

Associació d'Arxivers de Catalunya



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Catalan collection vs. common collections

Now, as the media storm caused by the return of the Catalan documents confiscated during the Civil War is beginning to abate, the question of the Archive of the Crown of Aragon (ACA) and the different collections stored therein has acquired a new dimension.

Organic Law 6/2006, of 19th July, on the Reform of the Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia, establishes in its thirteenth additional provision that "*Catalonia's own collections in the Archives of the Kingdom of Aragon and in the Royal Archives of Barcelona shall be integrated into the Catalan archive system*". Although the inclusion in this provision of the Royal Archive of Barcelona may be debatable, the confrontation provoked by the question of the ACA, with the presentation of three appeals of unconstitutionality by the other three autonomous communities affected, has done little more than position a question that should be dealt with in a scientific manner at the centre of an overly political debate.

On 9th November 2006, the Official Spanish Gazette published the long-awaited Royal Decree concerning the creation of the Board of the Archive of the Crown of Aragon (ACA), which will be founded formally on 20th January 2007 in Barcelona, in the presence of the Minister for Culture and the Presidents of the autonomous communities affected. It has taken over 70 years for this Board to come into being, a move that is seen as a preliminary step towards solving the problem of ownership of the collection.

The history of this Archive, initially known as the Royal Archive of Barcelona, is curious mainly due to its change in name in the mid-18th century, when the archivist of the time requested the reunification of the royal archives of Saragossa, Mallorca, Valencia and Barcelona in a single Archive. Although this idea never came to fruition, the change in name of the Royal Archive of Barcelona did take place and this came to be known as the Archive of the Crown of Aragon.

The Royal Archive of Barcelona was until then an administrative archive intended to serve the counts and the members of the royal lineage in Barcelona and their successors to these titles.

Later, this Archive began collecting documents that were generated or that had been generated by other institutions: the Higher Board of Government of the Principality of Catalonia (1808-1812), the Government of Catalonia (14th century-1714), certain Catalan monasteries (Sant Cugat del Vallès, Ripoll, etc.), the old *Consell de Cent* (Council of the Hundred), part of the archive of the Council of Aragon, the Archive of Royal Heritage of Catalonia (including the archive of the Royal Treasurer and the General Town Council), a large number of notarial protocols, an extensive heritage collection, etc.

During the course of the 20th century, given the lack of a provincial historical archive, a significant number of documents generated by the peripheral Spanish administration (the Treasury, industrial tribunals, the Civil Government of Barcelona, the National Statistics Institute in Barcelona, etc.) were incorporated into the Archive. The volume of documents required the creation of a supplementary repository in Cervera, the Regional Archive Repository of Cervera, which was moved to the headquarters of the Government of Catalonia in 1995.

By way of explanation for those who are not familiar with the situation, it should be noted that we are not talking of a single archive, but rather of different archives held under the same name. We are talking about the collections of the Royal Archive of Barcelona, and also those of the Government of Catalonia, of numerous monastic orders and a significant number of Catalan notarial protocols.

Today, the crux of the matter is the categorising of what are Catalonia's own collections and what are the common collections of the territories of the ancient Crown of Aragon. It is the former that, according to the new Statute of Autonomy, must be integrated into the Catalan archive system, while the latter should be in the charge of the Board of the ACA.

The book *L'Arxiu de la Corona d'Aragó: un nou perfil per a l'Arxiu Reial de Barcelona* [*The Archive of the Crown of Aragon: a new profile for the Royal Archive of Barcelona*], written by Ramon Planes, Laureà Pagarolas and Pere Puig and published by the AAC in 2003 in its collection of Texts, clearly laid out the opinion of the professional collective with respect to which of Catalonia's own collections were in the care of the ACA.

Taking this careful study into account, the AAC still defends the concept of a new profile for the ACA that is more in line with the new definition of its functions and with a revision of its content into three blocks.

Firstly, the ACA and its Board should have charge of the documents in the collections of the Royal Archive of Barcelona and of the Council of Aragon, in addition to other, smaller, holdings and collections.

Secondly, the Government of Catalonia and the Spanish Government should have joint control of the collections of the Royal Treasurer, of the General Council of Catalonia, of the General Service Corps of the Principality of

Catalonia, of the Royal Court of Catalonia and of the Governorate General of Catalonia.

And thirdly, the collections corresponding to the sections of the Government of Catalonia, the religious orders, the notarial protocols, the Treasury Office and a large proportion of the section "*Sundry holdings and collections*" should be integrated into other archives of the Archive System of Catalonia.

Another matter to be borne in mind concerns the building of the Palau del Lloctinent, the former headquarters of the ACA. It seems that the use to which this building will eventually be put is yet to be decided and the same is the case for the building in Carrer Almogàvers, the current headquarters of the ACA. On the one hand, the Palau del Lloctinent, with the documents stored there, could enable the ACA to regain its central position in the city of Barcelona, making up a historical nucleus in conjunction with the Historical Archive of the City and the Archive of Barcelona Cathedral, in which researchers and users would have, within a few metres of each others, the city's most important archive collections. With regard to the premises in Almogàvers, there has been much talk of converting this building into the new Provincial Historical Archive of Barcelona, an organisation that has been awaiting foundation for many years.

It would be of interest for the points of view of professionals to be heard not only here, but also in the newspapers, where attacks on the Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia in relation to this matter are already to be read and where the opinions of politicians and other intellectuals have also been voiced, but where we have yet to see more technical viewpoints, such as those of archivists.

In short, we must try to avoid controversy concerning this matter and to avoid partisan confrontation that has caused so much damage in other instances. The solution may be found in more technical points of view, with a good dose of imagination and willingness to reach an agreement. Failing this, the opinions of the demagogues will emerge once again and will block the way to Catalonia achieving its full and rightful authority over its archives.