

guided conventional understandings about archival functions and issues, from appraisal to description to electronic records. For Harris, the work of archivists is intimately bound up with questions of power and needs to be refigured to make room for contestation. “Section III: Politics and Ethics” and “Section IV: Past and Secrets,” draw from Harris’s experience grappling with archival issues in different institutions. Case studies cited in the book address issues ranging from African identity to the destruction of apartheid-era records, access to information legislation, archival ethics, and oral history. “Section V: Actualities,” illustrates Harris’s effort to spread awareness of archives to populist audiences.

Archivists of a positivist ilk will find here numerous pointed critiques of their theory and practice (Harris is particularly critical of the Australian continuum paradigm). Canadian readers will note the numerous references to Canadian archivy, as Harris credits the influence of archival scholars such as Terry Cook and Hugh Taylor, Tom Nesmith, Brien Brothman, Joan Schwartz and Rick Brown. Wendy Duff of the University of Toronto also co-authors a piece included here. As Harris further reflects, “Terry pre-eminently, but Canadian archival discourse generally, taught me that archives is a terrain for philosophy and poetry, as well as one for political struggle, community endeavour, and hard professional work” (p. 24).

In only a decade of work, Harris has raised enough questions to sustain successive generations of archival professionals. His application of Derridean deconstruction demonstrates the powerful potential of encouraging multidisciplinary insights in archival studies. He teases us with the possibilities of new roles for archivists, not only within the narrowly-defined realm of archivy but in the broader society and culture of which they are a part – not just in South Africa but internationally.

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**The Vatican Secret Archives.** LUCA BECCHETTI et al. Foreword by Cardinal Raffaele Farina; translation by Monsignor James O’Brien; photography by Philippe Debeerst, Andrea Marini, and Enrico Ottaviani. Brussels: Paul Van den Heuvel – VdH Books, 2009. 252 p. ISBN 9789088810077.

Upon opening this book, one cannot help but be taken aback by its impressive beauty and size. A magnificent tome (30 cm x 30 cm) it is the result of a collaborative effort between the Archivum Secretum Vaticanum and a Belgian art book publishing company, VdH Books. Currently available through Chapters and Amazon.ca in Canada, the book has been published in four languages: English, French, Italian, and Dutch. The written portions of

the book are primarily presented as white text against a black background, combined with richly coloured images that grace nearly every page. This, however, is not simply a coffee-table book showing pretty pictures of rooms and documents. It is at once a scholarly analysis of 105 archival records selected from the immense holdings of the Archivum Secretum Vaticanum, while also being “a meditative and calm walk through the papal Archives” (p. 3), providing access to documents, laboratories, and vaults that one would probably never see, unless he or she was a staff member of the Vatican Secret Archives. As the reader, one feels as though she or he is actually walking through the archives, stealing glimpses of books and files of immense historical value.

The book draws the reader in with a foreword by Cardinal Raffaele Farnia, Archivist and Librarian of the Holy Roman Church, as well as a brief history of the Papal Archives in general. These introductory sections are combined with images of Vatican buildings, views one might see if taking a walk toward the entrance to the Vatican archives at night. Following this, on facing pages, there are three images of a set of doors: closed, then parting, then open to a bright entryway, and the adventure begins – the reader has entered the Vatican Secret Archives.

An important point to make here is that the meaning of “secret” in relation to the Vatican Archives is more akin to “secretary” than “covert” or “mysterious.” The historical section on the Archives includes an interesting background on the assignment of this title, explaining that the use of “*secretum*” dates back to the fifteenth century, when it was used to indicate both persons and establishments close to princes, popes, and their “*familia*” (p. 5). The authors further point out that the Vatican Secret Archives continues to be considered the Pope’s personal or private archives in this sense. It appears that the authors are very much aware of the way in which today’s understanding of “secret” often misrepresents these archives.

