

Book Reviews

RBM: A Journal of Rare Books, Manuscripts, and Cultural Heritage reviews books, reports, new periodicals, databases, websites, blogs, and other electronic resources, as well as exhibition, book, and auction catalogs pertaining directly and indirectly to the fields of rare book librarianship, manuscripts curatorship, archives management, and special collections administration. Publishers, librarians, and archivists are asked to send appropriate publications for review or notice to the Reviews Editor.

Due to space limitations, it may not be possible for all books received to be reviewed in *RBM*. Books or publication announcements should be sent to the Reviews Editor: Amy Cooper Cary, Raynor Memorial Library, Marquette University, 1415 W. Wisconsin Ave, Milwaukee, WI 53233-2221, e-mail: amy.cary@marquette.edu, (414) 288-5901.

Kirsten Weld. *Paper Cadavers: The Archives of Dictatorship in Guatemala*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2015. xvi, 335p. ISBN 978-0822356028. \$26.95.

Harvard historian Kirsten Weld's *Paper Cadavers: The Archives of Dictatorship in Guatemala* is the first exhaustive study of the discovery, processing, and history of the "terror archives" of Guatemala's infamous National Police—an urban task force that for nearly a hundred years carried out surveillance, torture, kidnapping, and murder tactics at the behest of Guatemalan dictators and political officials. Long thought to be lost or destroyed, the archive of the National Police was discovered by Guatemala's Human Rights Ombudsman's Office while conducting an unrelated inspection of police property in 2005. In a former detention center made of cinderblock, the group discovered rooms piled high with records dating back to the National Police's beginnings, documenting many of the worst state-sponsored atrocities ever to occur in Central America. The collection the group discovered, composed of seventy-five million once-secret documents, made international headlines as the most significant collection of state documents to be uncovered in Latin American history.

Paper Cadavers explores the controversy surrounding the Guatemalan National Police archive—who should manage it, and how?—as well as the broad historical and cultural outcomes of the discovery of such a politically charged archive within a country recovering from four decades of conflict between authoritarian regimes and insurgent guerillas. In the midst of radical political transformation, Weld

argues, archives such as that of the Guatemalan National Police represent two distinct *archival logics*, or organizing principles: the first logic, dictated by the state, uses archives as weapons of surveillance and social and ideological control; the second logic, emerging from the archives' rescue from totalitarian dominion, democratizes archives in an effort to restore justice at the end of a period of war crimes. Thus, *Paper Cadavers* follows the narrative arc of the archive's history through Guatemala's transition from sustained conflict to tenuous peace. Instead of taking the traditional route of attempting to make historical sense of Guatemala's traumatic history through the discovered documents themselves, Weld addresses the archive as a site of historical and mnemonic knowledge production.

Weld's book is exhaustively researched, but what makes the volume compelling is the passion with which the author addresses her subject, her astute observations of both the practical and emotional concerns that accompany processing sensitive information such as that found in police archives, and the interviews she conducted with archivists—many of them former guerilla fighters—as they worked on the records through the past decade. Weld herself worked for a year and a half as an archivist for the Project for the Recovery of the National Police Historical Archives (PRNPHA), the foreign-funded activist initiative organized to handle the processing of the collection after its discovery in 2005. Her personal involvement allows her to appreciate the sobering details of the records that are specific to the history of violence in Guatemala, while her historical training leads her to theorize about the conceptual and political role of such archives in war-torn regions around the globe. The reader can only hope that Weld's work will invite a future comparative study that explores the history of the Guatemalan police archive beside other collections that document surveillance and state-sponsored terror: the Stasi, the Iraq Memory Foundation records of the Ba'ath Party, the Okhrana.

Archivists and specialists in the field of information science will perhaps be most interested in Weld's documentation, in chapters 1–3, of the overall organizing of the PRNPHA and its eventual move from a grassroots effort to a professionalized organization. While the reader wishes that Weld would address more completely the politics of having outside donors, governments, and human rights organizations fund the cataloging effort in Guatemala, the book succeeds in communicating the distinct challenges of organizing a collection of such vast political valence. Should the collection be mined immediately for documents that would be of use as evidence in war crime trials? Or should the archival principles of origin and provenance be upheld as guiding organizational tools? Weld traces the debate from the viewpoints of Guatemalan survivors of the terror, foreign volunteers, and young archivists who knew of their country's violent history but had not personally been victimized by the National Police. She successfully illustrates that debates about the

organization and structure of an archive reflect the constructs of memory, history, and political conditions that they inform.

Written with commitment, intelligence, and clarity, *Paper Cadavers* is a useful volume for any scholar interested in Latin American history or the processes by which the archives of authoritarian regimes can become valuable weapons for both perpetrators of crimes and their victims. While Timothy Garton Ash's valuable work on the Stasi archive¹ reminds us that records of secret police activity can open new wounds as well as healing old ones, ultimately such works as *The File* and *Paper Cadavers* convince us that the opening of sensitive archival materials—though fraught with pain and complication—is a necessary and invaluable step toward consolation and social justice.—Jean Cannon, *Literary Collections Research Associate, The Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin*

Historical Perspectives in the Conservation of Works of Art on Paper. ed. Margaret Holben Ellis. Los Angeles, Calif.: The Getty Conservation Institute, 2014. xx, 524p. ISBN 978-1-60606-432-0. \$70.00.

Historical Perspectives in the Conservation of Works of Art on Paper provides a comprehensive collection of ninety-six readings—spanning six centuries—related to the conservation of paper-based art. Published by the Getty Conservation Institute, one of this work's greatest strengths is its masterful organization of texts, which builds and climaxes in a finale that offers a multifaceted yet distinct and straightforward representation of the field of conservation.

The readings are gathered into eight sections based on the development of the technology behind and the thinking that underpins the field. "The Powers of Paper" illustrates various ideas about the role of paper. Practical, scientific, theoretical, and poetic, the range of opinion expressed conveys the complexity of responses to the medium. It also highlights paper as a carrier of information and demonstrates a respect for historical context that characterizes the sections that follow. "The Mastery of Drawing" builds upon the idea of paper as surface, addressing mark-making methods while stressing the significance of accurate record keeping in the practice of conservation. In addition to offering a discussion of methodology, "Printmaking: Multiple Originals" clearly presents a rationale for teaching printmaking techniques in conservation training programs. Part IV, "Paper Is Part of the Picture," moves the reader beyond technical issues in paper conservation to the broader considerations of materiality and meaning and completes the foundation for the following chapters.

1. Timothy Garton Ash, *The File: a Personal History* (New York: Random House, 1997).