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Chapter 5: Storage Spaces: Rooms and Buildings

Abstract: The construction of a space dedicated to archives is a modern phenomenon that highlights the growing importance of the need to document administrative activities, and a change in the relationship with the past, which gives historical documents a heritage value for society as a whole. It was only the preservation of archives that mattered in premodern societies, sometimes indiscriminately of other objects that constituted a treasure. The earliest documented concern was the construction of storage facilities to protect archive documents from various dangers, such as fire and damp. The interest in history shown by the citizens of modern societies has made it necessary to design places where documents can be consulted, open to an ever-growing public. Archives have become buildings charged with symbolic significance, whose choice of location and architecture help to exalt the identity of the populations whose history they house.

1 Introduction

Archival documents are not necessarily kept in dedicated buildings; hence, the dedication of specialised buildings may indicate a particular societal investment in record-keeping. Accordingly, the investigation of buildings dedicated to archives leads the historian to not only consider their construction as a response to conservation needs, but also question the value accorded by individual human societies to the written testimonies housed in such dedicated buildings. It is considered normal nowadays to dedicate a building to the conservation of archives, but this was not always the case. The discovery of archival documents in a building (e.g. during the excavation of an ancient Mesopotamian, Greek or Roman structure) does not necessarily mean that this edifice was dedicated exclusively to the preservation of archives. In many contexts, including most premodern societies and even in the Early Modern Period of European history, there was, for instance, no clear-cut distinction between libraries and archives: they were both storage places of knowledge.¹ Our word for ‘archive’ derives from the Greek term

¹ Assmann 2010.

ἀρχεῖον (Lat. *archivum*), which means ‘public building’ or ‘town hall’, but, for a long time, there were no buildings exclusively dedicated to ‘archival’ functions; instead, documents were usually kept somewhere in a multi-purpose building, including palaces, temples or churches. Records were occasionally carried around when people travelled.² Historians often argue that the creation of designated archive buildings impacts on the relation between people and the written testimony about their past: it is the expression of a transformation and, at the same time, conditions their relationship to archival documents.³ Archives not only related to public life and palaces during Antiquity and in many other premodern societies,⁴ but are also part of a treasury and are movable, before becoming more stable and staying located at a dedicated place, thereby reinforcing the sustainability of administrative documents and, thus, becoming a symbol of power. Unfortunately, we do not know what archives looked like in Antiquity, we only know where they were – i.e. in some dedicated rooms within a palace or at some strategic location in a public place.⁵ Archives have been intimately connected with historiographical work and the intellectual activities of remembrance in modern times (since the middle of the nineteenth century).⁶ Depending on the period, the place and the context, archival documents may retain an administrative value or only be of heritage and scholarly interest.

Rooms can be dedicated to special collections, but archival materials were very often kept without any apparent system or minimal order at best, such as the chaos depicted by Pieter Brueghel the Younger (1564–1638) (Fig. 1): there are many copies of this painting, which can be interpreted as a critique of the arbitrary power of tax collectors, who kept many documents by themselves, but were perhaps not aware of every document they had in their room.

² Fichtenau 1972.

³ On the transformation of the social meaning of archives, see Krakovitch 1994 commenting on Pomian 1992.

⁴ For a Korean example, see Ok 2021; for Japan, see Abe 2021.

⁵ Coqueugniot 2013; Messina 2021; Schreiber 2021.

⁶ Bautier 1968.



Fig. 1: *The Tax-collector's Office*, Pieter Bruegel II, Flanders, c. 1615, oil on wood panel; © Adelaide, Art Gallery of South Australia, acc. no. 0.814, <<https://www.agsa.sa.gov.au/collection-publications/collection/works/the-tax-collectors-office/24080/>> (accessed on 5 December 2024).

In a general sense, every facility dedicated to storing written artefacts can be considered as an archive, even if the documents are awaiting destruction. Such a case occurs in the Jewish world – for religious reasons. Rooms or small buildings called *genizah* are dedicated to the temporary preservation of documents that are to be discarded, however, for religious reasons, they cannot be simply destroyed. When found by historians, these *genizot* may acquire enormous importance, as they contain otherwise unavailable precious archive material documenting the social and economic life of Jewish communities. In the most famous case, the storeroom of Ben Ezra Synagogue in Old Cairo, the well-orchestrated discovery of thousands of documents at the end of the nineteenth century focused historical attention on the documentary value of Jewish *genizot* (Fig. 2);⁷ the prominent afterlife of the Cairo Genizah illustrates the nearly mythical status that archives occasionally acquire.⁸

⁷ Glickman 2011.

⁸ Jefferson 2022.