The book proceeds with the featured documents chronologically depicted and described, and interspersed with photographs of places such as research rooms, small storage areas, rows of archival shelving, preservation laboratories, and artistic features such as frescoes contained within the archives’ building. Full-page spreads of close-ups allow the texture of the archival holdings and storage features to be intensely visible. One can begin to imagine the feeling of the ragged edges of stacked pamphlets, the smooth spines of thick record books, the waxy seals hanging from documents, the cold metal of hinges and key-holes. For anyone who has ever felt the knobbly smoothness of birchbark, the reproduction of a letter to Pope Leo XIII from the Ojibwe of the region around Grassy Lake, Ontario cannot help but recall that particular tactile memory.

The earliest of the selected documents is the *Liber Diurnus Romanorum Pontificum*, a codex of formulas and statements used by the Papal Chancellery

before the year 800, and the oldest book preserved in the Archivum Secretum Vaticanum. The most recent is *The Tomos (Τόμος) of Patriarch Athenagoras*, dated 7 December 1965, in which the Patriarch of the Orthodox Church revoked the 1054 excommunication of Patriarch Michael Cerularius by Pope Leo IX.<sup>1</sup> Each selection from the Archives is identified below the title with the date and location of creation if known, the material (paper, parchment, silk, etc.), metric size of the item, a description of any attachments, and a citation of the item's location within the archival holdings. The selected records relate to events such as the Concordat of Worms; the Trial of the Knights Templar; the Councils of Pisa and Constance; the First World War; and the convocation of the Second Vatican Council. Records relating to specific people include such names as Frederick Barbarossa; Lucrezia Borgia; Martin Luther; Charles V; Henry VIII; Elizabeth I; Mary Queen of Scots; Galileo Galilei; Empress Helena of China; the Dalai Lama (in 1738); Voltaire; Mozart; Napoleon Bonaparte; Abraham Lincoln; Adolf Hitler; and Emperor Hirohito. Even this small sample of events and names illustrates the extraordinary nature of the records held by the Vatican Secret Archives, including many that represent significant controversies and historical moments that are part of the legacy of the Catholic Church.

The detailed texts accompanying the images of the selected documents have been written by nineteen different authors, "specialists" of the Vatican Secret Archives. Brief descriptions of the historical circumstances surrounding the documents' creations are followed by histories of the documents themselves. These are further developed with analytical observations on passages from the records or physical features of the items. A notable aspect of the book is the use of clear, detailed images that allow a reader to examine and analyze the documents; unfortunately, unless the reader understands Latin, which in most cases is a document's language, she or he is unable to go beyond the visual into textual analysis of a record. Furthermore, since the writing on the documents is sometimes quite small, one might need a magnifying glass to actually read them, despite the clarity of the reproductions. On a related note, while the descriptions are immensely informative and engaging, the print size is so small that to read them, one needs to lean right into the book. Perhaps it is the result of the book's production by an art book publisher that the documents and other images are featured with impeccable quality, while the historical and archival descriptions appear to have been relegated to the sidelines.

The archival settings, featured so beautifully throughout the publication, are just as captivating as the documents, and, perhaps even more so to archivists. Unfortunately the identification and actual descriptions of these places are

1 Pope Paul VI revoked Leo IX's 1054 excommunication of Michael Cerularius in a reciprocal document entitled *Ambulate in dilectione* on the same day (p. 234).

located in a separate, concluding section under the titles, “Reading Rooms,” the “Tower of Winds,” “Diplomatic Floor,” “The Subterranean Depository,” “The Gallery of the Metallic Shelves and the Soffitoni,” and “Laboratories.” Consequently, the reader is constantly left wondering where exactly the places in the photographs are or why they are important. Furthermore, although the book is filled with images of archival spaces, the extent of their description is significantly less than that of the records, with each category having only a single, though substantial, paragraph. It would have been interesting to see where the authors would have gone had they further developed the narrative of the Vatican Secret Archives as place. This descriptive, concluding section culminates with a list of the documents, marked by their dates and locations of creation, followed by an extensive bibliography listing all of the sources used by the authors in writing the historical reflections on the featured items and the Vatican Secret Archives as an institution. These scholarly features provide the opportunity for readers to further delve into the histories surrounding the records and the institution of the Vatican Secret Archives itself.

