

Multilingual Archival Dictionary Database –
a project of ICA-SAE about archival terminology

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When students come to the theoretical part of their archival education, and we tell them that it is important to pay attention on terminology, the questions they often ask is: Why is terminology so important? We all know what archives or records are, what appraisal means and what a finding aid looks like. They really believe that a sentence like “a record is a record is a record ...” is true.

If they argue so, they will be ordered to go to the computer lab and to google “archives”. The result of their research in English, French and in German is different and shows a big variety what of “archives” can mean.

The third position in the German list is e.g. an independent cultural centre with a gym, a theatre and a studio for artists in Potsdam and has nothing to do with archives.

Sometimes the students argue that this variation will not be there if one would ask only archivists what an archives is.

But that’s not really true. An archives is even for German archivists either:

- the institution like the National Archives or the City Archives of Cologne
or
- the building in which the archives are preserved and used

And that’s only a national point of view.

In August 2011 at Archives School Marburg, we had the ARCHIDIS Summer School with students and teachers from eight European countries. The theme of the Summer School was “appraisal and social memory” and within these two weeks we recognized a lot of differences in using termes. In addition to the two definitions of archives which are common in Germany, we had to add the English definition of archives which is: “The documents created or received and accumulated by a person or organization in the course of the conduct of affairs, and preserved because of their continuing value”¹. (DAT III)

¹ Dictionary on Archival Terminology, 3. ed. (= DAT III), only published by Angelika Menne-Haritz under <http://www.staff.uni-marburg.de/~mennehar/datiii/intro.htm>.

And our Norwegian colleagues told us that in Norway they use the word also for the repositories in an administration, so for all places where records will be stored during their whole life cycle. We needed a lot of time just to explain to each other what we really mean by using a specific word.

“Multilingual Archival Dictionary Database” of ICA-SAE

For this and similar reasons, the “Section for Archival Education and Training (ICA-SAE)” of ICA is running a project to create a multilingual archival dictionary database with 300 terms which will be translated into eleven other languages. This database shall be presented in Brisbane at the International Congress on Archives next year. The project is funded by ICA and the INTERPARES 3 project and is lead by Luciana Duranti in Vancouver. Her team has collected 300 terms which are important for archivists, including terms for describing medieval charters as well as digital-born objects.

After collecting this vocabulary, they try to find English definitions for all these words in order to show what an English speaking colleague will mean by using this term.

Then small teams of two or three persons begin to translate the terms and to find definitions also in these languages. For each language there is minimum of one student to translate it and find definitions and one native speaker in the named countries who will correct the translations and help to find definitions.

As we all know, archival work has different traditions and different cultural backgrounds. If we really want to understand what our neighbours are doing, we need more than a simple translation of words. We also need definitions that will explain them.

And that is what makes the new database different from older lists like “Elseviers Lexicon of Archive Terminology”² (1964) which has no definitions or

² Elsevier's lexicon of archive terminology : French, English, German, Spanish, Italian, Dutch ; comp. and arranged on a systematic basis/ by a committee of the International Council on Archives, Amsterdam 1964

the "Dictionary of Archival Terminology"³ (1984) which is only offering short English and French explanations.

Finally one will find in the database a word, translations into eleven other languages and definitions of this word in all twelve languages, made by experts from the countries where this language is used.

How complex this is, can be seen in an extract from the database about the term "archives" which the Vancouver colleagues made for me last week⁴. At the moment there are only eight languages, but for most there is more than one definition.

So, after about one year of work in this project, what are the difficulties?

The experiences with translation and finding definitions are different. Some translations are easy, others are more complex, a third group can be really difficult, not to say impossible. But all in all one can summarize all problems to four categories:

1. Even within one country or within the group of countries that use the same language, archivists are using different words for the same facts. For example: someone who is sitting in the reading room of an archives will be named in German: "Benutzer" or "Benützer" depending on the place where you are using it: in the north and east of Germany (Benutzer) or in the south respectively in Austria or Switzerland (Benützer). This means that for the translation of "user" you should give two translations.
2. One term can be used in different languages for different facts/things as the Norwegian example shows.

³ Dictionary of archival terminology : English and French; with equivalents in Dutch, German, Italian, Russian, and Spanish, comp. by Frank B. Evans, François-J. Himly, and Peter Walne. Ed. by Peter Walne, München 1984 (= ICA handbooks series, 3)

⁴ See appendix 1 at the end of this paper (as at 05.10.2011).

