

# Toward Early Modern Archivality: The Perils of History in the Age of Neo-Eurocentrism

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## INTRODUCTION: “EARLY MODERN ARCHIVES” AND NEO-EUROCENTRISM

The shadow of Eurocentrism has long haunted archives as objects of analysis.<sup>1</sup> Well before the field of historical archival studies came into its own as a sub-disciplinary specialization, scholars postulated (or implicitly assumed) particular kinds of mostly metropolitan, state archives to be prototypical. They suggested, teleologically, that certain institutional, archival, or technological formations

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<sup>1</sup> Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

inexorably led to (European) modernity.<sup>2</sup> These assumptions were articulated in a range of sweeping historiographical arguments, from the denial of historicity beyond Europe tout court, to categorical claims about orality versus literacy as distinct developmental stages of civilization, to the totalizing discourse in certain quarters of postcolonial studies that saw colonial archives as simply the imposition of European epistemologies upon docile, hapless, archive-less societies.<sup>3</sup> Within the growing field of historical archival studies specifically, this Eurocentric framework often privileged metropolitan state archives at the expense of others, especially private and family ones, but also municipal, ecclesiastical, and company archives.<sup>4</sup> It also entrenched the assumption that archivality was uniquely and quintessentially European. When historians of archives first turned their attentions to other world regions, their focus was primarily on archives' real or presumed "lack." They thus perpetuated misconceptions originating within Middle East Studies—specifically Michael Chamberlain's dual thesis about the priority of the oral over the written and about the use of biographical dictionaries as "communal archives" that obviated the function of documentary depositories. Both have been largely debunked by area specialists.<sup>5</sup>

This form of Eurocentrism has been openly disavowed in recent years. Significant professional activities intended to bring together scholars of early modern archives across spatial divides bode well for the future. So does the field's growing conceptual and methodological intersections with a vibrant range of cognate disciplines, including philology, diplomatics, and codicology.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Max Weber, for example, famously ascribed to the linguistic dialect of chancery records the power to have (single handedly) created modern national boundaries. See *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. Vol. 1 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 215. The focus on archives primarily as a tool of statecraft endures, albeit nuanced and much enriched empirically, in many recent studies.

<sup>3</sup> Eric R. Wolf, *Europe and the People without History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982); M. T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066–1307* (London: Edward Arnold, 1979); Bernard S. Cohn, "The Census, Social Structure and Objectification in South Asia," in *An Anthropologist among the Historians and other Essays* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987), 224–54.

<sup>4</sup> For a critique, see Maria De Lurdes Rosa and Randolph Head, eds., *Rethinking the Archive in Pre-Modern Europe: Family Archives and the Inventories from the 15th to the 19th Century* (Lisbon: Instituto de Estudos Medievais, University of Lisbon, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> Michael Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus, 1190–1350* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). For important critiques of this paradigm, see Tamer el-Leithy, "Living Documents, Dying Archives: Towards a Historical Anthropology of Medieval Arabic Archives," *Al-Qantara* 32 (2011): 389–434; Konrad Hirschler, "From Archive to Archival Practices: Rethinking the Preservation of Mamlūk Administrative Documents," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 136, 1 (2016): 1–28; Fozia Bora, *Writing History in the Medieval Islamic World: The Value of Chronicles as Archives* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019).

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, the Global Archivalities Research Network: <http://globalarchivalities.org/>; the two international conferences hosted by the Institute of Iranian Studies in Vienna under the banners of "Persianate Cultures of Documentation" (2016) and "Beyond the Islamicate Chancery" (2018); and, most recently, the "Cultures of Documentation in Persianate Eurasia" summer school (2019),

And yet, declaring the field's Eurocentrism a thing of the past may be premature. In fact, an emergent disciplinary consensus about the particularity of European archival formations, far from abandoning Eurocentrism, forms the core of what we dub in this essay "Neo-Eurocentrism." We identify two mutually reinforcing central features of this Neo-Eurocentrism: the embrace of comparative approaches in a civilizational-culturalist mode of analysis, which willy-nilly superimposes distinct archival formations on large civilizational blocks; and the tendency to treat "European" archives as clearly demarcated phenomena, with the "non-European" proffered as a counterpoint to a progressive teleology of European archival formation. All too often in this model, "non-European" archives are either ignored, or relegated to being residual comparata meant to represent a kind of archival prehistory that paints organizational systems in very broad strokes.

Two recent methodologically and empirically rich collections illustrate well this dual tendency. One, a 2016 special issue of the flagship journal *Past & Present*, titled "The Social History of the Archive: Record-Keeping in Early Modern Europe," foregrounds the "Europeanness" of the early modern archive through a series of case studies ranging from France, Italy, and Germany to the Low Countries and England.<sup>7</sup> The other, published by the British Academy two years later and entitled *Archives and Information in the Early Modern World* is, despite its title, equally focused on (Western) Europe, with only one of its eleven essays offering an empirical and conceptual critique of the field's entrenched Eurocentrism.<sup>8</sup> Other recent collections on early modern archives exhibit the same tendency to focus overwhelmingly on European archives and to acknowledge the latter's embedding in a wider regime of circulation only through the lens of empire.<sup>9</sup> A fine, if hardly isolated example is the recent introduction to a special issue of the *Journal of Early Modern History*, "Archives, Record Keeping and Imperial Governance, 1500–1800." Even as it emphasizes the centrality of

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Summer School - Cultures of Documentation in Persianate Eurasia (15th–19th Centuries), 2–7 June 2019, Austria (armacad.info).

<sup>7</sup> Alexandra Walsham, "The Social History of the Archive: Record-Keeping in Early Modern Europe," *Past & Present* 230, sup. 11 (1 Nov. 2016): 9–48.

<sup>8</sup> Kiri Paramore, "The Transnational Archive of the Sinosphere: The Early Modern East Asian Information Order," in Liesbeth Corens, Kate Peters, and Alexandra Walsham, eds., *Archives & Information in the Early Modern World* (Oxford: Published for the British Academy by Oxford University Press, 2018), 285–310.

<sup>9</sup> See, as a representative example, Elizabeth Yale, ed., "Focus: The History of Archives and the History of Science," *Isis* 107, 1 (2016): 74–120. While neither "Europe" nor "early modern" are explicitly thematized in the title, the empirical examples in the segment's six essays are all from early modern European, primarily English, to a fault. A single outlier, dealing with the Spanish monarchy, still treats archives as a European form that gives meaning to non-European ("New World") materials. See: María M. Portuondo, "Finding 'Science' in the Archives of the Spanish Monarchy," *Isis* 107, 1 (2016): 95–105. This framework is in keeping with virtually all recent compilations. For example, Maria Pia Donato and Anne Saada, eds., *Pratiques d'archives à l'époque Moderne: Europe, Mondes Coloniaux* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2019). For a comprehensive bibliography, see Walsham, "Social History."

*intra*-imperial circulation to the making of early modern statecraft and information orders, it stops short of considering transimperial circulations. It ends up reinforcing a civilizational divide by advocating for “cross-cultural comparison” between “Qing China,” “the Ottoman World,” and “the early modern West,” and devotes but one short paragraph to the first two combined.<sup>10</sup> The treatment of a narrow band of Western European empires as civilizationaly distinct yet paradigmatic is all the more jarring here precisely because of the effort to theorize the practices and conditions of imperial archivality writ large.

The entrenchment of Eurocentric civilizational discourse in the name of cross-cultural comparison is noticeable even in works that set out to foreground the place of archives in a certain “global” early modernity. Randolph Head posits the notion of “archivality” as a comparative category as follows: “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.”<sup>11</sup> To some extent, this comparative approach has been salutary in its openness to a broader set of historiographies. According to Head, one of the field’s leading proponents of comparative history, “archivality” promotes greater self-reflection about the genealogies of modern archivality and its inherited conceptual vocabularies in past chancery practices.<sup>12</sup> If nothing else, it has injected new questions and methods into the field as a whole, and allowed scholars of other world regions to engage in methodological and conceptual conversations with Europeanists, in whose field the study of archives has been established for a longer period, and who additionally benefit from the significant resources that have been invested in cultural heritage in the Global North.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, such formulations naturalize civilizational categories that map all too easily onto modern geopolitical formations and their inequities.

<sup>10</sup> Maria Pia Donato, “Introduction: Archives, Record Keeping and Imperial Governance, 1500–1800,” *Journal of Early Modern History* 22, 5 (2018): 311–26, at 317–18. The sum total of Donato’s treatment of Ottoman archival practice is as follows: “[I]n the Ottoman world the imperial administration was predominant in the conservation of written records.” An attendant footnote cites a handful of scholars of Ottoman statecraft from the 1950s to the mid-1990s, followed by various more recent studies of the Mamluks, Mughals, and twentieth-century Yemen; that is, reinforcing a notion of generalizable, timeless Islamic archivality.

<sup>11</sup> Randolph C. Head, *Making Archives in Early Modern Europe: Proof, Information, and Political Record-Keeping, 1400–1700* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 37.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 36. Though in what follows we question the a priori contention that these premodern practices were by default “Western European.”

<sup>13</sup> We use the terms “global North” and “global South” to indicate the deterritorialized geography of contemporary capitalism and the spaces and histories disadvantaged and marginalized by this phase of capital flow.

We call the dual tendency to paradigmatically compare “European” and “non-European” archivalities and to treat archives as naturalized cultural formations “Neo-Eurocentrism.” The “neo” aims to distinguish the current moment from earlier, universalizing modes of Eurocentric historiography. We also use this term to underscore Neo-Eurocentrism’s significant points of intersection with, and troubling potential unwittingly to reinforce, the resurgence of rightist politics in Europe and beyond. A hallmark of the new right has been its embrace—tactically or strategically—of a vision of an exclusive, “white,” European identity, at times even at the expense of overtly nationalist or regionalist particularities. This “European” identity is not only distinctly xenophobic and Islamophobic, but, crucially, trades in a caricatured metanarrative of European premodernity “clashing” with “Islam.”<sup>14</sup> In the historiography of archival history we note a disquieting resurgence of European particularism in certain recurring analytic features.

Chief among these is the return of a Whiggish argument about progress toward modernity, linking the consolidation of increasingly centralized archives to the consolidation of an increasingly rational and modern state.<sup>15</sup> Secondly, in recent approaches to the archives, while scholars recognize the “complexity” and “diversity” of early modern worlds, they at the same time insist on the particularity of early modern Europe therein.<sup>16</sup> This recognition of “complexity” is often followed by a proclamation of the limited historiographical command of “non-European” archival formations (ironically echoing, we might add, early modern textual practitioners’ own rhetoric of humility and deficiency).<sup>17</sup> This “humility statement,” however, is often a prompt for suggesting that the author’s admittedly limited optic, gained from the study of particular (mainly metropolitan/state) archives, somehow should serve as the empirical grounds on which “European archivality” can be postulated and, moreover, that this empirical basis

<sup>14</sup> Dorothy Kim, “Teaching Medieval Studies in a Time of White Supremacy,” *In the Middle*, 28 Aug. 2017, <http://www.inthemedievalmiddle.com/2017/08/teaching-medieval-studies-in-time-of.html>. Whereas historians of the archives have in no way embraced this politics (and personally often espouse diametrically opposed views), the recent precedents of classicists’ and medievalists’ scholarship being manipulated to buttress racist politics should serve as a cautionary note. See “Race & Racism in Ancient and Medieval Studies: The Problem,” *Endless Knot* podcast, episode 51, and the extensive bibliography therein (aired 17 Jan. 2018), <http://www.alliterative.net/podcast/2018/1/16/episode-51-race-racism-in-ancient-medieval-studies-the-problem>.

<sup>15</sup> For a strong illustration of this trend, see Timur Kuran, *The Long Divergence: How Islamic Law Held Back the Middle East* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012). Ghislaine Lydon offers a resounding critique of the causal relationship between archives and modern statecraft, in *On Trans-Saharan Trails: Islamic Law, Trade Networks and Cross-Cultural Exchange in Nineteenth-Century Western Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

<sup>16</sup> See the literature cited in notes 7–10 above. Our argument here does not seek to take away from the important and wide-ranging critique of the concept of “early modernity” and its globalized application. See Virginia H. Aksan, Boğaç Ergene, and Antonis Hadjikyriacou, eds., “Ottoman Early Modern,” special issue of *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association* 7, 1 (2020).

