Making Archives in Early Modern Europe: Proof, Information, and Political Record-Keeping, 1400–1700. **By Randolph C. Head. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019. xvii, 348 pp. Bibliography, index. Hardcover. $120.00.**

Over an academic career beginning in the early 1990s, Randolph Head (University of California, Riverside) has unpacked and interrogated the ways that early modern Europeans, particularly those in central Europe and the Swiss Confederation, thought about the past. *Making Archives in Early Modern Europe* culminates decades of research in the field of central European history, extended in this text to a handful of rather disparate and idiosyncratically chosen locales; namely Lisbon, Simancas, Leiden, Paris, and Berlin. While Head may find through this latest effort audiences beyond historians of Europe—including professional archivists, librarians, and cultural heritage curators—it is questionable whether he provides enough of a narrative for readers unfamiliar with European history to follow the book through its many glancing case studies and comparative analyses. At a price of $32.99, the paperback edition (released in August 2020) significantly reduces the entrance fee to Head's provocative, if unfulfilling, scholarship.

An extremely brief preface lays out the narrative's "trajectory" as proceeding from 1400, when repositories were "imagined as hidden treasuries of material proof," moving on after 1550 to "a phase during which archivists sought to organize records according to their content" rather than provenance, and, finally, to the 1700s, when "new approaches" converged across some parts of Europe in the ways in which evidence and information were categorized and preserved (p. xii). Yet, this bold thesis is undercut by the long introductory first chapter, which states the book's "key purpose is to explore from a comparative perspective the practices of record-keeping and record-finding that characterized chancelleries, registries, and similar institutions across Europe from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century" (p. 5). The telling of a single story across large swaths of time and place may seem compatible with an exploration of differences between recordkeeping regimes situated in specific moments and places. But, ultimately, the book illuminates more of the latter than the former. Indeed, Head acknowledges that the lack of "a shared literature for exchanging" archival ideas meant that "change was often local, and innovations spread only slowly until later in the seventeenth century" (p. 249). While *Making Archives* achieves the goal of bringing together individuals and places normally kept apart, its contributions to the history of political archives lie less in the periodization proposed in the preface, than in the microhistories embedded within its matryoshka-like organization. Those microhistories—based in some cases on previously published articles—deserve the fullest critique possible.

Part 1 ("The Work of Records, 1200–") consists of four chapters set more or less after 1100 CE. In that "late Antiquity" or "later Middle Ages"—a periodization that Head refrains from challenging—political recordkeeping, outside of the civil notaries in Italy, functioned without "permanent chancelleries that could record their acts or register those made by other parties" (p. 49). The emerging nobility (or nonchurch) leaders relied instead upon either chirographs or "self-authenticating" documents (p. 52). A chirograph consisted of two exact copies of a text written on a single parchment that

were torn apart and later matched by inspection of the physical tears, and did not need a witness to authenticate. At the same time, sealed contracts, diplomas, writs, and charters relied upon human witnesses, not physical copies of those records, to establish and honor the acts of privilege bestowed on lords by kings and emperors. As the number of loose parchments grew within the possessions of kings and feudal lords (physically stored in places called *archiva*), the cartulary and the emissions register—two types of "manuscript book" that borrowed their form from the scholastic tradition—proliferated to assist independently the recipients and the grantors of privileges in managing the organic growth of "circulating single-leaf records" (p. 59). Using the reformed chancellery codices of Portugal's kings from the 1460s through the production of the 60 highly decorated manuscript volumes of the *Leitura Nova* that were suspended in the 1550s ("a new core of the royal archive"), Head delivers a thorough account of cartularies and registers (p. 81). He suggests that late medieval rulers became interested in authentically preserving in book form the loose records that piled up underutilized in their *archiva*. The cartularies or registers were meant to serve political leaders as "archives-in-a-book," preferable to (or at least equivalent to) authentication of privileges through chirographs or witnesses (p. 93).

