

However, these minor limitations do not detract from this work's value and importance. Yun has assembled an incredibly ambitious volume, which provides a simultaneously high-level and detailed overview of different aspects of accessioning, depending on the chapter. No single, small volume could possibly tackle the complete, broad umbrella of accessioning practices across all institutions, formats, or acquisition types. This is especially true because best practices for accessioning are still under development: the National Best Practices for Archival Accessioning Working Group's final best practices are forthcoming in Fall 2024.

Archival Accessioning is a well thought-out and planned volume intended to help archivists create their own accessioning workflows. For an introductory volume establishing the importance of accessioning as core to archival workflows, this book is necessary for learning about accessioning practices, how they differ from archival processing, and where accessioning fits within an overall collection management program. While brief, this book does a great job providing readers with a variety of examples to capture the complexity and variability of accessioning practices suited to a variety of institutional types and format considerations. It is suitable both for writing local workflows and as a launch point for training technical services staff on the principles and steps required to properly ingest new and retroactive acquisitions. — *Alexandra (Lexy) deGraffenreid, Eberly Family Special Collections Library, Pennsylvania State University*

Dennis Meissner. *Arranging and Describing Archives and Manuscripts*. Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2019. Paperback, 224 p. \$69.00 (ISBN: 9781945246074 / 9780838946480 / 9781945246098 / 945246073 / 0838946488 / 194524609X).

Arranging and Describing Archives and Manuscripts by Dennis Meissner—a book from the Society of American Archivists' "Archival Fundamentals Series III"—serves not only as an essential resource but also as a platform on which individuals and organizations in the archives field can endlessly build. This text evokes so many principles that I use to ground my own work every day; it also reminds me of how much progress our field has made in the time since this book's publication in 2019. The bright spirit and detailed content of this book are remarkable feats, even taking into consideration that it covers areas which deserve to be updated with more forward-thinking approaches.

Meissner's name might be immediately familiar to many because he co-crafted the "More Product, Less Process" (MPLP) approach with Mark Greene. Meissner, who is now retired, served as deputy director of Programs at the Minnesota Historical Society, made enduring contributions to our professional discourse, and (among many other accomplishments) was elected as a Fellow of the Society of American Ar-

chivists. His book is structured in seven chapters—along with a collection of six very illuminating appendixes crammed with practical examples—that explore the history, theory, and practice of archival arrangement and description. As I read this text, I was struck (over and over) by the intensely methodical approach Meissner takes to crafting this collection of information; it’s difficult to write effectively about an expansive bedrock concept like “description” without getting tangled in the weeds, but he tackles some very complex concepts successfully by deploying exceptionally clear prose.

Chapter 1, “The Context and Significance of Arrangement and Description,” covers the rough history of how thoughtful, structured forms of archival description emerged and evolved. Meissner also explores concepts and tools that are currently embedded in every layer of our professional practices. This early chapter is critical: it establishes a vocabulary and framework that readers can use and recognize. Chapter 2, “Principles of Archival Arrangement,” builds upward and outward toward discussions of control, original order, and the burden of archival (in)decisions:

Archivists do themselves no favor by choosing to process one collection in an impeccable manner if doing so leaves them with insufficient resources to process the other collections in their repository. That misguided logic has been a big factor in the growth of unprocessed backlogs in many repositories (33).

Truly, here is the tension that many of us feel both in the background and in the foreground of our descriptive work: *How can we? But how can we not?* This is also a good example of an ethics-informed undercurrent Meissner makes present from the beginning—if we aren’t mindful of the implications of a continued imbalance of resources (e.g., acquisitions versus capacity to make acquisitions visible and accessible; highly controlled environments that protect materials versus carbon footprint of resource usage for collection control), then we are at risk of undermining some of the most essential tenets of archival description. MPLP was meant to help prioritize energy and tools, to support more strategic application of resources without dooming acquired archival materials to invisibility. Meissner’s mention of “misguided logic”

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indicates that one-pass perfection shouldn't be the end goal of archival description; rather, we should be striving toward the use of arrangement and description practices that can ensure transparency, focus resource usage, and be scalable.

