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Editorial: Archival transformations in early modern European history

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This special issue addresses a double transformation. The first is the historical process that saw a dramatic increase in the production of documents and a substantial improvement in their management and preservation throughout Europe between the fifteenth and the eighteenth century. The early modern period, inclusively conceived, is often described as the age of print, but it was also the great time of archives, understood as both the physical repositories and organised offices established by institutions or collectivities to store handwritten documents produced in the course of continuous functions with a view to long-term use. For many European historians, the process of centralisation, expansion, and (more or less successful) rearrangement of archives is symbolised by the establishment of the great Simancas and Vatican archives respectively in 1540 and 1612. But, as the articles collected here demonstrate, smaller states too enacted reforms in record-keeping, and the changes concerned more archives than those of central institutions. The second transformation is interpretive and methodological. Archives have long been at the centre of historians' research, but over the last ten-fifteen years an 'archival turn' in disciplines ranging from history to literature, anthropology and the social sciences has turned archives from sites of research into objects of enquiry in their own right. These works study the evolving processes of selection, ordering and usage that produced archives not as neutral repositories of sources but as historically constructed tools of power relations, deeply embedded in changing social and cultural contexts.

The history of archives has been long practised by archivists, who are professionally aware that documents were neither produced nor arranged as sources for modern scholars but as records of historical transactions and activities. Some archivists have written broad general histories of archival science, often published in textbooks in countries where archival training includes a historical component, such as in schools attached to Italian State archives or in central institutions such as France's *École des Chartes*.¹ Other archivists have written specific histories of the repositories placed under their responsibility, often as introductions to archival inventories.² Again, this has been crucial to archival work when arrangement and description are based on the principle of provenance. Lately, however, archivists have engaged in a dialogue with historians, leading to a growing number of joint projects, conferences, and publications. Since 2001 the journal *Archival Science* has been a forum for exchange and a standard reference for practitioners in both professions. In short, in a move that parallels the history of libraries

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¹ Eugenio Casanova, *Archivistica* (Siena 1928), Adolf Brennecke, *Archivkunde: Ein Beitrag zur Theorie und Geschichte des europäischen Archivwesens* (Leipzig 1953), Paul Delsalle, *Une histoire de l'archivistique* (Sainte-Foy 1998).

² See for example the large bibliography in *Guida generale degli Archivi di stato italiani*, 4 vols. (Rome 1981-94).

and museums, the history of archives has been moving from the domain of specialists towards the centre of historical studies.³

Before discussing some of these works in the context of early modern European history, it may be useful to capture some of the broader cultural and intellectual developments that have given impetus to this move. The first is the digital revolution that has been altering beyond recognition how we use, retain, and access information. The amount of records produced and stored online – how safely? for how long? – is growing at an astronomical rate to volumes that the mind finds difficult even to conceive. As we learn to organise our files and folders on hard drives or in the cloud, archives become a common presence in our lives, and now serve as an evocative metaphor for many artists, scientists and commentators.⁴ Meanwhile, new projects are exploring possibilities for the digitization and study of archives.⁵

The second, not unrelated but more strictly historiographical, development concerns the determination of scholars in different disciplines to historicise sources not as abstract containers of information but as themselves material means of communication shaped by changing preoccupations. Historians of the book transformed the study of culture and ideas by concentrating on the material conditions for the production and circulation of texts.⁶ This approach now extends to written culture more generally and to aspects such as the history of paper, writing and the physical form of documents.⁷ The time is ripe for the same critical scrutiny to be applied to archival collections, whose historical significance derives not just from hosting single documents but from establishing complex systems of meaningful relations among those documents. Studying the selection, arrangement and classification of archives helps us understand the uses (or non-uses) of documents at the time they were produced and in the immediate future. Just as historians of the book and new philologists have placed an emphasis on the creative, transformative effects of textual circulation, so archives can be shown to have been sites not just of knowledge preservation, but knowledge production.

Moreover, archivists and historians have both been engaged in important processes of self-reflection. Partly in response to Jacques Derrida's *Mal d'archive* (1994), the former have been affirming the active role of their profession, not as passive

³ Martine Aubry et al., eds, *Archives, archivistes, archivistique dans l'Europe du Nord-Ouest du Moyen Âge à nos jours. Entre gouvernance et mémoire* (Lille 2006); Francis X. Blouin and William G. Rosenberg, *Archives, documentation, and institutions of social memory: essays from the Sanjyer Seminar* (Ann Arbor, Mich 2006); Ann M. Blair and Jennifer Milligan, eds, special issue: *Toward a Cultural History of Archives*, *Archival Science*, 7, no. 4 (2007); Randolph C. Head, ed, special issue: *Archival Knowledge Cultures in Europe, 1400-1900*, *Archival Science*, 10, no. 3 (2010); Markus Friedrich, *Die Geburt des Archivs: eine Wissensgeschichte* (Munich 2013). Two new collections of essays are planned for the next few months arising from the British Academy conference 'Transforming Information: Record Keeping in the Early Modern World', edited by Liesbeth Corens, Kate Peters and Alex Walsham: "The Social History of the Archive: Record Keeping in Early Modern Europe", *Past & Present Supplement 11* (Oxford, 2016) and *Archives and Information in the Early Modern World* (Proceedings of the British Academy, forthcoming).

