

Case Study 4.1: Fluchtkisten

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So hat man in neueren Zeiten ganze Kasten verfertiget, und wie Gestelle in denen Registraturen auf einander gestellt; dergestalten, daß diese Kasten mit einer oder zweyen gegen einander aufgehenden Thüren und wohlverwahrtem Schloß versehen.

In more recent times, entire boxes have been made and placed on top of each other like racks in the registries; in such a way that these boxes are provided with one or two doors opening towards each other and a well-guarded lock.¹

The containers described by German archival theorist Philipp Fladt are today mostly called *Fluchtkiste* ('escape / rescue box') and became the most common container for Central European archival material during the late seventeenth to mid nineteenth century.

The boxes vary in size and internal division but share a set of similar features that makes them definable as one type of container. In most cases, fir wood is used for construction, only a few examples are made of the heavier oak wood. The size is never larger than carriable for two people. Iron handles attached at the two shorter sides make it easier to lift the box. Other iron parts could be found in the form of bands holding the lid or doors and the locking mechanism to secure the contents. In those cases where drawers make up the front, sealing was used for this purpose. Leftovers of the sealing wax can still be found in some cases – also on doors as an additional security mechanism. Decorations or adornment in any form were seldom applied. Yet, many boxes carry signs, such as letters or numbers, that refer to the archival inventory.

The boxes are internally subdivided by either a simple rack or drawers, depending on the preferences and needs of each individual archivist/archive. The paper format was not standardised during the Early Modern Period. Depending on the type of documents, sheets were stored either flat, folded or rolled up. Some sources explain how the internal subdivision was altered for a better use of space when a changing practice of preparing the documents for storage was implemented in the archive.

The popularity of the *Fluchtkiste* reflects the constant mobility of archives and the issue of space management. The main threats for archives were posed by fire and war. In both cases, a quick escape had to be possible. Experience had proven that it was much more convenient if the documents could be moved in the container they were already in, rather than packing them into sacks or barrels. This made the boxes preferable over racks or armoires. Yet, their characteristic of a good use of space, especially in the vertical, was also important. This is why the boxes were constructed in such a way that up to four of them could be stacked on top of each other when stored in the archive. This makes the *Fluchtkisten* a border case between the two categories 'containers' and 'furniture'.

¹ Fladt 1764, 64 (my translation).



Fig. 1: Archival boxes from Landesarchiv Karlsruhe; © Landesarchiv Karlsruhe.

Reference

Fladt, Philipp Wilhelm Ludwig (1764), *Anleitung zur Registratur-Wissenschaft und von Registratoribus deren Amt und Pflichten*, Frankfurt: s.n.