

Giorgietta Bonfiglio-Dosio  
**Archivi d'impresa. Studi e proposte**  
Review by Fabio Del Giudice

The book contains lessons, speeches and articles from the years 1997-2003, mostly still unpublished, or else published in magazines not readily available. It enriches the subject of archives and business culture five years after the publication of *Manuale di archivistica di impresa* by Paola Carucci and Marina Messina, issued in 1998.

Giorgietta Bonfiglio-Dosio sets out to present more than a simple review of cases; she also offers an original point of view on specific matters concerning the science of business archiving, including:

- methodologies of record processing
- conservation and enhancement strategies
- techniques of communication of archival products.

The author has a broad experience both within archival administration and as a professor at the University of Padova. She addresses several highly relevant issues, and in particular:

- history of business archives (*Archivi d'impresa: un bilancio e una riflessione*, and *Archivistica d'impresa: un mondo multiforme*)
- principle categories for documentation used in business archives (*Dall'archivio di famiglia all'archivio di impresa* and *Le tipologie documentarie degli archivi di impresa*)
- various points from her 2002-2003 lessons in the Master program in Conservation, Enhancement and Management of Industrial Heritage (*Lezioni di archivistica di impresa*)

*Archivi d'impresa: un bilancio e una riflessione* and *Archivistica d'impresa: un mondo multiforme*

In these articles, the author reviews the **history** of business archives and of the literature on this subject, with emphasis on important milestones:

- the 2002 meeting in Trieste and Udine;
- the two meetings held in Genova in 1982 and 1984;
- the round-table on industrial archives whose proceedings were published in a 1973 issue of «Rassegna degli archivi di Stato».

Some of the issues discussed at the round-table are still of current interest: the **survey** as the essential first step in understanding a still unexplored documentary heritage; and the need for active organizations to preserve and enhance their cultural heritage. Bonfiglio-Dosio also underlines the inadequacy of archival legislation at that time: in the 1970s, the law paid little attention to business records as historical documents; consequently, rules were drawn up based on family archives legislation. The author describes the spirit of that meeting, where, for the

first time, business records were recognized as historical sources, and therefore worthy of preservation and protection so as to allow their use by historians and researchers.

*Dall'archivio di famiglia all'archivio di impresa* and *Le tipologie documentarie degli archivi di impresa*

This section is one of the most innovative features of the volume. The articles focus on **accounting records**, which the author regards as explicit and detailed historical sources. Accounting records serve purely practical needs and aren't intended to convey an immaculate image of the business to future generations. These observations correspond to a particular tradition of Italian traders: since the Middle Ages, merchants have adopted their own system of memory recording and transmission based on accounting records; this allowed them to avoid some of the bureaucratic expenses of the notaries.

Giorgetta Bonfiglio-Dosio suggests that the interest of the State in passing legislation about bookkeeping has diminished: indeed, current Italian laws prescribe that accounting records must be kept for just ten years. Giuseppe Paletta correctly notices that entrepreneurs keep their records only when they are aware of their social role and believe that, through those records, they will leave a trace of their business activity to the future.

The book also provides a wide survey of **documentation categories** found in business archives, including account and labour records. This is the starting point for an invaluable atlas of diplomatics of business records: for each main category – ledgers, journals, stock books, letter books, payroll – a precise institutional and diplomatic profile is carried out. Each table includes the photographic reproduction of the record, its archival and extrinsic description, a bibliography and a short comment.

The critical annotation is supplemented by a useful **legal appendix** that chronologically lists the single statutes, as well as the texts of the legal articles concerning each record category. The reader may therefore view the development of laws concerning record keeping, from the French code of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century until very recent times.

In the last essay, the author explains the **difference between business and economic archives**. With reference to the work of Filippo Valenti and Stefano Vitali, Bonfiglio-Dosio describes the business archival science as a discipline that studies industrialization from the point of view of **memory organization**. The sheer volume of non-documentary materials held in a business archives poses many challenges, concerning their processing, description and preservation; challenges that can be resolved only through strong interdisciplinary cooperation.

The final chapter analyses current laws on private archives, also relevant for business archives, and defines the concept of business in the context of Italian jurisprudence.

Based on its clearly expressed observations and useful suggestions, *Archivi d'impresa. Studi e proposte* is highly recommended for both students and professionals in the field of archives management and coordination.