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Itinerario, Vol. 44, No. 3, 591–608. © The Author(s), 2021. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of Research Institute for History, Leiden University
doi:10.1017/S0165115320000364

Unseating "State" and "Archive": Mobility and Manipulation in Past Environments and Present Praxis

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These concluding reflections assess how the contributors to this special issue intervene in key assumptions that shape the current field of archival studies. As the "archival turn" gains ground, forms of Euro- and state-centrism reappear in scholarship otherwise innovative in its attention to the textual remnants of the past. Here, instead, we explore the methodological stakes involved in defining both the "archive" and the historical power brokers who created and preserved a documentary record in pursuit of their varied social, cultural, economic, and political projects. The essay points to the resurgence of culturalist and civilisational indices for comparative archivistics, and follows the arguments collected in this issue to assert by contrast the often uneven and uneasy regional, administrative, and procedural definitions at work within preserved records. Identifying "mobility" as both a methodological tactic and a historical process, this conclusion presents a fluid rather than fixed textual landscape and presents an alternative frame for investigating preservationist practices.

Keywords: periodisation, archivality, Eurasia, Ottoman *mühimme*, record keeping

Introduction: Beyond Monoliths?

The "archival turn" may indeed be a now decades-old awakening to the linkages between power, textual production, and the preservation of both, yet the import of this turn for the study of centralising states in an early modern Eurasian environment still demands careful attention. At least three elements of this turn risk reinforcing chronological, civilisational, and methodological biases once thought to be overturned: the presumption of teleology in periodisations that assume an early modern/modern rupture and equate modernity with bureaucratic functionality; a persistent assumption that this modernity, and the processes that led to its emergence, is also quintessentially "European"; and the seemingly steadfast methodological commitment to the presumed singularity of the "state" as a historical actor in itself.[1] Hence, while a renewed focus on archives brings a welcome "turn" towards the materiality of the past, the landscape and chronoscape

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0165115320000364 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of this past surreptitiously act as a disciplinary time warp in archival studies. Indeed, a recent fixation on archivistics reasserts a comparative method reliant on distinct civilisational blocs.[2] Unwittingly or not, scholars attentive to archives and archival practices have all too often reproduced conceptual hegemonies reliant on culturalist and civilisationalist discourses. Amounting to a form of "neo-Eurocentrism," this trend is particularly alarming in a global moment of political volatility.[3]

It is true, then, that the ascendency of historical archival studies has refocused attention on the relationship between record-keeping practices, authoritative claims over material and human resources, and the redefinition of territory and sovereignty between the fifteenth and the nineteenth centuries.[4] Yet when positing the "archive" as an object of research, scholars dedicated to the history and evolution of documentary repositories also risk returning to culturalist modes of comparison and to teleological arguments concerning institutional developments.[5] This essay reflects on the contributions of this special issue as a means to redefine both "state" and "archive" when investigating early modern Eurasian dynamics. It further seeks to draw attention to a text-dependent universe of records that both produced and preserved hierarchies of authority in competitive regional, juridical, and transimperial environments. This text-dependent universe of power and control belies the typology of "European" and "non-European" record-keeping practices and resists naming or locating the "archive" within a particular locale.[6] It suggests instead that the adoption of text-saturated legal transactions into an imperial base of sovereignty and the coeval transformation of chancery practices across Eurasia challenges both the myopic focus on the historiography of "early modern European archives" and the usefulness of the "Islamic archive" posited as the counterpoint.[7] Drawing first on the essays that comprise this special issue and then on a few examples from Ottoman record-keeping strategies, the essay challenges scholars of early modern archivality to attend to how the manipulability and mobilisation of texts offers an alternative "site" for the archive. This focus on manipulation and mobility requires in turn a different analysis of both the current storehouses of "documents" we constitute as researchers and the record-keeping practices and preservationist ethos that generated the texts now catalogued therein.

This distinct analytic mode is particularly important for those of us fortunate (or unfortunate, given the stamina required) enough to work in the "archival abundance" of Ottoman imperial action. In the rather misleading question as to the "presence" or "absence" of an "archive" in medieval and early modern Eurasian contexts, we have learned two things: to expand our notion of "archive" to the various practices that generate and preserve texts across genres and sites, and to treat with suspicion the presumption of mastery and sovereignty contained within the manifold loose folios and bound registers of centralising early modern states, such as the Ottoman. I would push to suggest one further point, and that is to resist the metonymic relationship between "archive" and "state" even *while* working within centralised repositories. The institutions we visit as researchers are themselves products of nineteenth-century reforming state agendas, equipped with organisational categories and digital search engines that often obscure past processes of textual production and preservation.[8] I argue that the centralised court "archive" as historians

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conjure it, even as they work within it, is a kind of trompe l'oeil—an illusion of fixity that masks a massive effort to mobilise and extend territorial sovereignty via textual assertions that map geographic limits, shape administrative categories of governance, and thus created and enacted a legible "ground," so to speak, of imperial rule.

