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ARCHIVAL SCIENCE IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

Abstract

The archival science in the Czech Lands started to develop until after the establishment of the Czechoslovak Republic in 1918, and, more significantly, after the WWII. When theoretical issues were being discussed the term "archivistics" was coined, first for the archival theory as the opposite of practice, namely under the influence of Slovak archivists, later as a complex term for archival science in its theoretical and applied form; the term "archiving", however, is still preferred in the Czech Republic. Currently, the archival science (or theory) is limited primarily to some problems, which are the subject of the present text: the definition of important archival terms and setting up the archival terminology, questions of selection and reception of archival material and, most recently, namely the recordkeeping of archival material.

Key words: *archival science – archival terms – selection of archival material – keeping records of archival material – ordering principles*

While in Europe the archival science, or archival theory, started to develop since the early nineteenth century, mainly in Prussia, later in Italy, the Netherlands, Poland and Germany, in the Czech Lands its origins cannot be traced back until after the establishment of the Czechoslovak Republic in 1918, and, more significantly, after the WWII. Many scholars have contributed to its development.

1. DEFINITION OF ARCHIVAL SCIENCE IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

The term "archiving" has been traditionally used and still is, understood first as a subject in a curriculum and, second, as the management of records including its organisation and protection of archival material. As an independent and distinctive science it has been pioneered only since the mid-twentieth century when more intensive discussions on the topic were started, namely in relation to the archival methodology which was being established at that time. All along, however, there have been voices that have been heard claiming that it was mere practice and experience. The establishment of the Scientific Archival Board (1957) became a major milestone as the board set as its goal to publish the *Archival Guidebook*. It did not concern itself with the issue of the scientific conception of archiving but, indirectly, it showed that given the subject of its study and methods used archiving indeed had a scientific character. When theoretical issues were being discussed the term "archivistics" was coined, first for the archival theory as the opposite of practice, namely under the influence of Slovak archivists, later as a complex term for archival science in its theoretical and applied form (Hanzal 1965; Šamberger 1970, 1971; Babička – Kalina; Štouračová 2013, pp. 17–18; Sulítková – Pokorný, p. 9–11); the term "archiving", however, is still preferred in the Czech Republic. The Archives and Records Service Act no. 499/2004 Coll. defines archiving as the "field of human endeavour focused on the recordkeeping of archival material as a part of the national cultural heritage and fulfilling administrative, informational, scientific and cultural functions" (Act 2004, § 2a).

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The main problems of archival theory in the Czech Republic, which are the subject of the present text, include the definition of important archival terms and setting up the archival terminology, questions of selection and reception of archival material and, most recently, namely the recordkeeping of archival material.

Other issues of archival theory (or archival science) in the Czech Republic include problems of archival legislation, technology (building and adaptations of archival buildings, depositories and research rooms), care of archival material, education of archivists, as well as information on the history of archives and on archival science abroad, or major archivists-scholars. These will be left aside in the present text too.

Two basic journals constitute the main forum for archival science in the Czech Republic – *Archivní časopis* (The Archival Journal) and *Sborník archivních prací* (The Anthology of Archival Studies). Opportunities to discuss various issues have been provided, since the late 1980s, by national archival conferences, whose papers are published in anthologies. Summary information on archiving, or archiving science, are provided in books by Josef Bartoš (and Karel Chobot; *Bartoš – Chobot 1995, 2000*), Jiřina Štouračová (*Štouračová 1999, 2013*) and newly Ludmila Sulitková with Radek Pokorný (*Sulitková – Pokorný*).

2. DEFINITION OF BASIC TERMS

Unfortunately, currently there is, in the Czech archivist literature, no comprehensive authoritative dictionary of archival terminology, only older tools are available. In the late 1980s some Czech specialists collaborated on the drafting of dictionaries of archival terms for countries of the socialist bloc. These were then published in Warsaw in 1972 and in Moscow in 1982 and 1988. In the 1990s the efforts to put together a Czech dictionary intensified, but only a survey of about 400 archival terms was compiled, out of which a selection was to be made and definitions to be worded. However, this work was later stopped as the new archival act was being drafted (*Sulitková – Pokorný, p. 13*). In the subsequent years the questions of archival terminology were dealt with mainly by Zdeněk Šamberger (*Šamberger 1976, 1987a,b, 1995a,b*). The following text focuses on the most important terms and explains how these are understood in the Czech context.

