

—Ine Fintland & Torkel Thime—
The archivist creating archival
descriptions— author or
notetaker?—

Awareness of how the role of the archivist has developed historically is widely acknowledged as being important to current archival practice.¹ The diversity of roles of the archivist as a writer has not been much studied from a narratological or discursive perspective. There is still a lack of empirically based research on the role of the archivist as a writer. By approaching the developing role of the archivist from an empirical as well as a theoretical perspective, we believe that this can give us a new understanding of the role as well as of archival descriptions, which are important and tangible signs of archival practice.

Aim of this study

The main concern in this article is twofold. On one side we will explore the archival descriptions as they emerge during the eighteenth century. By comparing two registries, one from the first part and one from the last part of the century, we are aiming to identify changes in practice related to elaborating archival descriptions.

On the other side we want to explore whether the archivist, as a royal servant, appears to be an author telling a story with his own voice or merely acting as a notetaker, presenting the archival material in a referring way.

We will try to analyse the development in light of Michel Foucault's thoughts on the scientific discourse and his notion of the *épistémè*, a term "that defines the general conditions for all knowledge at a certain time within a specific culture, be it knowledge manifested in a theory or tacit knowledge invested in a practice"² and the French art historian Jean-Michel Leniaud's ideas on the paradigm of patrimonial or cultural heritage.³ We claim that the

discourse related to archival issues may be regarded as quite similar to what Foucault describes as a scientific discourse, that is how knowledge is gained and discussed. Thus, we will use the term archival discourse and *épistémè* for the process related to establishing and discussing knowledge related to archival practice.

To elucidate the possible roles for the archivist as a writer, we have chosen to contrast the roles as an author and a notetaker, being aware that it probably is difficult to identify these two positions as being isolated from each other in “clean” forms.

We stick to a quite straightforward definition of a role as the answer to the following questions: “What to do? How to act? Who to be?”⁴ By approaching our material with the theoretical framework on paratexts developed by Genette,⁵ we aim to identify what has been done, how the archivist has acted, and who the archivist has pretended to be. The answers to such questions, as they emerge from our material, may help us to characterize the role of the archivist in former times.

This study is part of a research project on the development of archival descriptions set up by the National Archives of Norway. But it must here be emphasized that our analysis of both 1734- and the 1792-registry is in the initial phase. Therefore, this article should be considered as a presentation of preliminary findings.

The material

The empirical basis for our study is two Norwegian registries from the eighteenth century. The first one is *Registratur over Det Nordiske Archiv* (Eng.: *Registry of The Norwegian Archives*) dating back to 1734. The second one is *Akershusregistraturen* (Eng.: *The Akershus Registry*) of 1792. Both are registries over the archival fonds that were stored

at the Akershus Castle in Christiania (Oslo). [See *Fintland & Thime: figure 1*, p ii.] This archival repository preceded the establishment of the National Archives in 1817, only three years after Norway had got their own constitution. The establishment of archives based on national institutions may be regarded as part of the development of a national identity. The content and context of these early archives are further described by Thime.⁶ A general description of the development of the Norwegian National Archives in an international context is previously given by Kjølstad.⁷

The creation of archival inventories, or registries, had long traditions in Norway, as in most European countries. In Norway, from the late sixteenth century, the replacement of governors or other state officials always included a handover of relevant records, which necessitated the writing of an archival inventory. The 1734- and the 1792-registries were different than these inventories, and stand out as the only major registries covering the entire holdings of the Akershus repository (military records excluded).

Although the two registries were written with only a short 60-year interval, the “archivists” responsible for them had very different backgrounds. The first two were judges and bureaucrats, the latter came from a scholar and science-interested circle, heavily influenced by the Enlightenment ideas, including a strong interest for history and topographical studies.

The registers represent a material that can depict archival practices in their time and thus serve as a background for interpretations of the role of the archivist. To what extent do the Enlightenment ideas, research, and history, make a mark on the registries? Valid pictures of archival practice at a certain period, may serve as an empirical basis for employing the theories of Foucault and Leniaud as backbones for interpretation.

Relevant details for this study from the registries will be presented below under findings. The material is used for examining possible changes in form and development of the archival discourse from 1734 to 1792, and how the role of the archivist is mirrored by the way the archives are organized and described.

Theoretical perspectives

The archival discourse and the development of patrimony

When was archival material considered as research material and as cultural heritage? Eric Ketelaar raises the question in an article from 2007 called “Muniments and monuments: the dawn of archives as cultural patrimony”.⁸ The term “Muniment” is Latin and means defence. In transposed sense, the term is used for documents that defend administrative and/or legal interests. This was also the original function of the archives. But at one stage or another, the archives changed their function towards being monuments (Latin *momentum* = memorial), celebrating important historical events and developments.

The character of the archives has changed from being merely legal/administrative tools to becoming cultural heritage. Rather than attributing a point of time to this change, it may be claimed that it has been a continuously ongoing process, where the function of the archives is coloured by current views on public administration in the society and available technologies. Cfr. what is said about the archives as elements of an identity establishing process above. This is also what we experience today when new information and communications technology-based practices strongly influence current archival practices.

Related to this it is of interest to note that Ketelaar is particularly concerned with the perspectives of Jean-Michel Leniaud.⁹ Leniaud claims that the perception of something as heritage (patrimonial) was not a result of certain events or individuals, in for example the way that the French Revolution has been noted as the cradle of change for archives, but of long-term structures and processes, “La Longue Durée”. In this perspective assigning these changes as a mere nineteenth century phenomenon appears as a too narrow approach. One must look at the precursors of what might be called a “patrimonial” paradigm to understand the changes.