In a sense, then, the "presence" of a centralised court archive poses a grave methodological problem, one that requires the unravelling of both imposed organisational schemas and imperial avowals of sovereignty so as to reveal the fragility of territorial control and anxieties of influence that lie beneath them. The fixity of both court and "archive" is a grand imperial project in itself, one that we should not unwittingly consume. With this approach, the now commonplace claim that imperial establishments produced voluminous paper trails testifies to vulnerability rather than strength, and to vying competitive interest groups rather than sovereign mastery.[9] By tracing the material and textual tactics deployed to define, navigate, and sustain sovereignty we might turn the assemblage of actors and artefacts that produced a vision of imperial coherency into its own historical repository of transimperial processes at work, one that moves beyond frontier diplomacy or "encounter" as methods for analysing early modern spaces.[10] And this repository of our own making, following the textual strategies adopted to assert and extend sovereignty, reveals multiple sites of history-making and the inherent fragility of imperial power. It thus challenges even the framework of "empire" or a dynastic court as the most revealing object of inquiry.

The Textual Traverse as Historical Method?

The workshop that inspired the collection of essays in this special issue stands as a rare and prescient intervention in these methodological and theoretical conundrums. Its framework of "Beyond the Islamicate Chancery" became a forum for first linking and then re-envisioning state-centric, Eurocentric, and what might be called "archive"-centric accounts of record-keeping practices.[11] Each essay, via distinct textual genres, geographies, and chronoscapes, tracks how competing claims to resources and privilege were registered, enacted, preserved, and then invoked as sources of authority in competitive regional and global environments. Consequently, the authors show that "archiving" or acts of registration that first enshrine and then preserve authority was only one amongst many tactics for extending political power. Further, they suggest that each step in this process (registration, implementation, preservation, invocation) was an inherently *political* act, and hence vulnerable to and evocative of fluctuating power dynamics both in the moment of a text's production and in its idiosyncratic history of amendment, abrogation, and even neglect or obfuscation.

Collectively the contributors to this special issue decipher the processes by which claims to space (territorial, commercial, social) were realised and even naturalised through carefully constructed textual practices. These textual practices drew on languages of sovereignty, statehood, and ownership that were not fixed, but rather revelatory of a constantly renegotiated record of shifting regional and political alliances. Reducing the ultimate storehouse of this record to an imperial archive, whether Mamluk, Mughal,

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Muscovite, or Ottoman, thus elides the varied actors and practices that crossed imperial, juridical, and confessional boundaries.[12] Cohorts of scribes, messengers, jurists, diplomats, bureaucrats, translators, and information-gatherers all played a role in defining, deploying, and enshrining a vision of political authority.[13] These were "mobile" actors, as their assigned duties and the intellectual and sociopolitical communities that shaped these duties entailed both physical and conceptual movement.[14] Complicating this image of the "imperial" archive are also the multiple regional actors and institutions that created their own paper trails, such as the shari'a courts, managers of commercial or charitable properties, and, perhaps most profoundly, the prominent petitionary universe through which supplicants to the court deployed and reshaped the language of rule itself.[15] The contributors to this volume thus traverse these physical and conceptual expanses and thereby define as historical object a new kind of geography. This geography is framed not by isolated empires, states, or even regional power brokers, but rather by the traverse itself, a constant movement across genres, landscapes, and regimes. In the process, we can see realised a protracted struggle to negotiate status and to affirm political and legal authority in a bureaucratic and ceremonial vocabulary legible *across* boundaries, whether territorial, imperial, or social.[16] While the expansion and contraction of courtly establishments and their dynastic houses may suggest centralised nodes of authoritative rule, it is from within the *circuit* of text and performance that a new understanding of entangled, coeval preservation practices might be explored, one that renders meaningful the "Eurasian" as a historical unfolding.[17]

This special issue therefore dislodges the assumption that either "archive" or "state" are fixed in space and by imperial intent. It draws attention to the mechanisms by which vocabularies of governance and genres of textual authority both produce and are produced by protracted negotiations over categories and the rights to resources contained in those categories. One consequence of this shift is that the contributors move away from reifying a monolithic, centralised state apparatus and instead reveal territorial spaces defined by uneven supervisory oversight and ambiguous rule. Perhaps more pointedly, the essays contained here suggest that sovereignty itself is parlayed rather than fixed and comprises a bricolage of tactics intended to transform fragmentary power into a unified vision of political authority. As Lauren Benton argues, attention to "divisible sovereignty" rather than unified states more appropriately captures the punctuated nature of rule across an early modern landscape.[18] The authors of this special issue directly link the "papereality" of governance produced by imperial, diplomatic, bureaucratic, and legal actors to the vulnerabilities of rule, wherein the production and preservation of textual genres vie for the space (again, territorial and conceptual) to assert rights and privilege amidst a volatile competitive environment.[19]

