

Archives and Information in the Early Modern World

Edited by Liesbeth Corens, Kate Peters, and Alexandra Walsham. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018. 350 pp. Hardcover. \$91.00. ISBN 978-0-19-726625-0.

The history of early modern recordkeepers is likely unfamiliar to archivists who work exclusively with nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first century records. *Archives and Information in the Early Modern World*, an addition (No. 212) to the *Proceedings of the British Academy* based on a 2014 conference, “Transforming Information: Record Keeping in the Early Modern World,”¹ counters this myopia with evidence of our archival forebears who lived between 1500 and 1800. The attempt to foster “greater dialogue between historians and archivists,” which the editors Liesbeth Corens (British Academy postdoctoral fellow at University of Oxford), Kate Peters (director of history studies, Cambridge), and Alexandra Walsham (modern history professor, Cambridge, and fellow of British Academy) endorse in the introduction, has emerged over the past three decades. Building on the writings of Michael T. Clanchy, Jacques Derrida, Terry Cook, Ann Blair, and the presenters of the biennial I-CHORA,² the eleven scholarly essays in this volume also complement a special issue of *Past and Present*, “The Social History of the Archive: Record-Keeping in Early Modern Europe.”³

Divided into four parts—“Organisation and Agency,” “Access and Secrecy,” “Media Materiality,” and “Documentation and Distance”—one of the avenues this well-crafted volume opens is a labor history of archives. While kings, nobles, and philosophers in canonical histories of early modernity are featured—such as Arndt Brendecke’s excellent treatment of royal trend-setter King Philip II, who created Simancas as an archives-prison for concealing records and people (chapter 6, “Knowledge, Oblivion, and Concealment in Early Modern Spain”)—readers are also introduced to the social, political, religious, and material worlds of many lesser-known figures. They include the middling folk and lesser gentlemen, such as bishop-chancellors (Lorenz Fries), court chancellors (Alfonso Moro), ministers (Jean-Baptiste Colbert), court/council secretaries (Giovambattista Pigna), personal secretaries (Nicholas Faunt), church leaders (Ellis Hookes), mayors (Salomon Hirzel), notary scribes, *escribanos* (Antonio de Santa Cruz), stewards (Harry Rose), and formally named archivists (Diego de Ayala). Their contributions to the protoprofessional literature of archives are largely in the realms of action and praxis rather than meditation and theory.

Take, for example, the nearly ubiquitous secretary (*secretarius* in Latin), who kept both secrets and archives for more powerful people. The status anxiety and financial insecurity of secretaries may be well known, but Filippo de Vivo, professor of history in London, and Arnold Hunt, former curator of manuscripts at the British Library, delve deeply into the role of chancellery diplomats and

secretaries as recordkeepers. An expert in the field of early Italian archives, de Vivo investigates the “construction and use of diplomatic archives in principalities (Ferrara and Mantua), large and small republics (Venice and Lucca), states that underwent regime change (Florence), newly established and suddenly disappearing dynasties (respectively, Parma and Urbino)” (p. 58). The archives of republics were “more stable” than those of “ruling dynasties”; the former were tied to places and needed to ensure continuity in governance, while the latter often dissipated with the demise of dynasties (p. 80).

In chapter 5, “The Early Modern Secretary and the Early Modern Archive,” Hunt argues that noblemen of various ranks followed the tradition of kings by hiring servants who copied and drafted letters, wrote and summarized texts, and collaborated on business matters. Gradually, noble households grew large enough to accommodate two separate, secure archives: the muniment room, which held the master’s charters, deeds, and letters patent; and the secretary’s cabinet, which was a private closet or room containing letters and copies of letters, muster rolls, commissions, warrants, and court orders, by or from kings, lords, and ambassadors. To cultivate effective relationships with their masters, secretaries needed to command the wealth of increasingly actionable information that was becoming available by the latter half of the sixteenth century. To retrieve letters more quickly, secretaries endorsed the blank space of incoming letters, transcribed content into separate ledger books, and filed unbound papers according to subject matter. To restrict access, secretaries kept files under lock and key.

