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THE DILEMMA OF THE FINE ADMINISTRATOR: THE ORIGINAL OR FACSIMILE

Zusammenfassung

Dieser Beitrag widmet sich der Ausstellungspraxis des Archivs der Prager Burg. Der Schwerpunkt liegt dabei auf dem Ausstellen der wertvollsten und wichtigsten Archivalien und zwar aus der Perspektive des Archivgutverwalters. Das Archiv der Prager Burg bildet seit den 1960er Jahren eine wertvolle Faksimilesammlung. Für Archivarinnen und Archivare ist dies ein wichtiger Anhaltspunkt, denn im Archiv der Prager Burg wird das Ausstellen von Originalen als ein unangemessenes Risiko angesehen. Im Jahre 1996 waren Archivarinnen und Archivare nach Beendigung einer internationalen Ausstellung über Josip Plecnik auf der Prager Burg mit einer problematischen Situation konfrontiert. Die Ausstellung solcher Archivalien birgt immer mögliche Risiken mit sich. Sie hinterlässt unerwünschte Spuren bei der Materie (z. B. dauernd, vorübergehend, zunehmend). In der Tat befindet sich der Archivgutverwalter hier in einer schwierigen Situation – hinsichtlich des ethischen Zugangs nutzt der Autor dieses Beitrags den Begriff „*zuverlässiger Archivgutverwalter*“. Dieser stellt sich den

dringlichen Fragen bezüglich des Schutzes „seiner“ Archivalien. Zu den Voraussetzungen für den Erhalt der gewonnenen Kompetenzen des Archivgutverwalters gehören vor allem seine gute Zusammenarbeit mit dem Konservator sowie seine aktive Fachtätigkeit. Allerdings wird der anspruchsvolle Archivgutverwalter in seiner Laufbahn mehrmals gefordert, die hochwertigen Originalarchivalien auszustellen, wenn dies im Gegensatz zu seiner fachlichen Aussage stehen und zu anderen als wissenschaftlichen und Bildungszwecken bestimmt ist. Diese Prozesse sind auch in der Geschichte des Archivs der Prager Burg zu belegen, das seit 1920 in einer politischen Organisationsstruktur eingebettet ist. Diese Abwägungsprozesse stellen in der Praxis immer wieder ein weiteres Dilemma für den Archivgutverwalter dar. Er muss jeweils spezielle Schutzmaßnahmen für die ausgestellten Archivalien entwickeln und berücksichtigen. Fraglich ist, wer die Entscheidung darüber anhand welcher Kriterien trifft. Basiert die Entscheidung letztlich auf Einzelinteressen oder wird sie in gewisser Weise mittels demokratischer Prinzipien getroffen? (Übersetzt v. Petra Ponzerová).

Keywords: exhibition, preservation, archival care, facsimiles, administrator and fine administrator

Outline

Since 1920, the Archives of Prague Castle (hereinafter referred to as the APC), one of the most specialized archives of the public archival network in the Czech Republic, have stored unique archival documents from the 6th century AD to 2013 in its repositories.¹ It is a small workplace – four professional archivists take care of approximately 2,000 line metres of extraordinary documents. Due to the exceptional wealth of the Prague Castle archival depositories, its professional administration, including exhibitions, is carried out by professional and independent archivists. On a personal level, the archivists of the Archives of Prague Castle are required to be ethical professionals whom we suggest calling *fine administrators*. An important prerequisite of their work is their professional profile: if fine administrators do not publish papers in professional journals, which *de facto* reflect their constant interest in the documents, they should keep in touch with the relevant trends in their field.² What are the general principles fine administrators can follow in looking after invaluable archival heritage? When exhibiting archival documents, or preserving them as cultural heritage, we follow the Beijing Code of Ethics for Archivists (1996), which states *that archivists should protect the integrity of the archival material and ensure that it will be reliable evidence of the past*. The idea that *museums that take care of collections should preserve them in the interests of society and its development*

has also inspired the ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums.³

The binding standard for our work is the Archives Act (2004).⁴ Archivists also follow the principles for exhibiting archival materials in the National Archives of the Czech Republic (2002), set as an obligatory standard for Czech archives in 2019.⁵

