

References to Archival Materials in Scholarly History Monographs

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Abstract: This study examines citations of archival material in a sample of 136 recently-published scholarly historical monographs produced by a selection of highly-cited American university presses, with the goal of discovering patterns in scholarly user reportage of archival use. The study found that 68% of the titles referenced at least one archival collection, that archival collections housed at universities were used more often than other types of repositories, that citations to physical archival collections far outnumbered citations to digital archival collections and that the amount and type of repositories did not in most cases vary based on historical subject matter of the book. The findings could potentially provide a baseline by which further and more diverse archival use and users can be measured.

Keywords: archives, archival research, citations, historians, archival users.....

1. Introduction

This study examines citations of archival material in a sample of 136 recently-published, single-authored books (or monographs) produced by highly-cited university presses in the United States, and made available as e-books through Project Muse. The intended goal of the study is to examine the feasibility of using citation analysis to discover patterns in scholarly user reportage of archival use. Factors examined are the percentage of monographs that cite archival material; variations in number of formats (physical or digital) and repositories referenced; and whether specific historical subjects are more likely to follow distinct usage patterns, such as type of repository used. 'Repository' here refers to any entity containing archival collections.

It should be noted that unlike a strictly-defined "citation study", which counts each time a source is cited, this is a "reference study", which counts each archival collection only once per book, even if it is cited multiple times.

2. Research Problem

Understanding archival use has long been considered a vital issue to archivists, and user studies employing a number of methodologies have often been called

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for and periodically undertaken. Although citation or reference studies are not often considered in archival literature, fields that produce published works put considerable weight behind tracking and counting citations. The sources of published work in these fields (including scholarly articles in the field of history) are easily measured and tracked using citation tools such as Google Scholar, Scopus, or Web of Science. Archival citations, however, are not available through such indexes. This prohibits archivists and scholars from seeing a broader network of archival collections' roles in scholarly communication. Without that broader understanding, archivists lack access to existing evidence that may prove helpful in evaluating larger trends, movements, and impacts that affect the field as a whole.

To that end, this project intended to answer the question: What can references to archival material in scholarly historical monographs tell us about recent scholarly use of archival material? More specifically, can we tell from archival references what historical specialties are most likely to use archival material, and can we observe any patterns in how they may use different formats or repositories?

3. Literature Review

Evaluating the number and nature of citations in published materials to other works as a way to understand use has been an established practice in library and information studies, particularly when reviewing the "hard sciences". There is a thinner history of citation studies concerning the humanities (Heinzkill, 1980), and many citation studies of humanities scholars themselves exclude the study of archival sources (for one recent example, see Knieval & Kellsey, 2005).

There are exceptions: Some citation studies investigating the information use of historians by study of references in scholarly history journals have included information about archival sources. Jones, Champman and Woods (1972) looked at 7,000 references in historical publications and found that 12.6% of all references were to unpublished material, and 55% of all references to manuscripts came from the British Museum of Public Reference Office. Heinzkill (1980) analyzed 9,556 footnotes in 14 journals, and found that less than 5% of the references were to manuscripts. Elliot (1981), investigating material in the history of science, found that 28% of 3,600 references in 15 journals were to unpublished sources. Most relevant to this story is the work of Miller (1986), who looked at archival use in 214 journals, tabulating how many repositories, collections, and series were used. Recent citation studies, most notably the work of Sinn (2012, 2013, 2014), have focused on references to digital sources.

Other citation studies are limited to following past researchers of certain repositories, including studies by Goggin (1986), Beattie (1989), McCall and Mix (1996), and Jackson (1997).

In addition, there have been many archival user studies that have used entirely different methodology, including surveys and interviews. This includes work by Stieg (1981), Duff and Johnson (2002), Duff, Craig and Cherry (2004), Tibbo (2003), Dalton & Charnigo (2004), and Chassanoff (2013).

Virtually all of the citation papers mentioned (and many of the survey or interview based papers) have pointed out the limitations of citation studies. Citation studies are seen as incomplete because they cannot show the information the researcher did not find (Goggin, 1986), and as misleading because they don't reflect the importance of the archival material to the scholars' work (Miller, 1986). The latter is especially true of reference studies like this project –which will count sources materials only once, rather than each time a source was cited – because each source is assumed to have the same impact (Sinn, 2012). Another widely discussed apprehension to undertaking citation studies has long been summed up by the adage that researchers do not always cite what they use, and do not always use what they cite.