Yet, if such storage facilities may be called archives in a very loose sense, they appear as exact opposites of archives if by that term historians mean the documentation of legal, administrative and economic activity. Genizot were intended to store only (large amounts of) isolated texts that did not collectively form the memory of a coherent administrative activity, thus, they had no administrative purpose. Nevertheless, a comparison between genizot and archives is interesting, since, even in times when archives as rooms and buildings were more common, this did not necessarily amount to careful preservation of ancient documents, as many early modern narratives attest.⁹ Strict regulations prevail currently for keeping archive material,¹⁰ but this is, apart from more or less successful measures for protecting archives from water or fire,¹¹ only a very recent phenomenon, which occurs parallelly to the professionalisation of the functions of an archivist.¹²



Fig. 2: Interior view of Ben Ezra Synagogue showing the entrance to the genizah high in the end wall; © Cambridge University Library, <<https://www.lib.cam.ac.uk/genizah-fragments/posts/augusta-de-wit-and-genizah-hoard-0>> (accessed on 5 December 2024).

⁹ For some examples see Friedrich 2016, 69.

¹⁰ Glauert 2019.

¹¹ See Friedrich 2013, 160–163.

¹² Duchein 1992.

2 A place for eternity? Stability as a condition for the preservation of archives

The preservation of documents for religious purposes and the close link between archives and religious institutions in premodern societies can be observed in various cultures. Monastic and ecclesiastic archives enjoyed relative stability in many places around the world. An impressive example is provided by the Mogao Caves situated near the oasis town of Dunhuang in western China, a UNESCO World Heritage Site (Fig. 3). The first caves of this important Buddhist temple complex were dug out in 366 CE as places of meditation and worship; the caves later became a place of pilgrimage, and they continued to be built at the site until the fourteenth century (see Case Study 5.1). The Library Cave (cave 17) had been sealed and hidden since the turn of the first millennium CE. In 1900, a Daoist monk named Wang Yuanlu discovered it and found approximately forty thousand manuscripts, paintings and printed documents on silk and paper within its walls.¹³ Similarly, many Ethiopian monasteries also contain a room where manuscripts are preserved (sometimes a well-protected building also inside a rock-hewn cave), often together with other kinds of artefacts, not necessarily written, which is generally known as an *‘əqā bet* (Amharic, lit. ‘objects house, repository’). The *‘əqā bet* is a room or even a building that can be locked, where all kinds of precious objects pertaining to the monastic and church activity are preserved.¹⁴ Indeed, the distinction between diverse documents, for instance, books and charters, was not very strict, thus, both kinds of written artefacts were sometimes kept together, sometimes separately.

Similarly, the case of the Abbey of St Gall is revealing.¹⁵ Although an archivist is mentioned no later than in the last decades of the eighth century, there is no mention of any archive on the ideal plan of the Abbey of St Gall made in the ninth century, even though the library is mentioned. At that time, charters, most probably among the most precious manuscripts, were kept in an *armoire* (*armarium*) within the library. Its location is mentioned near the choir of the church (on the northern side) on the first floor (the ground floor was dedicated to the *scriptorium*, the room where the scribes were working); the sacristy is mentioned symmetrically (on the southern side of the choir): the room for liturgical vessels was on

¹³ Zhang (ed.) 2000.

¹⁴ Bausi 2014–2015.

¹⁵ Wagner 2016.

the lower floor and the vestry on the upper floor (Fig. 4).¹⁶ The St Gall plan adapts the late antique traditional buildings on both sides of the apsis (the *pastophoria*) to the needs of the early medieval period, as one can see in the late antique church of San Giovanni Evangelista in Ravenna (Fig. 5); the *pastophorion* originally referred to the treasury and the priests' quarters in the Temple of Solomon, potentially also indicating a relatively safe space where documents could be stored. Generally speaking, we can say that special care is given to the choice of building materials for churches due to their religious importance. Many temples were exceptionally secure places because they were built in stone.¹⁷ For that reason, they served as storage buildings in the premodern world and were preferred for the storage of the monks' documents.



Fig. 3: Dunhuang Mogao Caves, photo: Zhangzhugang; CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Dunhuang_Mogao_Ku_2013.12.31_12-30-18.jpg> (accessed on 5 December 2024).

¹⁶ Tremp 2014, 44.

¹⁷ Iogna-Prat 2006.

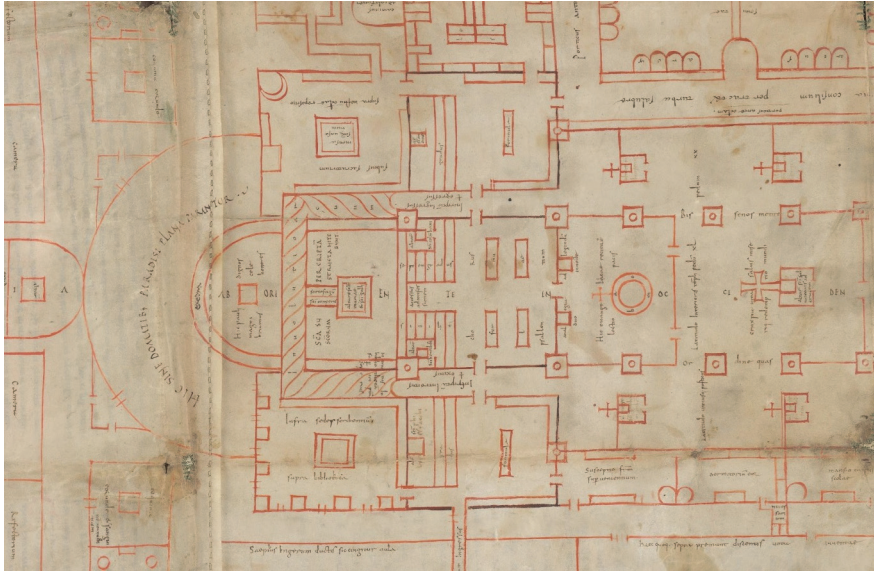


Fig. 4: St Gall monastery plan (detail), St Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek, Cod. Sang. 1092, recto; CC BY-NC 4.0, via e-codices: <<https://www.e-codices.unifr.ch/de/csg/1092/recto>> (accessed on 5 December 2024).



