

National Archives and the International Council on Archives: Converging and Diverging

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ABSTRACT

The International Council of Archives was formed in June 1948 when a small group of archivists adopted a constitution for the organization. They were all national archivists (or representatives of national archives). Although the original constitution does not privilege membership by national archives, in fact at the creation the convergence of interests between the national archives and the International Council on Archives was total.

Gli archivi nazionali ed il Consiglio Internazionale degli Archivi: convergenze e divergenze

SINTESI

Il Consiglio Internazionale degli Archivi venne fondato nel 1948, quando un piccolo gruppo di archivisti adottò la costituzione dell'organizzazione. Essi erano tutti archivisti nazionali (o rappresentanti degli archivi nazionali). Sebbene la costituzione originale non privilegiasse l'iscrizione degli archivi nazionali, in effetti al momento della creazione la convergenza di interessi fra gli archivi nazionali ed il Consiglio Internazionale degli Archivi fu totale.

Nacionalni arhivi in Mednarodni arhivski svet: zblíževanje in razhajanje

IZVLEČEK

Mednarodni arhivski svet je bil ustanovljen junija 1948, ko je majhna skupina arhivistov sprejela in potrdila statut organizacije. Vsi so bili nacionalni arhivisti (ali predstavniki nacionalnih arhivov). Čeprav izviren statut ne daje prednosti nacionalnim arhivom, pa so ustanovitvi interesi nacionalnih arhivov in Mednarodnega arhivskega sveta sovpadali.

Nine men gathered in June of 1948 in a Paris recovering from the cataclysm of World War II. The men—for they were all men—were professional archivists from eight countries (eight of the nine were national archivists), coming to the new United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization to “take action to establish an International Council on Archives; to draft the constitution of the Council and decide on action necessary to bring the Council fully into being”¹.

What led to the Paris meeting?

The League of Nations created a Permanent Consultative Committee on Archives in 1931, which in 1934 published the first *International Guide on Archives*. This Committee, like the League, succumbed to World War II. After the war, the initial proposal for an international archival organization seems to have been made by Solon J. Buck in his presidential address to the Society of American Archivists (SAA) in October 1946 (at that time he was both SAA president and the Archivist of the United States)². Concerned about the “urgent postwar problems” of archives, Buck argued that “archivists must share a concern for the ‘protection and effective utilization of man’s total archival heritage’

1. Provisional agenda online at <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0015/001545/154524eb.pdf> (accessed 2013-09-08).

2. Solon J. BUCK, *The Archivist's One World*, “American Archivist”, 10(1947), January, pp. 9- 24, <http://archivists.metapress.com/content/g1vw8301t1150450/fulltext.pdf> (accessed 2013-09-08).

and that protection of that total record could be achieved only through cooperative international activity.”³ SAA endorsed the Buck vision.

In December 1946 the first General Conference of UNESCO resolved to encourage archivists to create an international organization. With UNESCO encouragement, in 1947 Buck sent letters to “over 100 prominent archivists” worldwide asking for comments on his proposal of an international organization; the responses were unanimously favorable⁴. UNESCO then appropriated \$4000 for a small group of archivists to assemble in Paris to establish an international archival organization; the meeting was set for June 9-11, 1948.

Who were these archivists who met in Paris?

*Buck, Solon J. Archivist of the United States. He had a Ph.D. in history from Harvard University, was appointed head of the Minnesota Historical Society in 1914 (which includes the state archives), moved to at the University of Pittsburgh as professor of history while simultaneously directing the Western Pennsylvania Historical Survey and editing the Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine. After the U.S. National Archives was established in 1934 he was appointed the first deputy archivist and became Archivist of the United States in 1941⁵.

*Graswinckel, D.P.M. Director, General Archives of The Netherlands. He held a law degree from the University of Leiden; after World War I he first volunteered at the Rijksarchief (1919) and then was appointed to the staff in 1921. In 1944 he joined The Netherlands military authority, serving as the liaison officer to the U.S. military to return books looted by the Germans from Dutch institutions and private persons. He was appointed director of the Rijksarchief in 1946⁶.

