

the archives, the place of memory-keeping work, and the people who steward records for their communities. Although Krebs did not contribute a full chapter to *Research in the Archival Multiverse*, she is present throughout the entire collection.

Monash University Publishing has just released a free PDF download of *Research in the Archival Multiverse* at [www.publishing.monash.edu](http://www.publishing.monash.edu) (see “Open Access Titles”). The electronic version of the book not only facilitates greater dissemination of the material, but it is also a lot easier to carry than the printed text.

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**Religion in Secular Archives: Soviet Atheism and Historical Knowledge.** SONJA LUEHRMANN. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015. xii, 240 pp. ISBN 978-0-19-994362-3.

Archival records can simultaneously be sites of hostility and sympathy and can contain both deep silences and loud polemics. This is particularly the case when one’s research topic is religiosity in the Soviet Union, a state that considered religion antithetical to socialism and was thus bent on controlling religious communities. In her book, Sonja Luehrmann, an associate professor at Simon Fraser University in British Columbia, explores the innate hostility of the records creators, and therefore the resultant records, to topics of religiosity. She maps out a methodology for approaching the documents that occupy this interstitial space, emphasizing an awareness of the social life of records – that is, the manner in which documents have been created, organized, kept, and interpreted. While her area of research is religion, this review concentrates on the methodology she outlines and the relevance and implications this study has for archivists. The work has been recognized by the archival profession: it won the Society of American Archivists’ 2016 Waldo Gifford Leland Award for superior writing in the field of archival history, theory, and practice.

The book draws on extensive archival research the author conducted for her PhD in History and Anthropology at the University of Michigan (2009) and for her book on Soviet secularism.<sup>1</sup> Not limiting herself to focusing on relationships between one religious denomination and the Soviet state, Luehrmann examines the state’s interactions with Muslims, Orthodox Christians, Jews, and adherents of indigenous land-based rituals. The

1 Sonja Luehrmann, *Secularism Soviet Style: Teaching Atheism and Religion in a Volga Republic* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2011).

geographic locations of her sources are likewise diverse: most of her material stems from the records located in two regional government offices (in Ioshkar-Ola and Kazan, Russia), in Moscow, and in the Keston Institute's archive, which is housed at Baylor University in Waco, Texas.

The author argues that researchers must incorporate an awareness of "archival ecologies" in order to open documents as deeper and richer historical and evidentiary sources (p. 3). These arguments are presented in a short introduction, four chapters, and a conclusion. The first chapter, "Documentary Acts," moves beyond a simple discussion of what documents say and interrogates what creators wanted to accomplish by putting pen to paper. Luehrmann argues that there is value for researchers in examining the "processes of producing, exchanging, and compiling documents" to explore how "historical change unfolded" (p. 36). Chapter 2 examines how both archival records and oral histories work as "Mirrored Fragments" of religiosity in the Soviet Union. Although one might be tempted to use interviews as "independent correctives" (p. 73) to archival silences, Luehrmann cautions against pitting official history against popular memory. Ultimately, archival and oral sources must be brought into conversation with one another, and the researcher must be aware of the circumstances and context in which both were created (p. 99).

Chapter 3, "From Documents to Books, and Back," examines publications produced between the 1950s and 1970s by Soviet scholars of religion. Owing to processes of scholarly review and political censorship, these studies have been considered suspect by Western scholars. However, reading the published works in dialogue with contemporary archival documents and data reveals insight into the contexts in which the studies were conducted and provides a more nuanced understanding of the conclusions reached. Chapter 4 introduces the concept of "Counter-Archive" through a discussion of the Keston Institute archive. For Luehrmann, the Keston archive is a counter-archive because it refuses to engage with the logic of state bureaucracy, eschews the principle of provenance, and employs a user-centric classification scheme based on theme and subject. Ease of access comes at the cost of contextual information, as Luehrmann points out. Contrasting state archives with counter-archives leads Luehrmann to conclude that neither has any claim to presenting information in a neutral, objective manner (p. 156).