Fig. 5: San Giovanni Evangelista, Ravenna (fifth century): apsis and *pastophoria*, photo: GFreihalter; CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ravenna_San_Giovanni_Evangelista_126.jpg> (accessed on 5 December 2024).

With solid architectural structures also came local stability, another feature that contributed significantly to enhancing the chances of survival of an archive, as the case of the French medieval royal archive illustrates. The English king Richard the Lionheart defeated the French king Philip II Augustus in the Battle of Fréteval (3 July 1194). The latter lost all his documents which were being transported in coffers. After this difficult experience, the kings of France used to keep their archive in more secure places and increasingly decided against taking them with them as they moved through the country. The most ancient example of advanced storage spaces is a special room within the palace on the Île de la Cité in Paris (Fig. 6). King Louis IX of France ordered the construction of one of the most beautiful churches in France at that time, the Sainte-Chapelle, in his Parisian residence in the 1240s. Another building added onto the northern part of that church was devoted to royal audiences and next to it stood the sacristy, where the treasury and the royal archive were kept. On the northern side also stands a smaller building, which housed the workshop for preparing parchment for the court,¹⁸ indicating that the conservation of documents is not necessarily disconnected from the place of their production: these are two moments of the activity of administration and government. The royal archive was kept among the manuscripts collected by the king on the first floor of the sacristy of the Sainte-Chapelle, above the collection of golden precious artefacts and liturgical vessels kept on the ground floor. Medieval sources call this place, housing golden artefacts, manuscripts and charters, the *thesaurus capelle Parisius* (the ‘treasury of the Parisian chapel’); for that reason, the modern name of this royal archive is Trésor des chartes (from 1379, the keeper of the royal archives was called the ‘guardian of the treasure’).¹⁹ It remained there until 1783; since 1808, the royal archive has been kept in the Parisian Hôtel de Soubise as part of what is now the Archives nationales.²⁰ Books and charters were stored together for many years, indicating that modern distinctions between libraries and archives are not necessarily applicable to premodern contexts.²¹

¹⁸ Guérout 1949–1951; Leniaud and Perrot 1991, 98–104; Sohn 2019, 18–23.

¹⁹ Guyotjeannin and Potin 2004, 24.

²⁰ Babelon 1988; Pomian 1992; Hildesheimer 1997; Béchu and Béchu 2008.

²¹ Potin 2020.



Fig. 6: Courtyard of the royal palace in Paris with view of the sacristy of the Sainte-Chapelle housing the royal treasury ('Élévation des batimens anciens qui formoient l'enceinte de la cour du mai du Palais, Dess. par Thierry architecte et lith. par Nicolle. Imp. Lemerrier, Benard et Cie'), Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève, COLL GUEN ICONO TOPO 6 RES (11); © PDM 1.0, <https://archive.org/details/COLL_GUEN_ICONO_TOPO_6_RES_11> (accessed on 5 December 2024).

3 Stone buildings as secure places for archives?

A concentration of documentation in a secure location is also attested in the medieval Muslim world. According to the testimony of Al-Maqrīzī, a fifteenth-century historian, correspondence received by and sent from the Mamluk chancellery had to be deposited and kept in the Cairo citadel, built around two centuries earlier by Saladin (Fig. 7).²² Fortified places were often preferred options for securing docu-

²² Hirschler 2016, 10.

ments, frequently by furnishing or constructing a tower. The popes proceeded that way before creating the modern Vatican archives around 1600: Pope Paul III (1534–1549) located his archive on top of Hadrian's mausoleum, the so-called Castel Sant'Angelo. The Archivum Arcis was a very secure place (Fig. 8). At the same time, Emperor Charles V (d. 1558) and his successor, King Philip II (d. 1598), had an old fortress at Simacas, near Valladolid, retrofitted as an archive, including archival use of a prominent tower (Fig. 9).²³



Fig. 7: 'A view of the Cairo Citadel, 1950's', photo: Zdravko Pečar; CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cairo_Citadel,_1950%27s.tif (accessed on 5 December 2024).

²³ Fernandez-Gonzalez 2016.



Fig. 8: 'Castel Sant'Angelo room with treasure chests', photo: Matthias Kabel; CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Castel_Sant%27Angelo_room_with_treasure_chests.jpg> (accessed on 5 December 2024).



Fig. 9: Castillo de Simancas, Valladolid (Archivo General de Simancas), photo: Rabiespierre; CC BY 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Castillo_de_Simancas.jpg> (accessed on 5 December 2024).