<sup>17</sup> Jennifer Clement, *Reading Humility in Early Modern England* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2015).

warrants a comparison of one's data about "Europe" with what is known from the scholarship about "other" phenomena in "non-Europe."

The casuistry in this logical sequence is extensive, beginning with the occidentalist synecdoche of metropolitan state archives in, say, London, Venice, Paris, or Vienna with "Europe," the treatment of the latter as a static and distinct civilizational bloc, and the a priori denial of its embedding, indeed entanglement, in broader systems of circulation and processes of knowledge production. This return to a discrete Europe ignores over two decades of scholarship dedicated to the idea of a "Eurasian" sphere. The divide between "European" and "Non-European," long spurned by scholars of the "Eurasian" turn, still shapes not only how arguments are formed, but also the mechanisms by which they are publicized in conferences, journals, and monographs.<sup>18</sup> The use of "Eurasian" in this terminological turn sought to underscore not just a shared geographic space but also the problematic hierarchies involved in the presumption of a unified "Europe." Yet historians of archivality have yet to chart a more globalized approach to their object of study.<sup>19</sup> The very designation of archives as "European" or "Islamic" demonstrates a limited and limiting methodological and theoretical framework. This framework is far from innocuous, since it already hinders the entangled history we argue for in this essay. Beyond a terminological critique, we offer here the Ottoman case to illuminate how early modern transregional circulations of textual artifacts and practices render geographic or culturalist boundaries specious. Based on the Ottoman case, we outline some alternative methodological paths forward.

The most limiting aspect of Neo-Eurocentric assumptions in the study of archives, however, may in fact be their embrace of comparativism. Comparison, as is now well established, is hardly the only type of "global" history one can practice.<sup>20</sup> As transnational history has underscored, much is to be gained by

<sup>18</sup> Kären Wigen and Martin Lewis pointedly rebuke this phenomenon, in *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997). However, there is a longer genesis to this concern for how geographic designations mask and eclipse culturalist assumptions. In his three-volume magnum opus, Marshall G. S. Hodgson posited the use of "Islamicate" and hemispheric "oikumene(s)" as a way out of designations that reduce large historical processes to religious or territorial blocs: *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974).

<sup>19</sup> Muzaffer Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam are perhaps the best-recognized scholars to take on the "Eurasian" as the foundation of their work. See their *Indo-Persian Travels in the Age of Discoveries, 1400–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); and Subrahmanyam, "Connected Histories: Notes towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia," *Modern Asian Studies* 31, 3 (1997): 135–62; and *Courty Encounters: Translating Courtliness and Violence in Early Modern Eurasia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

<sup>20</sup> For some generative alternatives, see Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, "Beyond Comparison: Histoire Croisée and the Challenge of Reflexivity," *History and Theory* 45, 1 (2006): 30–50; Finbarr Barry Flood, *Objects of Translation: Material Culture and Medieval "Hindu-Muslim" Encounter* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Courty Encounters*.

thematizing mobilities across categories, units, and entities, rather than by drawing comparisons between pre-given “Europe” and “non-Western parallels.”<sup>21</sup> To say that one must compare because one is “just” a Europeanist is only seemingly a methodological caveat. It is to make the rather dubious claim that one can understand “Europe” separately from all the processes that made it, and that inherently defied continental boundaries (let alone civilizational divides). It is puzzling that this reductive civilizational conception of “the West” has resurfaced in the study of archives, decades after it has been widely critiqued by scholars in other quarters precisely by bringing greater attentiveness to textuality, materiality, and positionality, all core themes of historical archival studies.<sup>22</sup>

Notably, when recent scholars of early modern archives have addressed, mostly in passim, the notion of archival entanglements, they have done so almost entirely in the context, and as an implicit consequence, of European colonial expansion, when, “Extended contact with and suppression by highly bureaucratised European colonial organisations frequently created significant archival dynamics in extra-European cultures.”<sup>23</sup> “Entanglement,” in other words, is postulated here as synonymous with “contact” with European influence, a process of “cultural export,” and a “European overpowering of indigenous manuscript collections.”<sup>24</sup> To be fair, the author of these statements does concede, “It would be entirely misleading to understand postcolonial archival history simply as an imposition of European models.” Our point, however, is that it was not only postcolonial, but late medieval and early modern archives, too, which were profoundly, multi-directionally entangled, and not simply as an afterthought of European colonialism, but due to the very circulatory regimes that defined early modern imperial formations on a global scale in the first place.<sup>25</sup> We wish not simply to trace the spatial

<sup>21</sup> Friedrich, “Epilogue,” 433.

<sup>22</sup> For representative examples of empirically grounded critiques of “Western Civilization” as a historiographical construct, see Silvia Federici, *Enduring Western Civilization: The Construction of the Concept of Western Civilization and Its “Others”* (Westport: Praeger, 1995); Daniel Alan Segal, “Western Civ’ and the Staging of History in American Higher Education,” *American Historical Review* 105, 3 (2000): 770–805.

<sup>23</sup> Markus Friedrich, “Epilogue: Archives and Archiving across Cultures—Towards a Matrix of Analysis,” in Alessandro Bausi et al., eds., *Manuscripts and Archives: Comparative Views on Record-Keeping* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 421–45, at 439.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 440.

<sup>25</sup> While a comprehensive history of these processes is yet to be written, for illuminating case studies, see Jorge Manuel Flores and António Vasconcelos de Saldanha, eds., *The Firangis in the Mughal Chancellery: Portuguese Copies of Akbar’s Documents (1572–1604)* (New Delhi: Embassy of Portugal, 2003); Sylvia Sellers-García, *Distance and Documents at the Spanish Empire’s Periphery* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014); Paul Nelles, “Cosas y Cartas: Scribal Production and Material Pathways in Jesuit Global Communication (1547–1573),” *Journal of Jesuit Studies* 2, 3 (2015): 421–50; Arndt Brendecke, *The Empirical Empire: Spanish Colonial Rule and the Politics of Knowledge* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016);

distribution of archival forms “outside” Europe, or the transregional circulatory regimes in which archival formations retroactively recognizable as “European” were inherently embedded. Rather, we will explore, employing several empirical examples, the mobility of early modern archival practices across presumed civilizational, linguistic, and juridical divides. This mobility, we argue, altogether undermines the civilizational construct of “European archivality” (or Islamicate archivality, etc.).

Our examples are taken from the Ottoman context with which we are familiar, and which present some cogent challenges to the Neo-Eurocentric status quo in early modern archival studies. Our point is not simply to argue for the inclusion of this or that polity in a large tent “Europe.” We emphatically reject the effort by some Europeanists to incorporate the Ottomans into European early modernity without actually transforming the latter’s metanarrative.<sup>26</sup> The important genealogies of Ottoman archivality in earlier and contemporary documentary traditions of the eastern Mediterranean and the Persianate world, and the ongoing circulations of texts, textual practices, and practitioners between Ottoman and other contemporaneous polities beyond Europe, belie any such facile moves.<sup>27</sup> Despite, and perhaps because of, these multipronged interactions, we also are weary of the study of archives through the framework of “cultural encounter” and/or “diplomacy” merely as a set of ceremonial protocols and genre conventions.<sup>28</sup> Instead, we follow the lead of studies of the mechanics of commensuration, and build on important recent interventions that have underscored significant continuities in early modern philology from the Iberian peninsula to the Deccan plateau, tying together in complex circulatory regimes a broad range of Islamicate Arabophone, Persophone, and Latinate realms.<sup>29</sup>

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Amber Brian, *Alva Ixtlilxochitl’s Native Archive and the Circulation of Knowledge in Colonial Mexico* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2016).

<sup>26</sup> For a recent challenge to this approach, see Christopher Markiewicz, “Europeanist Trends and Islamicate Trajectories in Early Modern Ottoman History,” *Past & Present* 239, 1 (2018): 265–81.

<sup>27</sup> For a compelling overview of the latter, see James Pickett and Paolo Sartori, eds., “Islamic Cultures of Documentation,” special issue of *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 62, 5–6 (2019).

<sup>28</sup> For an analysis of diplomatic ceremonial that considers the adaptability and mutual imbrication of perspectives as inherent to the articulation of notions of cultural alterity, see Christian Windler, “Diplomatic History as a Field for Cultural Analysis: Muslim-Christian Relations in Tunis, 1700–1840,” *Historical Journal* 44, 1 (2001): 79–106.

<sup>29</sup> Tijana Krstić has shown the considerable degree of commensurability between the Ottomans and their neighbors in their respective confession building projects, in *Contested Conversions to Islam: Confessionalization and Community in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011). More recently, Matthew Melvin-Koushki has argued for shared epistemologies in Renaissance Europe and the eastern Islamic lands: “*Tahqīq* vs. *Taqīd* in the Renaissances of Western Early Modernity,” *Philological Encounters* 3, 1–2 (2018): 193–249. On messianism in early modern Eurasia, see also “Speaking the End Times: Prophecy and Messianism in Early-Modern Eurasia,” special issue of *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 61, 1–2 (2018). On commensuration as an analytical framework in the study of early modern imperial

In this vein, our Ottoman-centric case studies explore how archival formations can productively be studied by moving beyond the institutional focus on singular state archives, or sometimes beyond state archives altogether. We demonstrate how the existence of relatively well-preserved central state archives in Istanbul (in marked distinction from other contemporaneous and prior Islamicate polities) belie many Europeanist assumptions about the viability of a statist approach to the archives.<sup>30</sup> We inquire, *inter alia*, how such examples may help us conceptualize archivality beyond archives (e.g., in the study of paper trails, and in the pursuit of biographical and prosopographical approaches to the lives of texts that neither began nor ended with the moment of record making/archiving), and to thematize rather than naturalize the relationship between archives and sovereign boundaries.

Based on our understanding of the Ottoman archival experience, our critique of the “Neo-Eurocentric” historiography of archives focuses on two key elements: its “civilizational” taxonomy, and its emphasis on the centralized archive as a global yardstick. The first part of this essay addresses the usefulness of the concept of the “Islamic archive” and, more broadly, the logic of the historiographical construct of “archival cultures.” The second part turns to several interrelated issues concerning the over-emphasis on the centralized archive, and adopts Sue McKemmish’s argument concerning continuum theory as a means to assess a diverse set of record-keeping and archival practices.<sup>31</sup>

#### “ARCHIVAL CULTURES” AND AN “ISLAMIC COMPARISON”

A recent collection of studies of early modern archives proceeds, in the words of its editor, “from the conviction that archival cultures are historically specific and contingent.”<sup>32</sup> But whether pluralized or not, how analytically useful is the term “archival culture”? This nomenclature, we argue, isolates specific institutional

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textual formations more generally, see William F. Hanks, *Converting Words: Maya in the Age of the Cross* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010). On commensurability across the eastern Mediterranean in the context of recordkeeping and documentary practices more specifically, see Francisco Apellániz, *Breaching the Bronze Wall: Franks at Mamluk and Ottoman Courts and Markets* (Leiden: Brill, 2020).

<sup>30</sup> While beyond the scope of the current study, we note that the formation of the modern Prime Ministry Archive in Turkey, explicitly following Western models, is part and parcel of the confluence of historicism and Eurocentrism. This institutional history awaits a detailed study.

<sup>31</sup> Sue McKemmish, “Placing Records Continuum Theory and Practice,” *Archival Science* 1, 4 (2001): 333–59. McKemmish urges custodians of archives and librarians to embrace a continuum model for information managing systems equipped to both assess and create categories that mirror the expansion of interconnectable human thought and action. We adapt her notion of a “continuum” to the historical study of archivality and suggest its effectiveness in moving beyond geographic and culturalist divisions.