2.1 Archive

The historian and archivist Václav Vojtíšek (1883-1974) was one of the first scholars who dealt with archival theory more substantially. Vojtíšek served as an archivist and long-term director of the Archive of the Capital City of Prague (1909-1949, since 1921 as its director), but also as the scholar in the Archive of Charles University and later the director of the Central Archive of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences (1952-1968), while at the same time he was a professor of auxiliary historical sciences at the Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague. As early as 1924 he made a definition of archive, in which he emphasised that materials should enter the archive only after a process of appropriate selection. "The archive is a complex of written and other related sources (prints, plans, pictures, photographs) of documentary nature, which have undergone the process of selection for administrative and scientific purposes and have been selected from the material compiled by organic office activity" (*Vojtíšek 1924, p. 7*). It was very important that he put emphasis on the expansion of the content of the materials archived, the principle of provenience as well as on the balance between the administrative and scientific purpose of the archive. As this definition applies in fact only on the archival fonds, Václav Vojtíšek remarked in 1934 that the term archive denotes in Czech namely the institution that contains archival fonds of various proveniences, and suggested to adopt the term "archival office" for such an institution (*Vojtíšek 1934a, p. 464*). This sug-

gestion, however, did not come into the general usage. Václav Vojtíšek also refused to recognise the so-called "artificial archives" created by mere collecting (such as literary archive) (Štouračová 2013, p. 20; Sulitková – Pokorný, p. 3).

Scholars who came next only slightly refined this definition – Václav Hrubý, in 1930, suggested to replace the word "complex" with the term "systematic complex" (Hrubý, p. 10). Jaroslav Prokeš, for the purposes of the drafted (yet non-passed) archival act before the WWII, had to word a more concise version that emphasised a wider conception of archival material: "The archive is a large collection of written monuments, organised by their origin or in any other way" (Sulitková – Pokorný, p. 3). The emphasis on the archive as a collection of fonds, created organically and organised by provenience (against collection archives), was proposed by Zdeněk Fiala (Fiala 1951). The widest definition, taking into account various ways in which archives came into being, was provided by the *Archivist Guidebook* in 1965: "The archive is a collection of written and other related documents, created by selection for administrative, operational and scientific purposes from material gathered by organic activity of a certain institution (office, corporation, company, institute etc.), potentially its operationally and organisationally divided part, or a collection of documentary material of non-administrative nature, created by the political, scientific, economic or other public activity of an individual." (Čechová – Holl – Nuhlíček – Radimský – Šamberger – Vrbata, p. 125–126). This definition was subsequently followed upon by other (Wurmová 1967, 1969; Šamberger 1976), while the most recent Archives and Records Service Act of 2004 (no. 499/2004 Coll.) provides only a brief definition (Act 2004, § 2c).

2.2 Archival records

The attitude of Václav Vojtíšek was also important for the definition of the term "archival records" (archivalia; Vojtíšek 1934a). A detailed definition, however, did not appear until the Archives Act of 1974 (no. 97/1974 Coll.) and its subsequent amendment of 1992 (no. 343/1992 Coll). "Archival records are written, pictorial, audio and other records that originated from the activity of the government or other bodies and organisations and from activities of individuals and have, given their historical, political, economic or cultural importance, a lasting documentary value" (Act 1974, § 2,1; Act 1992, § 2,1). The definition of 2004 is similar, "Archival records are such documents that were, given the time of their origin, content, origin, external features and their lasting value, given by their political, economic, legal, historical, cultural, scientific or informational importance, selected in public interest for permanent keeping and taken into the record of archives" (Act 2004, § 2f); at the same time archival records included seals, stamps and other material objects related to the archival fonds or the archival collection, as well as digital documents with the term "document" being preferred – it is "every written, pictorial, audio or other record, either analogue or digital, created by the originator or delivered to the originator" (Act 2004, § 2e).

2.3 The Archival Fonds

Václav Vojtíšek had striven to define the archival fonds, but a major definition did not appear until 1954 (*The Dictionary of Archival Terminology*: "The archival fonds is a collection of papers, dossiers and books originated from an organic activity of a single office, institute, company etc."; Roubík – Kollmann – Haas – Fiala, p. 17) and 1965 (The *Archivist Guidebook*: "The archival fonds is a collection of archives with common origin, content or unified treatment"; Čechová – Holl – Nuhlíček – Radimský – Šamberger – Vrbata, p. 125) with emphasis put on the fact that an archival fonds is created not at random but by an organic activity. The Archives and Records Service Act no. 499/2004

Coll. defines the archival fonds as a "collection of archival records that was assembled by a selection from documents created by the activity of the originator" (*Act 2004, § 2h*). Václav Babička and Tomáš Kalina expanded the concept of the archival fonds significantly when they emphasised that it was not just a sum of archives but rather a system consisting of archival records and relations among them and they also drew attention to the fact that the provenience principle be observed, which means that this system must not be compromised – i.e. the whole, its parts and relations among them (*Babička – Kalina, p. 203*).