The primary natural risks to archival documents are fire and damage from moisture and water; archival buildings, therefore, were often designed in such ways as to minimise exposure to these damaging agents and provide protection in case of fire or flooding. The heirs of the noble Riedesel family, *Freiherren zu Eisenbach*, followed this trajectory when they had a purpose-built archive building erected in their familial seat of Lauterbach in 1760. It is clear from various documents that they wanted a lavish building rising up over a fireproof vault. The lowest floor was exclusively dedicated to the archive, including a special room for working with documents. On the upper floor, there was only a spacious conference room with two (small) chambers next to the antechamber. The wooden panelling of the room known as the ‘archive’, i.e. the actual magazine with a vaulted ceiling, had to be completely removed and replaced in 1781 as it had become rotten in places. The archive room could be entered only through an iron door. There were also concerns about the windows, which were secured with iron bars, as documents could easily be stolen or even set on fire through them. However, the windows could not be permanently closed, as the high humidity and bad smell were a cause for concern. Protection against fire and water, the major natural threats, often followed contradictory logics. Nonetheless, cats kept entering the building when the windows were open, causing inconvenience. It was then decided to secure these windows with additional wire mesh. Judging from the resources and care which went into creating this archival building, archival consciousness, even among smaller, albeit supra-regional, noble families, in the middle of the eighteenth century must have been quite advanced.²⁴

4 Specialised archival buildings: From preservation to communication

It was not only kings and princes who were concerned about the preservation of their archives; minor nobles also joined the growing interest in document protection. It became common practice in the late Middle Ages to store archives in a tower. A tower was built at Fürfeld Castle in southern Germany in the middle of the fifteenth century specifically for the safe storage of charters and other valuables. At a distance of about 2 m from the residential building and built completely out of stone, it can be considered fireproof. The upper floors of the tower can only be reached via a covered wooden walkway from the second floor of the castle. An

²⁴ Reuther 2012.

iron door closes the narrow upper archive room, which is poorly lit by two small windows. There are high shelves on the walls and in the middle of the room for storing files and documents. The upper archive room is also secured by means of an iron door. There are neither windows nor slits in the wall for lighting. This room is a particularly early example of a purpose-built archive building.²⁵

Other, later buildings are more ostentatious in their outward appearance. The Fürstlich Fürstenbergisches Archiv is the dynastic archive of the House of Fürstenberg and one of the largest aristocratic repositories in Germany (Fig. 10). The Fürstenberg archive, one of the earliest free-standing archive buildings in Germany, was built between 1756 and 1763.²⁶



Fig. 10: Fürstlich Fürstenbergisches Archiv; © F. F. Archiv Donaueschingen.

Special archival buildings were also erected outside Europe in the Early Modern Period, including in Ethiopia (see Case Study 5.2). Nevertheless, the late nineteenth century was clearly the heyday of archive construction. New archive buildings were erected throughout Europe as a result of the rapid increase in bureaucratic

²⁵ Andermann 2014

²⁶ Wieser 1960.

document production. In the context of political centralisation and affirmation of national unity, they become monuments of state identity. An early instance of such developments was the Habsburg Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, which was founded by Empress Maria Theresa in 1749. All the important legal and sovereign titles of the House of Habsburg were now brought into the new Geheimes Hausarchiv, partly from disjointed and previously largely inaccessible depots in Vienna itself, and partly from documents previously housed outside Vienna in various distant parts of the country. Initially, a few rooms on the ground floor of the imperial chancellery wing of the Hofburg served as archive rooms, where the archive headquarters remained for the next century and a half. Under Emperor Franz Joseph I, the decision was made to build a new archive building on Vienna's Minoritenplatz, where the Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv is still located today, in view of the ever-increasing lack of space due to the growing volume of files. The building, erected in 1899–1902 next to the Ministry of the Imperial and Royal Household and Foreign Affairs, met the most advanced technical requirements for a purpose-built archive at the time. With the founding of the Archiv der Republik department (1983), a significant reorganisation took place within the Österreichisches Staatsarchiv: all official records of the Austrian federal administration after 1918 were transferred to the new department, which also became the office exclusively responsible for current file transfers. The Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv was, thus, transformed into a 'historical' archive that was no longer growing and whose holdings ended with the year 1918.

A distinction was increasingly made between different types of rooms in modern archival buildings.²⁷ Functional areas were progressively separated from storage spaces, as, for instance, happened in the new archive building in Münster, which opened in 1889. The preliminary design by Karl Friedrich Endell (1843–1891) envisaged two separate buildings for administration and storage, connected by a narrow two-storey corridor. Although a similar two-part structure had already been realised in 1880 in the new building of the district archive for Middle Franconia in Nuremberg, this building was still a functional jumble compared to Münster only a few years later. The conventionally constructed, two-storey storage wing also contained representation rooms and a cimelia room, which was located in the rear part of the western storage wing.

