which records deserved permanent preservation. Then models of selection and plans for documentation might be developed that would secure a “maximum of documentation by a minimum of documents.” As public interests would shift over time, these models and plans should be reconsidered every ten years.

What Booms did, as a matter of fact, was to exchange “important administrative bodies” (the Sante-Rohr model) for “important social processes.” The similarities and dissimilarities as compared to the Marxist-Leninist model on the one hand and Zimmermann’s liberal model on the other are well worth noting, however. The Marx-

ist-Leninists defined one social process as essential: the struggle and victory of the labor class. Booms opened the concept up to a wide variety of social processes by letting “the free public opinion,” but not Zimmermann’s “market demand,” decide the priorities of the archivist.

Today the Marxist-Leninist appraisal orthodoxy of Eastern Europe is all history, as it were. The collapse of Marxist-Leninist state power has meant the downfall of their appraisal theories as well. Now the task ahead for East European (and I dare say even for West European) archivists is to save what is worth saving from the archives system and appraisal system constructed over the last forty years. At the annual meeting of German archivists in Aachen in October 1991, this was in fact a major theme. The discussion of theory in Germany had more or less slumbered since Booms’ bold endeavor in 1972, but now it suddenly seems to be wide awake.³⁵

Appraisal in the United States

Thus far the German debate on archival value has been fueled by the archivists’ confrontation with the problem of bulk after 1918, and more recently by the confrontation between the two different social systems after 1945. The last factor has left no imprint whatsoever on the English debate. The English do not seem to have been influenced by any German debate at all.

The Americans have been far more open to foreign ideas. I have already mentioned the reciprocal influence between England and the United States during World War II

³²“Eine echte Lösung ... is nur möglich unter den Bedingungen der sozialistischen Gesellschaft” as quoted in Booms, “Gesellschaftsformen und Überlieferungsbildung,” 4.

³³“Die kapitalistische Eigentumsverhältnisse und die darauf beruhende Archivorganisation verhindern eine umfassende, systematische Bewertung nach einheitlichen wissenschaftlichen Grundsätzen und Methoden,” *Lexicon Archivwesen der DDR* (Berlin: Staatsverlag, 1979), 95.

³⁴Booms, “Gesellschaftsformen und Überlieferungsbildung.” See note 25.

³⁵Botho Brachmann, “Theorien, Instrumentarien und Praxis der Bewertung in der ehemaligen DDR und deren kritischen Bedenken” [Theories, Methods and Practices of Appraisal in the Former DDR and Their Critical Consideration], *Archivmitteilungen* (1991): 109-113; and Angelika Menne-Haritz, “Anforderungen der Bewertungspraxis an die archivische Theorie” [Demands of Practical Appraisal as to Archival Theories and Methods], *Archivmitteilungen* (1991): 101-108.

(even though not many traces of this influence survived in England). To the value criteria of Brooks from 1940 the English added that it had to be the administrative body's own business to decide which documents were of importance for efficient administration. This is what Schellenberg recognized in the mid-1950s as the primary value of records.³⁶ He joined the English view that this was of a brief and ephemeral nature, and should be left to the administrator's judgement. Records achieve their secondary value through their importance to research.

The big difference between Schellenberg and the English is the fact that the English presume the existence of a tangible, physical divide between the two. By letting the administrator destroy what is of no more use for him, the remaining will be just those documents that have value for research. Schellenberg would hardly accept this bold artifice. Furthermore the English, as will be remembered, laid down three value criteria for documents of relevance to research. Documents ought to inform about an agency's history, about its function, and they ought to be of importance to research in general. Even these three elements are to be found in Schellenberg. The first two are to be found under his concept of the "evidential value" of documents. The last one corresponds to his concept of the "informational value" of documents. Thus Schellenberg's system becomes as follows:

Primary value - value for the originating agency

Secondary value - value for research

1. Evidential value

Documents informing on the agency's

- a) history
- b) organization and function

2. Informational value

c) documents of importance to research in general

It is the more lasting secondary value of documents that deserves the attention of archivists, according to Schellenberg, and he tries to establish a set of appraisal standards to be applied to such documents. When the evidential value of records is to be judged, an archivist should determine "the position of an office in the administrative hierarchy of the agency . . . for upon it the value of the records largely depends." Lowest in the administrative scale are the offices concerned with detailed and often routine operations, "which result in records that are least likely to have enduring value."³⁷ This is the German Meisner/Sante-Rohr tradition.

