THE ORIGINS OF MODERN EUROPEAN ARCHIVAL THEORY

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There has been no systematic international history of modern archives. Both historians and archivists have neglected to apply systematically to their own professions the principles of appraisal, textual criticism of sources, and the examination of the credibility of documents. Archival history and biography should show individual contributions to archival theory and practice, but both are underdeveloped. While bits and pieces of archival history and theory may be found in national manuals and textbooks, both have usually been summoned to support other purposes. Archivists have searched the past for useful evidence rather than studying the development of archival theory and practice in the light of the needs of the past.

Although there were important precursors in Jean Mabillon and the Maurists, and Daniel Papebroch and the Bollandists, modern archival science was developed in the nineteenth century. Influenced by the forces of nationalism and cultural chauvinism arising from the French Revolution, European bureaucrats and academics joined forces to protect and organize their archival patrimony. French, German, and Dutch archivists played important roles in the development of archival theory.

France

When the rising of the disaffected citizens required the formation of a new government, the leading archival figure was Armand-Gaston Camus, a Parisian lawyer and revolutionary. On August 14, 1789, in an existential situation, Camus was named archivist of the Assembly. Though he had no formal archival training, Camus gained valuable experience in property expropriation during a
period of incarceration in Austrian prisons. From 1794 to his death in 1804, he directed the French archives. He saved valuable records from systematic destruction, organized an office for selecting records for the archives, prepared a classification plan, centralized archives in Paris, and presided over the first three moves of the archives.1

While other Europeans proceeded to establish their own versions of the Napoleonic state, they denounced the model for the systems they were creating. As in other areas, the French were under attack for archival practices. Soldiers of the French revolutionary army used records for campfires and cartridge papers. Even worse, they fired the cartridges at those whose privileges were documented on the papers. A January 17, 1793, law directed this usage of worthless parchments. On July 17, 1793, another law authorized the destruction of feudal titles wherever they were found. In the same year, the Minister of the Interior was quoted on the burning of feudal documents at Strasbourg, “Medieval trash, into the fire with it.” Archives such as the one at Mainz suffered disarrangement when the custodians fled before the revolutionary armies. Between 1804 and 1815, Pierre Claude-François Daunou, a cleric and educator from Boulogne, presided over the archives of the Napoleonic empire. He is alleged to have had library training and has been nominated for eternal obloquy for reorganizing the Archives Nationales and extending a schematic arrangement system on a functional or subject basis.2

When Daunou left office in 1815, the French interest in archives remained. Napoleon had approved the idea of an archival training school, but it remained for Louis XVIII to establish the École des Chartes in 1821. M. Pavillette, chief of the Historical Division of the Royal Archives, was the first archival faculty member. The school led a precarious existence. Plans for “great works of erudition” to add to the “glory of our country” were fulfilled in part with the publication of eighteen volumes of sources. In 1830, Jules Michelet began a twenty-one year career as head of the Historical Division of the Royal Archives. His painstaking inquiries into manuscript and printed sources resulted, in 1833, in the publication of the first volume of his monumental History of France. Noted for his intuition and romantic style, Michelet sought, from his post in the archives, to “resurrect” history. Edmund Wilson wrote that “his
scientific passion kept him feverishly grubbing in the archives." In the 1830s, Daunou returned as head of the archives and joined historian François Guizot, serving as the Minister of the Interior and Minister of Public Instruction, in presiding over a massive effort to locate, organize, and publish documentary sources. Aime-Louis Champollion-Figeac taught diplomatics and paleography in the École des Chartes and published the first archival manual in 1860. In 1839, the school began publication of its annual journal—Bibliothèque de l'École des Chartes. While the publication of sources was an accepted archival activity for the École des Chartes, the placement of its graduates was a major issue. In 1840, archivists protested the appointment of unqualified persons. A decade later, a decree reserved archival posts in the French departments to graduates of the school. In 1846, the curriculum was broadened and the school gradually won respect as the leading archival training school."