"Divisible Sovereignty" in the Mughal Context

Nicholas Abbott perhaps best captures this trend, as he demonstrates how the shifting valences of an Indo-Persian vocabulary of governance were first used to augment provincial autonomy *within* the late-Mughal empire and then became the textual scaffolding for

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a brokered division of sovereignty between regional actors, the Mughal "state," and the British East India Company over the course of the eighteenth century. Abbott traverses textual genres of bureaucrats, treatise writers, jurists, imperial edicts, and the treaties and petitions generated by regional power brokers and reveals how in combination these textual assertions shifted the metonymic relationship of statehood from the personhood of a dynastic Timurid ruler to the territorial domain of "Hindustan." He thus evokes a "state" conjured by multiple actors for diverse purposes via a shifting textual terrain. This "state," detached from the Mughal emperor, enabled regional governors such as Shuja-ud-daula (r. 1754–75) to engage in a game of homologous translations in his bid for control of Awadh and Allahabad: the singularity of an imperial household (*sarkār*) reframed as a regional governorship, and the territory (*saltanat*) of empire as the private dominion and hereditary suzerainty of provincial guardianship (*riyāsat*). While this gradual depersonalisation of rule and move towards definitions of "statehood" located in territorial dominion and bureaucratic specialisation rather than solely dynastic lineage is perhaps recognisable for early modernists across the Eurasian landscape, Abbott inserts the East India Company *into* this bid for translation-cum-authority. At least for a time, the commensurate relationship between Shuja-ud-daula and the East India Company as share-holders in the division of territorial resources secured a significant treaty regime in 1765 that became the basis for a new conception of empire in the decades that followed. Both Company and provincial governor claimed "*sarkār*" status and bolstered this category to confer possession and dominion in a newly configured "inter-state" system. Their bid for power placed the emperor at a disadvantage, and thus captures the vulnerability of imperial rule itself in the midst of multiple interest groups.

Abbott's focus on how vocabularies of governance also produce a legislative terrain and embody mechanisms for administrative governance reminds us of the power of discursive categories.[20] Like Bhavani Rahman, Abbott engages with the paradoxical ambivalences of text-dependent imperial bureaucracies and the problematic assumptions of the scholars who study them.[21] As bureaucrats and statesmen sought to "fix" and render legible unwieldy composite domains, they created fixed categories of human and material resources, catalogued and registered so as to guide governance and frame petitions of grievance and complaint. They thus created a world in their own image, a mirror that sustained the empire but occluded the artifice of its production. A created category is also a category that can be manipulated, forged, or imitated for new purposes, often purposes of resistance and subversion.[22] Thus, the "papereality" of empire proposes legibility but conjures the illegible, the reordering of truth via a reordering of the vocabularies of governance.

Documentary Life-Spans in Late-Mamluk Cairo

While Abbott's story is cast within an eighteenth-century political landscape as large territorial empires jockeyed for position and redefined governance in an emerging international state system, we should not assume that this was somehow a "modern" story.

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Rather, it serves as a reminder of the uneasy claims to supremacy of centralising states more generally, and the multivocality of record-keeping practices that shaped the diverse textual terrain within them. In order to make this point, I turn from Abbott's eighteenth-century story to Daisy Livingston's work on Cairo's urban real estate of the early fifteenth century. Here we see the penultimate Mamluk sultan, Qānsuh al-Ghawrī, acting as one party in a crowded commercial landscape as he sought to preserve his legacy within the architectural fabric of the city. Pointedly, Livingston's contribution also illuminates the larger stakes involved in "paucity" arguments in the field of comparative archival studies. Livingston pushes back against scholars who assume the absence of large caches of preserved imperial records automatically reflects the absence of record-dependent practices more generally. Here we are reminded that the presumptive obsession with imperial caches eclipses the robust preservationist instincts of the quotidian—an odd turn away from the lessons of social historians in decades past. Livingston reveals a saturated "textual matrix" of legal property deeds in late-Mamluk Cairo linked to the Islamicate practice of *waqf* endowments—a practice that served to support public institutions and services (such as mosques, public kitchens, schools, and water fountains) but was also a well-used mechanism for sequestering wealth and property to individuals and their households, thus serving as a loophole around strict inheritance laws.

Livingston moves us out of the chancery practices of a centralised court into the long life-span of records intended to ensure the legal perpetuity of *waqf* endowments. This turn from the life-span of empire to the "archival life" of a particular genre of record keeping leads to surprising insights. First, Livingston's meticulous case study of a small series of *waqf* scrolls and codices brings into focus exhaustive methods of amendment, the incorporation of multiple textual genres, and the cross-referencing tactics necessary for the production and preservation of one documentary horizon. In true microhistorical form, then, attention to the life-span of a particular cache of documents within one textual genre reveals a world in which social, political, and legal alliances were forged through textual attestations of authentic ownership. Second, Livingston insists on multiplicity rather than singularity when deploying terms such as "archive," "document," or "state." Not just a centralised state archive, but interdependent preservationist practices that connected the imperial chancery, the offices of various judges and practitioners, and the scribes and notaries appended to each who together inscribed (literally, via the pen) the social, commercial, and political worlds of late-Mamluk Cairo. Extending from this then, is not just the genre of *waqf,* but the proliferating types of legal and property-related transactions enfolded *within* the textual matrix of a *waqf* corpus. And finally, it reveals not just a Mamluk ruler or ruling elite, but a record-dependent urban fabric in which the ruler too was one of many actors enfolded within the life-span of *waqf* endowment deeds.

