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FAMILY ARCHIVES AND
HISTORICAL RESEARCH

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**COLONIZING LAND, CREATING SOCIETIES,
MAKING AND REMAKING ARCHIVAL MEMORIES:
FAMILY ARCHIVES AND SOCIAL POWER IN THE
CANARY ISLANDS FROM THE SIXTEENTH
TO THE NINETEENTH CENTURIES**

ABSTRACT: This paper analyzes the evolution of family archive practices in the Canary Islands during the Early Modern Age. Since the colonization of the islands to the implementation of liberalism, most of elite families needed the archive for several purposes in each context: to manage the social reproduction of the family, to support the social promotion, to manage the family property or to create a noble family narrative. Through empirical examples this paper examines some events that involved new models of archival practices by the insular elites.

Keywords: family archive; colonization; Early Modern Spain; Canary Islands

RESUMO: Este trabalho analisa a evolução das práticas arquivísticas familiares nas Ilhas Canárias durante a Idade Moderna. Desde a colonização das ilhas até à implementação do liberalismo, a maioria das elites familiares utilizou o arquivo para suprir diferentes necessidades consoante o contexto: para gerir a reprodução social da família, para apoiar a promoção social, gerir o património familiar ou criar uma narrativa nobiliárquica familiar. Através de exemplos empíricos, este trabalho foca alguns dos aspetos que abrangem novos modelos de práticas arquivísticas desenvolvidas pelas elites insulares.

Palavras-chave: arquivo de família, colonização, Espanha Moderna, Ilhas Canárias.

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Introduction

In recent years, one of the historiographic fields with more innovations within European Early Modern History has been the study of the family elites in the Iberian empires and their ultramarine territories in a comparative perspective². This approach has been developing at the same time as medievalists and modernists are carrying out a deep revision of the studies of the nobility in Europe. They are questioning the agnatic lineage model proposed by G. Duby³ as the main form of family organization and the uncritical incorporation by historians of the conceptual terminology imported from Anthropology of kinship, house, lineage, etc.⁴. The studies carried out by N. Monteiro⁵ and M. Soares da Cunha⁶ have demonstrated the fundamental role of the house in the family organization of the modern nobility in Portugal (verified by J. D. Rodrigues in the case of São Miguel). Researchers from the University of Murcia have reached similar conclusions for Early Modern Castile⁷.

Although there are very interesting studies on family elites in the Atlantic archipelagos, such as those of J. D. Rodrigues for the case of the island of São Miguel (Azores)⁸, N. Veríssimo⁹ and M. Jasmins Rodrigues¹⁰ for Madeira, and the doctoral thesis of L. Fernández Rodríguez about the council oligarchy of Tenerife (Canary Islands)¹¹, we still know very little about the configuration of the social identity of the noble families in the Atlantic Islands.

At the same time, research carried out under the framework of the so-called “archival turn” has demonstrated that archives are not just created in a natural

² MONTEIRO; CARDIM; CUNHA, 2005; CUNHA; HERNÁNDEZ FRANCO, 2010.

³ DUBY, 1967.

⁴ MORSEL, 2004 and 2008; DACOSTA, 2016a and 2016b.

⁵ MONTEIRO, 1993.

⁶ MONTEIRO; CUNHA, 2010.

⁷ HERNÁNDEZ FRANCO; MOLINA PUCHE, 2007 and 2010; HERNÁNDEZ FRANCO; RODRÍGUEZ PÉREZ, 2014a, 2014b and 2015.

⁸ RODRIGUES, 2003.

⁹ VERISSIMO, 2000.

¹⁰ RODRIGUES, 1996.

¹¹ FERNÁNDEZ RODRÍGUEZ, 2013.

process but are historical and social constructs and sources of power¹². This is especially true of family archives¹³. Moreover, some archives, like most Canary Island archives, are not just the result of a natural process of record production and keeping, but were also made and remade retrospectively by families choosing certain records from their ancestors and giving preference to certain kinship above others.

Following M. L. Rosa and the Historical Archivistics methods¹⁴, the archive and its organization should be analyzed over time, understanding it in each historical context, taking into account the nature and evolution of its producer, and the production, documentation, conservation and use processes of organizational information.

