

CORRESPONDENCE, UNPUBLISHED PAPERS AND DATA : PRESENT MAKING OF HISTORICAL RECORDS

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Research process generates public and formal informations accessible through published documents or public data bases which libraries are used to deal with. It also generates informal, anachieved informations in format of correspondances, notes, calculus, reports, drawings... or other unpublished documents that libraries must not either leave aside.

THE STATUS OF DOCUMENTS

Since fundamental research, versus technological research for instance, implies great personal involvement, informal informations are mainly issued from individuals or small groups of individuals. It is probably the reason why this kind of informations and documents is often considered erroneously as private by astronomers deciding by themselves to destroy, to move or leave behind their so-called personal papers. These documents and informations actually belong to the institutions. They must be preserved because they are part of the research production and also because they may be used for astronomical research as it is illustrated in S. Débarbat's communication.

PROCESSING BOOKS AND UNPUBLISHED DOCUMENTS

Obvious differences of materials, a few differences of vocabulary must not hide the unique character of the principle of the preservation of archives and books.

Collecting and selection stand for acquisition ; inventories, like catalogues are both directories which enable public communication, the whole processing being made to meet user's needs.

In the case of archives, communication is illegal as long as a regular period of time is not achieved, according to the types of informations included. Meanwhile, confidentiality must be strictly observed. This induces differences in the methods but the collecting of the matter which may be part of archives presents similitudes with the collecting of the informations necessary to acquisitions and global selection programs are very close to acquisition plans.

COLLECTING

Efficient collecting needs great scientific community involvement. The most comprehen-

sive it is, the most pertinent the selection may be. Permanent organization activated by the archives production units (scientific and administrative) as soon as documents are no more permanently used, is the best way to avoid accidental destructions due to lack of room. On the other hand, strict respect of confidentiality rule will help to avoid deliberate destructions of what some authors might consider as very personal. Periodical reminding of the legal obligations is also necessary. The main line of action will be to obtain large and active cooperation from the "producers". The launching of the program is mainly time consuming. Its success will be followed by need of means, sufficient space being the first.

SELECTION PLAN

Though precise criteria to be finally used are specific of each funds, though selection itself is to be centralized, an approved official selection plan is a useful tool. It will be a guarantee to keep selection as objective as possible by restricting personal or institutional subjectivity. Thus, the task will be easier, thanks to the facilities of systematic decisions and processings : immediate transferring some categories of documents to other better suited institutions ; global predetermined destruction of previously identified duplicates ; non detailed and quick inventories of some other sets... Furthermore, the publication of selection plans will promote cooperation with relative research institutions, exactly as the publication of acquisition plans is a basic tool for resource-sharing on published literature.

Examples and conclusions in S. Débarbat's communication and recommendations in J. Dudley's one, on what to do and what not to do, will be a help to the setting up of practical rules which should fit national regulations and local necessities. Yet, consequences of new methods of astronomical research on archives preservation are also to be taken into consideration.

NEW WAYS OF DOING

New technologies, and specially the reversibility of information storage, make information shortlived and "volatile". No usable traces of electronic mail or phone calls, but much more serious, the question of observational data preservation. These are more and more directly acquired on magnetic supports, immediately processed and less and less completely published. Where would we be if our predecessors had systematically written with a pencil and robbed out their works to use again the paper sheets ?

Other problems come from changes in research management. Old routine observational programs and long term purposes have generated complete and comprehensive publications. Modern management by objectives generates new types of documents : scientific documents that mostly contain selected and specialized informations which may not be adequate to further unexpected aims, administrative documents containing also important scientific argumentation.

The third point is the high concentration of observation means associated to large information exchanges through electronic network and through astronomers' great mobility. Its consequence is the concentration of rough data in few unique data bases associated to the scattering of complementary informations in numerous astronomical research centers.

Furthermore, new technologies and new methods generate larger and larger quantities of information ; so, destruction, instead of selection, is not rare. Astronomical community is in great danger of loosing valuable and quite unique informations.

CONCLUSION

Paris Observatory is more than three centuries old. It keeps papers dating from its foundation and is rich with 18th century documents, papers and instruments as well. More recent archives are not so comprehensive neither so well processed. Last generations of astronomers as other french scientists, have not felt so concerned as their predecessors by preservation question. Great demand has brought the library to initiate a new program on collecting and selecting unpublished documents. The here described processes have been defined in cooperation with archives experts and are to be applied by library staff. It is a long range objective due to the lack of staff and the lack of room. Anyway, it has started ; people begin to be aware of archives. Hopefully, it will go on.