

Zwölf Wege ins Archiv. Umriss einer offenen und praktischen Archivwissenschaft

By Christian Keitel. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2018. 285 pp.
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Over forty years after the publication of the last German-language standard work on archival science, Johannes Papritz's *Archivwissenschaft* (1976, rev. 1983), Christian Keitel's *Zwölf Wege ins Archiv. Umriss einer offenen und praktischen Archivwissenschaft* (*Twelve Ways to the Archives: Outlines of an Open and Practical Archival Science*) reflects the shift of the field in the past decades. Keitel's book is not only a reflection on core debates in the field, but also an outline of an "open and practical archival science" relevant for today's society and for the future. Echoing Tom Nesmith, Joan M. Schwartz, Terry Cook, and other contemporary archival theorists, Keitel laments that archival science remains a marginalized discipline, despite its relevance for many contemporary questions and debates about the development of infrastructures to support the preservation of analog and digital information.¹ Keitel argues that archival scholars in the past may have contributed to the marginalization of their discipline by overemphasizing distinctions from other institutions—for example, libraries—instead of engaging with broader questions and debates relevant for archival science and adjacent fields. Keitel's book is a knowledgeable and engaging contribution to archival scholarship and to an open, interdisciplinary debate about archives.

Christian Keitel is an honorary professor of archival science and digital archiving at the University of Applied Sciences in Potsdam, Germany, as well as an archivist at the Landesarchiv Baden-Württemberg (state archives of Baden-Württemberg), where he serves as the deputy manager of the strategic division for "archival foundations." A trained archivist and medieval historian, he is a specialist in digital preservation and was instrumental in the development of *nestor*, Germany's interdisciplinary competence network for digital preservation.² Keitel's knowledge and experiences as a practicing archivist and educator, and his background in medieval history and expertise in digital preservation, position him well to analyze and map the field from a wide angle, while considering interdisciplinary theoretical and practical questions alike.

The term "archival science" has become more common in the United States and in other English-speaking countries, not the least due to the establishment of the journal *Archival Science* in 2001, yet it continues to have an unfamiliar, somewhat lofty ring to an anglophone audience accustomed to discussing archival theory or archival scholarship. Keitel's definition of *Wissenschaft* (translated

as science or scholarship), however, is refreshingly open, dynamic, and down to earth: he defines it as a place of reflection and debate where we can discuss, question, contradict, and develop assumptions and theses. This definition sets the stage for his book, which is not a standard work or handbook that imposes the author's archival knowledge on the reader. Rather, it reads like an inspired contribution to an ongoing discussion, which invites the reader to reflect, discuss, and challenge archival practices and theories, including Keitel's own arguments.

Keitel presents his outline of an open and practical archival science as a "platform that is open toward all questions about archives" (p. 21) in his introductory chapter, which is a revised version of his inaugural lecture at the University of Applied Sciences in Potsdam in 2015. The outline also serves as the structure of the book, which is organized into twelve chapters, each associated with one of three broader topics: "institutions," "objects," and "subjects." Following his initial chapter about "archival sciences," Keitel discusses and defines "What is an archive?" in chapter 2. Chapters 3 and 4 discuss the time periods for which archives must plan the preservation of information and objects, and the role of archives in the life cycles of information. Chapter 5 engages with appraisal theories and challenges, while chapter 6 provides a comprehensive overview of analog and digital preservation. Chapter 7 addresses archival organization, chapter 8 discusses provenance and context, and chapters 9 and 10 focus on archival units, objects, and genres. The final two chapters deal with the people in the archives: archivists, historians, and users.

Archival history serves as an analytical point of departure that informs most of the chapters. Beginning with a short reflection on the directions and deficits of archival history in German-speaking countries in chapter 2, he supports a procedural and, at times, cyclical approach to archival history that does not treat archives as a given unit, but rather considers the development of repositories (including digital archives) and the evolution of archival theories at different time periods. Anyone interested in archival history has much to discover in Keitel's book. The chapter about "What is an archive?" and the chapters about appraisal and preservation include particularly interesting and concise historical reflections and can be read as standalone pieces. Drawing on a wealth of scholarship in several languages, Keitel moves with ease from and between descriptions of the Metroon in antique Athens, to the first official archives of the Crown of Castile in Simancas that was established in the sixteenth century, to the "Registratur" established in many reigns of the Holy Roman Empire in the sixteenth century, to a discussion of classical archives and records management theories, to postmodern interpretations of archives, and to the development of the OAIS reference model. I was particularly interested in his historical and linguistical analysis of the term and concept of "archives,"

which highlights that today's popular usage of the term "archives" is not a new development. Keitel quotes the eighteenth-century German legal theorist and historian Johann George Estor, who wrote in 1767: "archiv, ist in Teutschlande mancherlei" (Archive in Germany is various things) (pp. 55–56).

