ARCHIVAL PROFESSIONALIZATION IN THE SOVIET UNION, 1918-1931

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Archival workers processing documents at the Archive of the October Revolution, 1927
OVERVIEW

• Brief historic background

• New expectations of archives and archivists under the Bolshevik regime

• Variety of actors and bottom-up participation in the creation of the Soviet archival system

• Professional standards

Workers in front of the Archival Administration building, 1928
SETTING THE STAGE

- WWI
- Revolutions
- Civil War
- Scarcity
- Threats to documents

Red Army armored cars during the Civil War

Red Army soldiers with archival documents
June 1, 1918

- Created the **Single Archival Fond**
  - state archives of the previous regimes
  - files of abolished state institutions
  - inactive files of currently operating state institutions

- Created the **Main Archival Administration**

- Stipulated that no document could be destroyed without permission from the new archival administration
• Marxism and Historical Materialism

• Archival documents as evidence of the scientific historical process

• “Inorganic collections”

• Power of archives

*Even the most insignificant archival document, when placed in capable hands, is like the small stone in David’s hands as he faced Goliath.*

-M.N. Pokrovskii, 1924

Head of the Main Archival Administration, 1920-1932
WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE PROFESSION

- Archivists as:
  - collectors
  - records managers
  - exhibit curators
  - book editors
  - authors
  - librarians
  - lecturers

The history of our Party is a battle weapon.
-Bor’ba July 17, 1925

Exhibit on the Civil War at the Vyatka Museum of the Revolution
An energetic organizer.
He loves his work.
He is active in party and non-party work.
He organized a commission in the village on Istpart matters.
Attends all party meetings and conferences related to Istpart,
is very productive.
Regrettably, he is semi-literate.

-Notes evaluating the head of a provincial state archive and local Istpart section (Commission on the History of the Revolution), 1928.
SOLUTIONS TO THE PROBLEM

- Used non-communists and many professions to staff the archives
- Professional standards
- Political and academic education for archivists, party members, and the public

Preserve Archives by Bonch-Bruevich, 1921
SETTING STANDARDS

• Development of standards at the center
• Cabinets, commissions, circles

First Conference of Archival Workers, 1921
Disseminating Standards

- Professional Journal: *Arkhivnoe Delo*, 1923

- Professional conferences
  - 1921 and 1927- First and Second Conferences of Archival Workers of the RSFSR
  - 1925 and 1929- First and Second Congresses of Archival Workers of the RSFSR
  - Several local conferences throughout the 1920s

Meeting at the Second Congress of Archival Workers, 1928
• 1920s- short-term courses in Moscow and Leningrad

• 1931- establishment of the Institute of Archival Science (later the Moscow State Historical-Archival Institute)
AND THEN?

Late 1920s/Early 1930s

- Less room for input
  - Consolidation of communist influence
  - Booting of the bourgeois
  - Flow of information and input became more and more top-down

- Merger of archival institutions

- Archives in service of building the socialist economy
  - political and the practical vs. cultural and historical