<sup>32</sup> Walsham, “Social History,” 12. Later in the same paragraph the author describes “the defining features of early modern archival culture and consciousness”—notably singularized, and with the European modifier removed, but still presumed to be “the” early modern archival culture par excellence.

repositories from the ebb and flow of textuality that is a precondition of archival formation and processing, and that rarely adhered to ethnolinguistic divisions, let alone to the civilizational blocs that habitually underwrite the notion of “archival cultures”—“European,” “Islamic,” “Chinese,” et cetera. The facile equivalence and coextension between “culture” and “polity” (and, often, language) that the nomenclature of “archival culture” perpetuates has grave analytical consequences in the case of imperial archives, early modern or otherwise, that self-consciously sought to assemble and order objects of wide spatial and ethnolinguistic provenance. But even in cases of more circumscribed archival ventures, we suggest that “archival cultures” are best left to the microbiologists.<sup>33</sup>

The presumed static nature of archives in the “archival culture” metaphor helps explain the unintended fit between Neo-Eurocentric logics and the tautological “Europeanness” of early modern archivalities as objects of study. Again, Randolph Head serves as a guide for the most illuminating work to date on comparative archival practices; he was a strong proponent of the field’s globalization. In his article dedicated to sixteenth-century European archivality, Head devotes a short section to what he dubs “an Islamic comparison.” He readily admits that the study of record-keeping practices in non-European societies is tentative and cautions his readers that “it is far too early to reach any comparative conclusions.” Despite this caveat, he surveys several recent studies of record-keeping practices in the Mamluk Sultanate and, to a lesser extent, in earlier Muslim-ruled polities (namely, the ‘Umayyads and the ‘Abbasids) to point to the importance of “question[ing] expectations that derive from European experience.”<sup>34</sup> Head is particularly drawn to the “Islamic

<sup>33</sup> The meaning of microbiological “archival culture,” namely “undisturbed storage” of bacteria populations that have survived “long-term under limited growth” in sealed vials (or similar conditions), envisions the archive as merely an agnostic container that serves as a barrier against intrusion from the outside for its inert contents. Even under such conditions, microbiologists have noted “extensive heterogeneity” among cultures that “stemmed from the same isolate stored in multiple vials.” The prevailing assumptions here—that these cultures witnessed only limited growth, and that any developments that took place were wholly internal to those cultures, irrespective of the vial let alone outside conditions—go against everything we know about how human archives function, and their partaking in socio-political transformations of great import. As Duranti reminds us, recurring processes of archival reorganization have profoundly transformed the nature and meaning of archival objects contained therein. Archives and their holdings, in other words, are never static, and rarely isolated from the outside. Kelly Edwards *et al.*, “Genetic Variability among Archival Cultures of *Salmonella* Typhimurium,” *FEMS Microbiology Letters* 199, 2 (2001): 215–19, 17; Amy Sutton, Raphael Buencamino, and Abraham Eisenstark, “RpoS Mutants in Archival Cultures of *Salmonella* Enterica Serovar Typhimurium,” *Journal of Bacteriology* 182, 16 (2000): 4375–79. Luciana Duranti, “Archives as Place,” *Archives & Manuscripts* 24, 2 (1996): 242–55.

<sup>34</sup> Rudolph C. Head, “Early Modern European Archivality: Organised Records, Information, and State Power around 1500,” in Liesbeth Corens, Kate Peters, and Alexandra Walsham, eds., *Archives & Information in the Early Modern World* (Oxford: Published for the British Academy by Oxford University Press, 2018), 29–52, here 34.

case” because “the older scholarship has generally maintained that almost no archival records remained from the ‘Abbasid and Mamluk periods.’”<sup>35</sup> He then moves to survey Tamer el-Leithy’s and Konrad Hirschler’s excellent studies of archival practices in the Mamluk sultanate that together challenge any casual reference to “[t]he apparent lack of “archives” in the pre-Ottoman Islamic Middle East.”<sup>36</sup> Head adopts these studies’ conclusion that archival practices across the Islamicate world varied considerably and questions the assumption that “the Abbasids, Seljuks, Mamluks, and European princes were all doing the same thing with their legal and administrative records.” Head’s emphasis on the differences between European states and various “Islamic” polities and within the latter is valid. Yet in his narrative, the differences seem to function as sharp temporal and spatial divides: pre-Ottoman versus Ottoman; “early modern Europe” versus “the Islamic case.”<sup>37</sup>

Since Head is interested in the archival landscape at the turn of the sixteenth century, his centering on pre-Ottoman cases to the exclusion of Ottoman archival practices remains unexplained. By, perhaps unwittingly, comparing “pre-Ottoman Islamic” archival practices with “early modern European” ones, he ends up ignoring the very formation of an Ottoman administrative elite in the late fifteenth century, part of whose very *raison d’être* was to systematically preserve registers. Head therefore disregards the multiple and variegated genealogies of these very archival practices that both emerged from and ultimately defined a broad, transregional dynamic. Finally, by labeling complex ruling establishments such as the ‘Abbasids and Mamluks “Islamic” he seems to suggest that there is a civilizational and even confessional dimension to those archives/archival practices.

### *The Islamicness of the “Islamic Archives”*

The prevalent invocation of the “Islamic” in comparative projects echoes a long-standing debate concerning the appropriate use of such a term. It also further demonstrates the pressing need to assess how implicit Neo-Eurocentrism revives methodologies and culturalist biases long thought to have been superseded. In particular, many studies of archives and archival practices in premodern Muslim-ruled polities have tended to adopt, often uncritically, the assumption that the jurisprudential traditions of Islam privilege oral testimony over uncorroborated written evidence.<sup>38</sup> In this historiographical vein, the alleged suspicion toward

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> See Tamer el-Leithy, “Living Documents, Dying Archives”; Hirschler, “From Archive to Archival Practices.”

<sup>37</sup> Head, “Early Modern European Archivality,” 34–35.

<sup>38</sup> For instance, Ghislaine Lydon, “A Paper Economy of Faith without Faith in Paper: A Reflection on Islamic Institutional History,” *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization* 71, 3 (2009): 647–59.

the written word has been one of the unique features of the “Islamic archive.” Specialists, though, have long called this assumption into question.<sup>39</sup> While it is true that different jurisprudential arguments articulated within Islamic schools of law were concerned with the evidentiary reliability of the written document, jurists developed legal arguments to justify complex record-keeping systems that did not rely on the corroborating testimony of witnesses for each and every document. For instance, certain Central Asian jurists who followed the Hanafi school of law, a branch of which was adopted by the Ottoman dynasty and its learned hierarchy, sought to establish a broader culture of trust by granting a special status to certain types of documents that could be used without the corroborating testimony of witnesses. And in the Ottoman lands, officially appointed Hanafi jurists argued that the centrality of the Ottoman imperial bureaucracy constituted the authority and maintained the integrity and reliability of archived documents and registers.<sup>40</sup> In other words, archival practices and bureaucrats replaced corroborating testimony by a living witness for each and every written document and register.

This jurisprudential creativity, observed in certain Ottoman contexts but by no means universally accepted across the early modern Islamic world, raises questions about the existence of a shared “Islamic archival culture.”<sup>41</sup> It shows that different jurists sought to justify solutions to new archival challenges on the basis of different jurisprudential traditions (and in so doing tried to establish the Islamicness of the archive, as Shahab Ahmed would have argued).<sup>42</sup> These attempts were sometimes contested.<sup>43</sup> But their very existence undermines any monocausal explanation that is based on the “Islamicness” of the archive and fails to account for the diversity in record-keeping practices and archiving activities across Muslim-ruled polities. Thus, while much of the attention to the

<sup>39</sup> For instance, Baber Johansen, “Formes de langage et fonctions publiques: Stéréotypes, témoins et offices dans la preuve par l’écrit en droit musulman,” *Arabica* 44, 3 (1997): 333–76; Guy Burak, “Evidentiary Truth Claims, Imperial Registers, and the Ottoman Archive: Contending Legal Views of Archival and Record-Keeping Practices in Ottoman Greater Syria (Seventeenth–Nineteenth Centuries),” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 79, 2 (2016): 233–54; Jessica M. Marglin, “Written and Oral in Islamic Law: Documentary Evidence and Non-Muslims in Moroccan Shari’a Courts,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 59, 4 (2017): 884–911.

<sup>40</sup> Burak, “Evidentiary Truth Claims.”

<sup>41</sup> As Francisco Apellániz has meticulously demonstrated, the transition from Mamluk to Ottoman rules in the Levant led to a radical change in recordkeeping practices, while at the same time allowing for various attitudes toward the written word to coexist within the Ottoman documentary regime. Apellániz, *Breaching the Bronze Wall*, 136–38. See also Guy Burak, “‘In Compliance with the Old Register’: On Ottoman Documentary Depositories and Archival Consciousness,” *Journal of Economic and Social History of the Orient* 62, 5–6 (2019): 799–823.

<sup>42</sup> Shahab Ahmed, *What Is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

<sup>43</sup> Burak, “Evidentiary Truth Claims.”

“Islamicness” of certain archives grew out of jurisprudential debates concerning the evidentiary status of the written document, this focus on evidentiary law overlooks multivalent practices adopted to produce, preserve, and deploy textual authority in Muslim-ruled polities and Muslim circles in which the shar’i evidentiary status of the documents was not a major legal concern. This was often the case, for instance, with diplomatic missives.

In questioning the meaningfulness of the “Islamic” archive, we also suggest an alternative to the presumed fault line between centralized state repositories and “the archive” and take seriously the shift from a static archive to mobile archival practices and trans-imperial, circulatory regimes of texts. In this sense, we embrace Head’s concept of archivality as methodologically generative, but caution against entwining it with civilizational assumptions about the singularity and boundedness of “early modern European archivality.”

We concur with Head on the need to carefully track the distinct discursive genealogies of particular record-keeping practices. Ottoman archivality evolved in conversation with certain European record-keeping practices. That these practices were legitimized in Europe by referring to their ostensible roots in Roman and feudal law,<sup>44</sup> while some Ottoman jurists legitimized them instead by referring to authorities within the Hanafi jurisprudential tradition, suggests that we need to attend to the retroactive nature of intellectual genealogies and the multi-directional circulations of both practices and their legitimizing discourses.

#### ARCHIVE AND CENTRALIZATION

The existence of a centralized archive has been key to the “Neo-Eurocentric” historiography on archivality. This emphasis on centralization has obscured other types of archival management. In a recent, thought-provoking article on archival practices in the Mamluk sultanate, Konrad Hirschler has argued for placing greater emphasis on a series of archival practices instead of looking for a single documentary depository that would resemble the modern central archive. As he demonstrated, shifting the focus to these practices reveals the operation of archiving networks through which the integrity of the sultanate’s paper trail was maintained. In his study, Hirschler responded to the pervasive privileging of Ottoman archival experience as the historiographical and conceptual yardstick for an “archive” in the Islamic world.<sup>45</sup>

The fairly centralized documentary depositories both in the Ottoman imperial capital and throughout the provinces (e.g., in collections of court records) resulted in unprecedented archival depth of cross-referenced textual production, which render Ottoman record-keeping ambitions easily comparable

<sup>44</sup> Head, “Early Modern European Archivality,” 46.

<sup>45</sup> Hirschler, “From Archive to Archival Practices.”

with those of many contemporaneous European polities. This comparability often presupposes progress in relation to other archival practices. The systematic interest of early modern Ottoman bureaucratic elites in the preservation of records and registers (or at least certain types of records and registers) may give an impression of a centralized and powerful information machine. But one may wonder, as several students of information in early modern Europe have, to what extent the physical concentration of records actually reflected the ability to retrieve information efficiently.<sup>46</sup>

Conversely, the formation of a coherent and committed bureaucratic elite and the operations of a much larger number of scribes of different types may have meant that information could be efficiently retrieved, at least in the relatively short term. Hirschler said that was already the case in the Mamluk sultanate and possibly in other Muslim polities besides the Ottomans, such as the Safavid and the Mughal empires. In recent years, scholars have given significant attention to different aspects of the formation of such bureaucratic elites throughout Islamic lands.<sup>47</sup> Their studies have shown the commitment of scribes to epistolary, bureaucratic, and courtly conventions over great distances and extended periods of time. And yet, because much of the paper trail that the members of these bureaucracies produced has not survived, this type of circulation of knowledge that formed imperial elites has garnered only limited scholarly consideration. Scholars have continued to focus instead on centralized documentary depositories.

The endurance of imperial polities for centuries in the absence of centralized documentary depositories, and their ability to cope with challenges similar to those the Ottomans were facing, cautions against over-emphasizing the maintenance and preservation of a centralized archive as a major indicator of progress and complexity. Moreover, it is worth pointing out that the Ottoman imperial administration itself was selective in its preservationist practices and only haphazardly registered certain types of documents and genres. For instance, the rulings of officially appointed jurisconsults (*muftis*) were not preserved systematically in centralized registers (although there was an attempt to

<sup>46</sup> For instance, Arndt Brendecke, *Empirical Empire*.