This last point brings us full circle. Blinded by an obsession with centralised archives, we are in danger of ignoring a documentary terrain in which a Mamluk sultan sought to secure his personal status and privilege via a sanctioned Islamicate mechanism for preserving wealth and legacy—the *waqf.* Preservation was not solely an imperial venture, and the empire's ruler was not the sole actor in a competitive regional and transregional

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environment with multiple textual venues for claiming and sequestering rights. Livingston's focus on *waqf* both as individual document and repository leads us towards preservationist practices *outside* the court (by individuals and institutions), and yet utilised by court actors when necessary. Further, the mobility of the *waqf* documentary genre reinforces my opening suggestion that if we seek to unfix "archive" and "state" we must also be wary of fixing a particular textual record in either place or time. Mobility and manipulation were both tactics *internal* to the *waqf* record and then carried across space and time to *external* environments wherein the *waqf* deed served as a form of attestation. Marginalia, references to other deeds of sale, substitutions, and transfers of ownership, requests for investigatory sojourns into the urban landscape, and the deployment of the deed within varied judicial settings reveal a documentary life-span that was simultaneously discursive, temporal, and spatial: the impedimenta of the text as both container and producer of the impedimenta of governance in an imperial setting. Thus, to Livingston's "textual matrix" I add the sociospatial universe of enscripted lives.[23]

"Multi-Processed" Documents in the Ottoman Chancery

Even when dealing most directly with a so-called imperial "archive," Selim Güngörürler's essay shows that the effort to analyse record-keeping practices *within* dynastic and courtly establishments and the textual production and circulation of materials *from* and *between* these courts also forces us to think *beyond* the court, the imperial establishment, or the "state." Textual assertions of sovereignty (such as edicts, regulations, treaties and contracts, appointments of officials, transfers of goods and individuals, and mobilisation of resources for campaigns and ceremonies) sought to bend territory into text, thereby producing legible regulatory regimes that shaped and sustained sovereignty. These textual assertions are thus uneasy hybrids, folding regional dynamics into an evolving imperial vocabulary of administrative mastery and transforming regional rivals and dynastic competitors into a preserved record of negotiated status. A retrievable repository of administrative judgement thereby implemented a preserved history of sovereign claims within a turbulent regional, legal, and transimperial environment.

This repository of preserved judgement was produced by increasingly specialised scribal elites, drawn from legacies of calligraphic authority literally conquered and co-opted for imperial purposes.[24] A similarity in the materiality of textual practices despite presumed ruptures such as the Ottoman conquest of Mamluk territories, or imperial rivalries such as Safavid, Ottoman, and Mughal, indicates not just a shared praxis of governance but also the shared investment in an evolving commitment to textual authority. The layout of proclaimed edicts of command, the types of situations that provoked imperial judgement, the use of marginalia that created an archived history of preserved assessments and amendments, the seals used to ensure authenticity in the midst of fragile and uneven structures of territorial control, along with an instinct to systematise codices, scrolls, and bound registers of property exchanges, legal judgements, official appointments, and land management systems, indicate a coeval praxis of en-textualising territory. The *waqf* scrolls of late-Mamluk Cairo might purposefully be used to decipher

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0165115320000364 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the multilayered folios of Ottoman imperial financial transactions. Both enshrine an effort to record and preserve a history of property claims, and both reveal a text and a property (or territory) in motion—transitioning from one owner to the next, indicating negotiated transfers, and constantly amended through marginalia and additions.

Güngörürler's quest for Safavid traces in the Ottoman imperial record serves as yet another entry point into the critique of state-centric "archival" histories. A heavy reliance on preserved treaties, the tried and true (and tired) method of diplomatics, defines the "treaty event" as the primary index of sovereign territorial mastery and vulnerability. If Livingston criticises "paucity" accounts, then Güngörürler challenges us to think beyond the treaty for glimpses of interimperial dynamics. Further, the "interimperial" is also "transimperial" in that the transition from chancery scribe or translator to imperial negotiator-cum-ambassador that marks the careers of officials within the Ottoman and Safavid courtly establishments were inflected by conversions and translations from one imperial system into the bureaucratic functionality of another, an echo of Abbott's portrayal of Mughal dynamics. While rivalry typifies scholarly analysis of these *inter*-imperial relations, the coeval emergence of bureaucratic specialisation gestures towards a different narrative: one in which the genres, style, and production of texts speaks to a transimperial institutional vocabulary and method of rule. Moreover, these shared strategies across Eurasian spaces generated a "companionate universe" in which ambassadorial negotiators became joined in a collaborative exercise of producing and exchanging texts.