Besides **simple fonds** (jednoduchý fond), **complex fonds** (složitý fond) was defined too. František Hoffmann describes them as fonds with a complex internal structure, originating from the activity of several offices (in the diplomatic sense of the word) serving a single institution, either simultaneously or in time sequence (such as fonds of court, estate, aristocratic family, church or municipal fonds); at the same time he defined three types of these fonds (1. a single complex fonds as a product of a single originator with a single complex office; 2. an integral collection of more or less tightly knitted fonds as a product of a single originator with multiple interlinked offices; 3. a group of fonds creating an ideal complex as a product of a single or more originators with multiple offices related by certain continuity; *Hoffmann 1974*).

Until the late 1990s, the Czech archival science also used terms a **compound fonds** (sdružený fond) for small fonds of the same kind adopted by a single archive or a **mixed fonds** (smíšený fond), denoting fonds of various kinds but, for instance, from a single locality). These two could be processed by a joint inventory; the terms are currently not in use (*Sulitková – Pokorný, pp. 5–7*).

Since the 1960s, the term **personal fonds** (osobní fond) has been defined mostly as the written estate of a physical person, which, however, often contains documents collected by other persons than the originator, or documents of collection character which do not have a direct relation to the originator. By the latest definitions the personal fonds is "a collection of written, photographic, film, pictorial and other documents, which originated organically in the course and in relation to the life and activities of a single physical person (or members of the person's family), it documents the main directions of the person's life, activities and interests and is of independent scientific value" (*Šimeček; Boháč; Wurmová 1973; Chalupa; Hanzal 1975; Edererová – Podaný; Sulitková – Pokorný, pp. 44–46*). Besides this, the **dynasty fonds** (rodový fond) was specified in the course of setting up rules to process archives – while in the case of a personal fonds the originator is a single physical person or several physical persons related by family in three subsequent generations at maximum, in the case of the dynasty fonds it is several physical persons from more than three generations related by family relationships (*Hoffmannová*).

2.4 The Archival Collection

Contrary to organically created archival fonds the collections represent files of written and related documents, originating from more or less conscious collecting activity of an archive or individuals who put them in an archive, and containing intentionally gathered documentary material of the same type (photographs, newspapers, graphics). In this case it is a collection of separate items unconnected by mutual relations of provenience (*Babička – Kalina; Sulitková – Pokorný, p. 8*). Collections, however, should in no case consists of separate items (such as photographs), selected from archival fonds. The Archives and Records Service Act no. 499/2004 Coll. thus defined the archival collection as a "collection of archives interconnected by a single or multiple common features" (*Act 2004, § 2i*).

2.5 Registry

Older studies define registry as 1) a collection of written documents originated by an organic activity of an institution and organised by a certain system – the order of registry; 2) a department of an office serving to store and keep record of documents originating from its activity. In the older period, the Czech word registry (*registratura*) meant the filing cabinet, i. e. a special cabinet with pigeon holes to store documents from the office (*Babička – Kalina; Sulitková – Pokorný, pp. 12–13*). The Archives and Records Service Act no. 499/2004 Coll. defines registry as a “place designed for keeping, searching and delivery of documents for the needs of the originator and for disposal of documents” (*Act 2004, § 2m*).

3. SELECTION AND ADOPTION OF RECORDS, DIGITAL RECORDS

In the Czech Republic, the issues of selection and adoption of archival records is dealt with mainly by the Archives and Records Service Act no. 499/2004 Coll. (*Act 2004, § 3–6*), which clearly defines what subjects and institutions have the obligation to keep records and make it possible to select archival records: these are public originators (the government and autonomous institutions, armed forces, universities and colleges, research institutions etc.), as well as private ones (companies and cooperatives, political parties, political movements, associations, trade unions, organisations of employers, churches and religious associations, professional chambers, foundations, notaries). The selection of records is carried out by the archival institutions by their province. The permanent value of the document in relation to the time when it was created, its content, origin and external features (i. e. visual value, language, type, writing substance, the type of execution etc.) is the criterion of selection. By the time of origin, written documents originating until 1850 or 1900 (from the areas of industry, agriculture, insurance, finance and mining), photographic records created to 1900 and film and audio recordings made to 1930.