From this approach, the aim of this paper is continue to deepen the study of the evolution of insular nobilities from their own family archives. To this end, this paper examines, through several examples, how family archives evolved, over almost four centuries, in the geographical context of the Canary Islands. Located in the NW of Africa, at a crossroads of the main maritime routes that crossed the Mid-Atlantic, these islands are an example of the creation of a new society in a place that originally had an aboriginal population and whose conquest began almost a century before that of America. Indeed, the islands are an ideal “micro-laboratory” for the analysis of the reproduction of the Castilian social value system in a non-European location. In this new society, families needed to produce and keep documents that proved their social status, purity of blood and the services they had rendered to the Crown if they wanted to be part of the processes of social ascent. For this purpose, repositories of records were vital.

Conquest, colonization and family archives

From a European point of view, during the fifteenth century the Canary Islands became the boundary of the *occupied world* and an important stop-

¹² SCHWARTZ; COOK, 2002.

¹³ ROSA, 2009.

¹⁴ ROSA, 2017.

ping off point on sea voyages¹⁵. The Canary Islands were not a European medieval society, but a location, given privileges by the Spanish Crown, where a new society was built in a particular context, characterized by the existence of an aboriginal population and its specific geographical, economic and geopolitical features several years before the conquest of America. This is the reason why the Canary Islands are a “micro-laboratory” for an analysis of the reproduction of the Castilian social system and set of values in a new space, which was a precursor and stopping off point for Spanish conquistadors, traders and missionaries on their way to the New World.

On the islands, the property of the Castilian Crown, a variety of people settled from different geographical, social and religious origins (aborigines, Castilian, Portuguese, French, Flemish, Genovese, Jewish and Muslim converts, conquerors, farmers, merchants, slaves...). During the first generations, social hierarchies were scarcely visible (or, at least, much less perceptible than in mainland Spain), family prosopography did not exist, and colonial families did not bring their family records with them to the islands.

During the sixteenth century, the elites represented by the Islands’ governing Councils refused to create nobility brotherhoods and instead decided to apply the “State Division” (*división de estados*), which implied that privileged classes were virtually exempt from taxation. According to Núñez Pestano, the reason why Councils refused to fund the brotherhoods was the need to prove families’ noble origins and blood purity to access to such privileges, which were incompatible with the Jewish origins of some of the councilmen, and the commoner ascendance of most of them¹⁶.

Due to the above, the history of family archives in the Canary Islands differed from mainland Spanish ones. Among other aspects, and coming now to the central subject of this paper, we have to consider that in the Canary Islands, elite families did not have medieval archives, and it seems that only a few powerful families kept records during the first generations of colonizers on the islands. There are two reasons for this: the first is because few noble colonizers brought family records with them. For example, this was the case

¹⁵ AZNAR VALLEJO; GONZÁLEZ ZALACAIN, 2018.

¹⁶ NÚÑEZ PESTANO, 1991: 288-289.

of the conquistador Hernando del Hoyo, Knight of the Golden Spur of King Ferdinand the Catholic, who was required to prepare an inventory of his personal documents in 1518 in Medina del Campo (Castile), just a few months before dying¹⁷. The second reason was the progressive influence of the Court by the oldest members of the nobility in order to arrange hypergamy. This was the case of the *Adelantados de Canarias* (the most relevant family during most of the sixteenth century), who left their family archives on the islands in 1559¹⁸ or the Marquises of Lanzarote (after the death in 1661 of the Marchioness *Doña Luisa Bravo de Guzmán* in Madrid).

The importance of family archives in the Canary Islands: an evolving process of social hierarchization

The current state of research only allows us to present the broad outlines of the evolution of family archives in the Canary Islands during the Early Modern Age. The first obstacle in such an analysis is the shortage of inventories until the second half of the eighteenth century, in line with the scarcity of original documents from these dates. As the project INVENT.ARQ demonstrated, inventories operate as “mirrors” of an archive, in the sense that they reflect the contextual conditions of an archive at a specific moment, which is why they are the best way to examine archives’ evolution¹⁹. Probably, the causes of the shortage of inventories were related to the extreme weather conditions on the islands back then (characterized by high humidity and high temperatures) and the lack of family archival practices. For example, the “Book of the Mayrazgo Benítez”, written in 1680 by Don Francisco Bautista Lugo de Castillo, talks about ancient family archives being destroyed through damp and lack of care by their keepers and following the parents’ deaths²⁰.