<sup>47</sup> Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "The Making of a Munshi," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 24, 2 (2004): 61–72; Colin Paul Mitchell, *The Practice of Politics in Safavid Iran: Power, Religion and Rhetoric* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2009); Bhavani Raman, *Document Raj: Writing and Scribes in Early Colonial South India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); Ekin Emine Tuşalp Atiyas, "Political Literacy and the Politics of Eloquence: Ottoman Scribal Community in the Seventeenth Century," PhD diss., Harvard University, 2013; Rajeev Kinra, *Writing Self, Writing Empire: Chandar Bhan Brahman and the Cultural World of the Indo-Persian State Secretary* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015); Apellániz, *Breaching the Bronze Wall*; Kathryn Babayan, *The City as Anthology: Eroticism and Urbanity in Early Modern Isfahan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2021), ch. 5; and, for a study that thematizes scribal practices beyond state bureaucracies, Sebastian R. Prange, *Monsoon Islam: Trade and Faith on the Medieval Malabar Coast* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

remedy this situation in the late seventeenth century). The same is true for the registers of the counsels of provincial governors.<sup>48</sup> Hence, we should not replace the misconceptions of an “Islamic archive” with that of a monolithic “Ottoman imperial” one, because neither attends to the variability and specificity of record-keeping instincts and practices within and across polities.

### *Boundaries of the Archive*

The focus on the centralized archive, which is often imagined as a precursor to the modern national archive, has led scholars to overlook other documentary venues and the relationships between various depositories. Documents produced by imperial administrative and ruling elites have also been preserved and recorded in many other settings, from the front pages of manuscripts to the archives of monasteries and Sufi lodges, to foreign chanceries, libraries, and other collections. To the extent that such documents have been examined, they have often been regarded as “copies” of original documents preserved elsewhere, most prototypically in the primary documentary depositories of the empire: the court records and the imperial registers.<sup>49</sup> This approach is myopic. First, the distinction between “original” and “copy” is hardly clear-cut, since these terms are relational and in certain circumstances the “copy,” when validated, could and did act as an original. Second, and probably more importantly, the relationship between multiple archives or documentary depositories can shed light on key aspects of the emergence of an imperial and even trans-imperial “fabric of trust” in documents and registers.<sup>50</sup> And third, analyses based on “original” and “copy” occlude the historical reality of an archival continuum irreducible to either a centralized imperial bureaucratic apparatus or its preserved remnants.

Consider, for instance, the archives of Ottoman monasteries. As Ana Sekulić has demonstrated, Franciscan monks in Ottoman Bosnia preserved relevant Ottoman documents attesting to their monastery’s privileges and property. Clearly, the monks deployed these documents to make legal claims

<sup>48</sup> James E. Baldwin, *Law and Empire in Ottoman Cairo* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), ch. 2; Guy Burak, “Şeyhülislâm Feyzullah Efendi, the Ḥanafī Mufti of Jerusalem and the Rise of the Provincial *Fatāwā* Collections in the Eighteenth Century,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 64, 4 (2021): 377–403.

<sup>49</sup> For an exception, see the important analysis of vizirial *hüküms* as their own genre, rather than reduced “copies” of sultanic firmans, in Mihnea Berindei and Gilles Veinstein, *L’Empire ottoman et les pays roumains, 1544–1545: étude et documents* (Paris: Éditions de l’École des hautes études en sciences sociales, 1987), 124–25.

<sup>50</sup> Marina Rustow has recently discussed the complex relationship between the “original” and the “copy” in the Fatimid context: *The Lost Archive: Traces of a Caliphate in a Cairo Synagogue* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020), chs. 12–13. For an earlier treatment of the rich lives of “copies” of medieval French charters, and a critique of the normativity of the “ur-text,” see Brigitte Miriam Bedos-Rezak, “Toward an Archaeology of the Medieval Charter,” in *When Ego Was Imago: Signs of Identity in the Middle Ages* (Boston: Brill, 2011), 37–54.

vis-à-vis the Ottoman provincial and imperial administration. It is possible that the monks' challenges spurred members of the Ottoman administrative elite to preserve more meticulously certain types of documents. Numerous petitions to the Sultan's council indicate that Ottoman subjects, and members of the administrative and ruling elites, used documents at their disposal to challenge official resolutions and decisions. These ongoing exchanges, rather than any specific record's status as an "original," proved crucial for maintaining an integral paper trail, or, in Rustow's words, "an ecology of documents," across multiple venues.<sup>51</sup>

Another illustration of how the "original" and "copy" model of provenance limits our understanding of circulatory regimes comes from the archives of the Venetian *bailate*, the Venetian state's resident embassy in Istanbul. Entire sections of these archives consist of what are deemed, through the *bailate*'s own filing logic, as mere "copies" of Ottoman "originals." However, to treat these "copies" as having a simple, unambiguous provenance (say, in the Ottoman imperial divan) ignores not only their complex itineraries, but also the interpretive apparatus these documents accrued and shed along the way. Take, for instance, the following entry in an inventory prepared after the transfer of the *bailate* archives to France in 1798: "Another [record] said [to arrive] from Durrës with some selected charters concerning the matters of that *scala* [trading post], that is hüccets, decrees, summaries, and other."<sup>52</sup> It suggests, first, that certain records arrived in the *bailate* chancery by way of circuitous itineraries through provincial locales. This in itself is hardly surprising, since Durrës (now in Albania) retained its significance for Adriatic trade long after this former Venetian colony was conquered by the Ottomans in the early sixteenth century and remained—like most Adriatic and Aegean Venetian colonies and ports where the Venetian state exercised soft power—under the diplomatic portfolio of the *bailate* in Istanbul. More striking is the detailed listing of the types of loose charters in the attachment; that is, "hüccets, decrees, summaries, and other." *Hüccets* held a special status in the *bailate* archives, likely due to their presumed probative value. "Summaries" may have referred to one of several different genres, including some understood as prototypically Ottoman. Regardless of the specific genre intended here and its putative provenance, it is clear that the legibility of any particular item in this instance would have relied on its placement in relation to all other types of documents in the cache, which invoked imperial authority (the decree), that of other levels of Ottoman officialdom (the *hüccet* would have been issued by a *kadı* magistrate), as well

<sup>51</sup> Ana Sekulić, "From a Legal Proof to a Historical Fact: Trajectories of an Ottoman Document in a Franciscan Monastery, Sixteenth to Twentieth Century," *Journal of Economic and Social History of the Orient* 62, 5 (2019): 925–62. On the "ecology of documents," see Rustow, *Lost Archive*, 245–377.

<sup>52</sup> Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Bailo a Costantinopoli (henceforth: ASVe, BaC), 378, fol. 379v.

as that of lower scribes and secretaries entrusted with producing summaries. Whereas the physical distance between the *bailate* and the Porte was short, the documents that bound them together could, and often did, travel further—in this case, the nearly 900 kilometers of the overland route between Istanbul and Durrës—only to make the same route back, ending up just across the Golden Horn.

As the examples above illustrate, by moving from a focus on fixed centralized repositories to mobile circuits of texts we can better appreciate the mechanisms by which a sixteenth-century trans-imperial space of circulation came to encompass a vast region wherein rulers great and small vied for the right to assert claims to territory and authority. These claims were enacted through ever more elaborate circuits of knowledge production and multiple sites of record making, deployment, and preservation. This proliferating phenomenon of contextualized claims to space and legitimacy within a competitive environment redefined the nature of both the “state” and its archived record of administrative practice. While the expanding courtly establishments of dynastic houses and their palatial abodes may suggest centralized (and centralizing) nodes of authoritative rule, it is from within the circuit of texts and the personages who produced, translated, deployed, and “archived” them that a new vision of entangled, coeval state practice might be explored.<sup>53</sup> This “circuit” of texts and personages was often forged from within the brokered zones it was designed to manage: territorial spaces defined by uneven supervisory oversight and ambiguous suzerainty, yet parlayed by imperial establishments from zones of fragmentary power into legible records of sovereign claims.

Tracing the links between territory, management, and the textual production necessary to both navigate and define imperial sovereignty moves us away from monolithic “centralized states” that “exchanged” information, “encountered” each other in the ambassadorial reception hall or on the battlefield, “surveilled” rivals through elaborate information networks, or even “translated” and copied the texts of treaties and edicts of command or complaint. Efforts to define the “trans-imperial” offer an instructive countermodel to narratives of encounter and exchange. At the same time, highlighting trans-imperial processes also challenges the assumptions of so-called “frontier” histories by insisting that “center” and “frontier” are hardly fixed or pregiven (either spatially or conceptually). Rather, they are partially produced through the very circuits of texts that operated as both an *index* of sovereign claims and a *register* of a new

<sup>53</sup> Our use of “coeval” derives from Johannes Fabian’s *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), esp. 30–35. 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*” [his italics], and argues instead for the creation of a shared, coeval space of intersubjectivity. Here we suggest that the “trans-imperial” is a *created* coeval space in which the circulation and mobility of the text play a key role.

mode of imperial operation: knowledge production and preservation as a form of power. The “knowledge-power” matrix has all too often been located at the birth of “modernity” and connected first to colonial regimes and then to the nation-state economies that define(d) their metropolises.<sup>54</sup>

Turning to both the territory rendered legible via circuits of texts and the set of expectations that sustains their functionality as an index of sovereign claims illuminates two aspects of a transregional archivality: the proliferation of imperial writs and trans-imperial correspondence as mobile objects imbued with authority; and the shared vocabulary of governance that emerged. Consequently, we seek a methodology capable of illuminating the interwoven nature of rival dynastic systems that operated within a “shared space” of textual engagement. This shared space of texts, the expectations that render them both actionable and worthy of preservation, and the systems of dispatch, deployment, and retrieval that emerged to sustain them become a new map of early modern Eurasian archivality. It lets us focus less on civilizational or imperial boundaries and difference and more on the mechanisms by which written authority was produced, authenticated, circulated, and enacted across territorial and linguistic boundaries. We thus turn from presuming the fixity of a state archive toward both the mobility and potential mutability of entextualized authority.

Furthermore, a methodology attentive to the production and circulation of texts allows us to reassess the well-studied examples of Ottoman-Habsburg and Ottoman-Safavid rivalries that all but define frontier narratives of the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries. Scholars of the protracted conflict between these dynastic houses have often highlighted the intricacy of “borderland” diplomacy and the variegated identities that it spawned.<sup>55</sup> “Diplomatics” is itself a newly

<sup>54</sup> The invention of the “medieval” in the Renaissance humanist enterprise, and its revitalization within Michel Foucault’s narrative of an emergent disciplinary order demonstrates the early conflation of periodization and hegemonic power. Anthony Grafton provides an example of this mode within the Renaissance moment, in *Defenders of the Text: The Traditions of Scholarship in an Age of Science, 1450–1800* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991). Anne Clark Bartlett highlights some of the problematic aspects of Foucault’s approach in “Foucault’s ‘Medievalism,’” *Mystics Quarterly* 20, 1 (1994): 10–18. Kathleen Davis provides a model for unearthing the culturalist assumptions inherent in periodization schemes that might usefully be applied to this effort to re-think the geography of archives and the “early modern” more generally, in *Periodization and Sovereignty: How Ideas of Feudalism and Secularization Govern the Politics of Time* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008). See also Greg Anderson’s call for a new ethical ontology in our treatment of time: “Retrieving the Lost Worlds of the Past: The Case for an Ontological Turn,” *American Historical Review* 120, 3 (2015): 787–810.