Thus, Güngörürler's contribution embodies the value of cross-genre and cross-documentary reading evident throughout this special issue. Faced with the lack of any recorded "official" Ottoman–Safavid agreement or treaty (*ahid-nāme*) from the Peace of Zuhab (1639) to the collapse of the Safavid dynasty in 1722, Güngörürler responds to presumed "paucity" with an exploration of financial records rarely read as a prism of diplomatics. As he also argues elsewhere, this presumed lack of "eventful relations" ignores the emergence of new textual genres such as the monarchal epistle (*hümâ-i hümâyûn*) and grand-vizierial letter (*mektûb-i sâmî*), in addition to new methods of bureaucratic specialisation and the reiterative processing of records within imperial chanceries.[25] Güngörürler therefore draws our attention to the highly regulated circulation of recorded entries, or "copies" *within* the chancery as an index of political shifts and claims to sovereignty that shape broader transimperial relations. Hence, the redefinition of the state secretary (*reisü'l-küttâb*) from a mere chancery manager to an "imperial plenipotentiary" was linked to his scribal role as master of textual composition and style: the threat cloaked in an offer of friendship; a slight variation in text masking political manoeuvres; a courteous phrase delivered with the import of an ultimatum.

"Empires of Ignorance" or Muscovite Tales of Obfuscation and Subterfuge

This refusal to diagnose either "state" or "chancery" as monolithic or singular, given the multiple actors and the multifaceted procedural techniques deployed to enumerate, embody, and implement sovereign authority, also eschews as given the truth claims of preserved records. First, Güngörürler reveals an anxiety over authenticity *within* the

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financial corpus as scribes and bureaucrats developed techniques to signal accountability and certify the accumulation or dispersal of goods and services. This anxiety over authenticity and verifiability was also a key part of the "textual matrix" Livingston explores in *waqf* records. And Abbott reveals how both regional power brokers and agents of the East India Company manipulated the language of sovereignty, presumably the preserve of the dynasty, for their own territorial advancements. But it is in Sartori and Abdurasulov's essays that we are most fully forced to question our assumptions that a preserved record reveals the "truth" about a past encounter. True, the "reading against the grain" mantra has long established itself as key to historical methods of textual inquiry, yet often enough we fall into the habit of equating text with imperial authority, imperial authority with "state," and both text and imperial authority with the logic of knowledge-based governance.[26] By contrast, Sartori and Abdurasulov lead us into distinct but connected histories of diplomatic and archival feints that join Central Asian, Muscovite, and Mughal actors in a conspiracy of mystification.

These two essays chart a kind of territorial and textual triangulation between the Russian state of Muscovy, the Mughal empire, and Central Asian authorities in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Both Abdurasulov and Sartori demonstrate that widely held assumptions concerning diplomatic and commercial relations between these actors—such as the focus on Emperor Peter I's (1682–1725) imperial ambitions and Central Asian antagonism in response, the "failed" attempt by the Muscovite state to engage directly with Mughal emperors, and purported Central Asian "barbarism" within the archival record—were in fact inventive constructs of distinct actors seeking first to direct and then to profit from information-gathering missions. Abdurasulov suggests that regional rulers in Khiva and Bukhara produced as discursive trope and diplomatic ideal a "mirage" of a passage to India in the face of an increasingly protectionist and expansionist Muscovite state. The emerging institutionalisation of formal commercial and diplomatic channels by Muscovite statesmen threatened the "hybrid" and unofficial, yet profitable, trade in human and material resources that key Central Asian brokers depended on. More significant, perhaps, is Abdurasulov's insistence that Khivan and Bukharan merchants, ambassadors, and rulers successfully parlayed the ongoing Muscovite ignorance (wilful or otherwise) of Mughal courtly practices and habits into a mechanism for their own territorial prominence.

Still, the mystery of a protracted "ignorance" of Mughal affairs by the Muscovite state despite lengthy negotiations, diplomatic attempts, *and* a preserved documentary record of such attempts within the state archives remains a question in Abdurasulov's essay that Sartori seeks to answer. Sartori traces the dramatic arc of a caravan bent on a mission of "reconnaissance" for the Muscovite state that embarked from Astrakhan and headed towards Khiva in 1732 but was ambushed along the way. The story itself amply illuminates the fragmented and often inchoate messiness of both territorial mastery and temporal longevity, as Khivan guarantees of safety were null and void within a competitive Central Asian environment. But Sartori is most interested in what happened to the meticulous cartographic and textual reports recorded by the head of the caravan, a German military officer by the name of Johann Gustav Garber, in addition to the

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chain of correspondence between the Muscovite councils of foreign affairs and trade, the chancellery of the Astrakhan governor, and the scribal records of the Khan of Khiva himself. This is a "paper trail" that Sartori consulted and catalogued within the Inventory of Khivan Affairs in the Muscovite state archives, but one that was "silenced" in favour of "ventriloquised" versions that suited distinct interest groups in the early and late nineteenth century. The first version "sanitised" the record by removing the violent nature of the ambush, and the second resurrected the tale so as to bolster Orientalizing claims of barbarism and treachery during Russia's efforts to "civilise" and colonise Central Asia.