Leniaud uses four criteria to identify “le paradigme de Patrimoine”:

- criteria of conservation: the intentionality of the creator of a monument; the scientific, artistic interest etc.; the importance of social life; the economic value.
- motivations which lead us to accept the past or to reject it: a patrimony not only needs a testator and a will, but also an heir who accepts the conditions. This process of acceptance and rejection is called *tri* (appraisal) or elimination, following ideological, materialistic, and/or scientific criteria.
- the modalities by which patrimoine has been appreciated, preserved, and transferred: inventorization, restoration, reutilization.
- the media for diffusion within society: publications, tourism, etc.¹⁰

Based on these criteria Ketelaar recommends using them as a “net”, “which one can throw out into the deep waters of history, to catch and to recognize fragments of a patrimony consciousness’ in societies of the past.” Ketelaar seems to believe that traces of “a form of historical consciousness” can be found further back than

early modern time, although it did not play a significant role until the nineteenth century.¹¹

Foucault's perspective

Foucault's theories about the discursive, the written and the spoken word related to institutions, is also a sensible approach to our topic. Not least during his last years Foucault worked on how different forms of practices constitute and influence the understanding of oneself and others, and how the different forms of practices, understandings and interpretations are conveyed by means of the written and the spoken word.¹²

According to Foucault, it is not the individual achievements that underpin the discourse, but formal, material, and institutional conditions and practices that govern what can be expressed. At a specific time, it has only been possible to say certain things, and changes are slow. A discourse can include such different phenomena as the teacher's grade book, a prison regulation, or an archival registry. Discourse is in other words linked to the activities that take place in certain institutional forms (e. g., school, prison, archives). In a discourse analysis, one tries to investigate how the knowledge practitioners within a particular field speak and write in certain ways.

Leniaud's theory of cultural heritage and Foucault's writings on discourses are both possible tools for analyzing the two archival registries from 1734 and 1792. The time span between them is narrow, but it covers a period with great changes in the Norwegian society, e. g. the establishment of the first "academic" institution in Norway in 1760 – Det Trondhiemske Selskab (later: Det Kongelige Norske Videnskabers Selskab (DKNVS)), the birth of the first Norwegian newspaper in 1763, The Norwegian Topographical Society

from 1792, with its own periodical, and the periodical Hermoder from 1795.

Both theories presented above deal in many ways with the same matter. They address the long-term structures and processes and the institutional practices of what can be expressed. They both constitute a framework for how archives can be perceived, described, and disseminated. These are structural frameworks that change slowly and often without the conscious awareness of the practitioner. A theoretical understanding of them may help the archivist in the interpretation of his or her own role and work.

By analyzing the two registries, we will try to find out if changes in contemporary thinking and the authors' very different background can be traced. Or, if the prevailing discourse and institutional framework 60 years later still set limits on how the archives were described and conveyed. And if so, what was the archival discourse of the eighteenth century? And not least, does this discourse still characterize our way of creating archival descriptions today?

Paratexts

The above mentioned approach based upon Foucault, Leniaud and Ketelaar can inform us about the relationship between the registries with their creators, the former and present users in their contexts. But they do not give us sufficient help when approaching the registries as texts. Even though we have used Foucault for discussing the discursive perspectives of the registries, we have chosen not to use his theories on authorship when analyzing the registries as texts.¹³ To make a distinction, or perhaps more precisely a boundary zone, between the text and the context, we will seek support from Gérard Genette. He defines the concept of paratext as:

[W]hat enables a text to become a book and to be offered as such to its readers and, more generally, to the public. More than a boundary or a sealed border, the paratext is, rather, a threshold, or – a word Borges used apropos of a preface – a ‘vestibule’ that offers the world at large the possibility of either stepping inside or turning back. It is an ‘undefined zone’ between the inside and the outside, a zone without any hard and fast boundary on either the inward side (turned toward the text) or the outward side (turned toward the word’s discourse about the text), an edge, or, as Phillipe Lejeune put it, ‘a fringe of the printed text which in reality controls one’s whole reading of the text’.¹⁴

The concept of paratext is originally developed based on literature presented as books, but the concept has a wider validity. How it can be applied on archives and in archival research is thoroughly described in a previous publication from this research project.¹⁵

In contemporary historical research the complex relationship between the making of narratives and the underlying factual information is a topic for discussion and methodological development.¹⁶ Munslow thus argues: “So, if I am right and historical understanding comes through both the narrative form of history as well as its content then it has to be recognized that past events are highly unlikely to have their own ‘given’ much less discoverable for ‘what it was’ story.”¹⁷

This is a stance that archivists must be aware of, and it should be discussed and further elaborated from an archival perspective. Knowledge about the position taken by the archivists, explicitly or indirectly, will be of importance for future users of the archives. It may have implications for the critical approach, not only to the archival descriptions, but even to the archival material.

Metaphorically, borrowing terminology from Genette, the archival descriptions may be regarded as the *vestibule* through which the users enter the *hall*, where the archival fonds are found. The threshold between the vestibule and the hall should not be an obstacle for entering the material. The archival description may be regarded as this threshold. It can function as a barrier or as a helping aid, thus the descriptions may be regarded as instruments for executing power, letting people in or keeping them out.

Standards for archival descriptions today

ISAD(G)

Archival descriptions are dealt with in several governing documents issued by international and national bodies. The international standard on archival descriptions is ISAD(G) (General International Standard Archival Description, issued by International Council on Archives, ICA). It is meant to provide general guidance on elaboration of archival descriptions. It describes a minimum set of information to be documented.

According to ISAD(G):

The purpose of archival description is to identify and explain the context and content of archival material to promote its accessibility. This is achieved by creating accurate and appropriate representations and by organizing them in accordance with predetermined models.

On basis of the archival description, it should be possible to validate the reliability, authenticity, and accessibility of the records for future users.

The content of the archival descriptions as defined by ISAD(G)

is highly structured. But the requirement for structure does not really limit the archivist's role as an author. Provided the required information is supplied, the archivist may use at least the context area (chapter 3.2) and the note area (chapter 3.6) for information framing the fonds. The content area (chapter 3.3) also opens for the archivist to give an appraisal of the material and not least document what material that may be or is destructed. In ISAD(G) it is also stated that the name of the person(s) elaborating the description and when it has been done shall be documented (chapter 3.7).

