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## **Annotated Bibliography: Archival History – Middle Ages**

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### **Abstract**

This annotated bibliography examines sources which give insight into the history of archives and recordkeeping during the Middle Ages (which lasted between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries). Through the creation of this bibliography, the eurocentricity of archival history became evident. Few sources examine the history of archives outside of Europe during this time period; therefore, this bibliography attempts to include archival perspectives outside of Europe, and aims to examine a number of different archival repositories. The bibliography touches on ecclesiastical archives, civic archives, university archives and private archives. Within the sources, themes of power and the importance of social memory are investigated, and organizational change within a variety of different archives is examined.

*Brown, W. (2002). When documents are destroyed or lost: Lay people and archives in the early Middle Ages. Early Medieval Europe, 11(4), 337-366.*

Brown's article argues that laypeople during the early Middle Ages kept their important documents in private archives. This article refutes the idea that lay education atrophied during the early Middle Ages, and that laypeople did not read or write, meaning that laypeople had no need for the storage of private records. Brown states that lay people in fact used documents regularly to "do such things as secure, alienate, or pass down property, get married or get divorced, settle disputes, and otherwise regulate the business of their lives" (p. 339). While Brown agrees with the argument that churches and monasteries played an important role in the creation and preservation of records, he does argue that religious repositories were not the sole type of archives used during the early Middle Ages.

Brown's article, focusing on the use and preservation of formula collections, which were model documents that, made generic, were used by private individuals as templates in the creation of their own documents, states that these collections of records were kept in private homes. Therefore, private individuals kept within their personal archives records that they understood as "vital to the security of their property holdings" (p. 351-352). Brown's article is useful in that it describes how and why records were kept in private holdings during the early Middle Ages; it is particularly useful when read with Douglas's 2009 article "Kepe wysly youre wrytyngys," as it provides evidence of private archives prior to the late Middle Ages, giving a fuller picture of the creation, use and preservation activities which occurred between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Brown's article is also an interesting break from Clanchy's argument in his 1980 "Tenacious Letters" article, as Brown makes clear that while the church and clergy played a large role in the creation of archives in Europe, the church was not the first, nor the only, source of document creation and preservation. Additionally, Brown's article supports Ketelaar's argument (2010, "Records out and archives in") as Brown examines the symbolic use of formula collections, focusing on the ways in which they acted as symbolic instances of social memory.

*Clanchy, M. T. (2013). The preservation and use of documents. (Third ed.), From Memory to Written Record: England 1066-1307. 147-79. West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell.*

Clanchy's chapter "The preservation and use of documents", from his book *From Memory to Written Record* is a detailed account of the creation and use of archives in the High Middle Ages in England. Clanchy focuses on royal and ecclesiastical archives, arguing that while kings used documents for the business of running their governments, these documents were not usually considered records (and therefore not considered valuable to preserve). Clanchy notes that the main occurrences of document preservation transpired in ecclesiastical archives, which saw records as "[assurances] of the continuity of institutions under God's providence" (p. 185).

Clanchy's chapter on archives provides readers with a detailed description of how royal and ecclesiastical archives were created, covering a section of information missing from his "Tenacious Letters" article. In particular, it gives readers an understanding of how these archives were organized, specifically in regards to how medieval users located records in these archives, a topic not covered in detail in any other source. Clanchy's book, however, does not speak at all about personal archives, which is a strange aspect considering his book claims to deal with all facets of medieval literacy, documentation and preservation. Clanchy's book, while being an excellent source on the details involved in Anglo-Saxon recordkeeping during the High Middle Ages, is best supplemented by other sources that can account for the use of personal archives (such as Douglas's article).

*Clanchy, M.T. (Winter 1980/81). "Tenacious letters:" Archives and memory in the middle ages." Archivaria, 11, 115-125.*

Clanchy's article focuses on the development of archives during the early Middle Ages. In particular, Clanchy examines the development of religious archives in Great Britain, concentrating on how the archives as a space was used and understood. Clanchy points to the early development of archives in Europe as a response to the "religious impulse" of the monks who created them, who saw archives as spaces for the preservation and worship of objects that evoked ideas of "Christian endurance" (p. 119-120). These objects, which ranged from letters, to manuscripts, to works of art, to religious relics, were all understood by medieval archival users as memory-retaining items.