¹⁷ Archivo Histórico Diocesano de San Cristóbal de La Laguna, repository of the “Conde de Siete Fuentes”, Protocol 31, fols. 48r-50r.

¹⁸ GONZÁLEZ ZALACAIN; RODRÍGUEZ MORALES, 2015.

¹⁹ ROSA; HEAD (eds.), 2015.

²⁰ Biblioteca Municipal de Santa Cruz de Tenerife, “Fondo Antiguo”, Ms. 246, prologue.

Despite the lack of inventories, we can, however, make certain conjectures over the course of the Early Modern Age about the central role family archives played in the social and political processes of the islands.

Family archives and the fight for status

The first landmark in this process was at the end of the sixteenth century, when the Canary Island society experienced a significant process of enlargement and stabilization of the social elites during the reigns of Felipe II (1556-98) and Felipe III (1598-1621), with the possibility for local elites to gain access to offices in the Holy Inquisition, the cathedral chapter and the royal service²¹. Certainly, this process should be framed within the conflict between those who already held these honorable offices and those who aspired to occupy them. In this context, having records to prove rights to a certain status was vital, so if families did not own them, they had to acquire them. *Don* Hernando del Hoyo was an eloquent example of this. He was the grandson of Hernando del Hoyo, conqueror of Granada, La Palma and Tenerife and Knight of the Golden Spur of King Ferdinand the Catholic, which for the society of the Canary Islands meant belonging to one of the few noble families of the islands. In 1578, he requested that the Council of Tenerife appoint him as warden of the fortress of Santa Cruz “porque yo e mis padres e agüelos e antepassados somos e an sido cavalleros hijosdalgo nottorios e de solar conosido según fuero de España”²². To demonstrate his preferential rights over other candidates, he relied on common opinion and the family documents he possessed: “porque es público y nottorio e consta ser así por los recaudos que de ello tengo que siendo necesario los presentaré ante vuestras señorías”²³.

²¹ FERNÁNDEZ RODRÍGUEZ, 2013.

²² “Because I and my parents and grandparents or ancestors have been knights of noble descent and proven lineage according to the jurisdiction of Spain” (Archivo Histórico Diocesano de San Cristóbal de La Laguna (AHDSLL). “Fondo Conde de Siete Fuentes”, Protocolo 31, fol. 319r-390v). Translations are mine.

²³ “Because it is public and notarized and confirmed that this is so and for the proof that I will present to your lordships”.

However, most family elites in the Canary Island did not have records to prove the purity of their blood and their noble origins, which implied the need to investigate their ancestors' social and religious status in Europe. In order to gain access to these offices and justify their right to a high social position, elite families were forced to gather records and prove blood purity origins. To do this, only the wealthiest families could pay for expensive proof from the mainland and obtain the records that would prove the noble status of their ancestors. These documents became the first "lineage documents" in most Canary Island family archives²⁴.

This was also the time when noble families realized the vital importance of having, sharing and ensuring the transmission of those "lineage" records to future generations. The creation of a well-documented family archive strengthened the power of all of them. The eldest son's house became the main name of the family, in other words, it became the highest part of a family network, connected by blood, collaboration and fidelity to other households. We can observe this aim in certain decisions made by some noble houses. The common way was to protocolize the original records and diplomas in public notary offices in order to obtain all the authenticated copies that may be required; another way was to include "lineage records" as part of the entailed estate, guaranteeing the right of the descendants to access the main family archives and to obtain copies of their ancestor's diplomas and titles. This was the case of the Hoyo's household. In 1598, García del Hoyo and *Doña* Beatriz Calderón founded a *mayorazgo* (entailed estate) that included the obligation to preserve the oldest family records in the family archives and the right of all family members to access these records²⁵.

²⁴ GUTIÉRREZ DE ARMAS, 2016a.

²⁵ Archivo Histórico Provincial Santa Cruz de Tenerife. "Sección Histórica de Protocolos Notariales". *Protocolo notarial de Álvaro de Quiñones*, 1598, fol. 220r (1598/07/12).