This book is designed to showcase the Vatican Secret Archives and its treasures. Unfortunately, no information is given on the reasoning behind the document choices, and the only explanation regarding why the overall book was published at this time was that it is intended to “reach the general reading public and go beyond the circle of experts” (p. 3). Perhaps this is in response to the attention focused on the Vatican Secret Archives as a result of Dan-Brown-esque portrayals of the supposedly conspiratorial records hidden within the Catholic Church’s “top secret” depositories. Another possibility is that the book is intended to be a demonstration of some level of institutional transparency, allowing readers to engage with historic documents and physical spaces that are part of this famed archival institution that would otherwise be completely inaccessible.

What is certain is that this publication, both visually striking and academically informative, will attract professionals and scholars working in the fields of history, archives, and records preservation, as well as anyone with a desire to peek within the vaults of the Vatican’s legendary historical repository. It is a beautiful example of what can be done for archival outreach, shown in the dramatic style of one of the most magnificent archives in the world. Furthermore, two special editions of this publication also exist. The first of these is *The Vatican Secret Archives: Limited Edition*, initially €299 but €399 after 30 April 2010. It boasts only fifty copies in each language of publication, all stamped, numbered, certified, and hand bound with a linen cover and protective slipcase. The thirty-three copies of the custom ordered *Unique Collector’s Edition* will be printed on 170g Basix felt, be fully hand stitched and hand bound at the workshops of the Vatican Secret Archives in sheep parchment with leather reinforcements, and be numbered, stamped and certified; the potential for a visit to the Vatican Secret Archives is also offered with

this edition.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, at €4,950, ten times the cost of the basic version, this unique edition is likely not in the budget of the average archivist.

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**Photographs, Histories, and Meanings.** MARLENE KADAR, JEANNE PERREAULT, and LINDA WARLEY, eds. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. 258 p. ISBN 978-0-230-61770-4.

*Photographs, Histories, and Meanings* is an edited collection of essays exploring the social histories of photographs and the forces that shape their interpretive contexts. As the editors Marlene Kadar, Jeanne Perreault, and Linda Warley explain in their introduction, the title of the collection was chosen in order “to focus attention on the processes of historical narration that modify viewers’ interpretive responses to photographs and events” (p. 1). The twelve essays in this collection are important contributions to contextual understandings of photographic history and meaning; revealing and communicating the histories of the photographs through their specific historical contexts and discourses in which they were created, circulated, and viewed. The interdisciplinary approach is strengthened by the diverse academic and professional backgrounds of the collection’s contributors.

The photographs analyzed in this collection are expanded from image to context of creation, function, use, and meaning. The collection is also a significant contribution to critical analyses of social documentary photography presenting a broad geographical scope that includes the 1916 Easter Rising in Dublin, Ireland; the aid industry in Biafra and Rwanda; Nazi propaganda photography at the Ravensbrück concentration camp for women and girls; the Nazi occupation of Amsterdam (1944–1945); forensic photography in Switzerland and New York; Canadian residential school propaganda photography; competing visual narratives of Farm Security Administration photographs; and reform photography of the Chicago Housing Authority. One of the great strengths of the collection is its acknowledgement and compelling analyses of the layered and dynamic interpretations and ambiguous and shifting nature of photographic meaning.

The contributing authors’ interpretations of the photographs are rooted in the historical, social, and political contexts of a particular temporal and spatial period in the photograph’s life. The authors are sensitive to context and function, ambiguity, and the photograph’s vulnerability to distortion and shifting

2 See [http://www.vdhbooks.com/en\\_vatican\\_ce2.htm](http://www.vdhbooks.com/en_vatican_ce2.htm) (accessed 2 June 2010).