3. A term has no corresponding term in another language because of different archival practices. There is for example no term for "recordkeeping"⁵ in Portuguese.
4. The vocabulary reflects different concepts and different importances. A "Serie" in France is not the same as a "Serie" in Germany, although it is the same word.

And why is this all interesting for the ITS archives?

Now, let us take a short look on the website of ITS and especially on ITS reading room rules. If we compare the English and the German version of these texts, we will find a variety of terms and translations:

On the websites navigation list, you first will find the item "archives" which is translated into: "Archiv"⁶

If you click on it, you will see "Collections" and "Bestände" in German

And if you click on that, you will find a text with the sentence:

"The key to the documents is the alphabetically and phonetically arranged Central Name Index containing over 50 million reference cards for over 17.5 million people. "

„Den Schlüssel zu den Dokumenten bildet die alphabetisch-phonetische Zentrale Namenskartei mit über 50 Millionen Hinweisen für über 17,5 Millionen Personen.“

Up to this point it seems to be clear, that:

"Archives" is "Archiv"

"Collection" is "Bestand" and

"Dokument" is "Dokument"

⁵ Rekordkeeping in the sense of "The function of capturing, storing and maintaining records and information about them and the set of rules governing such function". (Definition from InterPARES glossary).

⁶ <http://www.its-arolsen.org/de/startseite/index.html>. This and all other pages have been visited on 24.10.2011.

But if you will take a look on the “Finding aids” webpage you will find “archival records group” for “Bestand” and in the same chapter: “holdings” as well as “units of the archives” for the same German word⁷.

Under “Digitisation” you will find in one chapter: “documents” as well as “records” for the German term “Dokumente”⁸.

Under “General Provisions for Access” you will find the following sentence: “The archives and documents preserved by the International Tracing Service are accessible to public for research purposes”⁹

“Die vom Internationalen Suchdienst aufbewahrten Archive und Unterlagen sind der Öffentlichkeit für Forschungszwecke zugänglich”¹⁰.

Here „Archive“ is used for „Bestand“, which is in German possible, but not very common.

Finally, a sentence from the “Rules on Fees and Tariffs”:

“Handing out copies of entire records groups or collections is not admissible”¹¹

“Die Herausgabe von Kopien ganzer Aktenbestände oder Sammlungen ist nicht möglich”¹².

⁷ “Finding aids or inventories describe the content of one archival record group and shall guide the user to the holdings, records and other units of the archives.” (http://www.its-arolsen.org/en/archives/finding_aids/index.html); “Findbücher sollen dem Archivnutzer den Weg zu den Beständen und den Archivalien ebnen. Sie beschreiben den Inhalt jeweils eines Archivbestands.” (http://www.its-arolsen.org/de/das_archiv/findbuecher/index.html).

⁸ <http://www.its-arolsen.org/en/archives/preservation/index.html> ; http://www.its-arolsen.org/de/das_archiv/erhalt_der_dokumente/index.html

⁹ http://www.its-arolsen.org/de/das_archiv/erhalt_der_dokumente/index.html

¹⁰ http://www.its-arolsen.org/de/historische_forschung/forschungsantrag/benutzerregelung/abschnitt_1/index.html

¹¹ http://www.its-arolsen.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Dateien/forschung/Rules_of_fees_and_tariffs_ITS_Oct2010_cempl_01.pdf

¹² http://www.its-arolsen.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Dateien/forschung/GebuehrenordnungKplt_ITS_Oct2010_4.pdf

All in all, this shows that only within these two languages we have a variety of different translations:

English->	German	Deutsch->	Englisch
archives	Archive	Archiv	archives
	Archive (= Bestände)	Bestand	archival record group
	Archivgut		record group
	Archivalien		holdings
archival units	Archivalieneinheiten		collection
record group	Bestand		documentation
	Aktenbestand		units of the archives
documents	Dokumente		(archives)
	Unterlagen	Dokument	document
	vorgelegte Unterlagen		records
records	Archivalien	Unterlagen	documents
	Dokumente	Archivalien	archives
collection	Bestand		records
	Sammlung	Archivalieneinheit	documents
holdings	Bestand		

Some of these differences are correct or at least comprehensible. Archives, of course, can mean "Archiv" as well as "Bestand" and from the English definition we know that we also can use it to express the whole of material we store in an archives. But a translation of this totality of material with "Archivalien" will be misunderstood by most German readers. "Archivalien" is not specific enough. It can be two, twenty five or hundreds of millions. In German we use "Archivalien" mostly to name a few files, maps, charters etc., but for the whole we would

normally use "Bestände" or "Archives" or we combine with other term to express how much it is, like:

- "Unser Archiv umfasst sieben Kilometer."
- "Unsere Bestände umfassen sieben Kilometer."
- "Die **Archivalien** unseres **Archivs** umfassen sieben Kilometer."