Family archives in times of mayorazgos (entailed estates) and ennoblement

The second significant moment was at the end of the seventeenth century, matching with a great frequency of foundations of entailed states, local elites were able to buy military insignias and titles of nobility. The peculiar juncture of the reign of Carlos II (1665-1700) was characterized by the monarch's financial needs and the age old debate about the essence of nobility. This debate was between those who defended merit as an entry point for ennoblement, and others who proclaimed blood as the only proof of nobility (meaning the rejection of the latecomers)²⁶. This had important effects on family archives, since any individual or family who wished to become noble needed to collect and present family documents in order to prove their right to such status. Thus, first it was necessary to pay for a pecuniary service to obtain a title, and then to provide documents about their services and those of their ancestors to the Crown. Furthermore, they also had to demonstrate the noble blood of the family. During these times, families would spend great sums of money paying professional genealogists²⁷ for the elaboration of genealogies (with remarkable inventions and mythical ancestors) and petitions (*memoriales*) to the Crown. It is also significant that many of these petitions were signed by the islands' councils, which meant that the candidate's peers in local institutions had previously acknowledged their higher status at the time, and they in turn acknowledged the local institution (which the majority of the candidates belonged to) as being a competent institution capable of certifying nobility²⁸.

However, professional genealogists were also involved in archival organization. In 1681, *Doña* Marina González de Castillo Interián, after her husband's death, took the responsibility of completing the archive that her husband had started. She explained that her husband and she were helped in their work by *Don* Juan Núñez de la Peña. He was a *rey de armas* (king of arms), that is, an agent of the Crown, whose role was required in peace agreements and other

²⁶ GUILLÉN BERRENDERO, 2007.

²⁷ SORIA MESA, 2004.

²⁸ GUILLÉN BERRENDERO, 2014.

ceremonies related to royal power, and who attested the heraldic shields that belonged correctly and reliably to certain lineages. Some of them, like *Don* Juan Núñez de la Peña, were at the same time kings of arms, chroniclers and archivists. That is, as chroniclers, their chorographies justified the privileged position of the urban oligarchies, while their certificates of coats of arms justified that the house and the family archives contained the records that proved the family's superior status.

This relationship between genealogy and archive is also interesting because it influenced the family archive model in the Canary Islands. *Doña* Marina González de Castillo Interián also declared that “no se hallará por la misericordia de Dios, hacienda de maiorasgo también titulada en esta isla desde que se conquistó hasta del día de hoy con tan antiguos instrumentos como esta por lo que se a visto y experimentado”²⁹. That is, the family archive the Castillo family created was used as a model for other families. *Don* Francisco Bautista Lugo de Castillo and his wife *Doña* Marina González de Castillo, helped by the king of arms, made two *protocolos-libros de hacienda* (cartulary-property books): the first one with the records about entailed estate, and the second with the free properties that both owned.³⁰ This set of *protocolo-libros de hacienda* was also imitated by other families, like the Salazar de Frías, who made a cartulary of their entailed estate and a property book in 1740-1741.

The chance to improve one's social status was also important to non-Castilian families, who invested time and money in their ennoblement. An example was the house of Lercaro, who spent a fortune to prove their preferential right to manage the Lercaro's *albergo* (corporation of noble families) at the Bank of Saint George in the Republic of Genoa. According to Núñez Pestano and González Zalacain, the Lercaro's demonstration involved a rediscovery of the family's origin and identity, which they supported with a chaotic gathering of evidence, such as complex genealogical research in the Canary Islands and in Genoa, certification of a coat of arms, and the registration of Canarian family

²⁹ “as it will not be found by the mercy of God, this estate also titled in this island since it was conquered until today with such old instruments as this one because of what has been seen and experienced.” Biblioteca Municipal de Santa Cruz de Tenerife (BMSCT). “Fondo Antiguo”, Ms 246, fol. 163.

³⁰ BMSCT. “Fondo Antiguo”, Ms. 241-246.

members in the *Libro d'oro* (Golden Book) of Genoa³¹. This act of searching, producing and archiving records had, for the first time for Ler caro, a memory function that involved past, present and future generations.

Not all the Genoese families could demonstrate noble origins, and were often underrated because of this. For example, this was the case of the house of Franchi, who always claimed their nobility but could only afford a genealogical reconstruction and political support to obtain the certification of nobility from the *dux* of Genoa in the late seventeenth century, more than a century after the Ler caro family³².