Clanchy's article notes that written records were assumed to be items of tenacity and, because of this, these records found a natural home in spaces of preservation, mainly archives. While his article is an excellent summary of the use and development of religious archives in early medieval Europe, he tends to gloss over the creation of these early archives, writing as though religious archival repositories always existed and were just waiting to be filled with these objects of "Christian endurance". Although his article would be improved by a more detailed account of how these religious archives came to be – a gap which is filled in his chapter on "The Preservation and Use of Documents" - Clanchy's examination of these spaces, particularly his examination of how these spaces were understood by those using them in a way "most different from modern experience," illuminates early medieval religious archives (p. 125).

*Douglas, J. (2009). "Kepe wysly youre wrytyngys:" Margaret Paston's fifteenth-century letters. Libraries & The Cultural Records, 44(1), 29-49.*

This article examines the Paston family letters, particularly those of Margaret Paston, who was "the family's most prolific letter writer" (p. 29). The Paston family, a Norfolk family active during the fifteenth century, preserved their personal letters, which give insight into the War of the Roses, as well as more routine matters, such as business, household management, and relationships between family members. This case study is of interest to archivists because of "Margaret Paston's emphasis on the necessity of creating written evidence and of keeping [this evidence] safe," which can provide insights into personal recordkeeping practices during the late Middle Ages, particularly those of women and families (p. 30).

Of particular significance to archivists is the section headed "Kepe wysly youre wrytyngys," which delves into why Margaret Paston may have preserved these letters. This article is useful in that it takes a case study and highlights the genesis, use and preservation of medieval documents, while taking into account how these documents were understood by their author(s). It is the only close analysis of personal archives in this bibliography, and is of special interest because it is also the only analysis of the recordkeeping practices of a woman, which can provide great insight into the recordkeeping practices of late medieval families. This article is useful in that it can link broad themes discussed in more general resources, such as Clanchy's book *From Memory to Written Record*, to a particular case, providing a real example of record creation, the multiple uses and understandings of these records, and details on how family records were preserved.

*Duchein, M. (Winter 1992). The history of European archives and the development of the archival profession in Europe. American Archivist, 55, 14-25.*

Duchein's article offers several sections that relate to archives within the Middle Ages; these are "The Origins of Archival Practice in Europe" and "The Creation of the First Great Repositories." These sections give readers an introduction to the creation and evolution of archives within Medieval Europe. Duchein's article begins by outlining the use of medieval archives, and then gives an account of the development of both early modern and modern archives.

Duchein's outline is useful in that it both provides readers with an understanding of the theories by which pre-modern archives were governed (the use of records in archives as legal evidence, for example), but also outlines the archival theories that developed after the late Middle Ages (the use of Archival Science, the principle of Provenance, etc.). Duchein's outline clearly provides the full picture of the development of archives in Europe, neatly outlining the events that occurred during the Middle Ages. Duchein also highlights the fact that there is no single history that provides the full picture of all European archives; as Duchein notes "each European country has followed its own path of archival development," making each European country's archival history unique (p. 14). This is a good reminder to readers, as many other generalizing sources do not speak to the differences in European archival developments, but rather only to the similarities. The case studies examined in this bibliography prove Duchein's point; while general themes can be picked out, the development of archives depends on the region and the time period (a topic touched on in Head's article), as well as the type of archive (a topic touched on in Douglas's article).

*Duranti, L. (Fall 1994). Medieval universities and archives. Archivaria, 38, 37-44.*

Duranti's article demonstrates that all European medieval universities present a similar pattern in regard to their archives. This pattern, taken from an examination of universities in Italy, France and England, notes that university archives preserved no official university records until the end of the Middle Ages. Duranti notes that before this time, the university archives preserved only "individual statutes, grants, privileges, charters, and deeds, mostly copies, mixed up with seals, money, and other goods and valuables" (p. 40). The reason for this, Duranti notes, is because universities were not "invested with sovereign power," meaning that universities did not have the power to "endow their records with faith and credit" (p. 42). Instead, other powerful bodies, who did have the authority to grant records with the property of evidence, were given university records. Therefore, university administrative records created before the late Middle Ages can often be found in city archives or church repositories.

Duranti's examination of university archives in the Middle Ages gives readers insight into the particularities of university archives, and provides an explanation for the dispersal of important university records. Her examination of universities in the Middle Ages also presents readers with

an understanding of the ways in which archives were perceived during that time. Similarly to Clanchy's article, Duranti's piece would have been more informative had it included a brief explanation of the creation of these medieval university archives; however, her article helps to illuminate how medieval university archives were understood, and how the use of these spaces differed from modern use.

