



Markus Friedrich, trans. John Noel Dillon.- *The Birth of the Archive: A History of Knowledge* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2018), 284p.

At the first sight of the title of *The Birth of the Archive: A History of Knowledge*, the one may think that the book deals with archives' history. However, it is deeper than that. The book is the English translation of *Die Geburt des Archives* published originally in 2013 to provide a survey about the historical development of the perception as well as the use of archives as important documents belonging to both governmental institutions and individuals to produce knowledge. Markus Friedrich

has chosen the Early Modern Era and Middle Age in Europe. He focuses on France and Germany as case studies and examples to support his arguments and analysis. Therefore, the book is a critical survey about the importance of archives to change people's culture and societies.

There is a connection between people and archives. People produce archives and archives produce knowledge for people. So the relationship between the people and archives as documents is basic. However, the function of archives is not limited to a certain objective. Archives serve both culture and society. Therefore, as the writer argues that archives' utility goes beyond the political authorities' use and importance. As it was the early function of archives.

Tracing the history of archives, the writer doesn't limit himself to provide a chronological development of archives; however, he focuses on mapping out the historical development of the use as well as the development of the European people's awareness of the importance of archives. At the very beginning of the book, the writer introduces his survey by some narratives telling the readers some stories in relation to archives. These narratives give the readers the impression that the book is a selection of varied old stories about archives. However, by choosing such narratives, the author reinforces his views about the importance of archives to people's lives and culture. Again, the writer deals with the historical development of the use of archives by kings, archivists, historians, farmers, and ordinary people. In other words, he sheds light to the gradual historical evolution of individuals' awareness of the utility of archives to their lives and how archives develop the people's social consciousness and culture through the different knowledge they provide to anyone who is interested in archives. Once the archives become part of people's lives, they surely influence their culture as well as their societies.

The Birth of the Archive: A History of Knowledge represents a survey that aims at establishing new concepts breaking the traditional views and classical uses of archives that were limited to the upper class in the Middle Ages in Europe. The aim of the writer in this study is to overthrow the idea that archives were important as political documents and which are used by authorities as national heritage to the idea that archives help to change and influence societies through the important and varied

knowledge they provide. Again, the author focuses on the ways archives were used throughout history mainly during the period under study to come to the conclusion through the chapters of the book that the influence of archives on the people depended on how those archives were used.

As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, the writer focuses on the Middle Ages of European use of archives limiting himself to the examples of France and Germany. To reinforce his approach, he provides readers with various examples of historians and writers belonging to that period and who attempted to analyse and present different concepts of the use of archives in developing human's thoughts through the knowledge they provided. The type of knowledge that can impact the way people act and react in relation to archives as well as the culture in general. For the author, archives have always represented a contradictory and ambivalent meaning and use in relation to the European culture and society mainly in the Early Modern Period. The writer focuses on the fact that the function of archives in the European culture was always ambivalent according to the aim and use. Throughout history archives have been gradually included in various domains. In addition to their primer use as political documents, they were included in courts and laws' making.

Again, the writer argues that the importance of archives can be considered as symptomatic of the rising of people's awareness. The social and cultural significant role that archives played in the lives of people then went beyond the objectives of archives as governmental institutions. The writer in this survey is not simply tracing a historical line of archives, but his aim is to shed light to the improvement of the cultural and social perspectives in relation to the use of archives and their gradual transformation to be viewed not only as institutional and governmental documents but to become part of people's culture and society in Europe mainly France and Germany. To be successful in his arguments, in all chapters of the book, the writer presents examples of historians and authors who contributed in the revolutionary change of how archives were viewed and used. In fact, archives were considered as purely governmental documents, which were preserved in archival institutions as national memorial heritage. It was this concept that made of archives a source of power to authorities.

As there were institutional archives, the writer mentions in his book that there were individual archives. The individual archives in the Middle Ages in Europe were owned by individuals like farmers and ordinary people. In this context, the writer emphasises the fact that those individual archives were as important as governmental ones since they provided valuable knowledge that could not be neglected and was equally important to institutional archives preserved by governments. Those individual archives had the same cultural and social influence on people though the knowledge they provided. So, the individual archival knowledge could not be neglected in relation to development of people's culture as well as societies. In this context, the author provides an interesting link between on the one hand archival knowledge and the other hand the notion of knowledge and power. According to the author the knowledge offered by archives cannot be a means of power but can be a means of operating such power.

In his argument on the importance of the use of archives as source of knowledge, the writer does not neglect the difficulties that encounter any researcher of that archival knowledge. Being considered as governmental documents made the access to the information that archives contained was completely controlled by authorities. Hence, the benefit from archives' knowledge and its use was limited to a certain category of people. It was difficult to historians to have access to any document they wanted. Gradually throughout history, archives became a source of creativity of historical narratives. They were considered as source of truth which was basic to historical writings. The book argues that the Early Modern period in Europe generally and particularly in France and Germany the historiographical archival use became fundamental for historians. Archives were used as original documents to convey the truth to the people about the past. The emergence of historiography then in Europe reinforced the emergence of the cultural use of archives in historical researches and among historians. Collecting information from archives enriched the historical narratives as well as gave those narratives credibility. Again, the writer sheds light to the value of archival documents in the modern historiographical studies. Archival documents help historians to have clear views about the past and the era they are interested in in their surveys. Being aware of the importance of archives in relation to historiography, archives become basic to get knowledge about the past and to result in historical narratives as well. So, this important use of archives has resulted in an important relation between archives and historiography; which has formed basics of any successful historical research and writing until now.

The Birth of the Archive: A History of Knowledge provides its readers with very interesting and important historical information about archives development and their gradual influence on European people's awareness and culture during the Early Middle Ages and Modern era in France and Germany. Still, the various critical points that the writer dealt with in this book are opened to debate and appealing for further future analysis and writings about archives as a broad large field of study. Being a recent translated survey *The Birth of the Archive: A History of Knowledge* is highly recommended to be read as well as to be used in academic researches as one of basic references in historical studies.

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