Every fine administrator of archival materials of the highest category (in the APC, such materials include manuscripts on parchment, plans, photographs from the 19th century, the so-called Habsburg official acts from the 18th and 19th centuries, and the files of the Office of the President of the Republic from the first three decades of its existence) is *pressured* to exhibit them. Czech professional literature has reflected this crucial question since the 1980s. Ladislav Kolařík, who wrote textbooks on museology in the 1980s and 1990s, notes that *originals should not be allowed to be exhibited; facsimiles enable the same experience as the original*. Kolařík also defined various types of facsimiles and their use.⁶ In 1987, the journal *Archivní časopis* published a text by Denko Čumlivski, who summed up his experience stating that archival documents, originals (etc.) *should be exhibited as additional, often just supplementary, quite marginal materials*. This statement is not inconsistent with Kolařík's statement about exhibiting facsimiles.⁷

Following this preventive procedure, however, fine administrators paradoxically find themselves in many dilemmatic

1 The APC manages 59 archive collections of various ranges from the 6th century to 2013. Its depositories also include the funds of the Metropolitan Chapter of St. Vitus Cathedral in Prague (6th–19th centuries) and the so-called Habsburg funds of the Prague Castle court offices (1526–1918). For the foundation of the APC, see: M. HALATA, 'Archivní rozluka 1919-1925: Vznik a úkoly Archivu Pražského hrad', in: Karel Kazbunda, *kulturní dědictví a mezinárodní právo: Referáty z vědecké konference konané ve dnech 19.-20. dubna 2013 v Jičíně*. 2013 (Semily-Turnov-Jičín: Pekařova společnost Českého ráje v Turnově-SOA Semily, 2013), 264-293.

2 The fine administrators in the Archives of Prague Castle include graduate archivists, a historian, and an art historian.

3 'The Code of Ethics for Archivists', in: *Archivní časopis* 48, 1998 /1, 1-3. For the ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums, see: <https://icom.museum/en/activities/standards-guidelines/code-of-ethics/>, as museums can collect various kinds of archival materials.

4 The Act on Archiving and Filing Service and Amendments to Some Acts (Act no. 499/2004, Coll.)

5 M. ĎUROVIČ, 'Zásady vystavování archiválií ve Státním ústředním archivu v Praze', in: *Archivní časopis* 1, (2003), 37-50. Zásady vystavování archiválií veřejných archivů České republiky, 2019, available at: <https://www.mvcr.cz/zasady-vystavovani-archivalii-verejnych-archivu-ceske-republiky.aspx>

6 L. KOLAŘÍK, *Restaurování písemných památek a tvorba faksimilií* (Prague: SNTL, 1991), 46-49.

7 D. ČUMLIVSKI, 'Poznámka k archivním výstavám', in: *Archivní časopis*, 3 (1987), 147.

situations and are exposed to very stressful or even neurotic moments. These are influenced by several factors:

- 1) General (esp. economic) rules of exhibition management: i.e., the pressure of exhibition institutions resulting from their competitive efforts to increase the attendance of exhibitions, the trend to hire the so-called *star curators*, often from other than „conservationist” disciplines, and their lobbying to exhibit unique „treasures” (which is a matter of personal prestige). Unlike fine administrators, these professionals do not deal with the material nature and physical condition of the documents, but with their iconography or contents.⁸ Another factor is the ever-improving production of exhibition funds whose producers naturally have profit-seeking motives.
- 2) The conclusion of the APC into a political institution: this general aspect is also associated with specific institutional circumstances since the APC has been part of a political organization, the Office of the President of the Republic, since its establishment in April 1920. The APC is asked by the highest administration to use archival documents to accompany or present various political events or to represent its founder whose intentions are often different from the definitions of the codes of ethics.⁹ These intentions are then realised by more or less aggressive political management and often characterized by *anxious haste*

to implement their ideas. It is obvious that such a rush, based on the very nature of political work, is completely inconsistent with the reasonable speed and sequence of professional fine administration.