*Head, R. (2016). Configuring European archives: Spaces, materials and practices in the differentiation of repositories from the late Middle Ages to 1700. European History Quarterly, 46(3), 498–518.*

This article provides both a case study of recordkeeping in medieval Germany and an overview of the changing ways in which archives were used during the late Middle Ages. Head examines archives in Germany after 1400, with a particular focus on the ways in which recordkeeping practices changed after 1500, and the result of that on the Hapsburg administration. Head focuses on the use of established medieval archives, and the development of registries of informational records during the end of the Middle Ages. Head examines the differentiation of these two archival spaces, one space being historical (archives of historical documents) and one being administrative (state recordkeeping repositories).

Head's article is a useful examination of the differing spaces of archives in the late Middle Ages, providing the reader with an investigation of the use of historical archives during this period, as well as an investigation of the development of administrative repositories. Head's case study (German archives, and their development from 1400-1500) is also a useful reference point, as it provides readers with a case that reflects the development and use of archives in continental Europe. The article is a helpful resource to give readers an understanding of the events occurring in archives during the end of the Middle Ages, while also providing perspective on how archives continued to develop in early modern Europe.

*Ketelaar, E. (September 2010). Records out and archives in: Early modern cities as creators of records and as communities of archives. Archival Science, 10(3), 201-210.*

Ketelaar's article discusses the use of recordkeeping in medieval cities, arguing that making a distinction between archives and records cannot be considered historically valid. Ketelaar states that the records preserved in European medieval cities are archives, and that medieval city archives can likewise be considered records. Ketelaar examines a number of cities in Europe (focusing on England, Ireland, Germany, and Italy), examining the growth of their city records during the 11<sup>th</sup> century. In particular, Ketelaar observed that during the 12<sup>th</sup> century notaries and civic institutions took over creating and archiving records for communities; prior to this period, most records had been created and preserved by religious institutions.

Ketelaar's article can be best understood when read in conjunction with Clanchy's article, as it explains why Clanchy's religious archives collected the very specific religious materials that they

did; after the 11<sup>th</sup> century, city and community records were, in many places throughout Europe, being collected by civic archives. Ketelaar's article is useful for exploring how civic archives differed in material from personal, religious, or university archives. Ketelaar's focus on how civic records acted as symbols, often read aloud in public spaces in order to affirm citizens' shared identity, further enhances the reader's understanding of the complex ways in which records and archives were used during the Middle Ages. Ketelaar's article is a reminder to readers that, while other types of records were often private, sealed or restricted in access, as we have seen from our case studies on religious (Clanchy), personal (Douglas) and university records (Duranti), civic records often publicly acted as "centerpiece[s] of civic ritual," confirming medieval citizens "as members of a textual community" (p. 207).

*Lee, K. R. (2010). The role of Buddhist monks in the development of archives in the Korean Middle Ages. The American Archivist, 73, 61-81.*

Lee's article compares the roles of Buddhist monks in medieval Korea to the roles of Christian monks in medieval Europe, and their similarities and differences in their part in creating and using archives. Lee argues that, due to the political differences between medieval Korea and medieval Europe, Buddhist monks played a larger role in the development of Korean archives than the Christian monks did in the development of European archives. Lee notes that, because Buddhist monks in Korea were a part of a bureaucratic state system, "the likes of which would not exist in Europe for centuries", these monks were essential to the management of both secular and ecclesiastical archives (p. 78).

Lee's article is an excellent resource which aims to lessen the Eurocentric focus of archival history. While many of the sources on this list speak of archival history as distinctly European, Lee's article reminds readers that archives have existed and flourished outside of Europe, and that archives and recordkeeping are a global phenomenon. Lee's article does recognize the Eurocentric focus of archival history, providing not only an account of medieval Korean archives, but comparing these archives to those run by European Christians. Lee's article is a useful resource when read alongside Clanchy's article, as it allows readers to highlight the differences between the creation and management of religious archives during the Middle Ages.

*McCrank, L. J. (1993). Documenting reconquest and reform: The growth of archives in the medieval crown of Aragon. The American Archivist, 56, 256-318.*

McCrank's article on the growth of archives in medieval Aragon provides a case study of the High Middle Ages in Spain, focusing on the development of archival management systems in archives and records centres. While many people equate the creation of "modern" archives with the formation of nation-states, McCrank argues, using medieval Aragon as an example, that the creation of "modern" archives as we currently know them can be traced back to medieval Europe. Medieval Europe (specifically medieval Aragon) is where archivists can begin to see an "institutionalization" and increasing specialization of archives (p. 256).