On April 24, 1841, the French Minister of the Interior issued a circular for the arrangement of departmental and communal archives that contained the basic principle of "respect des fonds." Natalis de Wailly, head of the Administrative Section of the Royal Archives, explained that grouping documents according to origin was the easiest arrangement as "it involves simply the reproduction of the order of the former custodians." From 1835 to 1844, the French ministry also issued a series of administrative regulations governing departmental records disposal. In 1854, they began the publication of a series of archival inventories.

These early efforts culminated in the publication of several major works by French archivists between 1883 and 1895. The first, in 1883, was Gabriel Richou's Treatise on Archival Theory and Practice. In 1889, Marcel Prou, later director of the École des Chartes and author of its centennial history, produced a Manual of Latin and French Paleography. In 1893, Arthur Giry, a professor at the École des Chartes who had taught Prou, added a Manual of Diplomatics. In 1891 and 1895, Charles V. Langlois, educated as an archivist-paleographer at the École des Chartes, wrote Archives of the History of France and Science of Archives. From 1913 to 1929, Langlois was director of the national archives. In 1897, the French government created the Direction of Archives, with central responsibility for national and departmental archives. In 1921, the
Direction issued regulations for the nationalization of departmental archives. In 1926 and 1928, central archival control was extended over communal and notarial archives. In 1929, the Association of French Archivists was founded. In 1933, the Association began publication of its journal, *La Gazette des Archives*. For two centuries, the highly centralized French archival system has played a leading role in the development and dissemination of archival theory.5

**Germany**

The development of Prussian archives owes as much to the passions of a researcher as to the efforts of any single archivist. Leopold von Ranke, the father of scientific history, authored 63 volumes. A Saxon trained in philology and languages at Leipzig, he published his *History of the Latin and Teuton People, 1494–1514* in 1824 and won a faculty appointment at Berlin. Writing history "wie es eigentlich gewesen," he used "memoirs, diaries, letters, diplomatic reports, and original narratives of eye witnesses." His literary trail went from manuscripts to books, to libraries, to Prussian archives in Berlin, and to Austrian archives in Vienna. Writing about Venetian manuscripts, he said, "The object of my love is a beautiful Italian, and I hope that together we shall produce a Romano-German prodigy." In discussing Ranke’s "passion for facts, sources, and archives," Leonard Krieger asserts that Ranke’s "visceral impulses [led] a lonely and inhibited man to possess the human other.... The facts of archival history satisfied this desire exactly: they were expressions of other real lives... approachable through documents and they revealed themselves in the intimacy of his exclusive embrace." Ranke wrote of "virgin" archives and his "innocent desire for the data." In his sixties he wrote that he studied archives "with the greatest imaginable pleasure. There is some gleam of youth or rather of youthfulness in these studies, where one always learns something new and important... which makes one forget a little that one is getting old.... From these flowers [old papers] I draw honey." For the archivist who meets a serious Rankean scholar—young or old—forewarned is forearmed.6

Between 1827 and 1834 Ranke demonstrated the research value of archives. He spent his days among "endless shelves of weighty
folio volumes” and “somewhat rotting papers” in the company of archivists, copyists, and “vicious small insects.” Following his 1828–1831 travel and studies in Italy, he edited the semi-official Prussian Historisch-Politische Zeitschrift. While Ranke was at work in Berlin archives, Michelet labored in the Paris archives. Archivist Michelet also arranged and described records, but historian Ranke “found” and copied sources. Among his “discoveries” in 1835 were the official records of the German Reichstag which he found in the municipal archives at Frankfurt. From 1836 to 1866, he successively mined Hessian, Prussian, French, and English archives. Proceeding from historical evidence to historical “truth” Ranke perfected the seminar study of history. The scientific development of historical studies changed concepts of archives from records of value to their custodians to records of value to scholars. This transformation created a demand for archivists and archival buildings.7

