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THE HISTORY OF ARCHIVES IN SCANDINAVIA

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Introduction

“Archives were not drawn up in the interest or for the information of posterity.” Even if not entirely true, this famous quote by English archivist Hilary Jenkinson (1922, 11) points out that archival documents – records – are normally created as a byproduct, and for the benefit, of an organization’s administrative functions, not for the assistance of some historian or genealogist 150 years later. Nonetheless, the latter “secondary” uses of archives are what springs to mind when the general public think about archives. As sites of cultural heritage, archives are aligned with libraries and museums. But to fully appreciate archives as heritage, we also need to understand that records more often than not are created and preserved for the benefit of the original creator.

To a large degree, the development of Scandinavian archives resembles that in the rest of Europe. Many of the tendencies are similar, which is why it is also natural to present the different Scandinavian archival histories in one piece, while highlighting the differences that are still found.

In the following historical overview of Scandinavian archives, the main focus will lie on the modern state institutions, since they have until now dominated the archival landscape. Until the end of the twentieth century, the state sector in Denmark had a near monopoly on organized archival institutions (Bundsgaard and Gelting 1992). In Norway and Sweden, the state sector has also been dominant, and both archival policy and the profession have largely been shaped in the mold of state archives. Archival legislation has mainly concerned state archives. However, since the nineteenth century and particularly in recent decades, the archival sector in municipalities and the private archival sector have been thriving. We will therefore treat them separately after the general chronological survey to which we now turn.

Medieval and early-modern Scandinavian archives

If we exclude prehistoric rock carvings and runestones, which may be seen as documentary evidence, the dawn of Scandinavian archives occurred in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Initially, they were records of the king, often moving from castle to castle. Archiving before the nineteenth century was almost exclusively an integrated part of the administrative and legal functions of states, cities, religious organizations, or aristocratic families. Some records, documenting e.g. land ownership, debt, and treaties, could be relevant over the passage of many generations (Ducheyn 1992; Jørgensen 1968).

In Sweden and Denmark, central state archival institutions were established in the seventeenth century as parts of the growing early-modern state apparatuses. The uses of archives were still mainly for legal and administrative reasons, but they were also utilized in the proto-nationalist historiography of the early-modern states. In Denmark, a separate institution was established in 1663 for records of a legal and long-lasting nature, not crucial for the daily matter of affairs, which had been kept separately since the fourteenth century from more temporary records. These historical archives came to be known as the “Secret Archive” and developed into a resource for historical research during the eighteenth century (Kjølstad 2012; Paasch 2018). In Sweden, the predecessor of the National Archives was established in 1618 as a function within the Royal Chancellery. Internal regulations ensured that records were kept and archived in an orderly way (Smedberg 2012). In Norway, a royal archival repository was located at Akershus fortress from around 1300 AD. For about 400 years until 1814, Norway was subordinated to Denmark, and Akershus fortress became an archive for the Danish king’s representative in Norway. Many records on Norwegian affairs were also transferred to Copenhagen (Jørgensen 1968, 175–176).

The historical turn and nation building

If the legal and administrative aspect of archives had dominated until the eighteenth century, a new role rose to prominence with the modern era. While the records creators’ primary interests remained crucial and still are today, external agents’ interests in archives became more prominent, in two ways: First, what we now call “freedom of information” interests – famously put in effect with the French Revolution, when access to public archives was proclaimed a general civic right (Ducheyn 1992, 17); secondly, the generally growing interest in history within societies at large also affected archives: They were largely transformed into tools of academic historiography, and archives became part of nation building and similar forms of identity politics during the nineteenth century (Berger 2013; Cook 2013). At the same time, state archives in Europe, including Scandinavia, increased in organizational size and complexity, and emerged as independent institutions. They also increasingly became more accessible to external users – primarily historians.

Simultaneously, a modern archivist profession emerged, largely recruited from historians, and the two groups maintained close bonds long into the twentieth century in all Scandinavian countries, just as in other Western countries (Ridener 2009).