Archival records are selected by two basic ways – in the disposal process (*Act 2004, § 7–10*) and outside the disposal process (*Act 2004, § 11–12*). The disposal process is a process in which documents past their disposal date are discarded and are no longer necessary for the initiator's activity. This process has firmly set rules and dates, which are a part of the disposal proposal; each disposal activity is recorded in the disposal protocol. A similar protocol is made even in the case of selection of archival records outside the disposal process (*Bittner et al.; Brom*). The concrete steps are defined by the law.

Recently, the question of selection and adoption of electronic documents has been paid more attention, namely how to maintain their authenticity and to keep them permanently (*Lechner; Sulitková – Pokorný, pp. 16–19*). In contrast to the selection of archival records, these issues are discussed in more detail in Czech scholarship literature, often with inspiration sought abroad. Since 2004, the National Digital Archive has been developed as a pilot workspace for long-term maintenance and accessibility of documents in the digital form. The National Digital Archive was to be a part of the National Archive. However, due to various obstacles (delays in the open request for proposals of the key technology supplier) the project has not been realised. The National Archive thus started working on a new project – the Digital Archive of the National Archive. At the moment, modules have been completed that make it possible for individual archives to make electronic disposal processes and to transfer selected documents for their permanent storing in the digital archive. As of July 1, 2012, the National Archive is obliged to store archival records in the digital form that are within its scope or within the scope of individual archives. Its tasks further include to manage

the national portal for making archival records accessible in the digital form, to fulfil for other archives the methodological and consultancy function in the area of pre-archive care for documents in the digital form and in the area of digitisation of archival records in the analogue form, as well as to provide the individual archives with more information and support (*Sulitková – Pokorný, p. 20*).

4. THE BASIC ORDERING PRINCIPLES AND TREATMENT OF ARCHIVAL RECORDS

In the past centuries, the archival material in the Czech Lands – similar to the Viennese Home, Court and State Archive – was organised mainly along the relational or pertinence principle: this was the case with various municipal archives and namely for the old Czech Gubernatorial (till 1850) and Governor's Archive, in which there were processed and organised by their subjects documents of the Czech Office, Czech Chamber and the Governor's Office from 1526-1650 and from 1651-1760, into the so-called "Old Manipulation" and "New Manipulation" (*Sulitková – Pokorný, p. 24*). The pertinence principle was used for various documents, obtained mostly in the form of a gift, in the Archive of the National Museum, of which several thematic collections were created.

The organisation of archival records that respects their origin and belonging to a single originator, the so-called provenience principle, first applied in the nineteenth century in Saxony, France and Prussia and then clearly defined in the late nineteenth century in the Netherlands, was applied in the Czech Lands shortly after, namely in the archives of some estates, but also in the archive of the Governor's Office (*Sulitková – Pokorný, pp. 24–26*). The Czech environment remained largely untouched by the discussion on the definition of the archival fonds as related to provenience but the contribution of Vácslav Babička and Tomáš Kalina on the historical and provenience principle in archiving was important indeed. The two scholars, inspired by earlier work, namely that of the German archivist Liselott Enders, gave precision to the concept of provenience in the sense that it includes not just the origin but also relation and pertinence. The two scholars arrived at the conclusion that the "principles of provenience, archival value and archival information make up a triad which can be assessed from the perspective of individual principles but at always with the awareness of their complementarity" (*Babička – Kalina, p. 204*). The topics of pertinence and provenience approach in archiving and the definition of the archival fonds in the Czech context were further contributed to by Jindřich Tomas, Vácslav Babička and František Hoffmann (*Tomas; Babička 1995; Hoffmann 2004*), while attention was paid to the processing of personal fonds.