⁴ Louise Craven, ed, *What are archives? Cultural and theoretical perspectives: a reader* (Aldershot 2008); Eric Ketelaar, 'Archival Turns and Returns. Studies of the Archive', in Anne Gilliland, Sue McKemmish and Andrew J. Lau, eds, *Research in the Archival Multiverse* (Melbourne in press).

⁵ For different examples, see the projects carried out by the Centre for Editing Lives and Letters at University College, London (<http://www.livesandletters.ac.uk>) and the Venice Time Machine project based at the Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne and the University of Venice Ca' Foscari (<http://vtm.epfl.ch>).

⁶ Robert Darnton, 'What Is the History of Books?', in Kenneth E. Carpenter, ed, *Books and Society in History* (New York and London 1983), 3-26.

⁷ Olivier Guyotjeannin, 'L'érudition transfigurée', in Jean Boutier and Dominique Julia, eds, *Passés recomposés: champs et chantiers de l'histoire* (Paris 1995), 152-62; Bernard Cerquiglini, *In praise of the variant: a critical history of philology*, (Baltimore 1999); Lothar Müller, *White magic: the age of paper* (Cambridge 2014).

'keepers' of the records, but as historically-situated contributors to memory through selection and preservation.⁸ Once again, this is not unrelated to wider developments in information technology, as the growth of records gives paramount importance to processes of appraisal and selection. Archivists in many countries have developed an encompassing vision of archives as non-neutral instruments of power.⁹ In parallel, theoretically informed cultural historians have produced critical studies of their own complex and occasionally twisted intellectual dependence from, and emotional relationship with, archives, seen at once as validating ground, rite of passage and object of fetishism.¹⁰ Many, including feminist historians and those in subaltern studies have sought to unearth the inherent bias of archives and its unintended consequences on history-writing. In this rising awareness, the dialogue with anthropologists of post-colonial society has been especially important, as historians reformulate their questions to take into account the internal logic of archival organisation – studying archives, in Ann Stoler's words, along the grain.¹¹

Another great source of inspiration has been the work of some medievalists who have been conducting what has been described as the 'archaeology' of archival documents, at the intersection between traditional disciplines such as diplomatics and palaeography and the anthropology of writing.¹² Increasingly, they have looked beyond the form of single documents to study the physical conditions of their preservation in complex combinations with other documents. The study of cartularies – a sort of book-size archives – has emphasised the active choices made in selection and compilation.¹³ Inspired by these researches, historians of the high middle ages have recently confronted the question of the historical uses of documents, thereby revising the notion of a dark age in which literacy was confined to a clerical minority.¹⁴ Above all, perhaps, Michael Clanchy's pioneering *From Memory to Written Record* has inspired many to study the

⁸ Eric Ketelaar, 'Tacit Narratives: The Meanings of Archives', *Archival Science*, 1, no. 2 (2001), 131–41; Terry Cook, 'The Archive(s) Is a Foreign Country: Historians, Archivists, and the Changing Archival Landscape', *The Canadian Historical Review*, 90 (2009), 497–534, and see Elizabeth Shepherd, *Archives and Archivists in Twentieth-Century England* (Farnham 2009).

⁹ Terry Cook and Joan M. Schwartz, eds, special issue: *Archives, Records, and Power*, *Archival Science*, 2, nos. 1–2 (2002); Blouin and Rosemberg, eds, *Processing the past: contesting authority in history and the archives* (Oxford 2011); Isabella Zanni Rosiello, *Archivi e memoria storica* (Bologna 1987) and *Gli archivi tra passato e presente* (Bologna 2005).

¹⁰ Arlette Farge, *The allure of the archives*, (New Haven; London 2013; first published in Paris 1989); Carolyn Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History* (Manchester 2001) and 'After the Archive', *Comparative Critical Studies*, 8 (2011): 332–7.

¹¹ Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton, NJ 2009); Nicholas B. Dirks, 'Annals of the Archive: Ethnographic Notes on the Sources of History', in Brian Keith Axel, ed, *From the Margins: Historical Anthropology and Its Futures* (Durham, N.C. 2002), 47–65.

¹² Pierre Chastang, 'L'archéologie du texte médiéval. Autour de travaux récents sur l'écrit au Moyen Âge', *Annales HSS*, 63 (2008), 245–70; Armando Petrucci, *Writers and Readers in Medieval History: Studies in the History of Written Culture* (New Haven and London 1995). On the "new textual history", see also Benoît Grévin and Aude Mairey, eds, *Le Moyen Âge dans le texte* (Paris, 2016).