- 3) Crystallizing property relations to the most important archival collections, which is a consequence of the democratic development of the country after 1989. A special moment in the history of the APC was the deposit of ecclesiastic medieval archival materials and manuscripts of priceless historical value. Now, the interest of the deposit owner, the church, logically follows representational goals, often explained with the following words: *seized by the APC in the 1950s* (i.e., during the Czechoslovak totalitarian regime). The inadequacy of such a statement addressed to the current fine administrators is beyond dispute.¹⁰

Being a fine administrator

Fine administrators enter these relations with the conviction that archival documents are irreplaceable cultural treasures and they often form a *close attachment* to the documents during their daily work in the closely guarded depository, their *refuge*. However, the above-mentioned relationships are not the only factor the administrator has to mentally and intellectually cope with when asked to lend the document, especially when the facsimile is not accepted as a loaned object for various reasons, which seem *compelling* (summarized above under Points 1–3) to the interested party. Fine administrators are perfectly versed in the lending process, and they know their weaknesses. A human or technical error is, therefore, a depressing

8 J. VNOUČEK, ‘Výstavy vzácných knižních fondů z hlediska ochrany a konzervace’, in: *Problematika historických a vzácných knižních fondů Čech, Moravy a Slezska: počátky v dějinách knihtisku* (Sborník z 8. odborné konference; The proceedings of the 8th professional conference), Olomouc, 20-21 October 1999 / Brno: Sdružení knihoven České republiky and SVK in Olomouc, 1999), 97-107.

9 The first political exhibition at the Prague Castle was held in 1946, and the exhibition committee included active prominent politicians of the post-war period. The purpose of the exhibition was to present Prague Castle as the centre of a new democratic country, unlike wartime when Prague Castle – the seat of Czechoslovak presidents, Czech kings and Habsburg emperors – was occupied by the German administration of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia.

10 The ecclesiastical deposit has been stored in the APC since the 1957s. In 2002–2019, the relations with its owner were covered in three agreements about storing the deposit in the APC. The agreements include the APC Principles for Exhibiting Archival Materials, based on the national standard of such principles. See note 4.



Fig. 1: Police surveillance during the transport of the so-called *Dražice Codex* to the North Moravian city of Ostrava (2018)



Fig. 2: Police surveillance during the transport of the so-called *Dražice Codex* to the North Moravian city of Ostrava – a stop at a petrol station (2018)

experience for them. Problems can occur at any time during the exhibition preparation, and include, for example, failure to comply with the terms and conditions of the loan, upon the receipt of the document, or during its installation and uninstallation.¹¹ Let us mention the curious experience of one of our administrators, which she had during the exhibition project *Ostrava nevídaná na cestě ke své velikosti (The Exceptional City of Ostrava on Its Way to Greatness, 2017)*.¹² The APC was asked to lend the so-called *Dražický rukopis (Dražice manuscript)*¹³ that includes the oldest historical mention of Ostrava, the north Moravian metropolis. The exhibitor agreed to borrow the manuscript from the owner.¹⁴ The manuscript, contractually in-

11 VNOUČEK, note 8, 97-101.

12 Press releases are available at <http://www.ostrmuz.cz/website/mainmenu/stranka-akciem/2017/750-let-ostavy/ostava-stredneveka/>

13 APC, KMK, Msc. G 5, 1st mid.15th century (*PRIMA PARS CRONICÆ BOHEM*)

14 The manuscript belongs to the church deposit of the APC, the fund of the Metropolitan Chapter of St. Vitus Library.

sured for CZK 90 million¹⁵ was transported to a local museum by a specialized company, two employees of the APC (and thanks to the Office of the President of the Republic police officers). (Fig. 1, Fig. 2)

Both the museum and the owner of the manuscript accepted the strict conditions of the loan set by the APC and based on a conservator's report (the showcase type, the exposure length, the quantity of illumination, the opening angle, especially exhibition stands). The manuscript was installed by an APC administrator who had previously worked in a restoration/conservation centre. During the installation of the archival document, however, the room was *suddenly crowded* with journalists with cameras who wanted to capture this unique moment for the local public. Not only did the administrator lose confidence in his demanding exhaustive installation work, but the relative humidity of the room started to rise rapidly due to the presence of many people. The administrator managed to install

15 Ca. €3.6 million

the precious manuscript only after she vehemently protested this situation.