Sartori asks us to attend to the "silences" of archives that are admittedly difficult to intuit within the preserved records of imperial states. His version of a "paper trail" is one attentive to artifice, to the punctuated visibility and invisibility of documentary records shaped by the fickleness of various interest groups and their own political, commercial, and ideological agendas, and to the necessity of recognising that even catalogued records were once mobilised and manipulated at will.

Conclusion by Way of Bound Registers of Ottoman Imperial Daily Affairs

The contributors to this special issue bring us far indeed from the fixity of either "court" or "archive" that opened this essay. The authors illustrate that preservationist practices are not the sole domain of imperial rulers; reveal the interplay between state and nonstate actors in creating and maintaining a "fabric of trust," sometimes preserved in recorded registers but also manipulated by parties in their own interests; and portray paper trails that enter and exit "official" repositories, with longevities that extend beyond either the physical "archive" or the governing and institutional apparatus they were produced to serve.[27] Significantly, they also remind us that new methodologies can destabilise the authoritative vision of sovereignty fabricated by statesmen, scholars, and bureaucrats as a means to extend power across temporal and spatial landscapes. This is an especially important intervention, as it enables a "rereading" of even the most common registration techniques and genres of record keeping within imperial domains.

In the Ottoman case, one of the most prevalent documentary forms deployed by historians for an infinite array of purposes (e.g., social, diplomatic, political, provincial, and institutional histories) is the imperial register of daily affairs (*mühimme defterleri*).[28] Oddly, however, few attend to the historicity of this register in itself, and the gradual specialisation it reveals of a phenomenon of "bound registers" from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries.[29] The *mühimme* capture a "season of empire," if you will, a collection of *responsa,* arranged chronologically, that embed regional petitions and complaints into imperial edicts of command and entreaty.[30] Their repetitive structure belies their complexity, as each individual entry reveals a transcript of imperial concern, and bears traces of subversive and resistant tendencies across dynastic territories. More pointedly, however, the inspiration for systematising a catalogue of imperial commands, one that could then be deployed either from within the Istanbul-based imperial council or by official delegates located within provincial seats or mobilised on military campaigns, can be directly linked to the protracted territorial conquest of Transdanubian territories.

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Framing this instinct towards systematicity simply from within the bureaucratic reforms of Sultan Süleyman (r. 1520–66) misses the mark. The oldest preserved bound registers of daily affairs encompass the years 1544–45, three years after Buda became the seat of Ottoman imperial governance in Hungarian occupied territories.[31] At stake were the methods by which the Ottoman establishment reformulated juridical categories of rule capable of enshrining sovereign claims to territory in a contest with regional and Habsburg actors that was constant rather than definitive. The connection between Buda and bound register was not a coincidence, but rather a remaking of an empire now reliant on deposited records that preserved administrative judgement. The move also entailed a reworking of notions of trust and accountability, one that enshrined the text in a juridical system attentive to orality.

Yet, as the contributors to this volume indicate, systematicity also yields malleability, and the mobility of both the vocabularies of command and the privileges of those who strive to assert them can also be traversed within the registers of the *mühimme*. Thus, even within records produced for and from within the echelons of Ottoman officialdom, we can track anxieties over "correct" information, "loyal" servants to the realm, and stable categories for coercive extraction of resources.[32] Further, the *mühimme* resist our own categorisation systems. They serve as an archive of imperial command in themselves (reminiscent of Livingston's argument for *waqf* scrolls and codices), but their documentary horizon includes the subversive elements of competitive resistance across imperial domains (recalling Abbott's formulations). Dependent on trust, they also became records of misinformation, categorical chaos, and yes, even of ignorance (bringing to mind Abdurasulov and Sartori's interventions). Finally, while these are "state" registers, diverse actors populate individual entries and the bound volumes as a whole. Thus, casting the "state" as a text-based entity, dependent on record-keeping practices to extend and sustain sovereignty, also enables us to move "beyond" the state into a text-saturated universe in which the state is but one actor vying for power, control, and the right to invent the categories of ownership amongst a competitive field of participants. Neither "archive" nor "state" will survive intact at the close of this special issue, nor should they, for their presence threatens to restore culturalist and teleological frameworks best left in the clichéd dustbins of history.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Paolo Sartori and James Pickett for inviting me to participate in conversations attentive to both the vibrancy and the complexities of archival cultures of documentation. I am also grateful to Guy Burak, who commented on a draft version of this essay—our conversations are likely buried within my arguments.