The requirements of ISAD(G) may also be seen in connection with the standard *ISO 23081 Metadata for records*, which states that all types of records contain *metadata* in addition to the *content* itself. Even though this standard primarily is aimed at digital borne records, its principles are of general, archival interest (ISO, 2017). Metadata is supplementary information on the conditions under which the records have originated and are kept. Metadata seen like this is a part of the paratext, elaborated in "true" time, when the records are created, and thus quite parallel to archival descriptions, mostly made in the aftermath of the creation of the records.

The paratextual elements of archival material thus consist of the metadata created simultaneously with the records creation, as well as the archival descriptions and other texts commenting these records after their creation period. Most often this is done when the records are transferred to an archival repository. In general, defining an element of the paratext consists of determining:

Its position (The question where?)

Its date of appearance, and eventually of disappearance (When?)

Its mode of existence, verbal or other (How?)

The characteristics of its communicating instance, addresser and addressee (From whom? To whom?)

The functions which give purpose to its message (What is it good for?)

Contemporary archival descriptions usually contain a description of:

The archival fonds

The arrangement of the records

Digital records

Elements that are missing

Short description of the information content

In addition, the creator of the records should be described by its:

Legal basis

Precursor (if any)

Geographical scope

Subsidiary and parent organizations

Organization

Successor (if any)

General features of early archival descriptions

The oldest Norwegian archival descriptions are the so-called "arkivdesignasjoner" or archival inventories. These are lists of records and protocols that were kept in the repository of the regional governor. As mentioned above, they were made each time there was a change of governor. It documented what was being transferred

and defined what archival responsibility the successor took on. The oldest preserved inventory is from 1588. But this tradition has its roots back to the late Middle Ages. The regional governors were largely Danish nobles. Their assistants also had a strong Danish feature.¹⁸ Norwegian and Danish archival descriptions therefore share a common tradition.

Throughout a few centuries, the archives in Denmark-Norway had developed a specific genre with certain common features. Records that were considered to be of value and relevant to government practice were recorded and described at document level. Less important documents were described more summarily, often one package at a time. Packages with worthless documents were, at best, only referred to as such, or simply omitted from the list. The packages were usually numbered, very much like the documents within each package. Protocols were usually only given a title and the period that they covered. The document descriptions were more comprehensive than the package descriptions and could contain information about sender/recipient, the matter of the case and the date of the document. The protocol descriptions were the shortest. One and the same registry could be structured according to different principles. Typical subdivisions could be creator, subject (geographical or thematic) or physical placement (room, bookshelf etc).

The French historian Michel Duchein points out that European archival practices developed differently, according to various political and bureaucratic traditions. The most common feature is the importance put on legal and administrative needs.¹⁹ To what extent there are major differences as to how the registries were organized and the records were described in countries outside Denmark-Norway, has not been studied. But archival practices here were to a large extent built on German traditions. So, it is likely that the

registries in Denmark-Norway had the same major features as we can find in other European countries.

The Mission

On September 19, 1732, king Christian VI instructed Peter Vogt and Andreas Lachman to draw up a registry of “the so-called archive” at Akershus Castle. The order was initiated by the ministry secretary Peter Neve, who probably also had the letter in the pen. The assignment was hardly a dream job. State governor Christian Rantzau, who first made the proposal, characterized the archive as a pigsty. The work must have been awful. Two years later, on October 16, 1734, they were finished. An archival registry could be handed over to the chancellor- and justice secretary at Akershus Castle, Ulrik From, who had the daily responsibility for the archives at Akershus.

A few decades later, the job had to be done over again. The old registry was inadequate, new acquisitions had arrived, more protocols and letters, more or less of the same type as previously. Disorder had developed since the 1734-registry. Worthless records took up space, while important documents were difficult to find. It was unsatisfactory. On January 4, 1782, the king set down an appraisal committee, the first appraisal committee in Norway, to review the archives at Akershus Castle. The committee consisted of the regional governor Albrecht Philip von Levetzau (Akershus Region) and judge Herman Colbjørnsen. However, to make decisions, an inventory, a new registry, had to be created. On September 2, 1790, 18-year-old Carl Deichman Møller took on the job. The result was presented approximately two years later.

The stated purpose, both in 1734 and 1792, was to create an overview and simplify retrieval of documents in both registries,

as well as to distinguish the important from the unimportant. The unimportant ones seem to be those that had little relevance for the administration and for legal purposes, both to the public and the state administration. The administration needed order in the archives to achieve “Connection and Suite” in their daily affairs and to prevent “Dispute and Wickedness” among people, as state governor Rantzau’s expressed himself in 1732 when he asked for help in refurbishing the archive.²⁰ In other words, the objective was primarily of an administrative and legal nature. The principals were also the same both in 1732 and 1790, Norwegian central administration with approval from the King’s Council in Copenhagen. As such, the two registries had a common starting point.

The “archivists”

However, the people who completed the work were very different, both in terms of age, work experience, education, and social background. Vogt and Lachman were both born in 1685, belonged to old state official families and were close relatives. They had long experience as judges when they began the registration work. Lachman also had experience in archival work as a “registrar” at Akershus Castle from 1711. Their interest in the Akershus Archives was primarily of an administrative and legal nature. Through the exercise of their judicial functions, they were well acquainted with the archives’ legal value. In their judging, they experienced how archival material could have decisive significance. This was especially true in real estate cases and in disputes where financial interests were at the center, both for the state and individuals.²¹

The person responsible for the second registry, Carl Deichman Møller, was only 18 years old when he started writing the registry.

