



## Introduction

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### **Introduction**

Like the special issue of 2007 (*Archival Science* 7:4, "Toward a Cultural History of Archives"), "In and Out of the Archives" showcases recent work by historians on the formation, organization and use of archives. The papers contained in this issue seek to shed new light on a range of historical concerns, including the origins of modern attitudes toward documents and the ideals and tools of governance devised by states and institutions during crucial phases of their development. With its focus on archiving and archival documents in various European contexts from roughly 1400 to 1700, the research here examines a period well known for the growth of bureaucracies and the consolidation of powers of government, whether in city-states, principalities or nations, often in conjunction with concurrent imperial expansion, religious confessionalization and war. In each of the cases studied (in Venice and cities in Switzerland, Flanders and Germany, in England and Spain, in the Jesuit order and in the Catholic and Protestant principalities of Northwest Germany), archives were formed or transformed during this period, as a result of (among other factors) practical pressures like the rapid accumulation of documents, a heightened awareness of the risk of loss, and political

ambitions to consolidate power through the collection, control and use of documents.

While focusing on early modern archives, this volume is enhanced by due attention to late medieval developments in the articles by Eric Ketelaar and Simon Teuscher, each of whom challenges some commonly accepted paradigms. Ketelaar takes on the distinction found in much modern archival theory between archives – stored for the long-term “for the use of others than those that created them” – and records – generated by current transactions and stored initially because of their immediate utility. This distinction lies behind the traditional separation that modern archivists applied to medieval archives, for example, separating charters (*Urkunden*), which were generally among the earliest records saved and vested with special authority, from other records of business and legal transactions (*Registratur, Akten*). We learn that in Northern Europe, burghers relied on their city governments to record their legal affairs in the city archives, rather than turning to a notary as Italian burghers did – in a practice that generated abundant notarial archives that long evaded historians’ scrutiny because they fell into neither category. Ketelaar challenges the distinction between active records and permanent archives more broadly, as well, because in the Middle Ages and many early modern contexts, both kinds of documents were saved, inventoried, copied, and appreciated together as potentially important legal or political evidence. Ketelaar’s questioning finds resonance in several other articles. In some principalities of 17<sup>th</sup>-century Germany, Mareike Menne does find examples of the separation of archives from registries, both in regulations and in archiving practices. Elsewhere, particular circumstances

might favor the more active use of some documents more than others: thus Arndt Brendecke notes that Spanish officials brought selected documents or copies of documents home with them for more convenient access. All early modern archives were actively used for political purposes, it becomes clear, and all categories of documents could be brought to bear, even as archivists were also expected to store and sort documents for the long term.

In the second article attentive to medieval archival practices, Simon Teuscher challenges the classic model of a progressive shift from an oral to a written culture during the High Middle Ages by observing that even the early Middle Ages experienced a sophisticated textual culture. Teuscher proposes instead that the key late medieval innovation was a new pattern of keeping and interpreting documents in relation to other documents, rather than in relation to the people whose interests were represented in the documents, and who in earlier centuries would appear in court along with the document in order to supply context and authenticity. A new de-personalized and intertextual mode of interpreting documents, Teuscher argues, spread from scholastic contexts, starting in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, through the law books that were widely owned by urban elites. Without attending university, readers of legal collections learned from them how to gather and collect excerpts, and how to use cross-references and alphanumeric divisions to locate and interpret one text in the context of many others. As this approach spread, documents were seen less as representing the interests of a particular entity (person, family, or institution) than as objects of textual interpretation (e.g. by lawyers or chancery officials). As a result

archival documents alone could increasingly serve as evidence for political or legal claims, heightening the significance of the archive in early modern politics.