Dedicated archival structures were also created in conjunction with the growth of historical scholarship. European historicism, in particular, focused increasingly on archival records and scholars required specific spatial structures to work with them. Special collections were one key instance, including those

²⁷ Leiskau 2008.

created for teaching.²⁸ The diplomatic cabinet of Georg-August-Universität Göttingen, founded by Johann Christoph Gatterer (1759–1799),²⁹ is among the most prominent examples. Such teaching collections did not usually require entire buildings, but could rather be preserved in a dedicated room (or rooms), for instance, in private buildings or within the university library.

Growing interest in historical and genealogical research in the nineteenth century and, even more so, in the twentieth century, led more and more people to visit archives, which become civic temples of historical culture and national identity. Originally primarily places of conservation, archives gradually turned into places of consultation. Eventually, spatial arrangements had to be made to accommodate growing numbers of visitors. A dedicated reading room for researchers, for example, was set up in Paris in 1902 in the first rooms of the apartment of the princes of Soubise. By contrast, there were five different document consultation locations at the French Archives nationales in 1987. It was at this time that the National Archives Reception and Research Centre (Centre d'Accueil et de Recherche des Archives Nationales, called CARAN) was built, to accommodate an ever-growing audience. Today, it is possible to accommodate 350 readers at the same time.³⁰ A similar phenomenon can be observed in the national archives of Quebec. A modern building was built in 1999 as part of the renovation of the Maison Jodoin, erected in 1871, and the Gilles-Hocquart building, the main component of which is the former structure of the École des Hautes Études Commerciales de Montréal built in 1910. The consultation room can accommodate 200 people carrying out research (Fig. 11). In other contexts too, archival facilities are surrounded by additional purpose-built spaces, for instance, in the Archives internationales de la danse (see Case Study 5.3).

²⁸ Mersiowsky 2000.

²⁹ Goetting 1969; Petke 2001.

³⁰ Babelon 1988.



Fig. 11: Gilles-Hocquart building, Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec, photo: Benoit Rochon; CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Salle_de_consultation_de_l%27%C3%A9difice_Gilles-Hocquart_BAnQ_Vieux-Montr%C3%A9al_08.JPG> (accessed on 5 December 2024).

5 Looking for more space: Archive building as means of urbanisation policy

Certain events, including prominently wars and other episodes of violence, may cause archives to be moved. In the case of the Toggenburg War (1712), for example, most of the archive of the Abbey of St Gall mentioned above was evacuated to the monastery of Mehrerau, near Bregenz, where some of the documents remained until the twentieth century. When the modern canton of St Gall was created by Napoleon in 1803, most of the monastery's archival documents were congregated in the northern wing of the cloister court where they remain until today (Fig. 12). Together with the library, the archive enjoys the protection of UNESCO as a World Heritage Site.



Fig. 12: Northern wing (arsenal) of the St Gall cloister areal with the Stiftsarchiv, photo: Rocky187; CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Zeughausfl%C3%BCgel_mit_Kathedrale.jpg> (accessed on 5 December 2024).

Another essential and recurring reason for moving archives is a lack of space. Storage capacity is a big problem for archivists. Although destruction of huge parts of the documentation produced by modern administrations is a standard part of the work of archive keepers, the storage capacities required grow rapidly. The archive of the city of Hamburg, for instance, has had to move twice in the last five decades because of the need to increase storage capacity (Fig. 13). It moved to ABC-Straße in 1972, located in the centre of the city,³¹ and moved again twenty-six years later to the eastern periphery of the city (Wandsbek).³²

³¹ Bolland 1973.

³² Loose 2000.



Fig. 13: Manual mobile shelving units on the ground floor of the Staatsarchiv Hamburg's storage building, photo: Alexander Svensson; CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Staatsarchiv_Hamburg_Magazin.jpg> (accessed on 5 December 2024).

Relocation of archives is, however, not merely a result of practical concerns, but also part of conscious urban planning and politics. The city archive of Augsburg (Bavaria) had to relocate about ten years ago. At around the same time, the inauguration of the new state archive (Staatsarchiv Augsburg) took place in the southern periphery of the town near the university campus. Both archives needed more space for the documents they house: with a storage area of 2800 m² for 18.5 km linear archive material, the Staatsarchiv Augsburg is expected to run out of space during the next generation (about thirty years). The Augsburg city archive, meanwhile, has built more space (3200 m²) for less material (14 km linear archive). This resulted, however, from a set of different considerations, namely, urban and museological ones. By moving the archive from the location at Fuggerstr. 12 (a downtown area, next to the cathedral church), where it had been located since 1885, to the more remote Augsburg Kammgarnspinnerei (AKS), an ancient industrial quarter where the new Augsburg textile and industry museum opened its doors in 2010 on the emplacement of a textile factory founded in 1836, the city of

Augsburg wanted to revitalise this quarter and transform it into a museum-like area, where the archaeological museum (Stadtarchäologie / Archäologisches Zentraldepot) is also located.³³ Similarly, in Paris, the relocation of the headquarters of the National Archives of France to Pierrefitte (Seine-Saint-Denis) and the construction of a new building designed by architect Massimiliano Fuksas and inaugurated in January 2013 certainly responded to a need to increase storage capacities, but it also proved to be a measure with political significance, intended to revalorise the suburbs.

