

Memory of the World Register - Nomination Form
Senegal - Fonds of the "Afrique occidentale française" (AOF)

Abstract

The AOF holdings, which belong to the common heritage are of a tremendous cultural, historic and social interest. They include an immense stock of documentation on art and on a number of Islamic brotherhoods such as Mouridism and Tidjanism, as well as on catholicism in French West Africa. The AOF holdings contain some edifying information on the Island of Gorée – a symbol of slavery - which has been classified as a world heritage site by UNESCO.

Identity and Location

Name of the Documentary Heritage: Fonds de l'Afrique occidentale française (AOF) (French West African archives), 1895-1959

Country: Senegal

State, Province or Region: Dakar

Address: Immeuble administratif, avenue Léopold Sédar Senghor, Dakar, Senegal

Name of Institution: Direction des Archives du Sénégal

Legal Information

Owner: Senegal, which is conserving the collection for the benefit of researchers

Custodian: Collection formed under French sovereignty

Legal Status: Common heritage

Category of ownership: Legal person

Details of legal and administrative provisions for the preservation of the documentary heritage: in terms of organization, preservation and conservation, the *Archives du Sénégal* operates within the legal framework of Archives Law No. 81-02 of 2 February 1981 and its implementing decrees (see attached documents).

Accessibility: Access to the archives is unrestricted and free of charge subject to the time-limits laid down by decree. In this respect, section I of Decree No. 83-341 of 1 April 1983 stipulates that 'some documents may be consulted without restriction, regardless of their age'. However, documents that could represent a threat to the security of the State or to the honour of families or individuals may be consulted only after a period varying between 70 and 120 years.

Copyright status: The AOF holdings may be consulted by the public subject to the provisions of the above-mentioned decree alone.

Responsible administration: The *Direction des Archives du Sénégal* is the state body responsible for all questions relating to archives. The problems involved in the management, organization, consultation and preservation of the

archives are covered in Decree No. 81-430 of 15 April 1981, which lays down the conditions governing the organization and functioning of the *Archives du Sénégal*.

Identification

Description: The AOF holdings are equipped with a filing system and most documents have been classified and inventoried. It now has a printed guide, two printed catalogues and a series of typed and manuscript indexes.

Bibliographic details: AOF continues to be the focus of numerous bibliographical references. Researchers' enthusiasm is justified by the size of the holdings, which have not yet yielded up all their treasures.

Visual documentation: The AOF holdings include many photographs, some of which were displayed at the recent exhibition mounted for the centenary of the establishment of AOF (16-23 June 1995).

History: The archives of French West Africa (AOF) cover the period 1895-1959. They occupy an important place in the archival heritage conserved at the *Archives du Sénégal*.

It was the Decree of 16 June 1895 that set up the General Government and laid down the territorial composition of AOF, which included eight territories plus Togo which was placed under French mandate in 1919. AOF headquarters were transferred from Saint-Louis to Dakar in 1902. The eight constituent territories were Senegal, Mauritania, Sudan (present-day Mali), Niger, Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire, Dahomey (present-day Benin) and Upper Volta (present-day Burkina-Faso).

The Decree of 1895 was amended by a decree of 17 October 1899, and again in 1902 and 1904. However, it was the Decree of 4 December 1920 which laid down the territorial composition of AOF definitively. Togo was attached to AOF from 1936 to 1946.

Pierre Messmer, the last Governor-General, returned to France for good in 1959. The Member States of the Franco-African community that he left behind obtained their sovereignty in 1960, with the exception of Guinea which had become independent in 1958. The establishment of the archives on 1 July 1913 clearly encouraged the preservation of the AOF holdings. The day after the establishment of the service a circular was issued on the organization of the archives. Many other legislative and statutory texts were adopted before AOF ceased to exist. The most noteworthy were: general decree No. 5065 of 9 July 1953 establishing the general regulations governing the AOF archives, and general decree No. 5066 reorganizing the General Government archives service. Those texts remained in force until 1981, when the Archives Law, No. 81-02 of 2 February 1981, was passed.

The AOF holdings are relatively well conserved, despite many transfers and changes of custody since Dakar was made the capital of French West Africa in 1902. After being detached from the *Institut français d'Afrique noire* (IFAN) in 1954, the archives service came under the General Secretariat of the government and was installed in the basement of the administrative building. This advantageous situation is explained by the fact that the archives service was led by a succession of eminent palaeographer-archivists who were graduates of the Ecole des Chartes in Paris and who were supported by substantial legislative texts. They include Claude Faure (1913-1921), Prosper Alquier (1921-1922), André Villard (1936-1942), Marguerite Verdat (1945-1948), Jacques Charpy (1951-1958) and François Maurel (1958-1976). François Maurel was head of the Archives Service unit until 1974, when he was replaced by Mr Saliou Mbaye, the current Director, who is also a graduate of the Ecole des Chartes in Paris. Mr Maurel was above all instrumental in maintaining the AOF holdings in Dakar, when everywhere else France repatriated the archives of areas over which it had sovereignty at independence. The AOF holdings, which belong to the common heritage, remain open to all those who are actively involved.