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Notes

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1 Ghislaine Lydon offers a resounding critique of the causal relationship between archives and modern statecraft in *On Trans-Saharan Trails*.

2 Examples can be found in the most widely circulated studies in the field, including Walsham, "The Social History of the Archive" and "The History of Archives and the History of Science"; Friedrich, *The Birth of the Archive*; and Head, *Making Archives in Early Modern Europe*.

3 This concern with "neo-Eurocentrism" forms the basis of an ongoing project with Natalie Rothman and Guy Burak currently titled "Towards Early Modern Archivality: The Perils of Comparative History in the Age of Neo-Eurocentrism." Ann Stoler originally called attention to the Eurocentric nature of archival studies in *Along the Archival Grain*, but in positing this critique primarily in relationship to colonial dynamics she elides the import of this problem in scholarship dedicated to earlier historical periods.

4 The recent move away from "culture" to "practice" has indeed tempered some of the assumptions concerning civilisational comparison and progressive telos, yet the shadow of the "Islamic" other still remains, either in direct reference or by sheer absence. It is possible to sense the uneasy relationship with telos and generalisation that remains active within comparativist approaches in Head's *Making Archives in Early Modern Europe*.

5 In Head's otherwise welcome effort to recognise distinct practices as a necessary component in archival studies, he states: "Differentiating separate archivalities provides a way to understand how different societies accumulated records, how these records were preserved, and how later actors deployed them across multiple contexts. It allows us to distinguish medieval from early modern archivality within Europe, as well as European from Chinese, South Asian, or Islamic archivalities, which rested on quite different modes of making, keeping, and using records." *Making Archives in Early Modern Europe*, 37.

6 For important critiques of this paradigm, see el-Leithy, "Living Documents, Dying Archives"; and Hirschler, "From Archive to Archival Practices."

7 See Christopher Markiewicz's arguments for a recent challenge to this approach, "Europeanist Trends and Islamicate Trajectories." Shahab Ahmed provides the most sustained critique of reflexive equivalencies between "Islam," "Islamic," and sociopolitical processes in *What Is Islam*. And John-Paul Ghobrial overtly criticises

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the presumption of a European early modernity formed in isolation and argues specifically for the circulation of texts and rumour as constitutive of a shared manuscript tradition in *The Whispers of Cities* and "The Archive of Orientalism and Its Keepers." The recent issue of the *Journal of Ottoman and Turkish Studies* presents a large collection of reflective essays on the "question" of early modernity within the field of Ottoman Studies: "Chasing the Ottoman Early Modern," *Journal of Ottoman and Turkish Studies* 7:1 (Spring 2020): 1–253.

8 It is important here to consider how periodisation schemas have themselves been linked to a progressive telos of European modernity. The invention of the "medieval" in the Renaissance humanist enterprise and its revitalisation within Michel Foucault's narrative of an emergent disciplinary order demonstrates the early conflation of periodisation and hegemonic power. Anthony Grafton provides an example of this mode within the Renaissance moment in *Defenders of the Text*. Anne Clark Bartlett highlights some of the problematic aspects of Foucault's approach in "Foucault's 'Medievalism.'" The most resounding critique of this approach can be found in Kathleen Davis's *Periodization and Sovereignty*.

9 For an inspiring shift from "paper trail" to "archival depth" see Guy Burak, "'In Compliance with the Old Register.'"

10 For a representative sample of the prevalent focus on border and frontier diplomacy see Fabris, "The Ottoman Venetian Frontier"; Peacock, *The Frontiers of the Ottoman World*; Dávid and Fodor, *Ransom Slavery*; Firges et al., *Well-Connected Domains*; Ateş, "Empires at the Margin"; Połczyński, "The Relacyja of Sefer Muratowicz." By contrast, Natalie Rothman helped turn the focus of early modern scholars towards the "transimperial" in *Brokering Empire*.

11 The two international conferences hosted by the Institute of Iranian Studies in Vienna under the banner of Persianate Cultures of Documentation (2016) and Beyond the Islamicate Chancery (2018), in addition to its follow-up summer school (2019) Cultures of Documentation in Persianate Eurasia, are thus groundbreaking both in their scope and their aim to adopt strategies through publication and educational outreach to redefine the field of archival studies. The only other comparable project is the Global Archivalities Research Network: http://globalarchivalities.org/.

12 Tijana Krstić discusses the significant interplay of translation, the Ottoman chancery, and transimperial constructs in "Of Translation and Empire," 130–42. See also the now canonical article by Christine Woodhead, "From Scribe to Litterateur"; and Kaya Şahin and Julia Schleck's effort to demonstrate the creation of a coeval space in the life of one early modern traveller, "Courtly Connections."