From 1834 to 1836, three Prussian archival theorists published the Zeitschrift für Archivkunde, Diplomatik und Geschichte. They were Friedrich L. von Medem, the Prussian archives director from Stettin; Ludwig F. Hoefer, the Berlin Privy Archives councilor; and Heinrich A. Erhard, an historian-archivist from Munster. The lead article on archival science by von Medem covered archives, diplomatics, archival officials, and the official quality of archives. An article by Erhard discussed the concept and content of archives, the external position of archives, and the use of diplomatics, heraldry, history, languages, law, and political science in archival practice. The second part of Erhard’s article related to the internal arrangement and administration of archives and covered documents and records, the preparation of finding aids, and the historical use of records. Hoefer contributed definitions of archives and registers. These articles mark the beginning of the debate over the future of archives newly freed from their former role as private repositories of the rulers. The three editors debated archival independence, the right of disposal, and the extent of archival responsibilities.8

A second journal, Zeitschrift für die Archive Deutschlands, appeared in 1850, with sections on archival history and administration, research, the retention of court records, paleography, dating, diplomatics, genealogy, and book reviews. At the March 1862 historical meeting in Breslau, Wilhelm Wattenbach, one
of Ranke's students, reviewed archival history, the differences between archivists and librarians, and the research use of archives. Another Ranke student, Max Duncker, became Director of the Prussian Archives. Ernst Posner wrote that from 1875 to 1895, the Prussian State Archives was raised to “the rank of truly scholarly institutions.” Under the direction of yet another Ranke student, Heinrich von Sybel, six privy state archivists carried out archival and documentary publications programs. Chief among them was Max Lehmann. As befits an archival theorist, Lehmann was a controversialist characterized as “domineering, highly excitable, and hard to bear for his colleagues.” He led in the adoption of the principle of provenance under which the order provided by the "excellent system of recordkeeping developed in German registry offices" was retained or restored. Published in 1881, the Prussian archival regulations cleared the way for arranging records according to provenance. The scheme replaced arrangements based on subject matter under record groups. The Germans were distinguished for their contributions to modern historical scholarship and the organization of record keeping in the registry system.

Southern Germany was not far behind the Prussians in the development of archival theory. In 1876, Franz von Löher began editing Archivalische Zeitschrift, the oldest German archival journal. In 1889, Harry Bresslau published a Handbook of German and Italian Paleography, and von Löher published Archivlehre, Principles on the History, Functions and Establishment of our Archives in 1890. Von Löher traced the history of German archives, archival duties, the preservation and protection of archives, arrangement and organization, and archival administration. A decade later Eduard Heydenreich published Archival System and Historical Science, a discourse on modern archival history, the dangers to records, and the idea of bringing historical truth to the world. He quoted Goethe and Leibniz on archives and cited an inscription in Frankfurt: “Archives, the precious treasure of the state, the ornament of the fatherland.” In 1900, at the second German Archives Day, Georg Hille laid the basis for German appraisal theory in a paper on the principles of destruction.
Netherlands

In the last decade of the nineteenth century, Samuel Muller and his Dutch colleagues were able to draw on their French and German predecessors and contemporaries in producing a manual for Dutch archivists. A.E.M. Ribberink notes that Muller raised Dutch archival work to great heights. In 1874 there were serious deficiencies in the Dutch archival staff, buildings, methods, and organization. In a quarter century Muller and his colleagues overcame them all. Their success was due to the stabilization of Dutch society and the personal contributions of Victor De Stuers and Samuel Muller. A historical consciousness among the rising middle class led to a search for facts and proof. In the “footsteps of Ranke,” the Dutch university community pursued the “critical study of sources based on historical knowledge.” Periodicals were founded, histories written, and archivists appointed. On March 8, 1874, the government created a Commission of Advisors for monuments of history and art. Victor De Stuers became secretary of the commission. In the following year he was placed in charge of the Arts and Sciences Division of the Ministry of Interior, where he served until 1901. In this capacity he called upon the Association of Archivists to reform and reinvigorate Dutch archival work. Visibly successful archival programs usually have a friend in the ministry. De Stuers was both literally and figuratively a “Dutch uncle” to Robert Fruin, who in 1912 became Archivist General. On De Stuers’s death in 1916, Muller wrote of a friendship that “had known a cloudless sky of more than 40 years.”