<sup>55</sup> For a representative sample of border and frontier diplomacy, see Maria Pia Pedani Fabris, “The Ottoman Venetian Frontier (15th–18th Centuries),” in Kemal Çiçek, ed., *The Great Ottoman-Turkish Civilisation*, 4 vols. (Ankara: Yeni Türkiye, 2000), vol. 1, 171–77; A.C.S. Peacock, ed., *The Frontiers of the Ottoman World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Géza Dávid and Pál Fodor, *Ransom Slavery along the Ottoman Borders Early Fifteenth–Early Eighteenth Centuries* (Leiden: Brill, 2007); Pascal Firges *et al.*, eds., *Well-Connected Domains: Towards an Entangled Ottoman History* (Leiden: Brill, 2014); Sabri Ateş, “Empires at the Margin: Towards a History of Ottoman-Iranian Borderlands and the Borderlands Peoples, 1843–1881,” PhD diss., New York

generative field, focused on porous identities and easily transgressed boundaries; conversion, shifting expressions of imperial fealty, and affiliation with multiple regional powerbrokers all suggest more mobile rather than fixed modes of identification. Still, the emphasis on “crossing” physical, moral, or political borders reinforces the separateness of Ottoman, Safavid, Venetian, and Habsburg imperial narratives and elides the processes whereby these brokered zones of engagement also served to coalesce a mechanism of rule dependent on the very production and circulation of textual assertions and proclamations.<sup>56</sup>

Departing from traditional models of diplomatic history, recent scholarship tracks the efforts of rulers to remap their own power via linguistic and legal reforms defined in relation to each other in chancery practices, translation mechanisms, and bureaucratic organization developed precisely within a trans-imperial landscape.<sup>57</sup> Crucial to the success of Ottoman, Safavid, and Habsburg efforts to dominate contested territories was their respective dexterity in transforming imperial households into scribal bureaucracies capable of managing far-flung imperial domains.<sup>58</sup> In a sense, then, the literary, linguistic, and legal acumen necessary for the assertion of rule in a contested zone was both a defensive and an offensive strategy: defensive in that key representatives of each establishment solidified a text-dependent court as a means to forfend conquest, and offensive since courtly establishments also extended territorial control via the same tactics. Yet whether in the house of the

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University, 2006; Michael Polczyński, “The *Relacyja* of Sefer Muratowicz: 1601–1602 Private Royal Envoy of Sigismund III Vasa to Shah ‘Abbas I,” *Turkish Historical Review* 5, 1 (2014): 59–93. By contrast, Natalie Rothman helped turn the focus of early modern scholars toward the “trans-imperial,” in *Brokering Empire: Trans-Imperial Subjects between Venice and Istanbul* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011).

<sup>56</sup> John-Paul Ghobrial, for example, overtly criticizes the presumption of a European early modernity formed in isolation and argues specifically for the circulation of texts and rumor as constitutive of a shared manuscript tradition, in *The Whispers of Cities: Information Flows in Istanbul, London, and Paris in the Age of William Trumbull* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); and “The Archive of Orientalism and Its Keepers: Re-Imagining the Histories of Arabic Manuscripts in Early Modern Europe,” *Past & Present* 230, sup. 11 (2016): 90–111.

<sup>57</sup> Tijana Krstić discusses the significant interplay of translation, the Ottoman chancery, and trans-imperial constructs, in “Of Translation and Empire: Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Imperial Interpreters as Renaissance Go-Betweens,” in Christine Woodhead, ed., *The Ottoman World* (Milton Park: Routledge, 2012), 130–42. See also Woodhead’s now-canonical article, “From Scribe to Litterateur: The Career of a Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Katib,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 9, 1 (1982): 55–74; and Kaya Şahin and Julia Schleck’s emphasis on the unified coeval space in the life of one early modern traveler, in “Courtly Connections: Anthony Sherley’s *Relation of His Travels* (1613) in a Global Context,” *Renaissance Quarterly*, 69, 1 (2016): 80–115.

<sup>58</sup> On the emergence of the early modern court as a distinct yet shared process, see the contributors to J.S.A. Adamson, ed., *The Princely Courts of Europe: Ritual, Politics and Culture under the Ancien Régime, 1500–1750* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1999); and Jeroen Duindam, *Royal Courts in Dynastic States and Empires: A Global Perspective* (Leiden: Brill, 2011). On the Ottoman, Safavid, and Habsburg dynamic, see Kaya Şahin, *Empire and Power in the Reign of Süleyman: Narrating the Sixteenth-Century Ottoman World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

victor or the vanquished, the textual record and its preservation as an authoritative regime of sovereignty reigned supreme.<sup>59</sup>

However, the imperial strategy of producing texts, exchanging them as writs of agreed upon negotiations, and preserving them as an archived repository of customary practice available for consultations for either internal administration or trans-imperial mediation, was also a *trompe l'oeil*: a feint that camouflaged the inscrutability, even the messiness, of an ever-mobile geopolitical environment.<sup>60</sup> This “mobility” can be assessed in at least three primary ways: the mobility of the text itself, as both inscribing and embodying a circuit of authoritative claims across diverse landscapes (territorial/institutional/judicial); the mobility, or rather inconstancy, of trust these circuits of texts generated along with heightened suspicions concerning possible forgery or purposeful use of misinformation; and the mobility suggested by the differing actors involved in composing, dispatching, translating, “copying,” and preserving these texts, who obviously brought to their practices contested and shifting interpretive frames. Following the work of Francisco Apellániz, who demonstrates the evidentiary value of the multiple drafts and versions of diplomatic treaties negotiated between the Ottoman imperial council and the Venetian *bailo*, we focus below on the textual “artifacts” of the protracted negotiations necessary to conjoin distinct legal and interpretive practices into one ratified and binding agreement.<sup>61</sup> “Mobility” and the concept of textual “artifacts” also turn our attention to problematic assumptions concerning a “centralized” Ottoman imperial archive.<sup>62</sup> Here we suggest that the Ottoman imperial “archive” we consult today serves as both an index of imperial power and a reminder of its interdependencies.<sup>63</sup> Acts of scribal composition (either in

<sup>59</sup> The question of the relationship between empire, text, and administration allows for comparison across geographies and periodizations all too often isolated by culturalist or teleological assumptions. See, for example, the treatment of textual production and its circulation in works such as: Chelsea Z. Wang, “Dilemmas of Empire: Movement, Communication, and Information Management in Ming China, 1368–1644,” PhD diss., Columbia University, 2017; Brendecke, *Empirical Empire*; Kathryn Burns, *Into the Archive: Writing and Power in Colonial Peru* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); Christopher Leigh Connery, *The Empire of the Text: Writing and Authority in Early Imperial China* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998); and Gagan D. S. Sood, *India and the Islamic Heartlands: An Eighteenth-Century World of Circulation and Exchange* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

<sup>60</sup> Gábor Ágoston, “Information, Ideology, and Limits of Imperial Policy: Ottoman Grand Strategy in the Context of Ottoman-Habsburg Rivalry,” in Virginia Aksan and Daniel Goffman, eds., *The Early Modern Ottomans: Remapping the Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 75–103.

<sup>61</sup> Apellániz, *Breaching the Bronze Wall*, 136–37.

<sup>62</sup> Heather Ferguson, “Unseating ‘State’ and ‘Archive’: Mobility and Manipulation in Past Environments and Present Praxis,” *Itinerario* 44, 3 (2021): 591–608.

<sup>63</sup> Lauren A. Benton argues that attention to how we deploy terminology such as “document” and “text” plays a key role in our ability to understand sovereignty more generally, in *A Search for Sovereignty: Law and Geography in European Empires, 1400–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 29–30.

an imperial chancery, a regional bureau or court, financial ministry, governorship, or even on military campaigns) utilizing distinct formulae testifying to its production (e.g., *kayd edilmiştir/tahrir*) suggest imperial intent but cannot be used to verify implementation. We must also track how these scribal compositions were then deployed as claims of imperial power across a range of contexts (such as an ambassadorial visit, within court proceedings, inserted into registers, copied from one context to another). Thus, to isolate a singular “document” from the variable acts of production and sites of deployment that remain part of its “meaning horizon” risks losing sight of the text as both the product and the catalyst of mobile circuits. The meticulous processes of authenticating and preserving authoritative writs relied on information-gathering networks and multiple sites of registration that linked imperial, regional, and legal actors in a continuous circuit of textual exchange. Acts of preservation were thus also acts of duplication. Maintaining an archival order in different depositories (and beyond) enabled the dynasty and other actors to cultivate an archival consciousness of both ruling elite and subjects.<sup>64</sup>

#### *Toward an Entangled History of Early Modern Archivality*

The presumed fixity of the “Islamic” or “Ottoman” archive, of the “state,” and of “originals” and “copies” as the basis for assessing trans-imperial spaces methodologically undermines any effort to move beyond the prism of either monolithic culturalist assumptions present even in comparativist modes or in new approaches to diplomatic “encounters” and chancery practices as a methodology of the trans-imperial.<sup>65</sup> This is particularly visible in the case of Ottoman-Venetian and Ottoman-Habsburg relations, as the sheer volume of carefully catalogued treaty texts continues to capture the eyes of historians and in turn to shape the narratives they tell about these key Eurasian powers. Beginning with Joseph Hammer-Purgstall, scholars invoked the “diplomatic” as the axis for analyzing a progressive textual account of Habsburg-Ottoman negotiations.<sup>66</sup> This is also the case in the Safavid-Ottoman axis, wherein the

<sup>64</sup> Recent work on state and extra-state preservationist practices highlights the problems in assuming either the primacy or singularity of the state archive. See the special issue “Beyond the Islamicate Chancery: Archives, Paperwork, and Textual Encounters across Eurasia,” Paolo Sartori, ed., *Itinerario* 44, 3 (2020).

<sup>65</sup> This is not to deny the excellent work produced by careful textual comparison, as is visible in Dariusz Kołodziejczyk, *The Crimean Khanate and Poland-Lithuania International Diplomacy on the European Periphery (15th–18th century): A Study of Peace Treaties Followed by Annotated Documents* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

<sup>66</sup> Robyn Dora Radway tracks this “treaty-driven” approach to diplomatic history and offers an alternative framework that shapes the arguments presented here by demonstrating how careful attention to circulation can redefine our methodological approach to textual production in: “Vernacular Diplomacy in Central Europe: Statesmen and Soldiers between the Habsburg and Ottoman Empires, 1543–1593,” PhD diss., Princeton University, 2017. Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall, *Geschichte des osmanischen Reiches*, 10 vols. (Pest: C. A. Hartleben, 1827).

negotiated texts of treaties and their preserved copies serve as the primary index of inter-imperial relations. The comparativist impulse to lay side-by-side versions of treaties as the primary locus of analysis leads to several perhaps unanticipated consequences. First, this move implies that “diplomacy” is something preserved in “official” texts of treaties, ratified by key participants from each side and hence that the variations between these texts result from mistranslation, miscommunication, or the intentional manipulation of stipulations within the treaties themselves. The focus thus becomes on how “versions” vary, what these variations signify, and whether or not they accurately reflect the “true” state of Ottoman-Habsburg/Safavid/Venetian relations. Consequently, the treaty becomes the signifier of monolithic entities and serves to reinforce a fiction of imperial supremacy. Second, this intense focus on the “versioning” of treaties also overemphasizes the momentous over the quotidian: wars, the death of rulers or of ambassadors, and the pronouncements of imperial councils. It thereby ignores the protracted nature of negotiations, the regional actors who parlayed the knowledge later ratified in treaty form, and the continuous circulation of letters and other textual artifacts between these actors that constitutes its own kind of administrative paper trail. This fictive version of imperial diplomacy plays an insidious, if unintentional, role in sanctioning civilizational or sectarian discourses that transform Habsburg:Ottoman, and Ottoman:Safavid into Christian:Muslim and Sunni:Shi‘i rivalry, respectively.

Layered practices and brokered circuits of textual exchanges belie both confessional or sectarian rivalries and displace the preserved fixity of recorded transactions. Consider, for instance, that even to simply compile a list of Habsburg-Ottoman treaties requires a redefinition of what is meant by either “official” process or “preserved” text and necessitates a reorientation towards an archival continuum, dependent on reiterative statements and duplication across imperial domains.<sup>67</sup> Whereas at least eleven treaties were negotiated from 1543–1593 between varied Habsburg and Ottoman representatives, only three or four dominate the literature on these imperial establishments (1547, 1562, 1568, and

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Hammer-Purgstall’s massive study set the norm for later scholars as varied as Ignaz de Testa, *Recueil des traités de la Porte Ottomane*, 10 vols. (Paris: Amyot, 1864–1911); Reşad Ekrem, *Osmanlı Muahedeleri ve kapitülasyonlar 1300–1920* (Istanbul: Muallim Ahmet Halit Kitaphanesi, 1934); and Josef Matuz, *Herrscherurkunden des Osmanensultans Süleymân des Prächtigen* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Schwarz, 1971) as representative examples. The inherited assumptions in this approach to cataloguing treaties can be seen in more recent studies, such as Karl Nehring, ed., *Austro-Turcica, 1541–1552: diplomatische Akten des habsburgischen Gesandtschaftsverkehrs mit der Hohen Pforte, im Zeitalter Süleymans des Prächtigen* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 1995); and Viorel Panaite, “Peace Agreements in Ottoman Legal and Diplomatic View (15th–17th Century),” in Kemal Çiçek, ed., *Pax Ottomana: Studies in Memoriam Prof. Dr. Nejat Göyünç* (Haarlem: SOTA, 2001), 277–308.