McCrank's article is a close examination of the creation, development and use of archives in Aragon. Because McCrank's article delves into detail, readers are provided not only with a general history of medieval archives in Aragon, but also with an account of how these archives were managed, the physical location of the archival repositories, and what kinds of items were considered archival. As with other articles with a narrow focus, such as Clanchy's and Lee's articles, McCrank's case study is useful in providing a reference point for understanding the more general histories offered by Head and Duchein. Furthermore, McCrank's article offers additional proof of Ketelaar's claim that, after the 11<sup>th</sup> century, historians saw "the creation of centralized, funded, and professionally maintained public archives" (p. 298). McCrank also speaks to the creation and use of a number of new archival tools created by the archival system in Aragon, providing more context for Sherwood's article, which references the same system as being used by inquisitors.

*Posner, E. (1972). Archives in medieval Islam. The American Archivist, 35, 291-316.*

Posner's article examines the creation and use of archives in medieval Islam. Posner, acknowledging that there is a "serious gap in the history of archives," attempts to fill in this gap through an examination of archives in Islamic territories between the seventh century and the fall of Constantinople (p. 292). Posner focuses on secular state archives, examining how these archives were managed in medieval Islam.

Posner's article, much in the same way as Lee's, acknowledges the overwhelming Eurocentricity of archival history, and offers this perspective with the hope of lessening the Eurocentric understanding of medieval archives. Posner's article does not delve far into details regarding specific Islamic territories, but rather offers a general picture of the Islamic medieval world. This generalized picture, however, causes the article to veer close to Orientalism, often referring to Islamic territories as a vast homogeneity, when in reality these spaces spanned three continents and almost certainly contained a large variety of different archival knowledge and use. However, Posner's article is nonetheless an important piece to understanding the global complexities of medieval archival history, and does offer the reader a rare example of a non-European focus in the history of medieval archives.

*Sherwood, J. (2012). The inquisitor as archivist, or surprise, fear, and ruthless efficiency in the archives. The American Archivist, 75, 56-80.*

Sherwood's article examines the ways in which archives were used by inquisitors during the High Middle Ages. Sherwood focuses on how inquisitors used new archival technologies to "uncover hearsay, lies and evasions" (p. 56). Sherwood, by looking at the archives of inquisitors, examines how their records became tools for the Medieval Inquisition; in particular, she examines how the improved searchability of inquisitor archives allowed inquisitors to more easily compile evidence and uncover old crimes.

Sherwood's article is an interesting testament to the effects that the improved archival tools referenced to by McCrank had on the medieval persons' understanding of the power of records. Significantly, Sherwood notes the changes that occurred during the 11<sup>th</sup> century, where documents began to be understood as "written records" rather than symbols of social "memory" (p. 58), a theme also discussed by Teuscher, Ketelaar, and Brown. Sherwood's article is an interesting case study of the development of a very particular kind of ecclesiastical archive, which provides the reader with a greater understanding of the relationship between records, the medieval church, and power.

*Teuscher, S. (September 2010). Document collections, mobilized regulations, and the making of customary law at the end of the Middle Ages. Archival Science, 10(3), 211-229.*

Teuscher's article describes the ways in which medieval archives were organized, focusing on the late Middle Ages in Switzerland, and examining how the organization of archives changed. Teuscher argues that, during the late Middle Ages, records began to be understood in relation to their contexts (ie. in relation to other records), and there was a shift away from viewing documents only as symbols of past testimony. The shift in how records were understood fundamentally changed the ways in which archives were organized. Teuscher's article gives an overview of the ways that archives were arranged during the early and High Middle Ages, comparing this organizational style to the changes encountered in the late Middle Ages.

Teuscher's article is significant in that it is the only resource on this list that provides a detailed examination of how archives were being physically organized throughout the Middle Ages. Furthermore, Teuscher's article also powerfully demonstrates changes in how medieval laypeople understood archives, which is supported by Brown and Ketelaar's articles. Teuscher not only discusses a shift in the ways in which records were understood (from documents acting as symbols of local social memories to documents acting as part of a larger documentary context), but also how these changes affected the physical nature of the archives. Readers will find, however, that Teuscher neglects to specifically define the kinds of archives in which these changes occur. While readers can presume from his case studies that Teuscher's focus is on ecclesiastical and civic archives, the author does not make clear what kinds of archives experience this change.

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