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The archive as home: ruminations on domestic notions of provenance

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Abstract

This article investigates the notion of provenance, questioning traditional conceptions of the archival fonds that link this collective to limited relationships, including that of the individual, family, or organization. Drawing from work that embraces the notion of expanded views of provenance, the paper explores the theoretical and practical implications of tying the contextual boundaries of the archive to functions and activities connected to and serving as evidence of domestic spatial configurations and relationships. In doing so, the article adds to a body of work that queries key concepts used as part of systems of archival control, highlighting new conceptual and theoretical interpretations that bring dynamism, creativity, and flexibility to archival operations as they exist in analog and digital spaces.

Keywords Provenance · Societal provenance · Home · Archives · Archival theory

Introduction

“... the meaning of ‘archive,’ its only meaning, comes to it from the Greek *arkheion*: initially a house, a domicile, an address, the residence of the superior magistrates, the archons, those who commanded. The citizens who thus held and signified political power were considered to possess the right to make or to represent the law. On account of their publicly recognized authority, it is their home, in that place which is their house (private house, family house, or employee’s house), that official documents are filed” (Derrida 1995, pp 9–10).

“places are a touchstone for memory, a context for our physical, virtual, oral and embodied records and activities, and a place we can express and pass on our embodied knowledge, sparked and influenced by the nature of the places themselves” (Battley 2019, p 15).