Documents carrying informational value must be judged according to different criteria, however. Schellenberg wrote that, "We are not concerned with the source of the records The only thing that matters is the information that is in them."³⁸ In the words of Zimmermann, pertinence and not provenance becomes the decisive value criterion. Schellenberg had no doubts about appraisal being the task of archivists, about their playing an active role in it, and even their being a moderating element in the researcher's desire to preserve: "Archivists dealing with modern records realize that . . . a discriminating destruction of a portion of them is a service to scholarship."³⁹ That this task should be beyond the professional ethics (Jenkinson) or practical competence (Sante-Rohr) of archivists does not enter Schellenberg's mind.

One is struck by the fact that Schellenberg, by introducing the distinction between "evidential" and "informational" values, succeeded in incorporating into his system the German formal and hierarchical

³⁶Theodore R. Schellenberg, *Modern Archives*, 133-160.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 142.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 148.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 152.

criteria of archival value. Thus Schellenberg's book from 1956 elegantly represents a synthesis of American, English, and German appraisal theory. This is a formidable achievement in its own right. Whether it has led to a satisfactory practice is harder to assess. If the aspiration is to destroy as much as possible, the United States must have come far, since according to a Swedish article they claim to destroy more than ninety-nine percent of the records originating in their government offices.⁴⁰ This might be a world record. Only time will tell whether this result represents gains or losses to the cultural heritage of the United States.

Since Schellenberg, a lively debate on archival theory has been going on in the United States, ranging from self-congratulatory⁴¹ to the near desperate.⁴² In 1981 Frank G. Burke wrote an article on "The Future of Archival Theory in the United States," wherein he pleaded for more reflection among archivists upon their own trade. This set off a debate that engaged several authors, but which degenerated into a not unfamiliar dispute among archivists: should we theorize at all?⁴³ With surprising

vehemence John W. Roberts seems to reject all theory outright by holding that "Either . . . files contain historically valuable information or they do not, and an archivist can ascertain that only by actually looking at the records." This simple-minded statement brings us back to square one. As to the value of records, he maintains that "the marketplace will always be the point of reference,"⁴⁴ which places Roberts close to the Zimmermann position of 1958, only more dogmatically so.

How seriously is Roberts to be taken? He is not the first barbarian I have come across among archivists, but at least he is an entertaining one.

Summary Observations

The problems of appraisal, and the discussion of it, can be seen from different angles. The main theme has not been just the destruction of what but the destruction by whom as well. Here the English and the Germans became opposite poles. English archivists tended to withdraw from appraisal, while the Germans eagerly claimed an influence on what administrative bodies should leave for posterity. Apart from the English, there has been widespread international agreement that archivists do have a responsibility for what picture of the past posterity shall inherit. The now defunct socialist countries went to the one extreme in this respect, by solving the appraisal problem for archivists by way of an official definition of what had enduring value. At the other end we have Zimmermann, who suggested the market's demand as the guiding

⁴⁰Jan Lindroth, "Arkivgällring i USA: en litteraturstudie" [Appraisal in the USA: A Study of the Literature], *Arkivvetenskapliga Studier* 5 (1981), 253.

⁴¹Meyer H. Fishbein, "Current Records Management," in *ALA World Encyclopedia of Library and Information Services* (Chicago, IL: American Library Association, 1980), 40-43.

⁴²F. Gerald Ham, "The Archival Edge," *American Archivist* 38 (1975): 5-13; and "Federal Records Management: A History of Neglect. Report to Congress by Elmer Staats, Comptroller General, 24 February 1981," commented upon in a review by Maynard Brichford in *American Archivist* 45 (1982): 477-479.