He was born and raised in Porsgrunn, at that time a flourishing merchant town in the southeast part of Norway. We do not know much about Carl’s education and interests, just that he later left the archival career in favor of commercial citizenship in Porsgrunn. He was to be guided by his father, the Danish regional physician in Bratsberg county, Hans Møller.

Hans Møller was educated, among other places, in France (with royal scholarship). His interests included history, philosophy, and natural science. He was an avid reader of the French enlightenment philosophers and a favorite within the elite social circles in Porsgrunn and the neighboring town of Skien. Hans Møller was a member of the science association and an eager champion of a Norwegian university. He had also arranged the comprehensive book collection of the then deceased Carl Deichman, the uncle of his spouse, before being given to Christiania city. The Deichman library is the one of the oldest libraries and the biggest public library in Norway.

The Akershus Castle, the repository and the records

The Akershus castle was built during the reign of king Christian IV, but the fortress was begun already at the end of the 13th century. In 1732 the castle was much decayed. Building reports talk about roof leaks, exposed windows, rotten wood and various forms of wear and tear. The repository was small and dragging. Mice and rats feasted on paper and parchment. The rooms were on the third floor of the west wing overlooking the fjord. In addition, some archival material was put in the basement under the castle’s southern corner. Here the archives, besides rats and mice, were also exposed to moisture and

mold. In the winter cold and darkness to a large degree made work impossible. The lack of desks and shelves also complicated the work. The archives had to be carried in and out from the repository for the records to be reviewed and registered. Carl Møller writes that he had to hire people to help him carry records when the registry was made. The situation was bad in 1732. Sixty years later, the premises were only slightly improved, and the volume of archives had increased considerably. As mentioned above, the number of registered records had almost doubled, in addition to all the unregistered packages.²² [See *Fintland & Thime*: figure 2, p iii.]

The 1734-registry

The first initiative to create a registry of the Akershus archives was taken by the state governor Ditlev Vibe in 1726 when Ulrik From took over the office as the Norwegian chancellor- and judicial secretary. In this way, it can be said that the 1734-registry belongs to the tradition of “arkivdesignasjon”.²³ But at the same time it represented something else. It was first developed six years after From was taken into office. In addition, this was the first registry that aspired to contain a complete overview of the archival holdings at Akershus Castle. Anything similar had not been written since the Akershus registry of 1622. However, this was primarily an overview of some monastery archives that had been placed in Akershus castle during the decades after the Reformation.

The physical characteristics

We will begin with the physical object. The original parchment binding is preserved. On the cover we find the following text: “Registry on the letters and protocols found at the Akershus Castle

Archive”. [See *Fintland & Thime*: figure 3, p iii.] The title page reads as follows: “Registry of the Royal Letters and Papers, as well as Protocols as in the Norwegian Archives at Akershus Castle by the inspection in the years 1733 and 1734, is found after the Royal Decree of 19th Sept. 1732.” The protocol is pierced with two holes. The remains of the cord, which has obviously been dragged through the holes, are preserved. The lacquer seals of Lachman and Vogt attach the cord to the back of the cover. This was a common practice to ensure the authenticity and integrity of the protocol by supplying it with cord and a lacquer seal at the end. We know this practice from the seventeenth century “arkivdesignasjoner” and court books. It emphasizes the importance of the registry as a legal and administrative document. It clarified the archival responsibility, both in terms of scope and content. Initially, the registry also explains the assignment. Finally, the actual handover has been documented, where Ulrik From signs that he has received the registry together with the archives herein described and the key to the repository.

The registry covers 421 pages and includes 1400 registered packages and protocols. In addition, approx. 900 documents were described individually and about 250 documents more summarily in units of two to four documents. The other packages and protocols are very briefly described, often just numbered, and named. It is often indicated how many documents the packages contain. An appraisal is sometimes carried out, essentially negative, often using the words “of no significance”.

At first glance, this appraisal seems somewhat coincidental. But there is a pattern. More than half of the records are described. These were the most important. The other half is scarcely mentioned or at best summarily described. They are often characterized as useless, without information, value or interest for posterity. The important

documents concerned changes in the state organization and jurisdiction. They were land records, royal privileges, treaties with foreign powers and various laws and decrees that were still valid. The unimportant ones concerned more specific cases that did not carry any precedence and that only concerned individuals. They could be matters concerning payment of taxes, petitions, applications for work within the state administration, travel permissions etc.

The content

The Akershus archives consisted of records from state agencies that covered the whole country, but also from regional and local state agencies, especially from the courts. The registry begins with the royal letters. This was a long tradition which can be traced back to the early “arkivdesignasjoner”. The royal letters were most important. Therefore, they came first. These documents are also described individually in detail. The packages are sorted chronologically and named by year. Each document is numbered, sometimes within each package, sometimes across the packages. The numbers were applied earlier. Their provenance is mixed. Some are addressed to the state governor, others to the regional and the county governor. Following the royal letters are the documents and protocols of the state governor, with subseries. Within each series, the protocols are arranged chronologically. Thereafter, documents and protocols concerning the king’s land are described. Here, all of the documents are described individually. The same applies to the following series. These are documents of different content, but related to Bergen, Trondheim, Kristiansand or Akershus Region, the major Norwegian regions at the time. Between the series of Kristiansand’s and Akershus’s regions, we find a series of documents, accounts and records of property belonging to the church. The privileges and land

belonging to the nobility is a corresponding series. Also, for these two series most of the documents are described individually. The other thematically arranged documents are the series concerning mining, the military, the forest and sawmill commissions. Following these, we find the court books. They are mainly arranged so that all protocols created by a certain court is presented together. It begins with the Supreme Court’s protocols, then the regional court protocols and finally the minutes created by the local courts for the towns and rural areas. Within subseries the protocols are sorted chronologically. Finally, the older papers of the Supreme Court and the state governor are considered worthless. The first because “the law liberates the Justice secretary for such a long-time responsibility”. The others without any further explanation.