At the heart of the Dutch archival renaissance was Samuel Muller. Born in Amsterdam on January 22, 1848, Muller was the son of an antiquarian and bookseller. His birth occurred in a revolutionary year in the midst of a European movement for the use of primary sources to proclaim the glories of the nation and the development of scientific historical research methods. Muller studied law in Amsterdam and history at Leiden. Interested in the appointment as municipal archivist in Utrecht, he went to the École des Chartes in Paris, where he audited Anatole de Montaiglon’s lectures on paleography and the ordering of archives. On December 10, 1873, Sam Muller was appointed municipal archivist at Utrecht at the age of 25. In 1879 he became provincial archivist. He served in Utrecht until reaching the age of 70 in 1918. The Dutch
archival system before De Stuers and Muller has been described as "a very boring and quiet business." Muller wrote of the personal dangers of "falling asleep or drying up" and the public's perception of the archivist as performing "certain mysterious operations" that never appeared in public. In 1875 he published an inventory to silence a muttering council. When Muller became provincial archivist at Utrecht, he found a disordered maze of archival, library, and museum material. Charters were stored in cigar boxes and the "waters from heaven" ran through the roof. The most frequently used material stood closest to the archivist's office table. Muller started organizing the most recent records as they were most often used by the administration. In 1880 he published his inventory plan. He found some inventories or finding aids in chronological order. Others were in a preconceived library-type subject system. Muller objected to the subjective character of such divisions and the difficulty of putting items of a general nature under specific subjects. Both of these systems considered archives as pieces and did not recognize the organic nature of archives. De Montaiglon, in his lectures on the organization of archives, never tired of preaching about "le respect des fonds." Muller wrote, "I still remember very well how much the man bored me with it: only later did I understand how wise his counsel was and how fortunate it was that he repeated that advice...continuously for the future archivist."  

Muller was not a great speaker and declined four professorships. In 1886, he wrote to Robert Fruin, "Never have I been able to find that the job of archivist per se has a lower standing than a professorship. But when I see, how small and miserably many of my colleagues look at their 'aim in life,' it does not surprise me that the job stands in a less high esteem...." Muller was a disagreeable sort of fellow—a small, balding, and bearded man who wore glasses. He was a theorist and a politician. He was also dogmatic, domineering, rude, and iron-willed with "an enormous workpower" and a "dislike for slow and careless people." He inherited bourgeois sensitivity and the intimidating "passionate zeal" of his grandfather, a Mennonite preacher. So much for his qualifications as a theorist. He was also acknowledged as the "renowned, respected leader of the Dutch archivists." His national leadership came despite his provincial position and the antago-
nism between him and Theodore van Riemsdyk, Fruin's predecessor as archivist general. Muller resented van Riemsdyk's ties to nobility and disapproved when the latter was appointed deputy to the 77-year-old archivist general. The two agreed on the fundamental importance of a knowledge of the administrative and legal structure that formed the records and restoration of the original order, but disagreed on the employment of scientific archivists in the analysis and indexing preparatory to producing finding aids. Working closely with De Stuers, Muller "manipulated the posts and organizations" to dominate the Association of Archivists which was founded at Haarlem on June 17, 1891, serving as president from 1893 to 1910. The Association became a force in advancing Dutch archival practice and the production of the famous manual or Handleiding of Muller, Feith, and Fruin in 1898.13

