

UNESCO AND ARCHIVES

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The interest that Unesco's General Conference displayed in this field during its fourteenth session and the very title of this new communication sector — where the term “archives” appears beside “documentation” and “libraries” — give some idea of the role Unesco plays — and will continue to play — in this area, either directly with interested governments or through international specialized organizations, both governmental and non-governmental.

We are going to examine here various aspects of the Organization's projects and achievements in this sphere.

Microfilming the archive collections

It has become increasingly evident in the past few years that some countries, because of the ravages of climate, insects, earthquakes, etc., should have the basic documents in their archives microfilmed. But in these countries the equipment or personnel to carry out such an operation is not always available. For this reason, the General Conference decided at its eighth session in 1954 to put a microfilming unit at the disposal of those countries which might want to use it. Unesco lends the unit, with its technical equipment, and arranges for the services of a micro-filming expert. For its part, the country furnishes the work area, unexposed film and extra personnel and facilitates in every possible way the overall task. In addition, the country concerned decides which collections are to be filmed and chooses those who will benefit from training on the spot in the technique.

The unit began its work in Latin America; the first country to ask for its services was Paraguay, which had many documents dating from the 16th century to the present. The unit then went to Panama, El Salvador and Honduras. Eventually it was transferred to the Dominican Republic where, for six months, it reproduced the documents of the State Bureau of External Relations and the archives of the cathedral of San Domingo (the oldest cathedral in the Americas). Together with the work done in Barbados, Peru and Chile, the unit reproduced two million pages during its tour of Latin America.

While on a project, the unit's director gave courses to local personnel on the techniques of microphotography, paleography and diplomatics, etc. In addition, he drew up in each country a list of the microfilmed documents, preceded by an account of the archive and library services. Reproduced and distributed, these lists have been published in the “Bulletin of the Archives Committee” of the Pan-American Institute of Geography and History. Further, under the terms of a contract with Unesco, this institute drew up a reference guide to the microfilmed items in Latin America and its Commission for History undertook the publication of the work, which was completed in 1963. Unesco and the commission also reached an agreement calling for a copy of the microfilms to be lodged at the commission's headquarters in Mexico City. Following a further agreement between Unesco and the Centre for Scientific and Technical Documentation in that city, institutions and researchers can have copies of the microfilms at reduced prices.

In January 1962 the unit was moved to another region for similar work. The first country visited was Morocco, followed by Libya and the United Arab Republic — where it remained for a year and a half — before going to Syria. More than one and a half million pages were reproduced during this period.

Thanks to an agreement between Unesco and the League of Arab States, a copy of these microfilms is lodged at the Cairo Institute of Manuscripts which can — together with the Centre for Scientific Documentation of the Council for Research — make copies of these documents available to interested organizations and individuals at favourable rates.

Finally, a second unit was put to work, following the decision of the General Conference at its twelfth session. This unit works in South East Asia. Seven hundred thousand pages were microfilmed in Cambodia, Singapore, India, Malaysia and Ceylon. There also, following an agreement between Unesco and the Japanese National Commission, a copy of these microfilms must be lodged at the Oriental Library in Tokyo, for consultation and to serve as the basis for other reproductions.

Work entrusted to specialized organizations

The International Council of Archives (ICA), founded in 1950, receives from Unesco a subsidy to carry out various activities: international congresses, organization of an international round table on archives, publication of the magazine "Archivum", work in technical commissions on terminology, sigillography, etc. The General Conference of Unesco decided at its tenth session to have published a "Guide to the Sources of National Histories" which exist in the archives of Europe. The undertaking, based on contracts between Unesco and ICA, started with the publication of such a guide on Latin America in 1963. Regarding Africa, the work of compilation was started in 1965 and the guide is likely to appear in 1970, by which time work on the Asia edition should be under way.

The ICA was also charged by Unesco with preparing a "Manual of Tropical Archives" (which appeared in 1966 in English and French) as well as to carry out studies on the professional training of archivists; legislation on archives (including the lodging of various files and documents with national archives or similar bodies); and studies on buildings to house archives, on which three works were brought out in 1966.

Finally, in the execution of its programme for 1967-1968, Unesco signed new contracts with the ICA calling for the preparation of a programme for the professional training of archivists for developing countries, as well as for the preparation of a "Manual on legislation concerning archives".

It should also be noted that for some 15 years Unesco has granted various kinds of aid to the Pan-American Institute of Geography and History. In 1952 Unesco provided fellowships to two Latin American research students enabling them to work in the archives of certain French ministries on documentation concerning the wars of independence in the Americas. In 1955 and 1956 Unesco contracts with the institute enabled three Latin American historians to do research in the archives of Austria, Belgium, the United Kingdom, Denmark, France, Italy and Portugal. The results of this work are being published under the title

“Fuentes documentales para la historia de la Independencia de America”, the first volume of which came out in 1960.

Other Unesco activities in the field of archives

Fellowships and experts. Experts charged with advising governments on the organization of their archives and with the professional training of personnel have been sent to certain countries. At the same time, a number of fellowships have been granted to nationals of these countries to allow them to increase their knowledge of the field of archives and allied disciplines.

Exchanges. Considering the archaeological, artistic and historic value of the seals affixed to mediaeval documents, there is great interest in increasing exchanges of the moulds. Arrangements have been undertaken toward this end and useful contacts have been made among national archives or other competent bodies in France, Hungary, Iran, the Soviet Union, etc.

As for exchanges of photographs, microcopies, etc., they are mentioned in the text of the *Convention on the International Exchange of Publications* (1958).

Dissemination of information. Studies and bulletins on the activities and publications in the field of archives appear regularly in the “Unesco Bulletin for Libraries” and in the periodical “Bibliography, Documentation, Terminology”. Notices also appear in “Bibliographical Services throughout the World” (numbers 9 and 13 in Unesco’s series of bibliography manuals) as well as in other publications.

Protection of cultural property in the event of armed conflict. Among the cultural properties prescribed by the international convention which came into effect on 7 August 1956 were: “. . . manuscripts, books and other objects of artistic, historical or archaeological interest; as well as scientific collections and important collections of books or archives or of reproductions of the property defined above . . .”. The convention foresees two kinds of protection: safeguarding and protecting cultural property in general, and, on the other hand, special protection. This last could apply to the transfer of cultural property as well as, in certain cases, property (real estate) where cultural properties may have been stored for safe keeping. To qualify for special protection, the cultural property must be registered in the *International Register*, kept at Unesco. This registering is subject to strict regulations, among which are the right to oppose the registration — an option open to countries who adhere to the convention — and the possibility of arbitration. A copy of the convention is sent to these nations. A “Manual on the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict”, by H. Lavachery and A. Noblecourt, was published in 1958 in co-operation with Unesco.

Microfilms. The development of microfilming is of such close interest to the field of archives, that it is advisable to mention here the activities carried out by Unesco in this domain: experts sent, training fellowships granted, equipment furnished, centres of documentation and centres of scientific co-operation set up with the agreement of the interested countries.

This overall view of the activities of Unesco in the field of archives illustrates the diversity of the sectors where, directly or indirectly, the Organization plays a role, as well as the variety of this action, while indicating the large number of countries which benefit from these activities.