Fine administrators who deal with a psychologically challenging exhibition agenda have to fulfil demanding daily tasks, and after some time, they necessarily deal with a *personal intellectual dilemma*. The dilemma is related to their *professional self-reflection*: they realize they can lose their job if they do not give way to the *coercive political model of management* and do not agree with some loans, or they risk misunderstanding or professional isolation from the colleagues if they do not want to lend rare documents to them. This may make them think that their work is *the vanity of vanities*.¹⁶

The way out: a *preserving care*

What is the way out of these dangerous processes when we inevitably ask ourselves whether exhibitions of originals of invaluable documents are worth all the risk? Do exhibitions of originals meet the standards of archival care, which we propose to call *preserving care*? The APC has based its work on a single premise: *exhibitions of rare original documents represent a generally inadequate risk*. The APC has in its possession many facsimiles of a hand-made character (so-called “twins” – artistically crafted copies, technologically identical with originals) since the 1960s. Facsimiles began to emerge in 1966–1967, when the exhibition *Památník dějin československého lidu* (The Memorial of the History of the Czechoslovak People), gathering together copies of the most important documents of the Czech and Slovak state, was about to be prepared.¹⁷

16 When working for the APC since 2000, I have seen two colleagues who could not bear the brunt of these relationships and decided to leave the job they had devoted a great part of their good professional career to.

17 V. MALÁ, *Moje roky v Archivu Pražského hradu*, 2019, 8: unpublished manuscript – KOLÁŘIK, note 6, 46. The facsimile collection of the Archives of Prague Castle was exhibited as a separate art exhibition at the bibliophile congress in Prague (1995) when its artistic value was

Eventually, the so-called mock-ups and high quality copies (after 2015), produced by graphic reproduction studios, were created as well. If there are high quality facsimiles, they are lent instead of originals, or a new facsimile is created. This practice is stated at the exhibitions. Making facsimiles and mock-ups, however, is financially very demanding and, under the current legislation, also lengthy; for these reasons, digital print reproduction on a scale of 1:1 and subsequent print on quality paper of the same colour and weight as the original is preferred, for example, for documents and iconographic materials (e.g., drawings, written documents).¹⁸ This professional approach, which we suggest calling the *preservation mode*, however, may be seen as a kind of conservatory fundamentalism by the borrower and misunderstood or underestimated, which *may harm the reputation of the archives and increase interinstitutional animosity*.

The preconditions: cooperation and discussion are requested

Can fine administrators find a way out of this maze of relationships and risks? Based on our long-term experience, we conclude that the only solution is the close cooperation of fine administrators (archivists, archive curators) and conservators who sharpen their opinions in *mutual discussion*. Such co-operation is all the more effective if it is not clear whether an original document of the highest category should be exhibited considering its physical condition. Only a discussion between two professionals can

highly appreciated. Cf. M. KOSTÍLKOVÁ, *Rukopisy Knihovny Metropolitní kapituly u sv. Víta*. Katalog výstavy faksimilií ve Starém královském paláci-Pražský hrad 25.-30.9.1995 = *Manuscripts of the Metropolitan Library of the St. Vitus Chapter*. <Prague Castle - Old Royal Palace>. Prague, 1995.

18 By 2000, facsimiles were incorporated into the registration system of the archive of the Czech Republic, the so-called National Archival Heritage, and treated as originals – archival documents; in 2010, they were removed from the registration system on the initiative of the APC to serve their real purpose.

lead to the successful conclusion that *the rarest documents can be exhibited under very stringent conditions* and after careful conservation preparation, as explained by Vnouček in his work.¹⁹

What are the preconditions of such a discussion?

- 1) Fine administrators should have sufficient communication skills to be able to act as equal partners of hired preservers/restorers. The APC hires an external preserver/restorer that also works as an adviser of the fine administrator and needs to have good communication skills to persuade the administrator to consider their opinion. The two professionals cannot be in dispute since their cooperation would not work and lead to a common result.
- 2) An ideal precondition for the discussion is *long-term cooperation* of the two professionals, the fine administrator and preserver/restorer, during which they can reconcile their positions and educate each other. There are many ways of cooperation. For example, when the APC dealt with the collections of medieval manuscripts, after the physical condition of the collection was examined, a continuously updated, structured database was created.²⁰ The database can be ideally ac-

companied by a printed version on archival quality paper (ISO 11108) and continuously stored in the registry of the department to be available to *future* administrators.

