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call for papers

Gender and Archives

edited by LAURA CASELLA, SERENA GALASSO

The journal *Genesis* invites contributions to a themed issue devoted to **Gender and Archives**. A critique of the sources is the necessary starting point for any historical rethinking and for opening up new historiographical perspectives on gender inequalities. Since the 1970s – i.e. with the earliest studies of the pioneers in women’s history – archival excavation campaigns have identified unpublished documents and opened up new fields of research. However, the silence of the sources has continued to be evoked all too often in those (frequent) cases when records are sought but not found. Even so, to what extent do these documentary gaps reflect actual absences? Or is it rather that we do not sufficiently question the structure of archival and documentary systems and the logics underpinning their formation in the long run? The lack of sources is not always a given, and the low visibility of women in archives must be contextualised.

In recent years, the notion of ‘archive’ has been the subject of critical readings and, particularly in Anglophone historiography, such approaches, fuelled by post-colonial theory, intersectional feminisms, and queer studies have produced a real paradigm shift, an *archival turn* (De Vivo-Guidi-Silvestri 2016; Walsham 2016; Poncet 2019). These new epistemologies emphasise the need to deconstruct canonical archival strategies that tend to marginalise non-normative and subaltern subjectivities, providing useful theoretical keys also for rethinking the historical processes of document preservation in the pre-industrial period. It is now clear that the archive is a socio-cultural product shaped by asymmetric power relations and by precise projects of memory transmission. In other words, preservation practices of textual and material traces are discursive strategies that stand between us and the reconstruction of past events, and as such should be problematised and studied.

Scholars have most frequently focused on the transmission of documentary evidence related to political structures, chanceries and bureaucratic apparatuses, with the aim of assessing the mechanisms of state-building and forms of social domination. More recently, private archives have also been studied in the same perspective for the memorial discourses they produce on lineage and family history (De Lurdes Rosa 2019; Véronique Lamazou-Duplan 2021). However, the gender logics underlying the genesis and form of archives have rarely been taken into account and have never been the subject of a comparative and long-term analysis.

In this issue of *Genesis*, we aim to apply a gendered approach to the formation of archival systems, broadly understood as organised networks of papers, during the period spanning the late Middle Ages to the nineteenth century. This timeframe is the most appropriate for considering practices of documentary production and transmission that precede the full establishment and institutionalisation of modern archival science. Contributions are invited from researchers who intend to explore the following research avenues, based on specific case studies:

- The responsibilities of women and men in the production and transmission of written, personal, and family memory, and thus their roles in actively defining the order and morphology of archival systems. Also of interest are the spaces and methods through which the papers were preserved.

- The materiality of documents, their supports and their extrinsic characteristics, and how they can reveal, in a comparative key, differences or similarities between men's and women's documents; what these papers tell about literacy, and the literary, legal, accounting and economic culture of those who produced them and their possible gender differences.
- The transmission trajectories of the papers (and of the small objects sometimes associated with them) or how writings produced or owned by women have been integrated into archival systems; the formation of links and systems of documents relating to an actor and their dialogue with the archive as a whole.
- The problem of documentary gaps, discards and operations of voluntary or involuntary memory suppression. The aim is to clarify the processes of sorting and preserving documents in order to question not only what the archive contains, but also what it prevents us from seeing.
- Interdisciplinary and epistemological reflections on the concept of archive, on the ambiguous boundaries between libraries, collections and documentary systems, and on the logical-descriptive categories, often shaped on a masculine gender with claims to neutrality and normativity, through which we order and think about traces of the past.

Abstracts of unpublished articles must be of approximately 3,000 characters (400 words) long and must be sent to the editors, Laura Casella (laura.casella@uniud.it) and Serena Galasso (serena.galasso@unipd.it), by July 29, 2024. They must be accompanied by a short biographical note of the author. Articles selected for publication must not exceed 50,000 characters, including spaces and footnotes, and must be submitted by November 30, 2024. Contributions in English, French and Spanish will be accepted, but only from non-Italian scholars.

Selective bibliography

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