⁴³Frank G. Burke, "The Future Course of Archival Theory in the United States," *American Archivist* 44 (1981): 40-46; Harold T. Pinkett, "American Archival Theory: The State of the Art," *American Archivist* 44 (1981): 217-228; Lester J. Cappon, "What Then Is There To Theorize About?" *American Archivist* 45 (1982): 19-25; Michael A. Lutzer, "Max Weber and the Analysis of Modern Bureaucratic Organization: Notes Toward A Theory of Archival Appraisal," *American Archivist* 45 (1982): 119-130; Gregg D. Kimball, "The Burke-Cappon Debate: Some Further Criticisms and Considerations for Archival Theory,"

American Archivist 48 (1985): 369-376; John W. Roberts, "Archival Theory: Much Ado About Shelving," *American Archivist* 50 (1987): 66-74; and Richard J. Cox and Helen W. Samuels, "The Archivist's First Responsibility: A Research Agenda to Improve the Identification and Retention of Records of Enduring Value," *American Archivist* 51 (1988): 28-51.

⁴⁴John W. Roberts, "Archival Theory: Myth or Banality?" *American Archivist* 53 (1990): 112, 116.

line for appraisers. This can be seen as an extreme liberal position. In Denmark this has won some influence.⁴⁵ Even another analogy from the science of economics has its strong spokesman in Denmark. In 1987, Poul Thestrup argued strongly for a “cost-benefit” approach to the selection and use of records, much along the lines of G. Philip Bauer’s from 1944.⁴⁶

The idea that the destruction of records is a service to scholarship has also become a universal one. We have seen it as the opinion of Jenkinson, Schellenberg, Booms, and others. The Austrian archivist Walter Goldinger expressed it well in 1980: for an archivist there is no escaping the heavy obligation “. . . mit einem Minimum an Dokumentation ein Maximum von Information zu schaffen” (to deliver with a minimum of documentation a maximum of information).⁴⁷

The advent of computers has led to some reconsideration on this point.⁴⁸ Large masses of records can be made accessible and man-

ageable to scholars in new ways. But even so, this fact by no means solves the problem of appraisal. The need to reduce the volume of records, which is a need that springs from unavoidable economic realities, will continue to be felt, maybe even more strongly.

Whatever we do in the way of theorizing or reflecting upon the nature of our profession is an obligation of ours and never a narcissistic pastime. But to do so sensibly, we ought to be aware of how archivists elsewhere and before us have tried to come to grips with their task. There is a strange tendency, even among archivists, to start from scratch as happy amateurs every time the need to ponder what we are really doing is felt.

One last observation. Archival work has, broadly speaking, a democratic dimension as well. The development of archives, of the creation, retention, and use of them since the age of despotism, is a process of gradual democratization. To see to it that the doings of a nation’s administrative and political machinery are fairly well documented and made accessible to the public, be it scholars or just interested citizens, is the starting point of appraisal. I believe that in a way Schellenberg’s distinction between primary and secondary values takes care of even this aspect. And so we see that as archivists in unified Germany struggle now to cope with the new situation, they turn to Schellenberg. In 1990, a translation of his book from 1956 was published in Germany.⁴⁹

⁴⁵Erik Stig Jørgensen, “Status over Kassations-spørgsmålet. Sammenfatning og udblik til andre lande” [The Current State of the Appraisal Question. Summary and a View to Other Countries], *Arkiv* 7 (1979): 259.

⁴⁶Poul Thestrup, “Økonomiske Overvejelser vedrørende massearkivers opbevaring og anvendelse” [Economic Considerations on the Custody and Use of Sizeable Archives], *Arkiv* 11 (1987): 246–273. As to Bauer’s cost-benefit criterion from 1944, which some may think ought to have been considered in connection with a description of American appraisal, I would like to state that applying a cost-benefit criterion to the enduring value of records leads nowhere. It represents a confusion of incommensurates: shelving costs and archival value.

⁴⁷Walter Goldinger, “Der Standort der Archivwissenschaft” [The State of Archival Science], *Archivalische Zeitschrift* 76 (1980): 13.