In Sweden, the National Archives developed into a central archival repository of the state, especially from the 1830s. The new and more historical dimension of the National Archives was increasingly emphasized, in line with traditional administrative functions. There was an increase in the number of employees, and efforts were made to arrange and describe old records that had remained disordered from a long time before, as well as to transcribe and print historical records. The National Archives gradually obtained more storage facilities in Stockholm, although there was a constant need for more, and subsequently there was an increase in the inclusion of records that had until then been stored at individual state agencies (Norberg 2007).

In Denmark, a similar development began in the second half of the nineteenth century. A peculiar outcome of the transformation in Denmark was that for some decades, there were two parallel national archival authorities. The old Secret Archive remained a separate body, although it transferred to a new ministry for the Church and education service, and from the 1850s, it received state records that had been created until 1750; this relieved a state administration that was in dire need of more space. However, noncurrent records created after 1750 were transferred for preservation in a new institution, the Kingdom's Archives (*Kongerigets arkiver*), established in the 1860s (Kjølstad 2012; Paasch 2018). After a couple of decades, the two were united into a single National Archive.

While the Danish and Swedish National Archives trace a direct continuity from medieval and early-modern state archives, things were different in Norway. Norway became independent of Denmark in 1814, entering instead a personal union with Sweden, yet with its own constitution and a large degree of autonomy apart from in foreign and military affairs. The National Archives was established shortly afterwards, initially as an office under the Ministry of Finance and handled by the ministry's ordinary staff until the 1830s when the first designated archivist was employed. Initially, the National Archives was first and foremost a repository that was to secure records necessary for the government apparatus, both from the old repository at Akershus fortress and from the new administration. Toward the mid-nineteenth century, the National Archives emerged as an independent organization that also had a cultural heritage role, and the employment of romantic poet Henrik Wergeland may be regarded as symbolic (Svendsen 2017).

Initially, an important task for the Norwegian National Archives was transferring material relevant for Norway from the Danish state. Some guidelines had been set out in the Kiel Treaty, and after negotiations, the first transfers took place in 1820. Initially, the focus was on records of administrative value; only later did records primarily of historical value become the focus for subsequent negotiations and transfers. Control over the archives documenting the governing

of Norway remained for a long time a diplomatic tangle between the countries; it was not finally resolved until 1990 (Svendsen 2017).

Early archival legislation

The general development of the Scandinavian national archives followed a similar path: They crystallized as independent institutions within the government apparatus, with an increased number of employees. In the 1840s, they were transferred to the ministries for Church and education in all countries, and in the 1870s and 1880s, the national archives as independent agencies were established. The late nineteenth and early twentieth century gave ample proof of an extensive institutional development of the state archives in all countries, as well as increased legal regulation.

In Sweden, there was no separate law on archives until 1991. Instead, public sector archives had been indirectly regulated by the freedom of information legislation, which from 1766 had stipulated that citizens have a general right of access to the state's (and later also municipal bodies') written records (unless they were designated as secret). This led to a wide notion of "archives" in Sweden; generally records are considered archived at an early stage, when they are still kept by the original creator. A similar wide notion has been prevalent in Norway, while the Danish definition of archives has largely excluded contemporary records.

From as early as the seventeenth century, there were rules regarding the orderly formation of record categories such as registries, concepts, and incoming letters within the Swedish Royal Chancellery. From the late nineteenth century, a series of new regulations concerning the state archives was issued, specifying the obligations and organization of the National Archives, as well as basic rules regarding archival care. There were also general regulations about appraisal – which was seen as an increasingly unavoidable task – making it clear that all destruction of records must be sanctioned by the National Archives (Norberg 2007; Smedberg 2012).

As in Sweden, the first archival law in Norway came late (1992), but other forms of regulation were in place earlier. The creation of records in state bodies and municipalities had been rudimentarily regulated since the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Valderhaug 2011). The tasks of the National Archives were described, at its foundation, in a governmental resolution as safeguarding "qualified documents" from Akershus fortress. In the early twentieth century, this was elaborated in a royal resolution, which established a national archival agency led by the National Archivist as the leader for all state archival institutions (Marthinsen 1983).