Chapter 3's focus on the principles of archival description makes the book's ethical undercurrent more prominent. Through Meissner's discussion of the finding aid functionality and the importance of descriptive standards, we see how context and structured data become necessary elements of accessibility and visibility. Expansive, structured description for materials *and* creators is now more explicitly framed as an ethical imperative:

The archivist's description of creator and context goes well beyond controlling names and relating the simple facts of custody. We are required to describe creator and context with the same care and intensity that we describe the records themselves (58).

Description must be diversified in terms of content and application, but to acknowledge that tension again: there are limitations that shape the arrangement and description we can do. And as the concept of sustainable stewardship becomes more broadly implemented throughout our profession, there's sharpened focus not only on performing archival labor that supports ethical collecting practices, but also on the necessity of ethical treatment of those within our profession.

In chapter 4, "Physical Processing and Arrangement," Meissner shows us how to assess collections' physical condition and how to make thoughtful decisions about which types of handling we devote energy to during the arrangement and descriptive processes. Chapter 5, "Describing the Materials," illuminates the confluence of tools, structures, and content that allow us to describe archival materials more generously within the scope of our stewardship. But we don't hear much about how description should be regarded as a living document, how it must be understood as a series of layers with endless potential for improvement. At least in this text, it feels like Meissner can't quite embrace the possibilities of that type of ever-long reassessment, and hence, practices related to reparative work are an "emerging trend" instead of a vital facet of the descriptive continuum.

The brevity of chapter 6, which focuses on nontextual formats, also lurks at the edge of the author's comfort zone. The information about photographs, born digital formats, and visual materials was clear and helpful but somewhat limited. Meissner's primary point is that we can rely on core archival concepts to guide our decisions about these less standardized materials, and he's not necessarily wrong. But we also need more expansive scholarship about the unique descriptive needs of born digital materials with an eye toward incorporating their stewardship needs throughout the

lifecycle from appraisal, accessioning, processing, and storage to user access. I don't fault Meissner terribly for not digging deeper into it, but collectively we all need to stop shying away from engagement with this area of our work.

The final chapter, "Emerging Trends and Theoretical Shifts," is a useful highlight reel about challenges to concepts of original order, linked open data, and critical theory. This is also the section where culturally competent description and the right to control one's identity get mentioned. Every issue covered in this chapter deserves more screen-time than Meissner could spare, but he makes a commendable effort. For instance:

In the same way that our own cultural frameworks shape our descriptions of archives, the archives we describe are themselves cultural constructs lacking objective meaning. They are shaped not only by their creators, but also by archivists who have in turn influenced their meaning by *selecting* them from among other documentation and then *arranging* them into some sort of meaningful construct (150, emphasis in original).

As archivists, we are constantly attempting to balance our professional identities, our conceptions of the profession's purpose, and the intense volume of labor required to perform our duties. Meissner is taking care to remind us that our decisions to acquire and describe materials have noticeable repercussions.

This book is appropriate for a multiplicity of audiences, especially when being used as

- a deep dive for folks approaching a fuller understanding of archival description;
- a text that can be read in part or whole for use in education, training, and upskilling;
- a high-level document of historical, practical, and theoretical approaches of the past century;
- a resource to examine established practices for ideas about how to improve workflows.

Emerging descriptive practices and standards already build on many of the approaches Meissner covers in this volume, which is indicative of this text's importance and its value. However, there are also opportunities for a new edition that incorporates more of what's now and what's *next*. Just like archival description itself, the work of explaining our practices is endlessly iterative. Dennis Meissner took on a nigh impossible project—just as Kathleen Roe and others have done before—and the outcome is a remarkably succinct volume that is both imminently helpful and somewhat limited. Whoever tackles the next interpretation of these concepts will have at least a few horizons to chase and big shoes to fill. — *Rosemary K. J. Davis, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University*