The spread of paper in the late Middle Ages also played an important role in the explosive growth of archives in the Renaissance. Paper was first used in Europe as early as the 12<sup>th</sup> century (imported to Genoa) and was manufactured in Italy in the 13<sup>th</sup> century; paper use North of the Alps began in the 14<sup>th</sup> century (see Petrucci 1995; Lyall 1989).<sup>1</sup> The principal demand for paper before the invention of printing in mid-15<sup>th</sup> century, notably, stemmed from the production of legal and administrative documents, rather than the needs of readers or authors (Petrucci 1995, p. 157). Paper was cheaper than parchment, by a factor of 8 at its first introduction in England, and by a factor of 32 in 1500 (Lyall 1989, p. 11). Yet parchment coexisted with paper until the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century as the medium used for copying manuscripts. A greater prevalence of paper for vernacular works and of parchment for religious works resulted in part from the fear articulated by contemporaries that paper would not prove as durable as parchment; for example Johannes Trithemius (1462-1516), a learned abbot known for his cantankerous response to printing, predicted the rapid deterioration of printed books because they were printed on paper (Trithemius 1974, p. 35; see also da Bisticci 1963, p. 104; Kwakkel 2003; Booton 2006). Indeed, as Filippo de Vivo notes in his

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<sup>1</sup> A general history of the arrival of paper in Europe is lacking. For a timeline describing the beginnings of paper-making in Europe, see

<http://www.baph.org.uk/general%20reference/early%20history%20of%20paper.htm>

(consulted April 2008).

contribution, just such fears about the longevity of paper motivated the formation in Venice of annual registers on parchment that summarized legal decisions as they accumulated in the paper records.

In addition to these preexisting factors, the increased complexity of government in many early modern contexts often drove the growth of archives. This process is especially visible in Venice, where de Vivo shows how the increasing power of the Senate and the multiplication of elective councils generated vast numbers of reports and much copying of documents for different bodies within the city government. A chancery staff of eighty managed some eighteen archival series, which were kept separate and could thus be assigned different levels of secrecy. Sporadically, the chancery engaged in large-scale indexing, though certain documents deemed too secret were omitted from the resulting finding aids. Venetian ruling elites considered access to city records as a key to successful governance, and turned to the archives during their legal battles with the papacy, for example. The Jesuit order formed in 1540 offers a similar example of bureaucratic growth driving the formation of archives, as Markus Friedrich explains. Given the order's geographical spread and hierarchical structure, Jesuit archives were kept in many places, sometimes in multiple copies: in Rome, in the provincial center and in the local chapter. The mobility of Jesuit administrators and rivalries within the order for the prestige associated with the control of documents further complicated the patterns of archiving, so that Jesuits often had to correspond with multiple centers to locate a document they wanted to consult, for example, for a precedent in decision-making. Finally, Mareike Menne argues that the break with

Catholicism motivated the emergence of new archiving practices and institutions in the Protestant principalities of Northwest Germany, such as professional archivists and regular inventorying. In Catholic principalities of the same region, in contrast, the ecclesiastical institutions carried on with minimal changes modes of record-keeping they had established during the late Middle Ages, while the Catholic secular princes retained record-keeping based on dynastic continuity within a family.

More generally, starting in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century in the wake of Reformation and Counter-Reformation, and during a long, often violent process of confessionalization, religious institutions and secular governments each sought to establish and impose both religious dogma and institutional structures to match their notion of correct education and church-state relations. As multiple articles in this volume demonstrate (not only Friedrich and Menne, but also Nicholas Popper, for example, or de Vivo on the Venetian disputes with the pope), confessionalization in early modern Europe fueled not only the growth of archives through the religious splintering of territories and institutions, but also the use of archival documents as “weapons” in long-running confessional disputes.

These articles highlight for me a second factor driving the increased attention to archiving in early modern Europe: the fear that documents might be lost through violence, or through simple neglect. Throughout the Renaissance, humanists articulated their indignation at the terrible loss of ancient texts, even while they worked to recover as many of them as they could. In 1545 Conrad Gesner voiced the hope that thanks to printing and princely patronage, such a massive loss of writings would never occur again (Gesner 1545, f. \*3r-v). The lost manuscripts

bemoaned by Gesner were, to be sure, not generally archival documents. But the English case examined by Nicholas Popper shows how the dissolution of monasteries in England triggered a similar fear of catastrophic loss, even on the part of the king, Henry VIII, who had ordered the dissolution. To stem the tide of destruction, Henry charged John Leland and others to recover valuable manuscripts perceived to be at risk of loss. Among those involved in this recovery effort was John Bale, who had admired Gesner's bibliographical work while he was in exile in Basel, and collected not only biographical information for his dictionary of British authors, but also archival documents – first from the dissolved monasteries, then at the request of Queen Elizabeth, documents to support the union of Scotland with England. The English Office of State Papers took shape as a result of the document-gathering activities of Leland, Bale and their successors. Succeeding archivists gathered together documents from county repositories and various London offices, lest they become lost by neglect, and collected in one place the documents generated by the English Reformation, which had previously been stored in many scattered locations.