Denmark saw its first Archives Act in 1889, which was short and largely regulated the tasks of the new National Archives. In addition, there were circulars and other internal regulations, e.g., on the transfer of records (Eriksen 1993; Kjölstad 2012, 175).

A network of state archival institutions

A common theme is that the history began with archival institutions for the central government in the capital. During the last half of the nineteenth century, regional state archives outside the capitals developed in all countries. Norway was first, with institutions in Trondheim (1850) and Bergen (1885) – both at first duly submitted to the regional authorities but integrated in the National Archives in the early twentieth century. During the 1900s, six additional regional archives (soon labeled “state archives,” *statsarkiver*) were established. Until an organizational restructuring in 2016, the state archives had total responsibility for archives from their area (Svendsen 2017).

The new Danish Archive law from 1889 stipulated the establishment of three regional state archives (in Copenhagen, Odense, and Viborg), soon known as “county archives” (*landsarkiver*). The county archives (a fourth was established in Aabenraa in the 1930s) were part of the unified state archival agency. A similar development occurred in Sweden, where regional state archives (*landsarkiv*) were established from 1899 until 1935 at seven locations (Vadstena, Lund, Uppsala, Visby, Gothenburg, Östersund, and Härnösand).

In the past few decades, there has been a tendency towards organizational centralization of the state-level archives in Scandinavia. In Sweden, the so-called “War Archives” was discontinued as a separate government agency under the Ministry of Defense, and became a section of the National Archives in the 1990s; the same happened to the regional state archives in 2010. In Denmark, the central-state archival agency incorporated, in 1993, the Danish Data Archive in Odense, which primarily stores quantitative research data from various disciplines (Clausen and Marker 2000). Norway has seen several mergers of private institutions with the National Archives from the 1980s onwards, such as the Norwegian Private Archive Institute, the Norwegian Historical Source Institute, and the Sámi Archives (Svendsen 2017). During the 2010s, the National Archives of all countries were reorganized and based upon functions rather than geography.

Crystallizing out a separate archival theory

Around the turn of the twentieth century, a distinct archival theory became dominant all over Europe. The principle of provenance, *respect des fonds* in French, served a dual purpose: A pragmatic solution for the transfer of records from creators to archival institutions – they did not have to be reorganized more than necessary – but it also reflected the interests and theoretical views of academic historiography. For historians, archives ought to be as “neutral” and “authentic” as possible, and that was regarded as being accomplished only when the archives were seen as “organically” born out of the transactions of the original creators. These views became almost universally adopted by the European archivists during this time (see Chapter 8, this volume).

In Sweden, the principle of provenance was complemented by the idea that the “original order” within the archive should be kept, sometimes called “the structure principle.” In Sweden, this was soon the official archival policy from the National Archives in the early twentieth century, with the aim of ordering the archives that still remained within the creating bodies. With a particularly Swedish model for archival description introduced at the same time, most government agencies had to arrange their archives in series within certain categories, such as minutes and copies of sent letters. This model remained in state archives until the 2010s and was also almost entirely followed by municipal and private archives.

In Denmark, the principle of provenance was formally adopted in 1903, but this occurred slightly later in Norway, in 1913. Arguably as a consequence of the disagreement with Denmark over archives from the Denmark-Norway era, Norway defended a principle of “territorial provenance,” i.e., that records related to a specific area were to be controlled by whoever controlled the area, even if that meant removing records from the archives of previous powers (Svendsen 2017).

Archival expansion in the welfare states

In the twentieth century, there was a general growth in archives altogether, due to various and mutually influencing factors. Most importantly, there was a general rise in the state bureaucracy and organization with the evolving welfare state, and also a technological development that made record creating easier, such as the typewriter and copying techniques. Increasingly, new formats were introduced in the archives, where photographs and audiovisual recordings came to supplement written papers. This led to new challenges with methods of preservation, as well as a need to reformulate the classical notion of records, which had for a long time been based on textual documents.