This last sentence can be translated to:

"The **records** of our **archives** comprise seven kilometres."

Or by using the table above:

"The **archives** of our **archives** comprise seven kilometres".

But who will understand this correctly?

By jumping from one translation to the other, you can create a totally wrong equation:

"Archives" = "Archivalien" = "records" = "Dokumente" = "documents"

which will mean:

"Archives" are "documents" but that's not true, not in German and not in English.

Why does this "Babel of terms" on ITS website and rules exist?

Perhaps it is the result of the process of creating these rules: The text was first written in German, then translated into English. Later the English Version was adopted by the International Commission of ITS. On the German website you now can read, the English version will be the original, although the German is the original one and the English is a translation. And we all know that even the best translation will produce mistakes.

But surely the variety of used expressions is mainly based on the fact that the writer of these pages and rules do not want to use the same word within a few sentences too often – they want to write a well-readable text. But if the result is

then understandable or even incorrect, it will be better to use the same vocabulary five times in a paragraph and to renounce a prize for good writing.

Especially at the ITS with its international board and international users, an exact translation of archival terms is very important. The Multilingual Archival Dictionary Database can be an excellent resource for this.

Appendix 1

ARCHIVES

Definitions:

n, Those records that are appraised by Queensland State Archives as having continuing value and that have been selected for permanent retention.

Adapted by QSA from AS4390, Part 1, Clause 4.5

Definition:

a) Those records that are appraised as having continuing value. Traditionally the term has been used to describe records no longer required for current use which have been selected for permanent preservation. Also referred to as permanent records.

b) The place(building/room/storage area) where archival material is kept.

c) An agency (or part of an agency) responsible for appraising, acquiring, preserving and making available archival material. Bettington, Eberhard, Loo and Smith (ed), *Keeping Archives*, p. 633 [State of Queensland - Department of Public Works, *Glossary of Archival and Recordkeeping Terms (Queensland: Queensland State Archives, 2010)*]

Definition:

n, a) A repository, which is the preferred term for a building or part of a building in which archives (b) are preserved and made available for consultation. b) A general term for the materials held within a repository. See also papers, records. May be used as an element in the Title Sub-area, to indicate the materials which resulted from the business operations of the originating body. [Procter, Margaret, and Michael Cook, "Appendix 1: Dictionary of technical terms," in *Manual of archival description*. 3rd ed. Aldershot: Gower Publishing, 2000.]

Definition:

n, [records] The whole of the documents made and received by a juridical or physical person or organization in the conduct of affairs, and preserved. [School of Library, Archival and Information Studies (SLAIS) Glossary]

Definition:

n, [place] A place where records selected for permanent preservation are kept. [The InterPARES 1 Project Glossary]

Definition:

n, [institution] An agency or institution responsible for the preservation and communication of records selected for permanent preservation. [The InterPARES 1 Project Glossary]

Translation for archives

Term: (DE) Archiv

Definition:

n, Institution oder Organisationseinheit, die Archivgut erfaßt, erschließt, erhält und zugänglich macht. Im übertragenen Sinne auch ihr Gebäude, aber eher selten die archivierten Unterlagen; in der Büroautomation: elektronisches Archiv als Speicher unveränderbarer, maschinenlesbar gespeicherter Unterlagen ohne archivistische Erschließung und Bewertung. Der Begriff setzt die Abschließung der Aufzeichnungen voraus und impliziert ihre vorübergehende, jederzeit aber widerrufbare Auslagerung aus dem aktiven Gedächtnis. Im elektronischen Archiv bezieht sich diese Funktion auf Dokumente, während sie sich beim Archivgut auf die mit Hilfe der Unterlagen organisierten Ereignisse und Operationen bezieht. [Angelika Menne-Haritz, *DAT III Draft*, 2004. <http://www.staff.uni-marburg.de/~mennenar/datii/intro.htm> accessed 6/26/11.]

Term: (DE) Archivgut

Definition:

n, Als archivwürdig bewertete Teile von Schriftgut aus Verwaltungen. In Abgrenzung zum Archivgut wird der Inhalt von Sammlungen oft als Sammlungsgut bezeichnet. In der Formulierung der Archivgesetze wird der Begriff Archivgut auch als Oberbegriff für die Gesamtheit der Bestände genutzt. [Angelika Menne-Haritz, *DAT III Draft*, 2004. <http://www.staff.uni-marburg.de/~mennenar/datii/intro.htm> accessed 6/26/11.]