⁴⁸Meyer H. Fishbein, 43.

⁴⁹Angelika Menne-Haritz, “Anforderungen des Bewertungspraxis an die archivische Theorie,” 106.

The Evolution of Basic Appraisal Principles - Some Comparative Observations

Abstract: The vast increase in the production of documents during and after World War I led to a reconsideration of the role of the archivist in the appraisal of records. This reconsideration took various and quite opposite directions, in particular among English and German archivists. The German archivist has always put preservation before destruction; the English archivist has wished to defer to the office of origin for decisions on records retention. In addition to these two national variations, the author expands his review to include the Norwegian, eastern European, and United States archival contexts. He probes the variety of archival theories and practices of these countries, and concludes with observations on the further development of appraisal criteria in light of automation, market value theory, and democratization in eastern Europe.

L'évolution des principes de base de l'évaluation - quelques observations comparatives

Résumé: La prodigieuse augmentation de la production de documents pendant et après la Première Guerre mondiale a entraîné la reconsidération du rôle de l'archiviste lors de l'évaluation des documents. Cette étude a pris diverses, voire même différentes directions, plus particulièrement parmi les archivistes britanniques et allemands. Les archivistes allemands ont toujours misé sur la conservation des documents plutôt que sur leur destruction. Les archivistes britanniques ont espéré différer du principe de provenance dans les décisions de l'établissement des calendriers de conservation des documents. En plus de ces deux variantes nationales, l'auteur étend son étude afin d'y inclure les contextes norvégien, de l'Europe de l'Est et des États-Unis. Il explore la variété des théories et pratiques archivistiques de ces pays, et conclut avec des observations sur le développement futur des critères d'évaluation à la lumière de l'automatisation, de la théorie de la valeur marchande ainsi que de la démocratisation de l'Europe de l'Est.

Die Entwicklung grundlegender Bewertungsprinzipien - Einige vergleichende Bemerkungen

Abstrakt: Die gewaltige Zunahme bei der Erstellung von Dokumenten während des ersten Weltkriegs und in der Zeit danach führte zu einer Neueinschätzung der Rolle der Archivare bei der Bewertung von Aufzeichnungen. Diese Neueinschätzung verlief in verschiedene und zum Teil ziemlich entgegengesetzte Richtungen, besonders bei englischen und deutschen Archivaren. Für den deutschen Archivar hatte die Erhaltung von Beständen immer Vorrang vor der Vernichtung; der englische Archivar dagegen vertrat den Wunsch, Entscheidungen über die Erhaltung von Aufzeichnungen dem Amt zu überlassen, das die Dokumente angefertigt hatte. Der Autor erweitert die Besprechung dieser zwei nationalen Varianten, indem er den norwegischen, den osteuropäischen und den archivalischen Kontext der USA miteinbezieht. Er sondiert die Verschiedenheit der archivalischen Theorien und Praktiken dieser Länder und schliesst mit einigen Bemerkungen zur weiteren Entwicklung der Bewertungskriterien angesichts der Automation, der Theorien zum Marktwert und der Demokratisierung in Osteuropa.

La evolución de los principios básicos de evaluación - algunas observaciones comparativas

Resumen: El vasto aumento en la producción de documentos durante y después de la Primera Guerra Mundial, llevó a la reconsideración de la función del archivista en la evaluación de documentos. Esta reconsideración tomó direcciones variadas y totalmente opuestas, en particular entre los archivistas ingleses y alemanes. Los archivistas alemanes han puesto siempre la preservación antes que la destrucción; el archivista inglés ha querido ceder las decisiones a la oficina de origen sobre la retención de documentos. En adición a estas dos variaciones nacionales, el autor extiende su reseña para incluir a los noruegos, a los europeos orientales y a los contextos de archivos de los Estados Unidos. El autor prueba la variedad de teorías y prácticas archivológicas de estos países, y concluye con observaciones sobre el futuro desarrollo del criterio de evaluación a la luz de la automatización, de la teoría del valor en el mercado, y a la democratización en la Europa oriental.