Their cultural, historic and social interest attracts an ever-growing number of researchers (from other African countries, and from France, America and Germany) to Dakar to consult this treasure-house.

Bibliography: (see 3.2)

Names, qualifications and contact details of independent people or organizations with expert knowledge about the values and provenance of the documentary heritage:

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Management Plan

A new conservation policy focuses on protecting the documents and the information they contain. It covers administrative and financial management, techniques and methods for conserving the holdings and collections (binding, micrography, restoration and fumigation), staff training and storage-related matters. Emphasis is placed on preventive preservation so as to prevent or

retard the deterioration of documents. The plan focuses on the following points:
architecture: this includes all aspects that could have an effect on the preservation of documents, particularly fragile media:

- temperature and humidity control; light levels; installation of fire extinguishers and smoke detectors;
- progressive use of substitutes for the original documents (microfiches from 1961 onwards, photocopies, etc.);
- installation of a fumigation unit to ward off insects and micro-organisms; measures to counter vandalism and other damage caused by human beings (researchers, storemen, etc.);
- safety precautions in case of natural disasters or accidents, etc.

Assessment against the Selection Criteria

Influence: With regard to religion, the AOF holdings have an impressive stock of documentation on art and on a number of Islamic religious brotherhoods, including Mouridism and Tidjanism, which now have followers as far afield as Europe and the United States. There are also a number of documents on Catholicism in French West Africa.

Period: The AOF marks a crucial period in world history. It is a perfect illustration of the power struggles between the former colonial powers that left their mark on world history and which involved: economic expansion, balkanization, massive displacement of populations, acculturation, cultural intermingling, etc. To this we must add that AOF was a first attempt at the African integration which the peoples and the states of the region are now insistently demanding.

Place: The AOF holdings contain some edifying information on the Island of Gorée – a symbol of slavery - which is located in Senegal and has been classified as a world heritage site by UNESCO.

Comparative assessment of documents: Among the 19 series included in the AOF holdings, some are of such importance as to have a bearing on world history. This is particularly true of the G series (politics and general administration), which deals primarily with Muslim affairs and brotherhoods.

The O series deals with education, one of the consequences of which was the establishment of French-speaking African States that now play a major role in the French-speaking world.

The K series deals with slavery considered as one of the scourges of humanity.

Authenticity: The AOF holdings consist of authentic documents conserved in their original state.

Rarity: The whole AOF holding has been conserved in the *Archives du Sénégal*. The documents which make up the holdings cannot be found anywhere else. They are unique.

Consultation

Owner: Arrangements for consultations are specified in Decree No. 83-341 of 1 April 1983 (see 2.3(c))

Custodian: (See 6.1 (a))

Regional or National Memory of the World Committee: Not relevant (6.1 (a)).

Nominator

Contactperson:

Mr Saliou Mbaye

Director of the *Archives du Sénégal*

Secretary-General of the Senegalese Government

Primature

Secrétaire général du Government

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Assessment of Risk

The safety precautions taken at the *Archives du Sénégal* are set out in the management plan (see 7). Clarifications might, however, be provided on the following points:

Political climate - voluntary information: Senegal has up until now enjoyed political stability thanks to the establishment of a democratic system. In addition, the existence of a plural and private press and a coherent legal framework permit the free flow of information.

Environmental conditions : The Archives du Senegal are kept at the heart of the central government agencies, far from high-risk areas. To lessen the effects of an unfavorable climatic environment, steps have been taken to adhere to the climatic standards for preservation (safe storage of fragile media such as microfiches and photographic documents, suitable packaging for documents, etc.).

Physical conditions: There is basic, but adequate, technical equipment for preventive preservation - binding, restoration, microfilming and fumigation.

Preservation budget: Each year a portion of the budget (functioning and investment) is earmarked for document preservation, although it does not always

meet requirements in view of the amount of material, evaluated at 12 linear kilometers.

Extent and nature of use: In addition to the former member countries, within the framework of the reconstitution of their documentary heritage, the AOF archives attract researchers from all over the world.

Preservation Assessment

Present physical state : The AOF holdings are relatively well conserved thanks to a combination of preventive and restorative action. Preservation has always been a key element in the management policy of the *Archives du Sénégal*. The preservation policy on holdings and collections which has been followed since 1961 is designed to ensure by all available means the protection, the physical integrity and the preservation of the documents' intellectual content. The archives law and the organic decree issued in 1981 further emphasized the necessity of preserving the archives. In 1986, however, a new conservation policy was drawn up whose goal is to apply, in conformity with existing international standards, the appropriate measures for binding and restoration on the one hand, and for micrography, reprography and audio-visual material on the other. Under this policy a Division for Conservation and Technical Services was set up.

Current preservation policy in relation to proposed nominated documentary heritage: This policy is included in the overall preservation policy laid down by the *Archives du Sénégal*.

Person or organization responsible for preservation : *Direction des Archives du Sénégal*.