¹³ Olivier Guyotjeannin, Laurent Morelle, and Michel Parrisé, eds, *Les Cartulaires* (Paris 1993); Adam J. Kostko and Anders Winroth, eds, *Charters, cartularies and archives: The preservation and transmission of documents in the medieval West* (Toronto 2002); Chastang, 'Des archives au codex: les enjeux de la rédaction des cartularies (XIe–XIVe siècle)', *Cahiers électroniques d'histoire textuelle du LAMOP*, 1 (2008), 2–22 and Philippe Contamine, ed, *Les chartiers seigneuriaux. Défendre ses droits, construire sa mémoire; XIII^e–XXI^e siècle* (Paris 2010), which pushes the analysis beyond the medieval period.

¹⁴ Warren Brown et al., eds, *Documentary Culture and the Laity in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge 2012) and Etienne Anheim and Chastang, eds, special issue: *Les pratiques de l'écrit dans les sociétés médiévales (VIe–XIIIe siècle)*, *Medievales* 56 (2009).

multifaceted uses of records throughout medieval Europe.¹⁵ Some have concentrated on the pragmatic aspects of written culture while others study the practices of documentary writing.¹⁶ Medievalists have been particularly prominent in studying the material culture of record-keeping, an avenue that has also been increasingly pursued by cultural historians and historians of literature for other periods.¹⁷ To turn now to early modernists, they are following in these paths but also opening new routes for research by focusing on the transformations brought about by a variety of factors in the scale of production and management of archives from the fifteenth century onwards. For the sake of discussion we can group these studies under four headings.

The first is the political history of archives, or the archival history of politics. If some medievalists placed particular emphasis on the literacy revolution around 1200, it is impossible to ignore the massive surge in administrative paperwork resulting from the concurrent centralisation and expansion of early modern states. Recent Italian historians have been particularly attentive to the possibilities of comparing the growth of chanceries in republican and princely regimes as the regional expansions of the fifteenth century pushed them all to reduce their traditional reliance on notaries, to diversify their chanceries, and to make the latter directly accountable to the ruling prince or council.¹⁸ The rise of increasingly resident networks of diplomacy also required ever greater sophistication in archiving letters at the time.¹⁹ In larger states such as Spain, France and England, substantial hierarchies of officers emerged under the direction of new figures, variously described as principal secretaries or secretaries of state, who managed all papers produced in executing the ruler's orders.²⁰ As Jacob Soll has demonstrated in the paradigmatic case of Colbert, they turned archives into powerful instruments to demonstrate royal prerogatives inside the state and claims over neighbours.²¹ Various historians have described this process as the emergence of 'information states' with increasingly complex government departments charged with gathering and managing written information on their territories and population, whether to determine fiscal

¹⁵ Michael T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066-1307* (Chichester-Malden 2013, first published in 1979).

¹⁶ Hagen Keller et al., eds, *Schriftlichkeit und Lebenpraxis im Mittelalter. Erfassen, Bewahren, Verändern* (Munich 1999); Christel Meier et al., eds, *Pragmatische Dimensionen mittelalterlicher Schriftkultur* (Munich 2002); Guyotjeannin, Laurent Morelle and Michel Parisse, special issue: *Pratiques de l'écrit documentaire au XIe siècle*, *Bibliothèque de l'École des chartes*, 155 (1997); Paolo Cammarosano, *Italia medievale. Struttura e geografia delle fonti scritte* (Roma 1991).

¹⁷ Chastang, *La ville, le gouvernement et l'écrit à Montpellier (XIIe-XIVe siècle)* (Paris 2013) and J. Berenbeim, *Art of Documentation: Documents and Visual Culture in Medieval England* (Toronto 2015); Lisa Gitelman, *Paper Knowledge: Toward a Media History of Documents* (Durham and London 2014).

¹⁸ Franca Leverotti, ed, special issue: *Cancellaria e amministrazione negli stati italiani del Rinascimento*, *Ricerche storiche: rivista semestrale del Centro piombinese di studi storici*, 24 (1994); Isabella Lazzarini, ed., *Scritture e potere. Pratiche documentarie e forme di governo nell'Italia tardomedievale (XIV-XV secolo)*, *Reti medievali rivista*, 9, no. 1 (2008); Andrea Gamberini and Lazzarini, eds, *The Italian Renaissance State* (Cambridge 2012).

¹⁹ Francesco Senatore, "Uno Mondo de Carta". *Forme e strutture della diplomazia sforztesca* (Naples 1998), Paul M. Dover, 'Decyphering the Diplomatic Archives of Fifteenth-Century Italy', *Archival Science*, 7 (2007), 297-316; Filippo de Vivo, 'Archival intelligence: Diplomatic Correspondence and Information Management in Italy, 1450-1650', in Corens, Peters and Walsham, eds, *Archives and Information in the Early Modern World* (forthcoming).