Some contemporary archives are architectural masterpieces and reflect the technological evolution of their time. This is the case, for example, of the Seine-Maritime departmental Tour des archives, situated in the city of Rouen. This particularly rich archive, whose origins date back to the Middle Ages and the Normandy Exchequer, had long been due to receive new quarters; in a report written in 1941, its director had already requested the construction of a depot housing 20 linear km of racking and planning to extend storage possibilities to 40 km, documenting the spatial demands in the first half of the twentieth century. Construction of a new archival building, however, was only begun in 1953. It was decided to build a twenty-eight-story tower 89 m high by 11 m wide. Height was synonymous with modernity³⁴ in the 1960s (we can also cite another example in Burgundy: the Tour des Archives départementales de Saône-et-Loire in Mâcon, built in the second half of the decade, has twenty floors and is 50 m high). The design of the Rouen tower was chosen in order to ensure delivery of documents requested for consultation more quickly than in a horizontal archive building, thanks to an elevator which, at the time of the inauguration of the archive building, moved at a speed of 1.5 m/s – indicating how archival architecture, technology and user-requirements intersect to shape the appearance and nature of archives. The construction of this tower took eleven years. All windows are protected by screens to protect documents kept on the upper floors from light.³⁵ The Seine-Maritime departmental council took a very innovative decision in 2007 by lighting up the monument that dominates the city: the Rouen Archives Tower is the first media façade of contemporary architecture in France. Twelve years later, the light-systems were renovated. Currently, the building is equipped with 648 lights which illuminate the night by adapting the colours and symbols to current events³⁶ (Fig. 14).

³³ Engelke et al. 2019.

³⁴ Direction des archives de France 1987.

³⁵ Seine-Maritime, Archives départementales 1965 (a publication on the occasion of the inauguration of the Archive Tower on 9 June 1965).

³⁶ <<https://www.lightzoomlumiere.fr/realisation/tour-des-archives-rouen-renovation-premiere-media-facade-france/>> (accessed on 11 November 2024).

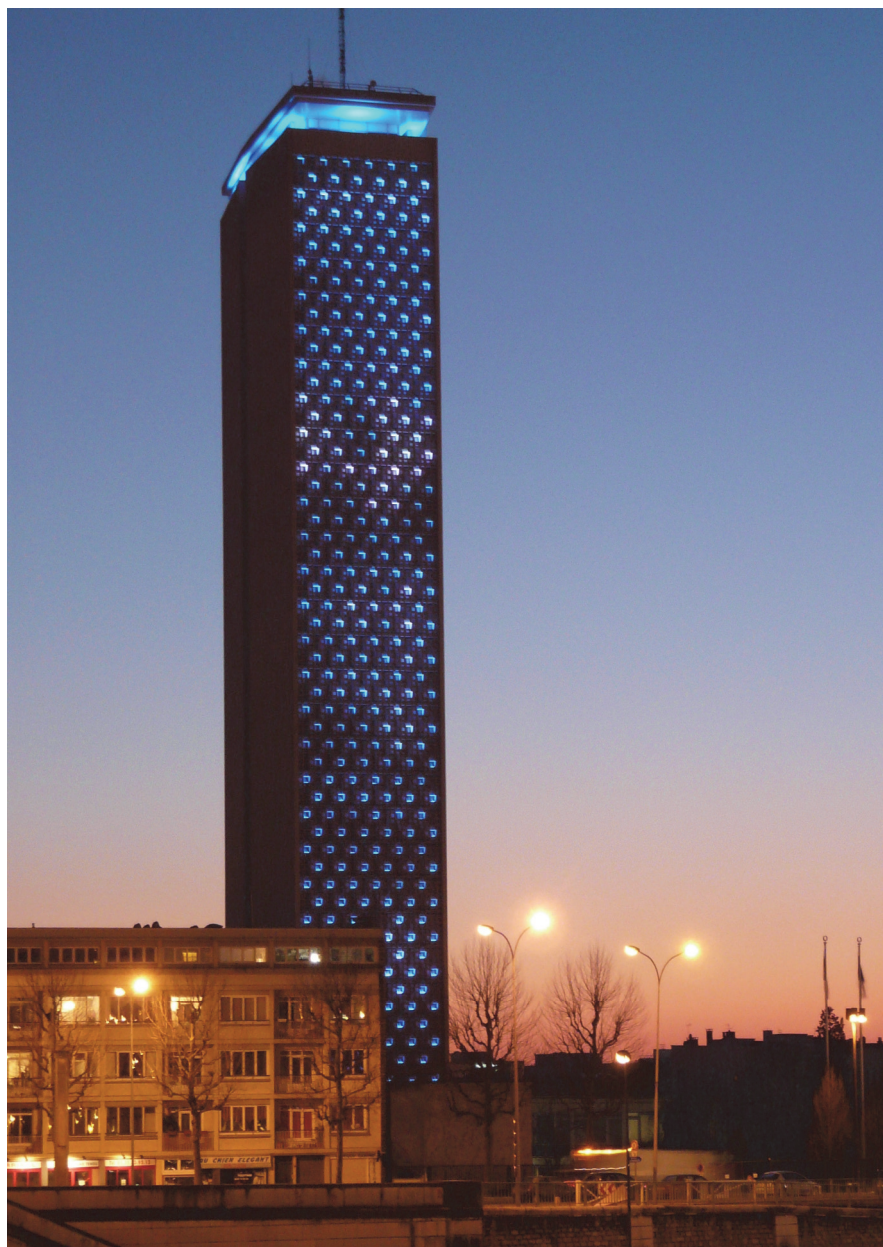


Fig. 14: Tower of the departmental archives of Seine-Maritime, Rouen, photo: Kaelkael; CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikipedia: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Tour_des_archives_-_Rouen.jpg> (accessed on 5 December 2024).