<sup>67</sup> Karl-Heinz Ziegler provides a useful example of traditional scholarship on diplomacy and treaties, in “The Peace Treaties of the Ottoman Empire with European Christian Powers,” in Randall Lesaffer, ed., *Peace Treaties and International Law in European History: From the Late Middle Ages to World War One* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 338–64, at 345.

sometimes 1565).<sup>68</sup> Because this was a period of relative territorial stability, it seems only the treaties that marked the seizure of new fortresses or the escalation from “border skirmish” into coordinated military campaigns tend to carry the weight of diplomatic history. Simply noting the proliferation of texts during a period of so-called peace underscores the protracted textual exchanges necessary to extend and sustain administrative control otherwise obscured when privileging full military engagement.

If we turn to the Safavid-Ottoman case, where no recorded *ahid-nāme* exists from the Peace of Zuhab (1639) to the collapse of the Safavid dynasty in 1722, we confront a different problem: how to interpret the absence, rather than overabundance, of formalized and preserved treaty texts. As Selim Güngörürler argues, this presumed lack of “eventful relations” ignores the emergence of new textual genres, such as the monarchal epistle (*nāme-i hümâyün*) and grand-vizierial letter (*mektûb-i sâmi*), in addition to new methods of bureaucratic specialization and the reiterative processing of records within imperial chanceries.<sup>69</sup> Güngörürler thus 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 trans-imperial relations as well. 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 maneuvers; a courteous phrase delivered with the import of an ultimatum.<sup>70</sup>

The shift from chancery scribe or translator to imperial negotiator *cum* ambassador marks the careers of officials within Habsburg, Ottoman, and Safavid courtly establishments. These men were often trans-imperial themselves, converted from one imperial system into the bureaucratic functionality of another. The earliest translators of Hungarian for the Ottoman court helped to establish an official post of dragoman and inflected that post with chancery-like qualities.<sup>71</sup> And the porous Safavid-Ottoman border witnessed the

<sup>68</sup> For the treaties before 1574, see the catalogue of Ottoman documents preserved in the Vienna Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv: Ernst Dieter Petritsch, *Regesten der osmanischen Dokumente im Österreichischen Staatsarchiv, 1480–1574* (Vienna: Staatsarchiv, 1991).

<sup>69</sup> Selim Güngörürler, “The Ottoman Chancery’s Role in Diplomacy with Iran,” *Itinerario* 44, 3 (2020): 572–90. Pál Fodor drew attention to the significance of these genres in “The Grand Vizierial Telhis: A Study in the Ottoman Central Administration 1566–1656,” *Archivum Ottomanicum* 15 (1997): 137–88. For published examples, consult Halil Sahillioğlu, ed., *Koca Sinan Paşa’nın telhisleri* (Istanbul: İslam Tarih, Sanat ve Kültür Araştırma Merkezi, 2004); and Rhoads Murphey, “The Veliyuddin Telhis: Notes on the Sources and Interrelations between Koçi Bey and Contemporary Writers of Advice to Kings,” *Bulleten* 43 (1979): 547–71.

<sup>70</sup> Güngörürler, “Ottoman Chancery’s Role,” 3.

<sup>71</sup> Christine Woodhead, “An Experiment in Official Historiography: The Post of Şehnâmeçi in the Ottoman Empire, c. 1555–1605,” *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 75 (1983): 157–82.

creation of shared artisanal, scribal, and intellectual cultures.<sup>72</sup> These cases instantiate the rise of the scribe to the level of master of diplomacy, and even to the position of head of state. For instance, Rami Mehmed Efendi, key representative in the Treaty of Karlowitz of 1699, moved from head of the chancery (*reisü'l-küttâb*) to the grand vizierate in a matter of eight years,<sup>73</sup> and figures such as Celalzade Mustafa, serving as chancellor under Sultan Süleyman from 1525–1534, actively reshaped definitions of state and sovereignty as they composed legal manuals of conquest and official correspondence exchanged between vying “universal” emperors.<sup>74</sup>

While rivalry typifies scholarly analysis of these inter-imperial relations, the coeval emergence of bureaucratic specialization gestures toward a different narrative: one in which the genres, style, and production of texts speak to trans-imperial institutional vocabularies and repertoires of rule. Moreover, this shared Eurasian archivality generated a type of companionate universe in which ambassadorial negotiators became joined in a collaborative exercise of producing and exchanging texts. The record of sustained contact between Rami Mehmed Efendi and the former Safavid ambassador Ebulmasum Khan Şamlu (serving between 1696 and 1698) and the testament to the intense exchange between the English diplomat Paul Rycout and the dynasty of Köprülü viziers serving the Ottoman state from 1656–1711 should qualify a straight polemical reading of Rycout’s image of the Ottoman state.<sup>75</sup> In both cases, a vision of sovereignty and state management emerges as a distinctly shared creation, even if the tone of Rycout’s epistle on the “declining” Ottoman state suggests otherwise.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>72</sup> Gottfried Hagen, “Translations and Translators in a Multilingual Society: A Case Study of Persian-Ottoman Translations, Late Fifteenth to Early Seventeenth Century,” *Eurasian Studies* 11, 1 (2003): 95–134; and Carina Johnson’s chapter, “Boundaries and the Culture of Diplomacy in Central Europe,” in her book *Cultural Hierarchy in Sixteenth-Century Europe: The Ottomans and Aztecs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 161–96.

<sup>73</sup> Tuşalp Atiyas, “Political Literacy.”

<sup>74</sup> Şahin, *Empire and Power*, 214–52.

<sup>75</sup> The mobility of scribes and officials across the borders of presumed rivals is well documented. Here we are simply calling attention to figures who exemplify the emergence of a shared discursive space. Rami Mehmed Efendi, who would ultimately move from the post of state secretary in 1694 to Grand Vizier six years later, demonstrates the significance of text to rulership as well. And documented correspondence with the Safavid ambassador Ebulmasum Khan Şamlu indicates that friendship also defined mobile visions of sovereignty. See Güngörürler, “Ottoman Chancery’s Role,” 7. For a broader consideration of the mobility of trans-imperial textual practitioners and its implication for the genealogies of Orientalism, see E. Natalie Rothman, *The Dragoman Renaissance: Diplomatic Interpreters and the Routes of Orientalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2021).

<sup>76</sup> See Linda T. Darling, “Ottoman Politics through British Eyes: Paul Rycout’s *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire*,” *Journal of World History* 5, 1 (1994): 71–97; and “Political Change and Political Discourse in the Early Modern Mediterranean World,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 38, 4 (2008): 505–31.

If the treaty stands not as a substitute for trans-imperial analysis but rather as a text that maps more mobile circuits of exchange and institutional transformation, then we must also be wary of reading treaty texts themselves as transparent reflections of diplomatic transactions.<sup>77</sup> Moreover, the “preservation” of these texts is also suspect, since we can assume neither a comprehensive record of these protracted strategies of engagement nor transparent motives behind the catalogued records now held in the archival repositories we consult. Suspicion is warranted based on the few moments when purposeful obfuscation can be traced. Oghier Ghiselin de Busbecq, acting in the service of Emperor Ferdinand I after the death of his mentor and former ambassador Malvezzi, twice believed he had attained a successfully ratified treaty in 1559, only to discover contradictions between the copies, leading him to risk his life to extend negotiations until a version was finally declared “official” in 1562.<sup>78</sup> In this case, even a ratified document, one that contained the rituals of agreement typically marked with the phrase “by the testimony of this letter, furnished with our hand-written signature and our seal appended to it” in the Habsburg case, and a *tuğra* (seal-like monogram), *elkab* (honorific titles), and *tahrir* (the colophon of the document) in the Ottoman cannot be read as a stable text.<sup>79</sup> The Ottoman “original” was actually a bid for supremacy, of which the Habsburg “copy” was not even cognizant. Further, this Habsburg version of the supposed treaty was never a “copy” of an Ottoman original but simply the record of a series of negotiations finally committed to writing. In other words, we must attend to the text as a *text in motion* even before we consider its circulation and mobility across linguistic and territorial domains.<sup>80</sup>

Thus, preserved records of treaties and of chancery-mediated imperial “decisions” can best be understood as distinct registers of multiple interest groups and powerbrokers “coded” as translatable acts of mediation. Of the eleven known instances of ratified treaties proffered as an example of this methodology here, only one (the 1568 Treaty of Edirne) was conducted in a mutually shared language, as ambassador Antonio Verantius and Grand Vizier

<sup>77</sup> On courier systems and transportation, see E. John B. Allen, *Post and Courier Service in the Diplomacy of Early Modern Europe* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1973), 33–37. These systems of circulation, particularly across Ottoman domains, remain understudied, but Selim Güngörürler has recently insisted on a methodological revolution that mirrors a revolution in early modern diplomacy, in: “Fraternity, Perpetual Peace, and Alliance in Ottoman-Safavid Relations, 1688–1698: A Diplomatic Revolution in the Middle East.” *Turica* 50 (2019): 145–207.

<sup>78</sup> For a full treatment of this case, see Radway, “Vernacular Diplomacy,” 41–45.

<sup>79</sup> Notably the Ottoman text uses the words of “letter of friendship” throughout most of this correspondence, rendering “treaty” a problematic term and one that masks the intricacies of trans-imperial communication.

<sup>80</sup> Anton C. Schaendlinger and Claudia Römer, eds., *Die Schreiben Süleymans des Prächtigen an Karl V., Ferdinand I. und Maximilian II* (Vienna: Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1983), #24.

Sokollu Mehmed Paşa resorted to the linguistic territory of their birth. The rest contain the traces of over one hundred ambassadors, messengers, and envoys who took part in transcribing, dispatching, carrying, and testifying to the transactional events of imperial councils. Further, as treaties were annulled upon the death of a sovereign and then renegotiated, some arrived in the moment of succession and were thus already null and void (such as the treaty of 1574, which Maximilian II never signed due to word of the death of Sultan Selim, thus requiring a new confirmation treaty ratified in 1575 negotiated between David Ungnad and Grand Vizier Sokollu Mehmed Paşa).<sup>81</sup> Succession was therefore simply a more vivid indication of an already fluid terrain, and the imperial council chambers were often the *least* important venues of these brokered arrangements.

By turning our attention once again to the brokered circuits of texts we can avoid prioritizing the imperial council halls and even the preserved record of negotiated treaties themselves. Not until 1555 did an appointed Habsburg ambassador assume a residential complex within Istanbul, and even then, that complex served more as a holding cell prior to a treaty's ratification than a thoroughfare for negotiations. The Ottomans appointed official dragomans but relied more on the governors of Buda as the "seat" for letter exchanges and source of information in their dealings with the Habsburgs. The governors of Buda in turn relied on their own campaigns of information-gathering, ever cognizant of variable loyalties, conflicting interests, and the often-untrustworthy nature of their "sources."<sup>82</sup>

The quest for "reliable information" vexed the mobile circuit of texts across the brokered zones of Habsburg-Ottoman-Safavid engagement. The Ottoman imperial registers of daily affairs (*mühimme defterleri*) were preserved first in the treasury and then in the residence of the grand vizirate. This shift in the site of the archived repository of imperial affairs indicates shifts in the reorganization of textual transactions in the late seventeenth century and in a conception of state sovereignty from the person of the sultan to the textualized bureaucracy of empire. These shifts are thus replete with anxious entreaties for "correct" information in an "appropriate" (i.e., translatable) language. This was especially true for Ottoman-Habsburg relations, since German, Latin, and Hungarian required the amassing of new scribal cohorts with the linguistic acumen to serve as trans-imperial agents. The Persianate world of literary production ensured, in the Ottoman-Safavid case, an already established mechanism for scribes to "pass" from one chancery to another. Courtly establishments were both populated by trans-imperial actors and sustained by

<sup>81</sup> Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv (HHStA), Vienna, Turcica, Karton 14, Konv. 3 (1559 VII-s.d.), fols. 78–117. This story is described in more detail in Radway, "Vernacular Diplomacy," 41.