²⁰ Edward Higgs, *The information state in England: the central collection of information on citizens, 1500-2000* (Basingstoke 2004); for France see references in Jacob S. Soll, *The Information Master: Jean-Baptiste Colbert's Secret State Intelligence System* (Ann Arbor 2009), 29-30; Alessandro Silvestri, 'Ruling from Afar: Government and Information Management in Late Medieval Sicily', *Journal of Medieval History*, 42, no. 2 (2016, forthcoming); cf. also Erik Thomson, 'Axel Oxenstierna and Books', *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 38 (2007), 705-729.

²¹ Soll, *The Information Master*.

revenues, allocate military contributions, or trace the spread of disease.²² Under rulers such as Philip II (the *rey papelero*) or Louis XIV (*roi bureaucrate*) archives evolved from repositories of old documentary proofs of rights into information-management institutions.²³ Regime change or expansion also meant that new states captured the offices of old ones, made them obsolete as administrative instruments, and turned their working papers into archives for their own uses.²⁴ Similarly, the expansion of overseas empires — colonial or commercial — brought about streams of correspondence which also required the institutional transformation of archives.²⁵ In the age of confessionalisation the Churches also underwent a process of information gathering and management, whether through diocesan questionnaires and other paperwork aimed at confessionalisation or through the correspondence of religious orders aimed at global expansion.²⁶

The second approach derives from historians of knowledge, who have been particularly keen to identify spaces and sites of research.²⁷ Historians of science have studied the archives of scientists and scientific institutions, as well as exploring the development of ‘paper technologies’.²⁸ At the juncture between information management and administrative life, archives are not just institutions for the preservation of knowledge, but — like laboratories — sites for its elaboration. The archival turn represents a natural evolution of the study of the transmission of knowledge, because the management of documents is instrumental to their transmission over generations.²⁹ Archivists and their masters selected, arranged and classified written information in order to turn it into useful knowledge. Partly because of the sheer growth in records, partly because of the accidents of conquest, the early modern period saw deliberate reforms in the organisation of records. Intellectual historians have shown how the expansion of information required the development of tools for its selection and retrieval. Ann Blair has studied the notes and anthologies of those Renaissance scholars who first expressed concerns about information excess.³⁰ More work could show the bureaucratic

²² As well as Higgs, *The information state*, see Jane Caplan and John Torpey, eds, *Documenting individual identity: The Development of State Practices in the Modern World* (Princeton, NJ, 2002) and Valentin Groebner, *Who are you? Identification, deception, and surveillance in early modern Europe* (Brooklyn, NY, 2007).

²³ Geoffrey Parker, *The Grand Strategy of Philip II* (New Haven; London 1998) and John C. Rule and Ben S. Trotter, *A world of paper: Louis XIV, Colbert de Torcy, and the rise of the information state* (Montreal & Kingston 2014).

²⁴ See for instance Daniela Ferrari, ‘Le carte disperse. Documenti riguardanti il Monferrato conservati a Mantova’, in *Stefano Guazzo e Casale tra Cinque e Seicento* (Roma 1997), 197–217 and Mareike Menne, ‘Confession, confusion, and rule in a box? Archival accumulation in northwestern Germany in the age of confessionalization’, *Archival Science*, 10 (2010), 299–314

²⁵ Margarita Gómez Gómez, *Actores del documento: oficiales, archiveros y escribientes de la Secretaría de Estado y del Despacho de Indias* (Madrid 2003); Arndt Brendecke, *Imperium und Empirie. Funktionen des Wissens in der spanischen Kolonialherrschaft* (Bohlaus Verlag 2009); Blair, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton; Oxford 2009).

²⁶ Peter Burke, *The Historical Anthropology of Early Modern Italy. Essays on Perception and Communication* (Cambridge 1987), 110–31; Giovanni Pizzorusso, Olivier Poncet, Matteo Sanfilippo, *Gli archivi della Santa Sede e la storia di Francia* (Viterbo 2006); Massimo Carlo Giannini e Sanfilippo, *Archivi per la storia degli ordini religiosi* (Viterbo 2007); Markus Friedrich, ‘Government and Information-Management in Early Modern Europe’, *Journal of Early Modern History*, 12 (2008), 539–63.

²⁷ Peter Burke, *A Social History of Knowledge From Gutenberg to Diderot* (Cambridge 2000), 116–48.

²⁸ Michael Hunter, ed, *Archives of the scientific Revolution: the Formation and Exchange of Ideas in Seventeenth-Century Europe* (Woodbridge 1998); Volker Hess and Andrew J. Mendelsohn, ‘Case and Series: Medical Knowledge and Paper Technology, 1600–1900’, *History of Science*, 48 (2010), 287–314; Richard Yeo, *Notebooks, English Virtuosi, and Early Modern Science* (Chicago 2014).

²⁹ Anthony Grafton and Blair, eds, *The transmission of culture in early modern Europe* (Philadelphia 1990).

