

THE ARCHIVE-KEEPING SCHOOLS OF THE STATE ARCHIVES AND THE CONTEMPORARY NECESSITY OF AN ARCHIVISTS TEACHING

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The author presents the archive-keeping schools of the State Archives: the present proposal and the prospects for the future.

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Standards (9)

The organization of the State Archives administration includes schools of Archive-keeping, Palaeography and Diplomatics. They started their activity in 1860 with the Unification of Italy and at their beginning were intended for the training of the "State Archivists" officers. The schools were in 17 State Archives situated in the capitals of the States into which Italy was divided at that time and in some of the regional capital towns (the most important territorial and political-administrative areas into which our country is actually divided).

These schools, together with the "Special School for Archivists and Librarians" of the "University of Studies" in Rome and the Vatican School, is among the most qualified structures for archivists teaching existing in Italy. The instruction is at university level, the attendance is compulsory (a minimum number of attendances is required during the two-years course to be admitted to the final exams) and free; the number of registered students is quite high: for example, during the years 2001-2003 there were 1400 registered students and until today 8131 students were awarded the diploma.

Until the Eighties, the schools were dedicated to the training of the "State Archivists", that is to say to the training of those officers who joined the Archive-keeping Administration. Until those years, in order to embark the career as Archivist it was required a Degree in some specific disciplines (Law, Political Sciences, Arts, Philosophy), to pass the public examination, to attend a two-years course at the State Archives Schools and, finally to pass a final exam with an oral and written test. It was the Decreto del Presidente della Repubblica n. 1409 in 1963 to establish the programme of the courses and the regulations of the Archive-keeping Administration. The programme includes the following disciplines: Filing System (the study of the procedures to organize and to manage the documents and the archives), Latin

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palaeography (the study of the different kind of ancient writings, many of them preserved with the numerous documents in the State Archives), and Diplomatics (the study of the procedures to create documents and of the way the public or private structures preserved those documents). To these principal matters it must be added the following subsidiary matters: sigillografia, heraldry, numismatics and, above all, chronology, that is an essential discipline to date documents in relation to the different dating systems adopted during different ages and/or in different places.

The study of the history of the Institutions (i.e. the study of the organizations that ruled the territory before the Unification of Italy) and of the documents preserved in the correspondent State Archive (i.e. the Judiciary of the Venetian Republic at the State Archives in Venice) has a big importance in each school.

Accordingly the courses are rather serious and it is required a good knowledge of Latin Language. In Italy the professional coming out of these school are simply called "State Archivist", but in the other European countries, he is defined as "conserver archivist" just because he is deputed to keep and to preserve the ancient or already existent archives.

They are the officers on the Institute or the other colleagues archivists (and Professors in some Schools) who are in charge of teaching the different disciplines; those people usually are not remunerated; only the Professors get a minimal remuneration (but the matter has never been regulated).

This premises allows us to start dealing with the most important aspect of the matter, that is to say the demand coming from the students registered in the Schools from one side and the training offered by the University and by other Institutions, private or public, on the other side.

Starting from the Eighties the training and the practice of the State Archivists profession has changed: the most significant change is that the attendance of the courses is no more compulsory; furthermore, it's more than 10 years now that no public examination is announced; the consequence is that at the present the youngest archivists working are more than fifty and there are not young men to whom the profession can be taught; in other words there is not a "generation change" that is essential to ensure the continuity of the profession that can't be replaced by any technological innovation although an updating is always necessary.

Consequently the paradox is that even if the number of students is increasing (in many schools the number of new registered students at the two-years course is more than 50) those who take the degree have not perspective to be employed in the public administration because only in very few of these offices the archivist is an officer or a manger. All this situation is in clear conflict with the need of continuing in preserving the hundreds of ancient documents kept in our State Archives and of studying, through our rich written sources, the complex history of our Country and of our public institutions. At the same time there is the problem of how the archives produced by public offices can't be managed and preserved considering that personnel in charge of this task, as said before, is not qualified.

To this situation must be added the deep change of the university teaching. When at the beginning of the Nineties it was brought in a three-year university degree (first

level degree) followed by an optional two-years qualifying course (second level degree), a lot of three-year university degrees in "Preservation of the Beni Culturali" flourished. These courses include among their teaching matters "elements of filing system"; the problem is that the study of this subject it's not always supported by an adequate knowledge of palaeography, diplomatics and other complementary disciplines because the university has not materials on which the exercitations can be conducted and the students don't have a deep familiarity with the Latin Language which is taught only at the Classic High School, and the access to the University is allowed to students coming from any high school course of study. On the other side it must be point out that these courses are characterized by the teaching, often supported by the study of the fundamentals of modern technologies, of the so called modern archive-keeping related to the creation and to the organization of the archives of contemporary institutions.