The division also largely follows the physical location of the records. The royal letters are located in the “inner chamber”, the protocols of the so-called Castle Act are placed from “the first rack” to the sixth. Then follow the shelf “royal land books”, the shelves of Bergen, Trondheim and Kristiansand region, the shelf of church land records and the “Great Cabinet”. Subsequent series are not given any placement before the “Rack Forest and Sawmill Commission”. Whether or not all of the previous series were in the great cabinet is uncertain. The many consecutive court records also lack placement. We do not find any reference to physical location again until the end of the registry, namely for the “worthless” material placed in a “chamber above the cellar”, “on the small cabinet”, “at the top of the shelves under the roof” and “on top of the great cabinet”.

Appraisal of the material

The first entry reads: “A package of royal letters from ancient times, of no significance”.

For us, this is unexpected, but also incomprehensible. Incomprehensible, because the claim apparently lacks justification. Unexpected, because most people today will think that old documents are more valuable than more recent ones. Nearly half of the archival holdings were in the same way written off as worthless, usually without any further explanation or description. Implicit: documents that were described were important. The rest were not. So why were the unimportant records kept? Hardly because they were considered to have a historical value. Most likely because the destruction of records was not included in their mission. We also know that later eighteenth century governors and “archivists” believed that many of these documents only were taking up space without “being of any value to Posterity”.²⁴

This tells a great deal about the purpose of this registry. Here it is difficult to spot any trace of “patrimoine”. But there are exceptions as demonstrated in a document “about Admiral Trampe’s sea battle and victory, dated 17 June 1676” (page 53, no. 272). There are 35 documents in the 1676 package, and this is the only one found worthy of registration. The battle that the document refers to must be the great naval battle at Öland when the Swedish fleet was defeated. Important events in wartime were often presented as examples of archival documents with historical value. Within the series of documents relating to Kristiansand Region, “A project by Counsellor Høyer and some other Citizens about the foundation and growth of Stavanger town” is found worthy of a description (page 182, no. 4). Also, a few other documents stand out by the fact that the content does not seem to have a substantial legal or administrative value. This is nevertheless difficult to say for certain. The main feature seems to be that documents found worthy of description were those necessary to govern the region, records that were of legal

and economic interest to the state and to the protection of the legal interests and rights of its inhabitants.

The protocols, and especially the court protocols, were obviously considered to be of great legal value. Nevertheless, they are only described by name according to the type of protocol. This was probably sufficient because these protocols had a uniform structure and content (civil disputes, letters of access and criminal cases). The book binding, cord and seal also secured their original form.

What primarily characterizes the content of the 1734 registry is the emphasis on type of physical unity (protocol, package, envelope), type of document (such as statement, command, resolution, listing, letter etc.) and which administrative unit (county, parish, etc.) or property/owner the document concerned. Additionally, year or date are included both when packages, documents and protocols are described. In a few cases material properties like parchment is mentioned. Paper is mentioned more frequently, but then not as a material property, but more like a synonym to document.

The 1792-registry

As mentioned above, the 18-year-old Carl Deichman Møller started working in the fall of 1790. The registry was 146 pages longer than its predecessor and the number of records were almost doubled. Carl Møller spent about two years, the same as Vogt and Lachman.

The physical characteristics and the content

The 1792-registry most likely has been preserved with its original binding. However, the protocol appears to be less intact than the one from 1734. The registry is pierced in the same way as the 1734-registry, but the corresponding cord is missing. There is also no

residue for any lacquer seal and handover text. It may have been missing from the start, but these may also have been removed later. In that case, the binding must be more recent. We know that Møller made two copies of the registry.²⁵ It is also possible that the preserved specimen was not fitted with a cord and seal. The text on the cover reads “Registry on the Akershus Archive 1792”. The title page reads “Registry of the Archives at Akershus Castle, which contains Protocols, Documents and Maps, from the year 1462 to the year 1770. Sorted and Registered in the year 1792.” [See *Fintland & Thime*: figure 4, p iv.]

The 1792 registry consisted of 567 pages including an index register of 58 pages. It included 1125 more registered archival items than the 1734 registry. A little less than 1500 documents were described individually, while approximately 150 documents were described collectively, two to four documents at a time. The rest was, as in 1734, only described as a certain type of protocol or package. In other words, the degree of detail was no greater in 1792 than in 1734. This was partly due to the fact that the royal letters were collected and hardbound this time. Thus, one described each volume as a whole – as a collection of royal letters and nothing else. The tradition of describing hardbound archival pieces trumped past practice.

The structure

The 1792-registry is structured with far more series than the older one. While the 1734-registry contains 57 archive series, the youngest includes 172. This is mainly due to new acquisitions, but also a more detailed system of subseries. In this registry, the court protocols are placed immediately after the hardbound royal letters. Then we find different thematic series. While the court protocols

are organized by provenance, that is by whom they were created, the document packages seem to be sorted by topic. In this way, the structure is similar to the registry from 1734. Many of the series and archival descriptions are a transcription from the 1734-registry. Virtually all the 1734 series are found in the 1792-registry, although some documents have been moved to new series. [See *Fintland & Thime*: figure 5, p iv.]

Møller’s registry contains far more detailed information about the physical location of the records. One can almost reconstruct how the records were stored. In brief the location was such: The hardbound royal letters, court protocols and maps appear to be located in the “first room”. The packages were located in “the second room” and began with documents about the matriculation in Norway, “above the door”. In addition, we find the other series placed on the shelf over the window towards the yard, “On the shelf over the cellar door”, “Over the cellar door, on the shelf”, “in the big cabinet”, “on the big rack”, “the rack over the cellar door,” “Above the smaller cabinet,” “On the shelf under the ceiling. above the small Cabinet”, “The drawer in the small cabinet“, “The rack by the door” (where the series Akershus, Bergen, Kristiansand and Trondheim regions were located) and “in the smaller cabinet and the shelves of the great rack”. Then, “The chamber above the cellar with its rooms and shelves” in addition to “the cellar below this chamber”.