*Husa, Vaclav. Director, Archives of the Ministry of Interior (national archives), Czechoslovakia. He earned a Ph.Dr. from the state archives school in 1934; from 1930 to 1934 he worked at the archives of the national museum and moved to the national archives in 1934. Better known as a historian than an archivist, he was part of an influential interwar “Historical Group” and famous for his historiographical studies⁷.

*Jenkinson, Hilary. Director, Public Records Office, United Kingdom. After graduating from Cambridge with first class honors in classics, he joined the staff of the Public Record Office in 1904 and, except for service in World War I, remained there for his entire career. A very influential archival theorist and writer, he was appointed deputy Keeper (chief executive officer) in 1947⁸.

*Martin-Chabot, Eugene. Conservator, Archives de France. A graduate of the Ecole des chartes and the Ecole des hautes etudes, as well as l’Ecole de Rome, he joined the national archives of France in 1905 and remained for his entire career. He published widely, notably on the Middle Ages⁹.

3. For a review of the U.S. role in forming ICA, see Daniels MAYGENE, *The Genesis and Structure of the International Council on Archives: An American View*, “American Archivist”, 50(1987), Summer, pp. 414-419, <http://archivists.metapress.com/content/20411563775t2666/fulltext.pdf> (accessed 2013-09-08).

4. Solon J. BUCK, *Letter Sent to Archivists of Foreign Countries Concerning the Organization of an International Archives Council*, “American Archivist”, 10(1947), January, pp. 227-231, <http://archivists.metapress.com/content/g52662228524x531/fulltext.pdf> (accessed 2013-09-08); for a good description of the survey and work on a draft constitution, see Oliver W. HOLMES, *Toward an International Archives Program and Council, 1945-1950*, “American Archivist”, 39 (1976), July, pp. 287-299 <http://archivists.metapress.com/content/n8137u67h0617487/fulltext.pdf> (accessed 2013-09-08).

5. *Solon J. Buck Biographical Sketch*, Minnesota Historical Society, <http://www.mnhs.org/library/findaids/00794.pdf> (accessed 2013-09-08).

6. *Graswinckel, jhr. Dirk Petrus Marius*, In *Biographical Dictionary of the Netherlands: 1880-2000*. <http://www.historici.nl/Onderzoek/Projecten/BWN/lemmata/bwn5/graswinckel> (accessed 2013-09-07).

7. *Historik Vaclav Husa*, “Akademicky bulletin”, <http://abicko.avcr.cz/miranda2/m2/archiv/2005/7/obsah/historik-vaclav-husa-25.-6.-1906-6.-2.-1965-.html> (accessed 2013-09-08).

8. Oliver W. HOLMES, *Sir Hilary Jenkinson, 1882-1961*, “American Archivist”, 24(1961), July, pp. 345-347 <http://www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/40290906?uid=3739584&cuid=2&cuid=4&cuid=3739256&sid=21102617638867> (accessed 2013-09-08).

9. Charles SAMARAN, *Eugene Martin-Chabaud (1880-1975)*, “Bibliothèque de l’école des chartes”, 134(1976), pp. 461-463 http://www.persee.fr/web/revues/home/prescript/article/bec_0373-6237_1976_num_134_2_460066 (accessed 2013-09-08).

*Re, Emilio. Director, Archivio di Stato, Italy. He had a university degree in history and a laureate in jurisprudence and started work as an archivist in 1908, working in both regional archives and the central state archives. In 1944 he was named the officer (“commissario”) to rebuild archives after the war, and in 1947 he was named the *ispettore generale archivistico*¹⁰.

*Rueda, Julio Jimenez. Director, General National Archives, Mexico. He earned a law degree in 1919, served as a diplomat in the 1920s, earned a doctorate in philosophy and literature in 1935. He was appointed director of the *Archivo General de la Nacion* in 1942 while also serving as the director of the faculty of philosophy and literature of the *Universidad Nacional de Mexico* where he taught Spanish literature. He wrote histories, plays and novels and was deeply involved in theater¹¹.