- 3) An essential part of the fine administration of archival funds is a functioning digital photo library, which is continuously updated based on researchers' requirements and includes both the images taken during the surveys of the physical condition of archival documents and the so-called study images taken usually by the fund administrators.²¹

Preconditions of a valuable discussion between the fine administrator and restorer are also shaped by the institution where the archival documents are stored:

- 1) Its employees should intensively explain the purpose of exhibiting faithful facsimiles ("originals for originals")²² and any types of copies instead of the originals.²³ Education seems to be a very effective way to reduce any adverse events associated with exhibiting rare originals.
- 2) *Controlled excursions to archival departments*, co-organized by archivists, conservators and restorers, are a very effective way of raising awareness of the function and exhibition of original documents. We should emphasize that the *administration* of rare documents, paid by public resources, *does not take place in exhibition halls* but in air-conditioned and strictly guarded depositories where they can be kept for future generations. The Czech archive network has not reflected the necessity of being an educational and popularizing institution for the *majority* yet.

19 Cf. note 7. Recently, such an approach has been used, for example, in the exhibition in the National Museum of Ljubljana, where manuscripts and prints from the Maribor collections were exhibited under the conservation supervision of the Archives of the Republic of Slovenia (Arhiv Republike Slovenije). The exhibition also met educational requirements with its accompanying catalogue. Cf. the accompanying print N. GOLOB, *Na pergamentu in papirju: Rokopisi in tiski iz mariborskih zbirk*, <Ljubljana, Narodni muzej Slovenije, 5.12.2017 - 7. 2. 2018>.

20 J. VNOUČEK - M. SUCHÝ, 'Průzkum fyzického stavu rukopisů fondu Knihovny MK u sv. Víta: konservátorská databáze jako předpoklad správy rukopisné sbírky', in: *XII. seminář restaurátorů a historiků*, Třeboň 2006, 240-249. - See also J. VNOUČEK - M. SUCHÝ, 'Conservation database as a precondition for the administration of the manuscript library stored in the Prague Castle Archives', in: M. J. DRISCOLL - M. RAGNHEIDUR (eds.), *Care and Conservation of Manuscripts 11: Proceedings of the eleventh international seminar held at the University of Copenhagen 24th-25th April 2008* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2009), 89-213.

21 M. HALATA - M. SUCHÝ, 'Fototéka Archivu Pražského hradu (situace v letech 2001-2008)', in: *Archivní časopis*. Prague 2009, 59 (1), 55-59.

22 The phrase was used according to R. SLOVIK, *Originál za originál. Zhotovení faksimile rezané knižní vazby*, 2016, available at: <http://www.artefakt.cz/a%20sborniky%20z%20konference.html#2016>

23 SLOVIK, note 22.



Fig.3: Excursion to the depository of the Archives of Prague Castle (autumn 2018)

To explain the meaning of archival storage means to explain how economically and technically challenging it is to keep the cultural heritage alive *and* how tricky it is to confuse this goal with the effect of an ephemeral exhibition (Fig. 3).

- 3) An ideal solution for exhibiting originals seems to be having *exhibition spaces* in archives where curators work as professional experts. As an example, I can mention the National Archives in Prague that has exhibited many rare archival documents under strict conditions in its exhibition hall. However, since it is impossible to build an exhibition hall for the APC, the institution has recently begun to entertain the idea of creating a partial *specialized fund (with air conditioning and showcases)* to present original documents, which would enable the APC to exhibit rare archival documents under the supervision of experts and the local team for a specific purpose and for a short time.
- 4) Natalija Glažar notes that the educational role of archives today does not represent a new aspect of their work;

the new aspect is rather cultural marketing that meets the needs of the user archive public.²⁴ From this perspective, PR presentations of short-term exhibitions of rare documents are extremely important. An example of such a strategy in the Czech Republic was a successful campaign of the National Library in Prague, which exhibited the most famous Czech book, the *Codex Vyssegradensis* of 1086, between 31 January and 1 February 2015. The manuscript was exhibited in the Klementinum Mirror Chapel after nearly fifty years. The exhibition was open for two weekend days, and it was preceded by a massive press campaign that emphasized the *momentariness* of the exhibition, the *free* admission and the financial and historical *value of the document*, described the extraordinary *security measures*, and *presented the facsimile* of the rare Codex. While visitors queued in front of the exhibition hall for the whole weekend (Fig.