³⁰ Ann Blair, *Too Much to Know: Managing Scholarly Information before the Modern Age* (New Haven; London

application, and perhaps the origin, of techniques that in the context of Enlightenment Germany have been described as ‘little tools of knowledge’: indexes, inventories, calendars; recently, an international team of historians has proposed writing a ‘history of lists’.³¹ In an evolution paralleling developments in bibliography, archival finding devices had existed since the Middle Ages, but were produced in greater quantities at a time that also saw the publication of an increasing number of guides to record-keeping.³²

The production of retrieval tools coincided with broader re-organisations of archives. In the sixteenth century a new organisational logic for filing current records by affair or theme gained traction in German-speaking areas under the label *Registratur*.³³ By the eighteenth century, administrators subsequently began to apply the principle of pertinence to historical collections reaching back to the fourteenth century – sometimes with disastrous effects as in the case of Austrian-ruled Milan.³⁴ These developments were of course never simply technical. To continue the parallel with the history of science, just as laboratory practices encapsulate notions of social relations, so new archival practices embodied new ideas about the archiving institution and its place in the world. For example, between the fifteenth and the eighteenth century, the archives of various Swiss cantons underwent a process of rearrangement that moved from hierarchies of charters granted by superior authorities to a new sense of territorial unity.³⁵ Between the mid-sixteenth and the early seventeenth century, France’s *Trésor des chartes* was reorganised under the guidance of jurists and antiquarians.³⁶ In this sense archives can be seen less as tools of government than as embodiments of the worldview of governors – what Michel Foucault called ‘governmentality’ – and as part of the broader history of classification.³⁷

Thirdly, moving from documents to people, we may speak of a social history of archives that complements and to some extent contrasts with the preceding approaches.³⁸ Thus, for example, while political historians of archives underline the

2010).

³¹ Peter Becker and William Clark, *Little Tools of Knowledge: historical Essays on Academic and Bureaucratic Practices* (Ann Arbor 2001); Gregorio Salinero and Christine Lebeau, eds, special issue: *Pour faire une histoire des listes à l'époque moderne, Mélanges de la Casa de Velazquez*, 44 (2014). Maria Gioia Tavoni, *Circumnavigare il testo. Gli indici in età moderna* (Napoli 2009). Also Andrea Guidi, ‘Muster Rolls, Lists and Annotations: Practical Military Records relating to the Last Florentine Ordinances and Militia, from Machiavelli to the Fall of the Republic (1506-1530)’, *Historical Research* (2016, forthcoming).

³² Elio Lodolini, *Lineamenti di storia dell'archivistica italiana: dalle origini alla metà del secolo XX* (Rome 1991); on bibliography, see Luigi Balsamo, *Bibliography: history of a tradition* (Berkeley 1990; first published 1984) and David McKitterick, *Print, Manuscript and the Search for Order, 1450-1830* (Cambridge 2003).

³³ See Randolph Head, ‘Configuring European Archives’, below, pp. 0000-0000.

³⁴ Marco Lanzini, *Archivi e archivisti milanesi tra Settecento e Ottocento*, doctoral thesis, University of Milan, 2010.

³⁵ Head, ‘Knowing Like a State: The Transformation of Political Knowledge in Swiss Archives, 1450–1770’, *Journal of Modern History*, 75 (2003), 745-82; For a similar process, cf. the classic study of the duchy of Savoy, Peter Rück, *L'ordinamento degli archivi ducali di Savoia sotto Amedeo VIII, 1398-1451* (Roma 1977; first published in «Archivalische Zeitschrift», 67 [1971], 11–101).

³⁶ Donald R. Kelley, *Foundations of modern historical scholarship: Language, law and history in the French Renaissance* (New York; London 1970), 215-38.

³⁷ Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller (eds.), *The Foucault effect: studies in governmentality, with two lectures by and an interview with Michael Foucault* (London 1991). See Head, ‘Knowing Like a State’, and Menne, *Herrschaftsstil und Glaubenspraxis. Bischöfliche Visitation und die Inszenierung von Herrschaft im Fürstbistum Paderborn 1654-1691* (Paderborn 2007). This approach has been particularly fruitful in the study of imperial archives, such as Antoniette Burton, *Dwelling in the archive: women writing house, home, and history in late colonial India* (New York; Oxford 2003); Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*. On classification, see Geoffrey C. Bowker and Susan Leigh Star, *Sorting things out: classification and its consequences* (Cambridge, Mass. 1999).