Even for secretaries in charge of official state offices, such as the principal secretary of the Privy Council in Elizabethan England, their personal activities were indivisible from their public roles. Thus, secretaries viewed archives as private property that they had cocreated with their masters, even if those men were employed by the state. Their control of such archives lasted in a few high-level offices in England into the twentieth century. Fighting against secretarial control, the keeper of the Exchequer records, Arthur Agard, and the first and fourth keepers of the State Paper Office, both named Thomas Wilson, sought to centralize recordkeeping in England in the early seventeenth century, as editor Kate Peters adeptly shows in chapter 7, “Access and the Politics of Record-Keeping in Revolutionary England.” Trained as lawyers, Agard and the Thomas Wilsons were fairly well-born individuals, but they depended on patronage as much as the next royal official. They would “compromise control of the papers” to collect fees for copying or if royal supporters favored wider disclosures (p. 165).

These fine-grained stories about the tenuous power of recordkeepers are complemented by essays on information and physical media sometimes not considered in the history of archives-as-institutions, such as material culture, book history, manuscript circulation, and documentation theory. In fact, the

volume changes focus somewhat in the final five chapters (chapters 8–12). For instance, celebrated researchers in early modern manuscripts Heather Wolfe and Peter Stallybrass explore in chapter 8, “The Material Culture of Record-Keeping in Early Modern England,” how the very material act of filing papers in any context (household, financial, and state) structured the intellectual content recorded therein. As filing became more routine, clerks found efficiency in using string (*filum*), laces, bags, pouches, boxes, chests, trunks, desks, drawers, and cabinets. Wolfe and Stallybrass argue astutely that these early technologies of physically preserving records are difficult to identify because many nineteenth- and twentieth-century archivists untied manuscripts and discarded original containers made of wood or leather. Photographs of early filing apparatuses accompany their arguments—including one of a rare wooden box dating to the 1530s and containing still-bundled records—which help readers visualize the materials of previous archival storage (p. 315).

In chapter 9, “Archiving the Archive,” historian Sundar Henny interrogates philologist Johann L. Frisch’s 1741 definition of “archive.” Frisch relied on the Greek *arkheion* (town hall) and the Latin *arca* (chest, sometimes referring to the “ark” found in medieval monasteries) in his etymology, which Henny uses to interpret the scribal family relics of three Swiss men—a church father, a pious cloth merchant-turned-gentleman and mayor, and a castle bailiff-turned-mayor. The manuscript books and papers these men wrote were not so much records as “quasi-sacred” texts that functioned as “corporeal remains depending on the care of the offspring” (p. 234). Similarly, the editor of the journal *Printing History*, Brooke Palmieri, shows in chapter 10, “Truth and Suffering in the Quaker Archives,” that both printed works and manuscripts shaped the testimonies that a close-knit religious society (in this case the Quakers) preserved about their personal struggles against intolerance in the late seventeenth century. Quakers wrote manuscripts that imitated printed works and selectively published private letters. Perhaps archival history is stretched beyond its proper boundaries if it encompasses the history of print, yet so many early modern archives contain a riotous mix of print and manuscripts. It seems impossible not to address “the interplay between records and printed works,” as have the works of Palmieri and Elizabeth Yale (p. 241).⁴

The final two chapters by Sylvia Sellers-García (chapter 11, “Death, Distance, and Bureaucracy”) and Kiri Paramore (chapter 12, “The Transnational Archive of the Sinosphere”) pose ontological and epistemological questions regarding the validity of looking at non-Western “archives” through a European lens. Sellers-García tries to understand how time and space radically affected the outcome of three “disempowered” women’s court cases in colonial Spanish Guatemala (p. 268). Arguing that the recordkeeping activities of notary scribes in Guatemala imperfectly constituted the imperial order imposed by Inquisition tribunals in

Mexico during the Hapsburg era (1516–1700), she concludes that the two nodes of empire were bureaucratically, temporally, politically, and affectively distant, which may explain why some cases were recorded, prosecuted, and preserved more than others. Paramore faces a task even greater, that of reconstructing an archives that lacks nearly any remaining physical presence: the private and state institutions that featured Confucian-centered or classical Chinese learning in Tokugawa, Japan (1603–1868), “were destroyed and their contents scattered through the process of modernization” when the Meiji were restored to power in 1868 (p. 288). While Paramore’s definition of “archive” as the “systematic institutionalization of knowledge” seems too unspecific or immaterial to be useful, the inclusion of the history of non-Western texts in a volume that otherwise could be easily renamed “Archives and Information in Early Modern *Europe*” suggests just how European the concept of archives remains (p. 298).