*Samaran, Charles. *Directeur des Archives de France*. He graduated from the *Ecole des Chartes* in 1901 and then spent two years at the *Ecole de Rome*. Upon returning to France he was appointed an archivist at the *Archives nationales*. He was a renowned medievalist and a pioneer of codicology and in 1923 took the chair of *paleographie* at the *Ecole des Chartes*. He was appointed director of the *Archives nationales* in 1941¹².

*Steinnes, Asgaut. Director, *Riksarkivet*, Norway. He earned a Ph.D. in 1928 with a dissertation on the tax system in the Middle Ages and pioneered the use of statistics in the economic history of agriculture. He was appointed National Archivist of Norway in 1933¹³.

These (with the exception of Dr. Jimenez Rueda) were men of the archives, with years of professional work. They were usually historians, with several of the Europeans specializing in the study of the Middle Ages. Most of them wrote extensively, either in history or archival theory or editing documentary editions or publishing archival finding aids. War had, in one way or another, touched them all. With the exception of Husa, they were all born in the 19th century.

Although the figures are not easily available, it is probable that the establishments they headed were relatively small: for example, as of June 30, 1948, the U.S. National Archives had 341 persons on its payroll. With the exception of Buck, records management probably was not yet a part of their outlook. At least half of them had archival associations in their own countries, which had been established as early as 1891 in The Netherlands (Emilio Re would help found the Italian association the year after the ICA began)¹⁴.

What kind of organization did they establish? The draft had been prepared in the United States, and it was surely influenced by the design of the Society of American Archivists' constitution from 1936 because Buck had chaired that drafting committee. The ICA constitution, as adopted, set out six purposes:

“(a) To hold periodically an International Congress of Archivists.

“(b) To establish, maintain, and strengthen relations among archivists of all lands, and among all professional and other agencies or institutions concerned with the custody, organization or administration of Archives, public or private, wheresoever located.

“(c) To promote all possible measures for the preservation, protection and defence against all hazards of the archival heritage of mankind, and to advance all aspects of the professional administration of archives by providing greater opportunities for the exchange of all ideas and information on problems concerning archives.

“(d) To facilitate the use of archives and their more effective and impartial study by making their contents more widely known, making reproductions more readily available, and encouraging greater freedom of access.

10. Thanks to Giulia Barrera for the information from several sources, including R. GUEZE, *Bibliografia di Emilio Re*, In “*Archivio della Societa Romana di Storia Patria*,” 1968, pp. 15-27.

11. *Biografia de Julio Jimenez Rueda*, In *Biograficas y vidas*, www.biografiasyvidas.com/biografia/j/jimenez_rueda.htm (accessed 2013-09-08).

12. Jean FAVIER, *Necrologie*, In *Chronique of the Bibliotheque de l'Ecole des Chartes* http://www.persee.fr/web/revues/home/prescript/article/bec_0373-6237_1983_num_141_2_450325 (accessed 2013-09-08).

13. *Asgaut Steinnes*, In *Norsk biografisk leksikon* http://nbl.snl.no/Asgaut_Steinnes/utdypning (accessed 2013-09-08).

14. Netherlands 1891; France 1904; United Kingdom 1932; Norway and the United States 1936. Didier Grange, “Background Material for a History of SPA,” available on the ICA website at <http://www.ica.org/5128/resources/history-of-spa.html> (accessed 2013-09-08).

“(e) To promote, organize and co-ordinate all desirable international activities in the field of archival administration.

“(f) To co-operate with all organizations concerned with the documentation of human experience and the use of that documentation for the benefit of mankind”¹⁵.