<sup>82</sup> Heather L. Ferguson, *The Proper Order of Things: Language, Power, and Law in Ottoman Administrative Discourses* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018), 181–91.

trans-imperial circuits of texts. These circuits depended on trust and loyalty, and the men acclaimed as “servants of the realm” were those who consistently acted as reliable brokers of information across this territorial expanse.

One example of this anxiety of trust and textual authenticity can be traced in the first bound *mühimme* register from 1544–1545. Anxious about Ferdinand’s potential amassing of forces to seize back recently conquered territories, upwards of thirty-five edicts sought to track the movement of men and resources across Hungarian-occupied regions.<sup>83</sup> Strikingly, while these textual remnants of imperial anxieties differ from one to the next in terms of specific focus (supplies of human or material resources, access to knowledge of Habsburg movement, directives to support vulnerable fortresses), they share fixed attention on the veracity of the dispatchers themselves. The adjectives “trustworthy,” “loyal,” and “consistent” mark these men even if we can rarely trace their full careers in imperial service. Furthermore, the reliability of individuals in a constantly shifting border terrain became prioritized over anything else. Hence, when we find preserved records of men bidding for alliance with the Ottomans, the extension of imperial protection is rarely granted precisely because their loyalty cannot be assured.<sup>84</sup>

Here we suggest that imperial influence necessitated textual circuits of exchange and information that were incessantly shrouded by concerns over trust and authenticity. Thus, it is essential that the methodologies adopted to read these preserved records also account for the implied malleability of the text itself, carrying within it, as it does, a history of circulation and suspicion as to the fixity of its content. Moreover, this malleability points to the entangled process of textual production itself and suggests that imperial chanceries should not be treated as isolated, sovereign spaces. Rather, they indicate that the preserved record, the archival artifact, contains within it a history of coeval collaboration. Hence, we will now turn to the lifecycle of a document as an alternative method, one that prioritizes archivality over archive, and practice over the fixity of text, archival repository, or state.

### *Inscribing Authenticity-in-Circulation*

One of the basic insights of the archival turn concerns the imperative to treat documents as possessing social lives that can be studied, biographically and prosopographically, in their manifold permutations over time and space. The social life of documents neither begins nor ends with the fact of archival filing at a certain juncture (or junctures) and in specific depositories/chanceries. In this

<sup>83</sup> Halil Sahillioğlu, *Topkapı Sarayı Arşivi H. 951–952 tarihli ve E-12321 numaralı mühimme defteri* (Istanbul: İslam Tarihi, Sanat ve Kültür Araştırma Merkezi, 2002).

<sup>84</sup> Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivleri, *Mühimme Defter* (MD) 7: 103; MD 12: 246; MD 6: 98.

sense, the parsing of a document's biography to treat only its career as an archival record can provide insight on the competing trajectories of different textual objects that were archived together. But it risks artificially segmenting one phase in a document's biography, thereby imposing a false sense of orderliness and the power of sovereign boundaries to delimit documents' mobility, when in reality this power was often contested, if not entirely circumscribed by competing forces and communicative circuits.<sup>85</sup> At both the imperial and the trans-imperial levels these circuits, we suggest here, are essential to study because they are integral to the inscribed meaning of documents, often holding vital interpretive keys to how they were read and acted upon—both before and after the moment of entry into the archives.

The fundamentally trans-imperial biographies of several canonical genres of records can be illustrated effectively through the case of *firman*s and *hüküm*s circulating between Ottoman and Venetian institutional spaces. As the discussion below shows, in order to appreciate both the particularities of specific textual artifacts and, ultimately, the formation of recognizable genres and their attendant modes of archivization, we must hold in the same analytical frame the various institutional spaces where these records were drafted, copied, rescripted, summarized, translated, reported, filed, recalled, and referenced as holding probative value of some kind.

In thinking about the “careers” of Ottoman decrees, it is important to consider not simply how the official words of the sultan embodied in these highly regulated, carefully authenticated records were frequently re-textualized (and reincarnated) in “copies” and “translations” (designations whose largely heuristic value should be evident by now). Equally important—and not unrelated—is the question of how different materializations of the same putative “original” followed distinct regimes of circulation, or “cultivated habits of animating artifactually mediated texts, enabling the movement of discourse along predictable social trajectories,” in the words of anthropologist Francis Cody.<sup>86</sup> Whereas some were incorporated into locally produced and maintained copy-books (both in the Ottoman divan and in diplomatic chanceries), others—whether as scrolls, loose sheets, or sewn/folded/pasted/copied or otherwise embedded into larger text artifacts—were sent to addressees and authorized overhearers in Ottoman provincial governments or abroad. In the latter case, they might be enclosed within a diplomatic dispatch, which provided both the material and the epistemological framing device for the document-in-copy or document-in-translation. Others still might be clandestinely whisked away from the divan to be sold, exchanged, or gifted to

<sup>85</sup> McKemmish, “Placing Records.”

<sup>86</sup> Francis Cody, “Daily Wires and Daily Blossoms: Cultivating Regimes of Circulation in Tamil India's Newspaper Revolution,” *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 19, 2 (2009): 286–309, 287.

various interested parties.<sup>87</sup> What material dimensions of the Ottoman record were deemed important to preserve in these quite divergent paths of circulation? What kinds of authenticity and probative value were invested in different “copies”? Under what circumstances was a summary deemed “good enough” and what were the techniques for summarizing deployed for different audiences? Were there manuals, established procedures, and stylesheets (explicit or embodied in practice) to guide the multiplex stages of transformation involved in these practices of textual production and circulation?

To answer these questions requires a close look at specific nodes along these circulatory paths, nodes that functioned as distinct yet interconnected sites of archivization. Such an approach helps underscore how co-textual devices that accompanied documents from point A to point B (e.g., when the document was attached to a dispatch that summarized it, or when certain scribal annotations were reproduced in a later copy) often provided key interpretive frames as well. This further underscores the Ottoman chancery’s co-dependence on others.

A particularly illuminating example of the interdependence between the textual production of different chanceries is that of the Venetian series of *Carte turche* (Turkish Charters), with its large, well-preserved corpus of Ottoman official records and their translations. Comparable series exist from at least half a dozen other contemporary diplomatic chanceries in Istanbul, once again highlighting the necessity to treat this archival genre as trans-imperial par excellence.<sup>88</sup> In general, the versions of sultanic decrees inscribed in the *Carte turche* did not include the sultan’s *tuğra* and introductory *elkab* that marked an Ottoman sultanic decree’s authenticity, and that were the *sine qua non* of the Ottoman divan’s textual production of “original” versions of “official” records in these genres. To be sure, the Ottoman chancery itself routinely produced other versions of sultanic decrees that replaced the titlature with the formula *ba’de-l-elkab* (“after the *elkab*”). In both the Ottoman and Venetian chanceries, then, doing without the titlature and the honorifics was a routinized practice, which saved a significant amount of paper and skilled labor (the Ottoman scribes employed by the *bailate* were reasonably up to the task of imitating standard *divani* hands, but producing the elaborate calligraphy of sultanic *tuğras* would have been well beyond their skillset). This practice, in a sense, indexically marked the resultant document as a routine administrative product not intended for broader circulation—one in which the trappings of officialdom expressed by the *tuğra* and the *elkab* were deemed secondary, trusting in the denotational text’s ability to activate administrative procedures even in the absence of these formalities and their affirmation of the original addressee’s stature. The Venetian procedure here clearly imitates the Ottoman divan’s own

<sup>87</sup> Similarly, Marina Rustow has traced the dissemination of Fatimid documents and their reuse for various purposes, in *Lost Archive*.

<sup>88</sup> On the *Carte turche* series and its cognates, see Rothman, *Dragoman Renaissance*, 183–187.

practice of “stripping down” a sultanic decree to its actionable denotational “meaning.” That the Venetian archivization process was premised partially on the *divan*’s is noteworthy, as it underscores, first, that it was these “unofficial-official” copies that the *divan* routinely forwarded to the *bailate*. These “copies” were thus hardly derivative in their functioning. Second, it shows that *bailate* chancery practitioners were not only themselves familiar with said procedures but that they expected the resulting document-in-translation’s authenticity to be legible to other Venetian diplomatic personnel as well.<sup>89</sup>

For Venetian chancery practitioners, this procedure also solved the dilemma of whether to tacitly accept the validity of the sultan’s titles and their claim to theologically charged, universal imperial rule, or to commensurate them with available Italianate repertoires of rulership. The latter would risk insult by implying parity between a universal sultan and Italian princes deemed in Ottoman political vocabulary to be mere clients of the Porte. Omitting these markers of officialdom in the *Carte turche* can thus also be understood as an elegant way of circumventing the problem of sultanic honorifics altogether, a classic example of what Erving Goffman famously described as face maintenance work.<sup>90</sup> While we cannot elaborate on it here, the ability to maintain bivalency was a hallmark of contemporary diplomatic practice, relying, indeed, on stakeholders’ ability simultaneously to see and not see, recognize and not recognize status differentials and competing claims.<sup>91</sup>

The simple (if inelegant) solution of avoiding formulas of address proved more fraught when it came to the *elkab* and *du‘a* (invocation) of addressees. In Ottoman diplomatics, it was customary for the name of each Ottoman official (and foreign dignitary) mentioned in sultanic decrees to be preceded and followed by finely graded honorifics and blessings. For example, a decree of 1022 AH (1613 CE) mentions a certain Ali Vechi, a palace official dispatched to the provincial governor of Bosnia with sultanic orders to return to Venetian territory captives and animals that a former official and his men had captured in a raid across the Venetian border near Zadar, as well as to apprehend the culprits and send them to Istanbul. In the Ottoman decree inscribed in the Venetian copybook, Ali is referred to as *dergah-ı mu‘allam bevablarından kidvetü’l-emasıl ve’l-akran Ali Vechi zide kadruhu*, which we may gloss as

<sup>89</sup> These multiple forms call for further investigation into different mechanisms of authentication as well as addressivity, and remind us of the somewhat arbitrary nature of the moment in a document’s lifecycle at which it was intercepted and “captured” in the archive available to historians.

<sup>90</sup> Erving Goffman, *Interaction Ritual: Essays in Face-to-Face Behavior* (Chicago: Aldine, 1967).

<sup>91</sup> For further discussion of bivalency in Venetian-Ottoman diplomatic chancery practice, see E. Natalie Rothman, “Accounting for Gifts: The Poetics and Pragmatics of Material Circulations in Venetian-Ottoman Diplomacy,” in Georg Christ and Franz-Julius Morche, eds., *Cultures of Empire: Rethinking Venetian Rule, 1400–1700. Essays in Honour of Benjamin Arbel* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 414–54.

“our Porte official, exemplary among his eminent and noble peers, may God increase his dignity, Ali Vecchi.”<sup>92</sup> The Italian version on the facing page, however, reads much more succinctly as *Ali chiagia Capigi della mia Ecc[els] a Porta*; that is, “Ali Kâhya, Doorkeeper of my Sublime Porte.” This translation not only loses the *dua*, but also specifies Ali’s title as “*chiagia*” (*kâhya*) and his function as “*Capigi*” (*kapıcı*), thus modifying Ali’s *elkab* in subtle but revealing ways. The Ottoman record designates Ali as *bevvabları* (lit. of among my doorkeepers), applying Turkish syntactical forms—the plural suffix *-lar* and the ablative case suffix *-dan*—to the Arabic-derived noun *bevvab*. The Italian version replaces this term with the fully Turkified form *kapıcı*.

