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Review: Science in the Archives: Pasts, Presents, Futures

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Science in the Archives: Pasts, Presents, Futures. ed. Lorraine Daston (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017. 392 pp.).

“Science” and “Archives” are not two terms that people immediately associate with one another. *Science in the Archives: Pasts, Presents, Futures*, edited by Lorraine Daston, brings the topic of scientific archives to the forefront, making it clear that archives are relevant to individuals beyond the field of history. As Daston observes in the introduction: “So complete and exclusive has the identification of archive with the discipline of history become that any other kind of archival research is assumed to be ipso facto historical in nature...” (p. 2). But the truth of the matter is that science relies on archives. This is a fact that all of the writers in this book highlight in one capacity or another. *Science in the Archives* originated in a working group that was convened at the Max Planck Institute for the History of the Sciences in 2013 and 2014. The main goal from these working group meetings was to think “about how the sciences choose to remember past findings and plan future research” (p. vii). Daston posits archives as the third nature of the sciences, i.e. the natural progression route from first nature (nature in its original state) to second nature (the production of scientific findings through research) to third nature (a repository of those scientific findings).

Science in the Archives is structured into four sections, each investigating different aspects of scientific archives. “Nature’s Own Canon: Archives of the Historical Sciences” examines how scientific archives have evolved over the centuries, specifically through looking at the archives of astronomical data, the fossil record, and published medical case histories. From these varied scientific archives, we see that archives are often iterative processes, with layers of data building on top of one another. A useful warning arises out of Chapter 2, “The Earth as Archive...,” where the author warns that with each iteration of an archive there is the possibility of loss of metadata. What knowledge persists into the future is underlined by J. Andrew Mendelsohn in his review of published medical case histories. His focus on published articles in elucidating the long arm of medical research stems from his observation that unpublished materials such as doctors’ casebooks and patient files often pass into disuse or vanish. Mendelsohn writes “Cases...are what medicine has preserved best, made accessible, and revisited – through print” (p. 87).

In “Spanning the Centuries: Archives from Ancient to Modern,” the reader discovers how scientific archives were often compiled with the purpose of future use in mind. From collecting secondary sources and opinions, as was often the case with ancient historians, to the rise of source criticism of texts in the nineteenth century, the authors in this section highlight how scientific compendia were created not to drive new discovery at the current moment but to build archives for the future. In Chapter 4, “Archiving Scientific Ideas in Greco-Roman Antiquity,” Liba Taub explores the question of how

ancient Greeks and Romans archived information for future use. Taken in a modern context, this question highlights how archivists' arrangement and description decisions can influence how records will be interpreted and what the future use of materials may be.

The third section of the book, "Problems and Politics: Controversies in the Global Archive," exposes the varied ethical and privacy issues that can be a part and parcel of scientific archives. In "The 'Data Deluge': Turning Private Data into Public Archives," Bruno J. Strasser looks at how scientific data collection has been compiled over time and how that data was (and often times still is) viewed as belonging to the individual(s) who created it and not belonging to the scientific community (and by extension the public) as a whole. Strasser focuses on the push for open access to scientific data that happened in the 1990s, but observes that victories in open access were only achieved through "the alignment between individual and collective interests within the existing moral economy of science" (p. 196). Authors Cathy Gere and Vladimir Janković respectively reviewed the history of international genetic diversity documentation projects and the climate science data archive.

Digital archives are the focus in the last section, "The Future of Data: Archives of the New Millennium." Rebecca Lemov looks at various self-archiving/personal digital archiving efforts and how the different ways in which data is collected and stored through devices can mirror different aspects of the self and thereby produce different kinds of selves. Lemov's analysis of personal digital archiving efforts is particularly on point in light of the social media universe that we live in today. Is the self we reflect through social media a true reflection of our actual self? In "An Archive of Words," Daniel Rosenberg focuses on how words can be utilized in a digital archive by looking back at the origins of stop lists and concordances. In the last chapter, Matthew Jones reflects on how data mining tools can be used to create easy access to information in voluminous digital databases.

Science in the Archives is a worthwhile read for archivists. The chapters are richly end noted which is a useful reference as many of the subjects being engaged are very domain specific, causing a lay reader to struggle sometimes to understand the full content and context of the articles. Several universal "archival truths" arose from this book. One is the primacy of archives' use as source material, a topic which is explored in varying ways by many of the contributors. Second, archives are defined by the identification and acquisition of records deemed important enough to be preserved. Questions explored throughout *Science in the Archives* are how the collection of records happens, what is worth saving, and why they should be saved. Third, archives are, in and of themselves, a mediated view of the past. This archival truth is specifically highlighted by Janković in his chapter on climate data archives. He writes "...the

archivization produces as much as it records the event (p. 237).” Fourth, archives act as memory. Several of the authors explore how building a scientific archive was important so as to propagate the scientific data of the past into the future. This book leaves the reader with many points to ponder about archives and proved to be an engaging and thought provoking read.

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