The constitution established categories of membership. Interestingly, category A was archives associations and Category B was “institutional and individual” members, the reverse of today’s order. The definition of institutional members was broad: “bodies charged with the care of archives of any kind, whether public, semi-public, private or ecclesiastical”¹⁶. The draft proposed voting power for all archival institutions that paid dues; however, the nine decided instead that voting would be by nation: “The total voting representation of any country at a Congress shall be limited to three. In countries where there is a National Association, that Association shall appoint two voting delegates and the National Archives or national archival agency shall appoint one voting delegate”¹⁷. Anyone could be elected an officer but no two officers could be from the same country; one of the two vice-presidents had to be from the “Eastern Hemisphere” and the other from the “Western Hemisphere.” If the president was “absent or incapacitated” the vice-president “from the hemisphere opposite that represented by the President shall preside.” So from the beginning, ICA was to include associations, non-governmental archives, and individuals and was to spread the geographical composition of its leadership.

Once the ICA was established, what did the national archivists talk about? At the first ICA Congress in 1950, the 350 archivists in attendance discussed four questions: how to handle modern records (“archives en formation”), microphotography, preservation of private and business archives, and publications on archives. A report of the Congress by a French archivist said it was so successful that he urged all archivists to become ICA members in order to attend future meetings¹⁸.

Today, 65 years later, the interests of national archivists have diverged in significant ways from the issues of most concern to the original conception of the International Council on Archives. How did this divergence occur? Is this divergence a temporary or permanent phenomenon? Does it affect all national archives or only those of wealthy countries with long established archives? What does it mean for the future of ICA? How did the inclusive vision of 1948 change?

Money was a part of it, as was perspective.

Money. As one of the U.S. delegates later wrote about the discussion of dues at the 1950 Congress, “In no part of the business proceedings was there such a sense of tension, yet in no other part of the meeting was there manifest more international camaraderie between archivists who were putting processional concerns about national considerations”¹⁹. The agreement was that each Congress would fix the dues structure until the next Congress; the first levy was 30 Swiss francs for both national archival institutions and national societies, 15 Swiss francs for non-national archival institutions, and 5 Swiss francs for individual members (although the French delegation suggested that national archival agencies pay at least 55 Swiss francs “if possible”)²⁰.

The question of how to finance ICA has been persistent and largely unresolved over the course

15. “Constitution as adopted at the Inaugural Meeting of the Provisional Council, convened by UNESCO, 9 to 11 June 1948,” http://www.unesco.org/ulis/cgi-bin/ulis.pl?catno=154531&set=51A0B54D_3_73&gp=1&lin=1&ll=1 (accessed 2013-05-023).

16. In addition there was “honorary membership”.

17. In countries without an archival association, “The National Archives or national archival agency shall delegate three voting members representing as fairly as possible the several archival interests in that country.” In neither the draft nor the final constitution would individual members have a vote. Voting by national delegation followed UNESCO practice.

18. Robert-Henri BAUTIER, *Le Conseil international des archives et le premier congrès international des archives*, “Bibliothèque de l’école des chartes”, 109(1951), n. 1, pp. 108-110 (http://www.persee.fr/web/revues/home/prescript/article/bec_0373-6237_1951_num_109_1_449429 (accessed 2013-09-08)).

19. Margaret C. NORTON, *The First International Congress of Archivists, Paris, France August 21-26, 1950*, “American Archivist”, 14(1951), January, pp. 1-32 (<http://archivists.metapress.com/content/511n14n858jr76vh/fulltext.pdf> (accessed 2013-09-08)).

20. Ibid.

of its existence. As decolonization occurred, fixed fees for all national archives were impossible, and a sliding scale for dues was adopted, based on the country's gross domestic product. The nature of the scale has been controversial and has changed significantly over the decades. ICA suffered staggering losses of revenue in the early 1990s when Eastern European governments could no longer pay assessments; in 1991 ICA simply decided not to suspend any national archives or archival associations who could not pay their dues during that year. After a brief period of financial stability, in 2006 the leading national archivists and the ICA leadership agreed to increased financial oversight of ICA in a document known as the "Curacao Consensus." And then, after further push back from national archivists, in 2010 ICA agreed to reduce the dues for the top ten contributing national archives by 10% in 2011 and to make further cuts in 2012 in the dues paid by the top 20 contributors²¹.