6 Archive building as places of memory

Archive buildings as symbols of power are representative buildings and should generate respect and pride. When the archives of the small Bavarian town of Amberg (in the Upper Palatinate) were built at the beginning of the twentieth century, this feeling was palpable among the population. An article appeared in the local newspaper (*Amberger Volkszeitung*) on 29 March 1909, which read: ‘The whole building promises to be an ornament for Amberg’.³⁷

Some archives are situated in places of particular symbolic importance. Consider, for instance, the French military archives in Vincennes, hosted in a former royal residence built by Louis Le Vau (1612–1670) for Louis XIV. This palace, intimately connected with the history of France, was sumptuously restored in the past decades.³⁸ Originally a hunting residence of the Capetian kings east of Paris, this location turned into one of the governmental places in the late Middle Ages: it was the main residence of King Charles V (1364–1380), who kept his treasury in the donjon. This defensive castle was transformed into a representative palace during the Early Modern Period, where the military archives are hosted (Fig. 15).

The Imperial Archive (Huangshicheng 皇史宬) located within the Forbidden City (Beijing)³⁹ was one of the locations where central documents of the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1911) dynasties were stored. This building, constructed in 1534, is located slightly south-east of the imperial palace. It was intended to house portraits of emperors and princes and official documents issued by the emperors, but, once finished, it was decided to store portraits in a separate archive in the Jingshen Hall (景神殿). The building is constructed with bricks, without timber, to prevent fire. Inside the building, documents are enclosed in 152 cabinets of carved, gold-lacquered wood decorated with dragons and clouds. The archive was plundered and damaged in 1900 by the Eight-Nation Alliance and restored by the Communist regime.⁴⁰

³⁷ Kruse 2010, 9.

³⁸ Chapelot 1994; Boyer 2006.

³⁹ MacFarquhar 1972; Barmé 2008. On Chinese archivist practices, see Zhang 2008; Fölster 2018.

⁴⁰ <<http://www.chinaknowledge.de/History/Terms/huangshicheng.html>> (accessed on 5 December 2024).



Fig. 15: Vincennes castle, photo: Chabe01; CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tour_Roi_Ch%C3%A2teau_Vincennes_6.jpg> (accessed on 5 December 2024).

The conservation of archives for memorial reasons appeared in Europe during the Early Modern Period. During the French Revolution, a crucial period for the creation of many archives in France,⁴¹ the memorial dimension of historical monuments, including, but not limited to written artefacts, increased significantly:⁴² although many pieces of parchment no longer have any juridical value, their symbolic value has now become increasingly important. They served as tokens of and sources for national history and grandeur. For such reasons, a special museum room dedicated to the history of France was created in the Parisian *hôtel* where the French National Archives were located at the beginning of the nineteenth century: in 1867, Napoleon III decided that the most precious documents must be presented to a public audience (Fig. 16).

⁴¹ Guyotjeannin 1998.

⁴² Favier 2004.



Fig. 16: Exhibition room in the Archives nationales / Atelier de photographie (Paris); CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikipedia: <https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Datei:Archives_nationales_%28Paris%29_Grands_d%C3%A9p%C3%B4ts_%28salle_de_l%27Armoire_de_fer%29.png> (accessed on 5 December 2024).

Similarly, archive buildings can help to keep alive the memory of this past in countries whose history is deeply marked by colonisation. Cape Verde is one of the younger states in the world: the Portuguese colony gained its independence in 1975. A former customs office, originally built in 1878, was transformed into the state archive created in December 1988 (Arquivo Histórico Nacional, since 2012, the Arquivo Nacional de Cabo Verde) for preserving the national archival heritage. In this manner, the new national identity can be associated with the remembrance of the colonial past of the archipelago (Fig. 17).



Fig. 17: Arquivo Histórico Nacional, Praia, Cape Verde, photo: Xandu; public domain, via Wikimedia Commons: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Arquivo_Hist%C3%B3rico_Nacional_Praia_Cape_Verde.jpg> (accessed on 5 December 2024).

The centralisation of archives and promotion of historiography based on preserved documents, the consultation of which is strictly controlled by those in authority, are two concomitant phenomena of which Egypt offers a particularly interesting example. The neo-classical ‘Ābdīn Palace (built 1863 to 1874, see Case Study 5.4) symbolises the beginning of modern Cairo, as it was built to give Cairo a European style layout. In addition to the construction of a library, accessible only to a privileged minority, the construction of a building dedicated to archives underlines the importance of these documents:

the ‘Ābdīn archive played two complementary and, for its time, unusual roles: first, its creation represented a pioneering attempt to establish a modern research archive in Egypt; and second, it simultaneously functioned as a state-governed royal workshop for politicized writing.⁴³

⁴³ Di-Capua 2009, 91.