The content description shared many of the same features as the 1734-registry. This applies especially to the emphasis on the type of archive and administrative unit. The dating is as widespread as before.

Comparison of the two registries and some remarks on their relation to description standards today

We find a much more elaborate series structure in 1792. The 1734-series are all found in the 1792-registry, but many more are added. Many of them contain documents that are older than 1730. Whether these are documents that have been relocated or not previously been described, is not sufficiently investigated.

Carl Møller points out that the protocols were the first to be brought into order, then the document packages.²⁶ The protocols were easiest to arrange, and this may be one of the reasons why these were handled first. But the protocols were probably considered more important than the packages. The royal letters came first, as in the 1734-registry. But here they were bound in 18 volumes and thus appeared as protocols. As protocols, they were also very briefly described, only with the title and year span – like other protocols, this in contrast to the 1734-register's description of the royal letters. There is also an emphasis on physical location that is far less visible in 1734.

What distinguishes the 1792-registry most from the other is the extensive alphabetical topical index. Here users are given the opportunity of various topical entries to the registry than those given in the main structure. Here, it should also be noted that terms such as “old” and “parchment” are key words in their own right. This is in stark contrast to the 1734-registry's first entry, where old royal letters are rejected as worthless without any justification other than being old.

The appraisal of individual documents from 1734 is, with a few exceptions, completely absent in the 1792-registry. Among other his-

torical documents the registry mentions “a historical description of Bergen, its origin and development, about its people, the trade and the industry of the inhabitants, about the Hanseatics, their trade and status.” (See, page 185.) A number of topographical studies about cities and rural areas from the seventeenth and eighteenth century are also presented (see, for example, pages 381, and 447). On page 395 there is a description of “A journal on the late king Christian V's travel through Norway in 1685”. These entries show that the archivist also had an eye for documents with little legal or administrative interest, but of historical value. But they are very few.

As mentioned above, Carl Møller and his father belonged to an academic elite. Carl's father, Hans Møller, was an active participant in the DKNVS, one of the founders of the Norwegian Topographical Society and a frequent writer of scientific articles in the major Norwegian periodicals at the time. His interest in history and science was shared with other Norwegian elite persons, among them Carl Deichman and Frederik Moltke, a Danish nobleman and the governor of the Akershus Region – and as such also responsible for the Akershus archives. The German historian Stefan Berger points out that many of today's National Archival institutions owe their existence to early modern interest in history and antiquarian tradition. Historians and antiquarians were appointed to write national eposes and to collect historical items. Their activities were partly based on collecting and studying archival records.²⁷ The Danish National Archivist, Adolph Ditlev Jørgensen (1840–1897), characterized the Danish Geheimearkiv (national archive) in the eighteenth century as the centerpiece for historical research in Denmark-Norway.²⁸

Against this background it is surprising that historical or research value seem to be so little emphasized in the 1792-registry. The

alphabetical index seems to be the most visible sign of a different approach to the archives than the traditional legal/administrative. Other user groups and applications are probably taken into account here. Some keywords in the registry indicate this.

Overall, the similarities between the two registries are obvious. In many cases the descriptions that we find in 1792 are exact copies of the 1734-ones. Also in his appraisal work, Carl Møller in many cases bases his arguments on the views of Lachman and Vogt. The archival holdings had increased considerably since 1734 and the job must have felt overwhelming to Carl Møller. His father most likely did not have the capacity to guide his son as first planned.²⁹ At the same time the 1734-registry must have seemed like a way out, a road map for completing the task he had taken on instead of inventing some new approach. But then he was also captured by tradition or the existing archival discourse – to use Foucault's terminology.

An eye-catching feature of both registries is that the ISAD(G) elements are not new. Already over 200 years ago we can find the following information documented in the registries.

Title
Scope
Date of creation
Appraisal
Archivist's note
Dates of descriptions
Archival history
Finding aids, which is a feature primarily of the 1792-registry (the topical index).

These elements were already rooted in existing traditions, long before the eighteenth century. This indicates that some parts of archival descriptions have been key elements for centuries, and still are. Carl Møller's alphabetical index in the 1792-registry nevertheless represented a new approach, most likely a result of the enlightenment ideas in general and the growing interest in historical and topographical research in particular. Readers at the time favoured an alphabetical ordering scheme rather than complicated thematic approaches.

Carl Møller started his work by proposing a scheme for grouping the various records at the Akershus archive. Carl's father, Hans Møller, was well familiar with the works of Carl von Linné. He even published a long article about Linné's classification of plants.³⁰ Carl Møller's scheme first grouped the records according to material properties: hardbound protocols – which came first – and then document packages. The first group of document packages were royal letters. The other categories were, in the following order, records concerning the church and clerical properties, procedural documents for the courts, military rolls, records concerning the Kongsberg silver mine, correspondence between the national governor, regional governors and the local authorities, tax estimates, customs documents etc.³¹ This scheme had little resemblance to the more scientific taxonomies that were developed to systematize knowledge. Carl's scheme mainly built on the categories that were found in the 1734-registry, even if the order was different and the number of categories had increased. But it was nevertheless a complicated scheme, the alphabetical index which he elaborated in the 1792-registry was easier to use for people outside the profession.

Archival descriptions as paratexts now and then

Through the years the terms used for the paratexts of archival records or fonds have varied. Today the term *archival description* has an internationally accepted definition:

1. The process of analyzing, organizing, and recording details about the formal elements of a record or collection of records, such as creator, title, dates, extent, and contents, to facilitate the work's identification, management, and understanding. – 2. The product of such a process.³²

In our context we frequently encounter the term “designasjon” or, as previously described, an archival inventory. This description of records was created to define the archival responsibility that a new state official took on as he replaced his predecessor. The designation gives an overview of the archival material that was considered relevant for the continued performance of office functions, also after a new state official was appointed. In this respect it may be considered an archival “snapshot”. It includes a short abstract and the date of each record.