The significance of this shift in linguistic register derives partly from the record’s serial placement in the Venetian archives; that is, from the fact that another missive to the Paşa of Bosnia, translated by the same dragoman and bearing the same approximate date, is collated in the same fascicle two folios previously.<sup>93</sup> That missive explicitly identified Ali as *kâhya kapıcı* in both its Ottoman and Italian versions. It is thus very likely that the translator, dragoman Marcantonio Borisi, sought to lend greater precision to the later missive, and to improve discoverability by cross-referencing, and so specified Ali’s function using the same Ottoman-Turkish nomenclature throughout. Yet the shift in the Italian version from *bevvablar* to *kapıcı* also partakes in the long-term process of archival-cum-linguistic reordering and standardization through the creation of a “stylesheet”—whether implicit or explicit. Such a “stylesheet” mediated Ottoman statecraft, its categories, and its hierarchies for textual practitioners in the Venetian *bailate* and their correspondents in the Venetian government. *Bevvablar* was not in itself a rare nomenclatural choice in Ottoman official records, but it was decidedly less standard in the implicit stylesheet that governed Venetian dragomans’ translation of Ottoman nomenclature into Italian. The greater familiarity of *kapıcı* versus *bevvablar* (and the presumed motivation for the textual shift in translation) was thus specific to a circumscribed group of dragomans and to their readership, already highly trained in matters Ottoman. The silent substitution of this Arabic-derived form with a Turkish one would have made little difference to anyone else. Yet in the particular context of the *Carte turche* and its serial use in the *bailate* this shift can be understood as part of an evolving regimentation of linguistic forms commensurable with dragomans’ own growing claim to specific mastery of Ottoman chancery practices and authority to mediate them to a Venetian readership. This quick example illustrates how serialization shapes both the inscription and the reading of individual records, how meaning is inherently intertextual, and how seemingly minute filing practices and choices of linguistic

<sup>92</sup> ASVe, BaC, 250, 332, fol. 59.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, fol. 57.

register shape denotational interpretation. It also reminds us how archival documents delimit their intended readership in a variety of subtle (and not so subtle) ways.

The existence of “leftover” Ottoman records with or without translations collated in a separate series in the *bailate* archives further attests to an active selection process for other fascicles.<sup>94</sup> An annotation in b. 342, which contains records from 1782–1794 under *bailo* Girolamo Zulian, explains that the records collated therein “*non esigono di essere passate nel registro*” (do not need to be moved to the register).<sup>95</sup>

If some Ottoman records did not warrant indexing in a proper Venetian register, others on the contrary were subjected to multiple instances of registration, filing, and interpretation within the *bailate* chancery’s workflows, where, in addition to the *Carte turche*, they were also dispatched to Venice, with or without a translation produced by *bailate* dragomans, often enclosed and framed within dispatches that might summarize their contents and broader context. In Venice they could be re-translated by government-employed public dragomans, resulting in the existence of two variant translations (or two copies of ostensibly “the same” translation) of an Ottoman record.<sup>96</sup>

One case of translations circulating in multiple copies in both the *Carte turche* and as attachments to dispatches concerns a series of documents exchanged between Istanbul and Tunis in the wake of a corsair attack on the Adriatic coast in 1624 CE/1033 AH. An intriguing feature of this cluster of documents is the ways in which the Italian “translations” bear traces of the Ottoman records’ own order, hierarchy, and interconnectivity, while omitting Venetian diplomats’ significant role in their procurement and circulation.<sup>97</sup> For example, whereas the sultanic decree to the Tunisian officials (#55) is translated (#56) “in full” (or at least aims to create a verisimilitude of such fullness by taking up a similar amount of space on the page) in a tight hand and increasingly narrower line spacing, three subsequent documents are cross referenced to the

<sup>94</sup> ASVe, BaC, “Carte turche di periodi diversi,” bb. 338–46.

<sup>95</sup> Giustiniana Migliardi O’Riordan, “Ordinamento ed inventario del Bailo a Costantinopoli,” Sept. 2012, 43, [http://www.archiviodistatovenetia.it/siasve/documenti/INVENTARIO\\_bailo\\_Costantinopoli\\_publicato\\_1.pdf](http://www.archiviodistatovenetia.it/siasve/documenti/INVENTARIO_bailo_Costantinopoli_publicato_1.pdf).

<sup>96</sup> For example, Cristoforo Brutti’s translation of a sultanic decree issued by Murad IV and directed at the Provincial Governor of Bosnia in 1626 is also included in the *Documenti Turchi* series, compiled in Venice out of copies sent by the *bailo*, alongside a separate translation by Giovanni Antonio Grillo of the same Ottoman sultanic decree. See, for example, ASVe, BaC, 251, 335, fol. 86v (the Ottoman text is on fol. 87r); and ASVe, Documenti Turchi, #1341 (with the Ottoman in #1339); BaC 251, 335, 87v; and Documenti Turchi #1340, respectively. For the context in which these decrees were issued and circulated, see Joshua M. White, “Fetva Diplomacy: The Ottoman Şeyhülislam as Trans-Imperial Intermediary,” *Journal of Early Modern History* 19, 2–3 (2015): 199–221.” We thank Josh for pointing out these matches.

<sup>97</sup> For details of the incident and its aftermath across chanceries in Istanbul, North Africa, and Venice, see Joshua M. White, *Piracy and Law in the Ottoman Mediterranean* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017), 148–49, *passim*.

decree but otherwise left untranslated, with only a very brief gloss identifying their genre, topic, and addressees.<sup>98</sup> The last of these three, namely several *fetvas* (legal rulings issued by a juriconsult), suggest a reversal of the actual order in which these various pieces of writings were procured, since the *fetvas* were solicited (by no other than the Venetian *bailo*!) in preparation for the sultanic decree. The sequencing of these various documents in the Venetian archives—to say nothing of the omission of their circuitous paths and multiple patrons—thus potentially alters their meaning and relationship to one another. It also, implicitly, acknowledges the bureaucratized nature of the *fetva*—in line with contemporary Ottoman transformations of the institution and contrary to idealized representations of the *şehülislam* as a chief juriconsult who acts autonomously from sovereign power. The Venetian *bailo*'s role in obtaining the *fetvas* in this particular case is rendered all but invisible.<sup>99</sup>

These brief examples underscore the need to consider the Ottoman divan's and the Venetian *bailate*'s practices of selection, collation, copying, summarizing, translation, and preservation not simply as operating within a shared space of textual production, but as mutually constitutive. Venetian textual practitioners—primarily copyists, secretaries, and dragomans—played a decisive role in organizing these records and in authorizing particular techniques of lending texts their legibility and coherence. Similar processes of selection are discernible in Ottoman paper trails preserved by textual practitioners in the Ottoman divan itself, warranting greater systematic attention. But above and beyond the methodological challenges of accounting for the semiotic labor of different kinds of textual practitioners (dragomans, but also scribes, copyists, clerks, secretaries, etc.), the examples above call for a rethinking of the relationship between the documentary production of the Ottoman chancery and the myriad caches of Ottoman records in the Venetian *bailate*'s archives (and in several other Venetian repositories throughout the overland and maritime routes that connected Istanbul and Venice). Maria-Pia Pedani, following Suraiya Faroqhi's pioneering work, notes that many of the documents in another corpus of Ottoman records now in the Venetian State archives, the *Documenti Turchi* series, appear to be copies of records in the *mühimme defterleri* and *maliyeden müdevver* in the Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi.<sup>100</sup> But this observation (and implicit claim of “source” and “target” as

<sup>98</sup> “Lettera scritta da Calil Bassà a Josuf Dai in Conformità del Com.to n.o 55” (#57, i.e., “A letter written by Halil Paşa to Yusuf Dey in accordance with Decree no. 55”), “Lettera scritta dal Caimecam a Tunesi p[er] li Schiavi in Conformità del Com.to n.o 55” (#58, i.e., “A letter written by the Kaymakam to Tunis for the slaves, in accordance with decree no. 55”), and, most tellingly, “Distinti fetfâ p[er] la liberation dei schiavi in conf.tà del Com.to n.o 55” (#60, “Various *fetvas* for the liberation of the slaves, in accordance with Decree no. 55”).

<sup>99</sup> On the *şehülislam*'s role in inter-imperial diplomacy, see White, “Fetva Diplomacy.”

<sup>100</sup> Maria Pia Pedani and Alessio Bombaci, *Inventory of the “lettere e scritture turchesche” of the Venetian State Archives*, Islamic Manuscripts and Books (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 33; Suraiya Faroqhi,

the primary model of translation at work in the production of these archives) elides a potentially more significant phenomenon: the profoundly trans-imperial process of producing and consuming governmentality in this context. As Ferguson notes, the tight relationship between “documentary production, legislative reform, and a centralizing state” was at the core of an emergent Ottoman “archiving state” in the sixteenth century.<sup>101</sup> The Ottoman symbiosis between “documentary production and statecraft,” however, was not simply a result of structural affinity between the Ottomans and their European neighbors. Rather, it was constitutive of ongoing entanglements across sovereign boundaries. Instead of conceptualizing the documents we find in the Venetian *bailate*’s archives as “copies” of “originals” produced by Ottomans and later consumed by Venetians (or, put more subtly, produced by Ottomans, then consumed by both Ottomans and Venetians in their respective archival iterations), we might think about the temporally and epistemologically coeval production of documents as embodying a shared trans-imperial space of circulation.

#### CONCLUDING REMARK

The authentication of documents by various practices and institutions across imperial boundaries and administrative units within the Ottoman Empire raises important questions about the centrality of the archive (and specifically the centralized archive) as the main authentication hub. Furthermore, as Francisco Apellániz has shown, trans-imperial circulation and authentication of documents required a certain degree of compatibility.<sup>102</sup> Thus, instead of focusing on a single institution in a specific polity, circulation of documents invites us to examine how this compatibility was achieved. Centralized archives were certainly important institutions in this documentary order, but they were supplemented by numerous other agents and practices across empires.

The entangled early modern archivality and circuits of texts we have examined in this essay bear on the manners in which modern archives should be approached on multiple levels. The study of record-keeping practices and preservationist instincts as a historical and trans-imperial continuum requires greater collaboration among scholars in order to bridge enduring disciplinary, linguistic, generic, and historiographical divides. The study of the production and circulation of texts and documents, as well as of the direct and indirect exchanges between record-keepers, can also serve to nuance narratives that otherwise assume discrete archival experiences and archivalities based on ethno-linguistic or juridical divisions. Finally, the entanglement of archival

“The Venetian Presence in the Ottoman Empire (1600–1630),” *Journal of European Economic History* 15, 2 (1986): 345–84, 354 and passim.

<sup>101</sup> Ferguson, *Proper Order*, 107.

<sup>102</sup> Apellániz, *Breaching the Bronze Wall*.

records and practices across empires calls for a different typology of archives and archival practices. As we have suggested here, the mapping of culturalist assumptions onto geographical terrains has unwittingly reinscribed a form of Neo-Eurocentrism that can obscure trans-imperial continuums. We propose instead that the threads and circuits of texts that crisscross the inherently trans-imperial spaces of early modernity map their own kind of geography, and, in turn, their own archival continuum. This continuum is the product of intersecting, inherently transregional discursive genealogies and practices that subvert modern continental and civilizational divides and that warrant a different conceptual and methodological framework to move us beyond the current impasse of early modern (European) archivality.

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**Abstract:** This essay addresses the revival of culturalist assumptions in historical archival studies and suggests an alternative framework. Rather than provenance, it privileges textual circulation; rather than civilizational divides between supposedly distinct “European” and “Islamic” archivalities, it highlights mutability and commensurability as defining elements of a broadly shared, if inherently dynamic, internally complex, and transactionally defined early modern archivality. We first show how the historiography on early modern archives has inadvertently perpetuated a myopic Eurocentric view of the centralized archive as a key aspect of European archivality. We analyze how the construct “Islamic archivality,” when proffered as a comparative counterpoint to such European archivality, not only promotes an outdated understanding of “Islam” (and, indeed “Europe”) as a discrete, transhistorical phenomenon, but rests on a limited set of mostly pre-Ottoman, medieval examples. By positing “Islam” as fundamentally premodern, this historiography sidesteps significant shared late antique genealogies of textual practices and mobilities across a vast early modern region that traverses modern continental/civilizational configurations. In lieu of the prevalent comparative mode, which juxtaposes civilizational blocs and then selectively contrasts specific archival institutions and practices, we suggest concentrating on intersections and circulations of documents and practices across ethnolinguistic, territorial, and juridical boundaries. Drawing on examples from our research in Ottoman diplomatic archives, we challenge scholars of early modern archivality to move beyond fixed notions of “European,” and “non-European,” “centralized” and “decentralized” archives, and “original” and “copy,” as primary indices of comparison, and attend to the social life of documents and their mutability through circulation.

**Key words:** archivality, early modern, Ottoman Empire, Habsburg Empire, Venice, Neo-Eurocentrism, trans-imperial archives, textual circulation, Islamic law, record-keeping