The growth of archives put new questions on the agenda for Scandinavian as well as international archives – not least the planning of archiving from the start, and the need for appraisal. In many respects, the development of the twentieth century forced the archival functions to somewhat go back a couple of steps toward the more bureaucratic-administrative end of the axis. For example, in Sweden, the National Archives increasingly functioned in a role of, so to speak, controlling the documentation all over the state sector, to decrease the overproduction of archives, and not least to assist with appraisal.

In all Scandinavian countries, the destruction of records became an increasingly important part of archival work from the mid-twentieth century to the present day. Common to all countries has been a certain pragmatism, led more by economic incentives than by international appraisal theory. In order to find a path between total retention and total destruction, various forms of sampling have been used (where, e.g., records concerning persons born on certain dates

have been kept), as well as initiatives to increase efficiency, such as the Danish innovation of arranging current records according to decimal-based classification systems (“journalplaner”); one advantage was that this could make large-scale destruction of records concerning topics without long-term value easier than chronological ordering, where appraisal would have to be on the item level. Methods like the ones described here have occasionally been controversial for archivists that find them too schematic. On a legal level, the Danish Archival Act of 1992 emphasizes the destruction of records as a key task for state archives, more so than in Norway and Sweden, and the level of destruction seems to have been higher in Denmark (Bloch and Larsen 2006; Bringslid et al. 2009; Edquist 2019; Marthinsen 1983; Paasch 2018).

Digitalization and the complex contemporary archival landscape

From the 1960s onwards, records creation has continued to accelerate in volume and complexity, not least because of the introduction of digital technologies. Digital records were introduced in the 1950s and 1960s in major administrative systems and similar centralized functions. Their preservation was discussed from the beginning but became a paramount issue in the 1990s, when the vast majority of all new documents became digital.

Adding to the complexity is the reorganization of the public sector, not least from the 1980s when neoliberal doctrines became prevalent. Many former state and municipal bodies have been privatized, sometimes leading to disruptions of the archives and reduced access. New organizational models, temporary projects, etc. flourish, which also challenges records and archives management.

Since the 1960s and 1970s, new use patterns and new techniques for making archives accessible have also emerged (e.g., see Chapters 6, 7, and 9 in this volume). Simultaneously, an opposite development is also visible: Many professionals consider themselves as records managers rather than as working in the field of culture, mainly managing current information and evidence in fragile and fluid digital media.

In all Scandinavian countries, the National Archives have introduced functions and requirements for the transfer of digital records. Government agencies are expected to follow certain guidelines for their electronic records, and Norway has had, since the late 1990s, a national standard for digital records, the NOARK 4, later NOARK 5 (Geijer, Lenberg, and Lövblad 2013, 110–116; Kjellberg and Hall-Andersen 2017; NOU 2019:9). However, the challenges of long-time preservation and management of digital archives are still a matter of discussion and sometimes dispute. Some archivists fear that the care of born-digital archives tends to be underfinanced, and that the “outside world” (those responsible for government funding, or the top managements of various organizations) generally underestimates the economic and, even more so, the organizational requirements of digital preservation of archives.

Beyond the government: Municipal and private archives

Municipal record keeping has tended to be weaker than that of the state, even though early municipal legislation from the mid-nineteenth century in all countries included some rules on archiving. Typically, only larger cities and towns had separate archival institutions. Measures to improve municipal archives were taken during the twentieth century. Since the 1940s, the Norwegian National Archivist has been mandated to supervise municipal archives. In Sweden, beginning in the 1930s, the National Archives issued advisory regulations for municipalities, e.g., on appraisal. In the 1980s, these regulations were formalized with a special archival council jointly run by the National Archives and the cooperation organizations of municipalities and county councils (since 2020 called “regions”, *regioner*), and from 1991, municipalities followed the same archival legislation as the state. Since then, most municipalities have established formal archival functions with employed archival personnel. In Denmark, municipal archives were traditionally tended by the National Archives. Since 1992, municipalities may choose to be liable to the National Archives or establish a local archival institution. Municipal archives must follow the same archival legislation as state archives, in terms of, for example, appraisal and accessibility (Edquist 2019; Furdal 1993; Valderhaug 2011).