³⁸ Eric Ketelaar, ‘Prolegomena to a Social History of Dutch Archives’, in Aad Blok, Jan Lucassen, and Huub Sanders, eds, *A Usable Collection: essays in honour of Jaap Kloosterman on collecting social history* (Amsterdam

exploitation of repositories by the state, social historians have recently focused on the clerical intermediaries who often remained anonymous in the very records that they were in charge of preparing and storing. Individual chancellors and secretaries of Renaissance Italy, from Leonardo Bruni to Niccolò Machiavelli, have for example long attracted attention, but recently this has given way to the analysis of the social and professional strategies of groups of professionals, at a time when training and eligibility were being streamlined, partly to facilitate the constitution of closed social groups.³⁹ A recent collection published by the same editors of this special issue has analysed the various figures who, under different names, worked as archivists for political institutions in Italy.⁴⁰ The agency of late medieval and early modern record-keepers has attracted particular attention in studies that range from Flanders to colonial Peru, although a comparative history of the notary, a figure that prevailed in large parts of Europe and European empires, still needs to be written.⁴¹

This more socially inclusive approach to the history of archives has underlined the apparently contradictory ways in which archives were not just tools of government but also sites of social and political conflict, more permeable to outside influences than the notion of an information state suggests. Archives were the objects of conflicting claims, as even Colbert saw archives as not just tools of state power but also as weapons against competing factional leaders.⁴² State archives in early modern Italy were often described as secret at the time (for example in Rome, Venice, Ferrara, Bologna), but the emphasis on secrecy may be seen as a response to the anxieties caused by the frequent illicit dispersal of documents.⁴³ Archives were built as a result of competition between different forms of record-keeping, as many early modern governments made determined attempts, albeit far from successful, at seizing papers from the hands of ministers, whose own aristocratic mentality saw archives as part of family heritage.⁴⁴ In Italy, the state's attempt to centralise the preservation of notarial archives was fought and successfully limited by notaries keen to retain the profit they secured from handing out copies of their papers to clients.⁴⁵ As a result, central archives competed with others. Families, local communities, professional associations gathered collections of records as guarantees of claims against other groups and against the state; archives could turn less into the means of legitimating than of contesting power.⁴⁶ In the Iberian world this engendered a

2014), 40-55.

³⁹ On Florence see: Alison Brown, *Bartolomeo Scala, 1430-1497, Chancellor of Florence: The Humanist as a Bureaucrat* (Princeton, NJ 1979); Robert Black, *Benedetto Accolti and the Florentine Renaissance* (Cambridge 1985); Guidi, *Un segretario militante: Politica, diplomazia e armi nel Cancelliere Machiavelli* (Bologna 2009). On Venice: Andrea Zannini, *Burocrazia e burocrati a Venezia in età moderna: i cittadini originari (sec. XVI-XVIII)* (Venezia 1993).

⁴⁰ De Vivo, Guidi and Silvestri, eds., *Archivi e archivisti in Italia tra medioevo e età moderna* (Roma 2015).

⁴¹ Laurie Nussdorfer, *Brokers of public trust: notaries in early modern Rome* (Baltimore 2009); Attilio Bartoli Langelì, *Notai. Scrivere documenti nell'Italia medievale* (Roma 2006).

⁴² Soll, *Information Master*, 123-28.

⁴³ Filippo de Vivo, 'Coeur de l'Etat, lieu de tension. Le tournant archivistique vu de Venise (XVe-XVIIe siècle)', *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, 68 (2013), 699-728.

⁴⁴ De Vivo, *Information and Communication in Venice: Rethinking Early Modern Politics* (Oxford 2007), 54-6 and G. R. Elton, *England, 1200-1640* (London 1978), 0000.

⁴⁵ Andrea Giorgi and Stefano Moscadelli, 'Cum acta sua sint. Aspetti della conservazione delle carte dei notai in età tardo-medievale e moderna (XV-XVIII sec.)', in de Vivo, Guidi and Silvestri, eds., *Archivi e archivisti*, 259-81.

⁴⁶ Vittorio Tigrino, *Castelli di carte. Giurisdizione e storia locale nel Settecento in una disputa fra Sanremo e Genova (1729-35)*, in *Quaderni storici*, 101 (1999), 475-506; Marie Lezowski, *Conflitti di precedenza, uso degli archivi e storiografia locale alla fine del Cinquecento (Pavia 1592)*, in *Quaderni storici*, 133 (2010), 7-39; Andy Wood, *The Memory of the People: Custom and Popular Senses of the Past in Early Modern England* (Cambridge 2013); Kuijpers,

competition between central *archivos* and smaller private or semi-private *archivillos*.⁴⁷ Precisely because they were so precious, archives were at the centre of conflicts extending beyond the institutions that produced them, and were occasionally targeted during civil strife.⁴⁸

The final angle we wish to underline is that of the history of historiography. Well before Ranke, archives began to be used with increasing regularity as sources for historical narratives. Scholars such as Arnaldo Momigliano, Donald Kelley and Anthony Grafton have long emphasised the importance of evidence in the response of antiquarians, jurists and philologists to historical scepticism.⁴⁹ Diplomatics, the technique of source criticism based on the form of documents, evolved in the seventeenth century. As Randolph Head and others have suggested, in the meantime, an alternative form of criticism focused on archival location.⁵⁰ This was no dispassionate enterprise. Rival official historians were given access to archives to score points drawn from past authority in the *bella diplomatica* or ‘wars of documents’ that arose out of religious and political conflict from the sixteenth century onwards, whether to prove the date of conversion of a particular ruler and so the confessional allegiance of his heir’s territories, to demonstrate the ceremonial precedence of one petty ruler over another, or to prove a ruler’s right over a particular territory.⁵¹ Recent contributions to this field have underlined the conditions of archival research and the practices of archival scholarship, including the collaboration between historians and archivists. The latter themselves prefigured historiographical activities, preparing compendia, annals, and lists of ‘curious and memorable deeds’ (as in Venice or at Simancas since the second half of the sixteenth century), whether or not they were then used by historians.⁵²