²⁴ See N. GLAŽAR, *Organizacijsko komuniciranje arhivov – hranitelj arhivskega gradiva* (Ljubljana, Arhiv Republike Slovenije, 2002), 155.



Fig. 4: A queue of visitors waiting to see the *Codex Vyssegradensis* (2015)



Fig. 5: The *Codex Vyssegradensis* in a showcase (2015)

4, Fig. 5), another exhibition presenting great exhibits, including many original manuscripts, had a very poor PR campaign.²⁵

Conclusion: the potential threat

The dilemma of “the original or facsimile” has been the main thread of the work of fine administrators, and it can leave a permanent mark in their mind. Each institution has to decide what the position of *their* fine administrators is supposed to be and what support they will be provided, and how it will maintain and develop its exhibition strategy. The APC, for example, works on the assumption that any exhibition of rare original documents presents an inadequate risk. It can harm the document during the exhibition process, and the damage may be small, reversible or irreversible, accumulative or non-accumulative. The archives of Prague Castle faced such a situation in 1996, after the end of

an important international exhibition of Jože Plečnik²⁶ at Prague Castle, when it was discovered that the previously restored tracing paper under 19 pieces of plans and drawings was subsequently damaged. Rusty spots, caused by the unpredictable contents of the microscopic iron and copper particles in the paper pulp, appeared on the material.²⁷ Due to such unpredictable consequences of exposing rare documents, we can agree with the claim of de Witte and de Passer that “in almost every case [...] this is a situation where the object loses its integrity, historical and financial value, and thus becomes a loss for our cultural heritage”.²⁸ Similarly, Vnouček (exemplifying the exhibition of books) states that “it is really advisable to see any exhibition as a potential threat”.²⁹

However, professional issues and dilemmas associated with exhibitions do not relieve the fine administrator of pressures to

25 Press release of the National Library of 28 January 2015: Událost roku – Národní knihovna ČR vystaví nejcennější knihu. Available at: https://www.nkp.cz/soubory/ostatni/tz_kodexvyssehradsky.pdf. (date: 31st July, 2019). – A very good and inspiring example of how to exhibit a rare monument, including its exploration and PR, is given by Melania Zanetti in this anthology. Cf. also M. ZANETTI, ‘From East to West: Study, conservation and exhibition of the *Tabula Chorographica Armenica* (17th c.)’, in: *Works of Art on Parchment and Paper* (Ljubljana: Znanstvena založba Filozofske fakultete – Arhiv Republike Slovenije, 2019), 125-133.

26 Exhibition *Josip Plečnik – architektura pro novou demokracii, Pražský hrad 1996*

27 H. PAULUSOVÁ, B. BAČÍLKOVÁ, R. STRAKA, ‘Informace o průzkumu poškození plánů Josipa Plečnika’, in: *X. seminář restaurátorů a historiků: Referáty. Litomyšl 24.–27. září 1997* (Praha: Pobočka ČIS při Státním ústředním archivu v Praze, 1999), 95-97.

28 Verbatim by G. DE WILLE, ‘De Zilveren Passer. Exhibition conservation: Luxury or necessity. A case study: manuscript exhibition conservation in Bruges’, in: G. FELLOWS-JENSEN – P. SPRINGBORG (eds.), *Care and conservation of manuscripts 9: Proceedings of the ninth international seminar held at the University of Copenhagen 14th-15th April 2005* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2006), 211.

29 VNOUČEK, note 8, p. 98.

exhibit priceless archival documents also for other than educational or scientific purposes. Paradoxically, this pressure can open a professional discussion between the fine administrator and the preserver and help them find a synergic or *de facto defensive position*, which may ultimately lead to a shift in the professions and stabilize the exhibition strategy. There is no doubt that such pressures represent a deficit of democracy and limit the expertise of every one of *us*, the participants of the Ljubljana conference.³⁰

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