“*Registraturer*” (registries) and “designasjoner” are often used interchangeably and its use is not consistent. However the former is more often used when the purpose is to describe a complete holding and not necessarily in connection with an archival handover. While the designation more functions as a document to describe the archival responsibility that is taken on, the “registratur” is to a larger extent designed to be a finding aid and a tool to gain physical control over the material, thus satisfying several of the criteria for archival descriptions of today, cfr. the definition above and ISAD(G).

According to Merriam-Webster a narrative is the art or practice of narration, which is an account of incidents or events. The narrator or author is the person that originates or creates the narrative. A notetaker is defined as a person who takes notes, which are informal written records of things that are said and done or a short piece of writing that gives you information. A paratextual element may communicate pure information, for example the name of the author or the date of publication, thus resembling a note. But even then, as archival descriptions reflect the values and the knowledge of the archivist who create them, it is imperative that we document and make visible these biases.

Based on the definitions given above, the archivist as the creator of archival descriptions, both 300 years back in time and today, acts more like an author than a notetaker. Taking this into account, the archivist should be regarded as an active element in creating archives, not merely a servant mirroring the contents of them.

The archivist appears as an active link between the society with its institutions and the archival material. The role is to “cultivate” the material, not merely to keep it. The descriptions show a tangible impact of the archivist, related to the linguistic presentation of the material as well as determining which documents were regarded to be of importance.

We can find lots of paratextual elements in the registries from 1734 and 1792, which can be traced back to the archivist not purely as a notetaker, or “describer” of the content of the fonds to future users. In this position the archivist is aiming to refer the content of the fonds, without giving any supplementary information than what is needed to find the records one is searching for. The role has some characteristics of being a subordinate royal servant. The archivist thus acts as conveyer of the archival discourse.

In the registry of 1792, and especially in the registry of 1734, the archivist has made judgements and decisions making him a more active “cultivator” of the fonds. But the criteria used, and trade-offs made, are mostly implicitly visible in the text of the registries. The archivist has not given that much of explicit judgements in the texts, thus appearing as an invisible author, but still an author. In this role the archivist is at least to some degree adding supplementary information and some own interpretations, however aiming to help future users to find the sought pieces of information. Even though still an obedient civil servant, the more active involvement may in the long run challenge the picture of the persons or institutions that have produced the archival material.

In the standards for archival descriptions of today there are clearer requirements for disclosing the judgements and decisions made by the archivists, making today’s archivists in a more obvious and explicit role as an author.

But the archivist’s role as an author is not a free role. The archivist must obey the fonds. In that sense the text created by the archivist really is a paratext to the original text, namely the records. Turning back to Genette it is worth to remember that a paratextual element always is subordinate to “its” text, and this functionality determines the essentials of its aspect and of its existence. The definition of a paratext implies that someone always shall be responsible for it.

The person responsible must be defined and ideally his or her background should be known to future users of the archival descriptions. Just as we today like to know the background of the archivists of 1734 and 1792, future users of our archival descriptions would like to know something about our backgrounds. Not only to be able to make a sound criticism of our archival descriptions, but also to be able to make judgements about the archival material.

It might well be that future users of our contemporary collected material will question our criteria for selection. The archivist should keep this in mind, especially when arguing for and describing the material to be destructed, not regarded as worth keeping.

Conclusion

A changing archival discourse?

Does the development from 1734 to 1792 show changes in how the archives are perceived and in the way they are expressed? Again, it must be emphasized that these are preliminary conclusions. The registries are extensive, and a thorough analysis must, to a greater extent than what we have done so far, compare each description, the terms used and what documents that have been chosen or omitted. This will take some time.

But that said, it should be possible to make some conclusions. The most eye-catching is how static the structure of archival descriptions are. Structure and concepts are largely retained. The prevailing practice is the results of traditions that go centuries back in time. These seem to have been cemented to the degree that neither cultural change nor change in the author’s personal background and interests overrule the institutional framework. This to some extent contradicts Foucault’s notion of the *épistémè*, as a general condition for knowledge within a certain period, in the sense that the archival discourse in many ways outlives the cultural changes that we find during the eighteenth century. And, even though the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have seen major changes in archival descriptions, important elements have survived until the present day. Changes, to the extent that they occur, seem to develop gradually with small steps, almost imperceptibly. A few entries

appear with a slightly different content and a different taste and emphasis than before.

In some cases, the changes are more visible, but it requires a careful reading to spot them. The removal of the appraisal of individual documents (as often found in the 1734-registry) is such an important change. The assessments of the single documents in 1734 were made from a legal and administrative perspective. With a broader approach, such assessments became more difficult. Admittedly, Carl Møller also conducts an appraisal of groups of documents at the end of the registry. Some of these are based on the reviews of 1734. However, and this is particularly evident in Møller's retention plan from 1791³³, these were justified in a different way than in 1734. Møller's proposal was based on a cost/benefit, user rate and a redundancy analysis. But, it must be underlined, that these criteria were based on practical purposes, and in no way by historical considerations.

The most visible change in 1792 is the extensive alphabetical register. This made the information more accessible for various purposes. It is important to point out the use of nouns like "old" and "parchment" in the register. This in contrast to the 1734 rejection of age as an interesting aspect of the documents.

The work of the archivists

How then does Leniaud's "fishing net" work to capture changes in how archives were perceived? It is difficult to track the conscious will to preserve archives because of their scientific or cultural value. The appraisals made in both registries cannot be described as distinctively historical. But there are changes that point in a different direction than the typical legal and administrative assessment. The archival description of 1792 has undergone certain changes compared to the 1734-description. These may indicate that the awareness

of the cultural and historical values of archives was not been completely alien to Carl Møller when his registry was created.