13 One beneficiary of more consistent focus on the production of texts and of textual authority is the scribe, who now has experienced a kind of heyday in historical studies. For examples see Alam and Subrahmanyam, "The Making of a Munshi"; Mitchell, *The Practice of Politics in Safavid Iran*; Raman, *Document Raj*; Atiyas, "Political Literacy and the Politics of Eloquence"; Kinra, *Writing Self, Writing Empire*; and, for a study that thematises scribal practices beyond state bureaucracies, Prange, *Monsoon Islam*.

14 For "movement" as part of knowledge production, see al-Musawi, *The Medieval Islamic Republic of Letters*; and el-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History in the Seventeenth Century*.

15 See the last section of this essay for a discussion of how one Ottoman imperial administrative genre was itself shaped by petitions sent from the provinces to the high council. On petitions as a key mechanism of imperial governance and a productive discursive form in itself, see İnalcık, "Arz-ı Hal ve Arz-ı Mahzarlar"; Ursinus, "Petitions from Orthodox Church Officials"; Wittman,

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"Before Qadi and Grand Vizier"; and Baldwin, "Petitioning the Sultan in Ottoman Egypt."

16 On the emergence of the early modern court as a distinct yet shared process see the contributors to Adamson, *The Princely Courts of Europe* and Duindam, *Royal Courts in Dynastic States and Empires*. On the Ottoman, Safavid, and Habsburg dynamic in particular see Şahin, *Empire and Power in the Reign of Süleyman*.

17 My use of "coeval" derives from Johannes Fabian's *Time and the Other*, esp. 30–5. Fabian addresses how the disciplinary rubrics of anthropology place the object of referent(s) of their study "*in a Time other than the present of the producer of anthropological discourse*" [italics in the original] and argues instead for the creation of a shared, coeval space of intersubjectivity. Here I suggest that the "traverse" of actors and texts *created* coeval space in which circulation, mobility, and manipulation disrupts any easy equation between "state," "territory," and "archive."

18 Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty.*

19 Dery, "'Papereality' and Learning."

20 This point builds on Michel Foucault's belief that language is coded and structured by historical processes and Pierre Bourdieu's description of discourse as a field of power "structured and restructured" by the practices and strategies of its participants: *The Order of Things*, 157–62; and *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 78–87.

21 Raman, *Document Raj*.

22 "Papereality," its artifice and propensity for forgery, was first argued by Das and Poole in "Signature of the State."

23 Messick, *Shari'a Scripts*.

24 Wakako, "Who Handed over Mamluk Land Registers to the Ottomans?"

25 Pál Fodor drew attention to the significance of these genres in "The Grand Vizieral *Telhis*." For published examples consult Sahillioğlu, *Koca Sinan Paşa'nın telhisleri*; and Murphey, "The Veliyuddin Telhis."

26 For an example of how contests over textual authority and legal claims reveals a thread of resistance to sovereign control visible in Ottoman regional juridical practices, see Burak, "Evidentiary Truth Claims, Imperial Registers, and the Ottoman Archive." See also Lydon, "A Paper Economy," and Sekulic, "From a Legal Proof to a Historical Fact."

27 On the fabric of trust, see Nussdorfer, *Brokers of Public Trust*. Also cited and deployed in Burak, "'In Compliance with the Old Register,'" 801.

28 It should be noted that while this designation for the registers is now commonplace in scholarship on the Ottoman Empire, the bound registers in which a wide variety of sultanic decrees were archived did not bear this specific designation until much later, at least until the 1640s, and perhaps after the decision to bind registers of complaint and their *responsa* in a category of their own, the *şikāyet defteri*. See Temelkuran, "Divân-ı Hümâyûn Mühimme Kalemi," 158; Kütükoğlu, "Mühimme Defterlerinde Muâmele Kayıdları Üzerine," 95–7; Dávid, "The Mühimme Defteri as a Source," 167–8.

29 See Heyd, *Ottoman Documents on Palestine*, for the earliest and still the most comprehensive effort to evaluate the textual and formulaic elements of the *mühimme*. See also Abu-Husayn, *The View from Istanbul.* In 1649 the *şikāyet defteri,* or register of complaints, came to constitute its own system of registration. And by 1742 the chronological ordering of the *mühimme* yielded to provincial specificity, indicating anxieties over shifting provincial terrain within the eighteenth century. For an overview of these transitions, see Emecen, "Osmanlı Divanının Ana Defter Serileri."

30 There are a total of 263 registers catalogued as Mühimme Defterleri (MD) held in the Başbakanlık Arşıvı, Istanbul. However, this classification, imposed by nineteenth-century reforming projects in the Ottoman archives, assumes a transparency that did not exist. Some *mühimme*

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registers are mis-classified or can be found in other cataloguing systems. Further, while “bound” they also reveal the haphazard nature of this binding, as within an individual register entries are often placed out of order.

31 Sahillioğlu, *E-12321 numaralı mühimme defteri*.

32 For examples of how this vocabulary and set of expectations frames the language of the *mühimme,* see MD 78:1563 and 1564; MD 6:88; MD 62:228; and MD 67:80.

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