It is not the purpose of this study to build a full understanding of historians' information seeking behavior in the archives; rather, the aim here is to examine the feasibility of using citation analysis to provide a recent, evidence-based, wide-angle view of academic historians' use of both physical and digital archival material from a range of repositories, as such a study is currently missing from the literature.

4. Methodology

This study reviews the archival references of one of the most common groups of users of archives: academic historians. Archival material is one of the sources historians consider most important (Dalton & Charnigo, 2004), which it makes it probable that a good number of their books will contain a number of references to archival material. That archival use results in citations as a necessary part of historians' output provides another advantage to focusing on this group over other archival users.

References to archival materials in monographs have been chosen over archival references in journal articles, not only because monographs are considered an important publication for academic historians (Cronin & La Barre, 2004) but because fewer citation studies have been conducted on references in books. Recent use of archives is also an important factor inherent to the design of this study. For that reason, the study will be limited to books published in 2012.

The study examines 136 monographs from publishers that have the top 50 highest total citation counts in Scopus History Journals, according to the work of Zuccala, Guns, Cornacchia and Bod (2015). The works of commercial publishers in this initial list were not included. In addition, only the 15 publishers from this list who make their full-text works accessible via Project Muse eBooks are included in analysis. Project Muse's holdings tool was used

to find titles with the listed discipline of “History” (muse.jhu.edu/about/librarians/holdings.html). Books with multiple authors listed or that have the subject “Poetry, Fiction, and Creative Non-Fiction” were excluded, leaving 136 books for analysis.

I took references from each book’s bibliography or works cited section. For those books lacking in a bibliography or similar section, I looked through the notes section. In the absence of a separate notes section, I searched the full text of the book for the words “archives”, “libraries”, “collections”, “box”, “folder” and “fonds”. I then captured and counted each archival repository cited, only counting a repository once per each book, and counting the number of discrete collections from each repository when that was possible.

Repositories mentioned in illustration credits were not counted. Published manuscript collections and microfilm collections were also not counted; for microfilm, it was sometimes not possible to tell if these were accessed on-site, or widely available as publications. Digital collections were only counted if they were the work of an existing repository, and not the archives of a publication or website.

The other information considered were the subjects associated with each book. For this I consulted the Project Muse holdings tool. Their designated “disciplines” and “subdisciplines” for each book include time periods (e.g., “the Colonial Era”), places (“U.S. History>Local>South”), and subjects (e.g., “Science, Technology, and Mathematics”). Where this information was missing, or seemed to contradict the title and subtitle of the book in question, I consulted subject headings in WorldCat.

After normalizing and de-duplicating the list of repositories in OpenRefine, I coded each repository based on the aim of the organization to which it belonged or the scope of what archival material was collected. Repositories – again, I am using this word to designate any institution housing archival records – fell into 15 categories: University; Religious; Independent; National (manuscript repositories such as the Library of Congress), Government Archives (e.g., National Archives and Records Administration); Local repositories (e.g., county historical societies); State Historical Societies; Presidential Libraries; Public Libraries; State Libraries and Archives; Corporate; Court; School; City Government, and Non-U.S. The decision to categorize non-U.S. repositories together instead of adding them to other counts (e.g., as universities or as independent, etc.) was born out of a reluctance to assume knowledge of archival culture outside of the United States.

I then used Excel to analyze books based on subject matter and repository type.

5. Findings

Subject headings for the books in Project Muse concerned region, era and topic. Not all books were given subject headings for all three categories. Ninety three of the 136 books were categorized in Project Muse (or in Worldcat) as pertaining specifically to US History, while 36 were labelled in Project Muse as concerning world, European or other non-U.S. History. Forty-eight of the books concern history of the 20th or 21st century; 26 books concern the 19th century, and 19 deal with pre-19th century history ranging from ancient to colonial times. The rest of the books did not specify if they concerned a specific era.

The subject headings associated with each book indicated the books in this collections were either about religion (12 books), some sort of social science (47) ranging from law to gender studies; military (16); STEM-related subjects (7); or literature (10). The remainder of the books did not specify a subject beyond era or region.

Ninety-three (or 68%) of the 136 books studied contained at least one reference to a manuscript or archival collection. In total, there were 895 references to such collections. These collections were housed at 525 different archival repositories.