Meanwhile, during the 1990s and 2000s professional associations, non-national archives and individuals continued to pay fees at rates far below that of national archives. Those dues were so low that an ICA treasurer flatly said ICA should not encourage individual memberships because it cost more to service the member (principally the cost of printing publications and mailing them) than the dues income! As part of the 2010 reduction of dues for national archives, modest fee increases were levied on other membership categories, and archival institutions other than national archives (but not individuals) were given the right to vote on ICA business. The gross imbalance between national archives and all other dues payers in the financing of ICA has created tension within the governance structure where, in effect, the national archivists have said, "We pay the bills, therefore this is our organization to manage as we see fit. If you want a larger role, then you need to take on more of the financial burden."

Perspective. In 1954 the President of ICA, Charles Braibant of France, "decided to convene an annual meeting of the leaders of the profession (directors of national archival institutions and president of national archival associations)"²². Braibant felt that the intervals between world congresses, then held every three years, were too long and wanted a more frequent exchange between national archivists; why he excluded other participants is not clear, although perhaps he and others in the leadership believed that 350 persons (the number who attended the 1950 congress) was too unwieldy for good professional discussion²³. This initial meeting became an annual International Archival Round Table Conference (CITRA, in its French acronym) with attendance limited to two or three members of a national delegation plus invited observers²⁴. As decolonization proceeded and more countries joined ICA, the Round Table grew substantially, but as late as 1984 in Helsinki all CITRA delegates were seated at a single huge oval table. CITRA lasted for nearly 60 years, until 2011, when it was replaced by an annual conference open to anyone.

ICA established regional branches in 1968 "to enable countries sharing similar conditions to actively participate in ICA and collaborate with each other"²⁵. These were to include all ICA members of any category within a region, but often they were meetings mainly of national archivists. In the early 1970s, some of the professional associations who were members of ICA "questioned the fact that the ICA dealt almost exclusively with government archives whereas [association] members were interested in giving more prominence to non-government archives"²⁶. The associations proposed creating "sections" within ICA, one for the professional associations and others for particular types of archival institutions (other than national archives). ICA adopted the section concept in 1976, giving many professionals a new home within ICA. This in turn led to demands for greater representation at CITRA for non-national archivists, and gradually more people were invited to the meetings, eroding

21. The ten countries whose dues were reduced were United States, Japan, China, Italy, United Kingdom, Canada, Spain, Germany, Australia, and India. ICA AGM2010.13A; copy in author's possession.

22. James B. RHOADS - Charles KECSKEMETI, *International Council on Archives*, In *ALA World Encyclopedia of Library and Information Services*, Chicago 1986, p. 374.

23. Didier GRANGE, *CITRA 1954-2011: A short review*, International Council on Archives website <http://www.ica.org/12603/about-citra/about-citra.html> (accessed 2013-09-08).

24. CITRA meetings were held each year when an international congress was not held. Each CITRA was to focus on one or two major problems of archival administration, but in fact covered a very wide range of topics. Until 1971 the proceedings of CITRA were available only in French.

25. *A timeline of the International Council on Archives*, International Council on Archives <http://www.ica.org/1832/about-ica/a-timeline-of-the-international-council-on-archives.html> (accessed 2013-05-27).

26. GRANGE, *Background Material for a History of SPA*, op. cit.

their exclusivity rather sharply in the first decade of 2000. This then led the national archivists to create their own separate meeting within the ICA structure, the Forum of National Archivists, which began in 2011. From this abbreviated history, it is clear that nearly the beginning of ICA, national archivists have seen their concerns as different from that of the profession at large and they want to meet separately to discuss them.

In addition to finances and a sense that national archivists have unique concerns, other factors altering the relationship between the national archivists and ICA seem to be at work.

First, the personal characteristics of national archivists have changed. Today's national archivist often did not grow up in the archival profession. Recent national archivists in major countries have been economists, public administrators, public relations professionals, librarians, journalists, and poets; many do not have an academic background in history. In a striking example of the current trend, the U.K.'s Chief Executive and Keeper (as the national archivist is now named) left the archives in 2013 to become the head of the government's Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency, a move that Hilary Jenkinson could never have contemplated. The ties of the national archivists to the political side of government appear to have strengthened, and the turnover is more rapid: very few national archivists will have a 27 year career at the head of the national archives as Asgaut Steinnes did in Norway. Consequently, the interests of today's national archivists do not lay in archival theory and practice as did the interests of the founders of ICA but rather in the areas of management, public relations, and intra-government liaison. This means that the topics traditionally discussed in worldwide ICA meetings hold ever lessening interest to the men and (now a few) women who direct national archives.