Family archives following the disaster. Remaking the archival memory in the eighteenth century

The beginning of the eighteenth century in Tenerife was characterized by two different events of great importance for the future of family archives. The first one was the destruction of the town and port of Garachico, the main port on the island, in 1706 by a volcanic eruption, which destroyed several key buildings and family archives, such as the archive of the count of Siete Fuentes. This situation meant the need to rebuild archives, looking for copies of records in public archives and among other families' archives. This involved a process of localization, selection, copying, organizing and accumulating records with the possibility of failure, since these records could also have been destroyed in other archives. The second was the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-1714), with which came the ostracism of Habsburg's supporters and a chance for the Bourbon's adherents to improve their status. Unfortunately, there is no in-depth research about this period in the Canary Islands. However, an analysis of the count of Valle de Salazar's archives, a Habsburg defender, reveals that they had to deal with social ostracism, the confiscation of their property (including entailed property) and its subsequent devolution after the treaty of Vienna (1725), with the resulting need to reorganize family

³¹ NÚÑEZ PESTANO; GONZÁLEZ ZALACAIN, 2017.

³² GUTIÉRREZ DE ARMAS, 2016a: 33-34.

archives. Families needed to prove the possession and delimitation of confiscated properties and their previous status in order to request their return³³. In addition, they had to demonstrate that the house was loyal to the new dynasty, re-writing the family history, hiding any acts of treason in order to adapt the house discourse to the new circumstances.

Nevertheless, the main event in the reconstruction of the family archives was the establishment of the *contadurías de hipotecas* (mortgage accounting offices) in 1768. The law approved in that year established the obligation for landowners to register in these offices all the rents that they collected, many of them from old leasehold contracts. This law forced a race to find and copy all the documents that proved the right to collect such rents, many of them signed several generations before. The owners needed to find these contracts, testaments, recognitions of income, sales, etc., to copy and register them, and in most cases, they did not have all those records in their family archives. Consequently, the quick and easy way to obtain them was by paying public notaries to research, locate and copy all the records related to their household. The most widely used organizational method was, again, to adapt notaries public offices' organization to family cartularies (called *protocolos de la casa*) regarding properties, genealogy, services, supplemented by property books of the house, citation books and bundles of records from the administration of the time.

In addition, towards the end of the eighteenth century, an emergence of genealogical research took place in the Canary Islands. The widening of the nobility implied the need for being part of an older and much nobler house than other houses and, of course, the need for publishing the house's antiquity to society. This was the great time for family trees, stories about nobility and social reputation, books of genealogy and family memories. Records had multiplied in the family archives and they needed to be organized or reorganized. Thus, family archives were reorganized from a genealogical perspective³⁴, confirming the family's identity and giving the archive a specific

³³ AHDSCLL. "Fondo Conde de Siete Fuentes", Protocolo 15.

³⁴ KETELAAR, 2009.

narrative(s), from its owner's point of view³⁵. Of course, these family narratives were adapted to the changing needs of the family's identity. For example, in the sixteenth century aboriginal ancestors were not considered noble, but they were considered so from the seventeenth century onwards. From that time, aboriginal "royal families" were included in families' genealogies. This was the case of the Castillo family who said they were descendants of the mythical aboriginal princess Dácilor of the Bencomo family, who claimed to be descendants of the *mencey* (aboriginal king) Bencomo.

This identity approach is probably the best way to understand the family archives not only as the result of the activities of simple organization, but as discursive constructs, with a narrative reflected in the system(s) of preservation, organization and inventory. This concern and regard for remembrance and identities also reflect an attitude geared more to the future than the past.

Other families; other ways of professional archival organization

Nevertheless, at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century, we can observe other organizational systems for family archives in the Canary Islands developed by non-noble families. In these archives, records were reorganized in bundles and ordered by issues (military, judicial...), properties, towns, chapels, and so on. The influence of genealogy in this archival organization is not as decisive as in the archives of titled families. In the non-noble family archives, the presence of documents with a strong symbolic component (such as heraldic emblems, genealogies and proofs of nobility) is considerably scarcer. This does not mean that these families did not want to be noble, just that they did not have the status or identity to be so.

An example of this archival organization is the Nieves Ravelo family archives, reorganized in the 1790s by the primogeniture *Don* Juan Laureano de las Nieves Ravelo, member of a local landowner and trader family³⁶. The

³⁵ NÓVOA; LEME, 2015.