Peter Vogt and Andreas Lachman are well placed within what Ketelaar calls the "muniments" tradition, while father and son Møller's personal starting point when confronting the archives must be categorized as belonging to the "monuments" understanding. Nevertheless, both parties worked within a particular institution and tradition, with the corresponding discourse. This must have limited their individual preferences and contributed to the stability of archival descriptions throughout the eighteenth century.

Author or notetaker?

Archival descriptions are narratives about the creating institutions, their tasks and their contexts, not merely notes. Thus, the archivists should be regarded as authors, not authors of fiction, but authors of factual prose encompassing information that could help future users understand the framing conditions for the development of the archives. The archivists originate or create the archival descriptions. They are developed on basis of defined standards. But even current, highly detailed standards on archival descriptions cannot be purely algorithmic. The standards do not eliminate the need for judgements made by the archivists elaborating them. Therefore, the role and the work of the archivists of our time will be a topic of interest and critical analysis, and of great importance to understand and interpret the archival descriptions.

Norwegian archival descriptions have gone through significant changes throughout the more than two hundred years that have passed since the creation of the 1792-registry. But these changes mostly consist of new elements that are added to the core description: various kinds of contextual information. The listing of the

archival items seems relatively unchanged. This underlines the importance of the institutional framework. For better or worse, this strongly limits the creativity or freedom for the archivist as an author.

The development of the role of the archivist

Archival practice carries traits of the contemporary society. A possible interpretation of our findings based on Foucault's thoughts on the *épistémè*, combined with Leniaud's perspectives on patrimoine, might be that archival practice is influenced by thoughts, knowledge and technologies of its time, thus in accordance with Foucault's notion. But the archival descriptions, as long lasting and durable signs of the explicit work of the archivist, appear to be in accordance with Leniaud's claim of long-term structures and processes. This should not be surprising. Professional actors seek support in their tradition, often embedded in their institutional framework. In addition, they must respond to the requirements from society. A combination of the theoretical approaches suggested by Foucault and Leniaud may help us construct a powerful platform for interpreting the development of the role of the archivist.

In the late eighteenth century, there are signs of influence on archival practices from researchers of various disciplines, especially from people creating topographical and historical works in this period. Historical research dominated archival practice during the nineteenth century. The latter decades have shown a focus on archival practice in light of social science, rhetorical and literary theory. New digital and information technologies have a strong impact on archival practice. Even so we can still identify core elements within archival description as a type of tacit, implicit and almost timeless practice.

The archivists act on basis of their own professional tradition, in

addition to, more or less willingly, implementing current trends in their work. In this way they defend their role as authors, not merely as obedient civil servants and notetakers.

Endnotes

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- 22 Thime, *Til Underretning*, 101–111.
- 23 Thime, *Til Underretning*, 126.
- 24 Torkel Thime, "'Af ingen Betydning'. Peter Vogt, Andreas Lachman og Carl Deichman Møller – verdivurdering av arkiver 1732-1804". (English titel: "'Of no Importance'. Peter Vogt, Andreas Lachman and Carl Deichman Møller – archival appraisal 1732–1804"), Norsk Arkivforum 27, 13-53: 17.
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Ine Fintland & Torkel Thime—The Archivist Creating Archival Descriptions—Notetaker or Author?—



Figure 1 (p. 163). A profile of the repository at Akershus castle, marked (C). Drawing by Hans Jacob Scheel, ca. 1757. The National Archives, the Map and Drawing Collection, KBK XVIII 2a. Photo: The National Archives, Norway.

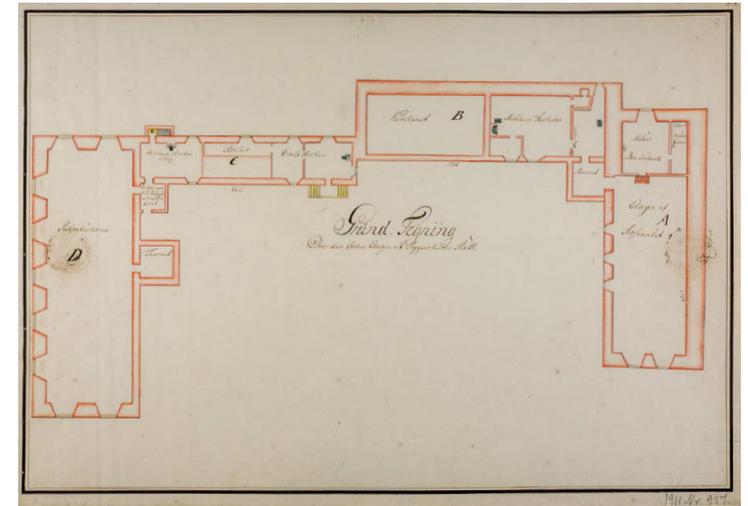


Figure 2 (p. 176). Ground view over the third floor in Akershus castle. The west wing shows the repository (C). It included both the military archive and the civilian archive. The military archive was divided into two rooms, one south of the civil archive and one north of the kitchen (B). The civil archive covered two rooms and a hall way. Drawing by Hans Jacob Scheel, appr. 1757. The National Archives, the Map and Drawing Collection, KBK XVIII 2ae. Photo: The National Archives, Norway.

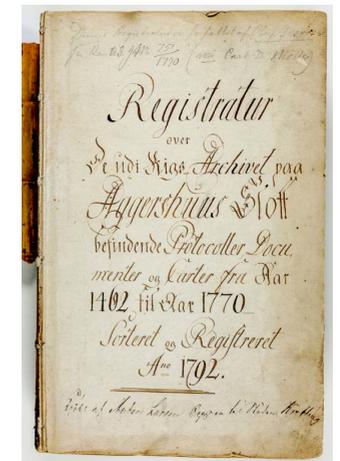


Figure 3 (p. 177). The title page of the Akershus Registry of 1792, written by Carl Deichman Møller. National Archives, Archive catalogs. Photo: The National Archives, Norway.