All countries, especially smaller municipalities, lack sufficient resources for archiving. In Norway, cooperation between municipalities in so-called “IKAs” (*interkommunale arkiv*, inter-municipal archives) has been on the rise since the 1970s (Bering 2017). Inter-municipal cooperation is less widespread in Denmark and Sweden, even though legislation permits it (Furdal 1993). However, the challenges of digital archiving have forced some smaller municipalities in Sweden to cooperate.

Municipal archival institutions, especially in larger cities and towns, have since the 1980s often embraced a more “cultural” approach. In Bergen, the city archive was given the task of guiding the municipality’s employees and acting as a repository, but also of promoting the use of the archives and collecting private material from the municipality. Oslo City Archive soon followed a similar path, and even some IKAs have developed public programs for active outreach. The City Archives in Stockholm has pursued many activities with the aim of reaching a larger audience, e.g., in the project “Stockholm Sources” (*Stockholmskällan*), a digitized historical database that is run in collaboration with the City Museum (Bering 2017; www.stockholmskallan.se).

Private archives have tended to be even less regulated. Larger businesses and organizations created and kept archives to the extent that they needed them. There were also some acquisitions of nationally significant private archives, from major noble families and the like, by the National Archives.

Separate institutions for private archives emerged from the early twentieth century. In all three countries, the labor movement established archival institutions in the early twentieth century. Over time, additional private archival

institutions have emerged, such as for business archives, archives for popular movements that are typical for Sweden, and local history archives that are abundant in Denmark. However, until now, vast amounts of private archives have been kept in public institutions – state or municipal archives, libraries, and museums – in all three countries. Generally, there have been more natural “libraries, archives, and museums” (LAM) connections in the private archives sector. For example, the institutions for labor movement archives are also libraries in all countries. And since private archives often have close relations with museums and libraries, they are also at the forefront in setting up exhibitions, archival pedagogics, and other public programs. Private archives have been discussed in policy debates on archives in Scandinavia as examples of a wider documentary heritage than that which public archives offer (Bundsgaard and Gelting 1992; NOU 2019:9; SOU 2019:58).

Archival politics: Democracy, transparency, and heritage

In all Scandinavian countries, the legal frameworks have changed in recent decades. In 1991 and 1992, Sweden, Denmark, and Norway all received new laws for archives throughout the public sector (that had already applied to Denmark since 1976). The laws, normally complemented by more detailed ordinances and regulations, include various rules on the proper care of archives, rules on transfer from agencies to archival institutions, and the responsibilities of the National Archives as the archival authority. Among national differences, the Norwegian law also contains some passages on private archives, and the National Archives may put some restrictions on particularly valuable private archives. As previously mentioned, Danish legislation puts a larger explicit emphasis on the destruction of records, while Swedish legislation since 1991 has put some emphasis on heritage and nonacademic users of archives.

If we define archival politics as all those political measures that affect the functioning of archives, we cannot restrict ourselves to only discussing legislation and other forms of explicit regulatory interventions. Another crucial aspect is economics: The actual funding from public bodies to both public and private archives. Without sufficient personnel and resources, it may be difficult to always fulfill the sometimes strict rules on proper archival care. Many previous studies have shown that archival realities often differ from what is considered desirable in legislation and policy documents (e.g., see: Edquist 2019; Eriksen 1993; Thorhauge, Heide Petersen, and Mølbak Andersen 2018).