5. RECORDKEEPING

The unified keeping of archival records in Czechoslovak archives was introduced at the same time when archives were transferred under the interior ministry by the government decree of May 7, 1954, on archiving. The so-called Unified Archival Fonds (as a central database in which contains information about different archival fonds in the country) was established and every archival fonds was accompanied by a record card with a number of details (*Sulitková – Pokorný, p. 31*). Compliant to the current legislation (Act no. 449/2004 Coll.), the National Archival Legacy is kept instead (*Act 2004, § 16,2*). The basic rules for these recordkeeping are defined in the Decree no. 645/2004 Coll., which is followed upon by the New Basic Rules for Processing of Archival Records, effective as of 2013. At the moment the central electronic database is maintained pursuant to this decree, as it was designed by the Document and Archive Management Office, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Czech Republic. On the level of ba-

sic recordkeeping, the written form is maintained besides the electronic form. The basic recordkeeping is continually updated. Data from the basic recordkeeping are transferred into the secondary recordkeeping from there, in the digital form, into the central recordkeeping. For the purposes of archival recordkeeping, the lists of newly adopted material are very important. New items are entered in the book of external changes, which captures changes in the relation of the archive to other legal persons. Internal changes occur in archival treatment, sometimes called the secondary disposal. Location surveys are an important tool, as they make it possible to navigate the storing of archival records in depositories, or a systematic evacuation of archival records whenever these are in danger (*Sulitková – Pokorný, pp. 31–32*). The most important archival records or their complexes require independent recordkeeping and care, as these can be declared archival cultural monuments or national cultural monuments (*Act 2004, § 21–22*).

Recently there has been an intensive discussion in the Czech Republic on the basic rules for the treatment of archival records, including processing of archival tools in the digital form (*Dvořák – Kunt – Pokorný – Šulc – Wannner*). Gradually, principles have been developed for the treatment of various types of fonds (such as the government, municipalities, communities, church institutions), with detailed attention paid to various types of archival records in archives, stored in both analogue and digital form (i. e. maps, plans, drawings, graphics, prints, seals or audiovisual documents), which are specified in detail. One of the major discussions concerned the recordkeeping units and their definitions. The resulting principles for the description of archival files and archival records reflect, to a certain extent, the international standards for the processing and description of archival records (*Babička 2008; Dvořák 2010; Kunt 2010; Sulitková – Pokorný, pp. 36–51*).

6. FURTHER QUESTIONS

Besides the already mentioned issue of electronic documents, their selection, adoption and permanent keeping (both in the Czech Republic and abroad; *Dvořák – Koucký – Vojáček; Šulc – Vojáček*), or the basic rules for the processing of archival records, the interest of Czech scholars has focused recently on the questions of the protection of personal data (*Kunt 2014; Čtvrtník 2018*) and the destruction of archival documents (*Čtvrtník 2015*), often, however, attention is paid to the history of the archives or archivists (*Lehr; Čtvrtník – Kahuda; Čtvrtník 2009, 2010, 2016*).

7. CONCLUSION

The archival science in the Czech Lands started to develop until after the establishment of the Czechoslovak Republic in 1918, and, more significantly, after the WWII. When theoretical issues were being discussed the term “archivistics” was coined, first for the archival theory as the opposite of practice, namely under the influence of Slovak archivists, later as a complex term for archival science in its theoretical and applied form; the term “archiving”, however, is still preferred in the Czech Republic.

Unfortunately, currently there is, in the Czech archivist literature, no comprehensive authoritative dictionary of archival terminology, only older tools are available. The basic terms are defined above all in the last Archives Act (no. 499/2004 Coll.).

In the Czech Republic, the issues of selection and adoption of archival records is dealt with mainly by the Archives Act no. 499/2004 Coll. Archival records are selected by two basic ways – in the disposal process and outside the disposal process. Recently, the

question of selection and adoption of electronic documents has been paid more attention, namely how to maintain their authenticity and to keep them permanently.

The basic ordering principle in the Czech republic is so-called provenience principle. The problem of the pertinence or provenience principle in archiving and of the definition of the archival fonds in the Czech context were contributed to by Václav Babička, Tomáš Kalina, Jindřich Tomas and František Hoffmann, an attention was paid to the processing of personal fonds also.

The unified keeping of archival records in Czechoslovak archives was introduced 1954. The so-called Unified Archival Fonds was established and every archival fonds was accompanied by a record card with a number of details. Compliant to the current legislation (Act no. 449/2004 Coll.), the record of the National Archival Legacy is kept instead. The basic rules for these recordkeeping are defined in the Decree no. 645/2004 Coll., which is followed upon by the New Basic Rules for Processing of Archival Records, effective as of 2013. The resulting principles for the description of archival files and archival records reflect, to a certain extent, the international standards for the processing and description of archival records.

The interest of Czech scholars has focused recently also on the questions of the protection of personal data and the destruction of archival documents, attention is paid to the history of the archives or archivists.

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