In chapters 5 and 6, Head turns to the category of documents that he calls "nonprobative records," that is, a "heterogeneous mass of informational records," including depositions, inquest reports, heresy procedures, "letters" of all sorts, rent rolls, and land books (pp. 97–98). Strangely, given an earlier statement that he would not deal with ecclesiastical records, Head's discussion of "judicial inquiries" concentrates on the Dominican tribunal records in their inquisition of the heretic Cathars in southern France in the early 1200s, which he juxtaposes ever so briefly against the "abrupt shift toward using written records" by King Philip II Augustus in Paris (pp. 15, 108). Over a chapter's worth of close analysis on the Innsbruck chancelleries of the Hapsburg rulers rounds out part 1. In particular, Head argues that a series of interlinked copybooks containing the correspondence flowing to and from Innsbruck started in 1523 represented the "distinction between probative objects and informational records, between the *archivum* and the archive, or between the treasury and the chancellery" (p. 132).

Part 2, also composed of four chapters, pivots from the works of chancellery scribes (e.g., *Leitura Nova*) to the increasingly orderly "inventories and comparable tools" of classification that wardens, secretaries, registrators, and proto-archivists undertook, mainly in the three centuries after 1400. Today's practicing archivists might relate to and benefit the most from this part of the book. For example, Head argues that "gathering material together by its content" "offered early modern archivists a powerful approach to arranging both the large amounts of material that were already in their repositories and the even larger amounts they anticipated arriving in the future" (pp. 183, 199). But why "organization by content"—its pertinence not its provenance—should have "seemed obvious to many chancellery staff," when late medieval Europeans had apparently not been utilizing it up to that point in time, is left unexplored and thus remains a teleological assertion (p. 136). Still, the close analyses of the archival arrangements are intriguing, particularly those of Gérard de Montaigu in Paris, Wilhelm

Putsch in the Hapsburg lands, Lorenz Fries in Würzburg, Gabriel Zurgilgen and Renward Cysat in Lucerne, and Johann Heinrich Waser in Zurich. Head's occasional labeling of these men as archivists suggests a level of professionalization that he otherwise does not attribute to them (p. 136).

Part 3 traces the increasing formalization of government recordkeeping as post-1550 rulers began demanding greater control over documents by comparing the Simancas archive of Philip II, the "actively managed archive" of the Electorate of Brandenburg-Prussia, and the three main forms of registry in the German lands and the new Innsbruck chancellery after 1564 (p. 235). Whether documents within a chancellery or registry could be located in a reasonable amount of time seems to explain the increasing pains taken to inventory or register larger amounts of political information circulating over wider distances. This impetus for order—matched in other cultural and scientific expressions of that era—meant that documents could be physically reordered to match shifting administrative purposes. Yet, as Head fully acknowledges, the "evidence" for those administrative purposes varies widely and is fairly thin, so his account of registries must remain an "idealized sketch" (p. 265).

Part 4 investigates, along a more narrow argument than the rest of the book, the post-Reformation crisis in how the content of archives related to its custodians. For the first time in Europe, books on the practical aspects of recordkeeping, notably Jacob von Ramingen's three works devoted to registration systems of lesser lords in the Duchy of Württemberg, were printed during the second half of the sixteenth century. Perhaps as the work that recordkeepers were doing—or supposed to be doing—became more widely known, the debates over their systems of knowledge increased. A case study on the controversy over the confessional implications of the Peace of Kappel in 1531 is both interesting and tangential to the larger narrative, as it asks the question of how religious views affected the hermeneutics of archives. Whether the growing number of seventeenth-century kings who drew upon the divinity of their personage to assert worldly powers had a greater need for factual evidence of their family's genealogy and authority—that is, the divinity of royal documents—is not addressed within Head's analysis. Chapter 14's comparison of the different ways of authenticating documents stored inside and outside of the "traditional archivum," as proposed by the seventeenth-century treatise-writers Papenbroeck, Mabillon, Fritsch, and Schilter, is intriguing, but deserves further expansion to serve as a satisfactory endpoint to the book (p. 289).

Moreover, a set of stylistic choices detracts from the purpose of the book. These include frequent throat-clearing around the "irreducible element of recursivity" in every archival history based on evidence in archives (p. 107); excessive defining of key terms, such as "archival threshold," which then receive only brief attention (p. 139); and an overuse of signposts to preceding and forthcoming chapters. This reader was left longing for a less jolty ride.

Notwithstanding these substantial defects, *Making Archives in Early Modern Europe* contains the outlines of more than one intellectual argument, several of which have not even been explored in this review. One of its strongest cases, however, is for the

internationalization or deprovincializing of European archival history, even at periods of history when nation-states were less powerful than more local forms of political organization.

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