Keitel grounds his own definition of archives in his discussion of archival history: "Archives are institutions that preserve documents and information and make them available to their users. Here, it is important that the objects are permanently preserved by a specialized institution" (p. 71). While institutions are integral to his definition, he defines institutions not as static facilities, but rather based on their function and responsibilities. By using the more general term "information" rather than "records," he opens up the definition to include other heritage institutions, such as literary archives, libraries, or geographical data archives, which have been excluded from traditional German definitions of "archives."³ By highlighting that different persons and institutions can assume the responsibility for the preservation of documents and information, his definition is compatible with postcustodial approaches. By excluding the term "records" as process-bound information from his definition of archives, however, Keitel departs from contemporary definitions by archival scholars, who emphasize the interdependence of records and archives in the context of the life-cycle model, including Eric Ketelaar, Theo Thomassen, and Peter Horsman, among many others.⁴ Keitel's distinction of records and records management on the one hand and archives and archival work on the other is a core assumption of his work, and one that I found myself arguing with as I was reading the book.

Informed by his experiences as a digital preservation specialist at the Landesarchiv Baden-Württemberg beginning in the early 2000s, Keitel argues that the focus on records management, often associated with postcustodial approaches to life-cycle management, has been associated with neglectful problems with accessioning electronic records into archival institutions. This contributed to significant losses of electronic records for many archives. He also argues that the emphasis on managing records as a core and distinct archival responsibility makes it harder to establish common ground with other cultural heritage institutions that focus on preserving information and objects rather than records. While Keitel's account of the practical challenges of accessioning electronic records is enlightening, I wondered whether a causal connection really exists between the conceptual emphasis on (digital) records management and the practical hurdles of accessioning electronic records. Can archives not be empowered to take on a more prominent role in the records management life cycle? Does one really exclude the other? Is the archival role in the life-cycle management of government records not one way of holding democratic governments accountable, including in Germany, where a strict distinction between *Schriftgutverwaltung* (records management) and archival functions has been one

of the traditional hurdles for accessing records that remain in the custody of government bureaucracies?

Keitel's definition of archives includes users, for whom archives make documents and information available. While this may be self-evident by today's standards, this was by no means always the case. Keitel's final chapter about users illustrates that classical German archival theorists, with one exception, were not particularly interested in user needs and demands. This chapter, once again, reflects the opening of German archives and archival science in the past decades, including the growing interest in user needs, education, and outreach. While short, the chapter includes interesting information, for example, the fact that Christian Keitel and the late Swiss historian Peter Haber in 2008 published a query on H-Soz-Kult (associated with H-Net) to solicit feedback on historians' needs for digital archiving. The fact that they received no responses indicates that archivists alone may not be to blame for their disciplinary marginalization.

I wish Christian Keitel had discussed education, including the development of archival education in East and West Germany since the late 1940s, more explicitly as one important way to the archives. However, *Zwölf Wege ins Archiv*, while covering core themes of archival science, should not be taken too literally. Keitel successfully advocates for an open and practical archival science, while setting an example with his own scholarship. There are, of course, more than twelve ways to the archives. Like an experienced guide with in-depth knowledge of the archival landscape, Keitel generously shares his knowledge of the terrain, while inviting archival wanderers to find their own way to the archives.

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NOTES

¹ Tom Nesmith, "Toward the Archival Stage in the History of Knowledge," *Archivaria* 80 (2015): 119–45, 44; Terry Cook and Joan M. Schwartz, "Archives, Records and Power: The Making of Modern Memory," *Archival Science* 2 (2002): 1–19, 2, <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02435628>, referenced by Keitel, p. 63.

² nestor, https://www.langzeitarchivierung.de/Webs/nestor/EN/Home/home_node.html, captured at <https://perma.cc/T93C-PM5Q>.

³ See Dietmar Schenk, "Getrennte Welten? Über Literaturarchive und Archivwissenschaft," in *Archive für Literatur. der Nachlass und seine Ordnungen*, ed. Petra-Maria Dallinger, Georg Hofer, Bernhard Judex (Berlin: de Gruyter 2018), 13–19, Reviewed in *American Archivist* 83, vol. 1 (2020): 195–99, <https://doi.org/10.17723/0360-9081-83.1.195>.

⁴ For example, Peter Horsman, Eric Ketelaar, and Theo Thomassen, "Presenting Archival Science," editorial, *Archival Science* 1 (2001): 1–2, <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02435635>; Eric Ketelaar, "Archives in the Digital Age: New Uses for an Old Science," *Archives & Social Studies: A Journal of Interdisciplinary Research* 1 (2007): 167–91, referenced by Keitel, p. 67.