³⁶ AHDSCLL. "Fondo Conde de Siete Fuentes", Rama familiar Nieves Ravelo.

archive was reorganized according to several criteria. Property management was organized according to the geographical location of the lands included in the entailed estate and the free properties. The military and religious issues were reorganized by subject or matter. Finally, the numerous lawsuits were another criterion for organizing the documentation. Within this archive, we do not observe large volumes of genealogical documentation, which was not a factor highlighted in the organization of the archive, as mentioned.

The end of the family archives era. The abolition of entailed property and the dismemberment of the archives

Finally, a last period worth noting in family archive organization in the Early Modern age was the abolition of entailed property in 1820 (revoked by King Ferdinand VII in 1823) and definitively suppressed in 1836. This involved the need to reorganize the archive in order to determine the current state of family properties, estimate their economic value and be able to divide them among all the heirs.

In these years, many inventories were produced, in several cases by professional archivists, in a process similar to the one developed in Portugal³⁷. With the end of entailed property and the establishment of the land registration system, the family archive lost its practical sense as an instrument to defend property. Thus, with the abolition of the old procedures of transfer of entailed property, it was no longer necessary to locate, copy and manage this documentation in the family archive in order to be able to litigate constantly to demonstrate a preferential right to benefit from an entailed property.

In other cases, in which a situation of family conflict predominated, the fragmentation of family properties often implied a breakup of the archive. An illustrative example is the house of the marquises of Fuente de Las Palmas. The death in 1840 of the seventh marquis, the primogeniture of the house, triggered the disintegration of the family patrimony. The marquis had named his servant as heiress, who had to sustain several lawsuits from the marquis's

³⁷ ROSA; HEAD (eds.), 2015.

sisters. As a consequence of the division of the entailed estate and the rest of family properties, together with the death without heirs of the eighth marchioness, *Doña* Josefa Chirino del Hoyo and the departure to Cuba of her sister and successor, *Doña* Beatriz Chirino del Hoyo, ninth marchioness of Fuente of Las Palmas, the family's archive was divided among numerous owners. At present, I have been able to locate two parts in the Diocesan historical archive of San Cristóbal de La Laguna: the first is made up of three nineteenth-century documentation boxes that were donated by the Gutiérrez de Salamanca repository. These archives present some documentary gaps, with at least four documents shown in the indexes which, according to several notes left inside the archive, were extracted and delivered to *Doña* Dominga Chirino. I have located this documentation in the count of Siete Fuentes's repository. However, it has been noted that seventeen other documents that are shown in the protocol index have been removed and lack references regarding their possible whereabouts³⁸.

Conclusions

Family archives were essential in the historical evolution of the Canary Islands. The transition from a frontier society to an entirely modern society, imbued with the Castilian value system, led families to create an archive to manage their heritage and build their social identity and social status. This process, which began to be clearly defined at the end of the sixteenth century, accelerated during the seventeenth century, coinciding with a period of insular economic upswing that resulted in the establishment of numerous entailed estates. Meanwhile, at the state level, the Habsburg dynasty was going through a deep economic, social and dynastic crisis, a situation that was an opportunity to buy honorific positions, military insignia and noble titles for many families. The social ascent and the formation of entailed estates led to an unprecedented accumulation of documents and the need to order them.

³⁸ GUTIÉRREZ DE ARMAS, 2014.

These first archives followed the model of the *protocolo-libro de hacienda*, a model that was extended to other family archives in the following decades.

The end of the eighteenth century saw the creation of an obligation to register rents in mortgage accounting offices (*contaduría de hipotecas*), which greatly modified family records. Thus, in addition to the documentation that families owned, there was the need to locate, copy, register and keep any documents that proved families' patrimonial rights. In parallel, the widening of the nobility also led families to a search for their genealogical origins, which resulted in the production of large quantities of genealogical documentation and in the reorganization of family archives with clear genealogical criteria.

Finally, family archives fell into disuse with the end of the family model that had generated them and managed them for generations. The end of entailed estates and property in the nineteenth century and the implementation of a political, economic and socially liberal system meant that archives lost their main function as guarantors of economic and social interests in a context in which the forms of family organization associated to the elites (house, lineage, etc.) evolved to new models.

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