Muller wanted to involve the Association in the development of registry plans for government offices and inventories of modern archives. Fruin objected and took the position that the archivist has to wait for what he gets from the administration. For the first 25 years of his archival career, Muller held that the archivist's first task was to inventory the archives and make them available for research. He said that archivists should not do historical investigations that historians can do themselves. He later stated that he took this position to convince the authorities that archives were no longer to be the "recreation grounds of amateur historians." He proceeded from inventoring to publishing source documents, which he regarded as a higher archival calling. While rejecting the writing of histories by archivists, Muller maintained that the archivist must be a historian. He wrote inventories and manuals for archivists and compiled, edited, and collaborated in the production of historial works. By 1911, he came to the position that writing history and publishing sources should come before inventories and "service work." Fruin placed description ahead of writing and held that guiding historical research and supervising the selection of sources made the archivist a true historian as much as did writing history. In commenting on Fruin's view, F.C. J. Ketelaar warns that the archivist-turned-historian feels like an epicure who has become a confectioner, or a drunkard who has chosen the trade of liquor merchant, and then discovers "that public service takes precedence over the fulfillment of one's own
desires." He observes that public service means also that the archivist continues to show the possibilities of the archives through doing historical research and publishing himself.\(^\text{14}\)

In 1894, in his first speech to the Dutch Archival Association, Muller concentrated on the archivist’s image. He said being unknown makes one unloved. The archivist must try to interest the highest authorities in the archives by emphasizing its usefulness for present-day administration and management. Muller also summoned the archivist outside the walls of the archives building to make his knowledge useful, by working as a teacher at a university and by participating elsewhere in society. “Don’t hide your light under a bushel,” Muller called. “Publish in newspapers and magazines, and let the public hear something.” Ketelaar notes that this was typical Muller: “urgency of deed and word, a vital daring to undertake everything, to bring about everything, to finish everything.”\(^\text{15}\)

In 1910, when Muller gave his peroration at the first international congress of librarians and archivists in Brussels, he urged his colleagues not to confine themselves to their studies, but to enter into full life. The archivist should be the leader and soul of the local organizations, founder of museums, life-giver in the community from within the archives. Muller concluded, “Gentlemen! Let’s take care that they know that we are alive, we and the treasures which have been confided to our care. Let’s take care that we’ll not be forgotten and nobody shall think our treasures as being dusty and mouldy. Let us make those treasures beloved, as we ourselves love them, a living part of the full human life! We don’t want to be forgotten, we want to live, share in the fast and strong current of modern communications.” In the French manuscript, Muller added the words that formed a cogent statement of his archival theory—“Vivons Messieurs!”\(^\text{16}\)

Muller, Feith, and Fruin’s Handleiding, or manual, codified the principles they had developed. They began the preface to the first edition (1897) with the words, “This is a tedious and meticulous book. The reader is warned.” The manual included chapters on the nature of archives, arrangement, description, and inventorying. The authors maintained that “uniformity in the handling of inventories...is extremely useful.” The searcher will quickly grasp the meaning of a consistent practice. We do not want “to
place the rules of this manual like a heavy yoke on the shoulders of our colleagues." We "ask...much criticism." 17

The manual provided the classic statement of the principle of provenance in its sixteenth section: the system of archival arrangement "must be based on the original organization of the archival collection, which in the main corresponds to the organization of the administrative body that produced it." A June 10, 1897, decree of the Netherlands Minister of the Interior mandated the principle of provenance. In applying the principle—"herkomstbeginsel"—and restoring the original order, Muller drew on the work of the man whom he succeeded as Utrecht provincial archivist. Vermeulen, in an 1850 report, had written that "an archive ought to be considered as something more than a simple collection of historical manuscripts" and criticized predecessors who paid "no attention to the origin or source of the collection." He recommended restoring the "arrangement, which it must have had before its order—through one or another fatal cause—was disturbed." He tried "to bring back the original order, which once had been the practical one, and so cannot be replaced advantageously by another." Drawing on Vermeulen's work, de Montaiglon's lectures, and his written and oral arguments with van Riemsdyk, Muller developed his statement of the principle of provenance. Applying his "unsparing assertive power," he improved upon, further defined, organized, and propagated these ideas. He used the pages of the Nederlands Archievenblad to urge greater uniformity and propose statements for discussion at annual meetings of the Association. Accepted at the Association's second meeting in 1893, Muller's propositions became the basis for the Manual. With "sword in hand," Muller, Feith, and Fruin tried to convince their colleagues. Every new member of the Association was obliged to obtain a copy. The Manual became canon law and Fruin tried to impose it. Muller was more liberal in accepting changes, but reacted sharply to criticism. He "wounded many by his sharp derision or his scornful sarcasm; he skirmished eagerly, but sometimes forgot to put a cover on his foil: 'by hardening in his once conceived opinion he often became unfair.' " 18