Translation for archives

Term: (ES) archivo

Definition:

n, [documentos de archivo] El conjunto de documentos producidos y recibidos por una organización o persona jurídica o física en el ejercicio de sus funciones y que son conservados con distintas finalidades.[School of Library, Archival and Information Studies (SLAIS) Glossary]

Definition:

n, [espacio físico como institución] Un lugar donde se conservan los documentos para decidir su conservación transitoria o permanente de acuerdo con los valores asignados.

Definition:

n, [servicio] Los documentos se conservan para brindar su consulta a los investigadores o usuarios en general.

Translation for archives**Term: (FI)** arkisto**Definition:**

n, [tila] Tila, jossa arkistoaineistoa säilytetään. [*Sanastowiki, muokattu.*]

Definition:

n, [organisaatio] Organisaatio tai organisaatioyksikkö, jonka tehtävänä on asiakirjojen säilyttäminen ja käytössä pitäminen. [*Sanastowiki, muokattu.*]

Definition:

n, [asiakirjakokonaisuus] Yhteisön tehtävien hoitamisesta tai henkilön toiminnasta kertyneiden asiakirjojen kokonaisuus. [*Sanastowiki, muokattu.*]

Term: (FI) arkistoinstituutio**Definition:**

n, ks. arkisto [organisaatio]

Translation for archives**Term: (FR)** archives**Definition:**

n, Documents, quels que soient leur date, leur forme et leur support matériel, produits ou reçus par toute personne physique ou morale, et par tout service ou organisme public ou privé, dans l'exercice de leur activité. Le mot archives est couramment employé dans le sens restrictif de documents ayant fait l'objet d'un archivage, par opposition aux archives courantes. [*Direction des Archives de France, "Dictionnaire de terminologie," 2002, 9.*]

Definition:

n, l'ensemble des documents, quelle que soit leur date ou leur nature, produits ou reçus par une personne ou un organisme pour ses besoins ou l'exercice de ses activités et conservés pour leur valeur d'information générale. [*QUEBEC (province). Loi sur les archives, L.R.Q., Chapitre A-21.1. Québec : Éditeur officiel du Québec, 1990, v-17 chapitre I, article 2.*]

Term: (FR) bâtiment d'archives**Definition:**

n, Édifice obéissant à des normes spécifiques, conçu pour accueillir l'ensemble des fonctions d'un service d'archives. [*Direction des Archives de France, "Dictionnaire de terminologie," 2002, 11.*]

Translation for archives**Term: (PT)** arquivo**Definition:**

n, 2 - Instituição ou serviço que tem por finalidade a custódia, o processamento técnico, a conservação e o acesso(1) a documentos. [*Arquivo Nacional (Brasil). Dicionário brasileiro de terminologia arquivística. Rio de Janeiro, 2005.*]

Definition:

n, 1 - Conjunto de documentos produzidos e acumulados por uma entidade coletiva, pública ou privada, pessoa ou família, no desempenho de suas atividades, independentemente da natureza do suporte. [*Arquivo Nacional (Brasil). Dicionário brasileiro de terminologia arquivística. Rio de Janeiro, 2005.*]

Translation for archives**Term: (SV)** arkiv**Definition:**

n, 1. En lokal för förvaring av arkivhandlingar. 2. En myndighet eller institution som tar emot, förvarar, vårdar och tillhandahåller arkivhandlingar. 3. Ett bestånd av handlingar som har tillkommit i en myndighets/enskilds verksamhet och som har lagts till förvaring hos denna. [*1. och 2.: Celandér, Elisabeth och Greta Solberg. Ordning och reda bland föreningens handlingar: Några ord på vägen. Landsarkivets i Uppsala Småskriftserie nr. 4, 2005. 3. Backhaus, Helmut. "Arkivteori i internationell belysning." A C Ulfsparré (red), Arkivvetenskap, Studentlitteratur, 1995.]*

Translation for archives

Term: (ZH) 档案

Definition:

n, 国家机构、社会组织或个人在社会活动中直接形成的有价值的各种形式的历史记录。(The various kinds of valuable historical documents directly formed in the social activities of state agencies, social organizations or individuals.) [*中华人民共和国档案法 1996. (The Archival Act of the People's Republic of China 1996)*]

Term: (ZH) 档案馆

Definition:

n, 集中管理特定范围档案的专门机构。The specialized organizations that concentratedly manage archives with particular scopes. [*DA/T 1-2000 档案工作基本术语 (Basic Terminology of Archival Work DA/T 1-2000)*]