Luehrmann engages with an impressive range of scholarly secondary sources, in particular the work of historical anthropologists such as Michel-Rolph Trouillot, Ann Laura Stoler, and Natalie Zemon Davis, recognizing value in their work but also pointing out that parallels to colonial and early modern archives are limited. Since Luehrmann's objects of study are all modern archives, a minor shortcoming of her work is her choice of secondary sources on archival scholarship. She relies heavily on Blouin and Rosenberg's

*Processing the Past: Contesting Authority in History and the Archives*<sup>2</sup> for explanations of archival terms and theory. In fact, the influence of this one book is visible throughout the work; it is cited as many times as works by archival scholars such as Terry Cook, Randall Jimerson, Laura Millar, and Geoffrey Yeo combined. Inclusion of, for example, Terry Cook and Joan Schwartz's work challenging the concept of archivists as neutral<sup>3</sup> would have added extra dimension to Luehrmann's discussions about archival arrangement and finding aids. The fourth chapter discusses archival description, pointing out that custodial history is often neglected (p. 154) and outlining reasons why researchers should have access to it, but the author does not draw upon the work of archival scholars who investigate the connections between authenticity, accountability, and custodial history, such as Heather MacNeil.<sup>4</sup>

A second shortcoming of the book is its blind spot when it comes to archivists and their work. In the first chapter, Luehrmann explicitly acknowledges the role of archivists as "actors" in the archival process who "made decisions about what to discard, what to keep, and what order to impose on documents" (p. 37). Regrettably, she never fully engages with this idea. Throughout the text, activities such as acquisition, arrangement, description, preservation, and the provision of access are referred to in the passive voice. For example, she writes: "Russian federal and regional archives are organized according to the principle of bureaucratic provenance, grouping together records originating from a particular agency" (p. 26); "the files in Kazan's archive were sewn together into folders after accessioning" (p. 50); and "the correspondence with Moscow and registration files of religious communities and clergy seem to be treated everywhere as representing the core activities of the council" (p. 52).

As illustrated by these examples, this shortcoming may not be entirely Luehrmann's fault, and archivists need to examine their own role in obscuring the work they do. Jennifer Douglas's recent article on "honest description" illustrates how archivists very often use a passive-voice, third-person omniscient narrator when writing finding aids, thereby maintaining the illusion that they are not actively shaping the fonds.<sup>5</sup> Although Douglas's article discusses

2 Francis X. Blouin Jr. and William G. Rosenberg, *Processing the Past: Contesting Authority in History and the Archives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). See the book review by Rodney G.S. Carter, *Archivaria* 74 (Fall 2012): 222–26.

3 See, for example, Terry Cook and Joan M. Schwartz, "Archives, Records, and Power: From (Postmodern) Theory to (Archival) Performance," *Archival Science* 2, no. 3–4 (September 2002): 171–85.

4 Heather MacNeil, "Trusting Description: Authenticity, Accountability, and Archives Description Standards," *Journal of Archival Organization* 7, no. 3 (2009): 89–107. See pp. 99–101 for a discussion of the custodial history element in *ISAD(G)*.

5 Jennifer Douglas, "Toward More Honest Description," *American Archivist* 79, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2016): 40.

arrangement and description of writers' archives, her observations are applicable to the filing systems and finding aids of government and state archives as well, for which archivists can rely on the language of records retention schedules (e.g., "Files are retained in office for 5 years and then transferred to the archives"), thus forcing the researcher to make assumptions about arrangement and who might be responsible.

Luehrmann's struggle with the "vicissitudes of attrition and restricted access" (p. 28) in the Russian archives she visited offers a blunt example of the extent to which archivists shape archives through their appraisal, arrangement, and access policies. Staff at the Kazan archives made decisions that were radically different from those of the Ioshkar-Ola archives in terms of how to treat similar records; a restricted series of records in the Kazan archives was freely accessible in Ioshkar-Ola. In Kazan, "the records of the commissioner were preserved in unusual detail" (p. 29), including correspondence with lower-level authorities, while archivists in Ioshkar-Ola chose to preserve only higher-level reports, without the supporting correspondence. These differences reveal again how archives are constructed through interventions or political actions and are not objective or neutral institutions.

In terms of an archival reference work, Luehrmann's book offers insights into how academic researchers approach archives. It better equips archivists to help connect researchers with the materials they seek and to manage the expectations of their archival research. For processing archivists, Luehrmann's discussions of contrasting arrangement and description processes reveal some inadequacies in current practices. Finally, for the profession overall, the work illustrates the ability of archival records to function as evidence of the past, even in a contested or hostile environment, and reveals the power that archivists wield in decisions they make about appraisal, arrangement and description, and access.

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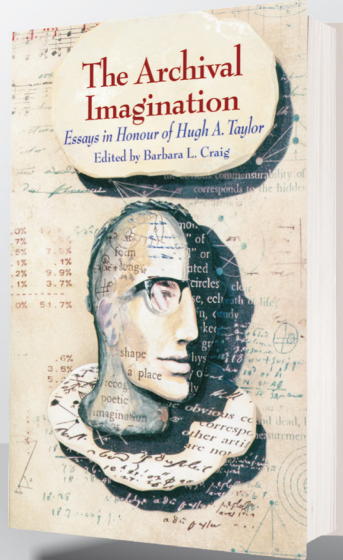
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