This special issue arises from the activities of the research project ‘ARCHIVES, A Comparative History of Archives in Late Medieval and Early Modern Italy’, funded by the European Research Council and based at Birkbeck, University of London in 2012-16.⁵³ Because of its fragmented political history, Italy has an exceptional variety of archives that invite comparison. The project has studied in depth seven case studies (Rome, Venice, Florence, Modena, Milan, Naples, Palermo) emanating from different

Pollmann, Müller and van der Steen (eds.), *Memory before modernity. Practices of memory in early modern Europe* (Leiden 2013).

⁴⁷ Fernando Bouza, *Corre manuscrito. Una historia cultural del Siglo de Oro* (Madrid 2001), 241-88; for an Italian example, see Caroline Callard, *Le prince et la république: histoire, pouvoir et société dans la Florence des Médicis au XVIe siècle*, (Paris, 2007).

⁴⁸ For two late medieval examples, see Amedeo de Vincentiis, ‘Memorie bruciate. Conflitti, documenti, oblio nelle città italiane del tardo medioevo’, *Bullettino dell’Istituto storico italiano per il medio evo*, 106 (2004), 167-198 e Leverotti, ‘L’archivio dei Visconti signori di Milano’, in Lazzarini, ed. *Scritture e Potere*.

⁴⁹ Arnaldo Momigliano, ‘Ancient History and the Antiquarian’, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 13 (1950), pp. 285-315; Donald Kelley, *Foundations of modern historical scholarship: language, law and history in the French Renaissance* (New York 1970); Anthony Grafton, *The Footnote: A Curious History* (Cambridge, Mass. 1997); idem, *What was history?: the art of history in early modern Europe* (Cambridge 2012); Jan M. Sawilla, *Antiquarianismus, Hagiographie und Historie im 17. Jahrhundert: zum Werk der Bollandisten; ein wissenschaftshistorischer Versuch* (Tübingen 2009).

⁵⁰ Head, ‘Documents, archives and proof around 1700’, *The Historical Journal*, 56 (2013), 909–30.

⁵¹ Helmut Zedelmaier and Martin Mulso, eds, *Die Praktiken der Gelehrsamkeit in der Frühen Neuzeit* (Tübingen 2001); Jacob Soll, ed, Special issue *The Uses of Historical Evidence in Early Modern Europe*, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 64 (2003); Chantal Grell, ed, *Historiographes et historiographie dans l’Europe moderne* (Paris 2006).

⁵² Richard L. Kagan, *Clio & the crown: the politics of history in medieval and early modern Spain*, (Baltimore; London 2009), 96-104 and 133. In this vein, see Filippo de Vivo and Maria Pia Donato, eds, Special issue *Scholarly practices in the archive, 1500-1800, Storia della storiografia*, 68 (2015), especially the article by Fabien Montcher (on Spain) and Fabio Antonini (on Venice).

⁵³ See <http://www.bbk.ac.uk/history/archives/> and <https://birkbeck.academia.edu/ARCHIVESProject>.

regimes. We focused on six aspects of archival history: the political and administrative uses of archives; their organization, arrangement and finding devices; material aspects such as textual supports, furniture and buildings; the staff in charge of archives; their broader social uses and their contested place in society at the time; and, finally, their use by historians. One of our driving principles from the beginning has been to compare the Italian cases with others and to combine our own methodological approach with insights developed by specialists of other countries – not least because the history of Italy's archives is strongly marked by the importance of relations with other countries, whether in the form of domination (as underlined here by Silvestri) or diplomatic relations (de Vivo). For this reason, we are particularly happy to publish this special issue, covering developments that took place not just in Italy but in several European regions in the early modern period broadly conceived, including regions such as the Mediterranean and England, which are rarely studied together. All authors have reflected on different moments of transformation and acceleration in archival practices, due to a variety of reasons.

The first two articles invite us to date the beginning of archival transformations to the fifteenth century and to tie it with political processes of expansion, administration and war. Alessandro Silvestri shows how the fifteenth-century expansion of the Crown of Aragon developed a variety of record-keeping practices to keep track of government over a vast and scattered empire in the Western Mediterranean. He compares archives instituted in different provincial capitals, to find that in some (Sardinia, Balearic Islands) the Aragonese imported their own model, while in others (Sicily, Naples) they innovated in dialogue with local archival traditions. Andrea Guidi, by contrast, focuses on the case study of the Florentine republic to demonstrate how archives served succeeding regimes. He underlines that documentary practices had a significant acceleration during the so called Italian Wars (from 1494 onwards) and, interestingly, notes the role played in the production and storage of a large quantity of state papers by Niccolò Machiavelli. The emphasis on the political framework for archival transformations is also shared by the following article, by Vanessa Harding, on sixteenth-century England. She discusses the fate and rearrangement of ecclesiastical archives after the dissolution of the monasteries and, echoing Geoffrey Elton's famous notion of a Tudor revolution in government, she asks whether a parallel transformation took place in the management of archives.