It appears clearly that the instruction offered by our Schools must be organized in a different way, as well as it appears necessary to regulate some of the integrations that have been brought to the programs, in the archive-keeping first of all, in order to make them consistent with the university instruction and with the demand that comes from those searching for a job. In particular, it has been introduced the education of the "computer science applied to archives" in order to take into account some basic changes, both technological and normative, such as: first of all the fact that, since many years, the Public Institution has started using software programs to organize the archives and to manage the documents (i.e. the Lombardy Region that has a program to describe and to organize the archives of the municipalities in its territory, implemented by another specific program for describing the archives of persona, or the Piedmont Region that has ordered a specific software for the description of its archives); secondly the necessity of taking into account the technological innovations that have been studied and realized to organize, to describe and to manage the archives in the archival administration (it must be point out that, since the Seventies, the States Archives have experienced programs for the description and the organization of the historical archives but, due to the complexity of the matter, the computer professionals didn't manage to satisfy all the requests); finally, the most recent law on materia di beni culturali, prescribes for the preservation of the archives, providing the integration of the regional and state existing systems of description.

Due to all these considerations and due to the awareness of giving to the students of our Schools a very high quality of professional skill (it must be underlined that the officers of the State Archives are often asked to hold lessons in the university courses, just considering their specific competence and professional practice acquired through the work in our Institutes), the Administration has decided to prepare a regulations draft that, keeping the teaching of the basic disciplines during the first year, provides two different courses in the second year. One course provide the training those who want to dedicate themselves to the study on ancient archives (they could be defined as traditional archivists); the other one is dedicated to those who are interested in the management of the modern or developing archives, so to allow the creation of a new professional figure assimilable to the records manager of the Anglo-Saxon tradition. The draft provides also an entrance fee for the new registered students so to cover partially the costs for the management of the Schools. These costs are increasing more and more in connection with the reduction

of the public expenses that during the last years are interesting the Ministero per I beni culturali and the field of archives particularly.

At the present the regulations draft has been approved by the Ufficio Legislativo del Ministero and must be proposed again to those bodies charged of the audit on the expenses in order to obtain the approval on the introduction of the entrance fee and on the budget item to which the correspondent sum must be imputed.

The introduction of this regulations in the normative system ruling the archival matter will represent an important improvement in the education of those who want to embark the archivist career: our Schools will be able to keep the tradition of a high quality and update specialization at the same time. Furthermore the settlement to this regulations will help to improve the cooperation with the Universities regarding the credits to the students so to make the degree awarded by these Schools as a title recognized at European level.

Summary

Le Scuole di Archivistica, Paleografia e Diplomatica attive dai primi anni dell'Unità d'Italia (1860) si pongono tra le strutture più qualificate esistenti sul territorio nazionale, insieme con la "Scuola Speciale per Archivistici e Bibliotecari" dell'Università degli Studi "La Sapienza" di Roma e la Scuola Vaticana. Il totale dei diplomati è ad oggi di 8131 studenti.

I corsi sono piuttosto impegnativi e presuppongono una buona conoscenza della lingua latina; inoltre, per la preponderanza delle materie di "taglio storico", essi sono diretti soprattutto alla formazione di una figura professionale che in altri Paesi europei viene definita "archivista conservatore" e che dovrebbe occuparsi prevalentemente della conservazione e dell'ordinamento degli archivi antichi o comunque già formati, ma che in Italia è semplicemente indicata come "Archivista di Stato". La necessità di offrire agli iscritti alle nostre Scuole una formazione di alto livello professionale aggiornata e al passo coi tempi ha spinto l'Amministrazione a predisporre una bozza di regolamento, che prevede la differenziazione in due tipologie di corsi che, mantenendo nel primo anno l'insegnamento comune delle discipline basilari, si differenziano nel secondo anno per formare, da un lato, gli archivisti che potremmo definire "tradizionali", ossia quelli che vogliono dedicarsi allo studio degli archivi antichi, dall'altro gli archivisti da destinare prevalentemente alla gestione degli archivi moderni o in formazione, con un taglio, quindi, che permette di creare una nuova figura professionale assimilabile a quella del records manager dei Paesi di tradizione anglosassone.