



## Book Review

---

*Scritti Di Teoria Archivistica Italiana: Rassegna Bibliografica* a cura di Isabella Massabò Ricci and Marco Carassi. Rome: Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali, Ufficio centrale per i beni archivistici, 2000. *Writing on Italian Archival Theory: Bibliographical Survey* translated by John Fliffe, William Joung, and Paul Metcalfe.

---

*Writings on Italian Archival Theory* is an annotated bibliography designed to introduce writings on Italian archival experience and knowledge to a wider international audience. Thus, this bibliography contains an abstract of each selected article or book in the original Italian, as well as in French and English. The writings date from 1963 to the present. This time period was selected for two reasons. First, it coincides with the promulgation of the 1963 archival law in Italy. Second, beginning this work with 1963 makes it a continuation of Renato Perella's earlier bibliography.<sup>1</sup> The compilers provide some insight into the selection criteria, stating that a preference was given to articles that dealt primarily with theory or those in which 'theory and practice were blended in the formulation of theories concerning specific issues' (p. 25). These criteria were developed as a result of the editors' belief that "satisfactory results cannot be achieved in day-to-day practice in the absence of the support and assurance of a sound theoretical backing" (p. 24). Having not read a large number of writings on Italian archival theory and practice, I looked forward to reading through the annotations to get a sense of the state of archival theory as well as the primary archival concerns in Italy. I was not disappointed, the articles represent a broad range of Italian archival thought and approaches to problems.

Non-Italian archivists will recognize common themes from their own national archival literatures in these writings. These themes include discussions of basic definitions, such as the term "archives" by Elio Lodolini, similarities and differences between libraries and archives (Arnaldo D'Addario, and the state of the archival profession (Isabella Zanni Rosiello). There are also articles discussing approaches to the core archival functions such as

---

<sup>1</sup> Renato Perella, *Descriptive overview and guide to Italian archival bibliography*. Quaderni della Rassegna degli Archivi di Stato, n. 24. Rome: 1963

Maria Guercio on appraisal and Paola Carucci on description and preservation. Some of the abstracts also highlight specific types of archives. For example, Augusto Antoniella and Roberto Cerri discuss municipal and local authority archives. Gino Baldini and Armando D'Addario on the administration and arrangement, respectively, of ecclesiastical archives. Renato Grispo provides insight into Italian business archives and one selection details the application of computerization to university archives. The annotations reveal that Italian archivists face many of the same challenges and concerns of American archivists. For example, in discussing business archives Grispo notes that there is a "limited awareness on the part of firms as regards the scientific and cultural value of their records" (p. 169). This is an all too familiar situation in the United States. Other discussions that will resonate with American archivists are the problems of imposing an order and trying to reconstruct original order, the necessity of appraisal, particularly in light of voluminous modern records series, and the evolution of archival descriptive standards.

As in other countries, the most recent writings reflect the increasing reliance on electronic technologies for the creation of records. The abstracts to articles by Augusto Antoniella, Roberto Cerri, Luciana Duranti, and Gigliola Fioravanti, among others, document a growing awareness of electronic records in Italy. These articles also reflect a broad-based discussion on how best to manage electronic records, the complex interrelationships between paper records and their electronic counterparts, and the need to educate archivists to administer electronic recordkeeping systems.

Yet, foreign archivists, particularly those in North America, will also see some unique issues and approaches. For example, the topic of diplomatics is featured in articles by Alessandro Pratesi and Filippo Valenti and Ezelinda Altieri Magliozzi discusses the problems of indexing medieval names. Other articles with an Italian focus, however, serve as a means for comparing archival issues among countries. Italian archival legislation and its affect on records, archivists, and the preservation of cultural memory can be used for just such comparisons. The abstracts of writings by Elio Lodolini, Paulo Galluzzi and Pietro Valentino, Isabella Zanni Rosiello point to common archival themes, but the foreign reader will see how these phenomena are enacted in a particular social and political environment. This provides a good reminder to archivists of all the culturally-determined factors that affect archival administration, archival functions, as well as archival decision making.

Some of the terminology will puzzle non-Italian archivists and I think this will vary depending on the nationality of the reader. For example, two articles by Giorgio Cencetti are noted as "clarifying the nature of archival association" (p. 151). At least from my American viewpoint this is strange

phraseology. My interpretation of this is the importance of the relationships between records within or among series or fonds. But the phrase “archival association” first conjures up other meanings. Another interesting and somewhat confusing phrase is “historical method” (pp. 156, 157, 166) which is introduced early on as “metodo storico” (p. 150). This refers to provenance and original order although the meaning of this phrase to English speakers in the United States is something very different. Although the sense of the text is ultimately discernable in these instances, I assume that other foreign readers will have their own lists of words and phrases where the meaning is obscure. Also, the translations of some annotations is a bit rough at times, and perhaps the translators should have given themselves permission to not to translate each abstract word for word, but rather more loosely to convey the sense of the entire article.

The annotations are arranged chronologically, according to the publication date of the original work. This provides some sense of the evolution of Italian archival theory and practice. In fact, the compilers note that some works build on or are responses to others. I would have liked to see more activism on the part of the compilers, though. Which authors were controversial? What ideas were revolutionary? How representative is the article of an author’s entire body of work? These are the types of contextual questions that ran through my mind as I read this book. These may also have been the types of questions the compilers sought to inspire when creating this work because these are the types of questions that can lead to more cross-cultural archival investigations.

Translation is always difficult, particularly in a field where until recently with the advent of the Internet, there had been few attempts at aiming archival writings at an international audience. Therefore, this volume is unique and a very bold experiment that the compilers should consider a success. The volume will certainly introduce archivists around the globe to the vast and rich offerings of Italian archival literature with which they were previously not familiar. It may also inspire some to probe more deeply into this literature and put archival literature in their own countries into a different and perhaps more international perspective.

Elizabeth Yakel  
*School of Information*  
*University of Michigan*  
*Ann Arbor*  
*U.S.A.*