This central Egyptian national archive was subsequently moved to a new location in the 1920s; it is an example of the ‘modernisation’ of archival practices in a semi-colonial context. Yesterday as today, the building leaves its mark on men, as recently noted by an American-Egyptian historian: ‘Custodian of memory, the archive is at the same time an organic part of Egypt’s contemporary state bureaucracy’.⁴⁴

The reuse of industrial buildings for archival purposes, already addressed in the case of Augsburg and Quebec,⁴⁵ is even more obvious in Roubaix (northern France), where the French National Archives of Industrial Work (called Archives nationales du monde du travail since 2007), originally created as the Centre des archives du monde du travail (1983), was created by the French government:⁴⁶ ten years after its creation, this new institution opened its doors in the transformed textile factory Motte-Bossut, built 1843–1845 (Fig. 18).



Fig. 18: Archives nationales du monde du travail), Roubaix, photo: Velvet; CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Roubaix_archives_travail.JPG> (accessed on 5 December 2024).

⁴⁴ Mikhail 2023, 5.

⁴⁵ See above pp. 236–237, 233–234.

⁴⁶ Porte (ed.) 2022.

7 Propaganda and symbolic value of archive buildings

Modern archival architecture can reflect environmental parameters and humanity's interaction with it, thereby, symbolically integrating archiving into broader societal and cultural concerns. This is the case, for instance, in the recently constructed new archival building of the French Département de l'Isère in the Alps: the skin and the concrete structure of the project link the geology of the limestone massifs which surround the Grenoble plain to the industrial history of this region, which is also an area playing a major role in technological research in France. The building is composed of three entities: a base, a plant stratum and the storage space. These spaces are supposed to express the raw and mineral nature of the territory of Isère (Fig. 19).⁴⁷



Fig. 19: Archives of the department of Isère, France, photo: Binnette; CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Archives_d%C3%A9partementales_de_l%27Is%C3%A8re.jpg> (accessed on 5 December 2024).

⁴⁷ Delohen 2022.

However, the fact that the construction or decoration of an archive building is an instrument of political communication and can be used as a propaganda tool is nothing new. This was the case, for example, at Westminster Abbey in the Middle Ages. This church featured a distinctive muniment room, which ‘occupies a curious position overlooking the South Transept and is a kind of open gallery midway between the floor and the triforium of the Abbey Church’.⁴⁸ This room dates from the reign of King Richard II (1377–1399), whose emblem, the White Hart, is painted on the wall above the armoire where the archival documents are kept: by painting this emblem over their archives, the monks were underlining the link between themselves and royalty (Fig. 20). The popes were also aware of the importance of propaganda through images, since the decoration of archive rooms is a means of communication about the value of the documents kept there. One of the most illustrious archive places is the Vatican archive (for a long time called *Archivio Segreto Vaticano*, since 2019, *Archivio Apostolico Vaticano*), created out of previously disjointed papal document repositories in many stages in the early seventeenth century.⁴⁹ The iconographic programme of the rooms decorated at that time emphasises the affirmation of the pre-eminence of the papacy.⁵⁰

Perhaps no archive building can express the sacrality of legal and historical documents more clearly than the American National Archives Building in Washington DC. The American Congress authorised the construction of the National Archives Building in 1926 as part of a massive public buildings programme in the capital city. This structure, built in 1931–1935, imitates the architecture of Greek temples. Consequently, it makes a clear link to Athenian democracy and celebrates the proudest elements of American identity, as President Herbert Hoover said during the cornerstone ceremony (in February 1933): ‘This temple of our history will appropriately be one of the most beautiful buildings in America, an expression of the American soul. It will be one of the most durable, an expression of the American character’⁵¹ (Fig. 21).

⁴⁸ Tanner 1936, 44; see also Mortimer 2012, 2–4.

⁴⁹ Poncet 2007.

⁵⁰ Maiorino 2014.

⁵¹ Reinert Mason 2009, 11; on the building, see also Viola 1984, 39–53.



Fig. 20: Muniment room at Westminster Abbey; © Dean and Chapter of Westminster, London.



Fig. 21: National Archives Building, Washington DC, photo: David Samuel; CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:US_National_Archives_Building.jpg> (accessed on 5 December 2024).

8 Conclusion

As we have seen, the stability and security of archive buildings in the face of external dangers, whether fire, damp or theft, are essential criteria in their design. Another criterion is the need to cope with ever-increasing documentary production. Despite the current practice of selecting documents for archiving, this has led to the relocation of archive collections and the erection of buildings that meet social demand, contribute to regional planning policy or influence the awareness of the symbolic value of archive documents. Archive buildings have increasingly gone from being places where documents are stored to being places where they are communicated. We can, therefore, consider that archive buildings, as places of memory, are not only places for preserving the memory of a society but also contribute to the construction of its identity.

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