The following two articles explore technical transformations as they consider the emergence of new record-keeping techniques between the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries. Randolph Head describes the separation in German-speaking lands of pre-existing repositories for storing charters and the new practices of *Registratur*, with a primarily informational rather than juridical value. He argues in favour of a nuanced understanding of archives, encompassing more than one model, as culturally and geographically inclusive. Filippo de Vivo compares the different ways in which Italian states increasingly recorded the oral contents of negotiations between ambassadors and hosting governments. As he argues, the nature and detail of the records depended on their uses at the time, as they served to inform further aspects of diplomatic activity. Both articles emphasise the importance of the material dimension of archiving, including the difference between parchment and paper, the specificities of bundles and registers or codices, and the crucial role played by paratextual tools such as indexes and tables of contents.

The last two articles seek to situate archival transformation in a broader social and cultural context, away from strictly political developments. Antonio Castillo considers changes in archival culture as part of a wider shift towards the proliferation and systematisation of written records, one which encompassed both the Castilian monarchy and municipal administrations, but which was also shared by wider social groups. As he

describes it, Habsburg Spain saw repeated, and repeatedly frustrated, attempts to bring order to growing quantities of paper. Finally, Markus Friedrich uses the case of Pierre Camille Le Moine (1723-1800), professional *archiviste* and the author of the first printed French treatise on archival management and description, to argue for a social history of archives. He focuses on private, seigneurial and ecclesiastical archives, and on the growing labour market emerging for archival experts in eighteenth-century France. He also discusses Le Moine's arguments in favour of arranging documents on the basis of pertinence rather than provenance, an arrangement which may owe its rationale to the principles of the Enlightenment.

In line with the double objective discussed at the beginning of this introduction, the articles of this special issue demonstrate, in different ways and on the basis of different cases, the uses of archives at the time they were put together and over successive generations, *as well as* the uses of the history of archives for early modern historians today. Collectively, the authors contribute to the archival turn by emphasising the reasons for the accelerating transformation of archives in the early modern age, in relation to the governmental management of information, the conduct of war and diplomacy, and the professionalisation of archival expertise. As the authors show, the centralisation and expansion of archives revealed new modes of government, while their shifting organization reflected changes in the priorities of the institutions that put them together. Such an approach will continue to illuminate our understanding of contemporary archival practices as new avenues open up for exploration. For example, how far did outsiders access and use state archives, as suggested in a recent study of early modern India?⁵⁴ What was the symbolic meaning of archives, independently of their practical functions?⁵⁵ If we know that documents were monumentalised, could archives as a whole be monuments to a particular idea of the states or communities that generated them?⁵⁶ And what about developments beyond Europe? If some early modern European governments were associated with information mastery, the same can be said of other regimes such as the early modern Mughal Empire, described as 'government by paper' (*kaghazī raj*) at the time of Akbar (1542-1605).⁵⁷ Across the early modern world, empires developed bureaucracies and archives whose parallels deserve further study.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Ângela Barreto Xavier and Ines G. Zupanov, *Catholic Orientalism: Portuguese Empire, Indian Knowledge (16th-18th Centuries)* (Oxford 2015).

⁵⁵ This is the implication of Eric Ketelaar's work on the representation of archival documents in seventeenth-century Dutch portraits, and of Filippo de Vivo's study of the place of the Chancery archive in the so-called 'myth' of Venice: Ketelaar, 'Accountability Portrayed. Documents on Regents' Group Portraits in the Dutch Golden Age', *Archival Science*, 14 (2014), 69-93; de Vivo 'Coeur de l'Etat, lieu de tension'.

⁵⁶ Jacques Le Goff, 'Documento/Monumento', *Enciclopedia Einaudi*, 5 (Torino 1978), 38-48 and Krzysztof Pomian, 'The Archives: From the Trésor des Chartes to the CARAN', in Pierre Nora, ed, *Rethinking France: Les Lieux de Mémoire*, Vol. 4, *Histories and Memories* (Chicago; London 2010) 27-99 (first published in 1992).

⁵⁷ Martin Moir, 'Kaghazī Raj: Notes on the documentary basis of company rule, 1783-1858', *Indo-British Review*, 21 (1983): 185-93.

⁵⁸ Peter Crooks and Timothy H. Parsons, eds, *Empires and Bureaucracy in World History* (Cambridge 2016). In May 2016 the ARCHIVES project has co-organised a conference in Paris on 'Connaitre le monde, administrer la diversité: les archives impériales/Imperial Archives in Global Perspective' with Labext Transfer and the Institut Universitaire de France.