Very sketchily, archivists have transformed from being guardians of public secrets to a contemporary professional identity where openness and transparency are hailed. Before the nineteenth century, access to state archives was generally difficult. During the nineteenth century, steps toward opening them to the general public were taken, even though the vast majority were historians. Reading facilities, etc. were established, but visiting an archival depot required time and skill (Norberg 2007; Thomsen 1976). Today, records and

archives are key elements of citizens' rights to control the doings of public authorities.

Records are important for transparency in all Scandinavian countries, but there has always been a tension between openness and secrecy. In Sweden, the rules of secrecy were transferred to a separate law on secrecy in the 1930s, which until this day regulates access to public sector archives, regardless of whether they are kept by the original creator or an archival institution. Thus, there is no separate regulation of access in the specific archival legislation.

Also in Norway, freedom of information rules are found in other legislation than that explicitly concerning archives, but just as in Sweden, the freedom of information legislation directly concerns archives, since both countries have a wide definition of the term: Archives also include very new and "living" records. In Denmark, archives are more separated from contemporary records. The Danish Archives Act has its own access provisions: Public records are usually released after 20 years, but if they contain personal information, they are released after 75 years (Thorhauge, Heide Petersen, and Mølbak Andersen 2018, 1222). Other legislation also has access provisions. Access can thus be granted in accordance with either the Archives Act or the Public Access to Information Act. This may sound liberal, but what the practical consequences are may be disputed. It has been argued that countries that have access rules both in freedom of information laws and archive laws (e.g., Denmark, Iceland, the UK, Germany, and France) may have less of a culture of openness in administration, and have therefore found it necessary to regulate access to disposed archives specifically. On the other hand, countries that only regulate access to public records in a Public Access to Information Act, like Sweden and Norway, may rely on this regulation alone because their administrations embrace a culture of openness (Noack 1993). However, in Sweden, the opposite argument has been made: That the principle of openness in legislation has led to a culture of avoiding documentation, with open but empty archives as a result (National Archives of Sweden 2004).

Concluding remarks: Archivists and archives today

Until the late twentieth century, there were no academic programs for Scandinavian archivists, who were typically employed on the basis of a degree in history or a similar discipline, and trained "in-house" (e.g., see: Svendsen 2017).

From the 1970s in Sweden, the 1990s in Norway, and slightly later in Denmark, several universities established programs in archival science. Some, like the programs at the University of Aalborg, Oslo Metropolitan University, and Mid Sweden University (which also includes PhD-level training), stress contemporary records management and draw on information sciences more than on history (Sundqvist 2020). This development from practical in-house training to a more theoretical education is partly due to transformations in the profession, and partly to the general academization of education.

Today, archivists are faced with an increasing specialization within the profession, where new technologies bring both new opportunities and challenges. On the one hand, records managers work as information specialists in digital environments, managing records created in the present for usage in a near or distant future. The reshaping of public administration from classic bureaucracy to less hierarchical and less stable organizations has put many archivists in new positions where they have to argue for archival concerns that may clash with other interests.

On the other hand, archival institutions are still heritage and memory institutions. More traditional archivists at archival institutions that predominantly store records that are several decades or centuries old largely work with service, provision, and mediation for the benefit of external users.

In the late twentieth century, many waited for the archival profession with digitalization to split into at least two professions. However, to date, there have been no signs of any definite split. On the contrary, there is a widespread view that archivists must be experts in *both* the contemporary creation and management of “living” archives, *as well as* having a longer perspective of time, whether they mainly work with old or contemporary archives.

Archives are double-edged, keeping records from a more or less distant past that serves history writing and historical knowledge, as well as being contemporary and future-looking: Evidence of activities for the records creators themselves, but also for the general public, as “accountability agencies” (Eastwood 2002, 70) or as reservoirs for historical knowledge. Archival institutions are thus only partially siblings of museums and libraries in storing information from the past, although the historical dimension of archives is probably the one with which most people associate. Nonetheless, an important part of the archival sphere will continue to acknowledge that there is a demand in society for archives as reservoirs of memory and heritage. That part of archives increasingly also aims to further increase the outreach of archives and to attract even more users.

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