In Spain, the loss of charters in the revolt of 1520-21 first motivated the formation of a royal archive at Simancas (near Valladolid) as a central archive for the expanding Spanish Empire. As in England, early archivists scoured the country, searching the archives of deceased and living officials as well as religious houses for documents that belonged in the royal collection. Once there, the documents would be “safe,” though this could also mean buried, never to be retrieved again. Arndt Brendecke recounts how documents containing damaging theological arguments



were put into in the archives and not allowed to circulate; similarly, a nine-volume codification of colonial law that displeased the Council of the Indies was deposited in the archives without being shown to the King. Although archives were meant for keeping documents safe, access to and use of the archives were regulated in all early modern contexts.

As examples throughout these articles demonstrate, early modern uses of the archives were often political: documents were gathered and deployed in order to support a policy (union with Scotland), or to prove a point against an opponent (Venice against the pope). Thus, Menne convincingly proposes that the archival inventory drawn up in Lippe in 1624 was designed to supply evidence in confessional conflicts, a function amplified when the year 1624 was selected in 1648 as the *quo ante* for confessional questions. In Spain, Brendecke shows the difficulties that even royally appointed historiographers could face, once they were granted access to the archives. Publishing accounts based on archival collections, inevitably favorable to the Crown, could arouse the ire of individual grandees like the Count of Puñonrostro, who attacked Antonio de Herrera in print and in court for portraying his deceased ancestor, a conquistador, in a negative light. When Puñonrostro himself adduced documents from Simancas to counter Herrera's account, however, the latter replied that "in the Indies powerful men prove whatever they want," showing a wary understanding that politics could govern the creation as well as the use of documents.

The final article in this volume examines the modern afterlife of medieval documents in two early publication projects: the Swiss *Urkundenregister* designed

to publish all the medieval charters of Switzerland (a project begun in the 1850s, but not carried to completion), and the *Monumenta graphica medii aevi* which published facsimiles of charters and other medieval documents from the areas covered by the Habsburg Empire (1859-82). The publications that resulted were organized so as to highlight medieval antecedents to the 19<sup>th</sup>-century political entities that sponsored them: documents from all over “Switzerland” were arranged chronologically in the *Urkundenregister* as though that nation had existed in the early Middle Ages, while the *Monumenta graphica* posed as a “national history” of the Habsburg Empire. Saxer shows how these collections were formed over decades by marshalling the contributions of many participants—archivists of course, but also amateur historians in the Swiss case, and photographers and chemists for the technical aspects of the facsimiles in the Austrian work. In the latter, the facsimiles were reproduced without commentary and omitted the verso of the documents; in the former, charters were included on the basis of whatever contributions were sent, even if these rested on multiple rounds of copying from the original. Saxer also unpacks the nationalist motives and complex politics behind these volumes, from local pride in a charter that might not be authentic to claims about the medieval origins of a nation.

Saxer’s article also reminds us that publication projects of this type (including the *Monumenta Germaniae Historiae*, which appeared around the same time based on a similar project, see Saxer 2005) became the principal means by which later scholars have accessed medieval archival documents ever since. In relying on these convenient collections, historians typically ignored the various

ways in which the documents were transformed by the processes of selection, presentation and reproduction that were involved. More generally, historians in many specialties have plumbed modern archives themselves without attending much to the ways in which these were formed. This volume, on the contrary, seeks to uncover the roles that archives played at the time they were formed or transformed, notably during the early modern period, so that we can better appreciate the complex layering of motives and methods by which the sources crucial to later historical research were preserved, organized and transmitted down to us.

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