The average number of repositories cited per book was 6.4, with the largest number of repositories cited in a single book being 44. Most archival collections cited were physical: Only 26 cited collections fit the criteria of a digital archival collection (digitized items housed and curated by an archival repository, and not the archives of a publication or website.)

Authors cited archival collections from 122 non-U.S. repositories, and 86 of these 122 were governmental archives of some sort. Authors cited archival collections from 118 U.S. universities and colleges; thirty-four percent (309 of 895) of the collections cited came from university repositories (see Figure 1). Overwhelmingly, these university-held collections cited were manuscript collections and not the archives of a university itself.

While universities were used more often than other types of repositories, the most highly cited single institution was the Library of Congress (22 citations), itself not a university but a national collection. The other top-cited institutions were National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), the University of Michigan, Yale, and the Wisconsin Historical Society.

With one or two exceptions, types of repositories and numbers of references to archival collections did not vary by subject matter. All categories of books, except for those explicitly concerning religion, used University-held collections more than any other type of repository. Books concerning the 19th century were more likely to cite archival sources than books concerning any other time period, and books concerning U.S. History were just as likely to use foreign sources as they were sources from American universities.

Finally, only 26 of the 525 collections cited appeared to be to digital collections.

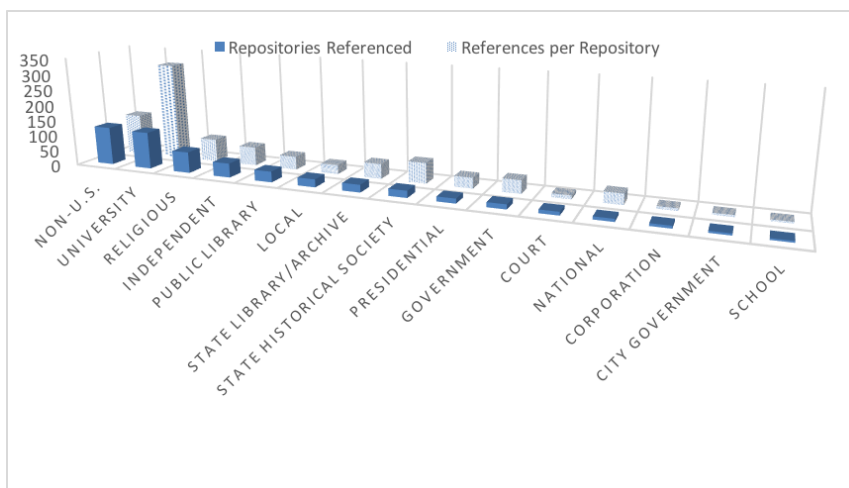


Figure 1. References to Collections at Different Types of Repositories

6. Conclusions

What can we learn about archival use from looking at references in scholarly monographs? The study demonstrates that, at least in this sample, authors of historical manuscripts are more likely than not to cite at least one archival collection per book, and on average cite material from at least six separate archival collections. While university-held collections are the most highly cited, archives from smaller and more focused repositories also see scholarly use.

It seems obvious that the larger and more diverse a repository's collections are, the more use that repository will see, and from a wider range of subject specialists. Record type may also determine the amount of repositories authors used per book. For instance, books with religious subject matter used more religious repositories than they did universities. This may reflect the recordkeeping and archival norms within American religious organizations: records of religious organizations may be more likely kept in smaller, less centralized institutions than transferred to a larger and more diverse repository.

Beyond these informal observations, it remains to be seen whether any meaningful kind of pattern concerning use by authors of different historical subdisciplines can be teased out by studying archival citations in the manner described in this paper. Firstly, a much larger study would be necessary to test the validity of the theory that archival use patterns are at all dependent on historical subdiscipline, especially when those subdisciplines or subject

headings are provided solely by a vendor or cataloger, as they have been here. A more nuanced representation of subject or discipline would need to be found and employed. But such a study, regardless of size, would still be hampered by the multiple ways in which both matters of historical inquiry and archival collections can be defined, let alone cited.

Given the low numbers of citations to digital collections found in this sample, it may be most useful to pursue the question of whether if the low underrepresentation here is due to comparatively low numbers of digitized collections, or due to the ways digital collections are (or are not) cited. It may also be beneficial therefore to look into practices and traditions that form citation habits of authors referencing archival materials in varying formats.

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