When Professor Blok objected that the researcher might find a chronological arrangement more useful, Muller again explained the disadvantages of the chronological ordering. His answer
contained venom towards a non-expert who had dared to criticize. Blok retorted ironically under the title "Touched the holy little house:"

Full of due respect would I, interested lay person, look humbly up to the archivist as such. Although I do not yet go so far as the "patrons" in a certain German archive I visited, where they stood up as one man at the "morning-appearance" of the "Herr Director" and sang to him, in chorus, "Guten Morgen, Herr Director," but I do have respect, true, indeed! But as user of the archive, I think that—in all modesty—I have also some right to join in the conversation with the expert archivist.

Blok also denied the independence of archival science. What archivists called archival science, Blok called professional knowledge. Fruin fulminated that "for professors in the different historical sciences, archival knowledge remains an auxiliary science, a means to extend historical knowledge and thus to better practice history. The development, which the archival system has undergone in this country in recent times tends to... free archival science from history and to make the practice of it an independent profession."19

The Dutch manual was an "instant success." Neither French nor German, the Handleiding, like the International Court of Justice, was accepted by the major powers. It was translated into German in 1905, into Italian in 1908, and into French in 1910. Eventually, it was translated into English in 1940 and into Portuguese in 1960. Since Muller, Feith, and Fruin, the manual mania has spread throughout the western world. Centerpieces in archival literature, there has been a proliferation of French, German, Dutch, English, Italian, and American national archival manuals.20

The manual's effect on American archival practice was substantial. Among those attending the 1910 international congress of libraries and archives in Brussels was Waldo G. Leland. The influence of the Dutch manual was readily apparent in a report he wrote in 1913 on the Illinois State Archives, saying that the first essential was an administrative history for each office and that "the archives must be so classified that the organization and functions that have produced them shall be clearly reflected." Leland and his associates drew upon archivistique, archivwesen, and archivalienkunde in preaching archival theory and practice to a full generation of Americans.21
Archival theory and theorists have addressed contemporary needs. In the 1790s, these included security or rescuing endangered records; the appraisal, selection, or evaluation of records for retention; and arrangement and description of archives to meet the needs of the new nations. As the nineteenth century progressed, the demands of magisterial national histories and documentary publications of sources focused archival attention on training in diplomatics and paleography. By the end of the century, experience with the specialized and chronological interests of historical researchers and confrontations with library subject classification schemes prompted archivists to emphasize the organic nature of records and develop theories of arrangement. In the twentieth century, the glut of records and involvement with administrative offices in records management have directed archivists to the theoretical aspects of appraisal for retention and description. The physical deterioration of records and increased public usage of archives have raised theoretical problems concerning conservation and user access.

An arbitrary or authoritarian attitude is essential for one who would organize documentation. Archivists are apostles of orderliness. Narrative excellence and ability as a synthesizer are less likely to establish one as a theorist than dogmatic pronouncements and timely appeals to trends. Historians of archival science should also guard against the affliction among historians of regarding historical development as the successive contributions of great minds. Associations, connections, and cumulative efforts move archival science, not the discovery of great theories, individual revelations, or revolutionary new practices agreed upon by committee or task force. In the words of Samuel Muller, "Vivons!" mesdames et messieurs!
FOOTNOTES


15. Ibid., p. 208.

16. Ibid., pp. 208-209.


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