Historian Randolph Head proposes “archivality” as a new term “to characterise collections of documents made up of records related to dominion, possessions, and power” (p. 32) in chapter 2, “Early Modern European Archivality.” Unfortunately, the promise of this neologism goes unfulfilled when Head provides only a brief mention of an Islamic archivality and instead expends greater energy comparing the “archivalities” evidenced in the Portuguese *Leitura Nova* (a set of sixty parchment volumes that served as a secretarial register to King Manuel I in Lisbon) and the German *Hohe Registratur* (a three-volume alphabetical finding aid to the chancellery books of the Prince-Bishop of Würzburg). Before archivality can be refined as a concept, more comparisons of European and non-European traditions of recordkeeping are required, a research agenda that Head openly encourages.

Although the names of most early modern archival creators in *Archives and Information in the Early Modern World* may be unfamiliar to practicing archivists today, many of their decisions about how to organize and preserve documentation have endured, a relatability that comes through in this engrossing collection of essays. Beginning around 1500 CE, the civil servants, ambassadors, merchants, accountants, preachers, and legal scribes who constructed networks of trade, international relations, religious zeal, and information exchange became the true builders of early modern archives. Their labors are worth scrutinizing both for how they individually interpreted their assigned or assumed roles as keepers of records or archives and for how they interacted with the nascent state systems within each of their local geographies. These men (and a few women) were “invisible technicians’ whose contribution to the creation of archives has been under-acknowledged” (p. 19). Are we archivists any more visible than our forebears?

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NOTES

- ¹ Eight chapters which focus on Europe were originally presented at the 2014 British Academy conference, and an additional three chapters (on Zurich, Guatemala, and Japan) were solicited specifically for this volume.
- ² Beginning in 2003, the eight I-CHORA (International Conference on the History of Records and Archives) have featured the presentations of nearly two hundred individuals. Over sixty peer-reviewed articles have been published after presentation to an I-CHORA audience, “15 Years On: iCHORA Returns,” *Archival History News* (May 28–30, 2018), “Archival History News (May 23, 2018), <https://archivalhistory.news/?s=15+Years+On%3A+iCHORA+Returns>; and “iCHORA Bibliography: Works Published from iCHORA Papers,” *Archival History News* (May 23, 2018), <https://archivalhistory.news/?s=iCHORA+Bibliography%3A+Works+Published+from+iCHORA+papers>.
- ³ “The Social History of the Archive: Record-Keeping in Early Modern Europe,” ed. Liesbeth Corens, Kate Peters, and Alexandra Walsham, *Past and Present* 230, Supplement 11 (November 2016): 9–359, https://academic.oup.com/past/issue/230/suppl_11.
- ⁴ Elizabeth Yale, whose work does not appear in this volume, authored several works about the early modern manuscripts of natural historians, including *Sociable Knowledge: Natural History and the Nation in Early Modern Britain* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

Ethics for Records and Information Management

By Norman A. Mooradian. Chicago: ALA Neal-Schuman, 2018. 224 pp. Softcover.
\$75.00. ISBN 978-0-8389-1639-1.

Norman Mooradian is an information technology professional specializing in enterprise content management solutions; he also holds PhD and MA degrees in philosophy from The Ohio State University and has taught university coursework in business and professional ethics. His new publication, *Ethics for Records and Information Management*, is intended not only as a resource for professionals, but also as a textbook for coursework on records and information ethics. Apart from the general goal of providing a text on information ethics, his specific purpose in this work is to “present ethics as a systematic body of knowledge that has developed over time and that has been extended and further articulated to apply to issues in the management of information and business records” and “to clarify the core ethical principles and rules that have been adapted and articulated as new developments in technology unfold, and to show how these principles and rules provide a framework and foundation for an ethics of records and information management” (p. 159). The systematic presentation of ethics tends at times to overshadow his coverage of the application of ethical norms to specific records and information management (RIM) related job duties, but, overall this book should serve admirably as a text for related coursework.

The first two chapters, “The Structure and Content of Ethics” and “Ethical Reasoning,” comprehensively address theoretical aspects of ethical norms and