Second, the changing structure of governments and "anti-big-government" politics has affected national archives. The "downsizing" of government, whether by the dismantling of the state-owned structures in Eastern Europe in the 1990s or the forcible reductions by Margaret Thatcher in 1980s U.K., meant that national archives were inundated with records of defunct institutions. But it also meant that government revenues were reduced as tax systems were revamped, and archives, like all government institutions, looked and continue to look much more carefully at every coin spent. ICA was not a core budget item for archival institutions facing these revenue strictures.

Third, and related to the second, fundraising is increasingly the major focus of national archivists. This includes both direct solicitation, including sale of merchandise, and indirect, by providing services to members of the broad general public that will encourage them to give positive evaluations of the archives to members of the legislature who appropriate funds. While this emphasis could be seen as early as 1991 when the theme of the CITRA was "financing archives," it has exploded in the last decade. And it has driven national archives into partnerships with commercial firms, particularly in the work of digitizing archival holdings and making them available on the internet. That focus on the general public, certainly laudable, is simply not the same as the "effective and impartial study" of archives that concerned the nine men in Paris in 1948.

In sum, the national archivists, particularly of countries contributing most of ICA's budget, do and will continue to see themselves as a separate category within ICA, often see ICA as irrelevant to their institutional needs, and will continue to provide major funding as long as ICA can accommodate their interests. To the extent that their resources are required to carry out projects, they will continue to shape the ICA work program. Is there a danger that the national archivists will leave ICA entirely? Probably not, if the Forum of National Archivists gives them a place to talk about issues they consider relevant. Furthermore, ICA's link to UNESCO gives national archivists another voice in UNESCO deliberations (outside their own national delegation) should they choose to exercise it, a potentially powerful option.

If the national archivists no longer can speak to the concerns of professional archivists, where can that voice be heard in ICA deliberations?

The professional concerns of working archivists are now most regularly represented in ICA by the various ICA sections and some regional branches, which provide a space for archivists with similar roles to exchange information: one of the original purposes of ICA. The Section of Professional Associations (SPA) in particular provides leadership on professional values in ICA; for example, it developed and pushed through the Code of Ethics for archivists, which many national archivists resisted,

afraid that the Code would conflict with national standards of conduct for archivists who were government employees. The Universal Declaration on Archives had its genesis in a Declaration on Archives that was developed by the archival association in Quebec and, through the work of a small committee of association members and the SPA steering committee, it developed into the Universal Declaration on Archives, subsequently endorsed by UNESCO. And SPA initiated international archives week in 1979, now a routine commemoration during the week of June 9, honoring the founding of ICA.

Some of the regional archival organizations are also taking on more importance as the balance of interests shift. The regional branch structure of ICA began in 1968 and now covers the world; particularly where the national archives and local archival associations are not able to provide support for the profession at large, the regional ICA branches are an effective way to bring training and publication resources to local archivists.

Today, as ICA seeks to increase its membership, particularly of non-national archives and of individuals, ICA must go back to its original conception as a voice for the profession. If ICA can be flexible and democratic, eventually allowing individual professionals to have a vote as well as a voice, then the Forum of National Archivists is a valuable device to meet the interests of national archivists while ICA continues to serve the entire profession—that profession that nine men in 1948 understood shares the concern for the oneness of humanity's archival heritage.

SUMMARY

Today, 65 years later, the interests of national archivists have diverged in many ways from the issues of most concern to the International Council on Archives. How did this divergence occur? Is this divergence a temporary or permanent phenomenon? Does it affect all national archives or only those of wealthy countries with long established archives? What does it mean for the future of ICA?

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